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How do emotions contribute to a child’s capacity to engage with educational spaces?

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My gratitude too, goes to my daughter who was a constant source of encouragement, I could not have navigated the difficult times without her.

**Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my husband, who sadly passed away before completion. I know he would have been very proud.

Abstract

This doctoral thesis documents a longitudinal study of two children in two educational settings, a school nursery, and a reception class in a primary school. The research aim was to answer the question ‘How do emotions contribute to a child’s capacity to engage with educational spaces?’ I am particularly interested in how children’s experiences might influence their learning capacity.

The concerns fuelling my interest related to the implementation of a performance-based pedagogy introduced by the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988, identified in the Literature review as a contributor to complex concerns around the marginalising of children’s experience of learning.

This thesis begins with the contribution to my thinking made by my personal experience and its influence on my ideas about teaching and learning, suggesting that focusing too heavily on achievement, measured by statutory testing, risks losing sight of the individual child’s experience. It is suggested in the literature that children’s views are underrepresented (Gripton and Vincent, 2021) and that their experience of the educational space can contribute usefully to an informed pedagogy where emotions are valued for their contribution to learning.

In seeking to discover how emotions contribute to children’s experience of the educational space I adopted psychoanalysis as the theoretical framework. A psychoanalytic framework draws attention to complex aspects of the mind, introducing the role of the unconscious and its contribution to children’s emotional experience of their educational space. The Tavistock Observational Model offered me a different way of gathering data, giving me glimpses of a child’s experience of their setting through a shared experience offered by its psychoanalytic approach. Insight into the children’s experience was supported by both my ongoing reflections on the experience and the children’s drawings. The study links psychoanalysis to education historically with early psychoanalysts also being educationists.

The study found that both the theoretical framework and the methodology provide deep insight into the two children’s experience of their educational space and how their emotions influence their engagement. The findings are discussed in relation to the literature and tentative implications for educationalists are discussed along with suggestions for future research.

**Key words:** children, emotion; education; observation; pedagogy; psychoanalytic; research; unconscious.

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# Chapter 1

# Introduction

This research aims to examine how emotions influence a child’s experience of their classroom or nursery, referred to in this study as their educational space or setting. I am particularly interested in how these experiences might be influential in developing children’s capacity to learn.

The implementation of a performance-based pedagogy with the introduction of the National Curriculum (NC) in 1988 has raised some serious issues. The literature review identified complex concerns around the marginalising of children’s learning experience.

Several reports and research projects evaluating the implementation of the NC in 1988, and its influence thereafter on practice, argued that the NC pedagogy introduces unhelpful influences on children’s capacity to learn (e.g., Alexander, 2009, Claxton, 2007, Winter, 2017, Brown, 2018). By focusing on raising literacy and numeracy standards and meeting a prescribed assessment protocol, other aspects of learning, such as the relational and emotional dimensions, are overlooked (Price, 2002). For example, the literature review noted one study about teachers in a secondary school who attempted to change pupils’ experience of learning by reorganising both the curriculum and the pedagogic approach. Their efforts failed and the study showed that a culture of compliance had inhibited these developments (Solomon and Lewin, 2016).

Children are at the sharp end of the political reforms and spend a great deal of their life in educational spaces and the literature contains several calls for research that reflect their experience (e.g. Alexander, 2009). This notion echoes the concerns of Dewey (1933) that education needs to be relevant to the context of children’s lives.

The rising disquiet about the NC and its ‘one size fits all’ mentality and concerns about social and emotional mental health (SEMH) has led to government concern (Government green paper, 2017) initiating research into the wellbeing of children and young people. However, the emphasis on results has become even stronger and this does not feel compatible with the mental health and well-being of children in schools. (Winter, 2017). It, therefore, seems germane to create a study to examine the emotional aspects of children’s lived experience in the educational setting.

Conversely the literature review found that locating recent research examining children’s lived experience in their educational setting is difficult. Although the literature recognises that children’s views need to be heard Gripton and Vincent (2021) reported that children’s views continue to be unrepresented, particularly the lived experience of younger children (Gripton and Vincent, 2021). They explain the notion of researching ‘lived experience’ as capturing ‘an appreciation of what it is like to be them (the child) in this place (the classroom) at this time’ (Gripton and Vincent p. 228). The idea of researching the ‘lived experience’ of children in their educational space seemed useful, however, it was important to find a research design that would facilitate such an in-depth examination.

With this in mind when looking for an appropriate research design for this study I came across The Tavistock Observational Model (TOM), a psychoanalytically informed observational method of studying infants, which is fast becoming considered a possible research model to explore the depths of young children’s lived experience (Stamenova and Hinshelwood, 2018, Rustin, 2003, 2019). In addition to its potential as a tool to examine children’s experience of their educational space, this study also set out to examine the benefits of using the TOM as part of the methodological design informed both by psychoanalytic theory and practice.

The contextual setting of the study links my personal life with my career. I retired over four years ago and the PhD process has been a useful opportunity to look back and place my developing ideas in perspective.

## 1.1: Setting a Context for this study

This research was initiated as the result of my growing concern, in my roles as teacher and therapeutic practitioner, that the present-day pedagogy was undermining children’s capacity to learn by underestimating affective aspects of their experience. My concerns led to my questioning a pedagogy that emphasises the value of individual children for their contribution to ‘market forces’ (Salmon, 1995) rather than valuing their complex multifaceted nature. A culture that values cognition to the point where it has become a monetary artifact of education is argued by some to be reductive and devaluing of other aspects of identity (Tough, 2014). This reductionist perspective, standardising learning in this way, is argued to determine who children are and limits the expression of their uniqueness (Winter 2017).

The combining influences of my studies, BSc Applied Psychology, M.Ed. in Special Educational Needs, P.G.C. in Specific learning difficulties (SpLD), and P.G.C in Therapeutic Play, alongside my personal experience as a parent, and my work with children in school, sensitised me to the complexity of learning and the powerful influence of emotions in that process. With this broad perspective from which to consider children’s learning, I became a point of reference for teachers who sought my help for advice on how they might manage some children’s disruptive behaviour. As I supported teachers, children, and often their parents, I became concerned that the expectations placed on some children by the demands of the curriculum were inappropriate. Some children seemed entirely ill-equipped socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively to engage with formal learning. These concerns will be discussed further in this introduction and the literature review.

Teachers shared concerns that children's achievement was being inhibited by their, poor hand-eye coordination, poor attention, and limited capacities for sitting still. To find ways to address these difficulties I became interested in looking beyond the present-day pedagogy for ways of understanding children’s experiences in the educational setting. Goddard-Blythe’s (2002) theory that retained primitive reflexes were influential in the development of dyslexia, seemed to offer a way of linking physical development to achievement. Children with dyslexia often failed to achieve expected goals because of a constellation of difficulties related to reading, writing, spelling, memory, and organisation. These mental difficulties were often accompanied by concerns about their clumsiness, poor memory, poor concentration, and poor coordination. I began to research literature about the implications of retained primitive reflexes and how this knowledge might be useful.

Reflective Box 1.1

One example of how I put these ideas into operation was the introduction of an activity session, developed and run by me with a support assistant, twice a week, which offered physical activities that included, crawling, balance, coordination, and an opportunity for a group activity to raise interpersonal awareness. The programme was a result of different training opportunities I took on the implications of physical development on learning. It was intended initially to be fun for the children, an alternative to sitting for lengthy periods on the carpet which seemed to be unproductive for some children. I also held a view and still do, that physical development is a factor in learning in the classroom though I was not clear at that time on what that was. The children taking part were identified by their poor coordination, limited focus and concentration in classroom learning, difficulty in holding a pencil, and poor fine motor skills, they generally fell into the ‘bottom ability’ groups. I was encouraged by the way the children engaged enthusiastically with the activities, it felt intuitive that this alone was of benefit to them because I saw their involvement included their bodies, minds, and their emotions.

It was extremely rewarding at the end of the first year when the teachers across the year group noticed improvements in these children’s ability to maintain slow but steady progress across the school year. The implication was that their capacity to focus, remember, organise their thinking, hold a pencil, etc., all important aspects of learning, went beyond expectations predicted at the beginning of the year. In addition, they seemed to develop an improving capacity for drawing themselves, going from blobs and scribble to detailed drawings including eyes, noses, ears, and limbs with feet and hands. Interestingly, these drawings were often more detailed than those of children in the ‘top ability’ groups. This suggested to me that children’s drawings were of value in providing insight about their development that was not provided in any other way. Staff throughout the school developed an interest in drawings, and they were often included in our discussions about children who were raising concerns, seeming to offer an additional perspective.

I felt encouraged to pursue my inquiry as to whether there were other fields of research that might add to my understanding of children’s experience of learning.

Further reflection on how physical activity might contribute to children’s experience of learning is offered in Reflective box 6.2.

I also became interested in aspects of neuroscience, which emphasised the relationship between brain and body and the role of emotion in sculpting the brain. LeDoux (1998) introduced me to the role of emotion in thinking, and eventually, social neuroscience raised my awareness of how the relational experience between infant and m/other significantly impacts neurological development (e.g., Damasio, 1999, Perry and Szalavitz, 2006, Cozolino, 2006, 2013, Wilkinson, 2006). Some literature suggested that neuroscience was useful to educationalists for example Immordino-Yang and Damasio argued that ‘Recent advances in neuroscience are highlighting connections between emotion, social functioning, and decision making that have the potential to revolutionize our understanding of the role of affect in education.’ (2007, p.115). Their argument is based on neurobiological evidence that cognitive aspects of learning such as ‘attention, memory, decision making, and social functioning,’(Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007, p.4) are interdependent upon emotion.

Neuroscience has made a significant contribution to appreciating the interrelationship between cognitive and emotional experiences and their contribution to thinking (Billington, 2013). However, there are some arguments that notions arising from neuroscience have been unhelpful in informing educational pedagogy, ideas such as preferred sensory modalities, and dominant brain hemispheres which have been suggested to be unsuitable for application in classroom settings (Howard-Jones, 2010).

However, neuroscience is as yet in its early stages of development and I noted Howard-Jones’s (2013) suggestion that neuroscience has limitations in examining the relevance of emotion to education. Nevertheless, the interrelation between emotion and learning has been argued by Billington (2013) to have long been posited by psychoanalysis and suggests that the link is of relevance.

While it seemed that no one field held all the answers I also noted through my reading that cross-fertilisation between the fields of social neuroscience, attachment theory, psychoanalytic theory, and education was taking place (e.g., Greenhalgh, 1994, LeDoux, 1998, Perry and Szalavitz, 2006, Immordino Yang and Damasio, 2007, Damasio,1999, Cozolino, 2006, 2013, Howard-Jones, 2013, Geddes, 2006, Price, 2002). Furthermore, my ongoing training and clinical practice as a certified play therapy practitioner (CPTP) offered opportunities for me to witness how addressing children’s emotional needs had a bearing not only on their emotional experiences in their educational setting but also on their levels of achievement. I had a sense of coming home as if the pieces of a jigsaw I had puzzled over for many years finally began to make sense.

I felt that the process of cross-fertilization offered more hope in finding answers to the difficulties some children seemed to encounter in schools. I found this notion echoing Eleanor Roosevelt’s exhortation to create ‘unbreakable bonds’ between the sciences and humanities, intended to provide a vision of a creative society synthesising across knowledge fields to address the many social problems that humanity faces.

The link being made across these fields emphasised the essential role of emotion to all aspects of development, with learning being understood as a relational activity, beginning at birth, if not before (e.g., Klein, 1959, Fraiberg, 1982, Cozolino, 2011, 2013, Bowlby, 1973, Wilkinson, 2006, 2010, Music, 2017). The implication of this is that when children arrive in their educational space they already have some experience of learning and will hold expectations of their teacher and peers that are likely to influence their emotional responses (Garner, 2010). Children are not a ‘tabula rasa,’ blank slates waiting to be written on by the current pedagogic system (Alexander, 2009), where knowledge is fixed, encapsulated in a curriculum where there are assumed to be ‘right answers and the denial of complexity, multiple perspectives, and other knowledge, even the unknowable.’ (Winter, 2017, p.64). From this perspective learning can be understood as a ‘stuttering process’ rather than a ‘clean, one-off event’(Bibby, 2011, p.27), where anxieties about not knowing something and fears of not remembering things are part of the learning process.

So far in this chapter, I have briefly outlined the steps that led me to the notion that other aspects of children’s experience are an important contributing factor to learning, not reflected in the pedagogy of the NC. Each step led me to the inspiration for this study.

## 1.2: Inspiration for the study and outline of what to expect

Inspired by the notion that ideas outside the present-day pedagogy can offer useful insight into how children learn I took steps to discover more by enrolling in a reading group at the Northern School of Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy. The purpose was to examine how neuroscience and psychoanalytic theory might inform each other. I belonged to the reading group for six years and the discussions were informed by Margaret Wilkinson, an author, and psychoanalytic therapist, exploring the cross-fertilization between psychoanalysis and neuroscience (2006, 2011). As a member of this reading group, I became curious to see what more psychoanalytic theory could offer, particularly to the field of education.

In my reading, I discovered that the idea psychoanalysis could offer a useful perspective through which to view teaching and learning was not new. For example, Greenhalgh, (1994) used the theoretical concepts of Melanie Klein to understand why some children become identified as ‘problematic’ and struggled to learn. Mayes (2009) examined psychoanalytic theories spanning forty years and suggested they offered a valuable insight into how relational aspects of teaching and learning might be useful in informing pedagogy. Price (2002) explored the theoretical perspective of object relations psychoanalysis to explain psychological mind states arising out of the unconscious emotions that influence learning in school. This literature suggests that relational dimensions of educational spaces, shared by adults and children, place emotion as central to their experience.

Consequently, understanding the role of emotions in learning appeared to be an important research area that needed to be investigated, leading me to my primary research question; ‘What role do emotions play in children’s experience of their educational space?’ However, there are ethical and methodological issues in researching children’s experiences, particularly in a system focused on measuring success. These issues are addressed throughout the study. The theoretical framework and methodology are designed together to give authenticity to the data collected in the two case studies presented in this thesis.

I have already touched on the literature that has guided my thought processes over my years as a teacher and therapeutic practitioner and in Chapter 2 I present a review of the literature related to the introduction of the NC and its influence on the present-day pedagogy in its efforts to raise standards. After presenting the background to the introduction of the NC, I explore six strands of research and commentary on the implications of this policy, with its focus on raising standards of literacy and numeracy enforced by meeting a prescribed assessment protocol, on the emotional atmosphere of the educational space.

The first strand introduces reports and research about the intentions of government policy to raise educational standards (LR, p.26). The second strand considers the powerful effect of a NC as a tool of the standards agenda fostering a trend towards singularity that compromises the uniqueness of the individual experience of both teachers and pupils (LR, p.29). The third strand relates to how teachers have responded to the accountability agenda and the impact it has had on their practice (LR, p.32). The fourth strand considers the impact of the accountability regime on children and young people, and their experience in their educational space (LR, p.36). A fifth strand examines the complex interaction of cognitive, affective, and motivational antecedents on performance, suggesting that meeting set assessment criteria instigate a reductionist perspective (LR, p.39). Finally, section 2.6 (LR, p.43) examines some of the issues around researching children’s emotional experience of their educational space. I complete the Literature review by outlining my Research Questions (LR, p.48).

## 1.3: Outline of the rest of thesis

**Chapter 3** examines the theoretical framework underpinning the study, it involves some psychoanalytic concepts that I found difficult to make sense of in terms of children’s experiences. I think psychoanalytic theory, although comprehensive, uses language and concepts that take time to understand and become familiar with. However, I found the psychological landscape psychoanalysis presented offered a structure to inform the research process, particularly in terms of examining children’s experiences of their educational space. The psychoanalytic framework informing the study’s epistemological and ontological heart was chosen because it recognises the centrality of emotion and relationality in the development of all learning.

**Chapter 4** begins witha full explanation of the rationale supporting the methodology rooted in a psychoanalytically informed theoretical framework alongside a similarly framed data collection and analysis methodology. The Tavistock Observational Method of data collection seemed to be in harmony with the framework and my choice was informed by other researchers exploring the use of this psychoanalytic tool in the field of education. A particular influence was Rustin (2006, 2019) whose careful examination of psychoanalytic observation as a research method proved invaluable. However, several other sources made significant contributions (e.g., Elfer, 2010, 2012, 2017, 2018; Stamenova and Hinshelwood, 2018).

This is followed by **a** qualitative case study design based on two children from two different schools.

**In Chapters 5 and 6,** the data analysis considers the two case studies separately, using an abductive approach to allow the children’s experiences to speak for themselves with the theoretical framework used as an interpretative tool.

The discussion in **Chapter 7**, considered each of the supporting research questions in a process of discussion of the analysis, while also exploring the relevance of the theoretical framework in understanding the children’s experience of their educational space. I offer conclusions arising from the research, consideration of its limitations with suggestions for further research and possible applications.

To support the reader in navigating the document I have included locations where ideas have been referred to before. For example, where an idea might be illuminated by reading a section in the Introduction, I use the following format (I, p.7), Literature Review (LR, p.3), Methodology (M p.?), Analysis (A, p.?). I hope the reader finds this useful. This referencing also facilitated my recognition of the interconnection of different parts of the thesis.

1.4 A reflective thesis

Throughout this thesis, I will comment on insights gained through my experience of incidents that occurred while working with children both as a teacher and therapeutic practitioner. To preserve anonymity the incidents are anonymised using pseudonyms and offer insight into the experiences of children I have worked with. These are referred in reflective boxes which also, at times, contain records of my thoughts, thinking, and challenges that have arisen out of the PhD. journey. Reflection as an aspect of the research process is discussed further in the methodology. The reflective boxes are identified by the chapter and box number (e.g., 2.1).

## 1.5: Summary

The context of this study arises initially from my personal experience as a parent, teacher, therapeutic practitioner, and finally as a student. My experience suggested that there is an emotional dimension to learning that the dominant pedagogy overlooks, thereby reducing the capacity for learning for some children.

Within this context, I set out on my PhD journey to examine the role of emotion in children’s experience of their educational space, using a psychoanalytically informed theoretical framework alongside a similarly framed data collection and analysis methodology.

I hope that the outcomes of this study will lead to educationalists becoming curious to discover how children are experiencing their educational setting as well as raising awareness that children and young people are emotional beings, emotions that can contribute usefully to their experience of the educational space and therefore their capacity to learn.

# Chapter 2

# Literature Review

Positionality on the purposes of education

The literature review argues that present-day pedagogy with its government-set, tightly regulated national curriculum, and its heavy inspection and audit, creates a conflict between teachers’ intentions to address children’s learning needs and the demand to demonstrate achievement in statutory tests.

It is further argued that the demands of such a high-stakes agenda, compromises children’s subject experience of learning with its intrinsic implication that all children should learn the same thing in the same way at the same time. This prescriptive approach is believed to undermine children’s natural inclinations towards discovery, negatively impacting their creativity and mental health.

It occurs to me that although I have presented a clear argument outlining the limitations of present-day pedagogy, it might be useful to present a brief outline of my position on the purpose of education. Throughout my life education and learning have offered enrichment, personally, socially, emotionally, and psychologically. Enrichment means that my life has been added to by the influences learning has introduced into my life, for example, my introduction to books by visits organised by my primary school to a local library opened up vistas of a world that would otherwise have remained hidden for me. Although I didn’t excel at school, I enjoyed the exposure to scientific ideas, literature, mathematical concepts and languages. The success of my education lies in the cultivation by teaching staff of a lifelong curiosity that led me to ask questions and discover answers, culminating in this thesis.

I believe that education can enrich lives if it can avoid impinging children’s natural curiosity and sense of autonomy. When teachers are allowed to create opportunities for learning that are relevant to children, learning becomes enriching, adding to their social, emotional, physical, and cognitive experience and promoting a sense of well-being. However, this child-centred approach relies on the teacher’s awareness of the developmental needs of the young people in their care and their professionalism in shaping an appropriate curriculum. These intrinsic qualities, centred as they are in the teacher/pupil relationship, are missing in today’s pedagogy.

## 2.1: Raising standards

The  [Earl of Swinton](about:blank), speaking in the House of Lords, described the White paper heralding the introduction of the NC to have ‘two principal aims—to raise the standards achieved by pupils of all abilities, and to secure the best possible return for the resources invested in school education.’ (Hansard, 1985). The move towards a more formal curriculum had been an ongoing discussion, across political parties, for many years culminating in 1985 with the Better Schools White Paper, a recommendation to move towards a nationally agreed curriculum by Sir Keith Joseph Secretary of State at that time (HC 344-I 2008/09). The paper was a response to growing concerns about falling standards and followed a shift in 1979 when the Curriculum and Development Committee and the Secondary Examinations Council, were appointed to take greater control of the curriculum (Wyse and Torrance, 2009).

Later the 1988 Education Reform Act, established the framework for the National Curriculum and contained the key principles informing its development:

It would be underpinned by two aims—and echoing the 1944 statement—to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental, and physical development of pupils, National Curriculum and to prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences of adult life.

It would be structured around ‘Key Stages’ and be subject-based, covering the ‘core’ subjects of English, mathematics, and science, and the ‘foundation’ subjects of art, geography, history, music, physical education, and technology, with all subjects studied from age 5 up to age 16, modern foreign languages from age 11.

The syllabus for each subject at each Key Stage would be set out in a ‘Programme of Study’, which would also include a scale of attainment targets to guide teacher assessment.(p.11)

The result of implementing a NC was to reduce the autonomy of schools and teachers. It replaced what was described as a ‘child-centred’ approach and it further enhanced government control. However, it was articulated as a move towards greater economic success and therefore of benefit to the country (Wyse and Torrance, 2009).

Historically concerns have been raised about the link between methods of accountability, i.e. statutory testing, and the constraints imposed on teachers’ professional judgment in assessing children’s progress (Salmon, 1995, Benjamin, 2002, Wyse and Torrance, 2009, Winter, 2017). Positioning data as a determinate of children’s achievement, and therefore of teacher performance, is thought to create an ‘inherent conflict’ (Hardy and Lewis, 2017, p.682) between validating one’s worth as a teacher and the complexities of children’s learning needs. The NC, therefore, creates a divergence between meeting children's educational needs and their success or failure to meet educational standards (Ball, 2003). This tension is increased by what has come to be considered ‘the terrors of performativity’ as a necessary means to measure teachers’ worth (Ball 2003).

Salmon (1995) argued that a centralised control by various governments established a system that valued each child in terms of economic benefits. She further argued that this not only meant the professional integrity of teachers was undermined but that it imposed a regime of ‘market forces’ which, she argued, had snowballed into a ‘Procrustean bed’ of one-sized provision with teachers trying to make the child fit the curriculum (Salmon1995, p.2-3). The economic emphasis placed on pedagogy is argued to identify some pupils as ‘weak links’ in the forward-moving momentum to improve and any child failing to reach normative standards, for example, those described as disadvantaged, are then in the unfortunate position of being problematized. Those individual components that don’t function to benefit the whole also become vulnerable to exclusion (Salmon, 1995, Benjamin, 2002).

The educational reform introduced in 1988 was justified by its intention to raise standards for all and has been criticised for its reductionist discourse. Ball et. all. (2012) regarded such justification as nebulous, and raised a quotation from an earlier political era when slavery was similarly being justified for the benefits it was deemed to provide:

Necessity is the plea for every infringement of human freedom. It is the argument of tyrants; it is the creed of slaves. (William Pitt, House of Commons, 18 November 1783)

The literature discussed here calls into question the efficacy of this reductionist approach, suggesting that although some may be meeting the set criteria there are other children and young people that are not.

An interim report by the National Statistics Office on KS2 results of statutory assessments in 2018 reported ‘64% of pupils reached the expected standard in all of reading, writing, and maths, while 10% of pupils reached the higher standard’. However, the Education Policy Institute (2018) described a more complex picture of levels of achievement across different areas of England including those pupils described as disadvantaged. This term describes pupils coming from financially challenged backgrounds, measured in their receipt of free school meals and the report evidenced a deficit inperformance between them and non-disadvantaged children.

Although there may be efforts towards parity in curriculum exposure the Education Policy Institute (EPI, 2018) report indicated that for some children this is not enough. Disadvantaged children for example have not done well in the statutory assessments it is suggested future difficulties narrowing the gap look likely to remain (EPI, 2018). The study found, rather disappointingly, that overall trends indicated ‘there is little change in the gap in school attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers’ (p.9).

The imposition of the NC has been endorsed by all political parties since its introduction and its dominance has exerted a powerful influence on what happens in educational spaces, the modifications it has made to pedagogy are examined in the following sections.

## 2.2: The power of the curriculum: How teachers have responded to the accountability agenda and its impact on their practice.

The curriculum has become the cornerstone of pedagogy, held to be the embodiment of knowledge made clear in the government guidance for example in the framework for the NC at key stages 1 and 2 (DfE, 2013):

3.1 The national curriculum provides pupils with an introduction to the essential knowledge that they need to be educated citizens. It introduces pupils to the best that has been thought and said and helps engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement (DfE 2013, p. 6).

There is a strong emphasis on the NC as an important cornerstone to human endeavour with implicit undercurrents that suggest its intrinsic truth. The unashamed authority it holds brings with it ‘a pragmatic engagement with knowledge’ (Winter (2017, p.64) for a pedagogy serving a diverse population with their own cultural and social expectations irrespective of ‘complexity, multiple perspectives, and other knowledge, even the unknowable.’ (Winter, p.64).

The compromise imposed on teachers seems to be between a centralized knowledge base of the NC and a more diverse and deeper level of knowledge and critical thinking (Wyse and Torrance, 2009, Winter, 2017). This compromise is driven by a statutory assessment system that does not lend itself to a broad and extensive curriculum sensitive to individual learning needs (Wyse and Torrance, 2009). On the contrary, conformity leads to compliance (Hardy and Lewis, 2017, Harris, Courtney, Ul-Abadin, and Burn, 2020).

The curriculum is the means to audit teacher’s performance, with the high stakes being the risk of public commendation or shaming, and therefore a significant driver of what takes place in educational spaces is reflected in reports of teachers teaching to the ‘test’ (Hardy and Lewis, 2017, Winter, 2017). The notion that by their efforts teachers can improve children’s future life prospects by raising their achievements is powerful (Winter, 2017.). Research by Winter (2017) recorded one teacher saying: ‘Because assessment drives the curriculum we’re all teaching and people say “don’t teach to the tests” but if you’ve got any sense you’ll teach towards the tests because then your students will do better in tests and they’ll have better life chances. So, it’s the tests that drive the curriculum (Jo).’ (Winter, 2017, p. 66).

Irrespective of teachers’ intentions, setting such high stakes for teachers lends itself to a propensity for staff to ‘teach to the test’ (Hardy and Lewis, 2017, Winter, 2107) and raises concerns that this worrying trend toward singularity, compromises the uniqueness of the individual experience both of teachers and pupils. While accountability is an important aspect of all public services, the present use of technology to micromanage teachers raises ethical dilemmas about its impingement on the subjective experience of both teachers and pupils (Winter, 2017).

The constant process of assessment has involved ‘being constantly judged in different ways, by different means, according to different criteria, through different agents and agencies. A flow of changing demands, expectations, and indicators make one continually accountable and constantly recorded’ (Ball, 2003, p. 220). The flux of directives is further argued to threaten and undermine personal ontologies, ‘unsure whether we are doing enough, doing the right thing, doing as much as others, or as well as others, constantly looking to improve, to be better, to be excellent.’ (Ball, 2003, p.220)

Top-down pressures influence teachers’ belief systems so that they lose confidence in their abilities to choose processes that will be beneficial to some children (Ball, 2003). By compromising their sensitivities to children’s educational needs (Hardy and Lewis, 2017) an uncomfortable tension is created ‘between meeting accountability measures, upon which schools are judged, and pursuing desirable educational goals (Braun et al. 2011; NUT, 2015, Solomon and Lewin 2016, in Harris et al. 2020, p.230). Consequently, teachers’ belief systems and inclinations toward a child-centred pedagogy become compromised by top-down pressures and the acceptance of data acclaimed to be an objective measure of performance (Moyles, 2001, Hardy and Lewis, 2017, Basford, 2019). Further, it is also argued that efforts to improve behaviour and/or academic performance by educational professionals can lead to painful emotions of children who are struggling to manage, being overlooked (Sapountzis, 2018). The veracity of teachers’ belief systems is examined in the next section.

## 2.3: Assessment and performance

Although the idea of generating and interpreting data to reach conclusions about teacher competence and accountability is attractive it is not straightforward (Hardy and Lewis, 2017). Data collection as a means of raising standards in education was found in an Australian school to be open to distortion by teachers seeking to comply with regulations by almost any means available to them (Hardy and Lewis, 2017). Performance in this school became the byword, the focus of the curriculum that was being delivered, and it is suggested that since these ‘data centric’ processes are promulgated globally across governments the unintended side effects, for example, compliance and teaching to the test, being accrued need to be considered’ (Hardy and Lewis, 2017).

Nevertheless, justification of the imposition of standardised testing to raise standards is an attractive suggestion, particularly when those measures are assumed to be valid and reliable (Winter, 2017). Wyse and Torrance, (2009) reviewed and reported on data from significant studies researching the impact on teachers and pupils of the data accumulated over the first ten years after the introduction of the NC. They reported that across government changes in the 1990s test scores rose throughout that decade. But after 2000 the data shows a plateauing of performance (from the government website <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/>) illustrated in figure 2.1.

Chart, line chart

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Figure 2.1 Graph showing plateauing of performance after the first ten years of implementation of the NC (From Wyse and Torrance 2009, p. 222) Notes explaining the statistical basis of the graph are added in the footnote[[1]](#footnote-1).

One interpretation of the test scores represented in figure 2.1. might suggest that the NC has been successful in raising ability. However, Wyse and Torrance (2009) suggested that it was possible to also argue that when introducing national testing teachers were initially deskilled in its application, gradually initial low scores were improved after teachers became more skilled. This notion supports the research represented in this review that teachers teach to the test and are successful in their efforts. This argument explains the plateauing to be a result of there being no further gains to be made (Wyse and Torrance, 2009).

Winter almost ten years later (2017) argued that there continued to be a presumption that data offers a panacea for authoritative bodies to control children's and young peoples’ academic performance. The technological advancements of recent years have further emboldened these bodies in their belief that what is being measured should be accepted as valid and reliable (ibid.). However, datafication is a reductionist process, limiting the expression of the human experience in education, and Winter (2017) argued that there has been a significant global body of research that cumulatively suggests this testing regime imposes ethical infringements on individuals’ subjective experiences. I have tried to make this point clearer in Reflective Box 2.1

Reflective Box 2.1

Reflecting on Winter’s (2017) argument, I am reminded of the discussions that have taken place over the years about the ethical impingement on pupils of the determining influence of the Eleven Plus. The exam determined children’s path through the secondary level of education, shaping future aspirations and career opportunities. Winter (2017) seemed to be suggesting that the present testing regime imposes similar restrictions, introducing the issues surrounding the elven plus, such as failure and humiliation, to a much younger age. At the end of Key Stage 1, children who are seven in the year leading to their transition to Key Stage 2 take their first statutory tests.

However, ‘The EYFS statutory framework sets the standards for learning, development, and welfare for children from birth to age five, following a child’s fifth birthday (2022, p.19).’ Most recently a foundation profile detailing children’s achievement, or not, of the ELGs (Early Learning Goals) was required to be submitted for the school year 2020/21. Early testing regimes such as this seem to raise similar ethical questions around determining children’s educational path as those raised by testing at eleven to determine secondary education.

The ‘high stakes testing’ agenda of the present-day pedagogy, with its inclination towards compliance and conceptualising performance in terms of academic achievement compromises the subjective experience (Winter, 2017). Although it is argued in the literature that social and affective factors are unacknowledged as influences in the learning process (e.g. Hardy and Lewis, 2017, Harris, Courtney, et. al. 2020), the reality that social and emotional factors influence achievement has received some acknowledgement from policymakers (Ubha and Cahill, 2014). Government attempts to introduce measures to address these issues are in the following documents outlining Government initiatives; Every Child Matters, Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2003; Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning [SEAL]/Social and Emotional Aspects of Development [SEAD] Strategies, DfES, 2005; National Institute for Health and Care Excellence [NICE], 2008, DoH and DfE, 2017).

Nevertheless, the dominance of the standards rhetoric has been unrelenting, promulgated by government policies, and during this time there has been a tightening up of NC ‘guidance,’ due to a great degree to a pedagogy driven by assessment and accountability of teachers (Winter, 2017). Consequently, demands for accountability have continued to create a climate of compliance, which has historically raised concerns that the current pedagogy’s emphasis on achievement does not consider emotional aspects of children’s learning environment (e.g., Salmon, 1995, Visser, 2003, Geddes, 2006, Bomber, 2007, Wright, 2010, Ramvi, 2010, 2011, Maclure, Jones, Holmes, and Macrae, 2012, Ubha and Cahill, 2014, Kourkoutas,Stavrou and

Plexousakis, 2018). There has been ongoing contention that the top-down pressures on teachers to meet performance demands compromises opportunities for a more empathic response to children, shifting the focus in the classroom away from a responsive compassionate attitude and thereby creating increasing stress and anxiety for adults and children (Best and Geddes, 2002; Wright, 2009, Ubha and Cahill, 2014, Solomon and Lewin, 2016, Winter, 2017, Holloway and Brass, 2018).

## 2.4: The impact of accountability measures on children and young people

The progressively more stringent set of expectations for academic achievement has resulted in a contracted view of education that has implications for children’s experience of their educational space (Ball, 2003, Best and Geddes, 2002; Wright, 2009, Ubha and Cahill, 2014, Solomon and Lewin, 2016, Winter, 2017, Holloway and Brass, 2018).

An NUT report (Hutchins, 2015), drew together previous research findings and new data from online survey (‘completed by 7,922 NUT teachers across all phases of education and types of school’), as well as ‘interviews with staff and pupils in seven case study schools across the country.’ (Hutchings, 2015, p.4).

Diagram

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Fig. 2 The impact of accountability measures on pupils (Hutchings, 2015, p.12).

This figure provides a diagrammatic illustration of the data from the NUT report (2015) demonstrating how accountability measures are understood to ripple down to children in their educational settings. The figure illustrates how children become the reservoir of the expectations of the adults seeking to ‘raise standards.’

The NUT report claimed that the impact of government policies cascades down through the system to pupils, placing them at the sharp end of policy reform, the object of accountability measures. (e.g., Wyse and Torrance, 2009, Holloway and Brass, 2018).

The laudable desire to raise standards may therefore bring with it factors that impact negatively on children’s learning by making adaptations to the curriculum for their educational benefit more difficult. I found an example of this in a study by Harris, Courtney, et. al. (2020) who found that curriculum delivery of history was influenced more by fear of not meeting government targets than the educational needs of the children. Data in the study suggested ‘that particular measures of accountability are effective in shaping school decision-making, but the type of school, socio-economic nature of the school intake, and students’ prior attainment are also important factors in understanding the decisions made’ (Harris, Courtney, et. al. 2020, p.228). For example, in two schools mentioned in the study there was a feeling that due to their poorer reputations, and despite their examination results being representative of national averages, they had less flexibility in the way they implemented policy compared to two other schools who were considered ‘successful.’ (, et. al. 2020).

There has been a robust trend in research toward understanding aspects of the quality of teacher-pupil relationships to school adjustment (e.g.,Harrison, Clarke, Ungerer, 2007; Pianta, Nimetz, 1991, Pianta, 2006*)*. Yang and Lamb, (2014) identified research that places predictors of engagement in academic achievement at this earlier stage with one of these predictors identified as the teacher-pupil relationship. There as been a growing consensus from a number of reports (Birch and Ladd, 1997; Howes, 2000; Pianta, Nimetz, & Bennett, 1997; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995) that a relationship characterized by more positive qualities, such as closeness, affection, and open communication, and fewer negative qualities, such as conflict and dependency, has benefits for children’s personal, social, and academic adjustment in the early years of school. Furthermore, longitudinal studies are beginning to show that early relationship quality is important in laying the groundwork for children’s future school careers (Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

More recently teachers are seen as significant contributors to children’s experience of their educational space, and consequently, their knowledge, awareness, and empathic sensitivities are influential in the setting (Zinsser, Denham, Curby, Shewark, 2015). However, adapting curriculum delivery to accommodate children’s differing learning needs is open to compromise when it is considered a risky move if it is feared that teachers would be considered non-compliant with government policies (Solomon and Lewin, 2016). It feels incongruent to appreciate teacher’s empathic responses towards children on the one hand while pressurising them to deliver a curriculum that does not address some children’s learning needs on the other

The study by Zinsser, Denham, Curby, and Shewark, (2015) found that ‘Teachers’ tendency to engage in emotionally supportive teaching practices depends on their knowledge of emotions.’ (ibid. p.914). This American study took place in a preschool programme known as ‘Head Start’ and used an objective research design rating system to explore levels of emotional support. Although findings varied among individuals there was evidence that awareness about the need for emotional support was evidentin teachers rated as ‘Highly supportive’. Knowledge of emotions seemed inherent as an important antecedent to supportive practice, along with their empathy and sensitivity when dealing with children. (Zinsser, Denham, Curby, and Shewark, 2015). It is suggested that these antecedents might explain the ‘variable experiences children have across classrooms in an on average high-quality centre.’ (Zinsser, Denham, Curby, and Shewark, 2015, p. 915).

The literature reviewed suggested that affective dimensions of teaching and learning can easily be overlooked by teachers in delivering a performance-based curriculum and researchers face a challenge when trying to access data that may be contaminated by social desirability bias. The influence of affective and motivational links to cognition are explored in the next section.

## 2.5: Cognitive, affective, and motivational antecedents to performance

Benjamin (2002) argued that in looking for what works in schools, attention is often diverted towards outcomes with efforts focused on making improvements there. As such it is based on a construction of education as a reward-based system where motivation is equal for all. Motivation is an emotional experience, a powerful one, however, motivation as a concept is complex and motivators are different in everyone (Galloway, Rogers, Armstrong, and Leo, 1998).

Price (2002) argued that motivation is not necessarily a conscious process so the motivation for one child might vary across contexts. ‘A child may learn in order to triumph over the object he or she is exploring and to beat a rival for ‘parental’ attention. The same child in a different context may learn because of an affectionate interest in the object and to emulate a capable friend who unconsciously stands for an admired older sibling’ (Price, 2002, p. 306).

Making links between cognition and affective processes may be difficult for some teachers to conceptualise, particularly if this aspect of learning was not included in their training (Zinsser Denham, Curby, and Shewark, 2015). Nevertheless, empirical research into the interaction between cognitive and affective variables in learning have pointed, for some time, to growing evidence that children’s and young peoples’ academic achievement are a product of ‘complex and dynamic interactions between cognitive, affective and motivational variables’ (Volet, 1997, p. 235).

Volet’s (1997) illustration of the potential of complex antecedents of performance and their potential to disrupt academic learning, is shown in Figure 2.3

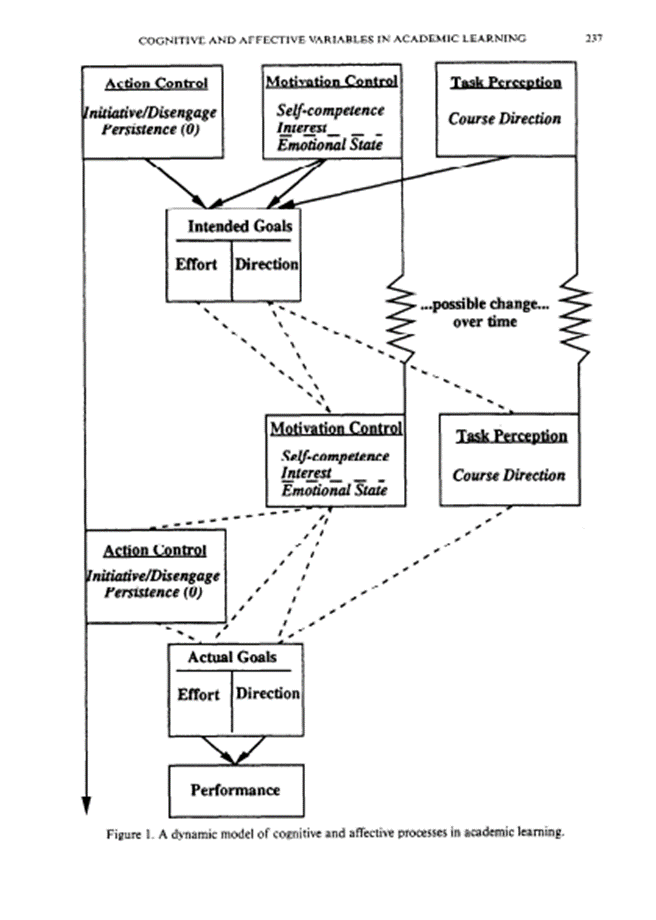


Figure 2.3: Volet’s model shows the dynamic influences thought at that time to be influential in learning processes.

The model attempted to capture a dynamic process that is unpredictable and easily diverted from the end goal. I believe it offered a useful hypothesis to frame internal processes thought to contribute to classroom performance. Although Volet’s model is over twenty years old and may not be familiar to some teachers, research into the role of emotion in cognition has been ongoing.

Motivational aspects of learning have been explored from several theoretical perspectives to clarify the link between emotion and cognition (e.g., Dweck, 2017, Garner, 2010). Garner (2010) references several studies that provide a sense of what that link might be. For example, the role of emotional regulation and its contribution to children’s ability to persist with a task was shown to be significant in completing it (Schutz and Davis 2000). Other research has shown that curiosity not only plays a significant role in children’s engagement with the curriculum but helps with their positive feelings about their learning task so that children are likely to do better in standardised tests (Lepper, Corpus, and Iyengar, 2005). Positive emotions may also lead to an improvement in problem-solving, recall, and decision-making (Estrada, Young, and Isen 1994; Isen and Shalker 1982). It has also been noted that the inclusion of emotional talk in the classroom contributed to creating a secure environment conducive to learning (Kiliç, 2015).

Volet, 1997 also cited a large body of research that emphasised the importance of self-regulation as an important aspect of the learning process (e.g., Boekaerts, 1992; Corno dc Mandinach, 1983; Pintrich & Garcia, 1991; Simons & Vermunt, 1986; Vermunt, 1989; Zimmerman & Schunk, 1989). She suggests that the research attests to the negative impact on self-regulatory learning when ‘teachers take over the responsibility of regulating student learning.’ (Vermunt, 1989, in Volet, 1997, p. 236). The top-down pressure of the NC agenda presents teachers with the challenge of balancing the tension between allowing children to take some responsibility for their learning while complying with expectations to get results. The literature reviewed in this chapter reflects this tension and has suggested that there is a tendency to ‘teach to the test’ (Hutchings, and Kazmi, 2011, Hardy and Lewis, 2017, Winter 2017, Harris et al. 2020,).

Damasio (1999) presented a perspective that challenged the notion of separateness of cognition and emotion, brain, and body by suggesting that brain and body are one and that emotions underlie all human experience. More recently the argument has been made that not only do emotions make a useful contribution to cognitive processing but that thought and feeling are the same. Emotions link experiences, making associations that can be utilised in learning and the transference of knowledge between domains (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007) Although aspects of learning such as rational thought and logical reasoning are recognised as important mental activities it is suggested that emotions act as a directional rudder guiding these cognitive processes (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007). The argument is not that the cognitive aspects are irrelevant but rather they are subsumed into the overall context of learning (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007).

Reflective Box 2.2

When reflecting on my process of working on this study I can see that motivation has not been enough to ensure a focused capacity to engage with the ideas I seek to present. The seven years it has taken have contained some challenging life events, my husband’s ongoing serious illness, and hospitalization, which has been present from the beginning, have involved managing my time and my emotions. His death as I was trying to set up the research project, followed by moving house and then engaging in a major building project all presented major emotional challenges. More recently a serious car accident seemed to turn my world upside down but did not undermine my motivation. It did, however, challenge my emotional capacity to hold it all together.

The NC presents a very clear expectation that the child meets testing expectations. However, this involves fitting the child to the curriculum and it is argued that this diverts attention towards outcomes and looking for what works. A comment that was noted in the data of an NUT report seemed to reflect a common feeling among the teachers interviewed: “Everything is about test results; if it isn’t relevant to a test then it’s not seen as a priority.” (Primary teacher) (Hutchings, and Kazmi, 2011, p. 9).

In the next section research into children’s experience of their educational space is considered.

## 2.6: Researching children’s experience of the educational space

The literature reviewed so far in this chapter suggested that there is tension for teachers in a pedagogy dominated by standards and divided between meeting performance targets and meeting children’s educational needs. Since the introduction of a performance-based pedagogy, there has been a concern about the impact on children’s emotional experience in the educational space. This is particularly relevant when learning is understood as a relational activity, with learning understood as a dynamic and relational experience for both teachers and children (Price, 2002, Mayes, 2009).

In a previous sections research and reports were noted identifying complex emotional interactions between top-down pressures on teachers and antecedents to performance for children compromising teachers’ sensitivities to children’s educational needs (e.g., Hardy and Lewis, 2017). Nevertheless, research to explore children’s lived experiences, particularly those of younger children, is argued to be underrepresented (Gripton and Vincent, 2021). The idea of researching the ‘lived experience’ capturing ‘an appreciation of what it is like to be them (the child) in this place (the classroom) at this time’ (Gripton and Vincent, 2021, p.228) offers a useful way to examine children’s emotional experience in the educational space.

Throughout the literature, there have been calls for further research into children’s experience of their educational space and pointers to the usefulness of understanding children’s perspectives of their experience. Dewey (1933) made his suggestion many years ago that children’s views should be considered since they are the ones the system is intended for. Later Salmon (1995) argued that the standards-based pedagogy fails to consult the very people is meant to serve. Recognition for this view was voiced in the Cambridge report (Alexander, 2009), which again argued for a greater representation of children’s views and perspectives since they are expected to fit into a particular mould at younger and younger ages. Garner (2010) also argued that more needs to be known about ‘how interactions with peers and teachers provide a unique forum for learning about or expanding one’s knowledge and regulation of emotions**’** (p.313).

A recent study into the relationship between school life and well-being (Newland, Mourlam, Strouse, DeCini, and Hanson 2019) reported a significant weakness in the study was its potential for children to respond to questions in open-ended interviews in a way that appeared socially acceptable. Researching children’s perspectives presents challenges to researchers (Einarsdottir, Dockett, and Perry, 2009) requiring a design that can consider children’s social, cultural, and developmental limitations. Their perspectives are necessarily limited by their experience of their setting, unaware of what they do not know.

The early year setting for this thesis offered an opportunity to gain insight into the beginning of children’s experiences (Yang and Lamb, 2014). Its intention is to examine components of children’s experience in the early years of education, their relationships with each other and their teacher, playing, and drawing. These aspects of children’s lives have all been used as windows for research into their emotional experiences (Harrison, Clarke, Ungerer, 2007, Gripton and Vincent, 2021). A study by Elfer (2012) used observational data to examine a young child’s experience of the nursery while also exploring nursery policy and practice. Elfer (2012) argued that psychoanalytic observations provided access to young children’s emotional states and the meaning of their behaviour, in other words, the method gives children, even young babies, a voice.

Elfer (2012) referenced the research done by Robertson and Robertson (1968) which highlighted how children’s quiet and seemingly compliant behaviour can be misinterpreted as happy and secure. Elfer wanted to make the point that children’s internal states are not easily measured by positivist quantitative evidence. In a later paper, Elfer (2017) argued that since nursery care has become an increasingly common experience for young children then the emotional aspects of their lives in these settings need to be better understood. While recognising that other theoretical approaches have contributed to a growing awareness of psycho-social issues in nurseries (e.g., attachment theory), Elfer (2017) reasoned that the research tool of the TOM, based on a psychoanalytic framework, offers specific insight into subtle emotional states and the meaning of children’s behaviour.

The TOM as a research tool emerged from a training instrument for trainee child psychotherapists and is examined more thoroughly in Chapter 4: Introduction to Methodology. It is an opportunity to observe a child every week at the same time on the same day for one hour without the use of written notes. This regularity has been noted to develop a capacity for sensitivity not only to the child’s emotional states but also those of the observer (Elfer, 2012, 2017).

One of the interesting aspects of Elfer’s (2017) study is the adaptation of the TOM as a short-term research project undertaken by nursery staff observing in a nursery for 30 min, rather than the usual 60, and limited to a few weeks. The researchers were also members of staff, their work was about engaging with the children in their care, however stepping out of their usual role was problematic because the children expected staff to interact with them as usual. Nevertheless, the study (Elfer, 2017) suggested that the challenges of the adapted TOM were handled sensitively by the trainee researchers and draws our attention to the benefits for teachers in learning about how emotions influence a child’s experience. The researcher’s experience enabled them to use this information to understand and expand their skills in helping children to make the most of their educational setting (Elfer, 2017).

Longitudinal research is sometimes prohibitive because of the high level of time commitment it demands, and this short-term project offered an opportunity for reducing this demand. Elfer (2017) identified the usefulness of the TOM in hearing children’s sometimes silent communications and offered a possible way forward to a more adaptive pedagogy, where practitioners become more aware of the inherent messiness of living and working with young children. This shift challenges the idea that children follow predictable steps suggesting that the developmental path is complex and convoluting, with implications for the role of practitioners who may unwittingly contribute to childrens’ difficulties due to unconscious processes discussed in chapter 3.

I am very attracted to the idea of a short-term research project where the number of observations is limited to less than five (Elfer, 2017). My longitudinal study over seven months, two school terms, was extremely demanding of both time and emotional investment. It also yielded a significant amount of data that added to the demand for my resources, and in turn, the analysis of the data was equally demanding. At times I was overwhelmed and the metaphor of being in a boat that might be swamped by powerful waves seemed to be a relevant one during this time. However, on reflection now, much of that feeling was due to an awareness that what I held in my hand, that is the data I accumulated from the observations, supervision, and my research diary, was extremely dense with meaning and I feared not being able to plumb its depths. Even now, as I draw the study together, I feel there is much insight still untapped, I felt compromised at times by the constraints of the study.

Elfer’s (2017) shorter study offered a manageable way to evaluate the contribution of the TOM, to capture something of the subtler emotional processes of young children’s experience in a nursery. However, I wonder if something of children’s experience is lost in its brevity, perhaps it depends on how the research is intended to be used.

To conclude this section, my overarching view, echoed both in the introduction and literature reviewed, is that learning takes place in a ‘dynamic, relational and emotional context’ (Price, 2002). Therefore, I believe we need to look further than educational policy and politically motivated government agendas, to understand the complexity of the issues we are dealing with in our schools and that a psychoanalytically based pedagogy offers a useful framework for understanding and appreciating children’s experience of the educational space.

## 2.7: Research questions

In response to the review of the relevant literature I have formulated the following research questions.

Table 1: Research Questions

|  |
| --- |
| Primary Research Question: ‘How do emotions contribute to a child’s capacity to engage with educational spaces? |
| Secondary Research Questions: |
| 1. What can be appreciated about the role of emotions in a child’s experience of educational spaces? |
| 1. How does our understanding of the role of emotions in children’s experience of educational spaces aid an appreciation of the complexity of the learning process? |
| 1. What contribution do adults make in supporting children’s capacity to manage experiences of the education setting? |
| 1. How do children use each other to manage the experience of being in education? |
| 1. How does play prepare children for adult-directed expectations? |
| 1. What can children’s drawings tell us about children’s experience of the educational space? |
| 1. Is psychoanalysis a useful perspective in understanding children’s experience of the educational space? |

# Chapter 3

# The Theoretical Framework

## 3.1: Introduction to psychoanalytic theory and its implications for development

In this chapter, I examine psychoanalytic theory which I have chosen as a theoretical framework for this study. I begin with an introduction to Freud, understood as the ‘father of psychoanalysis’ (Pick, 2015) presenting a brief biographical account to set his ideas in a historical context.

This is followed by a brief outline of his theories, and the chapter follows this model presenting a brief bio for each of the three theorists selected for the study, Klein, Bion, and Winnicott, followed by an outline of their theories. Each theorist builds on what has gone before and similarities and differences are noted in the text. However, psychoanalytic theory encompasses a broad breadth of content and I have limited description of the theories to those aspects that are most relevant to this study.

Many people are aware of Freud as the originator of psychoanalysis and some of his terminologies have become an unquestionable part of our language. Terms such as a Freudian slip (Gomez, 1997), refer to our words spoken with a subtext, an idea that we try to suppress, but which shows itself in an unguarded moment, often picked up by our close friends and challenged.

My understanding of psychoanalysis before this study was very limited, Freudian language seemed obscure and irrelevant to present-day issues, particularly those I came across in school. The concept of sexual drives as the foundation of human nature and child development described in terms such as oral stage, anal stage, pregenital, etc., seemed inappropriate when referring to babies and young children.

However, my reading for this study offered me the opportunity for a different perspective. I saw that Freud’s understanding and treatment of individuals who were his patients changed and evolved and psychoanalytic theory has undergone change and adaptation in response to psychoanalysts’ observations of their patients in the therapy room (Milton, Polmear, and Fabricus 2004). The sexual connotations needed to be set in the context of developmental theory and understood as an evolving concept. Freud’s original theories were only the beginning, they changed and evolved over his lifetime. Psychoanalytic practitioners that have come after him have furthered this ‘accumulation of knowledge and understanding achieved by psychoanalysis in the consulting room’ (Rustin, 2006).

My intention in the next section is to provide a brief biography of Freud followed by an overview of what has come to be known as classical psychoanalysis, that is Freud’s developing theory.

### 3.1.2: Freud (1856-1939)

The facts about Freud’s life can easily be discovered: Born in the middle of the 19th century; 6th May 1856, to a middle class, though not affluent, Jewish family (Gay, 1988); he qualified as a medical doctor in 1885 (Bradbury, 1989) and he is described as having greed for knowledge, valuing the scientific process of research which he adopted in his work with his patients (Gay, 1988). However, I hoped to discover something more about the personality of Freud, something that came later when I learned about the fate of his family and his relationship with his children.

With an interest in all forms of mental health he is known to have experimented with a variety of treatment techniques, one of these was hypnotism (Gay, 1988, Bradley, 1989). Hypnotism provided Freud with a means of helping patients to recall the inhibited memory of circumstances when symptoms emerged (Bradley, 1989). In developing this technique further ‘free association’ was found to be superior to hypnosis in his work with patients, providing access to inhibited memories more easily than hypnosis (Gay, 1998).

He lived through World War I and his family endured anti-Semitism and the threat of the death camps of the Nazi Political agenda, four of his elderly sisters died in concentration camps, unable to follow the rest of the family and leave Austria in 1938 (Gay, 1988, Gomez, 1997). A significant influence on his ‘life and work,’ was his family’s persecution as members of a persecuted minority, the Jews. Freud’s sick and elderly father witnessed the burning of his books by the political regime in Austria at that time (Gay, 1988, Gomez, 1997)

The immediate family was able to avoid the fate of his sisters due to the support of wealthy eminent figures both in France and England. It is important to note, however, that Freud only lived for one year in London, England, he died in 1939 (Gay, 1988), this sets his life and work, both as a commentator on his developing theory and his work as an analyst, in Vienna, Austria.

As the oldest child of his father’s third marriage, the hopes and aspirations of his parents that he would accomplish great things were invested in him (Gay, 1988). Gay (1988) described Freud’s eventual impact on the world as one who agitated ‘the sleep of mankind,’ (p.3), however, his first attempt at publishing his ideas was met with lukewarm interest, he sold a total of 351 copies of ‘The Interpretation of Dreams’ (1900, published in German). Nevertheless, ten years later, in 1910, it was observed that he considered this book ‘his most significant work,’ (Gay, 1988, p,4). Towards the end of his life (he died in 1939) he noted; ‘It contains, even according to my present-day judgment, the most valuable of all the discoveries it has been my good fortune to make. Insight such as this falls to one’s lot but once a lifetime,’ (Gay, 1988, p.4). The book was revised and re-issued several times, the eighth being translated from German into English (Freud, 1930, translated by Strachey, 1967).

Freud was prolific in recording his thoughts in correspondence as well as in books and he is open about many events in his personal life, a source of inspiration for his developing thoughts, the subject of his research (Gay, 1988). These books were written in German and have been translated into English, by several translators, and there has been some debate about some of Freud’s meaning in the language he used to describe mental mechanisms. Translating Freud’s original three mental constructs from; das Es, das Ich, and das Uber ich; meaning ‘the it,’ ‘the I,’ and the ‘over-I,’ to the id, the ego, and the super-ego. These terms are considered further in the relevant section.

This brief bio informs us of both the cultural and familial aspects of his environment however, it does little to capture his character which for me always seemed hard and inflexible, perhaps stern, and difficult to feel at ease with. I was encouraged to read in a biography, therefore, a brief description of his warm, relationship with his eldest daughter Mathilde (Gay, 1988) born in 1887. They seemed close and Gay noted that she brought him both ‘amusement and sheer pleasure’ (1988, p.308). After an appendectomy had gone wrong, the impact on her health was severe, resulting later in further ill health and surgery. The impact on her physical appearance because of her health issues was a cause of great concern for Mathilde, feeling she was not attractive enough to find someone to marry her.

Her low self-esteem was felt keenly by her father, provoking these thoughts which he shared with his daughter in a letter:

*“I have long suspected” … “that, with all your usual reasonableness, you feel hurt that you are not beautiful enough and therefore will not appeal to any man.’*

He added, *“You seem beautiful to me.”*

Aware that his love might not be enough to assuage her concerns he sought to reassure her further:

*“… for a long time now [it is not] the formal beauty of a girl but rather the impression of her personality [that]has been decisive.” (Gay,1988, p.309).*

He encouraged her to look into a mirror and discover for herself that she was “neither common nor repulsive,” (Gay, 1988, p.309). Within a short length of time she met and married, maybe suggesting Mathilde had taken her father’s words to heart.

His affection for his family was further demonstrated by his commitment, despite his work activities, to ensure time away with them all during vacations, usually in the mountains (Gay, 1988).

These brief references to his personal life suggest to me a warm caring father, with a sensitivity to the inner concerns and anxieties of his children. Along with his interest in ‘art, literature and prehistory’ (Gay, 1988. p.335), I get the impression of a man with an interest in the whole of life, influencing his developing theoretical ideas. The stern, prohibitive Victorian father has been replaced for me by a warm, loving, creative intellectual, loved in return by his family who supported his endeavours.

In his search for meaning in human behaviour, Freud developed a keen interest in dream interpretation, hypnosis, and free association as therapeutic techniques. The emergence of ‘involuntary thoughts,’ ideas that emerge ‘of their own free will’ (Freud, 1967, p. 102), suggested that such thoughts provoked resistance to be owned. The resistance he encountered led Freud to conclude that it was this resistance that held the answer to pathological symptoms he discovered in the patients he worked with. Thus, emerged his appreciation of a hidden self, a self that is felt to be unacceptable and therefore suppressed from the conscious, known, mind (Freud, 1930, Gay, 1988). Many of Freud’s concepts were present in the cultural atmosphere of his environment at that time, Vienna, the radical idea he brought was that ‘the individual was not in charge of the whole self,’ (Gomez, 1997, p.12).

Freud’s ideas about the complexity of the mind emerged out of his ontological perspective and his emerging psychoanalytic theory was based on several assumptions about the mind:

* That mental life can be explained, thus significantly challenging the notion of psychic determination.
* That the mind has a specific structure and follows intrinsic laws.
* That mental life is evolutionary for development. Following Darwin, Freud maintained that the adult mind can only be understood in terms of the formative experiences of the child.
* That the mind holds unconscious forces of tremendous intensity and power which, though not experienced directly, nevertheless have a far greater influence over human beings than they can recognise. Although the unconscious was not a new concept, Freud made it the cornerstone of psychoanalysis.
* That the mind is an aspect of the body. The biological facts of procreation and death comprise the basis of our mental as well as our physical life. Sexuality is the paradigm for all desire; infantile sexuality is primitive desire, rooted in the body, providing what Freud referred to as autoeroticism, self-pleasure (Freud, 2011).

Gomez (1997, p.12).

These assumptions can be recognised in later evolutions of psychoanalytic theory, although differences in perspective have altered some of them.

### 3.1.3: Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis

Freud saw adulthood as the fulfilment of potentials sown from birth onwards, ‘… primary processes, the residues of a phase of development in which they were the only kind of mental processes’ (1958, p.219). These lines of thought led him to reason that whatever anxieties were troubling the adult began early in the person’s life (Freud, 1949, 1958). This idea was particularly relevant in developing his psychosexual theory of development since it seemed to him that the origins of sexuality were located long before their emergence in puberty. The early years were considered significant in both the formation and development of all aspects of our adult dispositions and personalities, including sexuality (Freud, 2010). Therefore, the structure of the mind emerges from our earliest experiences, rooted in somatic events, and its configuration was conceived as multi-faceted: ‘The general theory of psychoanalysis, in its most abstract definition, is a psychology of mental processes and their organisation. For such a psychology, mind has ceased to be a static structure or a substantial thing and has become a dynamic entity, a nexus of activities and a sequence of adaptive responses,’ (Brierley,1951, in Rycroft, 1995 p.103). The challenge for Freud was how to conceptualise this dynamic landscape of the mind, requiring as it does a charting of phenomena.

#### 3.1.3.1: Freud’s concept of the inner landscape of the mind

The landscape envisaged by Freud needed mapping, with key features clearly identified to enable not only sense-making of his findings but also to facilitate others wishing to traverse the terrain. It can be difficult to imagine that at the time much of what we take for granted today about the mind was limited. To describe the complexities of the individuals he came across in his clinical practice, it was necessary to develop a conceptual framework of the mind requiring its own language (Pick, 2015). Although the idea that early childhood relational experiences influence the developing personality is generally accepted today, few people realise the influence of psychoanalysis on this assumption (Frosh, 2012). It seems that ‘culture is ‘saturated’ by psychoanalytic assumptions in ways that are not obvious because they are so taken-for-granted’ (Frosh, 2012, p.5).

In the beginning, an appropriate language to describe this landscape had not been developed and the concepts it described required an appropriate vocabulary. However, mapping something as complex as the mind was not easy, leading to the ongoing discussion about what Freud’s terms mean. In the next section I explain the language of Freud’s theory.

#### 3.1.3.2: Confusions relating to Language and concepts of Freud’s Psychoanalytic theory

Bradley (1989) pointed out that ‘… the practice of psychoanalysis and the illnesses it is used to treat are phenomena manifested in speech and language,’ (p.63), without a vocabulary it is difficult to examine these concepts. The mind is conceptualised using terminology developed by Freud, terms familiar to many, such as libido, drive, id, unconscious, affect, sexuality, erotogenic zones, and symbolism, (Rycroft, 1995). Issues arose due to translation of some of Freud’s terms and as other theorists later added to or changed some of these ideas, sometimes developing their own constructs, further confusions occurred and where necessary these will be examined later in the theoretical framework for the study.

### 3.1.4: Freud’s structure of the mind

Freud’s efforts to conceptualise mental life evolved over time, Figure 3.1 shows a diagrammatic representation of Freud’s thinking about the functioning of conscious processes. He saw the possibility of a continuum with some aspects of the unconscious being available to the conscious in a system he referred to as the preconscious.

Diagram

Description automatically generated

Figure 3.1: The features of the mind’s structure and function described by Freud’s Topographical Model (1905).

The structural model emerged around 1923 and Klein stated that ‘Freud’s formulation of mental structure in terms of id, ego, and superego has become the basis of all psychoanalytic thinking.’ (1957, p.84).

Understood as metaphoric (Gomez,1997) the second of Freud’s graphics schematically represented by several different authors, however, Figure 3.2 is Freud’s original visual representation of the relationship between the structure of mental life: id, ego and superego, and the dynamic aspects of the conscious and unconscious.

Figure 3.2: Freud’s structural model of the mind (1923)

Diagram, venn diagram

Description automatically generated

‘The id is not sharply separated from the id; its lower portion merges into it… But the repressed is only cut off sharply from the ego resistances of repression; it can communicate with the ego through the id.’ (1923, p.28).

#### 3.1.4.1: The Id

The id is understood to be present at birth and acts as a container for the somatic experience of the infant and is influenced by the desire to satisfy basic drives (Freud, 2018, Gomez, 1997). These drives are understood to be beyond consciousness and reason, demanding gratification and they are often associated with social deviance and the primitive (Gomez, 1997). However, certain drives offer necessary biological outcomes to the survival of many species, namely procreation, nesting, and feeding (Gomez, 1997). For the infant, this stage is characterised as pre-language and therefore limited to sensations, recalled via somatic memory.

As part of the unconscious the constraints of reality such as time, space, and logic are absent (Gomez, 1997) and the dominant inclination is immediate gratification without recourse to consequences (Gomez, 1997). Freud recognised that the tension between the id’s biological drives and social mores is common to all human beings (Mayes, 2009) and a common theme of literature.

The scenario depicted in the novel ‘Lord of the flies,’ (Golding, 1954) where the darker, primal drives in the boys run amok without adult constraint, illustrates for me the potential for an unrestrained id. The id lies within each of us and as Simon in Golding’s novel says, “Maybe there is a beast… maybe it's only us” (p.80).

Freud recognised that an organism dominated by drives runs the risk of self-destructive behaviour and therefore in need of being managed, a second structure was conceptualised to fulfil this function; the ego (Freud, 2011).

#### 3.1.4.2: The ego

Freud conceptualised the ego as the sense of self emerging from physical sensation (Freud, 2010). Developing out of the id, Freud’s (2010, 2011, Pick, 2015) analogous description of the ego, and its relationship with the id, was as a horse rider trying to reign in the need to satisfy inner pressures for the expression and satisfaction of primal drives, while the super-ego, discussed further below, demands compliance to cultural expectations ego (Gomez, 1997; Pick, 2015, Rycroft, 1995). If the balance between the two cannot be achieved in some measure, then the ego experiences anxiety which in turn needs to be managed (Gomez, 1997). It is these anxieties that motivate the ego to develop defence mechanisms to protect from either internal or external threats (Freud, A. 1937,1966; Levick, 1983).

#### 3.1.4.4: The Super-ego

A third aspect of the psychic framework, as theorised by Freud, is known as the super-ego and it is here that standards and expectations of influential figures, e.g., parents, in the infant’s environment are absorbed into the mental structure becoming the expression of those figures. The over-ego as it was initially conceptualised by Freud, represents the parental voice thereby acting as control or rather a regulating influence, by presenting ideals to be lived up to. This aspect of the mind, in Freud’s conceptual framework, may therefore conflict with the passions and drives of the id (Gomez, 1997; Pick, 2015). The voice of the super-ego may be harsh and critical, insinuating feelings of guilt and shame that can feel threatening and difficult to manage emotionally.

Freud placed the emergence of the super-ego at the end of the oedipal phase (2011), suggesting that the persecutory aim of this structure influenced the taboo associated with an awareness of gender and sexuality. Later Klein disagreed and this is discussed later in a new section.

### 3.1.5: The Dynamic system of the mind

In Freud’s original model of the mind, the topological model describing how aspects of the mind related to each other, he identified a tripartite phenomenon; conscious, preconscious, and unconscious (see figure 3.1). However, although he revised his model twice, the three systems remained (Diem-Wille, 2011) with each part making an equal contribution to the dynamic function of the mind (Frosh, 2012).

Conscious thoughts are the ones we are aware of, preconscious are ones that we can recall if we choose to and, in the unconscious, thoughts are more like ‘things’ (Freud, 2010, Diem-Wille, 2011) that are repressed and inaccessible (Frosh, 2012). An important aspect of the latter is that it is an active system, not, as may be thought, ‘a kind of longer-term store from which they can be removed to be used when needed,’ (Frosh, 2012, p. 41). The system holds back uncomfortable, unsettling, and anxiety-producing thoughts and ideas that seek expression. It is this repressive function that was thought to initiate the development of the unconscious and its function is to resist the emergence of unconscious material into the realm of the conscious (Frosh, 2012). However, when emotionally charged thoughts are not given an opportunity to find expression, they disturb the equilibrium of the mind, compromising conscious rational thought (Frosh, 2012). Without an opportunity for expression, issues may become problematic, and more violent ones become more threatening, with an increased likelihood of erupting in aggressive behaviour (Freud, 2010). By giving expression to thoughts and ideas they can be allowed into conscious awareness to be better managed, and this is the aim of psychoanalytic therapy, and play therapy for children serves the same function. Both processes use dreams and symbols, to convey troubling and anxiety-producing issues (Freud, 2010, Gomez, 1997).

Freud (1920) noticed that play allowed for repeating unpleasant experiences when issues can be examined and tested in a less threatening way and a degree of mastery can then be attained (Diem-Wille, 2011). In play unpleasant experiences may be revisited frequently as an active way of making sense and mastering them.

### 3.1.6: Psychic processes

Early in Freud’s thinking he described his intention to go beyond psychology, to explain what was “behind” consciousness (Gay, 1988), what became known eventually as the unconscious. A basic tenet of psychoanalytic theory is that everyone has both an unconscious as well as a conscious aspect of the mind. In his distinctive understanding of the unconscious Freud stressed its holding function, a receptacle of experiences from the past that are held on to and remain active, seeking expression in ways acceptable to social and cultural mores (Freud 1958). The psychic processes described by Freud are for the most part phenomena of the unconscious, a receptacle of primitive drives and instincts, with its origins in preverbal life, ‘formed perceptually before we had words to use,’ (Klein, 1930, in Bibby, 2018, p. 10). Within the unconscious lie facets such as basic beliefs and judgments, influential perspectives and viewpoints that may not be understood rationally. The existence of an aspect of our mind, a repository of thoughts and feelings we would rather not recognise, is challenging.

Traumatic memories may be buried in the unconscious, but their effect continues to ripple through the psyche, their emotional energy influencing behaviour. Making sense of trauma needs to be set relative to the experience infant and later the child. A sense of being forgotten by a m/other (this form of the word replaces mother throughout this study to indicate a significant other who occupies the role usually assigned to the mother) is a traumatic experience for an infant as is feeling hungry and not being fed. The buried trauma holds emotional energy which requires effort to contain, depleting resources. Freud found that by releasing unconscious emotions into conscious awareness their power to influence lives was eased. He developed techniques to bypass the suppression of these traumatic memories, initially using hypnosis, word association, and later dreams.

Alongside the traumatic memories often went a desire to find some way of avoiding the pain that accompanied them and Freud termed this unconscious process as ‘phantasying’ (1958, p.222) spelt with a ‘ph’ rather than an ‘f ‘to identify the phenomena as unconscious (Pick, 2015). Phantasies were employed to split off a painful memory and their content was often sadistic, including seeking retribution, finding expression in dreams, a time when the conscious aspect of the mind a most relaxed, unguarded (Freud, 1958).

The concept of an unconscious aspect of ourselves that is irrational, uncontrollable, and beyond reason, disconnected from aspects of a more conscious process (Bibby, 2018) undermines our belief in rational thought and a sense that we control our destiny. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of this construct comes in the form of relationships with each other, piloted as they are by inclinations arising from past relational experiences and unconscious processes known as transference and countertransference.

##### 3.1.6.1 Transference and countertransference

The concepts embody the unconscious phenomena occurring between individuals and arose from clinical practice where it was noted that patients displaced their feelings and ideas relating to other relationships, onto the psychoanalyst. This process is understood as transference (Freud, 1958, Rycroft, 1995) and became a major contribution to understanding the therapeutic process (Freud, 2010, Pick, 2015). By recognising emotional responses to the analyst as associations arising out of early emotional experiences it becomes possible to modify entrenched patterns.

Associations are made, for a child for example, between characteristics of a parent and those of the teacher, provoking responses towards the teacher *as if* they were the parent. A teacher, talking in a tone of voice perceived as resembling a punitive voice of a parent, may instigate an emotional response usually associated with the parent. The response may seem to appear out of the blue, for no clear reason and a child may not be able to explain why they responded in this way.

Later the idea of countertransference was developed by other analysts (Pick, 2015) whereby the analyst’s own transference is prompted by associations with the patient. The tone of voice or response of the patient or child results from their own associations to something being perceived in this reaction and is known as countertransference (Pick, 2015). For example, for a teacher a child’s threatening behaviour may be associated with an experience of being bullied and a defensive demeanour may be adopted, perhaps inflaming the child. This response occurs unconsciously and is difficult to be aware of. Hence, in the classroom, there can be countless occasions of transference and countertransference, between children and adults. An awareness that this may be happening offers the possibility of reflection and a possible route to exploring the dynamics at work in relationships.

Freud’s desire for coherence in trying to make sense of his encounters with patients, his reading and his own self-analysis motivated him towards a controversial concept, laden with social and cultural taboos, but particularly significant in understanding the landscape Freud was trying to map.

##### 3.1.6.2 Drives: Libido; fuelling mental processes

Sometimes translated from the German word trieblehre as drive I choose to use the word drive. Drives were conceptualised by Freud as biological urges expressed both psychologically and biologically, directed towards objects as an outlet for pressure the drives generated. My interest in the concept of drives is the connection it offers between ‘the mental and the somatic’ (Freud, 1915a, p.122, in Frosh, 2012, p.46). The sexual drive was expressed in early infanthood by pleasure-induced experiences in the body (Freud, 2011), and offers a broader understanding of pleasure and satisfaction than the adult sexual kind. It includes everyday experiences of eating, drinking, urinating, and defecating, all common experiences of the infant and all in their own way slightly terrifying when initially experienced after birth (Diem-Wille, 2011). Pick (2015) proposed a wider consideration of the concept of drive, relating it to aspects of love, for example, affection, lust, and other powerful emotions that hold a group dynamic, offering the possibility of connecting people with similar ideas and feelings.

The primary connection occurs between m/other and infant and follows the sensory experience of somatic awareness, rooted as it is in bodily parts, the focus of the infant’s most pleasurable experiences. Primary experiences such as these are felt somatically initially with no psychic structure to understand them (Freud, 2011). In mapping the internal landscape Freud used the gradual emergence of awareness, in the infant’s psyche, of the body parts as markers of development. He noted four phases of development identified by their relationship to the body part involved.

##### 3.1.6.3 Oral phase (Birth -1yr)

The early relationship between m/other and infant offers the pleasurable experience of feeding, intended to be mutually satisfying for both. Sucking of the nipple, breast, or bottle, is a sensual experience and if the nipple is not available, a thumb, tongue or toe, or some other object, can alleviate discomfort while awaiting the real thing (Freud, 2011, Diem-Wille, 2011).

The nipple and breast feature powerfully in the life of the early infant due to intense feelings related to hunger, the satisfaction of these feelings relieves the anxiety of an imminent, though impossible to identify, threat. In addition, the sucking engendered by the feeding process and the intense pleasure experience become associated with the mother’s anatomy (Freud, 2011).

This first stage of development, recognised as the oral stage, lasts from the earliest moments of life to the time of weaning (Bradley, 1989). Moving on from suckling of either a breast or bottle presents a challenging transition (Freud, 2011), however, the need for oral satisfaction will continue, particularly in anxiety-provoking moments when a substitute may be sought in their own thumb, a blanket, or some other beloved object (Bradley, 1989).

The connection between the psyche and soma is a pleasurable one, ‘incorporating, biting, digesting and expelling,’ representing ‘a basic emotional pattern, which expresses love or aggression.’ (Diem-Wille, 2011, p.194). A process of integration into psychic mechanisms relies on the security offered in the experience, inconsistency or fear disrupts developmental processes and can reverberate throughout childhood and later life. Freud was very aware of the impact of perceptions of auto-erotic pleasure as something dirty or shameful, citing such judgments as influential in adult sexual relationships (2011).

As the oral pleasure of suckling is replaced by the spoon and solid food, attention seems to converge on the physical experience of bowel evacuation, known as the anal stage.

##### 3.1.6.4 Anal phase (1-3yrs)

Bradley (1989) suggests there are two aspects to pleasure attached to the psychology of anal function, the first relates to the satisfaction of bowel evacuation, as the discomfort of the bowels is alleviated, and the gradual awareness of the control the baby can have over this process. These two aspects offer a measure of control for the young infant, a means of communicating their feelings to their parent or caregiver. Compliance with parental wishes brings a desire to be cooperative while withholding faeces expresses resistance to their expectations. The somatic sensation of defecating thus becomes a manipulative tool to express the young child’s displeasure in the parent’s responsiveness to their needs (Diem-Wille, 2011), while also providing a pleasurable experience when finally giving way to the need to defecate (Freud, 2011)

The anal stage identifies a stage of development when a young child is learning to control their bowels, and the next stage, relating to the genital area of the body is about a growing awareness of anatomical differences between male and female, including subtle sensibilities about their role in procreation (Freud, 2011).

##### 3.1.6.5 Phallic phase (3-6yrs)

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of Freud’s theory of development, suggesting as it does that infants and young children obtain pleasure from their genital organs and begin to notice differences in each other’s bodies, male and female. The fact that young children are often uninhibited by their bodies, happy to run around with no clothes on, their pleasure in genital stimulation is similarly free from inhibition. Issues arise when enjoyment in their bodies are harshly curtailed generating feelings of guilt, shame, or disgust in children (Freud, 2011, Diem-Will, 2011).

There are social and cultural restraints relating to appropriate behaviour in terms of anal processes and genital stimulation, that need to be managed by the child with the support of adults, and play using these themes arouses pleasure for small children (Diem-Wille, 2011). In my work with children, mess, the making of it and the clearing up of it, is an important issue. Children often seek out messy play experiences, exploring materials that arouse associations with faeces and expressing people and experiences as shit or feeling pissed about someone or something. Similarly, manipulation of phallic-shaped objects, pushing things into small cavities, is usual for young children as a way of giving safe expression to drives they have become aware of as being socially unacceptable. It has been noted by Erikson (1964) that boys chose ‘playing modes of fighting with phallic objects such as swords, spears and fishing poles, whereas for girls inner spaces assumed more meaning.’ (in Diem-Wille, 2011, p.219).

Since the proximity of the m/other or main caregiver is so immediate many of the infants and young child’s feelings aroused physically are directed towards this person and given an acceptable existence by becoming phantasies. Growing awareness by the infant and young child of the intense relationship between mother and father threatens the special intimacy felt to exist between themselves and their m/other. The resulting psychic conflict and its resolution have been given the term Oedipal phase and appears to overlap the phallic stage).

##### 3.1.6.6 Freud’s Oedipal phase (3-5, overlapping with the phallic phase)

Incestual thoughts of falling in love with the m/other, jealous feelings towards the father as a competitor of the m/other’s affections, along with the wish to see the father dead, were the basis of Freud’s belief that this was a common experience for infants (2010). The story of Oedipus and his father’s expulsion of him through fear that a prophecy foretelling of the son’s killing of his father and having sex with his mother, resulted in Oedipus, unknowingly, fulfilling both aspects of the prophecy, and Freud used the myth to illustrate this aspect of his clinical findings (2010). In Freud’s framework this phase generally occurred between the ages of three and five, later, other psychoanalysts noted signs of the conflict at an earlier age (Rycroft, 1995).

The m/other has been the primary source of satisfaction for the infant’s desires, however as a child begins to develop a sense of their sexual identity, phantasies seek to replace the father in his sexual relationship with this mother. The jealousy engendered by this desire also leads to phantasies of wishing for the death of the father.

The complex feelings around this phase lie in the unacceptable desire of the child to possess the parent of the opposite sex while also having equally powerful feelings of wanting to destroy the third party (Freud, 2010, 2011).

Perhaps one of the most disturbing aspects of Freud’s perspective is the suggestion that very young children are aware of their parents’ sexual intimacy, an awareness that something goes on between them that they are not a part of. Although knowledge relating to sexual intimacy between parents is limited, it is assumed to be envisaged as a phantasy (Diem-Wille, 2011). Freud (1915:266, in Diem-Will, p.200) leading to other phantasies relating to pregnancy and birth. Powerful feelings create internal conflict and jealousy, resulting in phantasies of violent acts against the m/other’s body and possible babies which may be distressing to the child who fears punishment by the m/other or father (Diem-Will).

Resolution of the complex arises when the reality that the parental relationship is an exclusive one, excluding the child but offering something different and separate, is realised. The dawning awareness, on the part of girls, of her own impotence in relationship with her father and a realisation he has something her mother wants, and she does not have, a penis presents difficulties with identification. She cannot be her father and so competes with her mother to have him for herself. Perhaps flirting with him and other male peers, seeking to identify with her mother as the desired object. The implications for a boy are similar but in reverse, the boy wishes to compete to use his penis with his mother and replace his father (Diem-Wille. 2011, Frosh, 2012).

Freud coined the phrase ‘castration complex’ (2011) to describe the necessary psychological mechanisms of adaptation to curtail these drives to fit in with social expectations of children’s relationship with their parents. A significant aspect of psychosexual development lies in the child’s ability to recognise the ‘universal incest taboo,’ once recognised as such it is repressed in the unconscious. Nevertheless, there is a recognition of the line so nearly crossed, and with it a fear of reprisal by the father in the form of the removal of his penis. Acknowledging at some level the transgression the boy pursues appeasement of his father, recognising his strength and power and seeking to identify with him. Eventually the intention is to replace his father, but with a wife of his own (Frosh, 2012).

Girls are understood to identify with pregnancy in their mother, wishing to have their father’s child (Freud, 1924) and often playing out being pregnant themselves by putting a cushion under their clothing. Play, for both boys and girls, provides a way for children to express and deal with their powerful and often confusing emotions in relation to this concept (Freud, 1924).

The Oedipus complex as a concept was initially met with mixed responses, significant criticisms were directed at the prominence of the role ascribed to the male child, particularly in terms of the castration complex, and penis envy ascribed to girls. The focus on genitalia was suggested by some to locate the issues in gender, bypassing the implications for development posited by Freud (Frosh, 2012).

With the benefit of hindsight Frosh offers a summary of Freud’s intention in describing the phenomena:

‘While individual children might or might not go through the mythical sequence of love and hate that Freud described all of us have to find ways in which our desires are parcelled out, made tolerable, encouraged and refined, and all have to deal with our resistance of our environment to them, as well as the opportunities our relationships provide to enable them to be fulfilled.’ (Frosh, 2012, p.87)

Childhood phantasies are opportunities for children to express the complex feelings arising from bodily-based sensations, and emotions are psychic responses to those feelings. However, these phantasies emerge at a time when the ability to express such complex affects verbally is not available. And, even if this capacity were available, acknowledging the content of the phantasies, based as they are on jealousy and thoughts of revenge, would feel frightening, laden with judgemental implications and fears of retribution. In Freud’s theory (2010, 2018) the unconscious is a safe space to wall up these issues with strategies to prevent them from reaching consciousness. However, Freud’s model of the mind was not a binary notion, as will be explained in the next section.

##### 3.1.6.7 Psychic defences

The ego ‘acts as an intermediary between the id and the outside world.’ (Freud, 1940 [2010, p.2]) and one aspect of its role is to mediate both internal and external threats.

Psychic defences act as ‘a psychological barrier which functions to protect the personality from the fear of threat or anxiety, and to keep the conflict which it masks out of consciousness’ (Greenhalgh, 1994, p.49). A significant aspect of these psychic defence mechanisms is that they emerge from the unconscious and are therefore difficult to observe from within the individual’s perspective.

Perhaps those aspects of anxiety in the psychoanalytic framework most easily understood are those around the ‘fear of loss and abandonment,’ related to both internal or external threats that can be real or imagined, and ‘excessive hate and destructiveness,’ (Rustin, 2015, p. 236).

Levick (1983) identified the defensive measure of repression as Freud’s ‘cornerstone for the whole structure of psychoanalysis,’ (p.17) and noted others as, projection, regression, reaction formation, undoing, and isolation. However, later conceptions were developed by Anna Freud and others, e.g., Klein and Bion. The underlying basis of all these defences ‘is that they represent ways in which unconscious material is either kept solidly out of sight (for example repression) or allowed through while remaining compatible with the demands of social order (for example sublimation)’ (Levick, 1983, p. 17). Freud’s earliest defences are given a brief explanation below.

##### 3.1.6.7.1 Repression

‘The task of all defences is somehow to enable the person *not to know* what is happening ‘unconsciously’ (Frosh, 2012). All other defensive activities can be subsumed into this one, (Frosh, 2012).

Repression is constantly at work, vigilantly guarding against something that is known but felt to be in some way threatening to the ego. Frosh suggests that it is a form of motivated forgetting ‘in which something that was once known is known no longer, but kept under and out of sight,’ (2012, p. 60). For example, when asked a question in an interview fear of being judged may repress a response that might invoke a judgemental reaction.

##### 3.1.6.7.2 Projection

The idea of projection was an early Freudian concept that held a possible explanation for paranoia. Freud (1958) described this defence as an ‘internal perception is suppressed, and instead, its content, after undergoing a certain kind of distortion, enters consciousness in the form of an external perception,’ (p.66). Frosh (2012) describes it simply by suggesting that just as it is normal to locate in the environment a source of discomfort, for example feeling too hot and locating the heat source, so internal anxiety is located in someone or something outside the body. He describes the operation of the mechanism as attributing ‘something painful in one’s mind … to something outside,’ (p.163). Projection offers the possibility of escaping uncomfortable feelings by attributing them to another person, thereby ridding themselves of; ‘qualities, feelings or wishes that the subject repudiates or refuses to recognise in himself, (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1983, in Frosh, 2012, p.163). For example, when someone feels another person is hateful when it is their own unacceptable hatred ‘split off’ and projected into that person (Frosh, 2012).

##### 3.1.6.7.3 Denial

Denial merges with repression, defending against the implications of people’s reactions while also suggesting a denial of intentions, for example, when someone has been killed the perpetrator may say it was unintentional, an accident, thereby denying responsibility (Frosh, 2012).

##### 3.1.6.7.4 Reaction formation

The denial of one’s feelings of inferiority by becoming a bully is a good example of this defence. Responding to something in a way that is the opposite of the way one is feeling, to deny one’s vulnerability, is at the heart of reaction formation. (Frosh, 2012)

##### 3.1.6.7.5 Regression

This defensive manoeuvre refers to a tactic whereby disturbing feelings are defended against by returning to an earlier stage of development when resources might have been appropriate at that time but have remained stuck in the past (Frosh, 2012). For example, to avoid facing an issue, such as rejection by another individual, a return to an earlier stage of development might be sought. In children this might be the sucking of a thumb or a return to bed soiling.

##### 3.1.6.7.6 Undoing

Wishing something can be undone is a form of defence where whatever was experienced is magicked away, pretending it never happened (Gay, 1988).

##### 3.1.6.7.7 Isolating

By isolating extremely disturbing experiences the affects resulting from them are also isolated. This defence, in the words of Gay (1988), ‘consists of an effort at fending off obscene, terrifying, shameful fantasies or memories from the affects that belong to them, (p.489). Isolating such feelings in the unconscious does not obliterate them and they may press for some sort of expression. Unfortunately, unconscious associations between the present and the past can result in the affects emerging with a sense of bewilderment as to where the feelings originate.

### 3.1 7: Summary

My intention in section 3.1.3 was to present an overview of the main ideas of Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis, often known as classical theory. Freud found associations between early infant experiences and adult anxieties which led him to establish a developmental framework for identifying areas where issues might arise.

Figure 3.1 (p.59) offered a visual representation of Freud’s structural model of the mind (1923) and the component aspects that constantly interact with each other, making a dynamic, complex system, interacting within this framework and with the external environment. Perhaps one of the most powerful concepts to grasp is that of the unconscious and the interplay between one unconscious and another, the phenomena referred to in psychoanalysis as transference and countertransference.

In Freud’s model of the mind, the ego mediates the sense of threat, which may be internal or external, and has a resource of defences to assuage threats to the personality. For example, guilt and shame may feel overwhelming and create a sense of devastation at being found out.

While thoughts and ideas remain hidden and defended against, they cannot be resolved, the purpose of psychoanalysis is to bring them into conscious awareness. Freud used dreams and word association and for children he recognised the usefulness of play.

What follows now is the theoretical framework on which this study is built based on three theorists who had developed Freud’s classical theory out of their own practice and understanding.

## 3.2: The Theoretical Framework for the study

Freud’s theory was further developed by others who used their understanding and clinical experience to enlarge and clarify his concepts. As a result, there are many theories to choose from, all providing their own useful perspectives, often similar but not necessarily the same. For example, Bion’s concept of container/contained and its presumed similarity with Winnicott’s (1971) theory of holding. Nevertheless, in psychoanalysis there is not one single unifying theory (Pick, 2015) but diverse perspectives, appropriate for the diversity of human experience and resulting from observations made by various analysts when working with their clients (Milton, Polmear, and Fabricus, 2004).

### 3.2.1: Rationale for the choice of theorists informing the study.

While similarities exist between theorists there can be subtle differences and, while it is not possible to consider the whole range of psychoanalytic theories, within the parameters of this thesis three psychoanalytic theorists that appear relevant to the purpose of this study have been identified as Melanie Klein, Wilfred Bion and Donald Winnicott. Each of them offers a specific view of development and learning and provides a perspective of what we might expect to see in children.

### 3.2.2: The three theorists: Adaptations of Freudian theory: Klein, Bion, and Winnicott

Psychoanalytic theories arise from Freudian classical thinking but have been reworked by some theorists using slightly different terminology and emphasis over time. Pick (2015) suggested that major contributors to the advancement of psychoanalytic thinking ‘provide a treasure house of clinical experience and ideas, models of the mind and unconscious relationships, simply not available earlier in the history of the movement.’ (p.19). He names Klein, Bion, and Winnicott as significant contributors. What follows is a brief overview of the contribution made by these individuals to our overall understanding of the internal organisation of the mind and the role of emotion in the mind’s organisation, their ideas are enlarged upon in the analysis and discussion.

Figure 3.3. Overview of theoretical developmental lines

Demonstrating the cumulative theoretical base for the three main theorists being considered in this study.

**Freud (1836-1939)**

(Classical psychoanalytic theory)

**Klein (1882-1960)**

(Object relations, P/S, D, Splitting/projection, Epistemophilic Drive)

The next section considers each of the theorists separately, with a brief biography followed by an outline of their conceptual frameworks.

**Bion** **(1897-1979)**

Origin of Thinking

Learning from experience

Container/Contained

**Winnicott** **(1896-1971)**

Good Enough mother

Transitional object

Play

## 3.3: Melanie Klein (1882-1960) (settled in England in 1926)

Classical Theory refers to the ideas formulated by Sigmund Freud about the development of the mind leading to thinking and behaviour that can jeopardise health and wellbeing. Freudian thinking contributed greatly to the development of Klein’s theories (Rycroft, 1968, 1995), however, Kleinian theory relates less to drives and more to relational influences (Rycroft, ibid.).

A brief biography places Melanie Klein in a historical and familial context.

### 3.3.1: Biography

Born into a Jewish family in Vienna in 1882, Melanie Klein (nee Reizes) settled in London in the 1920s (Pick, 2015) encouraged by Ernest Jones who was at that time a respected and influential member of the psychoanalytic fraternity. There were some significant relational difficulties within her family and anxieties about her own value due to the preferred treatment of her siblings by their parents.

The loss of her brother to TB when she was 20 appeared to be a significant loss and, because of the death of her father two years earlier, financial difficulties are thought to have influenced her decision to abandon plans for a medical career. Around this time Melanie met and married Arthur Klein in 1903, a chemical engineer who travelled widely, she developed a closer relationship with Arthur’s sister and other relatives rather than her husband and they divorced in 1920 (Gomez, 1997).

Her three pregnancies resulted in Klein suffering post-natal depression and this appears to have been exacerbated by the loss of her mother in 1914. Gomez (1997) suggested ‘a picture of a lost and frightened woman, unable to manage without her mother’ (Gomez, 1997, p 30).

Klein discovered psychoanalysis after reading Freud and subsequently entered therapy with Sandor Ferenczi, a close friend of Freud (Pick, 2015, Gomez, 1997). He is described as ‘warm and compassionate … who believed that people became neurotic not through sexual conflict but through lack of love,’ (Gomez, 1997, p.30). This therapeutic relationship seemed to offer Klein the opportunity for a warm, supportive relationship and she developed a deep attachment to him (Gomez, 1997). Her work with him led to her interest in becoming an analyst with children. Although criticised for her efforts to gain experience by analysing her own children it is suggested that she may have wanted her children to gain some benefit and compensate for her lack as a mother (Gomez, 1997).

Going through a difficult divorce and facing isolation and distrust, by others in her community, of her methods of working with children she found another analyst in Karl Abrahams who offered a supportive relationship (Gomez, 1997). Unfortunately, Klein received another setback when Abrahams became terminally ill fourteen months after becoming his analysand (Gomez, 1997). Her life was made more difficult by the judgemental attitudes towards women in Germany at the time, particularly being divorced, and she accepted the encouragement of a British psychoanalyst, Ernest Jones, to move to London (Gomez, 1997)

Her life in Britain seemed to facilitate the processing of the events of her early life resulting in a theoretical framework that reflected her awareness of the needs of infants and young children (Gomez, 1997). It is suggested that the series of personal tragedies and, later, assaults on her professional integrity, deepened a sense of personal unhappiness, however this was channelled into her work and appeared to increase her sensitivity to the feelings of distressed infants, Gomez reflected: ‘Perhaps this response sums her up as a person,’ (1997p.33).

My reading of Freud suggests that his interest in theoretical ideas about childhood and development arose out of his concern to understand adult neuroses. Melanie Klein also considered that the psychoanalytic view offered the possibility of understanding adult mental difficulties by studying the roots that are grounded in infancy (Klein, 1959). However, she was also motivated to resolve issues of emotional development in childhood rather than wait for them to become more problematic in adulthood. Klein was the first psychoanalyst to use play as part of her therapeutic intervention, and an important aspect of her thinking. She also had an interest in education and its role in supporting the holistic development of personality (Waddell, 2002).

Klein died in 1960.

#### 3.3.1.1 Explaining Klein’s use of the term phantasy

Melanie Klein had a particular meaning when she used the word phantasy as opposed to the word ‘fantasy’. Phantasy was the sense-making process of emotional sensations of children’s unconscious and encompasses all internal responses to the external world (Klein, 1959). I understand this to mean that it is the phantasies that give internal meaning to what is perceived externally. Phantasy is a result of body and mind working together to make sense of a somatic experience creating a cohesive experience described by Isaacs; ‘There is no impulse, no instinctual urge or response which is not experienced as internal phantasy … A phantasy represents the particular content of the urges or feelings (for example, wishes, fears, anxieties, triumphs love or sorrow) dominating the mind at the moment (Isaacs 1952, p.294).

This made sense to me when reading Abram and Hinshelwood (2018) discussing Klein’s meaning behind the illusory term ‘unconscious phantasy.’ Hinshelwood explained that the mental processes of a new-born infant require some sort of meaningful explanation, for example, of the inner world experience of hunger, while lacking sophisticated thought to do so. The limitations of the infant’s mental processes reduce experiences to being either good or bad, hence the phantasy of the good breast is identified when hunger is assuaged, while the phantasy of the bad breast represents hunger that persists without satisfaction (Abram and Hinshelwood, 2018). The reality for the infant is determined by those experiences and the emotion they engender. Perhaps the most terrifying reality they can experience is that of not having their hunger managed consistently, leading to frustration and anger with a desire to enact that anger on the object manifesting as the bad breast (Hinshelwood,1989).

Unconscious phantasy features throughout this brief examination of Klein’s theory.

### 3.3.2: Theory: Object relations

Although Klein elaborated on Freud’s theory, the landscape he constructed and described using the terms id, ego, and superego, unconscious, and conscious, remained the same and are common terms in psychoanalytic theory today. Klein valued Freud’s exposition on the relationship between id, ego, and superego as vital, however, she also acknowledged that ‘over time these basic concepts underwent further development,’ (1959, p.293). An example of Klein’s modification of Freud’s basic concepts lies in the timeline she established for when each of the aspects of personality, emerged. Freud believed that at birth only the id, composed of basic drives, constituted the mental life of the infant, Klein believed that the ego also operated from birth onwards (1959). The ego’s role ensured the repression of the id’s libidinal impulses and anxiety caused by psychic conflict ‘stirred up by the struggle within and by influences without,’ (1959, p.293).

While Klein did not completely reject Freud’s view, for some psychoanalysts this represented a major shift from Freudian thinking about the centrality of biological drives towards relational ones arising from the earliest relationship between a m/other and her baby (Waddell, 2002). Frosh describes the shift away from biological drives as a move to a more open system of psychology, ‘from a one-person psychology to a two-person one,’ (2012, p.129). However, Klein did not underestimate the contribution made by the father: ‘Much of what I have said about the m/other’s relation to her children in different stages of their development applies also to the father’s.’ (1975, p. 320).

This emphasis on the relational aspects of personality development influenced her foremost contribution to her thinking. The m/other is the first object, though initially understood through interactions with part objects, e.g., the breast, smell, voice, etc. The way the infant feels about the interactions makes the relationship dynamic from the earliest infant experience. It is only as development moves on that these initial primitive forms of mental representation evolve into an awareness that the breast, nipple, skin, voice, etc. are part of a whole object, m/other.

The developing perceptual nervous system serves the developing mind, eventually revealing the part-objects as elements of a whole and with this recognition a realisation that the good becomes bad in the absence of the good. Sometimes the breast is available, sometimes there is a delay but with the consistency of care trust evolves and feelings more easily managed. The process offers the infant an opportunity to learn about the reality of their world, sometimes satisfaction is delayed, and this necessitates an ability to tolerate this changing state.

Klein’s theory of object relations attributes the m/other with the initiation of the infant’s first experience in object relating, the feeling of being fed, loved, and understood are essential to the infant’s wellbeing (1959). It is her capacity in the role of caring m/other that provides the infant with its first experience of a good object, she suggests that the infant introjects these good aspects and by doing so can accept the world, and those objects in it, as a good dependable place to be (1959). The association relates to the identification with an external figure whose impact has been introjected and incorporated into a narrative constructed in unconscious phantasy (Klein, 1935, 1959). The good object also becomes a safe repository for the infant’s own feelings, both good and bad, which can be projected into the mother knowing they will be held safely. Gradually the ego identifies with the good object and is strengthened by it (1959).

The concept of goodness or badness of objects is associated with gratification or not of the infant’s needs. The phantasies are imbued with strong emotions, for example the good breast holds pleasure, satisfaction, and love, while the sensation of the breast being withheld, the bad breast, holds powerful negative attributes leading to a sense of anger, frustration, and sadistic impulses (Hinshelwood, 1989).

Primitive representations are the beginning of mental life and function, the objects that exist in the internal world are transformed as the infant’s perceptions grow and associations between part-objects and whole ones are made. However, unconscious phantasies, imbued as they are with emotional experience, are located in concrete physical experiences. The phantasies remain throughout life and later language formulates them into somatic metaphors recognised within society, for example, emotions can be experienced physically, and common phrases describe them, for example having a lump in one’s throat or butterflies in one’s tummy (Hinshelwood, 1989).

The primitive mental mechanisms usually develop into more sophisticated processes, where objects are identified by symbols, a representation of something rather than the internal object itself (Hinshelwood, 1989). Play offers the opportunity of externalising phantasy represented in the symbolic features of the toys, and the roles enacted, both imbued with the emotional context of the object being represented (Klein, 1946). For example, a crocodile may represent a father figure, suggesting anxieties about being devoured, a loss of self, or retribution. The usefulness of play as a therapeutic intervention was seen much the same as Freud used dreams and free-thinking, the phenomena of an inner world emerged (Klein, 1929, Hinshelwood, 1989). For the ego, this is a safe means for repressed emotions to be released into consciousness, to be grappled with, and eventually, hopefully, satisfied. The subject of symbolism and play are discussed in their own section later.

Klein identified what she termed primitive defence mechanisms of splitting and projection, both intended to externalise painful conflicts with play and symbolism employed to relieve their struggle. By splitting off unacceptable aspects of the ego or self, for example the desire to wreak sadistic revenge on a m/other and avoiding the pain of acknowledging their own feelings.

Projection similarly defends against difficult and intense feelings that need to be pushed away from their source and into an external object. It is another avoidance tactic for taking responsibility for one’s feelings. This can be problematic if children seek to attribute blame to others, particularly if the teacher has not witnessed the incident. Both primitive mechanisms were linked to the development of her conceptualisation of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive mind states and are discussed in (3.3.4, p.89).

Klein’s work with children, which included offering things to play with as well as scissors and crayons etc., informed her interpretations and has been described as ground-breaking, though she had many critics who believed she undermined the work of Freud (Pick, 2015). Klein’s (1929) view was that she used Freud’s theories as a basis for her own, but took them further in their application (Pick, 2015). Working with children was understood at that time to be innovative and has influenced the development of all psychoanalytic approaches to work with children (Gomez,1997). Klein (1929) believed that play offered unconscious phantasy a safe opportunity to express impulses and satisfy unacceptable desires, to seek revenge for unmet needs, or create possibilities for fulfilling wishes that might be considered unacceptable. The sexual phantasy of the Oedipal conflict, with its jealous desire for the death of a parent in order to replace them in an intimate sexual relationship, is an example. This is explained further in the next section.

### 3.3.3: Oedipal Conflict

The Oedipal conflict, sometimes referred to as the Oedipal complex, first introduced by Freud, is a central concept for psychoanalysis and successful negotiation ‘shapes the way we relate to others and assume that others relate to us,’ (Pick, 2015, p.51). A positive resolution is an acceptance that, although a dyadic relationship with the prized object might be desired there are advantages in being part of a group.

Klein’s work led her to believe that the Oedipal Conflict, first introduced by Freud and thought to appear around the third to fifth year, occurred at a much earlier stage, emerging ‘in the second part of the first year’ (Klein, 1946, p.99). She also disagreed with his view that the superego emerged out of the Oedipal phase, seeing the processes of introjection and projection arising as contributors to both the development of the ego, and superego, the parental voice.

Klein’s thinking at that time suggested an unconscious awareness of the parent’s sexual relationship, only limited by the child’s ignorance of the sexual act. The phantasies generated are a combination of body parts and actions relating to them which are pregenital and therefore influenced by their own experiences of feeding, biting, controlling their faeces, etc. Hinshelwood suggested that they represent an innate propensity ‘for imagining such things’ (1989, p. 60) featuring the part objects that are familiar to the young child, those of the breasts and nipples, penis, and the vagina, including the phantasy of them joining together to make one figure (Hinshelwood, 1989).

The main theme needing to be addressed in this phase arises out of a confluence of jealousy and phantasies on the part of the boy to replace his father in a sexual act with the mother, while the girl desires to replace the mother in a sexual relationship with her father. Later developments of the theory recognise that the phantasies are not restricted to the opposite sex parent and wishes for sexual intercourse with the same-sex parent may also occur (Diem-Wille, 2011). The gradual emergence of how unrealistic the possibility of a sexual relationship with a parent enables young children to tolerate that in this regard their wishes cannot be fulfilled (Klein, 1945, Pick, 2015).

An important aspect of coping with reality is the negotiation of the conflicts that emerge from the oedipal situation, the infant develops an awareness that there is a third person, usually father, in the relationship making a triad rather than the familiar dyad experienced in the early days of the infant’s existence. The desire to remain at the centre of m/other’s affections creates powerful emotions and phantasies involving sadistic notions of annihilation of the competition. The successful negotiation of this transition facilitates a move away from a persecutory mindset to a more positive one. While Freud had identified stages of psychosexual development as a stage theory, Klein offers the perspective of alternation taking place between mental states, throughout life, from one mind state to another, step away from classical theory. The persecutory position ‘paranoid-schizoid’ and the more realistic ‘depressive’ are examined below and contextualise some of the ideas mentioned above.

### 3.3.4: Paranoid schizoid (PS) and depressive (D) positions

These terms are frequently misunderstood as labels for aspects of mental illness, however they relate to a sense or meaning specific to Klein’s theoretical framework of development (Klein, 1946, Greenhalgh, 1994, Pick, 2015,).

Rather than a stage process of development, Klein thought in terms of ‘two modes of experiencing which remain operative for a lifetime,’ (Diem-Wille, 2011, p.81). The first being a more primitive form of experience while the second indicates a shift to the more realistic and mature experience of the depressive position. The potential for growth in Klein’s developmental framework was rooted in the capacity to move from the unrealistic paranoid-schizoid position to an acceptance of the reality of relationships, first within the family and later beyond, often encountering the wider world initially in the educational space. The potential for growth can be inhibited where there is entrenchment in defence mechanism, an over-reliance for example on splitting and projection restricts the development of a more flexible capacity to tolerate frustrations and uncomfortable feelings (Klein, 1946).

The paranoid-schizoid position is that primary experience for the infant at a time when the perception of reality is limited, arousing states of overwhelming emotions, the feeling of being under threat, and having no mental framework to make sense of the experience. Sensations felt in the body that feel threatening are subject to ‘impulses, fantasies, and anxieties’ (Diem-Wille, 2011, p.81). The good breast holds the pleasure of having pain and discomfort relieved, and these experiences are internalised, introjected, the milk rescuing him from the bad breast, the experience of gnawing hunger (Hinshelwood, 1989). The phantasy of there being a good breast can be represented by the bottle or breast, it is the sensations of being close to m/other, her smell, the feel of her skin, that allows the infant to defend against the lack of the breast, perceived as the bad breast.

If satisfaction from hunger is delayed the phantasy becomes one of an overwhelming sense of loss accompanied by pain and frustration, this experience is understood by the infant as the bad breast and is felt to be persecutory. The feelings arising from this experience are bundled together and projected, as part of the phantasy, into the object phantasised as the bad breast, which is the absence of a breast or bottle (Klein, 1946). The bad breast becomes the receptacle of anything felt to be bad and is utilised throughout life for the projection of bad feelings that are difficult to tolerate. This term ‘bad object’ features throughout the analysis particularly in relation to Arlia. In educational spaces children whose behaviour is seen as frustrating may be targeted as ‘bad objects’ to receive adult projections of uncomfortable feelings that are difficult to tolerate. The analogy of the man who has had a bad day at work and on arriving home kicks the dog may be a more familiar notion. Perhaps also satisfying the desire to make the object of the projection feel what s/he is feeling.

Over time the introjections of the good object form the basis of the development of the ego. ‘In the longer term, it is one of the most important mechanisms used to build up a secure personality through the experience of having the good objects introjected and safely located inside, with the ensuing experience of an internal sensation of goodness, or self-confidence and mental stability.’ (Hinshelwood, 1989, p.329). With the reliability of good experiences occurring more frequently than the bad, there is a shift away from a persecutory threat and as frustration gives way gradually to tolerance and the capacity to wait, the shift towards a more realistic view of the world can emerge. A return to overwhelming frustration may occur at times of anxiety and stress, when a persecutory phantasy predominates, however, the depressive state of reality can be returned to with a growing belief that life is generally bearable and changeable. In Klein’s conceptual framework the shift between the two mindsets is an ongoing experience throughout life, dependent on our level of anxiety and our capacity to hold on to the belief that good experiences will return (Klein, 1946). I wonder if the capacity to grasp this reality might be one aspect of mental health and wellbeing.

Unfortunately, for an infant who has not had the opportunity to introject sufficient good experiences, they may develop a tendency towards a more paranoid-schizoid state of mind (Klein, 1959). When the world is experienced as persecutory, offence may be taken at any suggestion that threatens their sense of self, they become sensitive to complaints and criticisms and expect things to go wrong. Responsibility for their part in an incident, both good and bad, will be difficult to accept and others will be subject to the phantasy that they were totally to blame. As a result, they ‘fluctuate between feelings of grandeur and phases of self-doubt and perceived inferiority, and they attempt to control other people by various means,’ (Diem-Wille, 2011, p.82).

Another defensive response to feelings of vulnerability is that of omnipotence. Klein (1946) has a very specific understanding of this concept that differs from Winnicott’s view. In Klein’s view, a sense of omnipotence offers primitive protection against the threat of loss of the good breast, the breast that satisfies the gnawing pains of hunger. The phantasy or illusion of being omnipotent defends against feelings of neediness, and the fears of anxiety at the loss of the good object, that accompany it (Klein, 1946, Hinshelwood, 1989, Abram, 2018). School children who are uncomfortable with asking for help may be defending against their sense of vulnerability, by saying ‘I can sort this myself, I don’t need anyone else,’ asserting a sense of omnipotence based on an assumption that they are likely to be disappointed if they ask for help. Winnicott’s (1971) idea of omnipotence is different and will be considered later.

The proclivity to experience the environment as persecutory will compromise other relationships making trust difficult to achieve, which can have detrimental effects on learning. If the teacher, or another adult in the classroom is perceived from the paranoid-schizoid position, trust in their guidance and teaching will be undermined. Alternatively, a child operating from a depressive position, open to the reality that no one is perfect, even themselves, and that sometimes even teachers can get it wrong, makes for a more realistic approach to learning. Thus, the paranoid-schizoid position inhibits the desire to know which was an important aspect of Klein’s theory, she used the term ‘epistemophilia’ (Hinshelwood, 1989) to describe her concept.

### 3.3.5: Epistemophilic drive

Within the present pedagogy, there is an assumption that for children to learn they need to be taught, but the evidence of many parents suggests that children seem to have a natural propensity to learning. At times, their inquisitiveness and questioning seem to know no bounds and the nature of this search for knowledge has been examined by other writers in this field. Ofer and Durban recognised the ‘nature and function of curiosity as a universal human phenomenon,’ (1999, p. 35) and further suggest ‘curiosity as a major force in the process of linking the self with others and in establishing intrapsychic, external, and transitional spaces (1999, p.35). In another paper, Blakemore, and Frith suggested that ‘… the brain has evolved to educate and to be educated, often instinctively and effortlessly, (2005, p.459) and extend this thinking that there is almost an evolutionary propensity towards improving ‘brains and minds,’ (p. 464).

Klein classified the instinctive curiosity of infants to know as epistemophilia. The innate impetus towards discovery and knowledge is also understood by Klein to be a ‘driving force in emotional development,’ (1921, p.25 in Miller, L., Rustin, Rustin and Shuttleworth 1989). Although care for an infant may appear purely physical, feeding, cleaning, etc., an implicit outcome is not limited to the relational aspects of these interactions but is the origin of mental development (Klein, 1921). The mechanism instigated by repeated patterns of behaviour by the caregiver is suggested to organise mental thought (Stern, 1985), allowing for an increased capacity for knowing and understanding self in relation to others (Waddell 2002).

Klein’s epistemophilic drive leads me to assume that the emotionality of early experience, at a time before the development of language, requires a framework to accommodate the infant’s constantly evolving emotional response to relational experiences. Symbols offer a form of sense-making, substituting this for that, expressing unconscious phantasies, processing, and integrating internal and external experiences (Segal, 1957). I also assume from my reading that the symbols themselves become hooks on which unconscious phantasies can be located, a primitive form of emotional memory. The significance of the symbols, linked as they are in Klein’s work, comes to the fore in children’s play.

### 3.3.6: Symbolism and play

Symbolism is described as an ‘interweaving of inner reality with a shared world,’ (Bibby, 2018, p.67). Images as symbols in psychoanalytic thinking are considered an unconscious substitution of one idea for another, it is a conception developed by Freud and then elaborated on by Klein, Bion, and Winnicott.

Play was considered by Klein to be a source of information about ‘the early stages of infancy and deeper layers of the unconscious,’ (1935, p.291). It offers a potential space for embryonic thought to emerge and be brought into existence, providing an opportunity for discharging the energy held within phantasies (Klein, 1935). The space is created by symbolic representations ‘being to some extent removed from the subject’s own person – (is) less invested with anxiety than is confession by word of mouth.’ (Klein, 1926, p. 149). In her work with children Klein (1927) noted that play was significant in the capacity to work through their anxieties describing how one child’s resistance to the meaning of his dreams was explored through ‘the box of toys and by means of dolls and other playthings depicted for me his associations, helping himself out with words again whenever he overcame some resistance’ (1927, p.145).

Symbolism supports the ego’s efforts to make sense of present-day anxieties arising from early primitive relationships (Klein, 1930). One example might be conflicts arising from the Oedipal phase of development when the challenge of having to relinquish the dyadic relationship with m/other becomes a pressing reality. Anxious and aggressive feelings can imbue toys and small world objects in play, offering a release of inner tension and the possibility of a different perspective.

Symbolic figures offer a form of expression where words would be ineffective (Isaacs, 1948). Small, real, world objects act as representations of internal conflict, structuring the internal world of the child, helping them make sense of their inner reality (Klein, 1929). Together symbolism, unconscious phantasy, and play create a concrete, physical form (Klein, 1929, Segal, 1957), useful both as an early creative experience and as a defensive mechanism (Hinshelwood, 1989). For example, a child can defend against uncomfortable feelings of helplessness by holding a phantasy of being a hero and identifying with the characteristics of a superhero.

Although children can be very loving Klein included in her accounts of therapy incidents that demonstrated the destructive and sadistic impulses of envy and greed (1959), but she understood these emotions as normal aspects of development (1937). The psychological processes that allow for feelings of envy and greed, with sadistic intent fuelling phantasies of death and annihilation of the loved object that has fallen from grace, also fuel guilt (1937). Without guilt there can be no reparation which brings with it the genesis of understanding and empathy for the different perspectives of others (1937).

Play offers a platform to express the constellation of the most powerful emotions arising from both love and hate. Internal mechanisms of phantasy and symbolism operate to resolve conflicts, for example, the struggle between the wishes of the id and the demanding punitive voice of the super-ego (Klein, 1929). The language of symbolism, translating feelings creatively through play, can express profound and confusing internal experiences that allow their expression without articulating them (Klein, 1959, Mayes, 2018). Klein described how, in play, the two structures of the id and the super-ego are assigned roles related to the many relationships in a child’s life. For example, the persecuting objects of the parents or teacher, representing the super-ego, array themselves against the child figure, representing the id, however, in play the child can personify themselves in both roles, sometimes as the persecutory super-ego, with sadistic intentions, and as the persecuted child who may seek retribution, perhaps emerging in the role as a powerful figure personified as a queen (1929).

Giving expression to the internal conflict around the desires of the id to seek satisfaction and the punitive super-ego’s attempts to deny gratification involves the processes of projection and displacement. Both good and bad feelings need to be attributed in some way to the symbolic representation. Klein describes an example from a therapeutic setting; ‘When Erna played the part of the cruel mother, the naughty child was the enemy; when she herself was the child who was persecuted but soon became powerful the enemy was represented by the wicked parents,’ (Klein, 1929, p.194).

Within children’s play, they can create a narrative, to manifest their own story and see it unfolding without fear of judgment or recriminations by adults. Play was understood by Klein as a formative experience, a journey into both knowing oneself and others (1975), an opportunity to fulfil the epistemophilic drive without the limitations of language or cognitive competencies. A sense of loss was a feature of children’s play noted by Klein and is considered next.

### 3.3.7: Mourning and loss

Klein, built on much of Freud’s work, and one area she developed was the powerful and, in her mind, underestimated influence of a sense of loss on our experience of the world.

Early losses include the loss of the breast or bottle at the initiation of weaning (TF, p.92), with the closeness to the m/other the experience implied (Klein, 1940, Hinshelwood, 1989). Another early loss arises from the dawning awareness that the infant is no longer part of a dyadic relationship. These experiences are suggested by Klein (1940) to be the genesis of the Oedipus complex, which holds within it the possibility of letting go and replacing the lost object of the m/other, offering a more enriching triadic relationship. Also making way for a shift from a persecutory framework of the paranoid-schizoid mindset, to the depressive one where reality can be accepted and worked with to bring other opportunities for satisfaction (Klein,1940).

Significantly, Klein (1940) emphasised that wherever there is a sense of loss there needs to be a work of mourning, an opportunity to work through the complex emotions engendered by the loss. She also made the point that further losses in life will to some extent re-awaken the primary losses of infanthood.

Although the difficulties presented by a transition in school are to some extent acknowledged, however, I wonder if the powerful feelings that are aroused by change in educational spaces are fully appreciated. Each school day brings a myriad of mini losses, endings, and beginnings that need to be negotiated by children, any of which can bring associations with earlier losses.

### 3.3.8: Summary

Melanie Klein emphasised the important contribution to development made by the infant’s relationship to the m/other, she proposed a trajectory in emotional development placed firmly on the physical experience the infant has of the m/other’s body, particularly the breast. She echoes Freudian thinking in locating the development of the erogenous zones of the body and the contribution they make to forming a mental framework.

Unconscious phantasy and symbolism facilitate the sense-making of emotional experiences and contribute to the mental framework. Feelings can seem overwhelming, but symbols, imbued with emotional associations, make them more manageable by the distance they create between them and the subject.

The potential for growth in Klein’s developmental framework was rooted in the capacity to move from the unrealistic paranoid-schizoid position to an acceptance of the reality of relationships, first within the family and later beyond, often encountering the wider world initially in the educational space. The potential for growth can be inhibited where there is entrenchment in defence mechanism, an over-reliance for example on splitting and projection restricts the development of a more flexible capacity to tolerate frustrations and uncomfortable feelings (Klein, 1946).

The potential for growth in Klein’s developmental framework was rooted in the capacity to move from the unrealistic paranoid-schizoid position to an acceptance of the reality of relationships, first within the family and later beyond, often encountering the wider world initially in the educational space. However, becoming over reliant on defence mechanism can inhibit the move towards the depressive position.

Klein outlined many challenges to be faced in the process towards the more mature depressive position, each challenge adding to the infant’s capacity to engage with the world in a meaningful way, culminating in the resolution of the oedipal complex which offers insight into the possibilities of intimacy, a useful resource throughout life. However, neither position is fixed, and life stresses can lead to a propensity to a shift from a depressive position to more of a paranoid-schizoid one.

I found her view of the two fluctuating positions of paranoid-schizoid and depressive mind very powerful. It serves as a useful reflective tool with which to view my own experience at times when I feel misunderstood and find myself reacting in ways that surprise me. Understanding that both children and adults can find themselves responding defensively to situations from a persecutory stance offers insight into the way relationships can work in educational spaces.

Play was significant for Klein offering opportunity both for the child to express internal conflicts and anxiety within the safe space and for the observer a window to the internal conflicts being wrestled with. One conflict that relates specifically to educational spaces relates to the influence of transition on a sense of loss.

The significance of Klein’s theories is summed up in her statement; ‘If we look at our adult world from the viewpoint of its roots in infancy, we gain insight into the way our mind, our habits, and our views have been built up from the earliest infantile phantasies and emotions to the most complex and sophisticated adult manifestations. There is one more conclusion to be drawn, which is that nothing that ever existed in the unconscious completely loses its influence on personality.’ (1959, p.302). In other words, to understand the adult we have first to understand the child.

Bion elaborated on Klein’s theories and his interest in the development of thinking apparatus seemed to extend her ideas, particularly those expressed through the epistemophilic drive.

## 3.4: Wilfred Bion (1897-1979)

Bion was very influenced by Kleinian thinking and made far-reaching contributions to her original theories, (Hinshelwood, 1989, Pick, 2015). It was interesting to note that Klein’s empathy for young children was often attributed to her troubled life experience (Gomez, 1997). Bion also faced several life challenges among them, being sent away to boarding school, a difficult relationship with his mother and the loss of his first wife, as well as the traumatic experience of being a serving officer in the first world war and a medic in the second.

### 3.4.1: Biography

Bion was born in 1897 in India to parents who were part of the English gentry, however, they struggled financially to maintain their status as members of the upper-middle class. Wilfred Bion was sent away to England to a prep school aged eight and later to a lesser public school, due to financial constraints in the family. His early school experiences were unhappy ones, uprooted as he had been from India and his family, (he was not reunited with his mother for three years and found it difficult to recognise her at their eventual meeting) and he was subject to all the horrors inflicted on a young vulnerable boy by peers (Bion, F. 1994).

Senior school was a happier experience when a significant part of Bion’s life was his athleticism which offered him some status and also seemed to have been important in supporting his passage through school as well as into his chosen profession of medicine after Oxford (Symington and Symington, 1996).

Bion served in both world wars, first in the Royal Tank Regiment, and later, after studying at Oxford and then enrolling in medical training in London, he served as a Medic in the second world war. His wartime experience is understood to have had a deep impact on him, he is said to have thought of war as ‘full of pain, tragedy, and waste’ (Symington and Symington, 1996, p.21). Although he doubted his own courage in the face of deeply disturbing experiences and loss during that traumatic time, his efforts were recognised by the awarding of the Victoria Cross, and later the Distinguished Service Order (Symington and Symington, 1996). Both of which he found difficulty in accepting.

Bion’s long-term interest in psychoanalysis was finally satisfied after he completed his medical training, although he was initially disappointed in the training offered at that time by the Tavistock Clinic. His training in psychoanalysis had been cut short by WWII, however, there seems to have been an integration of his personal experiences of war and his foundational training in psychoanalysis as he worked in military hospitals to explore ways of supporting casualties of what would become known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Bion, F., 1994). Bion’s clinical practice with psychotic and borderline psychotic patients was another great influence on his remodelling of earlier theories.

Another tragic event was to add to his sense of loss when his wife died in 1945 after the birth of their daughter. His second wife, Francesca, wrote many years later, ‘So at the end of the war, he was left grieving, with a baby to care for, very little money and no regular income to depend upon,’ (1994, p.94). His practice as a psychoanalyst, the publication of many papers as well as making a significant contribution to the development of the Tavistock clinic all contributed to his standing in the psychoanalytic world at that time. Bion also entered analysis with Melanie Klein who influenced much of his own thinking and development of psychoanalytic theory, though later their differences become issues which he tired of responding to when pressed to explain them (Bion, F. 1994). He was apparently never interested in being right or wrong, he resisted the competitive spirit that some protagonists stirred up. Six months before he died, his disinterest in the arguments between psychoanalysts seems reflected in his statement, ‘I find it very difficult to see how this could possibly be relevant against the struggle of the human being to emerge from barbarism and a purely animal existence to something one could call a civilized society. (Volume XI, pp. 347-348, in Bion, F., 1994, p. 111).

Bion’s relationship with his mother was not a close one, however, his second wife reported that he was a family man and placed a high priority on family times together, reading stories to the children, and enjoying holidays outdoors (Bion, F. 1994). In his marriage to Francesca, he had two more children, and this second relationship seems to have brought him deep satisfaction with his wife and family a source of ‘happiness and contentment’, (Symington and Symington, 1996, p.25).

Bion is understood to have treasured his privacy and, after having been president of the British Psychoanalytical Society, he moved to California for more privacy and to ‘develop his mind and to write,’ (Symington and Symington, 1996, p.21). He and his wife travelled to many countries in his sixties and seventies, leading what seems to have been a very energetic and active programme of talks and seminars, until returning to England in 1979 and dying unexpectedly a few months later of myeloid leukaemia.

### 3.4.2: Theory

This section begins with a brief overview of Bion’s theory before looking more closely at some of the concepts and enlarging upon them. Bion’s theorising included assumptions on which groups operate and he had a particular interest in aspects of group behaviour that renders them ineffective. Some readers might think that including Bion’s theory of groups to consider aspects of educational organisations, might make a useful contribution to understanding the day-to-day activities of children in their educational spaces. However, the intention of this thesis, outlined in the first two chapters, was to capture the lived experience of the individual children. Consequently, I made the decision not to include this aspect of Bion’s theory.

The theories of both Freud and Klein heavily influenced Bion’s theorising and practice, both prompted his hypothesising about the origin of thought, Klein in her concept of projective identification and Freud’s model of thought as ‘… a method of restraint for motor discharge,’ (Bion, 1962a, p.56). These ideas seemed to prompt Bion to speculate about thought and the psychic apparatus that makes thought not only possible but adaptable and useful in interpreting the environment. Initially the inner and outer world are indistinguishable but as reality impinges on the inner psyche an apparatus was needed to develop to integrate the two. Bion’s thinking seems to question the ‘how’ of this process and this leads us to one of the most profound aspects of Bion’s theorising about, in his own words, ‘the origin and nature of thoughts and a parallel reformulation of ideas about the apparatus by which “thinking” thoughts is achieved.’ (1962a).

Bion believed that thinking arises out of thoughts, not as might be assumed, the other way round with thoughts arising from thinking. Bion’s ideas about the genesis of ‘the activity of thinking,’ (1962, p. 31) can be found in Klein’s concept of projective identification (Bion, 1962) which suggests the splitting off of undesirable emotional parts of self and projecting them into another, described earlier. In developing Klein’s ideas, Bion’s conceptual framework suggested that the ability of the caring adult to contain an infant’s basic anxieties about having their primitive needs taken care of provides an experience of being thought about. With consistency in this way the infant is provided with a memory to eventually bridge the gap when the physical presence of the caring adult is not available. This attunement on the part of the caring adult facilitates learning and thinking and Youell (2006) suggested that being ‘able to learn and think has its roots, therefore, in a meeting of minds between m/other and baby,’ (p.15).

This overview misses one key aspect of the infant’s experience that explains the ‘how’ of the process of developing thought, which is encapsulated in the role played by frustration when needs or wants are not immediately satisfied (Bion, 1962). Referring back to Freud, Bion suggested that ‘Implicit in Freud’s statement is the part played by intolerance of frustration in producing tension and then relief, by the employment of thought to fill the interval between the need to unburden the psyche of stimuli and the actual unburdening.’ (Bion, 1962a, p.28). Bion’s theory holds the notion that there are two possible responses to the sense of being frustrated, that of trying to avoid it or developing a capacity to tolerate it, thereby moderating the frustration (Bion, 1962a). While temperamental factors are not ignored there needs to be an attempt to make sense of the feelings provoking frustration which in turn leads to developing new thoughts, facilitating a growing awareness of the interplay between self and the environment (Bion, 1962a).

A mother or adult carer who can make sense of the infants’ feelings by responding intuitively to the infant’s distress by acknowledging and attending to their needs, whether that be nappy changing, feeding, holding soothing, etc. (Bion, 1962, Sapountzis, 2018) facilitates sense-making of the experience. In this way Bion conceived of the m/other as a container of the infant’s frustrations, thereby developing the capacity for the infant to tolerate frustration and allay the deep fears and anxieties that beset an infant. Bion further linked the infant’s capacity for tolerating frustration to what he referred to as the mother’s reverie, ‘a state of mind which is open to the reception of any “objects” from the loved object and is therefore capable of reception of the infant’s projective identifications whether they are felt by the infant to be good or bad.’ (1962a, p.36). The infants’ anticipation of the caregiver’s capacity to respond reliably to their needs, leads to a sense of the validity of their experience subsequently the containing experience facilitates a sense of self and confidence in their capacity to predict events with some certainty (Dover, 2012). Sapountzis, (2018) linked these parental capacities to the role of the teacher and suggested that they can equip the adult in the educational space to make sense of children’s behaviour and offer a sense of containment.

The significance of feeling contained in the developmental process of thinking and learning is explained more fully next.

### 3.4.3: Container/contained.

Bion’s theory of containment offers a transformational experience, whereby the infant’s bad feelings, arising out of raw sensory perceptions, what Bion (1962) refers to as beta-elements, are projected psychically into the m/other (Bion, 1962, Pederson, et al. 2014). In a state of reverie, the attuned m/other accepts these projections, and in an empathic response translates and returns them in a way that makes sense for the infant. The pain of hunger for example is explained when the breast is offered, the pain of colic is explained when a soothing holding position eases the discomfort, and the uncomfortable bottom is explained by the changing of the nappy. Bion understood the m/other as a ‘crucial psychic repository,’ (Pick, 2015, p.101), absorbing the infants’ anxieties and returning them to the child in a form they can manage through their interactions together. In a good situation, the m/other identifies the cause of the distress and mounting frustration, identifying hunger or a wet nappy for example. Following consistent empathetic interventions, the infant eventually begins to make an association between the easing of the discomfort, and the m/other.

Bion linked the early relationship with m/other to the capacity to learn (Youell, 2006). He explained her response to the infant’s needs as a process of trial and error embarked on from the earliest days of the infant’s life. The meaning assigned by m/other helps the infant to make sense of those feelings and sensations himself (Hinshelwood, 1989, Youell, 2006). The higher ratio of success to failure in the m/other’s response ensures the communication between the two, with a feeling of being understood for the infant. ‘According to this way of seeing things, the mother becomes the container and the baby’s fragmentary impulses and emotions, the contained,’ (Waddell, 2002, p.34. See graphic of Bion’s theory of containment in Appendix 8)

Without the experience of having emotions contained some children may arrive in school with a low tolerance of frustration, leading to behaviour such as daydreaming, escaping mentally from the frustration, or fidgeting distracted behaviour (Greenhalgh, 1994). A teacher who has a capacity to understand their frustration may be able to offer a similar containing presence much the same as the m/other, contributing to the child’s capacity to use the incident for growth and development (Mayes, 2009, Sapountzis, 2018). Bion’s theory implies that a child who has his/her feelings acknowledged is more likely to feel contained and respond positively to further suggestions.

### 3.4.4: Learning from experience

In describing his conceptual framework about learning Bion uses metaphors relating to the alimentary processes that form the primary experience of the infant, from the taking in of food to its waste elimination (Bion, 1962a).

Feeding and changing protocols are a large feature of the infants’ early life and form the basis of the infant/carer relationship, they present an infant’s first opportunity to learn from experience. The negotiation required on the part of the dyad is a two-way process with the infants’ personality and disposition being part of that process. Consequently, there is a great potential for the infant’s frustrations to be expressed when they feel misunderstood and thoughts arising from these become the concepts found in language. Youell refers to the everyday language around feeding that we use to describe learning; ‘chew it over’, ‘hungry for knowledge’, etc. (2006, p.15). Pick makes a useful summary; ‘If all goes well, this process gradually comes to be internalised, so that (up to a point) we can ‘digest’ our moments of frustration, disappointment, or even blind rage,’ (2015, p.100).

Klein’s epistemophilic drive, mentioned earlier, positing that curiosity is a conduit to learning and a natural phenomenon, is reflected in Bion’s (1962) conceptual framework. His theory suggests that instinctually we are all born with a desire to find out the truth about the world – the truth is to the mind what food is to the body, and therefore, conversely, lies or distortions of the truth pose threats to the development of our minds (Bion, 1962, Youell, 2006). Youell claimed that individuals are curious to know the truth and that knowledge requires ‘an emotional link to what is being studied,’ (Youell, 2006, p.8).

When loving interactions are limited or unavailable there is an unfortunate impact on the infant’s developmental trajectory since a deficiency in the m/other’s attuned responses are likely to leave the infant with no way of satisfying his feelings and sensation. Instead, they can be felt to be catastrophic, leaving him ‘vulnerable to feelings of primitive anxiety,’ (Waddell, 2002, p.30). The raw feelings of this experience, what Bion described as beta-elements, lack the containing facility that transforms them into useful thought, the alpha-function, and therefore remain unavailable for learning; ‘To learn from experience alpha-function must operate on the awareness of the emotional experience; …’ (Bion, 1962a, p.8). From learning to ride a bike to remembering phonic letter sounds, attention requires the alpha function to be operational, learning is very much a shared emotional experience, a journey to be shared (Youell, 2006)

### 3.4.5: Thinking

Bion was interested in how children process sensations and experiences to come to some sort of understanding of them (Sapountzis, 2018). With consistency in the way the m/other responds to her infant’s communications, the infant is provided with a memory of their experience to eventually bridge the gap when the physical presence of the caring adult is not available. Attunement on the part of the caring adult, not necessarily the infant’s mother, to the infant’s communications facilitates learning and thinking creating an opportunity for a meeting of minds (Youell, 2006). The role of an attuned listener can be provided by a teacher who can also contribute a containing facility and to a developing conceptual process of thoughts and thinking (Pederson, 2014).

Thinking occurs out of the experiential encounters with the object, initially this will be around the part object, the breast, nipple, voice, smell, and their connection with the satisfaction, or not, of the infant’s needs (Hinshelwood, 1989, Bion, 1962b,). Associations are created through physical sensation, the primary experience of life for the infant (Hinshelwood, 1989, Pick, 2015). The absent breast is as much of a felt experience as the present breast, similarly the empty breast offers a felt experience that holds its own meaning for the infant (Bion, 1962, Hinshelwood,1989). Occasional failure on the part of the m/other and the ensuing frustration this may bring offers an opportunity for developing both tolerance and thinking, which in turn leads to the development of the apparatus for thinking (Bion, 1962b, Pederson, Polson, and Lunn, 2014). However, the frustration needs to be engaged with and on some occasions may feel so overwhelming that it is avoided using defences such as denial, splitting, or projection. The pace of development is variable and unpredictable meaning some children may arrive in school at an earlier point in this process than others.

### 3.4.6: Summary

The early relationship with the m/other provides a feeling of being contained, but additionally, there is a sense of accompaniment, of being together in the learning experience. Feelings of being accompanied eventually become an internalised sensation and supports the infant’s learning process as they make their own discoveries about the world. The development of thinking is a biproduct of an interaction between temperament and environment, and the infant’s capacity for tolerance at this early stage of development is influential in advancing thinking processes.

Children arriving in school will have had variable experiences of containment and their capacity for thinking and tolerating frustration will therefore also be variable.

## 3.5: Donald Winnicott (1923-1951)

Winnicott became a paediatric doctor before coming to psychoanalysis and his understanding of the theoretical framework was informed by his paediatric work with children.

### 3.5.1: Biography

Donald Winnicott was born in Plymouth in 1896, the only child of a middle-class family. It is reported (Gomez, 1997) that he felt rather distant from his father who at the age of thirteen informed him that he was to be sent away to boarding school which, fortunately, was viewed by Winnicott in a positive light. His mother is understood to have struggled with depression.

Winnicott trained as a doctor and joined the army medical corps during the first WW when he had suffered the loss of contemporaries and friends which had a lifelong strongly depressive effect on him. (Gomez, 1997).

Although he and his first wife, Alice, had a difficult marriage that resulted in their separation 27 years later, they worked together to care for vulnerable individuals, both children and adults. They had no children of their own.

Winnicott’s second wife, Clare, had been involved with him earlier in his life establishing hostels for children that were dispositionally unsuitable for evacuation to foster homes. Clare supported Winnicott in his work and eventually trained as a psychotherapist herself.

Winnicott worked as a paediatrician in medicine as well as a psychoanalyst and it is suggested that ‘he had a far broader experience of ordinary people than other psychoanalysts gained,’ (Gomez, 1997, p.84). However, while his creative efforts to offer support for vulnerable families and children were sometimes unorthodox, i.e., using psychoanalytic ideas outside the usual framework of analysis, he came under a great deal of criticism for what was referred to as an ‘arrogant attitude,’ (Gomez, 1997, p.84).

Nevertheless, he was understood by some to be ‘playful, spontaneous, sparkling and deeply empathic …’ and having a ‘unique capacity to slip into immediate communication with anyone from a baby to a delinquent to a borderline adult.’ (Gomez, 1997, p.85).

Winnicott died in 1971.

### 3.5.2: Theory

To some psychoanalysts Winnicott’s ideas seem in complete opposition to both Freudian and Kleinian theory (Rycroft, 1995), however, he showed great respect for Freud, recognising his contribution to the significance of emotions in development. In a preface to his first publication, he wrote: ‘Indirectly to Professor Sigmund Freud I am grateful for an increasing ability to enjoy investigating emotional matters,’ (in Abram, 2007, p.1). His emphasis on the need for human relationships aligns him with Klein and the object relations group (Gomez, 1997). Two other significant individuals influenced his thinking, his two analysts, first James Strachey, a translator of Freud’s writings, and later Joan Riviere, with whom he was in analysis for ten years, both significant in the psychoanalytic movement at that time.

Winnicott made some considerable contributions to psychoanalytic theory because of his work both as a paediatrician and psychoanalyst (Abram, 2007). Whereas Klein had used her observations of children in therapy with her to develop her theories, Winnicott’s perspective was influenced by his observations of infants and young children with their m/other, leading him to emphasise that a sense of self does not develop in isolation (Abram, 2007). A mother or someone caring for the infant in that role, particularly in the early weeks after birth, is an essential contributor (Bibby, 2018). In Winnicott’s conceptual framework the baby does not exist outside the dyadic relationship, reflecting his belief that all individuals need to experience relationships for them to experience themselves as ‘self’, (Winnicott, 1960, 1971, Gomez, 1997). ‘What this means is that the development of a mind is one not governed by innate factors but very much influenced by the environmental provision.’ (Parry, 2010, p.19,).’ The dyadic relationship was understood to work both ways with the mother playing an initiating role picked up by the baby. Initially, the mother is totally focused on the baby, characterised by Winnicott as maternal identification, but in time she will gradually pull away from the child as she separates herself from her highly focused care following the birth, creating an opportunity for the infant to develop a sense of self (Winnicott, 1971).

Appropriately managed the separation facilitates a connection to the world and others in it that is not overwhelming but manageable. If this transition is experienced as positive it builds increasing confidence in the infant’s capacity to interact with his environment (Gomez, 1997). As the mother separates herself from her highly focused care after the birth the separation allows a ‘space’ for the babies to make their own move towards independence. Winnicott suggested that initially this transition is sometimes supported by an object, such as a blanket or soft toy, which fills this ‘space’ during the mother’s absence (Pick, 2015). This is discussed further in the section ‘Transitional phenomena’.

### 3.5.3: Inherited potential

Although there have been some psychoanalysts who have criticised Winnicott’s emphasis on the facilitating environment he also emphasised that ‘the environment does not make the child at best it enables the child to realize potential’. (1965, p.85). Winnicott used the term ‘maximal personal maturation’ (1965, p.111) to convey the sense that although children are born with an inherited potential its expression is influenced by the environment. Development was described as a process of integration of both ‘psychosomatic interrelating and object relating’ (1971, p.112), encompassing the dynamic interaction between mind and body together with interpersonal relationships. This integrative quality is a constant aspect of the psychoanalytic theories presented in this chapter.

Winnicott’s perspective that ‘the inherited potential includes a tendency towards emotional growth and development,’ (1965, p.42) reminds me of Klein’s epistemophilic theory, with childrens inclination toward the need to know and make sense of their world. An important aspect of the developmental trajectory of the epistemophilic drive, is its potential to organise thought, however, it is dependent on the consistency of care provided by the caregiver (Stern, 1985, in Miller, Rustin, Rustin and Shuttleworth 1989). What this notion warns us of is the problems children may have arriving in formal learning not having received sufficient care from a facilitating caregiver, discussed further in the following section.

Although Winnicott stressed the crucial contribution made by the m/other he was concerned not to overburden m/others with some unrealistic idea of a perfect m/other and instead chose to use the term the ‘good enough’ m/other (1965, 1971).

### 3.5.4: Good enough mother

Winnicott’s theory placed a great deal of emphasis on the role of the carer since much of his conceptual framework was built on his observations of mothers and their babies (Pick, 2015). A central theme to his thinking was the idea of the ‘good enough mother,’ understood to provide the necessary attunement to her baby while not attempting perfection (1965, 1971). The good enough experience allows the child to encounter a certain amount of disappointment and thereby allowing the baby to develop their own resources and resilience to the vicissitudes of life (Pick, 2015).

The act of good enough mothering brings together ‘the worlds of sensation and emotion, building a stable unity of mind and body.*’* Gomez (1997, p.90). By experiencing being held both physically and emotionally an integrating experience is offered, where the physical experience does not also provide emotional ‘food’ there will be a lack of integration (Winnicott, 1965, 1971).

Winnicott used three characteristics to describe the good-enough mother’s behaviour towards the infant: holding, handling, and object presenting. However, underlying these characteristics is the mirroring function that each of them offers the infant (Pederson, Polson, and Lunn, 2014). At a time when the infant is sensitive to facial expression, Winnicott (1971) emphasised that incidents of caring for an infant’s needs were an opportunity for dyadic communication. The mother not only looks but is described as ‘seeing’ the baby’s mood and mirroring it to him/her. The seeing is felt by the infant in the mother’s gaze, and in time the numerous instances inform their sense of self (1971). This aspect of the good- enough mother’s behaviour occurs within the characteristics of holding, handling, and object presenting, providing an integrative experience contained within the infant’s skin (Pederson Polson, and Lunn 2014). These characteristics are considered separately next.

### 3.5.5: Holding

The sense of being held in Winnicott’s theory is not the same as Bion’s idea of container/contained. Winnicott emphasised the connection between the somatic and psychic experiences, the skin being the conduit with which the mind encounters the environment (Winnicott, 1965, 1971, Gomez, 1997). The concept of holding was central to Winnicott’s theories and Greenhalgh (1994) stresses that this concept does not refer to the action per se but to the process of providing a good enough environment, holding, and soothing disturbing feelings.

The infant needs to have a sense of the reliability of the mother’s empathy and understanding, however, environmental inconsistencies will be inevitable (Bibby, 2018). For example, time presents a challenging environmental inconsistency, when the infant must wait for his hunger to be satisfied. Just as Bion explained the developmental advantages of the infant’s experience of frustration, Winnicott makes the point that occasional inconsistencies, for example a delay to feeding, are useful to the infant, allowing tolerance of frustration to develop. The tolerance is aided, and its impact ameliorated by the good-enough m/other’s holding and soothing, (Winnicott, 1971).

Holding has both a physical and emotional component. Emotionally m/other ensures that the infant’s feelings are manageable, regulating difficult experiences so that the infant is not overwhelmed. By also managing the physical care of the infant the m/other ensures a felt sense of safety when changing, feeding, or carrying her providing a sense of being cared free from anxiety (Winnicott, 1965, 1971). From these relaxed experiences emerges a sense of being ‘in which his different experiences can join together in an unbroken stream.’ (Gomez, 1997, p. 89). These experiences contribute to the infant’s sense of an authentic self, discussed in a later section.

Winnicott’s conceptual framework of social and emotional development, and the way they connect the baby to the rest of the world, includes implicitly the idea of the ‘not so good mother’. The suggestion is that if there is a deprivation of the necessary relational interactions in the dyad then the baby suffers deprivation, and this will interrupt the expected developmental trajectory and the expression of the inherited potential. Winnicott acknowledged that mothers would experience negative feelings towards their baby, however, the crucial point would be that the balance should tip more towards more positive experiences than negative (1971). His framework suggested that without sufficient encounters where the baby’s needs are met there is an internal pressure exerted on the part of the child to be compliant. Winnicott considered compliance to undermine creativity and important aspect of all learning (Bibby, 2017).

### 3.5.6: Handling

The second characteristic of Winnicott’s expectations of good enough m/others was good enough handling, which relates to the sensitive responsive attention given to an infant’s physical needs (Winnicott, 1965,1971). The m/others handling of an infant offers a somatic sense of the mother’s intentions towards them, particularly in terms of their state of dependency. Without the m/others acknowledgement of this vulnerable position, the infant loses their connection between body and mind. The positive experience supports the infant’s physical sense of emotional contentment, bringing together ‘the worlds of sensation and emotion, building a stable unity of mind and body.’ (Gomez, 1997, p.90). By experiencing being held both physically and emotionally, a foundation is laid for a life that fully expresses the inherited potential, an essential aspect of the maturational process leading to an integrated, authentic self (Winnicott, 1971).

The alternative experience where being handled is not enjoyed or not felt to be reassuring, where the physical experience does not provide emotional ‘food’ there is a lack of integration and the development of a false self. Mind and body may not feel to function in a connected way and can be experienced by the child as having no connection with the environment which will be extremely distressing (Gomez, 1997).

### 3.5.7: Object presenting: Introducing the outside world

The third characteristic of good-enough m/othering defined by Winnicott is that of object presenting, whereby ‘the mother brings the outside world to the baby,’ (Gomez,1997, p.90). The mother allows the baby to experience the world with a sense of their own control over facilitating a connection to the world and others in it that is not overwhelming but manageable. The first object of the infant’s experience is the breast or the bottle. Its availability when experiencing overwhelming feelings of hunger is a formative experience, communicating as it does of the reliability or otherwise of the environment (Winnicott 1971, Pedersen et al. 2014). This initial positive experience builds increasing confidence in his/her capacity to interact with his environment (Gomez, ibid.). An important aspect of the reliable environment provided by the m/other is the sense of omnipotence it allows the infant to feel, perhaps the first experience of self as an initiator of experience, based on the fantasy that he/she can magic the solution to their own needs (Winnicott, 1971). This aspect of development is discussed further below.

I understand Winnicott’s expression of a good enough maternal relationship as offering the infant a point of reference by which to make sense of the somatic and psychic experience. By using both her mind as well as her own body in the way she handles her infant, her face reflecting her own positive mood in the face of the infant’s difficulties, the m/other provides a safe harbour. The infant may try to maintain his hold on his world but will not experience the luxury of an easy reliance on another to provide assurance for his anxieties (Winnicott, 1971, Gomez, 1997).

In Winnicott’s thinking this experience represents a lost opportunity for developing a true, authentic, self, and instead, it is replaced by a compliant response, arising from fear and anxiety, which may have an appearance of coping but without a sense of well-being (Winnicott, 1971). However, although the facilitating environment makes possible the steady progress of the maturational processes, the environment does not make the child, at best, as far as Winnicott’s theory suggested, it enables the child to realize their potential (Gomez, 1997).

### 3.5.8: Dependence to independence

The maturational process in Winnicott’s developmental model evolves out of the infant’s inherited potential which relies heavily on an enabling emotional environment for its successful expression (1965). The enabling relies on the degree by which an infant can express its vulnerability by being dependent upon the m/other, (Winnicott, 1971, Gomez, 1997). The steps to achieving healthy development were plotted not against a chronological age but as a series of steps towards equitable independence. By that I mean that a mature individual will know when it is appropriate for them to be independent or dependent where necessary (Winnicott, 1965). For example, in the classroom a pupil will know when to ask for help without feeling the need to hide their dependency from the teacher.

### 3.5.9: Omnipotence

Klein’s view of omnipotence is usually about defending against feeling ‘small and insignificant (Abram and Hinshelwood, 2018, p. 114). Winnicott’s view offered a different perspective of its role as a contributor to the development of agency, creativity, and play (Abram and Hinshelwood, 2018) The m/other plays a significant role by providing what for the infant’s needs consistently thus engendering a sense of omnipotence for him/her, allowing the first sense of power, as if they alone were able to magic into being the object of their satisfaction. The infant’s confidence in its omnipotence to manifest the satisfaction of its needs relies heavily on the m/other’s willingness to place them at the centre of her attention (1971).

The m/other’s focus on meeting the infant’s needs is eventually interrupted by the encroachment of daily life and this stage of relative dependence needs to be managed within the infant’s capacity or tolerance, which will initially be limited. The infant needs to develop resources to deal with this new situation, the loss of omnipotence too quickly will halt this transitional phase and the infant could become stuck in the expectation that life revolves around them and when it does not then extreme frustration can lead to aggression (Winnicott, 1971). However, if managed sufficiently the infant develops a sense of agency, a feeling of having a capacity to initiate and get what is needed from the environment (Abram and Hinshelwood, 2018). With support there is a learning opportunity inherent in this transition leading to a sense of the me that is separate from you and, through the development of psychic mechanisms of their own, the infant makes the transition to a positive sense of independence, using the environment for support when necessary.

One of the psychic mechanisms is Winnicott’s notion of the transitional phenomena which explains an infant or young child’s use of their environment to support their transition towards firstly relative dependency leading to independence (1971).

### 3.5.10: Transitional phenomena

Many people will be acquainted with transitional objects as those objects which hold significant interest for infants and young children, objects providing reassurance when the object of their affection is not available. However, the transitional phenomena cover the whole range of sensory experience, the sound of a voice, smell, or taste, performing the same opportunity. Winnicott’s theory regarded them as steps towards a transition from total dependence on the m/other to a more independent state (Rycroft, 1995).

Winnicott suggested that these phenomena offer an experience of a ‘‘not-me’ possession’ (1971, p. 1), an evolving concept that encompasses the notion of the distinction between the infant and the m/other. This is a hugely significant step in the maturational process and reflects a capacity to manage an important reality, that the infant can exist beyond the infant m/other dyad. There are benefits of this transition, namely a greater autonomy, and a widening horizon offering many possibilities for discovery, however, the infant/child must survive the separation and be able to use transitional phenomena to ease the transition.

Using objects as a representation alluding to the relationship the infant has with the m/other, they become symbols to represent a growing awareness that the primal relationship, where the m/other is viewed as part of themselves, is ending and a realisation of separateness is dawning. The nature of the separation and the turbulent feelings held by the child can be given expression when the baby is given a measure of control since the objects, for example, a teddy or blanket, is under their control thereby moderating the anxiety of being separate. The phenomena offer a significant contribution to development as Gomez makes clear: ‘It is the beginning of symbol-making, of fantasy, play and thought. … Gradually the child ceases to need concrete embodiment of the transitional state as he becomes able to take both connectedness and autonomy for granted. (Gomez,1997. p.94).

### 3.5.11: Play

Transitional phenomena added extra significance to the prominence Winnicott assigned to play in his overall understanding of child health and wellbeing (Winnicott, 1971). The beginnings of play were identified as occurring first between the m/other and the infant, created in the space between them, a shared experience encompassing both the inner world, a psychosomatic experience, and the external world (Winnicott, 1971). The quality of the experience relies on trust, the mother’s skill in sensing how far to go in tickling for example, or playing a simple peek-a-boo game, thus protecting the infant from becoming overly aroused and disturbed by overwhelming feelings.

The communicative attributes of play make it a useful tool in psychotherapy, and it has developed particular significance in psychoanalysis. However, the universality of play, for both adults and children, was understood by Winnicott to play a significant role in health and well-being and relationships within groups (Winnicott, 1971).

I have seen play, play that is child-led and not goal orientated, at times relegated in schools to a place where it is a desirable activity but unnecessary and therefore easily replaceable with an extra phonics or numeracy session. Perhaps reflecting a lack of appreciation for the value of its contribution to wellbeing posited by Winnicott.

In Winnicott’s conceptual framework the ability to play is also understood as the capacity to think, investigate, and explore, which are all necessary processes of learning (Bibby, 2018). The opportunity for play allows space between the inner and outer self, the opportunity to examine potentials and possibilities initially in a fantasy world and eventually transposable to the real world. This bridging between the real world and fantasy allows for the accommodation of new thoughts, the space for adjustments in internal processes, an internal subjective response that allows for the known and the unknown to relate to each other (Bibby, 2018).

In play the objects themselves take on a representation of whatever the child intends it to be. A car for example might not be simply a form of transport, it may represent a place of adventure, a sense of relationship when family do things together, it may be imbued with emotions, both positive and negative. Play therefore offers a space to revisit affective memories, a symbolic representation of that experience (Winnicott, 1971).

As well as an essential aspect of well-being, play offers an opportunity for developing creative thinking, both have implications for learning. Whereas pedagogy may reduce the value of play in favour of cognitive activities such as reading, writing, and numeracy, in Winnicottian theory play offers a space for the processes of learning to develop, i.e., concentrating, thinking, exploring, questioning with what if’s, (Bibby, 2018). A pedagogy where play is valued communicates to the child that the teacher wishes to stand with them where they are, reach down to their level rather than expect them to stretch beyond their capacity to the teacher’s expectations. Thus, pedagogy gives up its power to insist on compliance and makes space for discovery, creativity, and desire to know.

### 3.5.12: Summary

Within Winnicott’s theory, there is evidence of the influence of the thinking of both Klein and Bion. All three include the way potentials for development are influenced by relationships, particularly in the contribution relational experiences make towards thinking, symbolisation, creativity, and play. Winnicott emphasised the influence of the facilitating environment in the development of the true self, offering greater capacity for learning in the educational space than compliance which limits individuality and opportunities for creative thinking.

## 3.6: Conclusion

My intention throughout this explanation of the theoretical framework has been to communicate aspects of a psychoanalytic framework pertaining to the role emotions play in a child’s capacity to learn in the educational space. The three theories argue for an appreciation of the role emotions play in the development and growth of personality, clearly identifying mental processes underpinning thinking and learning and heavily reliant on social interaction, particularly between m/other and infant.

Freud set out to provide a basic roadmap of our inner world, as time has progressed other theorists have added important detail to the landscape it describes. With some signposting of particular features to facilitate our understanding of what may be helpful, there are warnings that obstructions in emotional development may arise to inhibit natural curiosity and a desire to learn more. At times I have found Freud’s descriptors of psychosexual development useful to refer to.

The language and concepts developed by psychoanalytic theorists offer a framework and language for the processes that influence a child towards curiosity and an increasing capacity to learn. In this framework, the literature points out that learning does not begin with school but learning in school depends on learning that has taken place before school, from birth onwards.

Psychoanalytic theories considered in the literature frame the genesis of human behaviour, however, the experiences that contribute to our personalities as we mature are common to all adults. Rather like a set of Russian dolls, within each one of us resides the infant, the weaned baby, the toddler, pre-schooler, the nursery child, pupil, student, etc.. Associations and feelings that were unresolved early in life remain hidden but seek expression, creating behaviour that, as adults, can feel uncomfortable.

The literature considered here does not encompass the totality of psychoanalytic theory; nevertheless, I hope it provides a demonstration of the commonality of psychic processes and internal struggles both children and teachers face in their dynamic relationship.

The research project was conceived to examine in depth the lived experience of two children in two different settings, with a methodology intended to capture the nuances of their behaviour to better understand the dynamic relationship between the inner and outer worlds. Although there are other developmental paradigms, e.g., attachment theory, I thought that the psychoanalytic framework, alongside a psychoanalytic method of data collection and analysis (the TOM) offered the most useful method of doing this.

When referring to the theoretical framework throughout the text I have used the letters TF followed by the page number to aid the reader in ready referencing the concept being referred to, (e.g., TF p.60)

# Chapter 4

## Methodology

## 4.1: Introduction to methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology underlying the study. Initially, the background to the specific methods by which the research and analyses were conducted is presented, and the key elements of the epistemological and ontological basis of the study are examined.

Much of the complexity implicated in the research process is centred in the phenomenon of the unconscious, an aspect of human experience that occurs beyond awareness. Psychoanalytic theory suggests that thoughts and feelings are linked but in ways that are sometimes difficult to recognise consciously. Thoughts and the emotions they trigger are expressed in distorted and disguised ways, for example in dreams or slips of the tongue. The psychoanalytic notion of transference-countertransference (TF, p.57) explains subtle, unconscious processes whereby emotions from past relationships are transferred to another person in the present. It is an essential aspect of both psychanalysis and the Tavistock Observational Method used in this study as a research method.

Researching these deep structures and processes of the psyche presents some challenges, not least of these is the dynamic relationship between inner and outer worlds requiring a research design compatible with my epistemological position outlined next.

### 4.1.1: The epistemology of the lived experience.

The epistemological perspective I have been drawn to is that of phenomenology since it is understood as a philosophical tradition underlying the research of the lived experience (Van Manen, 1997). Van Manen (1997) adopts Dilthey’s (1985) view that: ‘Just as our body needs to breathe, our soul requires the fulfilment and expansion of its existence in the reverberations of emotional life’ (p.59) and it is the essentialness of emotion to the lived experience that I am attracted to.

According to Van Manen the relationship between individuals and their environment, phenomenology understands consciousness as ‘the only access human beings have to the world’ (Van Manen, 1997, p.9). I find myself struggling with the thought that consciousness is ‘our only’ access to the world when I am aware of the contribution of the unconscious in all our interactions. I seem to interact with my world, which includes the people within it, out of responses that at the time may seem conscious only to realise later that they reflect historical interactions. I have become aware that past experiences influence my life in the here and now, often beyond my awareness at the time, and I understand these to arise from my unconscious.

However, Van Manen does make the point that the term consciousness is difficult to describe and I think it is at this point the psychoanalytic framework presents itself as a useful epistemology to inform us of relational interactions that occur across a spectrum of the unconscious to consciousness. Freud tried to express this notion in his models of the mind which express something of the complexity of the interaction between unconscious and conscious processes (TF, pp.66, 67).

While reflecting on the epistemological basis of this study I found that Stänicke, Zachrisson & Vetlesen (2020) suggested that the epistemological position of psychoanalysis has not been addressed by researchers. I wonder if this might be because ‘truth’ is acknowledged by Freud as something that can never be fully known (Stänicke, Zachrisson & Vetlesen, 2020) determining the validity of something that is hidden presents both ontological and epistemological challenges. Stänicke, Zachrisson and Vetlesen (2020) refer to Freud’s view that: “The unconscious is the true psychical reality; in its innermost nature it is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is as incompletely presented by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the communications by our sense organs” (Freud, 1900, p. 613). Maybe Freud is making the point here that we can believe ourselves to be self-determining, cognisant of our experience, but, much of our experience occurs below the surface of consciousness (TF, pp. 66, 67).

This view places psychoanalysis within a specific epistemology, one that includes the unconscious with its emotional context as discussed in the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3. Aguillaume (2001) argued for the contribution psychoanalysis has made to the discussions and examination of key epistemological models, i.e., ‘the strict natural science model governed by causality and the hermeneutic model where the problem of meaning is central’ (p.97). He further suggested that psychoanalysis can straddle both models, stating: ‘The originality of the psychoanalytic enterprise presents both dimensions, which, in our opinion, are articulated in the emotional experience, which is what gives meaning and complexity to psychoanalytic theory and practice’ (Aguillaume, 2001 p. 97).

### 4.1.2: The epistemology of psychoanalysis

The theory of psychoanalysis suggests deeper psychological structures as contributors to phenomena of the lived experience and is interested in the internal world of relationships offers a theoretical framework with which to make inferences about them. Psychoanalysis, as discussed earlier, has a particular knowledge base or epistemology, to draw upon and is manifested in the dynamic interaction between conscious and unconscious aspects of the mind. This is central to its ontology created out of the many hours of clinical practice. The phenomena are recognised as complex and varied, therefore the chosen research design for this study was intended to reflect this complexity

So for me psychoanalysis offers a framework of knowledge for a sense-making process, recognising that making sense of ourselves, particularly in the context of our relationships, is part of being human (Frosh, 2012). I have found its concepts valuable in challenging my ideas and perceptions of others during my Ph.D. journey. The process of reflection of my own lived experience has underpinned every aspect of my journey and is embodied in an epistemology and ontology aligned with that of psychoanalytic theory.

### 4.1.3: Examining emotional dimensions of children’s experience in the educational space to understand their lived experience

Psychoanalytic Models of the mind accommodate the multifaceted nature of human existence, leading to an appreciation of the connectedness between mind and body, emotion, and cognition (Rustin, 2019). When examining emotional dimensions of children’s interactions within their educational space, the lived experience is understood as an integrated experience that, from a psychoanalytic perspective, encompasses thoughts and feelings, both conscious and unconscious, about others (ibid.). All of which develop out of early infantile experiences (ibid.) as described in the theoretical framework.

### 4.1.4: The rationale for using the Tavistock Observational Model

Psychoanalytic theory conceptualises the mental processes of the mind using structures and mechanisms that mediate the relationship between the individual and their environmental space (Stänicke, et.al. 2020). This model emphasises the importance of cohesiveness and integration between mind and body and the premise of the Tavistock Observational Model (TOM) assumes patterns of thought and behaviour can be observed as they are expressed in infants and young children’s interactions with others and their environment (Rustin, 2019). These two ideas seem to support the notion that it is possible to observe infants and young children’s behaviour and gain insights into their inner world, through reference to a psychoanalytic perspective.

The TOM has been chosen as the primary research tool which offers the opportunity for inferences to be drawn from empirical experience, not from hypothesis or theory. This approach is considered by Rustin (2019) to bear similarities to grounded theory (Glaser and Straus, 1967) since methods are comparable both in their ontology and their impartial response to the meaning of data content both in the clinical and research setting.

Elfer (2012, 2018) has identified an increasing body of research that has introduced psychoanalytic observations to examine ‘the interplay the internal world of the individual, conscious and unconscious and the culture of social institutions’ (2018, p. 131). Among his examples are Clarke and Hoggett, 2009; Froggett, 2002, Huffington, Armstrong, Halton, Hoyle, and Pooley, 2004. One particular finding that seemed relevant to the context of my study was the highlighting of the importance of the role of emotion in nurseries despite a pedagogy where it was often overlooked by a focus on ‘educational outcomes’ (Elfer, 2010, p.62). In later research a modified version of the TOM, referred to previously (LR, pp. 46-47) was utilised by Elfer to investigate young children’s emotional experience of nursery and the link between the emotional containment of staff in nurseries and attachment relationships between staff and children (e.g., Elfer, 2017).

The rationale for this study was also informed by the method's emphasis on the reflexivity of the observational experience which offers checks on the observer’s interpretative capacity by providing an additional filter on perceived emerging themes. In psychoanalytic training, a small group of trainees with a trained analyst leading, offer this advantage but for this study, my supervisor took this role. By sharing the observational data on a bi-weekly basis there was an opportunity to share our different perceptions of what was being observed and work through the inevitable inclination towards personal opinions.

This study has a longitudinal element, it was conducted over two school terms, which further allows for ideas to be tested over time similar to the approach of grounded theory where the text is noted for patterns, symbols, and metaphors (Rustin, 2019). Later, the theoretical framework acted as a frame of reference for the themes that emerged.

Although the TOM was my first choice for data collection I considered the use of children’s drawings to offer a possibility of triangulating the analysis and findings. This method is considered further in section 4.1.10

A fuller description of the TOM follows in the next section.

### 4.1.5: The Tavistock Observational Model (TOM)

Although the TOM was developed originally for clinical purposes it has been adapted for research purposes (e.g., Hollway, 2012, Elfer, 2017, 2018, Rustin, 2019) and the resulting methodology is described as ‘psychoanalytically informed (rigorously so) without being psychoanalysis.’ (Hollway, 2012, p.24). The protocol means that observations are carried out on the same day, at the same time, each week, reducing the impact of the observer who ‘becomes part of the emotional atmosphere but refrains from doing anything but observing’ (Figlio, 2018, p.35). The data emerges in detailed accounts written up after the observation has occurred with as much detail as can be remembered and includes the emotions felt by the observer at that time.

Esther Bick developed the technique for studying babies to explore ‘the emotional events between infant and mother and other members of the family present at the time of the observation’ (Rustin, 1989, p.7). Her method later become known as the TOM, and it was developed as a component in the training of Child and Adolescent Psychotherapists at the Tavistock Clinic. Initially, it was for the observation of infants from birth over two years but later the observation of young children up to five was introduced (Rustin,1989). The training was intended to provide an opportunity to ‘learn from experience’ rather than simply learn about the theory of psychoanalysis, ‘… a form of knowledge imbued with emotional depth’ (Hollway, 2012 p. 8).

Further development has seen the appropriation of this method as a tool to be used by researchers and is argued by Rustin (2019) to offer a valid vantage point for both noting phenomena and making inferences about their meaning for babies and young children.

Nevertheless, the challenge in social research is to identify the reality in the data as it reflects the truth of the life experience of an individual person, and unconscious influences are thought to interfere with any research with human participants (Hollway and Jefferson 2000). The ‘defended subject,’ a notion proposed by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) refers to the inclination of subjects to present a positive view of themselves in the eyes of the interviewer. This self-censorship by participants presents a problem when trying to understand how individuals respond to being questioned by researchers.

Hollway came from a background as a professor of psychology, she was an experienced qualitative researcher searching for a valid research methodology for examining human experience. In her appraisal of her experience of the TOM as a qualitative methodology, she wrote about experiencing a ‘sense of ‘‘knowing’’, being in touch with the core and essence of something or somebody’ (2012). In another description, she identified this form of inquiry as a ‘form of knowledge imbued with emotional depth’ (Hollway, 2012, p. 23).

This ‘felt experience’ removed learning from a purely intellectual form of learning to the more experiential one of Bion’s (1962) concept of learning from experience, distinguishing it from learning about a subject and offering a depth of learning not available from books (Hollway, 2012, p.23).

The methodology has drawn some criticism because of the lack of objectivity in the process. However, Hollway (21012) argues that the ingenuousness of the observer’s reflective stance supports awareness of one’s subjective responses and allows for an open mind offering ‘an alternative epistemological basis for the practice of objectivity’ (2012, p. 29).

The role of the observer’s affective response not only offers a sense of primitive feelings of the subject in the transference-countertransference process (TF, p.65) but in addition a sense of containment that benefits them too. For example, in a study by Handa (2017), it was suggested that the role of the observer serves as a ‘witness to and bearer of the pain,’ (p.120) as the observer became a container of the pain experienced by both the mother and baby in the study (Handa 2017). The concept of the container speaks of Bion’s conceptual framework whereby a mother can provide for her baby a sense of being thought about (TF, p. 104)

This inclusion of the observer’s emotional experience is a bonus as additional data and is explained more fully in the next section.

### 4.1.6: Additional Data arising from the TOM

The process of observing both infants and young children is acknowledged to have an emotional impact on observers (Elfer, 2018), however, these affects are utilised in both processes of collection and analysis of the data. The recognition of what is owned by the observer and its influence on the meaning made of what is being observed also marks the difference between this and other methods of observation (Youell, 2006). In a therapeutic relationship the terms used to describe this influence are transference and countertransference (TF, p.57) and reflect for me the epistemological stance that objectivity is unhelpful since interactions between the researcher and the participant are understood to occur both at an unconscious and subjective level (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009; Boden and Eatough, 2014; Holloway, 1989; Holloway and Jefferson, 2000, Hollway, 2012).

By leaving behind all expectations of what might be observed the observer seeks to be open-minded, on the edge of the setting rather than an active participant. The intention is to create space within the mind of the observer to sense their affective response and accompanying thoughts, which are important contributors to the sense-making of the process (Miller, 1989). By including this data ‘Observers gain help in thinking about these emotional transactions, and their potentially positive and negative contributions to the understanding, from their seminar supervisor and colleagues.’ (Rustin, 1989, p.67).

The observations are written up in detail after the observational session has ended, incorporating the most detailed account the observer can recall including their affective responses while trying to maintain a non-judgemental stance (Figlio, 2018). Elfer described this process as ‘free-flowing, holistic and detailed in every way possible’ (2018, p.135). These written accounts are shared in the non-judgmental atmosphere of a small group or, in the case of this study, with my supervisor.

Sharing the written observations with another psychoanalytic mind, or small group contributes to sense-making of what meaning can be made of them while also monitoring the affective responses of the observer for unconscious transference-countertransference interactions (Elfer, 2018, Rustin, 2019). Thus, the notes made about each supervision session provide additional understanding of patterns and themes that emerge over time.

Data that is shared in this way, monitoring the countertransference, not only offers a containing space for emotions to be explored but also the use of another mind presents opportunities to explore the meaning in the data while controlling for subjectivity (Elfer, 2018). Data collection using the TOM felt daunting and I undertook a course of training to facilitate my familiarity with its process, an account of my experience follows next.

### 4.1.7: Pilot study

The observational process seemed far from straightforward, and I felt it important to engage in a pilot study to gain some training in the experience itself before commencing my research. I enrolled in a post-graduate training program at the Northern School of Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy (NSCAP), alongside trainees preparing for clinical practice. The course involved participation in a year-long series of observations of a young child in a pre-school setting, following the TOM. As a member of a group of seven trainees, I had the opportunity every week for sharing a member’s most recent observational accounts which were read aloud and followed by a discussion where different perceptions of meaning were considered.

The training gave me first-hand experience of the method as well as experiencing the sense of containment of one’s feelings about the observations by the group. Throughout this process theory was only occasionally alluded to, the discussions were about the felt experience of both the observer and the child. The course was very challenging but essential to my endeavour to utilize this form of data collection and analysis.

Reflective Box 4.1: Reflecting on why I felt the course to be challenging I realised that there was a challenge at many levels. The course continued over a year with a commitment each week which included two seminars, an observational hour in a preschool setting, time to right up the observation, and additional reading. At that time, I was working part-time with a heavy emotional workload that included reports for case conferences for Child-protection cases, and my husband was seriously ill and in and out of hospital.

One of the seminars was a group discussion of our weekly observations when the seven members took turns presenting an observation. I quickly noticed that there was a protocol for writing up and presenting the observations and I was quite fearful of making my own. I was aware that other members of the group were on a different journey completing a foundation course that might lead to a career in child and adolescent psychotherapy. They had already completed two years of Infant Observations and initially I felt an intruder, however, I quickly felt accepted by the group.

The observations required a high level of emotional attention and sometimes it was difficult to separate myself from other emotional demands in my life. Similarly, the group seminar required me to be open to different perspectives of what I understood was occurring for the child I was observing. I think this experience underlined the vulnerability I was feeling about my life at that time, the observational process offered no certainties and my life at that time felt very uncertain.

### 4.1.8: Additional data to support the TOM

Although the narrative account of my observations of each child was supported by additional data provided by Supervision sessions, referred to on p.131, the research principle of triangulation, examining research questions using different methods, is suggested to offer a more representative account (Pascal and Bertram, 2012).

When reading about different approaches to researching children’s perspectives I was impressed by a project called Mosaic (Clark, 2001) which combined research tools in a multi-method approach. Rather than using one tool, it demonstrated the benefits of listening to young children, under five, using a variety of tools. For example, combining observation with interviewing, use of a camera, drawing, or role-play

I was aware from my therapeutic work of the value of children’s drawings and noted that they had been used as an appropriate research tool for younger children (5-11) who may lack the necessary verbal ability to express their thoughts and feelings (Harrison et al. 2007). The sense that drawings can access parts of a child’s inner experience that is not available through any other means (Harrison et al. 2007), seemed to make it suitable for the psychoanalytic form of enquiry undertaken in this study. The rationale supporting my decision is considered next.

### 4.1.9: Rational for using children’s drawings as an additional research method

There is a long history of children’s drawings being used in research particularly as a method of gaining insight into children’s perspectives with a consensus that ‘artistic productions’ depicting a wide range of inter-personal experiences, particularly related to family, impart some aspects of self (e.g., Gillespie,1994).

Drawings are also suggested to be useful in reflecting children’s representational development (Cherney, Seiwert, Dickey and Flichtbeil, 2006) as well as a measure of their emotional status (Skybo, Ryan-Wenger, and Su, 2007). The ease and accessibility to pencils and paper make drawings a familiar task for children with the necessary materials being readily available in either schools, hospitals, or the clinical setting (Skybo et al. 2007). Play therapists posit that children’s communication through these expressive modalities offers as much value as verbal reflection about any experience (Robinson, 2011, p. 8; Landreth, 2002). Using expressive artistic mediums children can express ideas and feelings that they do not find easy when using verbal forms of self-expression (Green, 2010, in Robinson, 2011). The usefulness of children’s pictorial representations is, therefore, considered to be methodologically appropriate for young children (5-11) who may lack the necessary verbal ability to express their thoughts and feelings (Harrison et al. 2007).

Drawings as data are described as a ‘richly creative and colourful data source for visual researchers,’ while also being seen as ‘a minimally explored methodology,’ (p.236, Bland, 2012). Walker (2008) suggests that much has been learned from children’s drawings particularly by educators and researchers trying to better understand the developing child, a means to better understand the perspectives of children in their experience of educational settings.

Research has also highlighted the usefulness of children’s family drawings to inform relational representations in the school environment, highlighting potential adjustment difficulties in at-risk children (Goldner and Sharf, 2011). Other research using children’s drawings highlighted the potential in teacher-child relationships to influence both cognitive and behavioural indicators of school adjustment (Harrison, Clarke, and Ungerer, 2007).

This robust catalogue of research using children’s drawings is not surprising given the underlying epistemology of psychoanalysis that conceptualises the mind using symbolism to describe relational concepts (Rycroft, 1995). Children’s drawings are symbolic and therefore offer a capacity to appreciate several levels of experience at once (Allan, 1992) and they were an important aspect of Klein’s clinical practice who believed that objects were representations of children’s internal phantasies (Klein,1946).

The epistemological basis for the study outlined, in the theoretical framework and grounded in psychoanalytic practice, would suggest that using children’s drawings as representations of their emotional experience is an appropriate methodology. The following section examines the chosen instrument of collection and analysis of children’s drawings for this study.

### 4.1.10: Psychoanalytically informed collection and analysis of children’s drawings

My choice of using drawings as data, alongside the TOM, is similarly influenced by an ontological and epistemological stance, seeking to understand the children’s experience of their educational space from a deeper psychic level, informed by the psychoanalytic framework outlined in chapter 3.

What follows is an account of how I located a research model that seemed to be congruent with my research aims, epistemology, and ontology.

#### 4.1.10.1 Levick (2009) An Introduction

A colleague of mine in America, Dr. Janet Courtney, a play therapist who I have trained with as well as working as a trainer alongside, suggested Dr. Myra Levick whom I found to be a remarkable woman, a brief overview of her life can be seen in the link below[[2]](#footnote-2).

Myra Levick, a psychologist and art therapist, trained for six months with Anna Freud in London and was the ‘first president of the American Art Therapy Association and the first to implement a graduate training programme in art therapy education at the Hahnemann University of Philadelphia (now Hahnemann/Drexel).

Dr Levick developed an assessment instrument for use in schools. The Levick Emotional and Cognitive Art Therapy Assessment (LECATA, 2009) was intended to identify children aged between 3 and 11 at risk of failing due to hidden emotional, social, and cognitive difficulties, in the Miami Dade County school system. This definitive model was based on a normative study developed for Myra’s Ph.D. in 1982. ‘The final addition to the LECATA was completed in 1989 when a research project was initiated in the Palm Beach County (Florida) Public Schools.’ (Bush, 2009). I understand that the assessment is still used in some parts of Florida as a valid measure for examining emotional difficulties responsible for disrupting students learning.

I was impressed by the way Myra Levick identified a synthesis between emotional and intellectual development. Her assessment tool is based on both a chronological correspondence between Anna Freud’s unconscious defence mechanisms and emotional responses in drawings and Piaget’s cognitive stages of development, as well as artistic and psychosexual developmental lines. This framework facilitates an understanding of the whole child within their developmental context.

Levick’s examination of Piagetian ideas and their integration with psychoanalytical ones is well documented in her book (1983) and she makes it clear that she is not the first person to do this, advocating the work in this field of Stanley Greenspan (1979). She cited Greenspan who stated that ‘content of children’s play, fantasy and imitation is often related to emotional issues’ (p. xxi, Levick, 1983) and she aligned herself with his view that expression needs to be understood from more than a cognitive view stating that it was important that ‘those elements related to the influence of drives and object relations must be considered’ (p. xxi, 1983).

In the light of the points made in this chapter, the LECATA (Levick, 2009) seemed a useful tool informing analysis of the drawings collected in this study.

The LECATA was designed around specific tasks each with a Criteria Sheet to rate aspects of each of the drawings, examples can be found in the appendices, in early discussions with Myra she agreed that for this study I could use a simple series of drawings with each child participant.

Unfortunately, our relationship was brief and short-lasting as indicated in reflective box 4.2 below which gives a simple account of the personal circumstances that led to an interruption in my relationship with Myra, forestalling my intention to explore the model in depth. Despite having lost an opportunity to gain more insight into the LECARTA model, I felt that the basic principles of Myra’s thinking could be of use to me, and I endeavoured to find a way of incorporating them into the analysis.

Reflective box 4.2 Personal note: Unfortunately, my husband died which delayed the research project and communications with Myra ceased before I was able to grasp the protocol to implement her assessment, I later learned that she had died at the age of 96. I was extremely sad that I had not been able to get to know her better, my impression of her was that she was committed to furthering understanding of children’s emotional needs. It was also extremely disappointing because I felt the ideas underpinning her work, recognising unconscious elements expressed in children’s drawings, were important.

### 4.1.11: Reflection, reflexivity, and the epistemology of psychoanalytic research

The two terms reflection and reflexivity are often used interchangeably in research writing (Etherington, 2004). According to Etherington (2004) reflection concerns more conscious processes related to solitary activities of journal writing, while reflexivity allows the researcher to ‘acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing) inform the process of the enquiry’ (p.29).

I have used journaling as a process of self-awareness most of my adult life and I find Etherington’s distinction of the two terms unhelpful in appreciating the way the two experiences seem to interact. For example, I have found that when writing for reflection, for example in a journal or writing up supervision notes, it easily flows into reflexivity. I wonder if it is possible that rather than identify the two as separate processes one informs the other.

Hollway (2012) describes reflexivity as ‘how observers use their own emotional responses to encounters as they observe, note down and reflect upon them in the seminar (this informs what in qualitative research is called ‘reflexivity’)’ (p. 24). In keeping with Bion’s ideas about learning, (TF, p.134) Hollway refers to the value of emotional experience as an ‘emotionally imbued’ way of knowing that sets observational studies apart from other discussions based on ‘knowing about’ (2012, p. 30). Psychoanalytic epistemology recognises that knowledge is more than cognitively understanding something, it is an expression of feelings that are reflected upon both in the solitary experience of writing up and in the process of sharing these ideas with another mind.

The ongoing internal process of reflection and reflexivity requires the holding of an ‘open mind’ (Hollway, 2012) whereby the truth may be changed by reconsidering and re-evaluating emerging thoughts and ideas (Etherington, 2004). Exposure to other minds, in the supervision group for example offering different perceptions is an opportunity to reconsider impressions, particularly about observational data (Hollway, 2012)

Throughout this study reflection and reflexivity were ongoing. The word reflection is used throughout with the understanding that I understand reflection and reflexivity are part of the same process. The reflective boxes that are embedded in the main body of the thesis are intended to offer a sense of the context for some of the ideas that are being presented.

## 4.2: An account of the Methodology

Specifically, the following issues will be addressed in this section; research aims; research design; data collection; data analysis; reflective processes, and their contribution to the collection and analysis of data. Each of these is a section with subheadings enabling a detailed account.

### 4.2.1: Research Aims

The study had two aims. One was to assess the extent to which children’s emotions contribute to their experience of their educational space. A second purpose was to assess the usefulness of a methodology informed by a psychoanalytic framework in researching children’s emotional experience of their educational space. Underlying both these aims was my intention to conduct an ethically approved study including informed consent.

Table 2 Primary Research question and supporting Secondary Research Questions

|  |
| --- |
| **Primary Research Question: ‘How do emotions contribute to a child’s capacity to engage with educational spaces?** |
| Secondary Research Questions |
| 1. 1. What can be appreciated about the role of emotions in a child’s experience of educational spaces? |
| 1. How does our appreciation of the role of emotions in a child’s experience of educational spaces aid an appreciation of the complexity of the learning process? |
| 1. What contribution do adults make in supporting children’s capacity to manage overwhelming experiences of the education setting? |
| 1. How do children use each other to manage the experience of being in education? |
| 1. How does play prepare children for formal learning expectations? |
| 1. What can children’s drawings tell us about children’s experience of the educational space? |
| 1. Is psychoanalysis a useful perspective in understanding children’s experience of the educational space? |

The secondary research questions were designed both to finely tune my response to the primary research question and additionally address the secondary research aim which was to test the usefulness of psychoanalytic theory and methods in the setting.

### 4.2.2: Ethical considerations

All social science research has implications for the safety of both the participants and the researcher. My research proposal underwent a process of ethical review to ensure the risks were clear and minimal, with appropriate protocols followed to address any issues that might arise.

Ethics is understood to be related to power issues within the relationship between the researcher and other participants (British Psychological Society, 2018). When considering a research project involving vulnerable individuals, for example, children, ethical considerations are extremely important to ensure their safety. Flewitt (2005) cites Denzin (1989, p. 83);

‘… our primary obligation is always to the people we study, not to our project or to a larger discipline. The lives and stories that we hear and study are given to us under a promise, that promise being that we protect those who have shared them with us.’

I believe the transparency of the TOM, requiring the thoughts and feelings of the observer to be recorded in the written data not only establishes a context linking both researcher and subject (Etherington, 2012) but this transparency also offers protection for the subject against concerns about the operation of power issues raised by the BPS (2018). Added protection came from the sharing of the observational data on a bi-weekly basis with my supervisor.

The ethical implications for social science research reflect an awareness of the possible harm that may occur as a result of the process of data collection and analysis. The potential for harm may not always be obvious and may fall into five potential areas: physical, psychological, social, legal, or economic (Thomas, 2016). In an application for ethical approval, it was necessary to make clear any potential risks, both to myself and the participants, while also advocating for potential benefits concerning those risks.

The first step in establishing ethical quality in my research was to obtain informed consent and this is discussed next.

### 4.2.3: Informed consent

Research is a constantly changing process and ethical considerations need to be considered throughout its progression (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009). The transparency of the research design, discussed in section 4.2.3, supported a vigilant awareness of the possibility of harm to the participants in the study. It was made clear to the participants that if they or anyone in the setting felt any sense of discomfort, caused by my observations at any point during the process, they could withdraw their consent. In this case, the observations would be halted initially until the issue could be resolved but completely if not.

Anonymity is an ethical requirement, so all personal details that might facilitate the recognition of the children are removed from the observations. However, it was made clear to the participants that if a particularly painful disclosure arose it would need to be shared with whoever was most appropriate, the parent or teacher initially. Assurance of confidentiality was given with the proviso that the thesis would be read by my supervisor and others interested in the research. Withdrawal of consent was available throughout data collection, with the possibility that should an instance arise consent could be withdrawn at the point that data is analysed or before publication (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009).

It was important to ensure that enlisting each of the child participants was an ethical process, gaining informed consent from the headteacher, class teacher, parent, and finally child.

The ethical protocols supporting informed consent outlined above were followed and permission forms and additional information sheets are included in the appendices.

The recruitment process began with approaching the schools to explain my research interest and seeking permission from the headteacher to approach a teacher and parents for consent in approaching their child with the possibility of taking part.

## 4.3: A psycho-social case study design

This study was exploratory and interpretative and by employing qualitative modes of enquiry I attempted to illuminate the emotional experience of two children in their educational space.

I chose a qualitative, longitudinal, and psycho-social case study design with two research settings, Case study 1 was set in a reception class in a small infant and junior school in an area of economic deprivation, with predominantly a white British ethnic and cultural population. Case study 2 was a large eighty place nursery, with a high proportion of British multi-ethnic children.

Thomas (2016) records a number of instances where case studies were first used as a methodological tool. For example the systematic method of examining single cases was used by Jean Marc Gaspard Itard in his study of Victor the ‘wild boy of Aveyron,’ as early as the first part of the nineteenth century (Thomas, 2016). Another early implementation of the case study was the examination of French working people by Le Play, who lived in the homes of the people he was studying (Thomas, 2016).

Writing about case study research in education, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) suggest that it offers opportunities for understanding the experience of the individual rather than a scientific paradigm which ‘rests upon the creation of theoretical frameworks that can be tested by experimentation, replication and refinement’ (p.181). The usefulness of case studies is that they reveal aspects of an individual’s experience beyond that of quantitative methods which rely on numerical analysis (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). The qualitative nature of case studies captures the complex and dynamic contexts of the research field, recognising the significance that context can make on an individual’s behaviour.

One of the most illuminating examples of how case studies can provide a deeper understanding of an individual’s experience can be found in the work of RD Laing in the 1950’s.

In the book recording his research, ‘Sanity madness and the family (first published by the Tavistock in 1964)[[3]](#footnote-3) he raised concerns that mental illness was not necessarily a medical phenomenon, but an experience of life born out of familial conflict. Based on taped interviews with 11 psychiatric patients and their family over two years, Laing revealed the internal conflicts of the patients as they sought to manage their fears anxieties for their families.

The in depth interviews, over a long period of time, provided insight into each members story and the struggle as they attempted to make sense of not only the behaviour of the patient but their own too. It is this interaction over time that is so illuminating. However, the study created a huge amount of data that was challenging to analyse, nevertheless without it I believe our understanding of the familial context of mental health issues would be impoverished.

Pope and Mayes (1995),[[4]](#footnote-4) writing about research methodology in health settings, suggest that while quantitative research might inform the efficacy of insulin therapy, only qualitative research offers the possibility of understanding why a patient may be non-compliant. There is a similar situation in education where the strict regime of assessment and testing may inform us about the number of children not reaching expected norms, however, it does not answer the question of *why* this might be so.

As a result of this recognition Yardley (2000) suggests that there has been an increase in the use of qualitative methods with the advantages of case studies described by Flyberg (2006): ‘The advantage of the case study is that it can ‘close in’ on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice’ (p. 19) referring I think to the systematic processing of the data which necessitates an ideographic approach and going beyond a simplistic to a more interpretative understanding.

Paparini, Green, Papoutsi, Murdoch, Petticrew, Greenhalgh, Hancke, and Shaw, (2020) more recently continue to present the argument that case study research, ‘as an overall approach, is based on in-depth explorations of complex phenomena in their natural, or real-life, settings. Empirical case studies typically enable dynamic understanding of complex challenges and provide evidence about causal mechanisms and the necessary and sufficient conditions (contexts) for intervention implementation and effects’ (Abstract).[[5]](#footnote-5)

Oliver Sacks, the eminent neurologist, took great interest in individuals and their experience of psychological disturbance. His use of individual cases is documented in a series of books, one example being ‘The man who mistook his wife for a hat,’ (1985). In the introduction he is quoted as saying ‘only these narratives can give full weight to the experiential and existential character of illness – only they can adequately convey the ‘who’ as well as the ‘what’ of disease’ (p.ix). Perhaps this comment summarises the value of a case study and why I chose this methodology for my study.

What all case studies require of the researcher is the ability to put aside one’s own preconceptions and listen to the voice of the participant. Case study research is an ‘exercise in listening and thinking’ states Hilary Mantel in the forward to Laing’s book (p. xiii), two commodities that are often too costly for present day research budgets. Just as Laing’s study produced data over a significant time frame, the TOM, used over seven months for this study, also provided a large amount of profound data, that can be challenging to analyse. However, it was an invaluable tool for the case study design in this thesis. Such richness of insight into the lived experience of individual’s, over time, is demanding of resources and therefor difficult to fund.

The design builds on research methodologies that have a distinguished history of utilising aspects of psychoanalytic clinical practice and applying them to research approaches (Rustin, 2019, Stamenova and Hinchcliffe, 2018).

### 4.3.2: Enrolling participants

#### 4.3.2.1: Case Study 1: Tina (Reception Class, full time)

I approached a local school where I had good memories because my son had attended many years ago and this familiarity gave me a point of interest with the headteacher.

#### 4.3.2.2: The research setting

A reception class in a small infant and junior school in an area of economic deprivation, predominantly white British. The school has low numbers, e.g., only eighteen in Reception when they are all in attendance. I was informed by the headteacher at that time that the school had a higher-than-average number of children on Pupil Premium described by the Government as; ‘funding to improve education outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in schools in England. Evidence shows that disadvantaged children generally face additional challenges in reaching their potential at school and often do not perform as well as other pupils.’[[6]](#footnote-6) A higher number of children in receipt of this premium suggests that there are a high number of pupils who are described as disadvantaged.

Throughout my observations there was an easy relaxed feel in the classroom which seemed to stem from Miss G. I found her to be relaxed, authoritative, sensitive but capable of mistakes, occasionally missing clues of Tina’s needs by ignoring her. I sensed that Miss G made a significant contribution to Tina’s experience of her educational space providing a facilitating environment that was relaxed and safe where play was valued. These elements offered the potential of a third space, one of exploration and discovery, contributing to a growing ‘sense of self,’ (Winnicott (1971, p.56).

There was one class teacher and one educational support assistant (ESA).

The layout of the classroom can be found on p. 231.

#### 4.3.2.3: How Tina became a participant

I approached this school aware that it was a familiar setting located within easy driving distance from my home. My request to conduct research there was originally intended to commence at the beginning of the Autumn term. However, due to leadership changes in the school, along with personal difficulties in my life explained elsewhere, there was a delay in recruiting participants in the reception class for what became School 1.

It was towards the end of the Autumn term that letters were distributed to all the parents of the one class intake of reception. There were three responses of interested parents and a meeting was held with them to explain the study and what was involved. It was explained that their child would only be included if they consented after the study was explained to them. The parents were also informed that the class teacher would be present for the interview.

After this meeting, the class teacher chose the first child to be interviewed to seek their permission to be included in the study. The wording of the explanation of the study was read from a prepared sheet and can be found in the appendices (Appendix 2).

The first child to be interviewed, a girl, agreed to take part and gave her consent on the proforma which can be found in the appendices (Appendix 2). I assured her that if at any time she was unhappy she could tell mum or any of the staff and I would stop. I also informed mum that if she had any concerns she could talk to the staff or contact me.

I provided an information sheet with contact phone numbers for myself and my supervisor.

After returning her to class the teacher and I discussed if it was necessary to interview the other two children and came to an agreement together that the rejection of any of the children might be felt more acutely after being interviewed. The class teacher said she would explain to the parents their child hadn’t been rejected but that since the first one to be interviewed had agreed to take part it was decided not to interview the remaining two.

On reflection, I think it would have been beneficial if I had made it clear in the parent interview that if the first child chose to take part, then the interviews of the other two would not go ahead.

#### 4.3.2.4: Case study 2: Arlia

##### 4.3.2.4.1: Important information about School 2

I was previously employed as a teacher/therapeutic play practitioner in the infant school attached to the nursery setting for this second case study. I had not wanted to conduct the research project in the place where I had worked for over twenty years. However, having received no response to letters sent out to schools within a three-mile radius of my home inviting their participation in the study, time constraints and personal circumstances led me to make a different decision. I felt pressured and finally, I decided, based on convenience, to use the Nursery in my recent workplace for the second case study.

This was a difficult decision because I had at times expressed my concern with staff that top-down pressures of the curriculum were compromising children’s learning in the infant school and this had been a source of frustration for me. My views were not always welcomed and some of my frustrations have been presented more fully in the Introduction and Literature Review. I was aware that this history might influence my perceptions of children and staff in the Nursery setting. However, the convenience of having a setting where I was known and respected for my work gained ease of access which at the time was appreciated.

The nursery was the setting where I felt my presence would be least intrusive as an observer and my hope is that the transparency held within the research design will facilitate the reader to come to their own judgments on the interpretation of the data presented in this study.

#### 4.3.2.5: The research setting

The infant and nursery school had a high British multi-ethnic population, and the nursery is managed separately from the school. The large room is divided up into different areas e.g., a home corner, a café, water area, painting area, sand play area, cloakroom, using furniture and there are separate toilets for boys and girls. I have included some photographs in the analysis.

There are two qualified teachers, one of whom is also the assistant head of the infant school, and usually at least four permanent support staff as well as trainees. The outdoor area is manned, on a rota, by one of the staff in all weathers and the children are expected to access the outdoor provision whatever the weather, protective clothing is provided to accommodate a cold and damp environment. I have noticed in the past a surprising number of children will play outside no matter how wet, windy, or cold it is.

Arlia attended this forty-placement setting five afternoons a week, term time only. The morning session also accommodated forty children, so the staff carry responsibility for eighty children over five days each week. Some children attend for whole days and as in case study 1, the setting had a higher-than-average number of children on Pupil Premium.

#### 4.3.2.6: How Arlia became a participant

I decided that I would approach the parents, some of whom knew me personally, while they were chatting together in groups after bringing their children into the setting. I approached the first group of five or six parents and after enquiring about their children I explained to them about the research I wanted to do following the wording of the letter sent out to parents in the first school. One or two of the parents asked questions and then one of them said she would be happy for me to ask her child if she would take part. Mum took me to her daughter and listened while I explained as simply as possible, following the outline on the consent form, what would happen. The child nodded her consent, and then, after explaining the thumbs up and down symbol on the form, she gave me her thumbs up and put an X next to the one that signified consent. I assured her that if at any time she was unhappy she could tell mum or any of the staff and I would stop. I also informed mum that if she had any concerns she could talk to the staff or contact me.

I also provided an information sheet with contact phone numbers for myself and my supervisor (Please refer to copy in Appendix 2)

## 4.4: Data collection

Data for this study were collected using three methods: i) a series of observations over twenty-four weeks; ii) three drawings, done at intervals, by each child; iii) Supervision with its accompanying notes and my reflections recorded in my research journal during the process. The three together seemed to offer the depth of insight into children’s emotional experience of the educational space I was looking for as well as congruency with both my epistemology and ontology.

It is important to stress that the first element of the analysis was embedded in the process of data collection. As each observation was written and then read for understanding about what was going on for both the child, these were then shared in supervision, the discussion facilitated a developing narrative about the children’s experience. Each of the observations offers a piece of a jigsaw, but it is more like a kaleidoscope since the notions that emerge are constantly turned around, investigated from different angles before making comparisons with others in the series. However, at this stage, the theory is in the background.

The following section outlines the protocols introduced to ensure ethically safe and rigorous data collection methods.

### 4.4.1: The Tavistock observational method (TOM)

The observations of both child participants were conducted in their respective settings. The observations took place every week, wherever possible on the same day and same time, lasting for one hour.

I explained to the staff in both settings that the observational role required a sense of distance between the observer and other members of the educational space. The role was not one of an adult available for additional support in the educational space, for example, to negotiate children’s disputes, except in extreme emergencies, none of which occurred during my research.

To ensure rigour in the data collection process there are three distinct phases outlined by Skogstad (p. 114, 2018):

* The actual observation: no notes are taken and the observer remains as open to the experience as possible while focusing one’s attention on what can be seen and heard in the environment and how the child participant interacts with their facial expression, voice gesture, etc. The emotional state of the environment as well as the general atmosphere. Additionally, what can be sensed about internal emotional responses, ‘association, mental images memories, etc.’
* The writing up of the observations; takes place as soon as possible after the observation. Writing up as much as has been retained but without attention to interpretation, focusing on ‘what one has seen, heard and felt, in everyday language and as accurately as possible.’
* The process and interpretation of the observed material. Skogstad (ibid.) advises that a group setting offers the possibility of a ‘wider range of cognitive and emotional processing than just one mind.’ In this study, the additional perspective was offered by my supervisor.

Skogstad further advises that to hold any sense of confidence the interpretational process needs to adhere to three requirements (p.116):

* There needs to be a concordance between different areas of the observation, such as the observed behaviour and the subjective experience of the observer;
* One needs to see repeated patterns rather than just one single event;
* Interpretations arrived at through earlier observations should remain meaningful when looking at later material.

Throughout my research, I endeavoured to comply with these requirements.

### 4.4.2: Children’s drawings

Collecting the drawings for data analysis was straightforward. The children were to be given three opportunities with their teacher, either alone or in a group, to draw themselves in their setting. The instruction was ‘draw yourself in your classroom/nursery’ and then any comments were noted by the teacher, either annotating the drawing or on the reverse.

Through my therapeutic work with children, I found children’s drawings a useful contribution to emerging hypotheses about the issues that troubled them. Much of my work involved feeling my way, using an intuitive sense to support what I saw emerging out of our time together and these ideas and intuits were shared and discussed with my clinical supervisor.

### 4.4.3: Reflective practice adding validity in data collection and analysis

The significance of reflective practice and its relationship with reflexivity has already been discussed (4.4). Reflective practice makes an important contribution to the validity of observational research (Hollway, 2012, Mortari, 2015). Mortari stated that ‘Reflexivity is largely practised in qualitative research, where it is used to legitimise and validate research procedures.’ (p.1). This is because reflective practice offers those reading the research insight into how the findings were constructed (2015.).

It is also argued that sharing one’s reflections allows for critical scrutiny throughout the research process offering important ethical protection for both observer and the participant (Mortari, 2015). However, this view has been criticised by some, Mortari suggests that some scholars (e.g. Daphne Patai,1994) believe that reflectivity offers nothing useful to research methodology. Nevertheless, this criticism is countered with the view that to ‘become mindful of one’s own practice gives value to any kind of inquiry (Mortari, 2015, p.2).

Hollway (2012) argued that reflective practice within supervision provides space for emergent concepts to surface while providing a balance to self-serving bias.

An important aspect of my reflective process is bringing understanding of the contribution made to the communication between my position as observer and my unconscious association with my past, both personal and professional. When these associations were discussed with my supervisor they provide important insight into the transferential processes at play, adding to the sense-making process while also offering a counterbalance to subjectivity (Elfer, 2018).

The transference relationship between the observer and participant is suggested to be similar to that of the analyst and analysand (Rustin, 2019), however, the view that psychoanalytic research can provide psychoanalytic knowledge has been contested. One challenger cited by Rustin (2019), Andre Green, revised his view on considering the foundations of the method set out by Esther Bick. Another critique was offered by Steven Groarke (2008, 2010) who raised concerns that the premise of the therapeutic setting and that of the research setting are too dissimilar. Groarke saw the first as reliant on the emotional sense of being with a client and the second is purely an information-gathering exercise (Groarke, 2008, Rustin, 2019).

Rustin (2019) argued that the operation of transference and countertransference functions, along with the ‘cumulative understandings’ from psychoanalytic theory, occurs similarly in both situations and can be useful in offering insights into ‘recognition of *kinds* or patterns of development (ibid. p. 243). Rustin further argued that the similarity in methods of data collection and analysis between the clinical and research applications, both having evolved out of many years of psychoanalytic practice, are so similar that observational research requires little adaptation. This point is discussed further in 7.8.

Reflective Box 4.3: Reflecting on my experience working therapeutically with children and the and psychoanalytic observations I can agree there is a difference between both processes. It occurs to me that the intimacy of the therapeutic session allows a very close intuitive bond to develop, which in turn allows a sense of the child’s internal experience. This relationship provides a sense of knowing that can be tested out by wondering aloud sometimes, for example, what something might feel like, or what the puppet might be thinking or feeling. Impressions are noted after the therapeutic session but not in the detail required for the TOM and these impressions, shared in clinical supervision, cumulatively inform every session that follows.

The intent when working therapeutically is to create a safe space and demonstrate acceptance of the child, which is facilitated by allowing the child to lead the play. Although my intention as observer was to hold the same non-judgemental stance, I found it difficult to be sure this was what I was projecting from the position of this position. My concern, I think now, was that the participants would feel scrutinised, something I find extremely uncomfortable and wished to avoid for them.

My perception of the containing value that an observer contributes to a child participant emerged over the study and is discussed in the analysis, particularly in relation to Arlia.

## 4.5: Data Analysis: A process of abduction

### 4.5.1: Analysis of observational data

The TOM provided the process of data collection, however, although the protocol of sharing the data with another mind supports understanding it requires an additional process to provide useful analysis. Rustin (2019) advises that it is only recently, in the last ten years, that using the TOM has been considered as a useful tool in research, becoming acknowledged in its similarity to the way ‘new understandings emerge in clinical practice,’ (p. 243). These cumulative notions and ideas provide an ongoing source for the growing lexicon of psychoanalytic understanding (Rustin, 2019) offering a transition from observing the particular to a ‘more generalised recognition of *kinds* of patterns of development,’ (p. 243). This abductive process advocated by Rustin followed ‘the idea that theoretical understanding should follow not precede experience …’ (, p.9), resonating with both the clinical practice advocated by the British School of Psychoanalysis (Rustin, 2019) and as noted previously, in grounded theory.

I was interested in the use of the word ‘abduction’ used by Rustin (2019), he suggests that this word, rather than induction, best describes the process of this method of data analysis. In seeking to understand his meaning I found a useful informative graphic illustration:

A picture containing application

Description automatically generated

Figure 4.1 [How logical reasoning works (braingymmer.com)](https://www.braingymmer.com/en/blog/logical-reasoning/) Accessed 25/03/2021

Abduction allows for inferences to be considered from several different sources, in the case of this study it includes observational data, reflections, transference-countertransference processes, supervision discussions, and the analysis of children’s drawings. The final process is the application of theory as the best fit.

Rustin stated that abduction is ‘neither a formally deductive procedure nor [is it] inductive.’ (Rustin, 2019 p. 161) and explains abduction as a ‘method of analysis that allows for the discovery of both correspondences between observed data and existing conceptual schemes as well as for the development of new concepts and theories.’ (Rustin. 2019, p.161). The process finds associations in the data, related to psychoanalytic concepts and theories. It is not a process of testing a hypothesis, but a process of discovery, using the data to shine a light on the theoretical framework rather than the other way around (Rustin, 2019).

To manage the challenge of analysing a large data set I found Rustin’s (2019) example of tabulated analysis demonstrated how the principles of grounded theory seek to discover and demonstrate the emergence of theoretical inferences. The organisation of observational data in rows and columns, facilitates the emergence of themes and concepts, eventually leading to its association with the theoretical framework.

Rustin’s (2019) tabulated analysis demonstrates how the abduction process works (Fig.4.2). A series of columns offer a process for organising data and developing ideas, ‘finally arriving at concepts and categories emerging from grounded theory analysis,’ (p.181).

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Transcript of sessional material | Summary of issues from point of view of therapist undertaking assessment | Aspects of reports concerning two children being assessed | Notes and memo’s (a grounded theory procedure) | Concepts and categories emerging from grounded theory analysis |

Figure 4.2 An example of Rustin’s column descriptives: (Rustin, 2019, p. 181)

My column descriptives followed Rustin’s (2019) tabular model and emerged as the best fit from my data, as part of the analytic process.

The column headings were constructed together with my supervisor to support the process, each observation generated its own spreadsheet. An extra column was added to Rustin’s (2019) model to allow for extra notes thought helpful to the analytic process. Two Excel workbooks were created, one for each case study and excerpts are included in the Appendices (Appendix 5).

Figure 4.3 Column headings for Excel spreadsheets used to support abductive analysis of data

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Notable Observational Data | Contextual influences: environment/group learning/class learning/play opportunity  OR  What is Tina /Arlia interacting with? | Identifying individual response to interaction  All interaction is to some degree emotional | How has the response (emotional) influenced the capacity to learn? (Intrasubjective) | Relative perspective/  psychoanalytic theory to make sense of response | Additional notes |

There was an ongoing process of seeking meaning in the observational data in supervision sessions and at times I had feelings of being overwhelmed by the muddy and impenetrable meaning that was held within their content. Locating themes seemed impossible initially and on reflection, I can see that the process was rather like an archaeological excavation, there is a surface layer that needs to be scraped away to reveal another level where indicators of something deeper emerge.

The first level of analysis was embedded in the data collection process when perceptions were recorded and resonated with an intuitive sense that there was more to be found. The shared perceptions made in supervision contributed to a kaleidoscope image, initially feeling fragmented but later becoming more cohesive as patterns emerged.

### 4.5.2: Identifying emerging themes from the data

Plotting the data onto the columns was useful in grounding me in the experience of each observation but I was daunted by the task of identifying themes as a true representation of the children’s inner conflicts and preoccupations.

Since we cannot fully know the inner world that the children inhabit, we only catch glimpses through the data of a complex inner reality interwoven through their relationships (past and present), and their play, where inferences are made about unconscious phantasy and symbolism. Unconscious symbolism as a function of the ego’s efforts to deal with present-day anxieties offers a facility to manage internal frustrations, an ‘interweaving of inner reality with a shared world,’ (Bibby, 2018, p.67). The symbols allow a form of expression, initiated early in an infant’s experience, pre-language, of internal frustrations promoting thought and leading to the construction of the mental apparatus to handle them (Klein, Bion, 1962, Segal, 1957).

Isaacs (1948) identified three strands or pointers from clinical practice, where context, symbolisation, and phantasy reveal features of internal conflict and preoccupations. I found these features useful and although the diagram (Figure 4.4) shows each strand is separate there is an interactive and reflective aspect that informed the sense being made of the child's experience of their educational space.

**Context**

Significant aspects of the context may be incidents between children, with their teacher, incidents that occur in formal learning settings or during free play

**Phantasy**

Unconscious phantasies are always inferred (Isaacs, 1948) and Klein (1929) proposed an analogy between representations used in play and dreams and phantasies of wish fulfilment.

**Significant symbolic representations**

There were several symbolic representations arising from the context and expressed through phantasy.

e.g., jewels representing something special that has been lost, a crown as a representation of power and control, a magnetic sandwich.

Figure 4:4 A diagrammatic illustration of the interactive and reflective process of the analysis informing the emerging themes (Isaacs, 1948)

The process involved many turns of the Kaleidoscope offering many interpretations but gradually it was possible to notice particular emotional preoccupations and themes emerging from the spreadsheet.

### 4.5.3: Analysis of children’s drawings

The analysis of the children’s drawings for the two case studies followed the same abductive model as the observational data. Just as in the analysis of the observational data, the theoretical followed the experiential and initially my interpretation was guided by the observational data particularly its emerging themes, which was completed before I considered the children’s drawings.

I also used the resource of my previous experience of working as a therapeutic play practitioner. However, the interpretative process was aided by the theoretical model proposed by Dr Levick developed two tables to support interpretation, both tables can be found in Appendix 6. Table 1, presents ‘Definitions and Criteria for identifying Defences Manifested in Graphic Productions.’ Examples of these tables can be found in the appendices (2009, p.3). Table 2, presents a ‘Correlation of Developmental Lines of Cognitive, Artistic, Psychosexual Sequences and defence Mechanisms of the Ego, appropriate for those periods of development.’ (2009, p. 6)

The following two chapters explain the analysis of each case study separately.

# Chapter 5

## Analysis of data for case study 1

## 5.1: Introduction to the analysis

The data from the first of the two case studies are analysed in this chapter, the child is known for this study as Tina, a child in a Reception Class. The data includes the twenty weekly observations taken over seven months, all occurring at the same time and day each week of term time. The data includes the transcriptions of observation following the TOM protocol, from each session, the drawings done by Tina, supervision notes, with my reflections and thinking are integrated throughout the analysis.

The recorded observations contain a wealth of data relating to the children’s interactions with their educational environment and I found it difficult at times to handle the enormity of it. Additional reflections, along with a dream I had as I grappled with this analysis, are recorded in Appendix 4. The analysis used a psychoanalytic perspective to account for the children’s behaviour, questioning what function the behaviour was serving for them.

The set of three numbers at the end of the vignettes refers to the Case study, the Week of the observation, and finally the page number from which the excerpt is taken e.g., 1/3/2 refers to Case study 1, week 3, page 2.

## 5.2: Case Study 1: Introducing Tina

Tina, an August birthday, is slight in build, with fine, wispy blond hair long enough to tie in a ponytail. I know little about her home and family background. When meeting with Mum to discuss the research project she brought her six-month-old baby boy with her and because of this meeting I became aware that Tina had a young baby brother who had entered her life after she had been an only child until he was born. This birth will have coincided with a major transition in Tina’s life as she moved from Nursery to the more formal setting of school. She will have found herself in a new world with changes in family relationships, a new role as an older sister, and adjusting to a classroom setting where 18 children shared two adults.

Initially, I did not realise that her efforts to resolve her anxieties arising from this change of status in her role in the family would be so significant in the observational series. The relationship between mother and child is pivotal in the psychoanalytic understanding of human development so when this relationship is altered, for example by the birth of a sibling, it is not surprising that this arouses anxiety (Bibby, 2018). This would make the transition for Tina from being an only child to one of two, challenging, and one that many children are faced with it at some stage in their childhood.

In addition Tina had had to manage her transition, at the beginning of the Autumn term, to the social atmosphere of a classroom, another possible source of anxiety. This study began in January after she had been in school for one term.

The observations revealed Tina’s struggled to manage these transitions and other issues arising from her psychosexual development were also in the milieu. The emerging phallic phase of development (TF, p.69) brings an awareness of gender difference accompanied by an unwelcome awareness of sexuality and issues around, pregnancy, and birth. These aspects of development are difficult to resolve at this age since the related language and the concepts they convey are usually beyond the capacity of young minds.

The Oedipal dynamic (T.F., p.70, 87) also features in children’s development and brings with it a sense of exclusion as the growing awareness that the relationship between parents is exclusive. The Oedipal stage represents the bridge between the exclusivity of the primary relationship to a capacity for a wider range of associations (Gomez,1997), and offers some understanding of the internal context facing Tina at this stage in her development.

I was aware of feeling concerned that the perception of being replaced in her mother’s affections could be very powerful and distressing. In this context, during the analysis, I began to see that the images, or toys, that Tina used and roles she assumed, could be understood as substitutions for unconscious anxieties seeking expression, representing phantasies emerging into an external form (Klein, 1929)**.** Tina’s play, her use of symbolism and phantasy, provided a safe place to express notions that would otherwise feel too overwhelming (Hinshelwood, p.35).

Reflective Box 5.1: I became aware during supervision that I had quite strong feelings of empathy for Tina’s new position as an older sister and my supervisor wondered if there was any similarity in my own familial experience that might account for this.

I remember thinking, and recording in my journal, that I had presumed that everyone would feel the same empathy for Tina’s experience, I had been surprised to find this might not be the case. Tina was older than me when she was required to take on this role and, reflecting now, she was able to use play and symbolism to express her feelings about it. I was about nineteen months when my sister was born and at a time in my development when memory and language were limited in their form. I am thinking, in the light of psychoanalytic theory, that my feelings would have been somatic and sensory at that time and strong feelings of anger towards my mother and younger sibling would have had to be managed in some other way. Perhaps my unconscious memories influenced my empathic response to Tina’s experience.

I reflect further in Box 5.2.

Interestingly it was the use of symbolism in Tina’s play that seemed to speak of her inner experience. Theseformsare understood psychoanalytically to characterise aspects of self and others, representing the internal conflict that structures the world of a child **(**Klein, 1929). Although the conflict would have been sensed by Tina, rather than thought about, the emotional energy aroused by these unconscious thoughts, needed to be discharged in some way, and Tina’s play offered a space for her to do that.

These undercurrents are detectable throughout the observational series from the spider phantasy, the role Tina takes as a princess desiring to be special, through to a sense of the power of her gender in the emergence of the White Queen and her relationships with her teacher and peers. Each of these is examined more fully in the following sections but form a part of the whole.

## 5.3: The Analysis: An abductive process

The methodology outlined the process of abduction that informed the analysis with the first step embedded in the process of data collection. Each transcript was shared in supervision and the ensuing discussion facilitated a developing narrative about the experience of each child.

The second element involved identifying significant small events that I sensed were important in my transcripts and discussions with my supervisor. Three strands or pointers illuminated the data, the context, symbolisation, and phantasy and Isaacs figure (Figure 4.4, p. 159) showed how although each strand is separate there is both an interactive and reflective aspect revealing emerging themes.

### 5.3.1: Themes emerging from the data

Tina’s use of symbolism and phantasy is reflected in the emergent themes:

* **Theme 1: Being desired**: Regaining a sense of value.
  + The spider
  + The princess dress.
  + Evolution into the White Queen
  + The power of the feminine
  + Awareness of difference; Gender identification, phallic stage.
* **Theme 2: Friendships:** Patterns of relating.
  + Introduction
  + Key friendships: Two children identified by the pseudonyms Kia and Bee.
  + Friend Kia
  + Friend Bee. A third child Billie, a girl, is included in an additional subsection.
* Summary of theme 2
* **Theme 3: Miss G: Tina’s identification with authority** 
  + A facilitating environment
  + Miss G as a Mirror
  + Being seen to be good
  + Miss G as an influence for change

Each theme is examined and summarised before continuing to the next one.

## 5.4 Theme 1: Being desired: Regaining a sense of value

Through discussions about the observations, I became aware that my identification with Tina in her loss was influenced by my childhood experience of a similar experience. The way this notion emerged is described in the following personal reflection.

Reflective Box 5.2: As the eldest of four children, I seemed to feel a sense of affinity with Tina and experienced a deep emotional empathy at the impact the birth of her brother would have had. My sense of what had been lost as her brother became the centre of her mother’s world, replacing her, became a strong influence on my interpretation of the events I observed.

However, for many months I worked on the analysis unaware of the transference that was taking place. In supervision, my supervisor shared that the feelings I had around Tina’s loss were outside of his experience and he wondered if there was anything in my experience that might mirror Tina’s. Over time I reflected on this notion, at first feeling threatened that I was unable to be objective in my analysis of the data, and finally coming to understand that what had happened was that my experience had, unconsciously, contributed to my understanding of something of Tina’s lived experience.

The discussions with another mind were significant in providing insight into the transferential processes at work between me as the observer and Tina, adding to the Kaleidoscope of impressions that emerged. The concordance between observed behaviour and the subjective experience of the observer was one of the three requirements advised by Skogstad (2018) to be necessary for a sense of confidence in the interpretation of the data while also offering a counterbalance to subjectivity.

### 5.4.1: The Spider: Anxieties arising from the threat to early primitive relationships

I was particularly curious about Tina’s play-acting of a spider, intuitively I felt Tina was drawing upon an internal notion of something extremely important. Over the observational series, I came to understand that this powerful symbol held key aspects of Tina’s internal conflicts.

I had arrived in the classroom in week three, to see her and her friend, identified later as Bee, crawling around the carpet using big arm and leg movements. Tina informed me that they were spiders.

*As Tina and Bee crawled around, they pretended to eat flies, then they seemed to be spitting them out. Tina crawls under the table, she speaks half to me and half to Bee ‘this is what a baby spider does when it talks,’ and she makes some high squeaky sounds.*

*Bee crawls towards Kia and says, ‘We’re eating flies,’ Kia puts her hand out to Bee who eats from her hand and then spits it out. Tina crawls towards Kia who offers her hand and Tina pretends to eat from it and then spits it out. Tina and Bee continue eating and spitting out. (1/3/1)*

I was aware that the emergence of the symbolic is an important indicator that flags up something needing to be resolved (Isaacs, 1948) and the symbolism of the spider signposted my attention to Tina’s play as an indication of internal conflict and anxiety. (The theory relating to the potential space for emerging thought offered by play and symbolism can be found in the theoretical framework, p.80). I wondered if these were related in some way to a mother figure who, when encountered in dreams, is not the benign maternal figure but a symbol something more frightening representing the unconscious anxieties faced by infants and young children about the fearsome prospect of sexuality "the phallic mother, of whom we are afraid; so that the fear of spiders expresses dread of mother-incest and horror of the female genitals" (Freud, 1933, in Holland, 2011). The notion implies an unconscious, but real, awareness of the mother’s sexuality and the intimacy she shares with the father. (Diem De-Wille, 2011).

A second aspect of the spider phantasy involved the taking in and spitting out of flies, taking in and spitting out are recognisable behaviours in infants related to feeding and more specifically to the mother’s management of these behaviours. Klein’s view that taking in and spitting out, or introjecting and projecting, may be useful in understanding Tina’s efforts to make sense of her experience. Associations between early experiences and present ones become integrated at different levels of the psyche making possible an important maturational process (Hinshelwood, 2018) as past and present become assimilated. Her emerging sense of self brings a new capacity for self-determination, she can decide what ideas are considered useful and hold on to them, while rejecting those which are assessed as threatening in some way to the ego (Hinshelwood, 2018*).* My thought about Tina’s use of a gustatory metaphor is that she was exercising Bion’s alpha function, taking in what she finds useful and spitting out what is not, an indication perhaps of her developing mental framework (Bion, 1962).

Much of my concern for Tina at this time lay, I think, in a sense that the feelings of loss might be overwhelming for her, perhaps reflecting something of my experience reflected upon in the next section and in Reflective Boxes 5.1 and 5.2. However, the spider phantasy encourages me because it displays not only Tina’s anxieties related to her loss of place in the family but also her developing thinking process to manage those concerns.

### 5.4.2: The Princess; seeking to regain what has been lost

My concerns that the arrival of a sibling and the alterations to the dynamics in a family that is engendered have been explained above, however, it was as each phantasy role appeared that the picture of Tina’s inner world emerged. Initially, the significance of Tina wearing the princess dress held little importance until I noticed that it featured as part of a developing series (Isaacs, 1948).

Tina’s identification, in play, with a doll dressed as a princess and placed in a bath fully clothed, a receptacle perhaps of her projected anxieties, may offer a signpost to her anxieties. In the following vignette I understand her feelings about feeling abandoned by abandoning the doll, and replacing it with a small furry cat:

*Tina finds a square of fabric, I wonder if she is going to use it as a towel to dry the doll but instead wraps it around the cat, carrying it over to the bath. The doll is still in the bath and* *Tina lifts her out and puts her on the floor, there is no drying or gentle placing of the doll. Then she puts the cat in the bath and proceeds to pretend to wash it quickly and once again wraps the cat in the blanket and places it under a table for a few minutes before going back and lifting the cat up and places it on a cushion on a chair.* *The doll appears to have been forgotten completely and still lies there on the floor.* (1/1/3).

Klein’s theory of splitting and projection (p.72) helps me understand Tina’s role play by suggesting that she was wanting to defend against a sense of being replaced in her mother’s attentions by splitting them off and projecting them into the doll. This unconscious process protected her from what would otherwise have been very uncomfortable feelings, perhaps of anger and loss. The doll remained fully clothed, and I wonder if this was symbolic of a sense that her desires are unacceptable and need to be kept hidden. Securing feelings in this way means they can be examined in the safe space afforded by play.

I wondered for some time why Tina had chosen the cat to receive the caring treatment that ordinarily might be given to the doll. However, Tina’s choice of the soft, furry creature suggests that the object replacing the doll has obvious qualities that call forth gentle, caring responses from herself, maybe acknowledging she has experienced pleasant feelings when caring for her baby brother. Maybe, offering a sense of ambivalence in her feelings towards him.

The opportunity to engage in free, undirected play provided space for Tina to work through some of her conflictual feelings about herself and the transitional shifts she was facing at home (Bibby, 2011). The princess dress seemed to offer a useful instrument to enable her to do this, however the phantasy of being special seemed to be challenged a week later in a group learning session.

In week 2, I arrived to find Tina sitting at a table in a small group of five engaged in a literature session led by Miss G. Tina was wearing the princess dress and I recorded her physical appearance as suggestive of a sense of vulnerability. Her body seemed to be telling a story of being disconnected from the learning task which she seemed to be finding challenging (Pick, 2015). What struck me was how Tina managed the uncomfortable feelings, perhaps returning to a time when she was an infant, the princess, the only child in her mother’s care.

*Tina, in princess dress over her school uniform, looks washed out, tired and yawning looking at T rather than text. … The text itself did not seem to interest her; she seems to be needing something from Miss G. Her fingers play around her mouth, Tina watches T carefully for cues to answers to questions. 1/2/1*

In touching around her mouth, she may be connecting with the oral erotogenic phase of development (TF, p.59), when intense pleasure is gained from the sucking engendered by this process. By stimulating a form of self-soothing, linking unconsciously to primitive feelings of pleasure, she seems to be trying to fend off her present feelings of discomfort (TF, pp. 68/90).

It is interesting to reflect on how this experience of ‘being fed’ by her teacher recalled for her the infant's experience of feeding. Although Miss G tries to break the learning down into more bite-sized chunks Tina seemed to be struggling to take in what Miss G was offering, perhaps unable to find anything in the material to hold into. I am thinking here of the way some infants struggle to find the nipple or teat, as mentioned in the theoretical framework in Klein’s object relations theory. Early dyadic experiences of feeding, when the minds of the baby and mother meet with understanding, offer a prototype of later experiences of learning and thinking (Youell, 2006). While Tina can manage her uncomfortable feelings by self-soothing, it seems she is not at the point where she understands what is being communicated. There is as yet no meeting of minds (Youell, p.104).

Eventually, Miss G recognised there was a difficulty and released the children to play. However, the difficult learning task seemed to have drained Tina’s resources and she approached the craft table only to find a deficiency in resources and an inability to find a compromise when her friend Bee offers something less than she wants.

Tina asked Bee to join her in the home corner, maybe returning to the source of her dissatisfaction or maybe to connect with something familiar. Carey, another girl, follows and, by designating them as mum and baby, Tina seemed to want to separate herself from both roles perhaps to regain a sense of being the princess, regaining a sense of value in a situation perhaps where she had been faced with her inadequacy. The persona of the princess seemed to fail to offer what she needed, and there was a search for something stronger, perhaps the crowns, symbolic of power and control, represented something more powerful than the princess persona.

*Tina goes to a cupboard and asks, ‘who wants a crown?’ Bee and Carey both say, ‘I do, I do’, and they try on different crowns from the cupboard, sometimes chosen by Tina sometimes and sometimes self-chosen. They seem to try on quite a few but then abandon them. … Bee moves away towards the tubes she was working on and offers one to Tina who accepts this time and says, ‘I am going to put my name on,’ she finds the store available and accessible for the children, gets label, writes her name and sticks it on … I notice the label peels up. Tina doesn’t notice and her attention changes again. 1/2/2*

After not finding in the crowns whatever she was searching for Tina followed Bee back to the craft table. After a brief respite in the home corner something has changed and this time she can accept Bee’s offer of half and tube and put her name on it. Although Tina accepts what is offered, perhaps accepting the reality that it is this or nothing, she appears preoccupied and still not entirely satisfied with things.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Tina’s mindset seemed to be one identified by Klein (1945) as the paranoid-schizoid position. Characterised by feeling life was against her, someone needed to be blamed for the lack, ‘someone’ had taken them all she reported to the teacher, (1/2/2) but her neediness was unacknowledged, perhaps unheard. Modification of her position seemed to be facilitated by a brief visit to the home corner where she can be the princess. Returning to the craft table she then seemed to find the capacity to accept a more realistic view that it is not always possible to get what you want.

The move towards the more realistic depressive position eventually leads to a sense of integration for the ego, adapting to ‘… a growing perception of reality …’ (Klein, 1946, p.105). Throughout the observational series, I noted indications of the ongoing move towards a more dominant depressive position, however, the paranoid-schizoid position is never far from the surface, particularly when dealing with anxious moments (TF, p.89).

The see-sawing effect between the two mind states continued to be observed as Tina and Bee move on to the large water tray. Tina removed her princess dress and puts an apron on, divesting herself of the phantasy may be, using the water and the toys she found there as another opportunity to give voice to her growing awareness of reality. This is explored more fully in a later section (Friend Bee), however, the gradual fading of Tina’s use of the princess dress seemed to signal a capacity to manage the dissatisfaction and transform it into something else.

The last time I saw Tina in the princess dress was in week 6 and I noticed that on this occasion she seemed to present a much happier group learning experience with a meeting of minds between herself and Miss G:

*… I look around for Tina and notice she is wearing a princess dress sat at the table with Miss G. Her head is down, and she is leaning over her writing book with her pencil in her right hand. She appears focused on writing letters; the intention seems to be for them to write a sentence about the story ‘Red Riding Hood.’*

*‘Tina continues to form her letters carefully but then looks up and notices me. She smiles and shakes her head a little as she bends down again towards her book. She refers to the T again needing help with the next word in the sentence, the T says each word in the sentence using her fingers to help Tina see how many words she has written and what the next one is; it is the. She asks Tina, ‘how do we write the?’ Tina looks a bit blank, her head on one side. T goes and finds two cards, one with to and the other with the and she asks, ‘which one is the?’ Tina chooses the correct one and Miss G puts the card on the table for her to copy. Tina seems focused and when she needs help with the next word (which is wolf) she is told that it is on the prompt sheet on the table. Tina locates the word easily and copies it down.*

*When she finishes, she lifts her book up and waves it at the T, her face has a big smile and I sense she has a sense of achievement at having finished. I notice that she is the first to finish in her group. The T is very pleased with her, she has a soft warm expression on her face, and I can see from Tina’s face she finds pleasure in having received this positive response. Then the T says she can go and choose now, and Tina bounces off to the HC.’ (1/6/1).*

There seems to have been a shift in her relationship to learning, she is mastering the challenges of literacy, able to ask for help when she needs it, chewing over and digesting what Miss G offers.

Through a gradual diminishing of her princess role, I have a sense of an emergent self, becoming aware of her power, rather than her vulnerability, able not only to digest more solid food but feed herself. This seems to become more obvious when two weeks later (wk. 8) I observed a transformation away from the needy, princess fantasy and identify in week 9 with the more powerful figure of the White Queen. The transition from princess as part of Tina’s emerging sense of self continues through the analysis.

### 5.4.3: The emergence of the White Queen

In week eight there was no sign of the dress but there was a crown and her demeanour suggested she was feeling extremely happy. On that occasion, after entering the classroom, I noticed a lot of activity in the home corner and found Tina there, she exuded happiness and energy, reminding me of someone who has just woken up from a deep sleep.

*I am immediately struck by a change in her demeanour. She appears very happy; her face has a wide smile and for the first time I notice she has dimples in her cheeks. Her eyes are bright and sparkly, and it almost feels like she has walked out of a fog, or a sleepy state. I hadn’t thought she was unhappy before but today her overall nature seems sunny and light. ... She has a tiara in her hair that says, ‘Birthday Princess’ and for a minute I wonder if it is her birthday accounting for her happy disposition. But then I remember she is an August born child. (1/8/1)*

I was curious about the celebratory mood and what had given rise to this change. I wondered if the dress no longer served its purpose as a defence against her feelings of vulnerability at her loss of status in her family, and one of many in the classroom. Did this mean that she was moving through those feelings? And what was the meaning of the crown?

A week later (wk.9) I noticed this new mindset continued and on reflection, I wonder if I am once again witnessing a modification of the paranoid-schizoid mindset towards a more realistic depressive one (TF, p.89). I wondered if she was coming to realise that the transition she had faced was not all bad and that there might be advantages to being an older sister?

Reflective Box 5.3: As I reflect on what Tina’s experience as an older sister might feel like, I find myself having a sense of ‘specialness’ that older siblings might feel about their place in the family and wonder where that notion has come from. Looking back, I was always very aware that I was responsible for setting an example to my younger siblings and that my parent’s expectations of me seemed higher than the ones they held of my siblings.

Although I wasn’t always happy about these expectations, as I got older I found there were advantages at times, and I wonder if it is this aspect of being an older sibling that I am associating with Tina’s experience. Did her role as big sister become more favourable at this time because she realised that there can be advantages to being firstborn?

Tina brought the White Queen to my notice when I arrived in the classroom in week 9 to hear her singing in the toilet a song which only later became significant but seemed to express something Tina was feeling.

*She goes into the first toilet and comes straight out again, glancing at me. Then she goes into the second toilet but doesn’t close the door. I hear her singing a song. When she comes out she goes to T and begins talking about the song she was singing, she skips and looks extremely happy. They talk about the ‘show’ and when it is going to happen. One o’clock, one afternoon. Then Tina skips off to the computer and finds a CBeebies show about the White Queen. I remember the songs featuring in last week’s observation. (1/9/1)*

There was a problem with the webpage and Tina turned to Miss G. for help with it and while it was sorted they had a conversation that seemed to explain Tina’s newfound joy.

*Tina says her mum is getting married soon, T nods and says yes it will be soon, are you looking forward to it? Tina looks very pleased, her face lights up and she nods. Then she says, ‘my little brother is ill, he has chickenpox, he keeps scratching it.’ T says, ‘Oh dear, how old is your little brother now?’ Tina doesn’t seem very sure and the T gives a couple of guesses, Tina responds by saying he hasn’t had a birthday yet and he can’t walk. The closeness they share together, and the confidence Tina shows as she warms to the T suggest an ability feel comfortable in each other’s company. (1/9/1)*

Perhaps it is this occasion that has eased some of her feelings of being excluded, the celebration may be an opportunity for her to have a special role distinct from that of her baby brother, easing some of her feelings of being excluded. The computer offers easy access to the powerful image of the White Queen, a powerful image with the qualities of a person who has the power to control others.

The theme of Tina’s association with the White Queen continued to feature in the observations, in week 15 I recorded:

*As I walk over, I pass the computers and notice Bee and Carey singing and mimicking the White Queen song ‘I have the power.’ As I approach the table Tina notices the song and immediately joins in moving her body and singing to the music. (p.1) (15/4)*

I have the impression that the power of the White Queen infuses Tina’s body, as she responds physically to the energy the role engenders, the energy of omnipotence and control. This new energy feels different to the princess energy, which was more about seeking to return to the status quo. By becoming the controller, introjecting the admired qualities of the White Queen, she takes control of what happens in her relationships in school and may ameliorate feelings brought from home. Perhaps it was identification with this powerful figure, who is also a woman, that accounted for some of the change I was noticing. The notion of power personified as queen was referred to by Klein (1929) and understood to hold sadistic and retributory intentions (TF, p. 95).

Control features significantly as an aspect in Tina’s relationships, explored further in Theme 2, and through the analysis I speculated about the other female influences in her life at this time. Her mother offered an opportunity to work through her anxieties around her feminine identity explored next and Tina’s relationship with her teacher is explored further in Theme 3.

I had the notion that acceptance of her mother’s capacity as a sexual being, part of a powerful, dyadic relationship with her father and her ability to give birth, offered a powerful opportunity to locate the feminine as part of her persona. An important aspect in resolution of the oedipal conflict that she was working towards and explored further in the next section.

#### 5.4.3.1 The power of the feminine

The symbol of the princess holds a clear implication for me of feminine gender and Tina’s growing awareness of differences between male and female, an aspect of the phallic phase (TF, p.69). Little girls often have a special relationship with their father and may be referred to as ‘daddy’s little princess,’ which seems to represent a sense of being incredibly special, privileged even, in this relationship. I wondered at the time if this was one reason why this role held significance for her. The role of the fairy tale princess seemed to feature in what appears to be a re-enactment of a scene from Snow White:

*Tina says she has something stuck in her throat and collapses to the floor. Bee says it must be the apple and kisses Tina on the forehead. Tina opens her eyes and smiles. (1/3/3)*

I am reminded of the romanticism of fairy stories which hold the fantasy of the princess being found and rescued by the handsome prince, brought to life again by a kiss. In this early stage of development, the fantasy plays into the significance of being desired by the prince, which would be understood psychoanalytically as the father (Winnicott, 1964). Within the constellation of fairy tale figures are those of the evil witch and wicked stepmother, who the heroine tries to escape from before returning to vanquish and regain her rightful place. I wonder if, for Tina, both mum and teacher found counterparts in these two fairy tale characters in her early phantasies.

Indications that the emergence of feminine aspects of her gender, including pregnancy and birth are indications that Tina continues to manage the confusion around the usual questions thought about, though not necessarily voiced at this age, namely pregnancy and birth. Perhaps this sheds some light on a drawing I observed her make in an early observation:

*Tina has drawn something I am unsure about but think it almost looks like a pregnant woman from the side. (1/4/3)*

Much later, in week 11, as the phantasy of the White Queen grows stronger, her play continues to reflect a preoccupation with pregnancy and birth, the images seem to reflect a shared understanding and meaning for both Tina and her friend:

*Tina turns in a twirly sort of movement and returns to Carey; they laugh together while holding their toys as if they were babies. Suddenly Tina puts the Koala under her jumper, she arches her back and rubs her ‘bump’ laughing with Carey, she walks around in this pose, what seems a clear impression of a pregnant woman. I wonder if mum is having another baby.* *(1/1/15)*

I discovered later that mum was not having another baby and wondered what other meaning this playful act held. There is significance, I think, in the new order facing Tina who is no longer the ‘baby’ of the family and raised the question of her sense of identity, she is giving birth to a new sense of self unearthed from her encounters with life thus far.

It seemed that Tina was managing this process by drawing upon an internalised mother, which included an enlarged perception of her mother as sexual and capable of bearing babies. Winnicott (1971) suggests that when the good-enough mother has been internalised there is a capacity to use her to moderate anxiety and it may be that Tina that this internal resource has been instrumental in moderating Tina’s anxieties about both home and school. Looking back over the observations this process seemed to have begun a few weeks earlier, but its significance didn’t appear at that time. While sharing a book with Carey some images caught Tina’s attention, creating associations:

*Carey tries to tell the story from the pictures, but Tina seems to be flicking through looking at the pictures. She points to an image of two rabbits, they are both looking upwards, their tails are close together and Tina says something that strikes me as curious; ‘look they are kissing,’. I wonder if I have not seen the picture correctly and I check again. The rabbit’s faces are not near each other, but their bottoms are side by side. I wonder what this might mean. Is this a growing awareness of sexuality? (1/5/1)*

*Tina stands up and walks toward T, she tells her that she has tummy ache, Miss G suggests that she get a drink of water and sit somewhere quiet for a while. Tina finds her bottle and goes to HC and sits on the settee. Bee, also in princess dress, asks Tina what is wrong, and Tina says she has tummy ache. (1/5/1)*

There are associations between kissing, bottoms and tummy ache which seem to offer an insight into the connections Tina seemed to be making about what she has observed in her experience. The notion that for young children there is an awareness of the physical, intimate relationship between parents while remaining protected from the reality naive of adult sexuality, as is appropriate for childhood, is a key theme in Psychoanalytic theory (Diem-Wille, 2011). Tina’s playful behaviour with Carey suggested that this universal knowing could be played out between the two of them while remaining protected from the full sexual connotations.

It is interesting to note Miss G’s response to Tina’s tummy-ache, by suggesting Tina take a drink from her water bottle she offered Tina an opportunity to return to a time as an infant when sucking would have felt anxiety relieving. The oral phase (TF, p.67), when handled sensitively by the m/other, can be revisited to connect with those anxiety-relieving feelings experienced at that time. The bottle, by association, offers access to the soothing of her emotions (TF, pp.100, 109). Whether Miss G was aware of Tina’s anxieties or not, though I think it was highly unlikely except as an unconscious transference, Miss G was able to provide an appropriate resource for Tina to self soothe.

### 5.4.4: Summary of theme 1

For Tina, the educational space presented many challenges which hold the possibility of arousing associations with unconscious primal experiences and the associations being made by Tina in her day-to-day encounters offer her the opportunity to integrate early experience with the present. For example, her connection with the oral erotogenic phase when needing to alleviate her anxieties in a group learning situation.

Losing the exclusivity of the primary relationship offers some understanding of the internal context facing Tina at this stage in her development. Play offered a safe space to think about powerful feelings, Tina used it to both manage and explore disturbing feelings and thoughts around feelings of loss resulting from the birth of her brother and the exclusivity in her parent's relationship. Play and symbolism were useful vehicles for the expression of her internal frustrations to gradually negotiating her way through the oedipal stage of development.

There also seemed evidence that Tina was able to modify the demands of the paranoid-schizoid position (TF, p.89) increasing her capacity for tolerance of loss and an acceptance of the reality that there may be advantages to the role of an older sister.

Friends played a significant role in Tina’s developing social and emotional persona. So far, the analysis has focused on Tina’s adjustment to her changing role in the family, however, moving from a small stage of the family to finding her place in the wider world presents additional issues that also need to be resolved. An important aspect of her developing thinking is the use she makes of other children in her management of uncomfortable emotions. A wider world offers the opportunity to confront perceptions of difference, a key theme of the phallic stage of development (TF, p.61).

## 5.5: Theme 2: Friendships: Patterns of relating

There has been a strong feeling so far that Tina’s desire to return to the status quo before her brother was born is an expression of loss. The process of acceptance of this reality invites a shift from the inclination to experience the environment as persecutory, compromising other relationships by making trust difficult to achieve, to a more realistic perspective of both self and m/other, appreciating that both good and bad exist in all of us, an important necessary step in learning to learn (Bibby, 2011).

The observational data suggested to me that at times Tina was influenced by a paranoid-schizoid frame of mind (TF, p.89), her capacity to tolerate her loss seemed limited and her anger at the loss of her m/other and her abandonment to school needed to be assuaged in some way. The powerful feelings of wanting to be desired, to be special, noticed and sought after, rather than insignificant and overlooked emerged as a strong theme in Tina’s behaviour in her interactions with her peers.

Her transition to a depressive position (Klein, 1946) which would bring a more realistic view of self in relation to others, seemed compromised by her desire to be special, and she exercised her growing sense of power and control to fulfil this objective. Wanting to be blameless Tina engaged in scapegoating her friends quite ruthlessly, splitting off bad parts of herself and projecting them into those around her (Klein, 1946). I understood this as an aggressive action in response to her feelings that she was in a persecuting environment. Turning to Klein (1946) to try to find a way of understanding Tina’s mindset at this point, she posits that by identifying with a persecutor it is possible to access ‘power, potency, strength, knowledge, and many other desired qualities’ (Klein, 1946, p.102) of the persecutor. In the educational setting, Tina seemed to act out the persona of persecutor towards other children. However, it may also be that they felt safer targets for her aggression than for example Miss G. or her m/other. Klein (1937) suggested that ‘other children still further removed from the nearest family situation allow divergences from their relationships to brothers and sisters…’ (p.328). This undercurrent is conspicuous in the excerpts relating to her peer relationships which sometimes feel sadistic and aggressive.

### 5.5.1: Key friendships: Kia and Bee

Several children formed part of Tina’s circle of friends, however, Kia and Bee were the ones I identified as targeted by Tina as objects to re-enact her phantasies, some already examined above.

The first child I had noted was Kia who held significance for me because I had come across in a previous setting (this situation is explained further in Reflection 5.4). Kia was distinguishable by her different skin colour, the other children in the class were white while she was dark skinned with black curly hair which, partway through the observational series, was braided with beads. I often wondered if this difference explained why Tina targeted her with malicious behaviour. Kia, who was in the same ability group as Tina, seemed to become a receptacle for Tina’s negative feelings as if she was projecting unwanted aspects of herself into Kia. There were other incidents in the educational space where I noted children acting in a persecutory manner towards Kia and I also observed that Kia was usually a child who played alone. I wondered how colour might be significant for the children in this class, and if it was this difference that contributed to Tina’s choosing her as a receptacle of her feelings of frustration and anger, unwanted aspects of herself. These notions are examined next.

Reflection box 5.4: Just six months before commencing my research I had completed a PG course at the Northern School of Child and Adolescent psychotherapy to understand better the process of psychoanalytic observations. I had observed a child for one year in a pre-school setting where Kia had also been a member. On my first visit to the research setting, I noticed her name and thought it was interesting to note that this was a second child I had come across with that name, but it wasn’t until later I realised that this was the same child from the pre-school setting. At times I wondered if some of Kia’s behaviour was an indication that she also remembered me and my observational stance of not intervening in children’s behaviour. I wonder if she felt I was condoning and, by implication, being complicit in Tina’s treatment of her?

#### 5.5.1.1 Friend Kia

Psychoanalysis offers the possibility for deducing the genesis of emotions, how they are controlled and expressed, (Isaacs, 1948), thus providing useful insight, along with the current context, to inform an understanding of what was occurring in Tina’s internal world. The internal and external interact, weaving together a particular reality. Therefore, an important aspect of the context lies not only with the immediate environment but the influence of object relations (TF, p.83), those particularly related to her familial experience.

Kia was the first peer I observed playing together with Tina in the home corner:

*Kia joins Tina in the home corner and they play together with dolls, bathing, feeding, cooking. 1/1/2*

*Meanwhile, Tina busies herself around the kitchen, boiling the kettle, washing the food, and then cooking it for Kia to feed to the doll in the highchair. 1/1/3*

It was during this amicable play activity I overheard Tina tell Kia that she can take the role of big sister. This feels significant in the light of the knowledge that it is a role that Tina has relatively recently found herself in, as if she would like someone else to step into it, taking away the unwelcome aspects that being an older sister might bring. By creating a phantasy she can return to her original status as an only child.

A psychoanalytic perspective permits us to consider how Tina’s controlling and manipulative actions are a response against her feelings that others have control of what happens to her. Controlling what happened with Kia in school may have ameliorated her feelings from home that she has lost her power to control her mother and the new baby. Her skill at coercion is evident in the following extract, using whatever means are at her disposal, including magic, a force greater than her own:

*Turning to Kia she says she is going to change her into a rabbit with her magic wand. Kia seems upset and says, ‘no I don’t want to be a rabbit.’ But Tina says she has done the magic and that’s what she is now, she finds rabbit ears on a hair band and although Kia resists a little, she allows Tina to put it on her head. Tina and Bee sit by their house, they tell Kia to ring the doorbell. Kia does, and they open the door and Kia hops in, Tina gives her a cuddle and leads her to the bed under the table. Tina says pretend you’re not feeling well, come and lie down. Kia crawls under the table and lays on the bed, Tina covers her with a blanket, Kia looks extremely contented. Tina advises Kia on what she needs to do; pretend you’re feeling sick, pretend you’re sick in the sick bowl, pretend you’re not well. Bee joins in the game and Kia follows their instructions. (1/3/2)*

Kia seemed to feel she had no alternative but to comply with Tina’s specific instructions on how to ‘be’ in her phantasy. I wondered if being sick at home has been one strategy Tina has used to satisfy her desire to feel special, recreating to the cocoon of bed and being cared for. Reading Isaacs (1948) another possibility suggested itself as a way of understanding Tina’s behaviour. Isaacs (1948) advised that out of a sadistic phantasy about attacking m/other there emerges a wish to make mother better, to restore her to being a whole person rather than split into bits of good and bad. I wonder how much Tina’s role play as carer signifies a desire for reparation, maybe an indication of a move towards modification of the paranoid-schizoid position to the more realistic depressive one (TF, p.89).

The modification of the paranoid-schizoid position is an ongoing process throughout life, and there continued to be an internal conflict for Tina that the mindset of the position defends against. It seems to lie in wanting something that she cannot have, transferring her desire to have her old position at home back to something that Kia has, in the following vignette it is a bracelet.

*Tina wants something on Kia’s arm and when Kia refuses, hiding her arm behind her back, Tina says she is going to tell the Miss G that Kia is being mean. Tina marches off outside taking her story to the Miss G. I observe through the window, the T leans forward sympathetically and nods and smiles as Tina tells the story. Kia takes off the bracelet and gives it to Bee, I wonder if she is afraid that Miss G will believe Tina. When Tina returns both Tina and Bee resume their magpie game trying to take the jewels. (1/3/2)*

Tina’s ability to get Kia into trouble with Miss G, leaving Kia with no seeming defence against the pejorative accusation, endorses Tina’s powerful rapport with Miss G satisfying her craving to feel special. Also, in reporting something bad, this has an automatic effect of placing Tina in the opposite corner, making a clear statement she is good.

The following vignetter from the same week as the one above was quite painful to observe.

*I noticed that a bed had been created under a table, it looked very tidy and well thought out, around the table were baskets and boxes from the Home Corner forming a barrier between the bed and the rest of the space. A princess doll was in the bed and there were other fluffy creatures around the bed. I noted that one of these was the cat which seems to have some significance for Tina.*

*Kia has a box with hairdryer etc. Tina and Bee sneak up and take some things out of the box (jewels). Tina tells Kia ‘pretend you can’t see, pretend you don’t notice’ but Kia protests ‘no, no they are mine’ she tries to take them back from Tina and Bee. While she pursues Bee, Tina takes more out, her expression appears to me to be provocative as if she almost wants Kia to see what she is doing. Kia turns around, she looks upset and says ‘no, no’ and rushes forward to rescue her jewels. Tina says, ‘you’re mean; you have to share’. (1/3/1)*

The first paragraph sets the scene I think, with a cosy cave created in the home corner. Although I cannot be sure that Tina has created this safe space I wonder if she was trying to recreate something of what she felt she had lost with the arrival of a baby brother.

The vignette showed Tina and Bee colluding together in their particularly vindictive behaviour towards Kia. The question of whether Tina, recognized that she is the one being mean in this scenario arose in a supervision session. Since my observation notes suggested that Tina seemed to provoke Kia into the reaction she got, I thought it suggested that at some level she knew she was being mean. However, the next question might then be what might justify, for Tina, this mean behaviour?

I stated in the introduction to this chapter that this analysis used a psychoanalytic perspective to account for children’s behaviour, questioning what function the behaviour was serving for her. This perspective recognises unconscious processes, in terms of tensions and conflicts, that are being managed and contribute to this behaviour while acknowledging its hurtful qualities on the object. By taking the jewels from Kia, Tina is making an association between something precious in her own life that has been lost and guilt at her envious feelings of wanting to reclaim it.

I imagine that the loss of something so powerfully depicted in the cosy setting mentioned in the first paragraph of the vignette, that may depict her comfortable home, so crucial to her sense of safety, is a loss she felt as undeserved, leading to feeling powerless and needy. These emotions need to be managed and Tina uses Kia by projecting them so that she becomes the repository of them. By splitting her neediness off and projecting it onto Kia, Tina could feel less needy and vulnerable (TF, p. 91). Tina’s role in this scenario becomes her identification with the persecuting figure of the mother, the perpetrator of her loss. Klein would account for Tina’s behaviour as a psychic process to help her deal with the powerful emotions that have been stirred up by being displaced by the birth of her brother (Klein, 1940).

Even though I was aware that there was a context for Tina’s uncaring and malicious behaviour, being deliberately hurtful and trying to take something from Kia that seemed to have significance for her, I found it profoundly upsetting. I recorded my affective response to this behaviour: ‘I have a strong feeling that Tina is the one being mean, and that Kia is being picked on.’ (1/3/1).

The following vignettes seem particularly vindictive:

*Tina stops the game, she appears to me to be quite controlling and she tells Kia to pretend that she is a cat. Kia does a very good job of pretending she is a cat and Tina is very affectionate, stroking her hair and face. (1/4/3)*

*… Kia is allowed to draw and she draws a person, but the head body and legs are disconnected. (1/4/4)*

Kia’s compliance to Tina’s command to be a cat was rewarded with affectionate stroking and permission to draw, but her malleability was not forthcoming in a later observation and Tina’s response was harsh. When Tina tried once again to be controlling Kia seemed to become retaliatory:

*Tina notices me and turns to the board, she continues writing letter shapes, they are both upper and lower case but are not words. Kia arrives in the area and walks up to Tina. I am struck by how different Kia looks, her hair is in long small plats, with beads and ribbons woven in. I think she looks pretty. Tina seems antagonistic towards her, almost blocking her from accessing the board. When Kia tries to write a letter, Tina says ‘no you have to do it like this.’ And she demonstrates. Tina takes a board rubber and begins to rub out Kia’s writing. Kia rubs out some of the scribbles Tina has done and Tina retaliates with another erase of Kia’s marks. Then Tina points to her letters and says, ‘look I’ve done hard work,’ and places a boundary around them. She seems proud of what she has done. Kia looks but doesn’t say anything.*

*Kia leans forward to write something on the board and Tina uses her marker on Kia’s hair. I feel shocked at this action and curious about why she would have done something like that. Kia shakes her head and says, ‘stop it,’ Tina says something that seems like, ‘I didn’t do anything,’ but Kia looks as if she doesn’t believe her. Kia puts a mark on Tina’s hand with the marker and Tina says she is going to tell her off, marching over to ESA to tell her what has happened. The ESA asks Tina to ask Kia to come and see her, Kia goes over and Miss G tells her to say sorry and not to do it again. Tina has a look of … glee? Justification? On her face. Kia seems to be taking the brunt of Tina’s negative mood here. (1/7/1)*

No longer able to control Kia, Tina resorted to blaming, scapegoating Kia to assert her power, avoiding the reality that perhaps Kia is beginning to assert herself.

I think I was relieved later in the observational series on my ninth observation when a surprising picture confronted me:

*As I enter the room, I immediately notice Tina, she is sat in front of one of the computers but slightly turned to the right. Kia is focused on Tina’s hair, trying to put some clips in but it seems one of the clips is broken. Tina seems contented with Kia putting things in her hair. I notice her hair is looking tidier today, it looks less wispy and as if someone at home has taken time with it. (1/9/1)*

My initial thought was that there was a reduction in the sadistic energy being directed towards Kia, Tina seemed contented with Kia putting things in her hair, perhaps sublimating her desire to be special into a softer form (TF, p.74). I wonder if this is another example of modification away from the paranoid-schizoid position towards the more useful depressive position (TF, p.89). Bibby (2011) suggested that the depressive position facilitates freeing up energy to be available for thought processes and learning, offering a useful insight into the impact of emotional development on learning.

The depressive position is not a stage, modification of the paranoid-schizoid position towards the depressive is an ongoing process, however, the shift back is also possible particularly in times of stress (TF, p.89). Tina’s need to demonstrate her power and control was observed just a week later in this next excerpt which took place outside around a container of brown, messy, liquid:

*She tells Kia, ‘Pretend I came to your house and took all your blood,’ Kia says she wouldn’t let her and Tina responds, ‘no you couldn’t stop me I’d use powerful magic.’ Kia says she would use her magic to stop her, but Tina says that her magic is powerfuller than hers. She squeezes the mix through her fingers and then shakes it off, it sprays out over her coat and onto the other children. (1/10/3)*

Tina seems to move beyond the obvious association of the messy brown liquid as poo and wee, her symbolic association is with blood. I wonder if this is related to her emerging sense of female reproductive processes. Blood is a significant aspect of the reality of being female and, as already stated, awareness of gender seemed to contribute to her sense of power. Intuitively I feel the ultimate demonstration of power is taking someone’s blood. The threads woven together in this analysis seem to overlap in the themes, Tina’s awareness of the feminine, the power of her gender with its mystery of sexuality, and birth, identified previously, were all underlying currents in her lived experience.

Much later Tina seemed to moderate her sadistic and manipulative behaviour, responding by defending Kia when she is attacked by two other classmates by defending her.

*Bee and Carey are now sat at a table together decorating a wooden heart that belongs to Bee. Kia is now on the other side of the board on Tina’s left side with a pink pen, she is making some shapes, letters maybe, but I can’t make them out. Tina seems to accommodate to her being so close. Kia decides she wants the purple pen and notices that Carey is using it she goes over and asks for it, but Carey resists and Bee backs her up. Tina stands up and tries to reason that Kia needs the purple pen, but Bee and Carey are whispering to each other. Kia says they are putting Tina on the bad name list, but they insist they are not. In the end, Carey gives the pen to Kia but there follows a long-winded dispute about the pen as they try and determine who needs to use it. Tina defends Kia and argues for Kia needing the pen to do some writing. (1/15/3)*

I have a sense that this observation seemed to illustrate again Tina’s gradual modification from the paranoid-schizoid position with its sadistic and controlling defences, towards the more realistic depressive position (TF, p.89), which includes an increased capacity for empathy, thought, and learning (Bibby, 2011). A psychoanalytic perspective of Tina’s relational interactions questions what function the behaviour is serving for her. I wonder if Tina has developed an emotional capacity for empathy to consider Kia's feelings as she observed her being treated unfairly.

Nevertheless, development is not a static thing and takes time to mature. Her relationship with Bee, examined in the next section, shows a different relational narrative and an opportunity to use their relationship differently.

#### 5.5.1.2 Friend Bee

Observations of Tina’s relationship with Bee offered different insights into the challenges of home and her transition to the new environment of the classroom. Bee seemed more articulate and socially adept, having a wider friendship group initially than Tina or Kia. Bee’s level of competency in literacy and fine motor skills appeared more advanced and she was in a higher ability group

I had an impression of Bee as a warm and caring character and very willing to use her competencies to support Tina when she sensed she was struggling. She was also subjected to Tina’s harsh and vindictive treatment, and there were times when she colluded with Tina in her vindictive attacks on Kia, examined previously.

##### 5.5.1.2.1 Observation 2: My first encounter with Bee

My first observation of Bee was after Tina’s challenging group literacy session (1/2/1), thoughts about this experience were discussed on p.64. Tina moved to the craft table where some children, including Bee, were making things out of grey tubes, she investigated a large grey box that held materials for craftwork:

*Tina looks in a large grey box, for something, apparently wanting a cardboard tube, there are none, only two girls have them. Bee has cut hers in half and labelled both of them, when Tina says there are none left, Bee offers to take a name off one of hers so that Tina has one. Tina hesitates, Bee has a long and a short one, the one she is offering to Tina is the short one. Carey says the name of a boy who ‘took them all’. (1/2/1).*

The supplies available at the craft table were limited and although Bee offered Tina what she had this did not seem enough. I wonder if the depleting experience in her literacy group was endorsed for Tina by the emptiness of the box. Just as her lassitude left her without the capacity to learn, a lack of resources prohibited her engagement with the craft activity, and she was unable to accept Bee’s offer of help. Instead, Tina sought help from Miss G, her teacher.

*Carey says the name of a boy who ‘took them all’. Tina goes to tell T who is involved in directing some children to what they will be doing next, Tina says ‘there aren’t any tubes so and so took them all’ but as if to the wind, T doesn’t hear or notice. (1/2/1).*

It feels like the lack of something is unacknowledged by a significant adult and Tina herself is not seen. Although being seen is important in child development (Winnicott, 1975) within a large group of children it is likely that not being seen on occasion is likely to happen and Tina must find her own way of dealing with the difficult feelings aroused.

Dissatisfied Tina had moved to the home corner where Bee joined her and here the dullness faded as Tina seemed to know what she wanted from the space and Bee. She rejected the mother role Bee suggested in favour of being the princess with all that image holds for her. Significantly she wanted Bee to be mum, freeing Tina to return to the phantasy princess figure, wishing to regain her original status as an only one, to be desired as someone special, discussed previously. In this role she seemed mobilised perhaps escaping from a sense of failure provoked initially in the group literacy session and not being seen by Miss G. Bee’s willingness to take on the role of mother has provided a facilitating presence to enable Tina to access an internal resource, a phantasy of how she would like things to be.

On reflection Bee seemed to have sensed Tina’s difficulties and she found in Bee someone whose calm accepting manner alleviated her anxiety. After a little while, she is willing to follow Bee back to the craft table where resources are still depleted but Tina could moderate whatever prevented her before and she accepted Bee’s renewed offer of a half tube.

A little later, Tina also relinquished the princess dress, perhaps the symbolism of the role went with it, to follow Bee to a large water tray containing various toys. Blue, sparkly water adds to the fantasy qualities of the experience and seemed to offer a safe space for the expression of a joint phantasy:

*There is a large figure I recognise as Dora the Explorer, two children in a life raft and a number of wind-up creatures, e.g. a frog, a fish, Tina says ‘You be big Dora I’ll be the little children,’ referring to two children in a life raft. The children seem to bounce on big Dora’s head, and there seems to be quite a lot of aggression directed towards this figure. During their play they sometimes swop roles, almost trying out what each role feels like. Being sent to prison features and Dora is sat in a corner which they identify as prison, but then Tina says, ‘no all the water is prison’ and Bee agrees. When they become the children Tina and Bee become very baby like in the talk and behaviour, splashing in the water and making high pitched baby sounds.*

*I am not sure how it happened, but Dora is declared to have died, B wants to make her better but Tina says she has to stay dead, ‘Mum’s dead, she can’t be brought back’ and Dora is tossed into water (1/2/2)*

Reflection box 5.5: When reviewing my supervision notes for 7th February 2019 I can see where my thoughts about Tina, and the influence of home events on how she might feel in the educational space, began to take form:

*It has been evident in some of Tina’s play, however, that she is able to pretend herself into the role of child and when this occurs she seems to demonstrate strong negative inclinations towards adults. The reason for this isn’t clear as yet, though it may relate to the expectations adults place on her, e.g., at home where there is a very young baby brother. (p.20)*

The two girls were engrossed together in their play, apparently regressing to an earlier stage of development. I wonder if it is in the last paragraph we have a sense of difference in their feelings about whatever Dora represents, for Tina she seemed to represent mum and she is very definitely dead. The notion that something/one has died feels very final for Tina, I wonder if she is giving expression to her anxiety about the change that has taken place at home since the birth of her brother, the life she had before is dead, the mother she knew is dead. As is her life as a pre-school child with its freedom from formal learning and the uncomfortable feelings it brings with it, for example in literacy groups.

Whatever is ‘dead’ for Tina did not immediately seem true for Bee, she seemed to have access to a more positive perspective, whatever had ‘died’ for her is revivable. I find myself reflecting here on how modification of the paranoid-schizoid position (TF, p.89) might be operating differently for Bee. Perhaps there has been no disabling rupture at home recently as there had for Tina, or maybe it is an aspect of Bee’s personality that adapts more readily to events in the educational space.

The phantasy they enacted seemed pregnant with meaning and during the analysis I found myself reflecting on their experience of their educational space which seemed to be very different. Bee is seemingly more successful than Tina, observable at times when Tina turned to Bee for help with spelling and writing. It occurred to me that although some children find learning easier than others this would not necessarily mean that they have less difficulty with their transition to formal learning, which is an emotional experience for all.

It also occurred to me that the transition to school is not a choice children make and although adults have chosen the date and time of this transition it is something that happens TO children by adults, albeit with their best interests at heart. However, it occurs to me that for some children relinquishing their previous life when entering formal school may feel like a loss, particularly if they lack resources to manage anxieties the transition evoked.

Their narrative, enacted in the sparkling blue water tray, spoke to me of a desire to return to the childhood state of freedom from onerous rules where adults hold the keys, as their jailers, and therefore deserved to be attacked and even killed. Bee’s competencies, her dexterity, for example, might serve to relieve some of the anxiety she feels in her role as a learner, but the process of leaving childhood freedoms is the same. As a teacher, I might have expected that a child who is competent in literacy and numeracy enjoyed learning, but this phantasy suggested it may not be the whole picture. I have a feeling that the content of this vignette was only the tip of an ice-burg in their shared experience of the transition made to their educational space.

Later in the same observation, I noticed an indication that this opportunity to give expression to her emotions seemed to have energised Tina with newfound confidence, putting Bee in a more vulnerable position rupturing the shared relationship of their joint phantasy.

*Tina says let’s go to the carpet, Bee and Carey follow her. Carey picks up a book and begins reading the story sat on small chair decorated with images of story characters. Bee sits on the floor while Tina is on a cube cushion next to Carey, Bee seems to feel left out and says so. I am surprised Tina does nothing to ease Bee’s concerns, Bee has been tremendously supportive of Tina this week and last.* (1/2/3).

Tina no longer needs Bee’s mothering and this shift seemed to catch Bee by surprise and their friendship suffers a brief rupture. Although on this occasion they repair the rift and resume playing together in the home corner, in later observations the struggle to establish an equal relationship continued.

#### 5.5.1.2.2 Tina becomes more assertive over Bee

In observation 3 Tina wanted to invest jewels in Bee by putting them in her hair, but it is not what Bee wants:

*… returning to her stock of jewels and picking a few up she tries to put things in Bee’s hair, but Bee doesn’t want this and hides in a corner with her back to Tina, Tina persists and eventually manages to get a band around her ponytail. I wonder how strongly Bee feels about this. (1/3/3)*

Tina appears to be asserting her wish to give something to Bee, whether she likes it or not, she seems to be feeling less vulnerable or needy of Bee’s mothering role, perhaps wanting to ‘mother’ Bee. Having received support from Bee in the previous week, (week 2 discussed above) and shared such deeply emotional phantasy of the spider and also in the water tray, it felt uncomfortable to me to see Tina become so directive, riding roughshod over Bee’s wishes. I wonder if this reflected Bee’s feelings. After this point the dynamics between the two changed and in the following week (4) the Tina princess wore a slightly different princess dress on reflection maybe offering an indication of the change.

Unlike my observation in week 2 Tina seemed to be more engaged in week 4 when I observed her expending intense concentration in her literacy group, alleviated by her occasional gaze towards other children playing in the classroom. Although her attention was more focused I wondered if she longed to be released from her work to play, to escape into her fantasies.

Tina went straight to the home corner after being released from the group task but the organised state of the home corner seemed a surprise to Tina, something about the orderliness of the setting was disturbing:

*Bee entered the HC, she was dressed in the princess dress that Tina normally wore, she bounced up to Tina who said, ‘it’s very tidy,’ and Bee said, ‘I did it for you.’ Tina seems to complain, saying something about the settee and that there was no room to sit on it. (1/4/1)*

I noticed Bee was wearing the princess dress I had seen Tina in previously. It seemed that Bee was the one who had organised the home corner, she seemed very bouncy and pleased with herself, but Tina does not feel so happy about what has been done for her. I sensed the dynamics between the two seemed to hold powerful emotions, Tina felt annoyed and angry, perhaps feeling displaced both by Bee’s imposition of her ideas in the home corner and the wearing of ‘her’ princess dress.

Tina seems less needy of being mothered on this occasion, instead, she chose the role of mum for herself, becoming very controlling and preventing Bee from seeing what she is doing by using her body as a barrier between Bee and the cooker.

*Bee wants to see what Tina is doing but Tina acts quite defensively and uses her body as a barrier between Bee and the cooker, trying to keep Bee away from the pan, not even allowing her to look.*

*Tina says, ‘let’s pretend I’m the mum,’ and Bee uses a very childlike voice and asks mum if she can bake a cake too. Tina replies that she can get some more things to go in this cake, Bee is very obliging and picks up some of the toys in the HC and takes them to Tina who puts them in the pan. Each time Bee brings something she is sent away to find more. I wonder how much more will fit in the pan. (1/4/3)*

Bee seemed to sense that Tina did not welcome her and responded to Tina's direction by becoming like a little child. Tina repeatedly asked for Bee to get more ingredients, anything from the home corner that is small enough to fit into the pan. I wonder what there is not enough of for Tina, maybe of mum or of Miss G. or even enough time to play, her pan got extremely full but there was still something missing:

*Tina seems dissatisfied with what she has in her pan, something is not enough or missing. Asks an adult for access to another container of things. Bee finds a magic wand and Tina seems to think this is what she needs. (1/4/)*

The something that was missing seemed to be found with the magic wand, something much more powerful than either of them or even perhaps of the adults in their world. In one of Klein’s accounts of child analysis (1929), the wand was an instrument of a helpful phantasy figure using it to bring healing. The symbolism being employed in Tina’s phantasy, the pan of disparate items being mixed to make a cake, may be suggestive of an attempt at integration. The magnitude of this task of bringing experience and feelings together perhaps to find some meaning, needed something else, the magic wand. Discovered by Bee it offered the possibility of healing the anxiety that had arisen out of the challenging transitional events of their lives.

The girls turned their attention to the tabletop around the pan which had become cluttered with items that wouldn’t fit into the pan.

*Bee tidies the table up and decorates it while Tina puts the cake on the table then Tina turns to the box to find something to decorate the table. She lifts up an odd space person and Bee says, ‘Oh I want that,’ but Tina says, ‘well it’s just going to stay in here for now.’ Bee responds by suggesting they pretend; she tells Tina to pretend that she knows it is important to her and gives it to her as a present. Tina seems to pause for a moment and then agrees, saying ‘look what I have got you,’ and Bee acts very excited and says, ‘Oh thank you, mummy, thank you.’ (1/4/3)*

After withholding the desired object Tina becomes more benevolent and gifts the object to Bee, obtaining her heartfelt appreciation and placing Tina in the role of benevolent mother, one way of understanding this may be as an expression of Tina’s wish for a benevolent mother who grants her desires.

After week 7, Bee did not feature in my observations until week 11 when a close moment of sharing with Carey ended abruptly and Tina turned to Bee to play with her.

*She turns and looks at B lying on the carpet, engrossed in the train set, she asks her to play with her, but B says no she is busy. Tina’s expression is one of being fed up I think. She sits on the T chair nearby and pleads with B to play with her. ‘Please, B, please play with me.’ But B continues to refuse saying she is busy with the train track. Tina sits, looking a bit forlorn watching B, but I notice the Koala is not being held closely now. (1/11/1)*

I am not sure if Bee is engrossed in playing with a trainset or if her refusal was a retaliatory response perhaps to Tina’s controlling behaviour. Indication of an ongoing shift in their relationship was also noted in later observations, for example, in observation 14 Tina is part of a group, sat at a table where each of them had some dominoes:

*Tina is building something, but it is not clear what it might be. I notice that each of them only has a handful of dominoes each and not enough to build anything substantial. The children each seem engaged in their own project, Bee is very quiet, but Emma and Carey are chatting to each other. Suddenly Tina makes an announcement in what I would describe as an affected mode, ‘hey you guys,’ she says very dramatically, ‘I know what we can do, we can build a stage!’ As she ends, she uses her hands in a gesture that seems to indicate some sort of presentation. I think she is anticipating a positive response from the two girls as if her announcement is important. There is no response from Carey and Emma, they are apparently unaware of Tina’s announcement, for a fleeting moment Tina’s face changes and I wonder if she is disappointed, they are not listening. I notice she seems to be tired; her eyes have dark rings underneath. (1/14/2)*

Being ignored created some uncomfortable feelings for Tina, her desire is to be wanted, listened to rather than ignored. Almost as if trying to rid herself of those negative feelings she targets Bee with a sadistic attack, taking what she wants, making Bee feel the loss of something she herself feels. Bee was left with these feelings and although Carey and Emma share their dominoes with her, she is still left with very few.

However, signs that the relationship with Bee, although ambivalent, was significant and valued as indicators that Tina continued to care were noted. In week 16 (1/16/2) Tina took what appeared to be insignificant small pieces of paper, made by Bee, and put them into a container. The container seems to have a special significance since she then decorates it with what appears to be a happy picture and then snips around the edge of the lid, an interesting analogy perhaps of the fractured boundary between them. The container suggested Tina wanted somewhere to keep fractured pieces together, I wonder if she was becoming aware of the value of her relationship with Bee and was looking for reparation. The change in her attitude towards Bee might be understood from Klein’s theoretical perspective as part of her ongoing movement modifying her paranoid-schizoid position to the more realistic view of the depressive position (TF, p.89).

In week 17 I watched uncomfortably as Tina seemed to choose another child in preference to Bee and inflicted a painful blow to her. I have used another subsection to describe this incident which I considered a significant event between Tina and Bee.

#### 5.5.1.3 Billie

I found Tina’s ambivalence towards Bee difficult to observe, but there was one most difficult incident. In week 17 Billie, a girl, emerged as a new influence in Tina’s relationship with Bee. I had an impression of Billie as robust and intimidating physically and socially, unlike Bee and Kia. The vignette of this observation seemed to be about something being precariously balanced.

*In the HC Tina was sat under the canopy over a stage holding a doll. There was a barricade around the space with Tina, a boy Eric and Billie. Tina seems to be sat a little higher than Eric and Billie, Emma is holding a handset to control the TV and he and Tina are talking to each other.*

*Tina turned to Billie and asked permission to place the doll on top of some cushions, these were stacked so they seemed at least as high as Tina and a little precariously. I wondered if the doll felt safe? On reflection as I type this up I am wondering if the feelings I am sensing are related to my own sense of being in a precarious position, things at home seem precariously balanced and although I think I am managing it maybe I feel vulnerable to the possibility of things wobbling and falling? (1/17/1)*

*I notice Bee sat outside the barricade and wonder if this was her choice, part of the game or if she was feeling excluded. Bee says something about wanting to play with Tina, but Tina says she can’t because she is in the house playing with Emma and Billie, but Tina notices Bee seems gloomy and asks Billie if Bee could be a cat or a dog? Billie says she can be a cat and tells Bee to go and sit ‘over there’ pointing at the farthest position from the contained space the three of them occupy. Bee moves to where she is directed, and her face looks as if deeply upset. (1/17/1)*

I wondered what meaning there might be in Tina’s raised position, Billie seemed to be controlling what everyone did, and I don’t know if she put Tina in that position. Although Tina held a higher position it appeared she had little power or control, she had to ask permission to place the doll on top of the cushions. The doll’s precariousness speaks of something delicately balanced, something that could fall away at any moment. Is this how Tina feels in her relationship with Billie, or does it hold some other significance, I am not sure.

There was a physical barrier excluding Bee from playing the game and although Tina attempted to include Bee, she is offered what might be considered demeaning roles in their play determined by Billie’s direction e.g. cat or dog. Tina appeared to struggle to hold the two relationships together, she tried to offer some assurance to Bee by stepping outside the barrier and explaining she will play with her another time, but this did not alleviate Bee’s hurt feelings (1/17/2). I find myself wondering if issues of exclusion from parental intimacy, an aspect of the Oedipus conflict, have not yet been completely resolved for Tina. Perhaps Bee was being excluded as part of a projective defence against her feelings of exclusion from the parental dyad.

There may, however, be other reasons for Tina choosing to be controlled by Billie in a way that excluded Bee. In seeking to understand her behaviour I wonder if there was a quality in Billie that Tina herself would like to have. Billie has an appearance of strength; she is of large build and gives the expression of being powerful and unyielding and I wonder if Tina is seeking identification with her.

A process of introjective identification (Hinshelwood, 1989) is described as ‘an alteration of the ego in the direction of becoming like the object,’ (ibid. p.316) and this seemed to be a good fit with Tina’s intentions as she moved away from the princess to the White Queen.

Nevertheless, her relationship with Billie exposed Tina to another way of relating, perhaps challenging her preconceived ideas about herself and offering an opportunity to test a different way of being.

#### 5.5.1.4 The beans and reparation

The situation in the home corner ended when Miss G. rang a bell and asked for the children to begin to tidy up and Tina rapidly exited, leaving Billie and Bee behind, and maybe this reflects something about Tina wanting to escape the uncomfortableness of the relational issues that had emerged there. What happened next may offer further insight into Tina’s internal conflict, perhaps suggesting that she was struggling to come to terms with a growing awareness that she had been unfair to Bee.

Tina joined Emma and they played in a large tray of cold baked beans, an opportunity to revisit a naughty bus story from the previous week.

*Kia runs the bus through the beans, Tina is watching and asks if she can have it, Kia replies no, and Tina tells her she is mean, she needs to share. Tina sounds very whiney, pulls a bit of a sulky face and looks down. Kia spoons some of the beans in her tray and puts them into Tina’s. ‘look I’ve put more in yours.’ Tina then proceeds to spoon more of Kia’s into her own until Kia objects and takes some back, while all the time holding onto the bus.*

Initially, Tina found herself in conflict with Kia because she wanted the bus to play with and Kia refused. Tina may have used this setting initially as an opportunity to project some uncomfortable feelings from her play in the home corner onto Kia, however, Kia responded like with like and there is a tit for tat interaction with both taking beans from the other.

This unwillingness on Kia’s part to include Tina in the sharing of the bus may have unconsciously brought her attention to how Bee might have felt having been excluded from a game.

The following short vignette showed how Tina seemed to be sensitive to the notion that messy things can get out of hand and she abruptly dropped her spoon and ended the play.

*Cory joins them, his face is alight, the ESA tells him there is to be no mess and he responds ‘how can you play with beans and not get messy?’ But the ESA doesn’t appear to hear him. Tina slops some beans onto Cory’s hand and he returns the same to her. But then he begins to toss the beans so they fall onto the floor and Tina warns him that they are not to be messy. He tosses the beans again and they land on the floor. Tina drops her spoon and walks inside, she goes to wash her hands. Running the tap she tells a boy that the water is lovely and warm, her hands were cold from the beans.*

I have the impression that Tina does not want to be associated with Cory’s actions, his behaviour seemed to create uncomfortable feelings for her as if she had an internalised boundary about what was acceptable in a group activity and what was not. Her feeling about ‘fairness’ in social settings may have held some relevance to what she felt about her treatment of Bee in the home corner earlier since, a short time later, Tina’s emotion about Bee seemed to shift dramatically towards remorse and a desire for restoration:

*Then Tina goes to the writing-table where she finds a paper she was working on earlier, there are some letters that don’t make sense to me until she dances over to the whiteboard where there is a sentence that says, ‘I will sink,’ and I can see how she is trying to write this sentence. She needs frequent visits to the model to recall what letters need to come next, but she is focused and appears very pleased with herself. When she has finished, she goes to the T and shows her, she explains what she has written and the T seems pleased, acknowledging she has worked hard. She tells Tina that she can put it on the special work board and Tina goes to find the blue tack. After putting it on the four corners she looks on another wall for Bee’s work and places it next to that. (1/17/3)*

By aligning herself with Bee in this way, placing her work next to Bee’s on the display wall, perhaps Tina was recognising her desire to be like Bee, to be able to do what she saw her peer could do. I wonder if Tina’s ambivalence is a result of a mixture of respect and envy not only for Bee’s competencies but her compassionate nature and the sensitivity she had shown at times towards her.

### 5.5.2: Summary of theme 2

A sense of identity evolves from our relationship with others and the internal conflicts engendered as we emerge through the different stages of maturation as envisaged by Winnicott (TF, p.111).

Kia offered Tina an object to project aspects of herself she wishes to deny. Nevertheless, the relationship is not all bad, there is an ambivalence that emerges over time and Kia is defended eventually from attacks by others. Perhaps demonstrating a growing shift towards a more realistic state of mind of the depressive position.

In Bee, Tina had found a kindred spirit in their imaginative phantasies in the water play and the spider, and their collusion in attacking Kia. Both Kia and Bee were impacted emotionally by Tina’s phantasies, however, I see Bee’s role in their relationship as different to Kia, primarily because Bee has more choice of whom she chooses for her friends whereas I have observed Kia frequently playing alone

The three characters mentioned here offer Tina the opportunity to test out and experience different ways of being. Billie was a strong and intimidating force in the classroom, perhaps being in a relationship with her Tina is hoping to introject some of these traits, or perhaps there is kudos from being associated with her?

Tina and Bee have engaged in some deep emotional experiences and shared phantasies. Bee initially seemed to offer a substitute mother figure, offering support when Tina found some tasks too difficult. Tina identified with a comforter initially for the young vulnerable child, hurting because a usurper had replaced her in the family. Hurting someone, as she often seemed to do can be an identification with the person being hurt. Perhaps Tina wanted someone else to know what it felt like to feel hurt as she did. However, there was a strong impression that Tina admired Bee, and there were times when she seemed to want to find a way to manage her ambivalent feelings towards her

Her relationships with both Kia and Bee have offered Tina space to develop adaptive behaviour, facilitating a journey of exploration through phantasy and play managing the complexity of relationships while negotiating her inner world.

Important as these relationships were to Tina’s social functioning, the emotional associations, served an important purpose in the development of mental functioning, particularly relevant when we consider the development of thought. Tina’s mental mechanisms of symbolism, phantasy, splitting and projection and transference, involve affective processing. Resolving the absence of satisfaction of her desires leads her to explore, through these tools, the reality she is seeking to integrate into her experience. Consequently, what is being observed is the growing emergence of thought, and the development of thinking processes, all contained within the safe environment of the educational space.

One significant factor in this safe environment is Miss G and in the following section, the contribution of Tina’s relationship with her is considered.

## 5.6: Theme 3: Miss G: Tina’s identification with authority

At an important transitional stage in her development, Tina’s friends seem to offer an opportunity for her to develop mechanisms to process internal conflicts as unconscious anxieties press to be addressed while exploring the dichotomy of me and not me. The role of Miss G is equally significant but very different, holding as it does the caring figure of m/other alongside the persona of a major representative of power and authority (Bibby, 2011. 2018).

#### 5.6.1: A facilitating environment

For Winnicott the process of development is a creative process, leading to an integrated sense of self (Bibby, 2011). However, it is Miss G who provides the environment for this creative process to operate and in this context, appropriating Winnicott’s idea of the good enough mother (TF, 112), she appears a ‘good-enough’ teacher. A good enough teacher provides a good enough environment that ‘makes possible the steady progress of the maturational process,’ (Winnicott, 1963a, p.85). A teacher who has imperfections, and occasionally misunderstanding a child’s needs for example is not going to cause a significant impediment to the learning process unless it is something that regularly occurs. For Winnicott (1971), these occasions offer an opportunity for frustration and even anger to facilitate the development of self (TF, p.121).

Tina seemed overlooked by Miss G. at a point where her resources seemed to have been depleted through a difficult literacy session and exacerbated by a lack of resources at the craft table. She had turned to Miss G. only to be disappointed and, as I have mentioned previously (p. 194) her words were unheard (1/2/1). However, Tina seemed to move through the uncomfortable feelings to a satisfactory ending by being able to use an environment that encouraged creativity and play. In the home corner, where she returned to a safer place being’ mothered’ by Bee I noted that she seemed to regain some capacity to work through anxieties provoked by an experience of lack.

One of the most important elements of the facilitating environment is the opportunity for creativity and play. Winnicott emphasised the subjective experience as a source of creativity, by taking play seriously space is offered to explore challenging thoughts, ask questions, develop anxiety-free processes of mental processing. Miss G. as a ‘good enough’ teacher ensured an environment where the necessary space was available (Bibby, 2011). Play provided Tina with space to become comfortable with frustration, working through and thinking about her preoccupations while feeling safe, so that it they may be transformed into a stimulus to solve problems.

#### 5.6.2: Feeding

An aspect of the m/other’s role that falls to the teacher is that of a provider of nourishment but in the education space, it is the food of information and skills. As I write this, I revisited my research journal where I had recorded my feelings around my struggle to understand a recorded conversation of Supervision, set down in reflection 5.6.

Reflection Box 5.6: A Supervision note after listening to a recording of the session; ‘I had to listen a few times to begin to grasp the meaning of the content. Interestingly as I tried to ‘digest’ the ideas I suddenly felt very hungry. After eating I seemed to see things more clearly. I wondered if the two things might be related. Perhaps the break refreshed me, or maybe digesting food enabled me to digest information’. 18/04/19

Considering learning as feeding offers an analogy of breaking down tasks to facilitate digestion and the following extract is an example of Miss G offering small bite-size pieces to Tina, scaffolding the presentation of the material in this way makes it easier to absorb:

*Tina continues to form her letters carefully but then looks up and notices me. She smiles and shakes her head a little as she bends down again towards her book. She refers to the T again needing help with the next word in the sentence, the T says each word in the sentence using her fingers to help Tina see how many words she has written and what the next one is; it is the. She asks Tina, ‘how do we write the?’ Tina looks a bit blank, her head on one side. T goes and finds two cards, one with to and the other with the and she asks, ‘which one is the?’ Tina chooses the correct one and Miss G puts the card on the table for her to copy. Tina seems focused and when she needs help with the next word (which is ‘wolf’) she is told that it is on the prompt sheet on the table. Tina locates the word easily and copies it down. (1/6/1)*

Just four weeks after my first observation of Tina in a literacy group it seemed that she could shake me out of her head and pay attention to the task at hand. Her focused attention seems to suggest that there is an internalisation of the importance in the task for learning, an identification perhaps with Mis G., and introjection (TF, p.90) of the characteristics Tina has observed in her.

#### 5.6.3: Identification with Miss G. as an authority figure

Miss G is seen as an authority figure, a very different ‘not me’ than her peers, and Bibby (2011) suggests that there is a seeking behaviour, by children in the classroom, of belonging to someone who has a sense of our needs without verbal expression of them. This intuitive response facilitates receptiveness to this m/other figure and a desire to identify with them. Bibby (2011) suggests that it is these identifications that provide layers of self, rather like different garments or coats. She states, ‘the ego, the ‘I’ of our sense of self, is made up of layering identifications (and disidentifications) we have unconsciously made with objects we have found or been presented with ‘out there.’ (Bibby, p.35). A parent’s standards and expectations are opportunities for identification, a teacher, however, determines the child’s experience of education. There is a certain amount of measuring up demanded of Tina when wishing to identify with Miss G who, through her observations and assessments, can determine who Tina is perceived to be in the educational space (Bibby, 2011).

In psychoanalytic theory the ego is understood to be a body self, the ‘I’ is experienced in a visceral sense and in many of Tina’s approaches to her teacher her body reflects joy and lightness as she skips towards their interaction. A secure identity can only be established when we feel valued and ‘seen’ and her teacher seems to provide this for at least some of the time. An example of the pleasure Tina gains from their relationship is in this vignette.

*Abruptly after a few minutes she stands up and skips, beaming, over to the T. The T notices her immediately and Tina talks to her about the White Queen and how much she loves the songs. They talk about the upcoming show and T suggests that Tina might like to make some tickets, Tina says only 10 because only 10 can be in the band. The T suggests she might like to make a poster, it would need the time and date on and a title. Tina’s response is an increase in excitement, and she skips to the table and begins finding some paper, she says she is going to make some tickets. She looks for scissors but there are none for her in the writing space, she confidently sets of to the craft area and picks some up. First, she finds an envelope and after roughly cutting a square of paper and writing a 10 on it she puts her name on the outside of the envelope and a ticket inside. (1/9/2)*

Tina takes in Miss G’s enthusiasm as it melds with her own, leading to a desire to own it herself, placing the tickets she makes into an envelope with her name on it. Play has become a source of creative thinking facilitated by an emotional engagement between teacher and child, creating an appetite for more.

Tina seems to have introjected the expectations her teacher had in the importance of academic learning. She valued Miss G’s recognition of any effort she made, particularly in her writing in which she engaged frequently in her play, both by herself and with her friends.

*Another boy shows her some writing he has done, and he is told it is good enough to go on the wall, a display of work the children can be proud of. I see Tina, noticing this, seeming to think about something, and she runs to where she has been writing in the speech bubble with the help of Bee. Picking it up she takes it to T who smiles with pleasure and asks Tina to tell her what it says. With T’s help Tina reads what has been written. The paper is then fixed to the wall. Tina has a very pleased expression on her face.* 1/1/5

Seeing another child receiving praise seemed to initiate something in Tina to want to receive some of that praise for herself. It also suggested that this is how Tina wished to be seen, her emerging self reached for that quality which suggested she was a learner and wished to be seen as such. Envy is rerouted, sublimated (TF, p.74), to provide a positive stimulus serving her endeavour to both be seen as a good pupil and find favour with her teacher.

For Tina, during this important stage of resolving issues around gender, Miss G offers another female model, a powerful one that includes a certain degree of parenting. The transference of feelings associated with a parent will determine much of Tina’s response to other adults, particularly in the school setting (Winnicott, 1964).

Tina was in a vulnerable phase of life as she transitioned from home to school, and she grappled with her new status in her family calling forth questions about her sense of self. Tina was able to relinquish her princess role for a more powerful role of the White Queen suggesting that at some point she identified with a more powerful female role and saw the reality of the untenable position of the privileged princess.

#### 5.6.4: Miss G. as a mirror

At the heart of the observations is an impression that Tina values Miss G’s opinion of her, just as the infant sees itself in the mother’s face, Tina sees herself reflected in the face of her teacher. To be seen in the eyes of another means we exist, we see ourselves as if in a mirror, in order to ‘do’ we must first ‘be’ (Winnicott, 1971). Tina seemed to light up, becoming spirited and emotionally engaged in their interactions, as this observation shows:

*The T accompanies Tina to her computer and scaffolds how to access the web page she wants. When it comes on there is no sound and she says, ‘ah we have had this problem before I think.’ Then she gets on the floor and sorts the wires and plugs before eventually the sound returns. She is now kneeling beside Tina and they engage in conversation, initially they discuss their favourite songs and then Tina says her mum is getting married soon, T nods and says yes it will be soon, are you looking forward to it? Tina looks very pleased, her face lights up and she nods. Then she says, ‘my little brother is ill, he has chickenpox, he keeps scratching it.’ T says, ‘Oh dear, how old is your little brother now?’ Tina doesn’t seem very sure, and the T gives a couple guesses, Tina responds by saying he hasn’t had a birthday yet and he can’t walk. The closeness they share together, and the confidence Tina shows as she warms to the T, suggests an ability feel comfortable in each other’s company. (1/9/1)*

Winnicott (1971) suggested that being seen in the eyes of a significant other offers ‘a satisfaction of a deep kind’ (p.118). Being seen offers an opportunity to be, leading to an opportunity to do, perhaps lying at the heart of finding pleasure in learning, what I believe Klein conceptualised as epistemophilia (Rycroft, 1995).

#### 5.6.5: Being seen to be good by Miss G.

There has been the suggestion in this analysis that Tina used her peers to avoid blame for her actions, seemingly wanting to present herself as ‘good’ to Miss G and the ESA. The idea of what is good and what is bad seemed to be something Tina needed to explore, and this can be safely accomplished through a phantasy shared with friends:

*Tina has a cup in her hand and is stirring something in it with a spoon. I hear the words ‘evil king’ and I wonder if this is related to the Snow Queen theme that has emerged for Tina over the last few observations. Tina looks up and notices me, there is no acknowledgement, and she turns away from me while looking at whatever she is stirring in her cup. (1/13/1)*

*The three girls talk about the evil king and that they need to do a poster to warn people, they seem to agree this needs to be done and head for the writing table where Tina and Bee get a piece of paper and sit down to begin their drawing. Emma says something that at first I think is ‘evil king’ but then sounds like ‘evil pea’. I wonder if I am hearing right. I find myself thinking it doesn’t make sense to me to have an evil pea, it must be evil king. Reluctant as I am to give up on my own idea, Emma nails it by placing a plastic clump of peas on a cushion and telling the other two that the evil pea is there. (1/13/1)*

Being bad appeared to be something so important that the girls need to warn others about it, a concern perhaps about contamination, or being seen as one of the bad. I wonder where these ideas arose, perhaps from something they have heard commented upon at home, in school or on television.

I am reminded of the characteristics of the super-ego, (TF, p.62) as a repository of social expectations introduced by parents, grandparents, teachers etc. These social mores are often felt by the id to be unwelcome restraints and the ego has the task of managing any sense of conflict between the two. It seems likely then that the topic of good/ evil can be safely explored within a safe environment using play and f/phantasy.

The concern to avoid being seen as ‘bad’ seemed part of Tina’s developing sense of self, wanting to see herself as free from blame, reflecting the reality of herself as being capable of both good and bad has not yet been achieved. This has implications for her relationship with Miss G. and other adults in the classroom, creating pressures from internal conflict as she struggled to meet the demands of her impulse towards wanting to be special and the demands of the superego to obey the rules.

Tina holds Miss G in such high esteem it arouses anxiety and the fear of failure, Tina’s attempt to find resolution of her vulnerability to failure, and the possibility of the loss of her object’s gaze, lies in her projection of blame onto others:

*Kia leans forward to write something on the board and Tina uses her marker on Kia’s hair. I feel shocked at this action and curious about why she would have done something like that. Kia shakes her head and says, ‘stop it,’ Tina says something that seems like, ‘I didn’t do anything,’ but Kia looks as if she doesn’t believe her. Kia puts a mark on Tina’s hand with the marker and Tina says she is going to tell her off, marching over to support assistant to tell her what has happened. The support assistant asks Tina to ask Kia to come and see her, Kia goes over, and the support assistant tells her to say sorry and not to do it again. Tina has a look of … glee? Justification? On her face. (1/7/2)*

And later:

*Tina flounces off to the HC and finds a marker, then starts a zig-zag pattern on a piece of paper which she continues onto the table. This was not accidental but very deliberate. Bee has finished her group work and finds Tina in the home corner. Tina tells her that Kia has made a mark on the table, and they both decide to clean it off. (1/7/2)*

Tina seemed to have some strong feelings she needed to express first on paper but then spilling over to the table, something usually prohibited in the classroom. She is aware of the prohibition and divests herself of this ‘bad’ by blaming Kia. The cleaning went on for some time, using lots of water and when the ESA asked them what they were doing they both blamed Kia, making them seem the ‘goodies’, restoring the table to its stain-free state. There seems to have been something that Tina wanted to wash away, a stain on her desired persona maybe.

Washing away something appears again later in week 10. After messy play outside, Tina seemed anxious about cornflour mix on her coat, especially around the gold tag which appeared important to her. Tina and Kia made their way to the sink area, laid the coat on the floor, and used lots of water, soap, and paper towels to scrub the mess away. The mess proved difficult to remove and there was concern about something important being spoiled. Kia points out that Tina has some of the mess on her face and she looks in the mirror, Jack appeared and joined Tina, they smiled while looking at their joint reflection. I smile now remembering that moment, there was a relaxed, comfortable ease between the two of them as they gazed into the mirror. I wonder what they both took from it.

Tina’s actions following this intimate moment surprised me. Jack left the area and Tina continued with the cleaning process, unaware of the greater mess they created on the floor around them. Maybe harbouring some guilt at the mess on her coat Tina made accusations about Jack’s responsibility for it:

*Tina then proceeds to wet another paper towel, puts soap on it and rubs at the bottom of the zip, exclaiming that she doesn’t like it and saying that it was Jack that was responsible. Kia agrees with her and they both continue to accuse Jack of causing the problem on Tina’s coat. An area of concern is the zip tag itself, which Tina declares is gold, she repeats that she does not like this at all and that it is because of Jack that the mess has happened. They continue in a high state of indignation about Jack’s contribution, while bustling about wetting paper towels and rubbing the coat. Tina announces that she is not going outside ever again, and Kia asks why? (1/10/5)*

The closeness of the relationship between herself and Jack seemed to have been lost, he has become the bad object as Tina splits off and projects her own sense of badness into him (TF, p.90). A new narrative is created by Kia colluding with Tina when they are confronted by the judgmental voice of the ESA. The girls are caught by the ESA, she points out how wet the floor is and also blamed the running taps on Bee who had only recently appeared in the scene.

Tina's phantasy seemed to have been disrupted and she was confronted by the reality presented by the adult. The evidence seemed irrefutable, the mess was Tina’s responsibility and initially the reality impacted Tina both physically and emotionally. Her whole demeanour changed as I noted she had what I referred to as a ‘hang dog’ appearance. The emotional response seemed to stop her in her tracks, unable to move forward she struggled to find a solution, standing for a few moments as if trying to manage powerful feelings.

Klein’s paranoid-schizoid position (TF, p.85) offers a sense of meaning about Tina’s inner world as she tried to find a way forward. The ESA’s intervention was felt by her to be unfair and persecutory as Tina denied all responsibility, splitting off the bad feelings she had and projecting them into Jack (TF, p.89). Her unconscious phantasy of Jack as the bad boy created a narrative that she then shared with the ESA. Having settled her guilt, divulged of all responsibility, her demeanour changed once again and I noted:

*She skips across the classroom towards the ESA and tells her that Jack had got the mix on her coat. The ESA asks if it was an accident and Tina says no, it was deliberate. Her expression has a ‘poor me’ sense to it. The ESA says that it wasn’t very nice of Jack, she will have a word with him about it. Tina’s face brightens and she turns around and skips to the computer. Kia asks her if she wants to go out to play but Tina says ‘no’ and proceeds to access the Snow Queen video I saw last week. This time she opens a different song, it begins with a powerful image of the Snow Queen, stood pointing into the air and singing, ‘I have the power,’ The song expresses a sense of control through freezing enemies. Tina’s stance matched the character and she sings with a similar attitude. (1/10/6)*

Being found out by an adult was uncomfortable, threatening how she wished to be perceived and Tina scapegoated Jack to escape her feelings, in telling the ESA about Jack, she made it as bad as it could be by suggesting his action was deliberately malicious.

I wonder how much of this was related to Tina’s growing awareness of difference, discussed earlier (e.g., p.184). But rather than colour, as in the case of Kia, she focused on gender, locating the boy as non-female, an outsider, a legitimate target for her disassociation with ‘bad,’ shifting blame onto Jack.

Transferring her feelings onto another does nothing to resolve them, the function being served is one of providing ‘an illusory sense of security, rather than confronting a difficulty,’ (Greenhalgh, 1994, p.54). Tina is trying to manage difficult feelings, without the capacity or the language to reflect upon them (Greenhalgh, 1994). The transference being acted upon can be done unconsciously, meaning that a child genuinely believes the difficulty is in the other person. It seemed as if something very painful was being deflected and avoided using defence mechanisms rather than being worked through and allowed to emerge fully into conscious awareness.

A supportive adult with an appreciation of a child’s internal conflicted experience may be able to facilitate a move from a paranoid-schizoid position (TF, p.90), where self-responsibility is avoided, to a more realistic depressive one, where their capacity for both ‘good and bad’ behaviour is recognised.

#### 5.6.6: Miss G. as an influence for change

As time progressed Tina’s identification with Miss G seemed to offer the opportunity to view her relationships with her friends differently. On one occasion Tina had noticed that Miss G had observed her harsh behaviour towards Kia, Miss G’s face reflected a different perspective of her behaviour, almost like holding up a mirror:

*The T is walking back and forth preparing for the next activity. Earlier she had been watching when Tina was being harsh with Kia, Tina sensed her eyes and smiled at her a little. Then Tina walks over to the T and says something, I wonder if it is an attempt at appeasement? I couldn’t hear what was said I just notice the T’s face is not severe and Tina doesn’t seem upset in anyway. Later I noticed Tina’s response to Kia changed on reflection I wonder if that was when her behaviour changed towards Kia? She skips back to Bee and Carey. (1/15/3)*

On this occasion, Tina was confronted by her teacher’s perception of her behaviour and was unable to evade her responsibility for it. Afterwards, her behaviour towards Kia became more positive and I wondered if she had internalised and introjected Miss G’s perception of her. However, it is also possible that her desire to be thought of as ‘good’ was also a powerful motivator for her transformed behaviour.

#### 5.6.7: Summary of theme 3

The dyadic relationship between Tina and her teacher was created over time, out of their day-to-day interactions which had provided a safe enough environment for the relationship to blossom. Miss G. is a powerful authority figure whose judgement is important to Tina, so much so that she often resorted to scapegoating other children to avoid being seen as bad.

There is a sense that Miss G. created a facilitating environment, speaking of similarities with the early infant experience but in a larger environment. The opportunity for Tina to enjoy and use play to further her own development and thinking processes was enabled by what Winnicott would have referred to as a facilitating environment. I also noted that learning was facilitated by how the material presented by Miss G was scaffolded and offered in digestible pieces to facilitate its absorption.

The reflection Tina sees of herself in her teacher’s expressions is positive, suggesting she is a child Miss G. enjoyed being with and this relationship seemed to facilitate Tina’s development. Her relationships with her peers offered further opportunities to grow emotionally as she used them to test her ideas of herself and move towards resolving both internal and external issues.

Tina’s resources, seen in her ability to engage in phantasy and symbolic play suggest that Tina’s early relationships have been good enough so that they can be built upon with Miss G. If she had had a different relationship with her mum, her response to the challenges she faced may have been less satisfactory. Her capacity to use Miss G and her peers to manage her inner conflicts while negotiating the social and emotional tumult of living with a group of complex individuals meant she was also able to accommodate the basic academic foundations for future learning.

Introjection is understood in psychoanalytic theory to be an important mechanism, contributing as it does to the developing personality (TF, p.85). Tina’s introjection of the good object, recognised in Miss G, offered ‘an internal sense of goodness, or self-confidence and mental stability,’ (Hinshelwood, 1989, p.329). The world of school seemed like a good place for Tina to be.

## 5.7: My influence as the observer

Throughout the observations, it was not clear to me if or even how Tina was using my presence as an observer. However, on a visit to what would be her new classroom I sensed that she was pleased to have me there to witness her experience. As I walked into the new room, she looked very pleased to see me and acknowledged me with a big smile:

*Tina is waving at me, with a lovely big smile on her face, she looks very pleased to see me. I find her welcome reassuring; I feel as if I was expected and welcomed. (1/19/1)*

My own experience of the new classroom was very different:

*The feeling throughout the session is an unsettling one. There seems to be a constant parade of adults in and out of the classroom, sometimes they want to ask questions of the T, at other times they mention the air conditioning and other organisational concerns. There is a sense for me that these adults ‘own’ this space, they feel totally ‘at home’ here and the children appear to be insignificant. I wonder how many times I have ‘owned’ the space without a thought that it was the children’s space too? (1/19/1)*

I felt as if I had lost my right to be there, lost my space. On reflection, I wonder how much of what I was feeling was transference from some of the other children in the class? The transition to a new environment was a challenge for me, how much more would it be felt by these young children, all with their own anxieties about what lay ahead for them and the separation from what they had known.

Tina seemed able to draw some comfort from my being there and I had noted that on entering the classroom all the children had focused on me. I wonder if I might have offered a benign presence to some of them, a link to their previous educational space, as they attempted to manage their own anxieties.

## 5.8: Observation 12: Ofsted

This observation is different to others in the observational series. Reading the transcript feels different and from the beginning, there was an apprehension about what I was about to observe.

Entering the building I was immediately aware of an atmosphere. I wasn’t greeted in the same manner of friendliness I had experienced previously as the vignette makes clear.

*I ring the bell, and someone lets me in, I sign the visitors log and go to the window and request my badge. I am very surprised when I am asked about my status in school, am I a visitor, do I work with any children alone? I explain my role and say I don’t interact with children just observe one child in Reception. I feel anxious, why the sudden interest in my role, the person in the office says in a very quiet voice that they have Ofsted Inspectors in school, have I filled in one of their volunteer forms. I say no, I hadn’t been asked to sign anything. There is an immediate panic as people try to locate one of these forms and I am asked to sit and wait until I have signed it. Eventually, a form is located, and I fill it in. (1/12/1)*

Reading the transcript, I am aware that there is nothing in my arrival that is familiar. I am not allowed to make my own way to the classroom but am taken, and when I arrive in the classroom, I am introduced formally to Miss G. On reflection now it was as if I was a stranger rather than a benign and unobtrusive presence, somehow linked with the other observer already there who is the inspector.

I felt a need to distance myself from this ominous presence:

*I notice Tina is working on the table that is being watched and I stand a little distance away, allowing space for the Inspector. (1/12/1)*

Tina seemed to have received some special attention to her hair for this occasion, her hair is in plats, something I have not noticed before. This seemed to emphasise the importance of being presentable for the inspector and that his observation of them needed to be favourable.

*Tina picks up her creation and takes it to T saying, ‘Miss G I have made something for you,’ and the T looks pleased and says she will put that on her fridge at home. Tina is happy and skips back to the table saying, ‘I’m going to make more.’ (1/12/1)*

I wonder if Tina’s craft offerings to Miss G. are intended as communications to soothe her, to express Tina’s sense that this is a very difficult time for her teacher. This deep empathy is touching, revealing how much Tina values Miss G.’s difficult position. Perhaps reflecting something of her appreciation of Miss G’s previous empathic responses to Tina.

I have noticed that issues develop for some children when they are faced with a transition from self-directed arts and crafts activities to a more formal learning session. K is particularly resistant, and it is necessary for Miss G. to physically stand up and tidy K’s things away and bring her to the group. A few minutes later some of Miss G’s nervousness became clear when, having told the children they are not working in their books but on paper she. mouths to me the word Ofsted and I realise the books are being inspected. I try to reassure her of my empathy with a nod and a smile.

The learning objective seemed to be related to adjectives, a concept that many years ago would not have been introduced to children at this age. Although I had noted previously Miss G’s careful scaffolding and offering of bite-size pieces of material presented, despite these skills the children seemed to have difficulty focusing and she adapted the task for them.

*The children are difficult to engage in the activity which involves making a sentence using words to describe the Little Red Hen. The T does lots of scaffolding, leading them one step at a time, saying a sentence and then counting how many words and asking them how many words and which word describes the Hen. I think her intention was for the children to each come up with their own sentence, but she sets that aside as a seemingly impossible task and they focus on a sentence prompted by her. She writes the sentence on a whiteboard and asks the children to help her with the spelling, full stops capitals etc. (1/12/2).*

Tina gave the impression that she was not perturbed by important visitor but by her response to the material I have the impression that she and the other children seemed to have *‘some measure of understanding about each individual thing, but they cannot hold them together when looking at a sentence.’ (1/12/2).*

*Their struggles were with the initial sounds, blended sounds, letter formation, they reminded me of young children needing help with a jigsaw but just can’t see how it fits together and the only way is very overt demonstration. (1/12/2)*

The difficulties compounded when the inspector returned to observe the group after a brief turning away to observe another group. I had observed Tina work with the components of the session previously but something about this occasion seemed to prevent her from utilising those experiences. I commented in the transcript that I was concerned about the children’s literacy competencies and the problem this might pose for them in Yr1 (1/12/2). I think this thought reflected a thread of anxiety that existed for me and many other teachers as they consider the curriculum children face in their next year. The pressure to prepare children for what is coming rather than where they are at present in their learning journey can be a distraction from their educational needs. This notion was expressed throughout the Introduction to this study and this observation illustrated this pressure.

However, this thought was contradictory to my other feelings that Miss G. was a very competent teacher but that the task was too challenging for the children on this day. I found myself wanting to tell the inspector that Miss G was a very good teacher and that the children were responding to his presence.

There is relief when the inspector leaves and the feedback given to the children as they complete their task is positive, Tina leaves the table happy with her work seemingly unaware of the struggle Miss G. had faced to present the material and adjust the task significantly to facilitate her capacity.

A sense of the high level of anxiety all the children experienced was observable later as the children moved to the carpet for fruit.

*As the children come to sit down they are in a very unsettled mood, there is a lot of shuffling around, disagreements about where and who is sat where. T uses lots of strategies to try to maintain their focus. A child is chosen to sell the fruit and another boy, who had his turn yesterday becomes very upset and angry and gets up and leaves the carpet area with a lot of noise. T begins the process of selling fruit and then asks ESA to take over while she sorts out the boy. (1/12/3)*

I note with interest that when the teacher (T, Miss G) returned to the carpet to initiate a plenary of the learning that morning she doesn’t use the word ‘adjective’.

*The T returns and brings the story to an end. She has a bag on her lap and asks the children what they have been learning about. Tina puts her hand up but the T asks another child, one that has been very belligerent, she draws him in by asking him more detailed questions. He seems to be very bright.*

*Then she puts her hand in the bag and uses descriptive words to describe the shape she has in her hand that they can’t see. I notice she doesn’t use the word ‘adjectives.’ Tina seems bright and interested the whole time. (1/12/3)*

I wonder if Miss G. had sensed that the word ‘adjective’ had presented a problem to the children and had decided that for the present moment it was best to avoid it.

Reflective box 5.7; I am aware that at that time one of the expectations when delivering the literacy material was that children should be aware of particular terms to describe parts of speech and written text, e.g. adjective. However, I wonder if words that hold no meaning for children at such a young age create difficulties for them in their writing. Using the psychoanalytic metaphor of feeding, although meat is a protein a child not knowing this doesn’t compromise their ability to process it nutritionally. In the same way, engaging with literacy competencies and writing a meaningful sentence is not dependent on understandings words such as noun, verb, adjective etc. which can be introduced much later as part of an age-appropriate diet.

## 5.8: Summary of the themes

Tina’s experience in the classroom suggested she was aware of what was available in her environment and she demonstrated a social and emotional capacity to be successful in utilizing her peers, the adults, and the physical environment to support her development. Her play seemed quite sophisticated and dominant themes in her play suggest that the challenge of establishing a sense of self in relation to others was an ongoing process. Throughout the observational series play offered time to think and give expression to a milieu of emotions during a time of great transitional changes. (Bibby, 2011).

Symbolic play contributed to Tina’s development of thought and the mental apparatus that makes learning possible, influencing her capacity for learning in a more formal setting. Sometimes items provided within the setting seemed to hold symbolic meaning for her and at other times she becomes the symbol, a personification (Klein, 1924) acting out an image that has emerged from her creative psyche. The images used by Tina, and their significance for her, provide additional contextual information, demonstrating how tightly woven together are both context, symbolism, and phantasy. I had a sense of a growing child testing out various roles in her play both on her own and with her peers, attempting to understand relationships between males and females, those the same and those that are different, as well as seeking to affirm her sense of self in the eyes of Miss G.

Using the lens of the psychoanalytic framework presented in chapter 3, the analysis suggested that Tina’s daily experiences in the classroom could be understood as an attempt to integrate them with early relational encounters. This integrative work was observed in her use of role-play, symbolic representation, and certain defence mechanisms, particularly splitting and projection related to the paranoid-schizoid position (TF, p.90). The moderation towards the depressive position seemed to have been facilitated by events at home related to her parent’s wedding, repositioning her role in the family as special but not the vulnerable abandoned baby.

Tina’s experience was not unique, it will be familiar to many children of this age. What is notable is Tina’s mobilisation of her psychic defences and how she used the adults, peers, and environment to think and formulate ways of understanding her reality and how she might resolve the issues between her internal and external world.

## 5.10: Tina’s drawings as data

My decision to use drawings as data was influenced by an ontological and epistemological stance, seeking to understand the children’s experience of their educational space from a deeper psychic level, informed by a psychoanalytic framework.

In the analysis are two drawings by Tina, on two separate group exercises overseen by Miss G. The directive was ‘Draw a picture of yourself in the classroom.’

Unfortunately, I only have two of Tina’s drawings, a third and final one did not reach me. This made the analysis of the drawings difficult for me to match up with the narrative of my observations over the twenty-four-week period. I felt very let down about this, however, Miss G had been very helpful throughout the observational series, and I understood that the last weeks of the term were extremely busy for her. I assume she simply forgot.

### 5.10.1 Tina’s drawings

I present Tina’s two drawings in response to the directive, ‘draw yourself in the classroom.’ The comments I offer about the communication Tina is making in her drawings are very tentative, I am not an experienced art therapist and have limitations in interpreting them.

##### 5.10.1.1 Drawing 1

The first drawing meant little to me initially, it was only seeing drawings one and two together that the narrative they seemed to be conveying began to emerge.

### 

Figure 5.1: Date on back of drawing 18th January 2019 Week 2

In figure 5.1, the first drawing, my first impression of the figures in the top left-hand corner of the paper was of an image that appeared to be a depiction of Tina in the princess dress. I say this because the dress seemed to be long, covering her legs, and the colour was the same as the one she wore in class. There is another smaller figure, and although I have no information about who this might be, I notice the second figure has black hair and it caused me to wonder if it might be Kia since she was the only girl that Tina played with that had black hair.

Analysis of Tina’s drawing was undertaken initially using the Levick emotional and cognitive art therapy assessment (LECARTA, 2009) under some advisement from Myra. My relationship with Myra is related in the methodology section beginning on p.124.

To identify the presence of defences in drawings Levick defined the criteria for each defence in a table containing nineteen defences, based on the work of Anna Freud. Another table shows a ‘correlation of developmental lines of cognitive, artistic, psychosexual sequences and defence mechanisms of the ego appropriate for those periods of development.’ (2009, pp.6-8). Tina, sits astride two of the tables, the first being two and a half to five years and the second five to seven years. This positions her psychosexual development in the oedipal phase.

Points to note about Figure 5.1 informed by from LECARTA (2009)

1. One of the first things I noted is the way the figures float at the top of the paper, there is no connection with the environment, and no ground or horizon is depicted. Tina did the drawings in a group exercise and only one of the group drawings was boundaried, the lack of a boundary may suggest that its absence is due to an aspect of development. Tina may not have matured enough in her thinking to present an environmental perspective.

However, the figures may also represent something of Tina’s sense of loss and not feeling connected both in her family and in the educational space. A sense of exclusion was evident in the observational data and understood as an aspect of the Oedipal phase when the intimacy of parents can feel excluding.

1. One image appears to be Tina in the princess dress, she has used the same colours as the one she wore in the early observations, it seems to include a head and what might be a tiara. The other image is a circle incorporating other shapes, hair around the head, and legs that are not connected. This binary symbolisation may be representative of the ambivalence in her behaviour towards Bee and Kia, noted in the observations.

Levick suggested that ‘projection is present in all graphic images’ (LECARTA p. 18) and I wonder if the size of the second figure is a projection of how Tina has felt since her brother arrived, small, inconsequential, and disconnected.

1. The drawing may also be suggestive of the defensive position of isolation. There are no arms on the princess, causing me to ask if she feels a lack of control and helplessness in her situation? Drawn before the shift towards the powerful figure of the White Queen these aspects of Tina’s experience are noted in the observational data (p.177). Perhaps she is waiting for someone to rescue her, the prince of the fairy tale, the fantasy plays into the significance of being desired by the prince, which would be understood psychoanalytically as the father (Winnicott, 1964).
2. The other figure is smiling but appears disembodied, I wonder how Tina sees this person and if it is Kia, I am unsure.

##### 5.10.1.2 Drawing 2

In sand tray work particularly, the four quadrants of the space and what is placed in them are significant in finding meaning. The thought that there may be some positional meaning surfaced when I considered the second drawing.

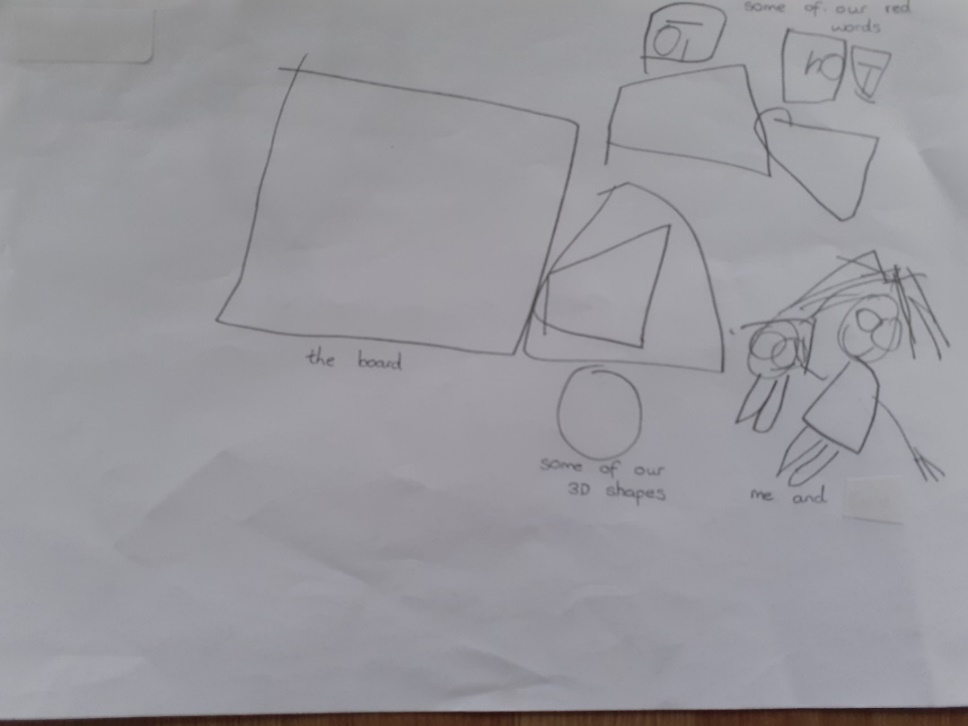


Figure 5.2 Date on back of drawing 1st April 2018 Week 12

In the second drawing, Tina located most of the action right of centre and initially, I wondered if this positioning might hold significance from an interpretative view. When the two drawings are placed together, alongside the classroom map figure: 5.3 provided by Miss G, the images are located in areas where Tina was emotionally invested and there appears to be a development moving from the home corner to the class teaching area. Figure 5.1 is located in the home corner and figure 5.2 in the carpeted area used for class teaching and holding the large whiteboard other drawing implements and cues to graphemes of phonic sounds.

The orientation on the paper of the two drawings leads me to think that at the time each drawing was completed they represented Tina’s preoccupations noted through the observational data. Focus on the home corner, with its connotations of inner conflicts related to home, shifts later when these are replaced by different desires and aspirations, perhaps seeing herself as a learner and placing herself in an area of the educational space associated with learning.

In both drawings, she is located with a friend, and I think the relational aspects of thinking and learning (LR, p44, TF, pp. 92,121) provide insight into an association between locating oneself in a space being facilitated by another.

The larger figure identified as Emily in the second drawing is a peer who appeared occasionally in the observations. I had noted Emily during my observations as being very competent socially as well as in literacy and numeracy. I wonder if this had any influence on why Tina included her in this area of the classroom. Perhaps the larger size of the figure related to Tina’s sense of awe at her ability, wishing to identify with Emily’s aspirations.

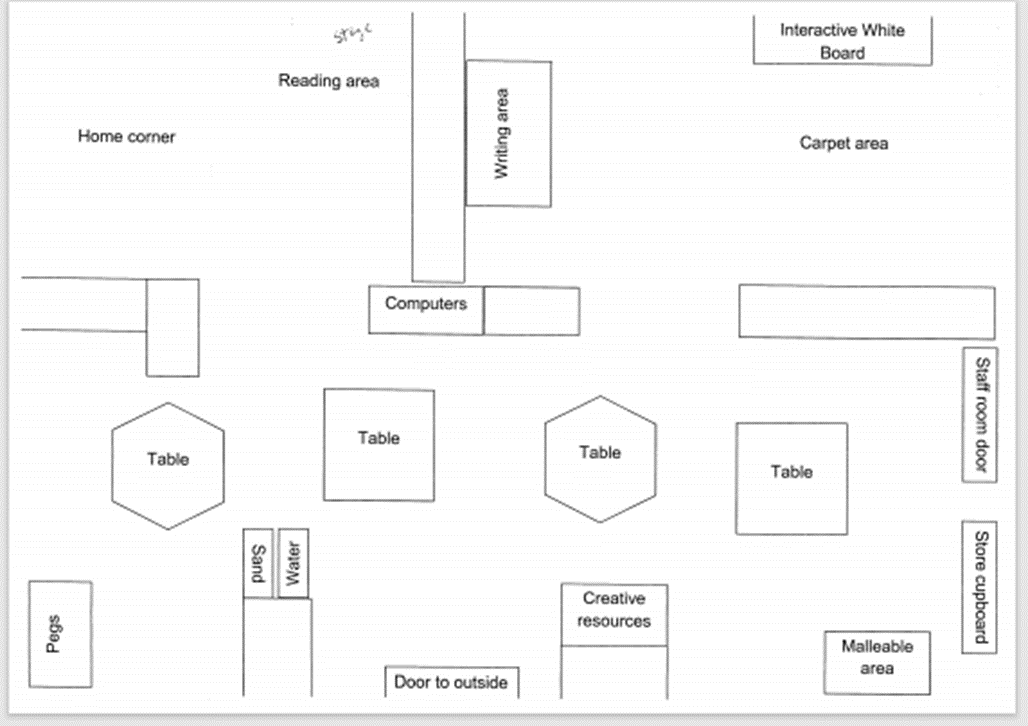


Figure 5.3 A plan of the classroom layout provided by Miss G.

#### 5.10.2 Summary of analysis of Tina’s drawings and links to observational data

I considered the drawings carefully and wondered what they might contribute to understanding Tina’s emotional experience in the educational space. However, it was in the light of the observational data I found clues to what this might have been. The drawings seemed to indicate a shift away from her preoccupations expressed in the home corner, a location linked to her internal conflicts, to an engagement in the process of learning, located in the top right of the paper. The notion for this shift found support in the observational data taking the form of Tina’s introjection of Miss G’s curriculum interests because of an emotional connection they made together.

My use of the LECARTA presented limitations since at the time of starting the analysis I was in the early stages of becoming familiar with it relying heavily on Myra’s advice, limited also because of her illness and difficulties with communication. This presents a clear limitation in the interpretation of the data.

I further recognise the limitations of Tina’s drawings as data, two pictures present a restricted view even with the observational data, a third or even fourth would present a more legitimate co-narrative.

# Chapter 6

## Analysis of data for case study 2

## 6.1: Introduction to the analysis

The data from the second of the two case studies are analysed in this chapter and includes eighteen weekly observations taken over seven months, all occurring at the same time and day each week of term time, with one exception. The exception occurred when I altered my visit to avoid a clash with transition day when the whole school was organised to allow the children to visit their new class and teacher in the coming new academic year. As with the first case study, the data includes the transcripts of observations following the TOM protocol and the pictures drawn by Arlia. With my reflections and thinking, supervision notes are integrated throughout the analysis.

Case study 1 and case study 2 presented quite different challenges, the settings and the children’s age and stage of development offered an opportunity to test out the usefulness of psychoanalytic theory in understanding how children use their educational space. The presentation of this analysis, Arlia, may differ slightly from Tina’s, the process of data collection was the same, however, the abductive analysis allowed different issues to emerge.

Both observations were conducted using the Tavistock Observational Method (TOM) outlined in the methodology. Much of Arlia’s behaviour was difficult for me to understand and even more difficult to locate within psychoanalytic theory. I think my difficulties in understanding Arlia may have arisen from an over-reliance on symbolism, which had proved so useful in Tina’s analysis. Instead, there seemed to be a strong body-mind interaction where her physical movements seemed to occur in response to emotional contexts. There was also confusing grit or dirt eating behaviour and this seemed linked to an occasion when she stuffed far too many small orange segments into her mouth. Her relationships with her peers seemed problematic and she became intent on attaching herself to Aziah, a female peer who was already part of a small group of three that resisted Arlia’s attempts to join them. The group, including Aziah, frequently rebuffed Arlia’s approaches but this did not deter her.

Arlia’s relationships with the adult staff in the nursery were at times fraught with difficulties and frustrations, her behaviour sometimes seemed to provoke responses that favoured other children in disputes.

The research questions were listed in chapter 3, p.141

## 6.2: Introducing Arlia

In the methodology (p.141), I made the reader aware of the connection I had with the setting which had been part of my workplace for over twenty years. Although I didn’t know Arlia’s family well I was well known to the family through my work in the school.

Arlia was tall for her age and her stature was strong, she was well built, her dark hair is soft, curly, and cut close to her head. She has a round face with chubby cheeks and dimples. Her facial expression is often fixed but when she smiles her smile is bright and lights up her face. However, she often seems to be hiding her feelings behind a blank expression.

I knew little about Arlia’s home setting, except that she was the youngest of several older siblings, these siblings were not referred to throughout the observational series. Her mother and father were both mentioned in a one of her drawings (p.294)

Graphical user interface

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Figure 6.1: Some views of the outdoor area showing the climbing equipment and the wooden playhouse.



Figure 6.2 Entrance to indoor space

There were two qualified teachers, one of whom is assistant head to the whole school, and at least four permanent support staff employed as educational or language support, in addition, there were a couple of trainees. Support staff are referred to in this chapter by the acronym SA. The outdoor area was manned, on a rota, in all weathers, and the children were expected to access the outdoor provision whatever the weather, protective clothing was provided to accommodate a cold and damp environment. A surprising number of children will play outside no matter how wet, windy, or cold it is.

As in Child study 1, the observations are identified using three numbers; the first is the school number/the second is the observation number/the third is the page number e.g. 2/1/1.

## 6.3: The Analysis: The abductive process

The methodology outlined the abductive process with the first step embedded in the collection of data. The sharing of transcripts in supervision and the joint discussion facilitated our first sense of a developing narrative about the experience of Arlia in her educational space.

Identifying Arlia’s preoccupations using the three strands of context, symbolisation, and phantasy featured in Tina’s analysis (Isaacs, 1948), was more difficult because Arlia’s play seemed less sophisticated with fewer symbolic clues. However, I began to understand that her preoccupations were more easily observable through her physical movement and sensory experiences where I could see clues to her unconscious phantasies. The use of the ‘ph’ rather than ‘fantasy’ reflects Klein’s meaning of the concept of ‘phantasy’ examined in the theoretical framework (T.F. p.82).

### 6.3.1: Themes emerging from the data

* **Theme 1: Mind/Body: sensory and somatic representations**
* Movement
* Digesting the indigestible
* **Theme 2: The desire for Intimacy. Wanting to connect.**
* Being disconnected
* Adhesion rather than connection
* Seeking Connection
* **Theme 3: Being seen**
* Being seen as a bad object
* Protecting others from Arlia
* **Theme 4: Towards a more integrated experience**
* Development of symbolic representation
* Development in relationships
* Separation
* Arlia’s drawings
* The ending
* **Theme 5: Seeing Arlia: The observer’s perspective**
* Locating Arlia
* Being seen by Arlia
* Transference and countertransference

Each of the themes is considered in turn.

## 6.4: Theme 1: Mind/Body: managing feelings through sensory and somatic representations

Klein identified unconscious phantasies by inference and believed them to underlie ‘every mental process and accompany all mental activity’ describing them as ‘mental representations of somatic events in the body’ (Hinshelwood, 1989, p.32). Many of the clues to Tina’s inner experience came through her use of symbolism and role play, but for the most part, Arlia seemed to express herself and her inner world through somatic events in her body, and I found the clues to Arlia’s inner experience lay initially in the context in which they were observed.

### 6.4.1: Movement

The outdoor space was large and included grass, hard and soft areas as can be seen in figure 6.3.

A picture containing grass, outdoor, field, green

Description automatically generatedFigure 6.3: A view of the outdoor area encompassing grassy hill and hard and soft play paces.

I noticed in Arlia’s movement there was little focused attention with a lot of flitting about and this was discussed in supervision where my initial thoughts about the meaning behind this behaviour were first explored.

Reflective Box 6.1 Supervision note 7/2/2019

*My supervisor had used the word manic about her physical restlessness, flitting from one thing to another, using her body to dissipate energy she is holding within but with no constructive relational interaction to provide a more satisfying resolution.*

This thread emerged as significant in making sense of her response to her environment and is referred to throughout the analysis.

Arlia showed obvious pleasure in her sensory experience of movement, and on my first observation I noted this exuberance:

*I find her running around the Nursery with a slightly younger-looking child (Reema) here with her mother. Arlia’s face is bright and smiling as she chases around, she appears to be very excited, and it occurs to me that she is doing well not to trip up or bump into anyone.* (2/1/1)

I wonder where my concerns about her tripping up came from, perhaps the parent/teacher role was trying to raise its head in the face of my more neutral observational stance, a role I didn’t immediately feel at ease with (RB, 4.3, p.153). The scenario continued with Arlia seeming to lose her connection with Reema and I noticed her putting something in her mouth, it was not until later I began to make sense of its significance which is examined further later (p.249).

*Arlia runs past Reema and hides behind a screen peeping out and watching Reema. This seems to be a game about hiding hoping to be found. As I watch Arlia picks something up out of a plant pot and puts it in her mouth, it takes me a moment to realise what she has done, and I wonder if I have been mistaken. Arlia races around the area and I wonder if she is looking for Reema, an adult suggest that she go and get her coat because it is cold, and she heads indoors. (2/1/2).*

I wonder if the interruption to her movement also intruded on mental processes since when she went indoors Arlia had difficulty working out where her coat was:

*There is a long half-height wall with coat hooks and photos of the children to help them locate their coats. Arlia spends a few minutes trying to find hers, lifting the coats and looking at the photos, but she doesn’t seem to find her coat and abandons the search. Running off she finds Reema once again who has also returned inside and this time Reema takes Arlia by the hand and they walk around together.* (2/1/2)

I feel curious as to why Arlia had difficulty at this point in locating her coat. She will have been allocated a peg when she first entered nursery at the beginning of the Autumn term which was over four months ago. Had she forgotten where it was or had she in some way lost touch with her coat and any sense of its location? Or maybe the adult, directing her to get her coat, had interrupted something that was happening internally that she was processing.

Abandoning her search for the coat Arlia found Reema again who had also returned inside. They seem to reconnect and walk around the indoor space together holding hands before Arlia’s thoughts returned to the outdoors and she asked if Reema would like to go outside. Reema nods and Arlia goes to find her coat for a second time. Arlia’s search for her coat the first time had seemed haphazard, but this time she found her coat on a peg with her photograph above it, almost as if she suddenly remembered where it was.

*Arlia’s face is open and smiling, I wonder if she feels she has claimed her friend and been claimed by her.*

*Arlia asks Reema if she would like to go outside again, Reema nods and they drop hands while Arlia goes hunting for her coat. Reema wanders outside and Arlia finds her coat at the opposite end of the coat hooks than she looked before*. (2/1/2)

The context of the forgetting followed Arlia’s disappointment at her loss of connection with Reema, establishing her reconnection with Reema seemed to be the context of the remembering where to find her coat, hinting perhaps at the organising influence of this friendship for Arlia (Winnicott 1971). The beneficial effect of connection with another child as an organising influence on her thinking will surface again in this analysis.

Reflecting on the contextual aspect of Arlia’s running, I wonder if she may have been trying to manage heightened emotions at the loss of her connection with Reema, pushing them from her mind into her body and expelling them into the environmental space? (Frosh, 2012, p.169) I wrote up my notes with this in mind.

*However, it may be that her sometimes chaotic flitting and running from one activity to another is a necessary activity for Arlia to dissipate emotionally charged energy being held within her body. (2/1/3).*

Emotions seemed to surface in her body and this connection between her mind and body afforded Arlia the propensity for using her body in movement not only to experience pleasure but to evade frustration and agitation in situations she found difficult to handle.

Reflective Box 6.2: Arlia’s link between her mind and body raises some interesting questions about how feelings emerge and I find myself considering the relationship between movement and the positive outcomes of the physical activity programme I referred to in chapter one, RB 1.

The outcomes of the programme seemed to suggest that spending time in a programme of physical activity in a group promoted the capacity to focus, remember, organise their thinking, hold a pencil, etc but also an awareness of self, expressed in their drawings. At the time of rolling out this programme, I tried to find research to support and explain why there should be this effect. I discussed this in July 2003 with Professor David Sugden (Vice Chancellor at that time, University of Leeds) who, along with Mary Chambers and Helen Wright, also of University Leeds had published papers relating to this subject (Chambers and Sugden 1998, Sugden and Wright, 1998). In my research journal of that time I noted, ‘He suggested that it is possible to observe improvement in children’s overall academic development when they are involved in physical developmental activities. However, what has not been established is *why* this is so’ (Meeting with David Sugden, July 2003)

The theoretical framework on which this study rests emerged in part from Freud’s linking the infant’s awareness of erotogenic development with an integration of the body and mind. Winnicott (1962, 1971) had also identified the physical care of the infant in developing a safe environment, necessary for maturational development. I wonder if it is the integration of mind and body that is afforded by movement that allows the development of mental functioning and a greater sense of self. I am offering a tentative suggestion that perhaps the link between mind and body lie in the wholeness that the two bring when harnessed together. This might help us to understand Arlia’s use of her somatic experience as part of her natural inclination to use her body as a resource to manage her difficult feelings.

Perhaps this notion might explain the importance for example of P.E. and music and the poverty of experience some children suffer when these subjects are restricted in the curriculum.

Frustration, when sense cannot be made of an experience, demands some sort of internal response to manage those feelings, however, the process requires tolerating them long enough for the sense of their meaning to emerge. Arlia’s running about suggested to me that her capacity for tolerance was low and the feelings needed to be dissipated through this physical activity. Her frustrations in her relationships are avoided, rather than engaged with (TF, p.105), using the physical/sensory device of running, and at other times chewing or eating something hard to digest.

Although running presented Arlia with a useful coping mechanism to manage her feelings, useful social learning to facilitate an understanding of herself in relation to others is out of reach. Her limited capacity to think about and examine her experiences is further suggested in the other somatic strategies she used to manage her feelings when there seemed some confusion about what she wanted. One of these was to express her inability to process or digest sensations by eating undigestible grit.

Bion likens the process of thinking to alimentary processing (TF, p. 101) and many phrases in circulation suggest this concept offers a useful metaphor in the general population today, e.g. ‘I found what he was suggesting hard to swallow’. In the next section, her difficulties in organising and making sense of her experiences are examined and seem to find expression in unusual oral behaviour as if trying to digest fragments (TF, p.101) that are undigestible or hard to swallow.

#### 6.3.1.2 Digesting the indigestible

A disturbing aspect of her behaviour was the surprising use she made of picking up pieces of grit and eating it:

*Arlia runs past Reema and hides behind a screen peeping out and watching Reema. This seems to be a game about hiding hoping to be found. As I watch Arlia picks something up out of a plant pot and puts it in her mouth, it takes me a moment to realise what she has done, and I wonder if I have been mistaken. Arlia races around the area and I wonder if she is looking for Reema,* (a young visitor to the setting) *… (2/1/1)*

This grit ingesting behaviour seemed bizarre, and I had no idea what it meant for Arlia. She seemed to stop in mid-flight and pick something up from a plant pot, putting it in her mouth, there seemed nothing to explain it. I never saw her spit the grit out again.

Grit eating emerged several times in the observational series and led me to wonder what part of her experience warranted the need to eat fragments of dirt. The context of the initial observation of this behaviour was after her game of hiding from Reema but not achieving the desired result of being found. The game of hide and seek is a popular one for children, however, the risk of such a game is not being found and Winnicott identified what this might mean for children when he said, ‘It is a joy to be hidden, and disaster not to be found’ (1971). It seemed that something about not being found was such a disaster it found expression in what seemed to be the bizarre behaviour of grit eating.

Sapountzis (2018) suggested that seemingly bizarre actions by people, reflect frustration experienced when internal states ‘do not make sense to them and they do not feel in control of what is happening or has just happened to them,’ (Sapountzis, 2018, p.188). It seemed that after the promising indications that Reema had wanted to be found by Arlia the phantasy of being found in return is left unfulfilled and lacking the mental capacity to use thought to make sense of her feelings Arlia turned to another form of expression.

There was another child besides Reema that Arlia was observed claiming as a friend. She is named Zadiya and appeared to be younger than her, she appeared in observation 3.

*Arlia spots another girl nearby and stands up and takes her hand, she says to a SA ‘She is my friend’ and they walk around together. The girl, Zadiya, is younger in appearance than Arlia. …*  *Arlia turns around and sees a puzzle formed by semi-circles of wood in different colours that all fit sequentially together to make a rainbow. She points to it and says to her friend Zadiya ‘Look Zadiya a rainbow.’ She picks it up, not easy, puts it on the floor and begins to dismantle it. Zadiya tries to do this too but Arlia is quick and Zadiya doesn’t manage to hold on to many. Arlia spends a long time putting the puzzle together, sometimes thinking it is completed only to find another piece or notice a gap where something is missing.* *Zadiya tries her best to add her bits but Arlia has claimed this for herself and doesn’t want anyone else involved. She is not aggressive but very determined. (2/3/2)*

Holding on to the puzzle seemed more important to Arlia than a reciprocal play arrangement. Later in the observation, the two seemed to compromise by playing side by side rather than together. Perhaps reflecting an aspect of Arlia’s social development, unable as yet to make the compromises necessary for a shared experience.

Arlia’s feelings for Aziah, a peer with whom she was preoccupied, seemed more complex and are examined further in a later section (p.265) however it seems appropriate to include the following scenario as it emerges through a series of vignettes.

Arlia, Aziah, and some other children had been playing in the sand tray, a long tray with dry sand, and different types and sizes of containers to play with. My impression of Arlia was that she was troubled by something that may have occurred before my arrival.

*Two boys are playing in the sand and one of them says that Arlia is angry, she gets a fierce look on her face, I have not seen that look before, and then she growls but I am not sure what she is growling at. Her hand movements in the sand are quick and I wonder if she is acting out her anger, she takes some sand from other children, one of them a boy opposite her, he protests, and she stops but continues trying to increase her pile of sand from elsewhere in the tray. (2/9/1)*

As I watched Arlia’s play I found myself wondering about its meaning for her, she seemed to be wanting more sand for herself but restrained herself when a boy protested at her attempt to take what the boy feels is his. The scenario continued:

*Arlia is moving the sand around with her hands, the movements are quick and firm. She seems insulated from the others playing alongside her. She looks in one of the boxes and finds a crane with a grabber bucket and spends a long time scooping the sand up and closing the grabber bucket to hold it in and then letting it go. I wonder if she is holding something in, something she wants to let go of? (2/9/2a).*

Arlia seemed to be in the middle of trying to resolve some issue, wanting to grab from others, to get more from wherever she could but avoiding taking it from one of the boys. Perhaps the crane offered a mechanical device that might be more effective in holding on to something that keeps being taken away. I wonder if the thing that kept getting away was her desire for connection, particularly with Aziah, a target for her desire. Coincidently Aziah was taken away from the sand tray by Miss P (the nursery teacher, NT) to work 1-1 on a sewing activity and I found what happened next difficult to unravel.

*Arlia watches and after a moment she follows, standing beside the table where NT is sat with Aziah. Arlia says ‘can I do it?’ The NT says she can when she has finished with Aziah, later. Arlia returns to the sand. She searches through the metal items to find something she seems to have in mind, two nice metal containers that I think are mini cooking items for Asian dishes. She spends time in the sand half burying them and then filling them, smoothing them carefully before tipping them out and repeating the process. She is very careful with the smoothing which seems to be an important aspect of levelling them. After a few times of doing this she picks them (the containers she filled with sand) up and looks around, she goes to the NT and offers them to her, ‘for you,’ she says. The NT stands up, leaves Aziah and takes her to the sand tray, I know she is trying to make the point that the sand needs to stay in the tray. (2/9/2b)*

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Figure 6.5: The indoor sand tray

It seemed that whatever mental process Arlia was involved in vignette 2/9/2a, was disrupted when Aziah left the sand to work with Miss P. Her thoughts seem to be about wanting to do the same as Aziah and I am not sure if this is about Aziah occupying Miss P.’s attention or wanting to do the same activity as Aziah because she seeks to be close to her. I wonder if Arlia’s offering for Miss P. was intended to distract Miss P. from her attention to Aziah or may be an attempt to please Miss P. so that she would remember she was next in line to do the activity.

Other members of staff were approached in the same way with Arlia’s imaginary gift created from the sand. They responded quite differently and engaged with her fantasy, accepting her gifts with pleasure, even talking about flavours etc. with Arlia until she eventually emptied the sand back into the tray.

Arlia returned to Miss P. several times to ask when it would be her turn to sew. Each time she was told she had to wait until Aziah had finished until finally, unable to manage whatever feelings the situation had evoked for her, she tried to fill herself up with oranges, recorded in the following vignette:

*Arlia was turned away from the sewing activity again. This time, the anxiety seemed to provoke an impulse to fill her mouth with oranges, even though this was difficult to swallow. (2/9/2)*

Sometimes someone else receiving what you want can be ‘difficult to swallow.’ Arlia’s desire to be chosen might also reflect her desire to be found, a desire that often seemed to be thwarted. Turn-taking is a necessary part of children’s experience of the educational space and Arlia sometimes had difficulty waiting her turn (e.g., 2/2/1). However, the capacity for waiting can be challenging because it requires flexibility and tolerance (Bion, 1962) and these responses take time and support to develop.

#### 6.4.2 Summary of theme 1

In trying to make sense of the reactions she provoked in others Arlia resorted to a range of physical strategies such as running about and oral sensory experiences of eating grit or dirt, however, these were limiting in their influence on developing her thinking and linking cause and effect. Without the mental apparatus available to contain powerful emotions, both good and bad, her emotions found expression through the body.

Arlia’s quest for friendship with Aziah is like a thread running through each of the themes and it often created the context whereby it was possible to deduce how Arlia managed her emotions. While ever she remained stuck in managing feelings in this way the opportunity to develop alternative perceptions and strategies may have eluded her.

I wonder if Arlia needed a containing presence, someone who could understand her internal difficulties and translate them into something meaningful (Bion, 1962), my feeling as her observer was that her desire for connection was a search to find someone who understands her.

## 6.5: Theme 2: The desire for connection. Wanting to be found.

Early in the observational series I had noted Arlia’s interactions with Reema (6.4.1) and the disturbing impact of not being found. I also noted that Reema’s presence seemed to offer an organising effect on Arlia’s ability to solve the problem of locating her coat.

However, there were times I found sensing a connection with Arlia difficult, and I wondered if this reflected a deeper experience of relationships for her. In the next part of the analysis, I examine a relationship between her behaviour and her desire for connection, particularly with Aziah.

### 6.5.1: Disconnection

Arlia’s disconnect with both adults and other children seemed to become more obvious in week 7. The observation began with my difficulty in locating her in the setting and then my noticing something about her demeanour that suggested she was not happy, a thread that seemed to weave its way throughout the observational hour. I begin with this vignette:

*Arlia’s physical body appears to be more developed than most of her peers. But the way she walks and interacts with her environment gives me the impression that she is developmentally much younger. She has a look of a child that is closed to things and people around her, especially when adults are talking to her as if she doesn’t quite know how to deal with them. (2/7/1)*

I recorded my feelings at this point:

*I notice I don’t feel as connected with her today, I have a more solitary feeling in myself, she hasn’t acknowledged me in any way either. (2/7/1)*

Arlia moved towards the mud pit (figure 6.6) where I observed a group of excited children watching a worm in the dried-out mud, she stood just outside and appeared very much like a bystander. The children were trying to intimidate the worm while Miss P. attempted to protect it by advising them not to hurt it.

*Arlia stands at the side of the mud pit watching what is happening, then she reaches in and picks up some mud between her thumb and forefinger and puts it into her mouth. She seems to be watching the boys to see if they are noticing what she is doing. She repeats this action about four times. I notice there is no expression on her face while doing this.*

*She moves around to the other side of the mud pit and stands in it watching as Easha and another girl try to put a bucket over the top of a worm, there is some screaming from some of the children, boys as well as girls. Arlia is stood in the mud pit in her soft, canvas, sparkly pumps, not the wellies that are provided for this purpose. Her face is expressionless, I have no idea what she makes of what is happening. I feel sorry for the worm, for the children it seems to be something alien and scary, I know they are curious, but I wish I could scoop it out of the sand and put it somewhere safe, under a bush where the soil is softer, and it can find its way down into a safer environment. It has been still but finally, it tries to wriggle away, and the children scream again. (2/7/2)*

I found it difficult to watch what was happening to the worm, Arlia’s face was expressionless as if holding herself still, or maybe it is holding herself together. Reflecting on the analysis now I sense that my feelings about the worm may be associations I am making with Arlia, linking the vulnerability of the worm with the vulnerability I had noticed in her. Like the worm, I sensed her experience feels uncomfortable and difficult to make sense of. Is it her I want to rescue?

Figure 6.6: Outdoor mud pit



Arlia’s passive features seemed to undermine the depth of emotion she experienced, and my sense of Arlia’s vulnerability appeared to be reflected in what happened next.

Stepping out of the mud pit and heading towards the door to inside, she noticed a small plastic duck lying among the gardening tools. The duck seemed out of place among the tools, in the wrong place, she seemed drawn to it and picked it up, taking it with her to get her milk. Something about the duck held some meaning for her:

*She stands for a long time drinking much longer than the other children, and for most of the time she holds the duck to her cheek, gently stroking it. (2/7/2)*

This action evoked thoughts in me of feeding a baby and Arlia seemed to take comfort from her actions. The possibility that Arlia can make an association in this way feels important, it suggested that at some point she has introjected a good experience, a time when she felt held and the world felt a safe place to be which she can access in the here and now (Klein, 1959, 1946). Her facial expression as she sucks the straw and uses the duck to stroke her cheek, brings to mind thoughts of a calm blissful feeding of a young baby, replenishing her depleted resources.

The duck was a source of comfort for her and the associations the toy evoked raised several different possibilities following on from our experience of the worm. One possibility may be that she found the duck in the wrong place, as the worm had been, and she may feel she is in the wrong place, rescuing the duck she desired to be rescued herself. However, the opportunity for reverie, connecting with an inner resource to soothe her distress (TF, p.103), was snatched away by what happened next:

*She puts the duck down on the table while she puts the milk carton in the bin, as she goes to retrieve it another child picks it up and runs indoors. Arlia chases after him and there is a tussle as she tries to retrieve it from the boy, he is holding tight and I think she is about to give up when a SA interrupts and wants to know what is going on. Arlia drops her hands and puts them behind her back, her expression is blank. She tells the children to bring the duck to her and the boy hands it over. There are many questions about where the duck has come from: where should it be, why have they got it, why is Arlia trying to take it from A??? I feel she has already assumed that Arlia was trying to take the duck away from A. I feel annoyed, it seems like Arlia has lost the duck twice and it seemed to have some sort of comforting effect on her while drinking milk. The SA says she will keep the duck since they can’t share it. I find myself wondering if the SA is moderating her words because she knows I am watching and have the thought of the saying about a swan gliding on the surface but paddling madly under the water. (2/7/2-3)*

Arlia had been identified as a bad object (TF, p.90), seen to be problematic with other children and used as a receptacle of adult projections of their sense of dissatisfactions. Unable to defend herself, she has no alternative but to move on without the duck. I felt annoyed at what I have seen but this was not the end of her being identified as a culprit. She turned to go back outside and noticed a table with plastic buildings related to film hero figures, maybe wanting a hero to right the wrong that has been done to her. After watching the boys play, she tried to play with Spiderman's house but was again rebuffed by the boys. There seemed no safe place to be.

When she tried to pick up a witch-like figure it is snatched away again by another child. While trying to snatch it back a SA spots her and once again Arlia is blamed and thought to be in the wrong. The support assistant told Arlia to give the item back to the boy, saying it is wrong to snatch. Although there were no visual clues to Arlia’s internal response my imagination was fuelled by emotions in response to her loss. Her face was expressionless while this conversation was going on, I felt helpless witnessing this complete misunderstanding and I could only imagine how she was feeling at the continued negative response to her efforts to resolve some inner turmoil.

Reflective box 6.3: I think that there will be many occasions, both in nursery and in school, when children will find themselves in this situation, feeling blamed for something that was not their fault.

Reflecting now on this scenario I find myself wondering about children’s inability to speak up when they are faced with blame and what makes this problematic. I wonder if it is a problem with articulation. Arlia seemed to find difficulty in conveying her feelings verbally, however, I also wonder if a sense that adults could be relied on to help was not a sufficient part of her experience.

In my work in school, I have noticed that when children speak up to defend themselves from being blamed for having taken an object from another child they may be instructed to next time to tell the teacher who will sort it out. However, this may be problematic if their experience has been that adults can’t be trusted to resolve things, instead they may have learned to solve issues themselves.

Arlia’s choice of the witch seemed to have a specific significance for her, making its loss even more poignant so that it was not lost from her mind as the following vignette shows.

*She continues to play at the table, with the dragon, sliding him down a slide, trying to fit him in different places. Then she sees another boy with the witch and snatches it away from him and gives him the dragon instead. I watch, wondering if the boy will protest but he doesn’t he looks to see what is in his hand and continues to play with it. Arlia plays with the Witch and I hear her say something that sounds like ‘magic’. She tries to push the witch down the slide and although it fits easier than the dragon her hat is still an obstacle preventing her from sliding down. Arlia doesn’t seem to mind, twisting the witch slightly to accommodate the ride. (2/7/3).*

The dragon did not appear to hold the same significance for Arlia as the witch and I wondered why this might be. In my experience of working in this community, I had a sense of the witch as a cultural representation of someone who was bad which seemed in line with my perception of Arlia as identifying as a bad object (TF, p.90). There may however be an alternative, or parallel, interpretation of the witch as a representation of a female who can do magic, a more empowering figure she wished to identify with.

Bion’s interest in how children process sensations and experiences to come to some sort of understanding of them has been discussed earlier (TF, p.107). Imbuing toys with emotional meaning offers an opportunity for thoughts to emerge from feelings. The toys, and how she used them, speak of Arlia’s internalised responses about how she is experiencing herself, for example when Arlia rescued the witch she tried to fit her into different spaces, twisting her this way and that, on a slide, in an oven which almost closes, expressing perhaps her struggle to fit into the space offered to her in the nursery.

This observation felt like a progression from running around to manage her frustration and disappointment as I had noticed previously. It seemed as if Arlia was expressing her overwhelming experiences and trying to make sense of them through the language of symbolism, allowing their expression without needing to articulating them (TF, p.93). Reaching out to a power that is greater than herself, magic, reflected perhaps her feeling of powerlessness and her wish for help in managing what was happening to her. The externalisation of her feelings in this way seemed hopeful to me, it seemed like a step towards organised thinking, perhaps an alternative to verbalising the sense of ‘I don’t fit in here’ associated with the worm in the hard mud and the duck in the toolbox.

I think the vignette is also indicative of intense emotional effort on Arlia’s part, symbolic figures offer a form of expression where words would be ineffective (TF, p.89). Expressing her feelings symbolically suggested a potential development in thinking, the construction of a mental mechanism, connecting thoughts into a process of thinking and offering the possibility, eventually, of finding the capacity to tolerate her frustration (TF, p.107). Bion (TF, p.107) recognised the potential in frustration for growing thinking frameworks, but growing capacity is a gradual process.

Almost as if she couldn’t pursue the thoughts any further there was a lack of continuity, which may be a reflection that her mental processes are still developing and unable to sustain themselves to the point of resolution.

*She suddenly drops the witch and turns around and runs off towards where Aziah is playing with another child. I feel a bit lost at this moment I think, and as I write up my notes I have a gap at this point. (2/7/3)*

Arlia’s sudden move away from her play, dropping the witch and running towards Aziah, results in a feeling for me that I have missed something, there was a gap in my thinking, and I noticed I felt lost. On reflection I am unsure of whether it is my own sense of feeling lost or hers.

Perhaps seeking a more concrete form of expression of her ongoing confusion at the messages she was receiving from the staff I noticed a little later she resorted to licking or eating gritty fragments.

*The next thing I notice is Arlia at the sandpit with some other children. She doesn’t get in but picks up sand between her forefinger and thumb and puts it in her mouth, she repeats this a few times. (2/7/4)*

Arlia’s experience speaks to me of a sense of fragmentation (TF. P.101) in her thinking, an inability to create some sense of the behaviour of others in her environment and their expectations of her. I have a sense that developmental opportunities may have been missing in her early relationships and this experience appears to have continued in the educational space. The emotional capacity to both tolerate frustration and make use of it in growing a thinking framework is directly related to an interactive process with a significant m/other (TF, p. 102). Sapountzis (2018) described a very similar case of inadequate empathic appreciation of a child’s perspective, stating ‘more important was the failure to understand how anxious [Arlia] felt in the classroom and how unable she was to make sense of what was happening around her,’ (p. 191). (My insertion).

My response to the SA who had taken the duck from Arlia had been anger and I felt quite cynical towards her when I noticed her trying to connect with Arlia later. My feeling was that she was trying to demonstrate to me that she wanted to make some sort of reparation, but I was reluctant to let it go. Nevertheless, Arlia responded to her positively:

*… she (SA) notices Aziah and another girl painting the floor with brushes and a bucket of water. Arlia goes up to them and picks up a bucket and walks away with it, the girls look shocked but Arlia seems to be oblivious to them. Then she suddenly turns around and walks back with the bucket, as she puts it down a SA (the one who took the duck away earlier) asks her what she is doing with the bucket and Arlia says something about washing something. The SA says that the water is dirty would she like to get some clean water? Arlia says yes, then the adult proceeds to empty the bucket on the floor, I feel shocked and notice the girls who had been playing with the bucket also looked surprised. They seem to recover though and begin to paint the floor with the spilt water and their brushes.*

*I follow Arlia and SA into the Nursery room, they walk to the sink and Arlia is encouraged to wash the bucket out. The SA asks if it is clean and Arlia says it is, but the SA says, ‘Oh no look there is still dirt there’. Arlia washes some more and finally the bucket is clean. I lose something here, I am not sure what happened to the bucket. (2/7/4)*

The sense of my loss of something here may have been due to some conflict on my part at what lay behind the SA interaction with Arlia. My belief that she had been harsh in the way she managed the duck event led me to assume that the SA was trying to assuage her sense of guilt at her sharp treatment of Arlia earlier and on reflection perhaps I had lost my neutral observer stance.

Putting my feelings aside, the SA seemed to know Arlia enjoyed being messy with water and facilitated her in her inclination by asking her to clean the bucket. Recognising Arlia’s love of messy play seemed to offer a sense of acceptance for this aspect of herself.

The tragedy Arlia experienced both through the loss of the duck and the witch and being blamed for something that was not her fault was difficult to observe. It felt tragic to witness Arlia’s connection with what I perceived as an experience of the good breast, snatched away, bringing with it a great sense of loss and frustration (TF. pp.79, 85).

During my observations, there were very few attempts on behalf of the adults in the setting to understand Arlia and offer a containing experience, there was therefore little opportunity ‘for her fears to become manageable’ (Bion, 1962, p. 114; TF, p.100). In the next section, I will examine Arlia’s management of her desire to connect with Aziah.

### 6.5.2: Adhesion rather than connection

On a cold and wet day, I had arrived to witness Arlia outside dressed for the weather. She was walking towards the door to remove outdoor clothing and seemed weighed down and moving slowly. At the door Arlia was told by a support assistant to remain separate from three girls, Aziah, Easha, and Farhana and I gathered this was because of an incident that had occurred before my arrival that day (2/4/1/). There was a tone in the adult’s voice that spoke loudly of her annoyance with Arlia. The vignette explains what happened next.

*In the main play area of the nursery Arlia flits around, not really connecting with anything or anyone. There does not seem to be one single child she feels drawn to. It seems as though she is an outsider. Gravitating eventually to the HC there are girls there and their name badges suggest these are the girls she has been told not to play with. (2/4/2)*

Figure 6.8: View 1 of home corner

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Figure 6.9: View 2 of home corner.

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As Arlia watched them, the girls ignored her until one of them voiced her desire for a doll and Arlia jumped in to provide what is needed.

*She sits down and watches the girls playing with two dolls, one of the girls says she wants a baby so Alia goes and finds one in a cot. But when she hands it over saying you can have this one,’ the girl throws it on the floor and says ‘ugh, smelly.’ The doll is white, the other dolls are brown. Arlia looks surprised at first and then picks the doll up again and drops it on the floor saying ‘ugh, smelly.’ (2/4/2)*

I wondered if it was coincidental that the doll is rejected because it was white while the others were black. The white doll she offered was rejected as smelly and her echoing of the group’s objection that it was smelly suggested to me that Arlia wanted to identify with the group’s idea of what was acceptable. Arlia seemed to grasp an opportunity for a connection with the girls by providing a doll regardless of the colour and I assume from this that initially its colour wasn’t an issue for her.

That children are aware of the value placed on colour from an early age has been suggested by several studies (e.g., Clark and Clark, 1939, Jordan, and Hernandez-Reif, 2009), however, I am curious that Arlia seemed unaware of this in her choice of the white doll. Arlia continued to be ignored and I wondered if her rejection of the white doll was a projection of her feelings at being rejected.

Arlia’s exclusion from the group created difficult feelings for her to manage and in the following vignette she seemed to resort to a sensory experience to do this.

S*uddenly she looks under a chair and reaches for something when she pulls it out it is a wooden egg, Alia shows it to one of the girls, ‘look an egg,’ but the girl is not interested. Arlia turns away and places the egg in her mouth with her lips around it, it looks like she might be sucking it. I wonder if there is some oral gratification in this action. (2/4/2)*

Turning to this early primitive response of sucking seemed to be related to the phantasy of feeding, to manage the painful feelings of rejection and abandonment (TF, pp. 68, 69). Arlia may be seeking to feel ‘loved and cared for,’ (Gomez, 1997, p. 179), and by self-gratification, using another object, the anxious feelings can be assuaged albeit temporarily.

Bick’s proposal that by recreating the sense of ‘latching on’ as a baby to a breast, using illusion (1968, 1986, in Youell, 2006) enables an infant or young child to defend against feelings of being overwhelmed. Bick referred to this as ‘adhesive identification,’ an attempt to hold themselves together when faced with their sense that they may be about to fall apart (Waddell, 2002). For some infant’s persecutory feelings at being left to suffer their hunger alone can lead to pseudo independence, a denial of their desperate need, and I wonder if Arlia turned to the egg as if to make a statement, ‘you won’t feed me so I will feed myself.’

Arlia sought proximity to Aziah whenever she could, and frequently tried to communicate her desire to be close to her. Two weeks after observing her egg-sucking, (2/4/2), it looked as though Arlia had been accepted by the group of girls that included Aziah. I noted that; *‘she was laughing with her friends,’* (2/6/1). The four of them seemed engaged in a fantasy of being chased by something. Arlia appropriated her participation in the group to connect physically with Aziah by reaching out to hold her hand but her attempt to hold on to Aziah was not reciprocated

*She gets close to Aziah, …, she tries to hold her hand, but Aziah says ‘NO!’ very firmly. Arlia looks disheartened but then returns to running about. (2/6/1)*

A little later Arlia directed her attention towards more creative processes, playing with magnets and a shape game. Both offered opportunities to explore the notion of connection. She spent time making a magnet sandwich which she offered to Aziah:

*She seems to be investigating the shapes, pins, and the hammer. Sometimes removing the shapes on the board sometimes putting them back. After a while, she drops the hammer on the table and walks across to another table with a magnet activity. There are large, colourful, wand magnets, tin lids as well as smaller round magnets. Using two lids and some paper clips and magnets she creates a magnetic sandwich which she takes to Aziah, but Aziah ignores it, maybe unsure of what Arlia is giving her. This feels rejecting, Arlia seems to want to connect with Aziah but her attempts are not reciprocated. Arlia runs to the magnet table and drops the sandwich there before running off towards the climbing frame and slide. (2/6/2)*

I have attributed Arlia’s sometimes chaotic flitting and running about from one activity to another, as a necessary activity for Arlia to dissipate emotionally charged energy being held within her body. In the previous vignette, Aziah’s resistance to Arlia’s wish to hold hands was the antithesis of being held or connected with, and it seemed notable that in this instance she expressed her desire for connection with Aziah by creating a magnetic sandwich. It appeared to be a creative attempt to share something of her desire for a closer connection.

I understood the magnet sandwich to represent a creative attempt at exploring how the different and varied shapes connected without any visible connection. Perhaps the simplest interpretation of her interest in offering Aziah a magnetic sandwich is the desire to share something with her, a friendly attempt to give her something she has created specifically for Aziah. However, I also wonder if her attraction to the magnetic shapes, in the light of what has been explored above, is more nuanced. The magnet sandwich seems to offer a notion of Arlia’s efforts to find ways of connecting with Aziah. Magnets have an adhesive quality and Arlia’s communication suggested a desire not simply to connect but to adhere, a skin-to-skin contact, as in the mouth and nipple of the early infant experience.

I find myself wondering what it was about this particular girl that invited Arlia’s identification with her. My impression of Aziah was the opposite of Arlia, for example in appearance, she is slim and petite with long hair and she wears a style of dress adopted by many in her Asian culture, lots of silky fabrics, gold braiding, sequins, and sparkly jewels. Aziah is desired as a friend by other girls and is seen favourably by the adults in the setting. Whereas Arlia was chunkier, had short hair that she had voiced she wanted to grow so she could have a ponytail, and wore very practical western clothes.

Aziah also had many socially desirable attributes that Arlia may have been interested in acquiring, however, she seemed limited in her capacity to introject these qualities and integrate them into her persona. I wondered if Arlia’s clinging or adhering to Aziah offered a defence ‘against inadequate or dysfunctional skin boundary functioning,’ (Turp, 2012, p.66) so that a functioning sense of self is furnished (Turp, 2012).

In explaining this more fully Bion posits that adhesive identification usually occurred at a point when the processes of projection and identification are intended to contribute to the containing process fails (Bion, 1962, in Waddell, 2002). When Arlia is consistently rejected there is no sense of connection, leaving her with little or no sense of an inner world, ‘a world where experiences of the self and other might be engaged with and found meaningful’ (Waddell, 2002, p.58). Adhesive identification with Aziah may also have been another way of holding fragmented parts of self together (Shuttleworth, 1989), important for Arlia when there seemed limited opportunities to identify and introject a good object from her environment, discussed further in the following sections.

In this section, I have tried to convey the notion that Arlia’s relationship with Aziah is one of trying to maintain proximity with her, rather than a sense of companionship and a shared experience. The former reflects a primitive form of connection, one that lacks the experience of a meeting of minds (TF, p.98) where Arlia might benefit from being able to see herself reflected in Aziah’s mind. It makes me wonder what the experience felt like for Arlia in the light of her need to experience connection.

### 6.5.3: Seeking connection

Interactions with other children in the setting often related to Arlia trying to hold on to something she wanted, for example, a bike or the swing and a toy such as the duck where the physical objects evoked a possessive response. Arlia’s desire to connect with Aziah by trying to hold on to her was often unreciprocated and their relationship continued, through the observational series, to experience setbacks.

Arlia’s wish to connect was also expressed by trying to be the same as Aziah, noted in the following vignette when the small group of girls are engaged in an activity at the drawing table.

*As well as having the same paper, Arlia also chooses the same crayon as Aziah, seeming to follow Aziah's leading and mark-making, suggesting she is wanting to do the same as Aziah. Suddenly Arlia wants a black crayon but can't find one, she becomes very whiney but it seems there is no black. Whining is a very infantile response when one’s desires are not met, perhaps the black crayon represents something for Arlia that she feels is missing and does not know how to get it.* (2/10/3).

Aziah had the black pen and my interpretation of Arlia’s whining, in the vignette above, was that it signified her desire to be the same as Aziah, a wish that was not being satisfied, perhaps this was a bridge between speech communication and a physical dissipation of the energy usually satisfied by running around.

For much of the time, Arlia seemed to seek a connection with Aziah from a needy position, placing Aziah in control. However, in week 13 the following vignette placed Arlia in a position of control because she has something Aziah wants. Arlia seemed to be playing a harmless teasing game but her intentions have a sadistic aspect to them:

*Aziah approaches up the hill and Arlia tells her ‘I’m on the swing, you can’t get on.’ Aziah replies, ‘you’ve been a long time, I want a turn,’ she sounds whiney and looks a bit sulky. A game begins now, instigated by Arlia who shouts to Aziah as she begins to walk away, but as Aziah turns around to return Arlia laughs and says, ‘no it’s my turn,’ and laughs. Aziah walks further down the hill this time and Arlia chases after calling her name, but when Aziah turns around Arlia runs back to the swing. Aziah returns to the swing area and Arlia offers to share the swing with her but they don’t seem to be able to synchronise (2/13/3).*

Arlia’s efforts to connect with Aziah had at times been unsuccessful and I felt she had been left feeling vulnerable and ill-equipped to make sense of it all. This vignette suggests that she is revelling in a feeling of being the one in control, however, two weeks later she seemed to relinquish her control of the swing to join with Aziah and Easha in a game.

*Aziah and Easha are balancing on a bench, pretending to be wobbling and shouting for help. The bench forms part of a square around a tree* (figure 6.10)*. At first, Arlia ignores them and goes on the swing, but she looks towards the other two who seem to be having a lot of fun, laughing and giggling as they balance and almost fall over.* *Arlia stands up as if to join them but then someone approaches as if to go on the swing and Arlia quickly returns to it and says, ‘it’s my turn.’ When Arlia doesn’t feel threatened by anyone close to the swing she joins Easha and Aziah balancing on the bench. They stand on one leg and put the other up behind them, Arlia does the same, she seems to be enjoying this game, sometimes she puts her hands down on the bench and one foot up in the air. (2.15.2)*

There is a sense here, for me, of a shared experience between the two girls, perhaps a notion of danger and threat of some disaster, a fantasy they share. The attraction to be part of the shared fantasy seemed to become important enough for Arlia to leave the swing, moving from a solitary activity to a group experience where she has the opportunity to experience the connection she desires. I wonder if Arlia realised that it was important for her to belong, to be part of a group and this feels like a positive development, a recognition that she valued these two girls more than being in control of the swing.

Figure 6.10: The swing and the bench around the tree

A picture containing tree, ground, outdoor, grass

Description automatically generated

Later in the same observation there seemed to be another opportunity to see evidence of a shift in this important relationship.

*Arlia picks up a thick red pen and makes a mark on her paper. Aziah says she wants red but Arlia refuses. Aziah looks in the boxes for another red pen, she finds a pen with a red top and Arlia says ‘that’s a red pen’, but when she takes the top off it is blue, she looks disappointed. Arlia laughs as Aziah looks for another red pen, each pen she picks up, regardless of colour, Arlia says ‘that’s a red pen.’ Aziah laughs with Arlia and there seems to be some meaningful exchange going on between them as they repeat the scenario. (2/15/5)*

Arlia didn’t seem so needy, she was less adhesive and more connected, they seem to meet at a deeper level, recognising each other as individuals. My initial thought was that Arlia could stand up for herself, she could laugh in the face of disappointment, but later I wondered if there was also something about their shared disappointment. This seems to me to be a very special quality, she reframed Aziah’s disappointment and made it something to laugh about. This relationship seems no longer about adhesion but about shared experiences, a meeting of minds (TF, p.171).

Reflecting on Arlia’s experience I am aware of my view that a reality of life and relationships is that they are not fair all the time, but they are still worthwhile pursuing. Experiences such Arlia’s ‘test the capacity of the personality to hold new experience with its inevitable pain and uncertainty, and to grow from it.’ (Harris, 1978, pp. 167-8, in Shuttleworth, 1989, p.37). This developing capacity reminds me of the Kleinian concept of the moderation of the paranoid-schizoid (TF, p.85) mindset towards a depressive position where there is a possibility of accepting reality. This seemed to be a maturational step for Arlia.

A picture containing text, indoor, floor

Description automatically generatedFigure 6.11 The outdoor drawing area

Bion’s idea that ‘thinking is a development forced on the psyche by the pressures of thoughts…’ (Bion, 1962, p.111) suggests that the frustration of her attempts to connect with Aziah became tolerable enough to press her to develop a mental framework to manage those frustrations.

### 6.5.4: Summary of theme 2

Arlia’s journey towards a more authentic connection with Aziah was painful to witness. Her strategies seemed unsuccessful in achieving her aims, creating more frustration and misunderstandings. Nevertheless, Arlia was not deterred and perhaps the experiences of trying to make sense of her experiences led to an increasing level of tolerance and a willingness to shift away from a desire to control to a more realistic perception of her own need to forgo some things to belong to the group which included Aziah.

At this point in the analysis, I sense that I have witnessed growth in Arlia, a development that had taken place in the face of her apparent limited capacity at times to make sense of her experience. However, the progression towards managing feelings, learning to tolerate frustration and transforming it into thinking, feels to be not yet fully developed and vulnerable to external events. Theme 3 considers the emerging sense I have of the negative perceptions towards Arlia of the staff in the setting.

## 6.6: Theme 3: Being seen.

Being seen ‘… is the sounding board against which [the child] can try out his personality. [The adult] is the one who holds the mirror so [the child] can see himself as he is … The therapist-teacher is alert to recognise the feelings the child is expressing and reflects those feelings to the child in such a manner that the child gains insight into his behaviour.’ (Axline, 1989: 136,140, in Greenhalgh, 1994, p.121)

Arlia’s face showed a capacity for expressing her emotions. There were times when I saw her face light up, for example when Reema had taken her by the hand and they had walked around together. I noted on that day her face was open and smiling, clearly communicating that she was enjoying that moment (2/1/1). On another occasion her visceral excitement at being propelled ‘*as if unattached to the bike’* made me want to laugh at her obvious delight (2/5/2).

She could show annoyance too as I had observed when she was playing with two boys in a sand tray when she growled, matching her aural sounds to her facial expression (2/9/10). However, there were times when she seemed to have a fixed facial expression, and these were usually occasions when she was being reprimanded by an adult. My observations recorded these occasions when I noticed that her face had no expression, or that it was blank while at the same time often experiencing a blank mind myself. It made me wonder how she was internalising the responses she had evoked in the adults reprimanding her (Sapountzis, 2018).

In psychoanalysis facial expression is linked to seeing and feeling seen (Beebe, 2004). Winnicott (1965, TF, p.112) suggested that when an infant looks at the m/other’s face s/he saw a reflection of himself, making the experience one of finding a sense of meaning for oneself (Beebe, 2004). With this in mind it seemed significant that at these moments of reprimand, which were often instances of being misjudged, Arlia did not engage facially with the adult.

Beebe (2004) presented several different views on what this might mean as communication of internal processes. For example, as well as communication, facial expression can offer a means of self-regulation, intensifying or inhibiting emotional experience (Tomkins, 1962, in Beebe, 2004).

Facial expression is a two-way communication (Winnicott, 1965) and Arlia’s blank face and staring away from the adult may present confusing messages to the adult, perhaps confirming their assumptions about Arlia. Remaining silent may have been misunderstood for acquiescence and an admission of wrongdoing whereas it might have been another of her strategies for managing her painful feelings at being misunderstood. In the same way, Arlia’s perception of the communication conveyed through the adult’s facial expression will be as a mirror through which she sees herself (TF, p.112).

In Observation 2/7/3 (A, p.251), Arlia gave no outward sign of her emotions following being reprimanded for taking the duck away from another child. However, I wonder if she saw herself in the SA’s eyes as something unacceptable and if her identification with a witch, possibly a cultural representation of a bad object, was a symbolic representation of what she saw in the adult face.

### 6.6.1: Being seen as the bad object

The analysis has raised concern that some of Arlia’s experience with adults in the setting has led to her being identified as the likely cause of disruption in the educational space (e.g., 2/4/1). She seemed to be the one who had snatched something away from someone else, the one who is reprimanded for something she may not have instigated (e.g.,2/5/2, 2/7/3). Staff assumptions have led to Arlia feeling painfully misunderstood (Mayes, 2018) which in turn has left her feeling confused.

Arlia’s experience of the educational space often seemed to be one where the adults focus on her behaviour without consideration of her internal experience. I felt there was a danger of her interpreting her experiences not as a rejection of her behaviour but of herself (Sapountzis 2018). Bion (1962) suggested that problematic children are perceived through their acts, with the observer losing sight of them. Seeing children as their anti-social behaviour results in them being perceived as ‘bad objects’ (TF, p.90) which poses questions for the children about who they are. The question may be unvoiced and exist at an unconscious level but will feel very real for them, ‘If this adult thinks I am bad then maybe I am’. A frightening notion when a connection is so important.

The next section considers an incident when Arlia was told to remain separate from three girls because of an incident that had occurred before my arrival that day.

### 6.6.2: Protecting others from Arlia

My observation in week 4 began with me feeling cold and disappointed that Arlia was playing outside. The pre-observation reflections noted that on arrival I had a sense of disconnect with her and a lack of curiosity about what I might observe that day. Reflecting on the observation my feelings seemed synchronistic with Arlia’s internal state noted in her behaviour, I sensed a feeling of disconnect between herself and the other children as well as the staff.

I first saw Arlia as she tried to cycle against gravity, peddling to get up a slope, but the bike was a heavy two-seater and she kept sliding backwards, she eventually gave up and abandoned the bike. As she moved towards the door, I had the impression that the support assistant did not seem pleased with her wanting to go inside when she had only been kitted up in wet weather gear for a brief time. Arlia generally enjoyed being outside, my sense on this occasion was that outdoor play may not have been her choice, but that she had been told to go outside as a result of some incident. It must have taken some time for Arlia to put on the weather-proof clothing, probably needing some assistance from an adult, and now she faced taking it all off. The vignette captures something of Arlia’s mood.

*Arlia walked towards the door, she seemed weighed down and moved quite slowly, I wasn’t sure if she might change her mind and turn around to return to the bikes. But she didn’t and as she entered the door the SA inside was supervising the putting on and taking off of the outdoor clothing. As Arlia entered the SA did not seem pleased to see her, again expressing her annoyance about Arlia wanting to be inside when she had only just gone outside. She told Alia she would have to take the outdoor clothes off herself, she had put them on herself so she could take them off herself. (2/4/1)*

Already feeling weighed down and unwelcome Arlia seemed abandoned to struggle with removing outdoor clothing on her own. I had a notion here that the SA was presenting Arlia with a sense of her being a bad object, and as such did not deserve to be cared for and supported in removing her outdoor clothing. The thought occurred to me that there was an intention for Arlia to ‘learn’ that her behaviour was unacceptable, she was a bad object, and therefore left to take care of herself.

Arlia removed her wet weather clothing by herself, not expecting any help. Then she hung her coat up, trying to fit it on the peg with her umbrella and as she turned towards the play area the SA gave her a warning not to play with three named girls: Aziah, Easha and Farhana. The girls’ names occur regularly in the observations and have already appeared in this analysis. I had a feeling from all staff members that something had happened earlier, and they were all cross with Arlia about it. I presumed it related to the children that she was told not to play with. At that moment, my feelings were blank, and I noticed I didn't know what to feel. Arlia's face seemed blank too, I wondered if she was feeling the same. I sensed Arlia felt alone, abandoned to manage her undressing, and her feelings.

I wondered what Arlia could have done to provoke this harsh treatment. During the observational series, I had noticed attempts by Arlia to interact with other children were interpreted as malicious on the part of adults. However, from my perspective, these were missteps in a relational dance as I think the following incident shows.

An example occurred a week later when Arlia was in the quiet area with thick coloured Perspex jigsaw pieces on a lighted table. A boy is there, and she picked her nose while watching him. Initially, she seemed helpful in finding some pieces for him off the floor. The boy appeared very appreciative, but a few minutes later Arlia seemed to think the boy was breaking the jigsaw up and she did the same while dropping the pieces on the floor. The boy was upset and reported the incident to the SA who reprimanded Arlia, whose face was expressionless, as the vignette of the incident shows:

… *the SA warns Arlia that she will be cross if she finds that Arlia has dropped jigsaw pieces on the floor. Arlia has no expression on her face when she is reprimanded, her face is very still but she stares intently. I had been witness to the events before this incident and it had struck me that Arlia was attempting to find a way of connecting with the boy, though she eventually upset him enough to report her to the SA. The member of staff had immediately assumed that Arlia was in the wrong, however, she also responded based on the assumption the boy was right. I wonder if there is a sense of powerlessness in these situations, she can’t seem to do the right thing as she is admonished to do.* *(2/5/2)*

Her first response to managing her feelings seemed to be to enter a switched-off state, removing herself from the painful situation in the only way available to her. However, returning to the task to help the boy complete his pattern she was in a very subdued mood, quite different to the lively interest she had shown earlier. I find one possible explanation of this shift in her mood in Winnicott’s (1960,1971) concept of the false self, that inclination to be compliant by taking on the demands of someone else to please them, rather than finding enjoyment in an activity chosen for personal satisfaction (Bibby, 2018). Winnicott (1960, 1971) argued that compliance meant death for creativity and I wondered if Arlia’s low mood may be due to a loss of creative energy.

Having held herself together to manage this incident her second response came a little later when she resorted to physical movement as if the feelings had become too difficult to be held internally and needed physical expression.

*She moves away and runs towards the door, … (2/5/2).*

*Outside she heads for the bikes* (Figure 6.12)*, choosing to sit on one that has a second seat out to the side rather than behind. I have not seen one like this before. The girl peddling is smaller and lighter in stature than Arlia but somehow can propel the bike and manoeuvre it around the area. I have some sense of being aware of* ***Arlia being weaker than she looks.*** *(2/5/2)*

I have made the last six words of the vignette bold because it occurs to me that her robust appearance may belie her vulnerable inner self, making adults think she is tough and a threat to other children. However, the delight she expressed seemed to relieve some of the emotions she had been defending against after being misunderstood.

Figure 6.12: Bike area

A picture containing trash

Description automatically generated

Arlia seemed to be continuously struggling with being misunderstood when what she was seeking was to feel connected. The impact of being misunderstood was profoundly unsettling for her I think, Sapountzis (2018) explained that without someone who can understand and make sense of underlying feelings, moderation of the experience will be ineffective (p. 189). Arlia seemed to have a limited model of thinking to handle these social issues for herself (Shuttleworth, 1989) and the adults in the educational space had difficulty envisaging Arlia’s experience, missing an opportunity to respond to her distress thoughtfully.

### 6.6.3: Summary of theme 3

By not appreciating the complexities underlying behaviour the staff lost opportunities for fostering trust and contributing to help her make links between her behaviour and its consequences. With no one to act as caretaker with the capacity to contain her feelings and help her to make sense of them Arlia is left to rely on her limited resources.

## 6.7 :Theme 4: Toward a more integrated experience

Despite the downfalls Arlia faced she seemed to have some good-enough experiences to propel her development forward towards a more integrated experience. However, she appeared to lose momentum towards the end of term, around the time of ‘transition’ bringing with it the knowledge that she would not be placed in the same class as her friendship group in the coming year.

I begin by considering the developmental changes I observed suggestive of a more integrative experience I had observed through the observational series and then, in the following section, I link these with her drawings during this time.

### 6.7.1: Development of symbolism

Arlia’s reliance on sensory rather than symbolic to organise her thinking was illustrated, I think, in the difficulties she had in grasping numerical concepts presented by a SA in observation 2/14/3.

*… The SA offers a tin of jewels and tells the two children to take as many as they want. The children are very excited and compete with each other to take as many as they can. She tries to say they have enough, but they continue to grab handfuls of the sparkly objects.*

*The children are more interested in looking at the jewels than listening to what the SA wants them to do with them. She is trying to set up a counting activity. She asks them to find 5 jewels, but they don’t seem to understand. So, she asks them if they have five jewels, the boy says yes, and Arlia looks at him and says yes.*

*I am not sure the children understand what is being asked. Do they know the question refers to the number five? Are they aware of what five is and because they have so many there are obviously five there? She asks them if they have five or more than five and the boy replies yes and Arlia, still looking at the boy says yes. She asks them to put the jewels in a line and count five. The children spend a lot of time trying to line up the jewels, there are a lot of them. In the end she tries to stop them and take some away. The children look confused. She asks Arlia to count five, Arlia goes on to thirteen and then gets a bit muddled so the SA shows her how to do it, but she counts right to left not left to right. Arlia copies her. We seem to have lost sight of five at the moment.*

*When the children count I notice they want to count the jewels that are all the same colour and don’t want to include certain colours, different for each of them. This doesn’t fit with the plan the SA has in her head and she finds it difficult to accommodate. It occurs to me that the children are in a completely different place in relation to the task than the SA and where she expects them to be.*

The children were asked to make a row of five but having chosen many more than five the notion of limiting the line to just five seemed difficult for them. In trying to remedy the situation the SA tries to take some of the jewels away, to reduce the number they are dealing with. However, this resulted in the children looking confused.

The concept of ‘five’ apparently had little relevance for Arlia or the boy, since both organised the jewels in a way that seemed to hold particular relevance to them. Arlia’s organisation of the jewels seemed to focus on the concept of colour, and this may have distracted her from what had been asked by the SA. I wonder if the colour red had some significance for her, I have noticed that red plays a significant role in Arlia’s culture, particularly in the festivities and weddings. Perhaps it was this association that took her attention, a reminder perhaps that associations and connections that children make may follow their own trajectory of affect and thought rather than the one planned by the teacher.

Arlia had seemed to rely heavily on managing her feelings through sensory and somatic representation early in the observational series. However, symbolic representations of her anxieties gradually emerged in her play I observed her use of small figures to externalise her thoughts, discussed above. Halfway through the observational series there was another incident where Arlia was presumed by support staff to be in the wrong, but this time she seemed to attempt a graphic representation of her feelings.

*Arlia returns to her paper but I notice her scribbling becomes far more intense and now all over the paper. I wonder if this is a way of dissipating angry energy. Is this the beginning of symbolism? A visual representation of what she is feeling inside. Replacing the need for manic racing about? (2/10/4)*

I saw this graphic representation as a progression in her thinking, an indication of development in her mental mechanisms moving away from dissipating energy by racing around to a more abstract form of representation to manage her feelings of frustration (TF. P.107). Through the observations I had a sense of Arlia’s experience in the educational space as less fragmented, the incidents of eating grit or dust were not observed, perhaps suggesting the need was diminishing.

One lovely vignette demonstrated something, I think, of her more integrated experience:

*Arlia begins singing as she paints, it is a simple song where she repeats the word painting over and over again. She sounds very happy and is obviously enjoying painting. She uses different strokes on her paper, sometimes up and down and sometimes wavy and occasionally she goes off the paper. She licks the paintbrush and then licks paint off her arm. Her whole body is engaged with the task, she is totally focused and engaged. (2/14/2)*

Although oral satisfaction continued to be enjoyed it seemed less uncomfortable, her experience seemed less fragmented, paint was licked suggesting a more pleasurable experience than eating grit and dirt. Had something shifted, become more tolerable maybe? I wondered if these experiences made Arlia’s interactions with Aziah, Fahanna and Easha less difficult too (2/13/3, 2/15/3).

Figure 6.13: Painting area, scene of Arlia’s singing and painting vignette above

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### 6.7.2: Development in/through relationship

Aziah seemed to offer just enough encouragement for Arlia that she was willing to be friendly. and I wonder if these incidents encouraged her persistence to keep trying even through the many rejections she received. Arlia’s face seemed to open up when she felt connected and one of those occasions is recorded here.

*In the final observation of this half term I observed a change in her behaviour, after an initial rebuff from Aziah, Arlia seemed to be included in the group of three girls, the leader of this group, Aziah, finally taking notice of her, willing to hold hands and enjoy running around the outdoor space. Arlia’s face seems very open and her enjoyment of this experience is obvious though I sense in myself some apprehension about her unsteadiness, while Aziah is surer footed and seems to have a better? sense of herself in the space than Arlia. (2/6/2).*

In this observation I was witnessing, I think, something of the grounding effect the more surefooted Aziah was able to offer Arlia which emerged later in her drawings. Although conflict with Aziah, Fahanna, and Easha, continued there were occasions such as this that provided her with an opportunity to feel included, no longer a complete outsider. I referred previously that Arlia seemed to find a sense of belonging in a group, willing to let go of a safe place where she was in control, for example on the swing, and become a participant (Winnicott, 1971). Choosing to be one of a small group, rather than an exclusive dyad with Aziah, is an aspect of oedipal development and a modification of the paranoid-schizoid mindset which seeks to possess a prized object (TF, p.89). Through her friends Arlia can be found, meeting her deepest desire, and she finds that by relinquishing control of Aziah she gained more than she lost.

### 6.7.3: Separation

The school offered several opportunities for nursery children to visit the reception unit in the main school to become familiar with their new surroundings in preparation for September. These visits had occurred on days when I had not been there. In week 17 I had altered my usual visit because the whole school had been involved in a transition event when everyone visited their new class and teacher on my usual day. Arlia would have found herself visiting the classroom with the peers she would be with and, I discovered, later they did not include Aziah, Easha, and Fahanna.

On my arrival the day after the whole school transitional event I was told she was visiting reception again and I made my way there. In the following vignette, I began my observation trying to locate Arlia in her new setting.

*When I turned my attention to Arlia I found her wandering aimlessly, without expression on her face. Her hair was held back from her forehead and she had smudged red lipstick. I also thought she had put on weight, she looked much fatter than when I saw her last week. She seemed lost and reminded me of the child I had observed initially in the early months of this year. (2/17/1)*

The lipstick seemed to add an inappropriate adult aspect to her face, almost as if someone is suggesting she is ready for the next stage in her education. The nature of her ‘lostness’ reminded me of her need for connection to organise her thinking, seen early in the observational series (2/1/1).

Perhaps reflecting on an internal sense of the forthcoming separation from Aziah she seemed to find some satisfaction in the Velcro strips on a counting activity.

*She stands at a table with a laminated fish pond on it, fishes attached by Velcro and a small square of artificial turf, another girl was sat at the table, ... Arlia asked her if she could take the fishes off the pond while tugging one, the girl said no just as Arlia pulled the fish off its Velcro strip. She then proceeded to pull all the fish off and stick them back on again. (2/17/1)*

Arlia seemed to have a strong desire to pull a laminated fish off the pond, giving a satisfying sound of ripping the Velcro strips. I wonder if this pulling is associated in some way with her feeling that, in September, she will be pulled away from Aziah. Arlia’s sense of loss over Aziah emerged again in an incident a little later

*There is a dressing table with a mirror on and some hair styling tools nearby. Arlia looks at them carefully. The girl wanders towards her and Arlia tells her to sit down, saying something else that I think refers to Arlia wanting to do her hair. The girl says no and resists Arlia’s attempts to sit her on the chair. Arlia says, ‘you’re not my friend, Aziah is my friend, do you know her?’ The girl shakes her head and reluctantly sits down. Arlia tries to brush the ponytail but the girl tries to resist, Arlia persists but then the NSA* (Nursery Support Assistant) *lets her* *know it is time to return to the Nursery. (2/17/2)*

Her comment about Aziah seemed to emphasise that her friend Aziah was missing.

On returning to the nursery after the visit I expected Arlia to seek out Aziah immediately, but this did not happen:

*As we walk through the door into the Nursery play area Arlia runs off, her face expressionless. It looks like she is looking for someone. The first person she connects with is Easha, who takes her hand and leads Arlia around the outdoor setting, Arlia’s face continues to be expressionless. I am surprised that Arlia didn’t look for Aziah. Easha seems to have taken control leading Arlia around the whole area, she seems to be trailing a little behind Easha almost like a child holding her mother’s hand being led reluctantly, but there is no attempt to escape. I wonder if she needs to feel led? They go up to the wooden house* (figure 6.12)*, there is a very young boy in there, he looks apprehensive as they approach, Arlia refers to him as a baby girl, Easha, authoritatively says he is a baby boy, what do you think? Arlia changes her answer to include a boy. She lets go of Arlia’s hand at that point and leans on the window, looking inside, Arlia joins her. (2/17/2)*

She seemed to appreciate a familiar face and an opportunity to return to a more childlike way of being, guided around the familiar setting. Her energy seemed depleted, and she yielded without protest to Easha taking control. The young boy seemed to arouse a sense for Arlia of the his apprehension at being approached by two comparatively much older children, perhaps projecting some of her feelings of vulnerability into him when she referred to him as a baby girl. Later she tried to pick up a younger girl (some younger children were visiting in preparation for their starting in the nursery in September), perhaps another representation of her identification with a younger self, needing to be picked up and held.

A picture containing tree, outdoor, ground, grass

Description automatically generatedFigure 6.13: The wooden house

As I reflect now on Arlia not seeking out Aziah I wonder if she was avoiding her feelings at the sense of loss she was experiencing with the realisation that she would be separated from Aziah in September. Perhaps Easha represented Aziah but offered a slight distance and perhaps a less painful experience.

Where I had noticed a positive shift in her bearing and attitude up to this point in the observational series there now seemed to be a regression which alarmed me, I became concerned that the transition was proving difficult for her to manage.

Arlia’s drawings provided a useful additional insight into what was happening for her and the following section examines these.

### 6.7.4: Arlia’s Drawings

The study was intended to include drawings in the hope of supporting the observational data and answering the research questions. I have included the drawings here, as part of Theme 4 ‘Towards a more integrated experience’ because they contribute to the overall narrative of my observations of her journey towards integration. I found them particularly useful in understanding Arlia’s emotional experience of transition.

Zago (2008) examined drawings of children in art therapy ‘as the ‘first’ window through which to begin to gain insight into a young person’s internalised ways of having been seen, received and held,’ (2018, p.315). I am not an art therapist, and my first window is the observational data, however, when looking at the drawings by Arlia they seemed to offer a second window into her experience in the nursery.

The protocol for doing the drawings was outlined in the methodology; the teacher in the nursery sat with Arlia in the indoor part of the nursery and asked her to draw herself in Nursery. This was the instruction given on each occasion, Arlia did two drawings on the second occasion, making four drawings in all. Individually they might seem to be of little significance, however, when placed in order Arlia’s initial limited awareness of herself in the setting seemed to resolve before returning to a more developmentally immature state as transition and its implications for her relationship with Aziah became an unavoidable issue.



Figure 1. Week 2 January 11th January 2019

Arlia’s first picture, drawn between my first and second visits, presents a very simple depiction of a head and face with three unconnected squiggles on the right-hand side. There were the key features of the face, with hair and a few disconnected scribbles. No apparent arms or legs. When asked what she was doing in the nursery she said nothing.

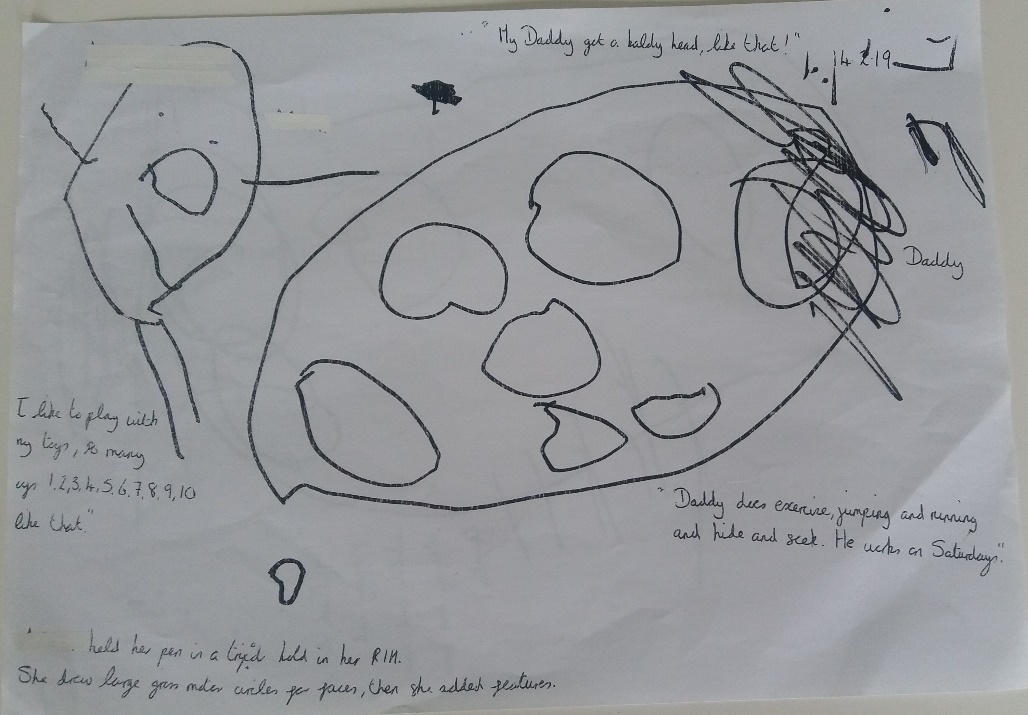


Fig.2a 4th February 2019 Week 5

The second drawing shows a comparatively simple figure of Arlia, and as well as facial features there are arms and legs. Arlia is positioned in the top left-hand corner of an A4 sheet of paper, alongside a large confusing blob, her Dad, with little definition or facial features. The picture is annotated by Miss P with her comments about what she has drawn.

*I like to play with my toys, so many toys 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10 like that.*

*My Daddy get a baldy head, like that!*

*Daddy does exercise, jumping and running and hide and seek. He works on Saturdays.*



Fig 2b 4th February 2019 Week 5

On the reverse of the paper, Arlia wanted to draw her Mum (Fig. 2b). In this figure it is just possible to make out facial features, there are some additional marks at the edge of the outline and a scribble at the top, disconnected from the main object. The figure almost filled the paper and she commented:

*My Mum do jumping and skating and some clapping and some tricycles.*

It is interesting to wonder why Arlia included both of her parents in these drawings about the nursery. In the light of the observational data, intuitively I surmise there may be a growing awareness of the differentiation between the two biggest influences in her life. Issues around difference, finding one’s place within the parental dyad, relating to the wider group of family and then the outside world are all expected in the oedipal phase of development. It is interesting to note that both parents are drawn and understood as physically active, this surprised me since neither presented as physically active individuals.

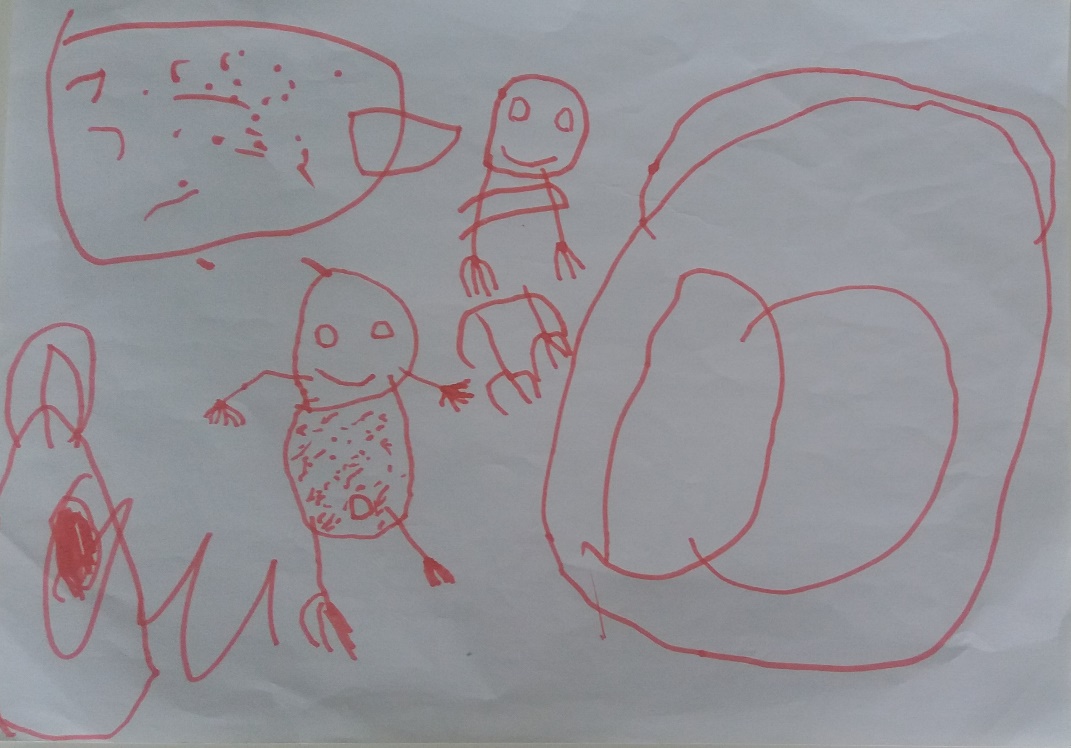


Fig. 3. 21st May 2019 Week 15

Figure 3 depicts Arlia and Aziah in the nursery, the three larger images represented things in the nursery, they were visualised and symbolised by space bounded by lines, a clear developmental step forward, particularly in terms of her connection with her environment. The two figures represent Arlia and Aziah who was the more complete figure. In conversation she announced to the teacher that ‘Aziah love me,’ a projection, I surmise, of her need to feel loved by another as well as a projection of her strong feelings towards Aziah who she wanted to see as a friend. Arlia has a head, body and arms, legs and feet seem to be floating underneath. Her face has clear features of eyes and mouth, but she lacks a nose and hair suggesting there is still a sense of Arlia’s fragmented self, drawn seemingly split in the middle. Nevertheless, I felt this drawing to be speaking of a more organised experience in the educational space which she seemed able to frame because she has a relational context. Rather like her relationship with Reema which organised her thinking so she was able to locate her coat.

Arlia pictured Aziah in Figure 3, as a whole person, almost central in the nursery and herself close by as if giving a context to the rest of the nursery that she can almost map out. This was the first time she had responded with spatial awareness to the suggestion that she draws herself in the nursery and it seemed significant that she said, ‘*Aziah love me,’* reflecting the dynamic and relational aspects of the educational space.

Although there are signs of fragmentation in each of her drawings, Figure 3 offered a picture of self within an environment that included both physical objects and a relational one. However, although there is some obvious disconnect within herself, she can define Aziah without having to feel she has to hold onto her, there seems to be less of a need for adhesive identification. Also, she can hold more than one object in her mind at once, an important progression in the oedipal phase, which is about moving beyond the dyad (TF, p.94) .

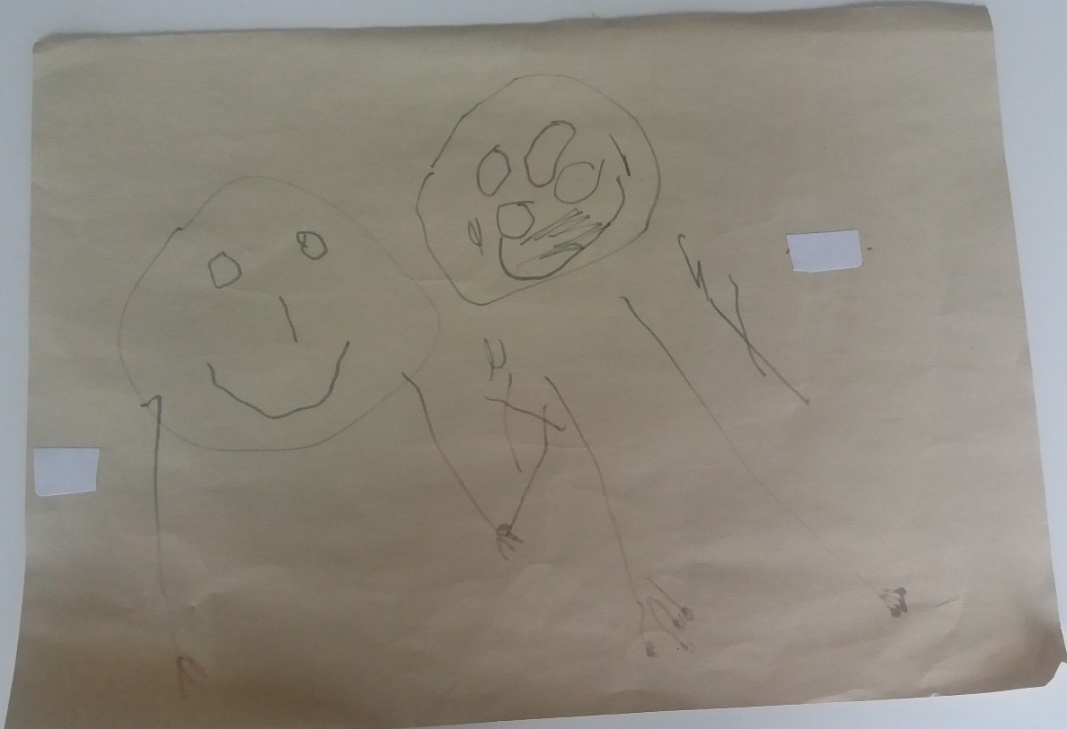


Fig. 4 Week 18. 9/07/2019

Finally, Figure 4 caused me great concern when I saw it on my final visit because I felt depicted something of Arlia’s response to the new knowledge that she will be moving into Reception class in September, but without Aziah. My sense of the reason underpinning this decision by staff was that Arlia was a disruptive influence on the group of three girls that Aziah was one of. Although I am aware of the difficulties that grouping children may create, I had strong feelings that Arlia had not been ‘seen’ or recognised for her whole self, but the self that had been projected onto her. The significance of her relationship with Aziah, and the implications for her development, had gone unnoticed

The two girls in this final drawing are holding hands but much of the detail noted in the previous drawing is missing. Neither girl is depicted as a whole and there is no connection to the educational space. Arlia’s face on the right is not a clear depiction of a face, the four circles could represent two eyes, a nose, and a mouth, however, there is no organisation of them into clearly defined features. There is a curved line indicative of a smile, however, it looks as if it has been scribbled over. The head and the body are disconnected but there are clear indications of feet and toes. These are also featured in the previous drawing but seem more detailed here. What appears to be arms are also disconnected and other marks are difficult to identify. The drawing offers a sense of fragmentation, a regressive step to an earlier time seen in figure 2a.

Despite being very petite and much smaller than Arlia, Aziah’s importance is reflected in a larger head and clearly defined features, she lacks legs, but her arms and hands are more important to Arlia because this is how Arlia feels connected to her. I am reminded of how Arlia connected with Reema in the first observation, by holding her hand, a physical connection seemed to offer a more somatic experience than being held in mind. Arlia may also not want Aziah to have legs because she does not want her to run off and become separated, resisting the inevitable separation of their transition to the reception unit in September when they will be in separate classrooms.

This final drawing felt like a regression, although she is holding Aziah’s hand, the depictions are generally less well-formed and Arlia has an odd facial portrayal. I had been concerned about aspects of her behaviour when I had observed her in a transitional visit to the Reception Unit she will move into in September. I had learned that Arlia was to be placed in a classroom without Aziah or the other two group members that she had eventually seemed to connect with. I was concerned about this and I wonder if the latest picture is of her hanging on to Aziah’s hand, suggesting she is aware that she will lose her in September. The lack of any other objects in the drawing indicated that she is once again struggling to hold more than one thing in her mind, her progression through the oedipal phase seems to have been halted.

### 6.7.5: The final observation

Arlia had been absent for three of the planned observations and I had missed two, this meant that Arlia’s final observation was number 18. This observation was far more hopeful than I had anticipated from her final drawing. I noted a very playful interaction with Aziah:

*She lifts her top up and places her hand on her tummy, stroking it. Then she turns around shows the girls her tummy laughing as she does so. Aziah rushes forward and tickles her until she turns away and pulls her t-shirt down, but a moment later Arlia repeats revealing her tummy and the girls take it in turns to tickle her tummy. (2/18/2)*

The playfulness got out of hand as another child, Zarah, I hadn’t noticed previously joined in the game and is hurt, however, Arlia and Aziah seem to recognise this and Arlia tries to clarify the situation.

*Arlia says, ‘pushing hurt, yeh?’ And Zarah nods. ‘You don’t want me to push you?’ Zarah shakes her head. ‘If you hurt you cry?’ And Zarah nods her head (2/18/2)*

Arlia verbalised clearly what she had experienced and how their play had had unwanted repercussions, she seemed to be able to make sense both for herself and Zarah of what had happened. This seemed to be an enormous step in Arlia’s social development and I find it interesting that it occurs while she is playing with Aziah. The desire for exclusivity with Aziah seemed to have been reduced and Zarah was included in the dyadic relationship.

*… the NT is stood watching out of my view and she tells Zarah to stop, reminding her about kind hands and feet. I am even more amazed when Zarah stops for a moment and then goes to push Arlia again. The NT steps forward and says, in a very quiet and patient voice, that Zarah can’t stay there if she is going to do that. She takes Z’s hand and walks her away. (2/18/2)*

Interestingly when Miss P. (Nursery Teacher) intervenes and they both take Zarah’s side when she is reprimanded and led away.

*Arlia and AM sit on the settee together and are commenting on what happened. I assume they are disgruntled with Zarah, maybe even blaming her for the trouble they were in. But they were actually feeling sorry for her, upset that she had been taken away! I feel very surprised and find it hard to understand. The two of them decide after a few minutes to go and find her, they search the indoor area and then head outside. (2/18/2)*

The two set off to find her and the three then offer a united front against a boy disrupting the children playing on bikes.

I had noted earlier that Arlia had difficulty waiting (p.248) but in the following vignette there is a change in her response which seems to be facilitated by a SA. Arlia wants the small bike Zarah is riding but is told by a SA to wait her turn. However, when the waiting gets difficult the SA responds with understanding.

*She tilts the timer away from her and then brings it back, the SA notices and kneels down beside her to explain that the sand will move more quickly if she has the timer upright and demonstrates this. Arlia holds the timer more upright now.* *(2/18/3)*

Her wait was rewarded and coincidently she became aware of Aziah who is sitting with an unhappy Zarah at having given up the bike. Arlia responded empathically.

*Arlia gets back on the bike and scoots over to Zarah who is sat on a little wall with Aziah looking a bit glum. Arlia asks ‘you want little one?’ Zarah nods and Arlia gets off the bike and hands it to Zarah, finding a large bike for herself. She sets off peddling. (2/18/3)*

This observation seemed to suggest two important developments for Arlia. Firstly, her relationship with Aziah had the capacity to include another child and secondly an adult who has taken time to appreciate her difficulty in waiting her turn also appeared to have extended her capacity to understand the feelings of Zarah. These two experiences together suggest that Arlia may have experienced the satisfaction of one who has been found.

### 6.7.6: The ending

The planned ending was very disappointing. I arranged twice to meet mum and Arlia for a thank you and goodbye to create a sense of completion, for myself, Arlia, mum and the Nursery staff. Both times mum didn’t bring Arlia in. I was informed that the family was planning a trip to Mecca and that it could be she was busy and that Arlia may not even return to the nursery for the end of term. My main concerns were for Arlia as it seemed there would be no sense of completion for her both in terms of our observational relationship and her time in the nursery. Especially concerning was the thought that she would carry this inadequate ending through the long school holiday and into the coming new school year, alone.

### 6.7.7: Summary of theme 4

The observational series offered an opportunity to notice slight changes in Arlia’s developmental trajectory. She had negotiated through some difficult moments in her relationship with Aziah, seemingly taking encouragement from the occasions that Aziah was accepting of her and included her within the group. My concerns about Arlia, as a result of observing the transitional process of visiting the Reception unit and seeing her final drawing, added more significance to our ending.

Gradually Arlia was able to find other ways of expressing her internal frustrations and anxieties, moving on from running around and eating grit to becoming more expressive symbolically, perhaps even directing her frustration through a crayon onto paper. Something I feel was important because she left a mark, the beginning of graphic recording that can be reflected on later, the paper held her feelings at that moment. Later stories poems and drawings can be returned to and reflected upon, offering opportunities for reflection and greater self-awareness.

Arlia’s experience of the preparations for her transition seemed to have a regressive impact, however, the final observation offered hope that her relationship with Aziah was an ongoing influence increasing her engagement with other children. There was evidence also that adult support at a difficult time facilitated a capacity for empathy for another child.

The following section considers the influence of my role as observer and witness of her experience of the educational space.

## 6.8: Theme 5: Seeing Arlia: The observer as witness

Before beginning the observational process, I had concerns about not wanting to intrude too much in Arlia’s space, however, the role of the observer in psychoanalytic research is important, serving an important purpose; that of providing a felt effect of being seen. I had no idea when I began the observations of the importance of being seen for Arlia and what this might mean for her at that time. I understand more clearly now what Winnicott meant about the importance of being seen in the experience of holding (1965, 1971). As an observer, I offered an opportunity for Arlia to see herself and thereby facilitate developing thought processes (Zago, 2008).

Reflective box: 6.5

Although I intended to offer a benign presence I noted in my write up of the observations that there were times I tended to see things from a teacher’s perspective, finding reason’s why an adult might behave in certain ways even though they did not help understand Arlia’s experience.

For example, after watching Miss P. offer various suggestions of ways Arlia could solve a dilemma, Arlia turned away from the activity and I noted:

*I feel a bit annoyed that Arlia has not followed through on using the string when the NT has made a special effort to find some for her. (2/3/2)*

I found myself conflicted by viewing what I was seeing from a teacher’s perspective rather than from Arlia’s. Recognising these perspectives through supervision guarded against a substantial bias.

On reflection, I wonder if by witnessing her experiences I became a container of her pain (Handa, 2017) when she felt misunderstood or rejected by both staff and peers. Over time Arlia seemed to moderate her need for physical strategies to manage her emotions to move from the somatic felt experience towards a symbolic mode of expression and I hope my observing gaze had offered an opportunity to develop this creative capacity.

However, on several occasions I arrived at the setting and had difficulty locating her, perhaps reflecting a thread underlying the observational series, her sense of being lost and a desire to be found.

### 6.8.1: Locating Arlia

Arlia’s experience of feeling disconnected was, I think, reflected in my difficulties at times in locating Arlia on arrival in the setting which happened frequently in the beginning. Initially, I felt no emotional connection with her and even after six weeks of observations I noted:

*As I go outside, I ask another SA if she has seen Arlia and she points her out sat next to the NT who has pointed out to her that she has her shoes on the wrong feet. I realise I had been aware of this conversation as I had walked inside. I had walked past Arlia without recognising her. I wonder what I had been expecting to see and why I missed seeing her? (2/6/1)*

Being unable to locate her in the environment was very concerning for me, so much so that when I did find her easily, as in week 13, I noted my feelings of relief at doing so. Difficulties in locating Arlia were discussed in supervision where we wondered together about how she was seeing herself. Since it is understood in psychoanalytic theory that a sense of me and not me arises from being recognised by another as a separate being (Abram, 1996, 2007) it seemed relevant to consider how Arlia was being seen. Over the series of observations my ‘seeing’ her recognised her as ‘not me,’ and in turn for Arlia there was an opportunity to feel the ‘me’ that was being observed, without judgement.

In three early observations of Arlia (2/1/2, 2/3/1, 2/4/3) Arlia’s interactions in a mirror seemed to suggest a curiosity about herself. In what seemed very private moments, she seemed to pay close attention to her reflection in a mirror while washing her hands. I noted she considered her reflection in a mirror carefully, experimenting with different poses and changing her facial expression, seemingly oblivious to my presence. On occasion she created some scary images in the mirror as if trying out different presentations of herself as the following vignette illustrates:

*Arlia goes into the low toilet sinks, she is rubbing the paint into her hands and watching through a mirror. A couple of times she sticks her tongue out and looks at it in the mirror, pulling scary faces and making claws with her hands. She glances towards me as if she has only just remembered I am observing her. However, she continues making faces in the mirror before she tries to wash the paint off her hands. (2/1/2)*

I had the impression of someone trying to work out not only what she looked like but who she was. I wonder if this attention to her reflection arose as a result of her being seen by me. There was no sign of embarrassment and the images she was projecting did not seem inhibited. Three weeks later a similar event occurred:

*In the toilets she stands in front of the mirror and pulls faces at herself, flapping her hands. She does this for a few minutes and keeps her eyes on the mirror even when she is washing her hands. (2/4/2)*

Arlia’s gaze was fixed on the mirror as if she was afraid that in losing visual contact she would also disappear. I wonder what her experience of being held in mind was, when she wasn’t seen where did she go? There was something profoundly uncomfortable for me to think of a child being lost, unfound, I didn’t want her to think that she wasn’t important to me.

On one occasion when I had located her easily, I noticed that this was also the first occasion where she seemed curious about me.

*Suddenly she looks up and says, ‘the swing,’ and scrambles up to run towards the swing. She asks me who I am, and I say Lynn. She says, ‘no not your name,’ and I understand she knows me as Mrs. Stammers so I give her the name she knows me by. She nods and says ‘that’s it.’ Aziah has joined Arlia at the swing, she says ‘what do you do?’ I reply that I am doing quiet watching. Aziah is smiling at me and asks ‘why?’ I touch my lips with my finger and say ‘sh, I am watching,’ Arlia is swinging and watching me intently. (2/11/1)*

I find the coincidence of my ability to locate Arlia and her curiosity to question me suggestive of the notion that we had made a connection, however, this is a tentative idea since a week later, in Week 12, I had difficulty locating her in the environment again. However, in the next section, I examine indications that our connection was strengthening as she began to see more of me.

### 6.8.2: Being seen by Arlia

For some time Arlia showed little interest in me, other children might ask me who I was and what I was doing but it was not until week 13 that Arlia asked the question for herself; ‘what do you do here?’ (2/13/1). When I replied, ‘I am doing quiet work,’ she responded with ‘yes, you do quiet work.’ Later she asked me if I would like to do a variety of things that I had observed her doing, on the swing, on the bikes, in the mud, etc. and each time I shook my head until finally, she said,

‘*You want to stand there?’ (2/13/2)*

Arlia seemed to accept my action of ‘standing there’ and on reflection, I wonder if she had established I was a benign presence, different from other adults she had encountered and free from the pressures of compliance (Winnicott, 1971, Abram, 1996, 2007). I had held her in my gaze, giving her my full attention for the observational hour, demanding nothing in return. Winnicott (1971) suggested that this holding gaze was a necessary aspect of the facilitating environment, contributing to the maturational development of a more integrative experience between body and mind.

### 6.8.3: Transference and countertransference

An assumption of the theoretical framework lies in the value of the unconscious processes of transference and countertransference. Recording my emotional responses and discussing them in supervision offered an opportunity to discern what were my feelings and what were Arlia’s being communicated through the process of transference. Sometimes my feelings became a conduit to Arlia and helped me focus my attention on what was happening for her at these times, enabling me to get a sense of her inner world (Elfer, 2018). An example was not being able to locate Arlia when I arrived at the beginning of an observational hour alerted me to a sense that she was waiting to be found, examined in the previous section.

A meaningful aspect of my experiences as a benign observer in this setting were the times when I felt a sense of disconnection both with the general environment and more specifically with Arlia. My sensitivity as a benign observer hopefully served as a container to receive those transferences.

I had arrived in week 17 to find that Arlia was visiting her new setting in Reception in preparation for the transition in September. Unexpectedly finding myself in my previous workplace setting created a high level of anxiety for me and at times it was difficult to determine what uncomfortable feelings were mine and which were hers. I was concerned that the newfound confidence I had observed in the nursery setting had been lost and felt anxious about her future. I recorded my feelings about Arlia’s transition experience on this visit in my Supervision notes of the 4th July 2019:

*My concern was that Arlia had regressed, totally expressionless, wandering apparently aimlessly, much as she had when I had begun my observations. I was also concerned at hearing that Arlia will be in a class without any of her friends in September.’*

In our supervision discussion, it came to light that my level of anxiety had been provoked by being in the place I had worked in previously. I had not anticipated revisiting it in my visits to observe Arlia and it occurred unexpectedly. On this occasion I had no opportunity to prepare myself. In Supervision I began to question how much my concerns and anxiety were related to my experience and how much could be attributed to Arlia.

The content of this difficult supervision session is presented in this vignette from my notes.

*T (my supervisor) pointed out the complexity of this situation where identifying which feelings are Arlia’s and which are mine presents obvious difficulties. On reflection I am not sure how much I was aware of the transference taking place until Tony mentioned it. It felt as if a light went on, I was a little surprised that I had been blind to this until he raised it.*

*T pointed out that the visit had produced some positive aspects of Arlia’s development; meeting and talking to another child; she managed to undo the scarf; I wondered if her efforts to bring D to the group waiting to return to Nursery were part of her response wanting to return or was she being helpful? My feelings had been ones of wanting to escape, were they shared by Arlia?*

I had struggled to see anything positive in Arlia’s experience that day but perhaps my apprehension about Arlia’s transition to the reception unit was being informed by my experience in that setting. I had wondered if Arlia’s attempt to bring a child to the door ready for returning to Nursery could have been because she was wanting to return there. But in discussion with my supervisor I began to understand that might have been my wish. I began to see the events from another perspective, how my feelings could be misinterpreted for Arlia’s. It seemed that my anxieties about returning to a setting where I had been unhappy and frustrated such a short time ago could be clouding my perceptions.

In our discussion I reflected that Tony had often pointed out that learning is hard and that what I seemed to pick up on in this observation was the hardness rather than the opportunity that the situation presented to Arlia, to grow and learn from the experience. I reflected that maybe I was so bedded in my own experience I couldn’t separate my experience from hers.

Nevertheless, there may well have been some transference at work and my sensitivities to the setting may also have contributed to my susceptibility to Arlia’s felt experience. I had grown to know her reasonably well through this lengthy observational process and the longitudinal nature of the study offered additional resources to provide insight into her experience. I think that Arlia’s drawings were also useful in this respect.

### 6.8.4: Summary

This section considered how my role as a benign observer may have offered Arlia an opportunity to be seen and to witness her struggles to make sense of her relational environment. I suggest that this may have been a developmental experience of which there may not have been enough when she was an infant and that offered an organising capacity for her chaotic thinking.

Examining this theme of ‘seeing Arlia’ there has been an opportunity for recognition of my internal conflicts and how they might have influenced the analysis of the data. I reflected upon the usefulness of the process of having another mind to reflect with.

## 6.9: Overall summary

In reflecting on the analysis, I think it revealed Arlia as a child often misunderstood. I felt concerned for the implications this perspective held for her sense of self, however, having a silent and benign witness in the observer, appeared to have provided an opportunity to be seen and held in that gaze. The observational series exposed a precarious journey with many twists and turns of emotion, witnessed and felt by me as a silent observer.

Arlia’s attempts at reaching out to connect with others sometimes proved unsuccessful, for example when she was rebuffed by Aziah. However, the desire to be found had fed a robust pursuit on her part, she braved many rejections, determined to find some sort of connection with Aziah and eventually also gained proximity with Fahanna and Easha. Arlia’s difficulties in being accepted by others revealed an internal imperative for connection and relationship with others and this impetus carried her on. The final observation revealed another connection relationship with Zainab seemingly emerging from her relationship with Aziah.

She was often perceived as being a threat to other children by adults in the setting. There has been evidence presented in this analysis of Arlia being cast as a bad object, rejected by her peers, and judged unsympathetically by the adult members of staff. This perspective seemed to influence the decision to separate Arlia from the three girls who had contributed to her emotional development in the next stage of her formal education.

Elfer’s studies (e.g., 2010, 2017, 2018) aimed to capture the voices of young children who are unable, perhaps for reasons of development, to speak for themselves. Arlia was one such child and I feel it has been important to both witness and voice her lived experience in the hope that others might notice what she had to say.

Arlia’s analysis was informed using my observations and her drawings of herself in the nursery, alongside my feelings recorded as part of the observational experience and continually reflected upon. Although over the time of the observational series there was a sense that Arlia was developing an increasing capacity for thought and symbolic representation, it was noticeable that preparations for her transition to reception in September appeared to stretch her internal resources to capacity.

# Chapter 7

## Discussion

## 7.1: Introduction and explanation of what is to come.

This study arose out of my interest in the contribution children’s emotions make to their learning in the classroom. I came to the study curious about how emotions contribute to a child’s capacity to engage with educational spaces and to understand something of children’s lived experience.

The literature review underlined the importance of examining children’s lived experiences in their educational settings, suggesting that children’s views are underrepresented. The research project was conceived to examine in depth the lived experience of two children in two different settings, with a methodology intended to capture the nuances of their behaviour to better understand the dynamic relationship between inner and outer worlds.

Rather than testing a hypothesis, the analysis looked for correspondences between the observational accounts, reflections, supervision notes, and the children’s drawings. The results are discussed in the light of a process of abduction which found associations in the data with psychoanalytic concepts and theories,

In this chapter, I intend to offer detailed insights into the primary research question by answering secondary research questions that are aspects of the whole. Each one will form a subheading in which I will reflect on the insight gained from the analysis of my observations. The supporting questions can be referred to in Table 4.1 (p.140).

The primary research question (PRQ) was: How do emotions contribute to a child’s capacity to engage with educational spaces?

The PRQ is supported by several secondary questions and the discussion is structured around these. However, the interlinking of the ideas being presented means that there is some overlap between the discussion of each question.

**Note:** A reminder thatthe set of three numbers e.g., 1/3/2 refer to Case study 1, week 3, page 2. Where I have referred to points examined in the analysis, if it seemed helpful to the reader to refer back, I have included the page number where it can be found, e.g., A, p. 234.

### 7.1.1: What can be appreciated about the role of emotions in a child’s experience of educational spaces?

In the literature review, the idea was presented that learning is a result of complex interactions where emotions can disrupt cognitive processing (Volet, 1997, p.39). This idea was developed further with the notion that emotions are central to the very cognitive processes essential to learning. Emotions link experiences through the associations that emerge from experience and are then utilised in learning (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007). Damasio (1999) made a significant contribution in the field of neuroscience to our understanding of this idea. However, research studies and reports argued that there was little flexibility within the NC to take account of aspects of learning other than cognition (e.g., Price, 2002, Alexander, 2009, Sapountzis, 2018, Harris et al. 2020). The emphasis on the results of academic tests was further argued to disregard the relational and emotional aspects of learning, thereby marginalising children’s experience of education and limiting the expression of their individuality (e.g., Winter 2017) (See section 2.4 for more explicit discussion).

The purpose of this question: What can be appreciated about the role of emotions in a child’s experience of educational spaces? was to note the emotional content of the children’s experience and the role it played in their experience of the educational space. The literature review highlighted the need to capture children’s perspectives of their experience of the educational space and the importance of giving them a voice (Dewey, 1933, Salmon, 1995, Alexander, 2009, Garner, 2010). The methodology was intended to examine the children’s relationships with each other, their teachers, their play, and their drawings. All are components of children’s experience in early years education used previously in research into their experiences (Harrison, Clarke, Ungerer, 2007, Gripton and Vincent, 2021).

After examining the data, collected over seven months using the TOM, a key observation was that children’s thoughts and feelings are evident throughout all their activities. The nuances of the children’s behaviour were like signposts, alerting me to something important occurring in their psychic world, particularly their preoccupation with frustrations and internal conflicts.

Arlia’s experience revealed something about the nature of our need for a connection with others and how some children may resort to unusual behaviour to manage their distress when their attempts to make desired connections fail. Arlia’s grit eating behaviour seemed bizarre to me initially, its emotional underpinnings were difficult to fathom, and careful consideration of contextual factors supported the nature and extent that emotions might inform our understanding of inexplicable behaviour. An example was Arlia’s failed game of hide and seek with Reema (2/1/1, A, p.245) which seemed to provoke this apparently odd behaviour, later it made sense in the light of Winnicott’s (1971) suggestion that there was nothing quite as distressing as failing to be found.

Arlia’s desire to be found led her to pursue Aziah in search of a connection but she suffered many rejections by her before a satisfactory link could be made. However, Arlia’s frustration at her failed attempts to make this connection seemed to provoke her to find a more creative approach. For example, on one occasion when Aziah had been very clear in her resistance to Arlia’s desire to hold her hand, the offering of a magnetic sandwich seemed to be a creative response (2/6/2, A, p.268). The sandwich seemed to be a metaphor for her desire for a close to skin to skin contact and although sticking together may seem a limited experience of a relationship, all thought must begin somewhere. Arlia’s frustration provoked her to think about ways of expressing her desire, which Bion (TF, p.103) would understand as an increasing capacity for thinking.

Arlia’s efforts to find a connection with Aziah were played out through persistent overtures on her part, over time it seemed as if these experiences led to a shift away from a desire to be close to Aziah in a physical sense towards a more companionable one. In observation 2/15/5 (A, p.274) Arlia demonstrated humour in her growing capacity to manage frustration when both she and Aziah wanted the same red crayon. While trying to locate another red crayon they make a game out of the crayons having tops on that do not represent the colour underneath. It occurs to me that this is yet another creative solution to resolve a possible point of conflict offering an opportunity, instead, to promote a sense of companionship. I think this was an important observation because it shifted my perception of Arlia as vulnerable and unable to make satisfactory connections, towards a more optimistic view that she was able to eventually find the resources she needed to get what she wanted. I began to understand that her desire for connection held a potential to facilitate her development, propelling her forwards and extending her capacity for thinking and symbolism. This notion of the potential of frustration for creativity is at the heart of Bion’s theory of thinking (TF, p.107) and echoed in Winnicott’s notion that although the environment doesn’t create the child it holds the opportunity to facilitate their inherited potential (TF, p.111).

Tina’s experiences were also significant in her navigation of the educational space. In her relationship with Bee, Tina sometimes appreciated her kind intentions while at other times found they were unwelcomed, for example, when Bee had organised the furniture in the home corner to impress Tina only for Tina seeming to respond ungratefully (1/4/1).

The relational dance they created together had some emotionally intense shared moments, for instance their shared phantasy play in the water tray (1/2/2, A, p.173), while at others she seemed to leave Bee outside of a game she shared with another girl, Billie, who had not appeared significant in Tina’s relationships prior to this point (1/17/1, A, p.204). Conflicts like these offered both Tina and Arlia opportunities for managing their emerging sense of self in relation to others, as well as their frustrations with and tolerance of the feelings of others. This is suggested to be another step toward integrating their physical and emotional self with the wider world (Mayes, 2009).

The study revealed something about the nature of play as emotional work, a space where children can seek to resolve their internal conflicts (Winnicott, 1971) and challenges the notion that play is just a brief respite from ‘real’ work of learning. There is a sense that an education space that features opportunities for play also offers the prospect for a child to explore and work through their emotional preoccupations, framing play as a developmental opportunity (Greenhough, 1994). This notion is discussed further in section 7.1.5.

### 7.1.2: How does our understanding of the role of emotions in a child’s experience of educational spaces aid an appreciation of the complexity of the learning process?

The literature review raised concerns that the nature of the current pedagogy, with its emphasis on achievement, neglects the complexity of children’s learning (e.g., Salmon, 1995, Visser, 2003, Geddes, 2006, Bomber, 2007, Wright, 2010, Ramvi, 2010, Maclure, Jones, Holmes, and Macrae, 2012, Ubha and Cahill, 2014, Kourkoutas,Stavrou and Plexousakis, 2018). The notion that emotion contributed to the complexity of learning was also introduced and supported by neuroscientific research. For example, Damasio (1999), and Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007), were identified as significant contributors to the idea that emotion act as a rudder to guide thinking, rather than the converse. It seemed germane, therefore, to seek to understand how children’s emotions might contribute to their experience of the educational space in order to understand their role in the complex process of learning.

Tina and Arlia had preoccupations that influenced their engagement with the environment that required the children’s attention, time, and space for them to find their way to some sort of resolution. Tina’s difficulties in managing her anger and sense of loss at her displacement in the family seemed to occupy both her time and energy and occupied her attention as she sought to resolve her ambivalent feelings. Generally, these feelings are not amenable to reasoning, and assurances that a child is still loved may not be received since the roots of the loss are in the inner world (Klein, 1936, 1937). The contribution of early infant/m/other relationships particularly the sense of loss that infants may feel at the loss of the breast or bottle during weaning may underlie responses to later losses (TF, p.96). What is needed are opportunities to assimilate reality in a satisfactory way, something that Tina seemed able to do through play. Tina’s experience draws our attention to the importance of considering that children may have preoccupations with issues at home that may influence their emotional capacity to manage levels of focus and concentration on teacher-led tasks. These preoccupations may lead to distractions when they are in a learning situation (Mayes, 2009), suggesting that identifying children as needing to focus or concentrate in order to learn subject matter may actually be because they are focusing on resolving internal conflict.

Tina was managing other issues too, some of which were vague and veiled due to the protection offered at this stage of her development, such as the nature of sexuality, her parents’ procreative activities, pregnancy, questions about gender differences, the altered relationship with her mother and her role as a sister. These universal questions bring with them emotional pressure and come together under the psychoanalytic umbrella of the Oedipal Conflict (TF, pp.62, 83) and they require working through as part of her development, integrating her new status into what she has known in the past. Tina’s play saw the emergence of various symbolic forms and role play indicating that she seemed occupiedin trying to make sense of her new familial role.

Looked at from a developmental perspective Tina seemed to have a strong sense of agency, initiating an exploratory process to conceptualise who she was through her play and in her use of symbolism (Blatt, Auerbach, Levy, 1997). Initially the princess dress (1/1/3, A, p.169) seemed to serve as a personification of Tina’s wish fulfilment to return to her familial role as an only child. Klein (TF, p.89) had noted that play offered an opportunity for children to work through their anxieties by using toys and dolls that were associated in some way to their internal conflicts. It seemed that for Tina, the time and space offered by play, using toys etc. with their associated symbolic representation, facilitated working through her internal conflicts. Her capacity for symbolisation suggested a capacity to organise internal experience in the sense making process and is a significant contribution to developing new thoughts and ideas (Greenhalgh, 1994, Bibby, 2011). It is this facility that seems to differentiate the experiences of Tina and Arlia. Although I witnessed some evidence of the use of symbolism in Arlia’s play it was considerably less sophisticated than Tina’s and this was true of her thinking which also seemed to be less organised.

The notion that children’s capacity to manage new concepts and ideas is subject to their capacity to use symbolisation might offer some explanation as to why some may not be ready to understand curriculum constructs of literacy and numeracy at a young age (Greenhalgh, 1994, Bibby, 2011). This may go some way to explain Arlia’s difficulties in grasping numerical concepts presented by a SA in 2/14/3 (A, p.284). In that instance Arlia and a boy were asked to organise some jewels they had been allowed help themselves to. The children were asked to make a row of five but having chosen many more than five the notion of limiting the line to just five seemed difficult for them. In trying to remedy the situation the SA tries to take some of the jewels away, to reduce the number they are dealing with. However, this resulted in the children looking confused. I suggested in the analysis that Arlia’s interest in the red jewels provided an emotional connection for her organisation of the jewels distracted her from the task. This emotional correspondence took precedence over the symbolic function of the numerical value of the number ‘five.’ Perhaps the notion of the link between associations and emotions might inform teachers to enhance children’s understanding (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007).

Both Tina and Arlia seemed to be deeply engaged with preoccupations that held an internal imperative to resolve and they may help us to understand why some children’s focus and attention on what is presented by the teacher may be disrupted. This seemed to add a level of complexity to their capacity for thinking about things that held no emotional context for them. While it is certainly necessary for educationalists to consider cognitive aspects of learning it might be helpful to appreciate a more holistic perspective (Mayes, 2009).

The link I am trying to make is that there are dispositions of mind that are influenced by past experiences and remain influential in the here and now (Klein, 1946, Lichtenberg, 2013) and this seems to be further evidenced in children’s responses to transitions which occur frequently in the educational space. If emotions influence children’s experience from moment to moment, day to day, at best their emotional state can facilitate the teacher’s teaching, at worst it can undermine it. It seems concurrent then that each child’s pace in this organic process will be individual and require sufficient space and time to satisfy emotional constraints. This challenges the notion that teacher’s do not need to be aware of emotional aspects of children’s experience and suggests that facilitating children’s learning depends on the teacher’s capacity to be aware of the complexity of children’s emotions.

I am not suggesting that children’s internal processes here can be fully understood but advocating for a more reflexive and adaptive approach to teaching and learning. By being aware that emotional preoccupations add a layer of complexity to their capacity for digesting curriculum topics allows for the possibility that some children may not be ready to absorb new ideas. New ideas need minds that are receptive to different ways of seeing things, and opportunities to work through emotional conflicts in play contributes to their capacity to do this (Greenhalgh, 1994, Mayes, 2009).

### 7.1.3: What contribution do adults make in supporting children’s capacity to manage experiences of the education setting?

The literature review referred to the quality of the pupil-teacher relationship as a predictor of school adjustment (Harrison, Clarke, Ungerer, 2007; Pianta and Harbers 1991, Pianta, Nimetz, and Bennett, 1997) and academic achievement (Yang and Lamb, 2014). The psychoanalytic framework, on which this study is based, offers one possible explanation for this association since it places all learning as contingent on a dynamic relationship and its contribution to the emotional atmosphere of the educational space (Mayes, 2009). Children internalise teachers’ perceptions of them, both positive and negative, which in turn shapes their experience of the educational space (Sapountzis, 2018).

The sense of belonging to someone who has a sense of our needs is a forerunner to identification with them, an opportunity for an introjection of their admired qualities. (Bibby, 2011). Looking at Tina’s relationship with Miss G., Tina seemed to feel connected to her seeking her out, often skipping toward her which may suggest a sense of belonging not just in the educational space but to Miss G (1/10/6, A, p.213). Miss G. provided Tina with a positive contribution to her ego-self, essentially placing Tina in a position to see herself in the teacher’s eyes, as a good student who can master the skills for learning. This in turn led to self-identification with qualities that were admired in her teacher and seemed to influence Tina’s sense of herself as a learner. Tina’s gradual mastery of literacy skills also contributed to this sense of herself as someone who was capable of learning new things, emotionally invested and curious. This attitude to learning was carried over into her play as she devised tickets, posters, and songs for phantasised productions, demonstrating that learning is not just about acquiring knowledge, how that knowledge is attained is also significant if it is to alter perceptions of the world (Rustin, 2019).

There were other examples of Miss G’s sensitivity, for example in Tina’s struggle to grasp basic literacy ideas the bite size pieces that were offered to Tina enabled her to manage the small steps towards completing a task herself and thereby feeling a sense of achievement (1/6/1, A, p.212). This careful, measured handling gave Tina much more than a sense of achievement, by avoiding any judgement that she wasn’t getting it right Miss G instead conveyed that she saw her difficulties and was able to manage them.

Miss G’s supportive relationship with Tina may have been an important factor as she struggled to manage her preoccupations, particularly the desire to feel special. Miss G conveyed an interest in Tina’s life experiences in a very personal way, for example I observed the teacher kneel to Tina’s eye level so they could share together the joy of the forthcoming wedding celebration between her parents (1/9/1, A, p.215). Positive experiences such as Tina’s, cultivate what Klein (A, p.88) referred as epistemophilic curiosity, a desire to know what the person one admires knows (Bibby, 2011). In turn Tina demonstrated that she was interested in classroom activities which she recognised as important to her teacher, such as reading, drawing, and writing.

From a psychoanalytic view Miss G offered a mirror so that Tina could see herself through her eyes and added an additional layer to her sense of self, a self that is created by identifications with those individuals that children feel connected to (TF, p.112: Bibby, 2011). Tina’s case study may help us understand the need to create opportunities for communication at a deeper level, where eye contact, a gentle understanding manner, soft voice and even an appropriate touch, create an emotionally accepting atmosphere demonstrating that children are valued.

Klein posited that being able to identify with other people allows us to ‘put ourselves in the place of other people,’ (1937, p.311), something there was less evidence of in Arlia’s play than in Tina’s. Tina seemed to identify with significant female figures for example her mother, Miss G, and the fictional character of the White Queen. Miss G.’s view of Tina as a learner seemed to enrich her experience of the educational space and was very different to that of Arlia who struggled to identify with her teachers, or maybe it was their perception of her as a bad object that prevented staff to identifying with her? (TF, p.90)

Arlia’s experience of being seen by staff as a bad object had important implications for Arlia’s engagement with the educational space. Arlia seemed to be blamed for disruptions that occurred and while I can appreciate and identify with a sense that it is important for staff to be fair to all the children, in their efforts to improve behaviour and/or academic performance educational professionals may overlook the painful emotions children are struggling to manage (Sapountzis, 2018). Some of the issues emerging from Arlia’s observations related specifically to adult perceptions of her behaviour when they are based on a partial understanding of situations that arise between children. The loss of the duck was one such emotionally charged experience as I witnessed Arlia’s painful loss of an object she had shown an emotional investment in (TF, 96: A, p.182). An adult who could understand something of Arlia’s experience would be able to support her as she tried to make sense of and manage her overwhelming feelings. By recognising her difficulties Arlia might find a way to make a connection between her feelings and her actions.

There was one occasion I observed, Arlia receiving support for her efforts to manage her frustration when waiting for her turn on a bike (2/18/3). The SA had noticed subtle behaviour with the large egg-timer Arlia was holding waiting for the sand to run out when her turn would come up. She explained that the sand would flow quicker if it was held upright and Arlia seemed to focus then on following this instruction. The intervention seemed to restore a connection between Arlia’s body and her feelings as she grasped that her actions were delaying the thing she wanted.

Arlia’s behaviour may have been frustrating for the teachers to manage, however, Bion’s (1962) theory of containment offers a useful perspective to understand how an adult might support Arlia’s sense making of the experience. Bion’s theory of thinking suggests that a teacher can offer an important psychological process of engagement by accepting children’s distressing feelings by trying to make some sense out of them (TF, p. 104: A, p. 258). The process initiates the child’s own sense-making of their often-confusing feelings by receiving the adult’s verbalisation of something that was previously unknown. It is this meeting of minds that allows for a sense of being understood, a source of connection that I think Arlia was desiring. Bibby (2011) suggested that experiences such as this are opportunities for intellectual and emotional growth. My reflection of how adults can provide a containing experience for children can be found in the appendix 5 (Reflection 2).

However, in my experience although teachers generally want to contribute to children’s wellbeing, there is no frame available for contemplating how children react ‘to the difficulties they experienced and how they internalized the responses they evoked in their teachers and peers.’ (Sapountzis, 2018, p.187).

Recognising the challenge facing staff in supporting all children demands a working practice where staff are also able to share their feelings in a safe, containing space that allows the possibility of reframing one’s perceptions of some children, facilitating ‘a shift in perspective that can help [Arlia] experience herself and the gaze of others’ (Mayes, 2009, p.193, my insertion).

#### 7.1.4.1 Transference and countertransference

An assumption of the theoretical framework, examined in chapter 3, lies in the value of the unconscious processes of transference and countertransference. Recording my emotional responses and discussing them in supervision offered an opportunity to discern what were my feelings and what were Arlia’s that were being communicated through the process of transference. Sometimes my feelings became a conduit to Arlia and helped me focus my attention on what was happening for her at these times, enabling me to get a sense of her inner world (Elfer, 2018).

The concepts of transference and countertransference, embody the unconscious and are understood to be powerful phenomena occurring between individual’s outside of conscious awareness (Mayes, 2009). Data collection and analysis included reflections around the notion that my felt experience had important implications for developing an added depth to understanding the children’s emotional experience of their educational space (Rustin, 2019).

Although I cannot make any assumptions about the content of transferential matters relating to the staff, the psychoanalytic theory of transference is of a global phenomenon, an aspect of human experience. With these thoughts in mind, I am aware there may be incidents in staff lives, perhaps related to loss and blame, that underpin their responses and lead to their own resistance to showing empathic understanding towards children who present with what is perceived as antisocial behaviour like that seen in Arlia (Greenhalgh, 1994, Mayes, 2009).

Nevertheless, my experience as an observer drew my attention to the importance of considering how our responses can provide insight into children’s experience. An example of the unconscious communication between Arlia and myself was initiated by my sense of not being able to locate her at the beginning of my observations (e.g., 2/6/1, discussed on p.306). My anxiety alerted me not only to my own concerns that she was lost to me but also that her experience in the educational space was one of being lost to adult views of her as a whole person, often only noticed when she did something ‘bad’. It felt imperative that she knew she was important to me, that if no one else saw her at least I did.

At times when Arlia’s feelings were difficult to read, her passive features and robust stature seemed to undermine her vulnerability and the depth of emotion she experienced. These notions came to my awareness when my feelings were aroused, and on occasion they were initiated by something else in the environment. One example was my linking concerns I had about a worm exposed and vulnerable in the mud (2/7/2, A, p.256) and my desire to rescue Arlia from uncomfortable experiences with peers and staff. Being alerted though the process of transference to the feelings Arlia was experiencing offered additional insight into her behaviour and may also have provided a feeling of being seen for her. Such seen experiences offer a mirror, enabling a child to gain insight into their own behaviour and offering the possibility of change (Axline, 1989, p. 136,140, in Greenhalgh, 1994, p.121).

Other observer accounts have noted their experience of being able to provide a sense of containment for infants and young children (e.g., Wilson, 2007, Zago, 2017, Handa, 2017) by offering a sense of being held in mind. I wonder how much the sense of being seen contributed to her developing sense of self, evidenced in her developing use of symbolism, the development seen in her drawings and growing confidence in her relationship with Aziah. These notions raise intriguing questions regarding the nature and extent of the experience for any child being observed.

I felt transference differently in my observational relationship with Tina. In Supervision it was noted that I had a very strong empathic response to the notion that Tina had suffered a loss of place in her family since the birth of her brother. Reflecting on this with my supervisor I began to understand that these feelings were located in my own experience. It was important to identify how my own feelings were influencing my perceptions of Tina’s experience, however, they were also useful in providing insight into the sense I made of her experience through the abductive process of the analysis. The supervision process was essential in helping me keep a balanced view.

Although awareness of transference processes draws our attention to its usefulness for adults in understanding children’s experience in the educational space, there are limitations, it is not a technique that can be embarked on alone. Another mind who can appreciate the content and processes at work is essential in knowing what feelings are relevant and useful. Bion (1962) referred to this support as containment, the other mind will be a person who can reflect on what is being shared without judgement. By ruminating together, the significance of the transference may emerge. This process also offers the benefit of holding the child in mind, allowing other perceptions of their behaviour to be considered and offering the possibility of responding differently (Mayes, 2009).

#### 7.1.4.2 The role of adult characterisations of children

One of the issues that emerged from the findings was that when difficulties arose between Arlia and other children she was usually assumed to have been the initiator of the incident. On one occasion it seemed that staff felt it was important to protect other children from her and she was told to stay away from them (2/4/2, A, p.265). Later the decision was made that Arlia was not to move up to the same reception class as the three girls she sought out to play with, despite what I had observed as a growing connection with them. This seemed to lead to a regressive development in her sense of self reflected in Arlia’s final drawing which showed a split between top and bottom halves of her body and no obvious connection to her environment.

Arlia’s experience revealed something about the nature of the power adults have in shaping children’s lives and has important implications for children’s developing sense of self. Unaware of what is happening for Arlia below the surface she is identified as a problem for other children by the staff and I think this has led to Arlia feeling painfully misunderstood (Mayes, 2018). Perhaps closer observation of her, by staff, might have revealed something of the strong emotions she was struggling to manage and her desire to feel connected to other children. I feel concerned that this characterisation of her as a bad object may follow her through her time in formal education and maybe even beyond.

Bibby (2011) makes the point that teachers’ judgements of children are never neutral, they represent abstract qualities symbolising an idea that will be weighted with inferences for whoever hears them. Tina and Arlia were at a particular developmental point in their lives when they were discovering who they might be, and they looked for answers in their teachers (Bibby, 2011).

Arlia’s response to accusations by staff often brought a blank expression on her face and no verbal defence and I wondered if it was read by staff as an admission of guilt. I also wondered how Arlia had internalised her experiences of being misunderstood and blamed for something she was not responsible for initiating. Sapountzis (2018) suggested that fear of failure and futility can be so great for some children they withdraw in a defensive attempt to distance themselves from being seen by adults as bad objects.

Internalising these experiences of being misunderstood may have prompted Arlia’s fears that others cannot tolerate and make sense of them (Sapountzis, 2018), judging them as ‘bad’. This response leaves children open to repeating behaviours with ever-increasing efforts on the part of educationalists to eliminate the behaviours (Sapountzis, 2018 Thoughtful notions and careful wondering might have felt containing of the confusing feelings experienced by Arlia and helped her feel understood (TF, p.104).

Recalling the powerful influence in my life of characterisations by significant adults early in life and the way they have shaped my perceptions of myself have been recorded in the reflective box (7.1). This personal experience draws our attention to the importance of considering how our perceptions and characterisations can influence lifelong expectations.

Reflective Box 7.1: Recently I have become aware of the way my own life has been influenced by early labelling and characterisation in my family. Each one of my siblings was identified early on by a label signifying a personal characteristic. In a way my own label held positive connotations that influenced my interest in learning, however, on reflection, now I can understand that in accepting this perception of myself I was restricted in such a way that I was limited in seeing myself as anything else. My siblings were labelled differently, and their characterisations held the connotation that I would not be like them. An example might be related to fatness or thinness, lazy or active, whatever the label given to my siblings would be something I was not. So, from an early age the opportunity to be more than my own label was restricted by my internalisation of these characterisations. What I find even more curious is that it is only now, emerging into my late sixties, that I have become aware of these labels and see how they have influenced not only my own life but that of my siblings.

The determining effects of characterisations of children by adults can lead to children seeing themselves through weighted perceptions. Perceptions are mirrored back to children, and they are at risk of seeing themselves in these reflections, powerless to challenge them (Winnicott, 1971). The characterisations I am referring to now are related to what comes to be understood as personality traits. If a child is considered ‘bad’ it risks holding connotations of a personality trait, which may invoke a response to innate ‘badness’, necessitating a corrective response. The child is perceived as ‘bad’ and therefore we need to change the child by changing his/her behaviour. My recent reflection (Reflective Box 7.1) highlighted that we are not only defining what a child is but also what they are NOT, and the inclination to look to adults for a sense of who they are can leave children vulnerable to internalising these expectations that are often too subtle to question.

In attributing a characteristic of ‘bad’ to Arlia she is also being described as not good, what does that mean? Not good enough to be cared for, not good enough to be given time, not good enough to be understood? If she is not good does that mean she is not a good learner or a good listener? There are a multitude of implied characteristics in the concept of bad that are open for Arlia to identify with and internalise and this alerts us to aspects of school culture that emphasise adherence to procedures and protocols placing values on children that have little relation to the experience of the child. Attending to their emotional state first before attending to what they have done may be beneficial for a child’s sense-making of why things go wrong for them (Sapountzis, 2017).

Reflective Box 7.2: Arlia demonstrated a desire to try to work things out, to make sense of what was happening around her and in her relationships with others. Working with children therapeutically there is an expectation that given the time and space they will be able to find their own resolution to whatever issue had brought them to the playroom. Full recognition was given to an appreciation of the process they were in, acknowledging their unspoken desire to understand themselves and their environment. However, what can be problematic for them in this process is understanding the reactions to their behaviour by the adults who care for them.

The case of one young boy comes to mind, Tahir was an August birthday, and in many ways he was very young for his age, all he wanted to do was play. He was good-natured, polite, and socialised well with other children but was not interested in formal learning, consequently he often found himself in trouble for not completing work, being distracted, and not paying attention. Unfortunately, on the occasions when he did find something interesting, he was found to be very astute and to grasp concepts easily and this led to him being labelled lazy and naughty. Every morning when one of his parents left him in the classroom their final words to him were ‘be good’. Every evening the parent or even grandparent would enquire of the teacher if he had ‘been good.’

He was seen as not ‘thinking’ and wilfully ‘not concentrating’, but I witnessed something in the playroom that demonstrated he was very much a thinker, preoccupied with one particular thought. He voiced this thought after several weeks of sessions together when he would stand at a large painting easel and paint what appeared as nothing in particular. Eventually, one week he asked a question, not looking at me and still painting he asked, in a quiet voice, ‘what’s good?’ I realised from his tone and demeanour how big this thought was for him, this thought that was put on him each day by various adults must be important, but he did not understand it or know how to manage his feelings about it.

I have a sense that Arlia was in this state of not comprehending the meaning of some adult responses, she may have had questions, as Tahir did but there was no space for them to materialise so that she could ask them.

I think this adds additional insight into Arlia’s grit eating as an effort to digest something, to make sense of something that she struggles to process mentally.

The point I am trying to make here is we can assume children are not thinking because they are not thinking about what we as adults think they should be thinking about. Whereas they are very much deep in thought, trying to make sense of internal anxieties and conflict.

Arlia’s sense of self was influenced by the perceptions of those she encounters, they contribute positively or negatively to her growth and development as she seeks to see herself socially and academically within the educational space. Well-being is suggested by Winnicott (1971) as a concept that includes being known by another, implying trust and underpinning spontaneity and creativity.

The literature review highlighted issues in the classroom around top-down pressures focusing attention on results competing with making time available to get to know some children beyond their immediate behavioural presentations. Pitt and Brushwood Rose offer a useful analogy of the significance to the child when adults offer a child their time: ‘By taking time-in, the adult is loaning the child a sense of competence and confidence with which they can explore their emotional state,’ (2007, p.333). Foundational to the creation of trust is the adult’s willingness to offer themselves by taking the time to be with them to get to know them.

This study draws our attention to the importance of considering that class teachers need to be emotionally available to their pupils because they have the power to influence children’s perceptions of themselves particularly as lifelong learners.

### 7.1.4: How do children use each other to manage their experience of being in education?

When I initially considered this question, I found myself resistant to the idea that children use one another and on reflection concluded that this may be due to my own concerns about the cruel behaviour children can inflict on each other. Perhaps some part of me would like children’s lives to be free from unhappy experiences, hurtful words, and feelings of being targeted by children intent on hurt. However, as well as opportunities to experience good things such as companionship, shared interests, and ideas, feelings of love, Klein believed that both good and bad experiences contribute to our personality and sense of self (1937). Looking at my observations of Tina and Arlia from this perspective, seeing how relational experiences enriched their lives, the thought that children might use each other for this purpose feels much more positive.

Klein’s view (1937) was that friendships offer opportunities for experiencing not only affection but feelings of guilt, the opportunity for developing tolerance to the frustrations inherent in relationships, as well as opportunities for making reparation. Particularly relevant to Tina is the opportunity for reworking familial relationships through the slightly more distanced peers that share the educational space. However, for both Tina and Arlia I hope to show how their experiences with their peers enriched their lives in ways I had not expected. To answer the question the experiences of Tina and Arlia are considered individually.

#### 7.1.4.1 Tina

My observations of Tina led me to consider how children might use each other to manage internal conflicts that were too complex to be handled verbally and too uncomfortable to deal with directly. Relationships in the educational space afforded Tina the opportunity to examine her feelings about her familial situation while being slightly removed from it. For example, in the first observation I had witnessed Tina projecting her unwanted role of sister onto Kia (1/1/2, A, p.185) and I understood this as an expression of her ambivalence about her new role, and her desire to return to the time prior to the birth of her brother. The phantasy of a return to her original status afforded her two resolutions. The first allowed her to shed the sister role by placing it into another, while also defending against the uncomfortable feelings being a sister had stirred within.

Locating an object on which to project her powerful feelings Tina chose Kia, a child like her in that she was a girl but also different in that she was a different colour, making her a safer target than her parents to receive her angry feelings (Klein, 1937). By projecting unwanted feelings into Kia she was, at least temporarily, relieved of some uncomfortable feelings (TF, p.82).

Many of Tina’s behaviours, particularly her sadistic and persecutory projections into Kia, spoke to me of Klein’s (1946) concept of the paranoid-schizoid mindset (TF, p.89). The paranoid-schizoid position, examined in the theoretical framework, is that primary experience for the infant at a time when the perception of reality is limited, arousing states of overwhelming emotions, the feeling of being under threat and having no mental framework to make sense of the experience. Although a gradual move towards tolerance and a shift towards a more realistic view of the world can be expected to emerge with maturation, the possibility of a return to a more paranoid-schizoid mindset is always a possibility. Times of transition and change can invoke a sense of threat to be defended against, and Tina is experiencing a time of transition both at home and in her adjustment to formal learning.

Kia was different to other children in the class because of her darker skin and I wondered how colour might be significant for Tina and if this colour difference had been influential in her choice of Kia for her projections. Children become aware of the implications and status of persons of colour, studies show that these perceptions are established very early in development (for example Hernandez-Reif and Jordon, 2009, Kenneth and Mamie Clark, 1939, 1947), and the cultural representations of white and black as good or bad present opportunities for expressing internal phantasies. Klein’s (1946) paranoid-schizoid phase, with its persecutory behaviour, lends credibility to the idea that children look for social and cultural prejudices to express their phantasies.

It was interesting to note that negative comments related to colour were also observed in Arlia’s observations. On an occasion when Arlia was seeking proximity to Aziah, Easha and Faizanah a white doll was rejected first by her peers and then by Arlia with a derogatory association (2/4/2, discussed on p.267). I wonder if the nature of these links to colour may help us to understand something of the cultural influences at work for these young children.

In psychoanalytic theory both Tina and Arlia are at a stage in their psychosexual development where differences become more noticeable and significant, the Oedipal phase, when attention is drawn to aspects of others that are either the same or different to us (TF, pp.70, 87). This issue of noticing difference is an important aspect of development, raising issues around feelings of belonging or feeling left out. Perhaps the experiences of both Arlia and Tina alert us to the vulnerability of children at this time to absorb cultural standards and norms, thereby predisposing them to prejudices that become so deeply entrenched that they are not questioned. Social unrest can create opportunities for these prejudices to emerge and individuals of colour, religion, gender, sexuality etc. become objects for projections of paranoid-schizoid notions where threats, such as feeling left out or victimised, are defended against.

An important component of Klein’s perspective on Oedipal conflicts was the opportunity it offered for a sense of identification, guilt, and reparation (TF, p.87). Relationships in the educational space offer opportunities to work through these feelings with peers who might feel safer than their family members. Klein (1937) suggested that there is an internal compulsion to make reparation towards those who have borne the brunt of our aggressive impulses, and this seemed to be affirmed in Tina’s behaviour towards Kia. There were times when Tina seemed to take the role of mother, insisting on caring for Kia by settling her in bed (1/3/2, A, p. 186). On another occasion (1/15/3, A, p.192) Tina seems to defend Kia, arguing against other girls for her right to use a particular pen. Perhaps these incidents are indications that she is becoming aware of the notion of how her actions can hurt someone else and the need to make reparation, both are necessary aspects of relationships and essential to both individual and social wellbeing (Klein, 1937).

The idea of reparation seemed to occur again later, this time in relation to Bee for example on the occasion when she chose to follow Billie and seemed to exclude Bee, something that must have been extremely difficult and painful for Bee to understand (1/17/2, A, p. 193). Later in that same observation Tina received approval from Miss G. for some writing she had completed, and she was told it could go on the special work board. Tina chose instead to place it next to something of Bee’s (1/17/3, A, p.208) on a different wall, forgoing, it seemed the kudos of the special work board designated by Miss. G. Later, reflecting on her action and what meaning may lay behind it, I wondered if she wanted to convey to Bee that she still considered their relationship important to her perhaps feeling a sense of remorse at her behaviour towards Bee earlier.

Not all of Tina’s use of peers was sadistic and cruel, Tina was able to use Bee’s calm, accepting manner to alleviate her anxieties that seemed to arise after a difficult group literacy session and contributed to providing a safe space for Tina to find some equilibrium. At the craft table where resources were low, Bee seemed to sense Tina’s low mood and offered half a cardboard tube to work with, but Tina was not interested. It was only a little later, in the home corner, when Bee’s willingness to adopt the mothering role Tina wanted of her, did Tina’s mood begin to lift. Bee seemed to have offered a facilitating presence to enable Tina to access an internal resource, the phantasy of the dyadic relationship between herself and her mother. (1/2/2, A, p. 195).

There seemed to have been a shift in Tina’s mindset after she had received this little bit of mothering, and she returned to the craft table, where resources were still low, but was she was able to accept Bee’s offer of a share of her cardboard tube. This scenario demonstrated how children can use each other not only to play out their anger and frustration, but as sources of comfort and reassurance, perhaps in a manner that is less threatening because of its play-based orientation.

I enjoyed witnessing Bee’s capacity for empathy and understanding as she supported Tina. They seemed to share a deep connection, particularly in their shared phantasies observed in their spider play and in the water tray (, p.185). Bee’s competencies, her dexterity, literacy, and numeracy skills were called upon at times when Tina needed to know, for example, how to spell something. There were ups and downs in their relationship, however, I think there was something reciprocal in their friendship and I like to think that Bee also found benefits through their relationship.

#### 7.1.4.2 Arlia

I never felt concerned that Arlia was being cruel or sadistic to another child, she had a strong desire to connect with other children, for example Reema and Aziah, but I didn’t have a sense that she manipulated them in order to get what she wanted. When Aziah rejected her attempts to get close by touching her hand one solution for Arlia was to create a magnetic sandwich and offer it to her as if she was trying to convey what she wanted in symbolic form because she couldn’t articulate what she wanted.

However, looking back now I think that Arlia’s desire for a connection revealed something about an aspect of relationships that was not obvious to me before I began this study, that of an organising facility, perhaps grounding her in the here and now. For example, her physical connection with Reema seemed a factor in facilitating Arlia to organise her thoughts to find her coat when she hadn’t been able to find it the first time around. One of Arlia’s drawings also seemed to suggest that her relationship with Aziah provided a connection with the educational space anchoring her to her environment. This is discussed further in section 7.1.6 where I answer the question ‘What can children’s drawings tell us about children’s experience of their educational space?’

Perhaps therefore Arlia was persistent in her pursuit of Aziah because there was something in her connection that made her feel safer. In my imagining I might contemplate that she was seeking to identify with Aziah who seemed to fit into the environment with ease and through this identification she found her own sense of belonging. From this perspective it becomes easier to appreciate her anxiety about being separated from Aziah because of the organising facility she had provided.

However, it was encouraging to note that when she returned from a transition visit to reception it was another child she turned to for support, perhaps using her to manage her feelings at the forthcoming change in their educational space (2/17/2, A, p.267, 173). What was notable, I think, was although I had expected her to search out and find Aziah, she didn’t, she found Easha, one of a group of three girls that Arlia was becoming more familiar with. I reflected that maybe she avoided seeking out Aziah for support to avoid her feelings about the sense of loss she is experiencing with the realisation that she will be separated from Aziah in September. Fortunately, she found in Easha a caring individual who seemed empathically aware of Arlia’s emotional state, taking hold of Arlia’s hand to lead her around. Arlia appeared very childlike as if she were lost in a familiar environment. Later she tried to pick up a younger girl (some younger children were visiting in preparation for their starting in the nursery in September), perhaps an identification with a younger self, needing to be picked up and held (2/17/1, p.279).

In my final observation, Arlia’s connection with Aziah became more inclusive to include an unfamiliar child (2/18/2, A. 301) Zarah and I wonder if this was made possible because of what seemed a secure relationship with Aziah, the object of much of her attention over the observational series. I also noted in the observation Arlia’s ability to articulate to Zainab how their rough and tumble had got out of hand and caused hurt. Both Aziah and Zainab seemed to call forth for Arlia new skills and a greater appreciation of other people’s feelings.

Through the observations and drawings, it was possible to witness the more nuanced aspects of the children’s relationships. Tina was more socially aware and seemed at times to intentionally exploit her relationships, while Arlia’s need for connectedness seemed necessary for her sense of belonging in the educational space. What appeared to be a common theme for both was that through their relationships they changed and evolved as individuals.

Perhaps these findings will help us to find new ways of better understanding children’s social interactions with each other and the importance of prioritising our observations of their relationships to better explain what their interactions mean for them.

### 7.1.5: How does play prepare children for more formal learning expectations?

The literature review emphasised the view of the present pedagogy as Psychoanalytic theory frames play as an opportunity to develop thinking processes, for example in the elaboration of their use of symbolism, necessary for more adult-led learning, as well as a time to reconcile their emotional preoccupations that may prevent ‘him or her from fully engaging with the subject matter at hand. (Mayes, 2009, p.546).

This study draws our attention to the value of play in the educational space, offering a significant opportunity not only for emotional work, work that seeks to resolve the internal conflicts children face (Winnicott, 1971) but also for developing a process of thinking about things and seeing them from different perspectives.

In the theoretical framework (TF, p.120) I referred to the opportunity created by play for developing creative thinking, seeing it also as a demonstration of adult intention to see things from a child’s perspective. Rather than insisting on compliance I further suggested that by giving up its insistence on compliance space is made for discovery, creativity, and desire to know, an important component of this opportunity might be its potential to resolve internal conflict.

#### 7.1.5.1 Play as a space to resolve inner conflicts

The observational study of Tina and Arlia revealed something about the nature of children’s preoccupations and the way they use play and symbolism as a safe place to examine internal conflicts that are often part and parcel of their everyday lives. Both children took advantage of the opportunities for play in the educational space, developing their capacity to integrate internal and external experiences and bring them together to find personal meaning.

The psychoanalytically orientated observations provided a rich tapestry offering a tentative insight into the internal preoccupations of the two children that occupied so much of their thinking. Tina’s play, particularly when located in the home corner, and her imaginative use of symbolism signposted her difficulties in accepting her new role at home after the birth of her baby brother as well as her emerging sense of self. Play offered the opportunity for Tina to examine more complex ideas and express deep desires that may be considered negatively for example by parents. Her desire to divest herself of the role of sister might arouse concerns that her parents would be displeased she doesn’t wholly share their delight at the arrival of a sibling. Playing with Bee and Kia gave her the opportunity to return to a time free from any responsibilities being an older sister may have imposed (A, p.162).

Having this capacity to bring her feelings symbolically into the space afforded by play, allowed her time and space to adjust to a more realistic view that having a baby brother can also bring positive experiences. I had surmised, for example, that her parents forthcoming wedding offered a different perspective on her role in the family, as an older sister able to actively take part in the celebrations (A, p.176). Perhaps even adding kudos to the role of big sister.

Elements of Tina’s play suggested that she was curious and attempting to make sense of the notion of sexuality, expressing ideas related to gender and difference, femininity, female power, pregnancy, and birth. These concepts may be considered taboo but in psychoanalytic thinking they are aspects of both phallic and oedipal development and therefore important for Tina to explore to discover a female sense of herself (Klein, 1937). This transition was also part of a mutual experience reflecting a shared understanding and meaning for both Tina and her friend Carey (1/1/5: A, p.180). Tina’s play, her use of symbolism and phantasy, provided a safe place to express notions that would otherwise feel too overwhelming (Hinshelwood, 1989).

Observations of Tina playing introduced me to the notion of the challenge children face as they adapt to the demands of the educational space and the adjustments that are part of their transition to the wider world. These feelings sought expression and the tension they held was released into their phantasies, given voice for example in Tina’s play with Bee in the water tray (1/2/2: A, p.173). In this safe boundaried space they were free to express not only their deepest fears and overwhelming feelings about the loss of their previous lives, but also the opportunity to mourn that loss (Klein, 1994). There was also a sense of a shared experience and thoughts about that experience, providing one of the most powerful of all human encounters where another recognises our feelings. In the words of Winnicott ‘on the basis of playing is built the whole of man’s experiential existence’ (1971, p. 64).

In psychoanalytic thinking the psyche holds all emotional experiences within its structure, some lie in the conscious aspect of that structure, however the unconscious is the repository for many more, making them difficult to access and use for rational reasoning. Preoccupations with internal anxieties and conflicts need to be externalised, not into the real world but into a space between the internal and external, this is the space created by the phenomena of play (Winnicott, 1971). Perhaps underscoring the necessity of play as space where children can explore and discover aspects of previously hidden elements of self (Winnicott, 1971)

The internal conflicts seeking expression can be understood as emotional energy (TF, p.64) some of which have been repressed for some time due to their anti-social connotations, for example Tina’s complex feelings towards her parents and brother discussed earlier. As well as interfering with a capacity to think and learn Sapountzis (2018) suggested internal conflicts and tensions also interfere with curiosity, inhibiting the desire to know. Tina’s use of play seemed to provide a space for her to explore internal conflicts and tensions that might otherwise prove distracting and inhibit her focus and concentration on curriculum topics (Mayes, 2009).

#### 7.1.5.2 Play as an opportunity for developing thinking processes

It was interesting to notice that I found Tina’s experience easier to understand because many of the clues came through her use of symbolism and role play. Arlia’s play was also less symbolic and there seemed a greater reliance on sensory experiences to express unsettling feelings. For example, her grit and dirt-eating seemed important to manage feelings associated with her frustrations at failing to connect with other children. Similarly, early in the observational series, she demonstrated a physical restlessness as she flitted from one thing to another with no apparent relational interaction seemingly dissipating emotional energy that was held within her body (2/1/1, A, p.286).

The idea that symbolism is an abstract form of thinking emerging from a developmental process gradually dawned on me as I undertook the analysis. I am not sure why this hadn’t occurred to me before, it seems obvious now when I consider symbolism is the basis of both language and number which allow for increasing elements of abstract thinking (Greenhough, 1994). The notion that there may also be a relationship between a capacity for symbolisation and emotional development (Greenhalgh, 1994) helped me understand why Tina’s capacity for symbolism seemed more sophisticated than Arlia’s. Although there was an age gap of just seven months between Tina and Arlia there was a significant difference in the way they used their educational space for play and this seemed related to their capacity for symbolism. They each seemed to have their own agendas preoccupied with making sense of their experience, however Tina seemed better equipped to do this. Not only was she able to use symbolism to express the internal conflicts she was struggling to resolve, but her identification with strong female adults also provided opportunities to internalise their characteristics as aspects she wanted for herself.

However, there was evidence that Arlia’s capacity for symbolic thinking was developing. Arlia expressed her desire to be close to her friend by ‘sticking’ close to her physically. Later she used the adhesive feature of some magnetic toys to think more about this idea of adhesion, relating it to her desire to be close to Aziah (2/6/2, A, p.269). After the loss of the duck (2/7/2, A, 258) she had employed small figures in her play as symbolic representations of her anxieties emerging from her frustration and sense of loss (2/7/3, A,258). Her choice of the use of the figure of the witch and trying to make it fit into different spaces seems poignant and symbolic of her experience. She seemed to identify herself with a bad object of fairy tales, the witch, and I understood her play at this point as Arlia transferring to the figure pressure she felt to fit in with adult expectations and to be compliant.

Arlia seemed stuck in a sort of no-man’s land a lot of the time, at the edge of being able to think of things symbolically, finding expression instead in somatosensory feelings (Zago, 2008). It is possible that Arlia did not experience the sort of contained experience another adult could offer when she was an infant, and if so, maybe there was not enough of that rich experience to meet her maturational needs. I have suggested that Arlia might benefit from a relationship where she could experience a positive relationship in a playful setting.

From my observations play enriched the children’s lives in more ways than simple enjoyment, play seemed to be a significant factor in allowing both children the space to work through issues in a safe way as well as develop thinking processes. Unfortunately, in my experience, the provision of play opportunities is sometimes side lined as teachers try to channel children’s thinking along predetermined curriculum paths, unrelated to their developmental needs (LR, p. 29). This move away from self-determined play is concerning and it seems a significant opportunity for children’s development is being lost. Unless play can be fully appreciated for the capacity it offers to prepare children for more formal to aspects of learning children will be denied opportunities that would facilitate their successful negotiation of formal education.

### 7.1.6: What can children’s drawings tell us about children’s experience of the educational space?

So far, the study has considered the data from the observations and, through a process of abductive reflection, has related the observations to psychoanalytic theories that proved useful in understanding the child’s experience of the educational space. My experience of observing the children was one of privilege and I felt appreciative of the detailed sense that emerged of what was going on for them. However, the children’s drawings also offered valuable insight into their experience of the educational space.

My enthusiasm for using children’s drawings as windows into their inner world arose out of my therapeutic work with children and I found it particularly useful for those children who couldn’t speak for themselves. I had found that drawings and paintings reflected something of the internal conflict children were engaged in and seemed to track their development acting almost as a thermometer of their emotional temperature and supported, or not, my own hypothesis about the issues they were struggling with.

In this study the images the children drew supported my sense making of the observational data, offering an impression of their internal experience in a graphic form. My understanding of the drawings was their representation of the children’s phantasies, conveying meanings that are multi-faceted and far too complex to be explained by language (Greenhalgh, 1994). The symbolic forms offered an opportunity to explore the children’s meaning, with the prospect of thinking about something in a new way, to better understand the emotions from which they emerged (Klein, 1929, Segal, 1957). As with the symbolism observed in play, I believe the drawings to reflect dynamic and relational aspects of the educational space.

There were some aspects of the children’s drawings that seemed to make an obvious link to the narrative of the observations, for example the first image of the princess dress and its relationship to Tina’s internal conflicts and frustrations (A, p.169). In her second drawing, Tina used simple line drawings to depict a location in the classroom associated with teacher-led learning, e.g., the whiteboard, literacy and numeracy resources, the teacher’s chair and her resource drawers holding pens and other items the teacher found useful as resources in her work. When looking at this second drawing, I had a sense of Tina’s growing engagement with the curriculum, the ‘tools of the trade’ and her strengthening relationship with her teacher.

Arlia’s pictures told a different story, but it was only through seeing the drawings in the series together that their meaning seemed to emerge. Arlia’s drawings appear to me a poignant expression of her experience captured over the observational series. The narrative of the drawings, and its associations with the observations, reflected her experience in the nursery and provided another window to aid our understanding. The drawings were particularly significant for me because I felt I could see in them a gradual integration of body and mind, a growing sense of self and a willingness to reach out and try to connect with her friend Aziah. I was hopeful at the progress I saw depicted in them and pleased for her that she had travelled such a long way. However, when I saw her last picture I felt very dismayed at the regression I saw.

Nevertheless the final observation seemed to suggest that Arlia had regained ground and that her drawings perhaps only told half the story. If there had been a later drawing it might have reflected this development and it seems important to note that the observations informed the meaning-making of the drawings and not the other way around.

The observations took place over a long period of time and were useful in this aspect, sensing something about the nuances and depth of the children’s experiences, however, the pictures seemed to sum up quite succinctly what had emerged gradually in the observations. Perhaps this reflects the subtle power of the symbol, speaking of deep experiences beyond what any words might capture.

### 7.1.7: Is psychoanalysis a useful perspective in understanding children’s experience of the educational space?

‘For pupils with emotional/behavioural difficulties, there are dangers in over-emphasis on “managing” the behaviour without attempts to understand the child’s feelings’ (National Curriculum Council, 1989a:35)

It is interesting to note in this quote from the earliest stage of implementing the NC there was an understanding of the need to consider children’s feelings, not just their behaviour, in the educational space. However, since that time the literature review suggested that the teacher’s experience of the NC left little room for this consideration.

Psychoanalytic observations provided me with a framework to imagine what the inner world of a child might be, to engage in what Bion referred to as reverie, (1962) a willingness to put aside adult judgements to make sense of the child’s experience with an open mind, open to the thought that there may be a link between their inner experience and their behaviour. For example, Tina’s sadistic behaviour towards Kia was understood from a psychoanalytic perspective of splitting and projection to reveal a struggle to manage feelings of abandonment and loss A, p.186)

Observations of Arlia presented more of a challenge to understand what was happening between her inner and outer world, because her communications were less symbolic. Although I sensed that Arlia’s behaviour was of emotional significance it was the concepts and language of psychoanalysis that helped to frame Arlia’s experiences for me, affording insight into the difficulty she had in managing her emotions in this environment. She seemed to struggle to make sense of incidents that happened, often resorting to behaviours as a response to experiences that perhaps overwhelmed her. An appreciation of Arlia’s struggle may have led to a more empathic response on the part of the adults she encountered, something I think Arlia would have benefitted from, particularly in her emotional journey through transition.

What present-day pedagogy fails to address is the complexity of the context, since it neglects the influence of the unconscious and its interaction with the setting. Everyone within the educational space is subject to their own internal and unconscious responses to others and without an awareness of this intrapsychic influences can impinge on how individuals respond to each other. Children are complex and their response to their environment is equally so, as psychoanalysis aims to explain, and I think this study has demonstrated that. It is difficult to see how policies that add strategies to a system that is focused on raising standards, without regard to *how* children develop, think, play, and learn, can be expected to be effective for individual children.

The discussion suggests that a psychoanalytic theory of development can enhance ways of seeing children and relating to them. Having worked in schools I am aware of the tension teachers feel between their desire to support children emotionally and the demands placed on them by the standards agenda discussed in the literature review. I think the research and reports in the Literature review suggested that teachers felt there was a conflict inherent in doing this. Perhaps this issue underlies a more complex one wherein teachers find quantitative measures offer evidence of their performance in a more tangible form than qualitative ones. There is no doubt that for some teachers the stress and anxiety they face in their everyday lives at school can be difficult to manage and the notion of taking time to consider children’s inner worlds may feel too difficult.

However, I was heartened to read an article by Margaret Moore (2017), a teacher of vulnerable pupils, who embarked on a journey of her own to explore the usefulness of psychoanalytic concepts in improving the learning experience of her pupils. Applying a psychoanalytic framework in her classroom had a significant positive impact on her efficacy as a teacher, finding that the framework it offered provided a ‘point of stability’ (Moore, 2017, p.36). She further stated, ‘I am now experiencing the positive effects of using a proper framework, as I no longer feel exhausted at the end of each working day. I also have restored myself as a competent, professional teacher’ (p.43/44).

In this study the psychoanalytic perspective proved useful in understanding children’s experience of the educational space and the role played by teachers and peers in the process of social, emotional, and intellectual development. The underlying assumption is that a child does not function solely out of mental intellect, learning is a complex process, intertwined with social and emotional aspects of development (Mayes, 2009). I believe it therefore offers another way of viewing children’s experience in the educational space which poses not only a more child-friendly way of learning but one that may also be beneficial to the teachers who are responsible for their learning.

Reflective Box 7.3: Working therapeutically with young children freed me from the tyranny of the oppressive and stifling testing agenda where children were force-fed pieces of learning that they were not developmentally ready to handle. I find it difficult to describe the joy of being able to trust children with their own processes rather than constantly trying to pull them into the ideas and thoughts that were laid down for them in the NC.

I have mentioned elsewhere that there were times during the observational series when I felt myself adopting the teacher’s perspective over Arlia’s behaviour rather than hers and I think this is the essence of the problems of the present-day pedagogy. There is very little manoeuvrability to accommodate the child’s needs. As a teacher this can be difficult to appreciate, after all the job is about helping children to learn. However, the psychoanalytic framework offers a broader perspective of how to do this, particularly with children that seem to draw out our negative feelings for them.

#### 7.1.8 The usefulness of psychoanalysis as a research tool in education settings

This study arose from a heartfelt desire to explore children’s experience of their educational space. The literature review presented studies and reports to suggest that the present-day pedagogy was grounded in a culture of accountability and testing with emotional aspects of children’s experience being overlooked.

I believe psychoanalysis offers a useful research tool because of its ability to account for the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious aspects of the mind. Gradually these aspects have come to be considered by researchers to be relevant to enquiries about the subjective experience of participants (e.g., Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, Rustin, 2019, Stamenova and Hinshelwood, 2019).

The TOM has been emerging for some time as a recognised research model (Rustin, 2019, Stamenova and Hinshelwood, 2018) drawing upon psychoanalytic concepts and sensitive to the subtlety of children’s experience of their educational space. Studies particularly those by Elfer (2010, 2012, 2017, 2018) demonstrated that it was possible to adapt the TOM as a research tool for exploring issues around the daily experience of children in nurseries.

However, there has been a critique levelled at the TOM by Groarke (2008, 2010) that the processes of psychanalysis and the collection and analysis of data were too dissimilar. This point was discussed earlier (M, p.152) when discussing the methodology, however, it seems relevant to reflect at this point after having some limited experience of both. Reflecting on my experience of the research process I would say that the efficacy of the TOM lies in the emotional connection that is established between the observer and the participant, much the same as the therapeutic relationship. Both processes acknowledge the emotional process of looking to see what is being communicated and articulating how this communication is understood. This is not surprising since Rustin (2019) argued that both processes evolved from many years of psychoanalytic practice. The difference lies in the use of the emerging data which is acted upon in the research context differently to the therapeutic one.

My experience of the study was an emotional one, however, as I have hoped to demonstrate through the reflective aspect of the process, emotions have formed an important subjective element of both data collection and analysis. Using the psychoanalytically based research model of the TOM allowed me to notice the participants emotional states and supported the meaning making process of the analysis. Perhaps drawing attention to what Elfer referred to as ‘the subtle interactive processes of early childhood pedagogy to emotion’ (2017, p.443) that might benefit from further study.

## 7.2: Limitations of the study

Although the study took place over seven months, the Spring and Summer terms of the school year, I believe the study was limited by not including the full year, missing the crucial transitional phase of the Autumn term. I believe that data that could have been collected then would have enriched my observational experience, my relationships with the children and a more informed analysis. The intention to begin data collection in the Autumn term had been in the original time plan, but unfortunately family circumstances made that impossible.

In the methodology (p. 147) I informed the reader of my ambivalence about using my previous workplace as a setting for the second case study. It was not an auspicious beginning, and I was aware of how my feelings about past relationships and issues might influence my perspective. I record this as a limitation to continue my intention to maintain transparency, however, I want to balance this by stating that despite the internal conflict, acting as a witness to Arlia’s experience was a very informative and rewarding process. Arlia opened my eyes to the possibility of looking beyond symbolism to more nuanced expressions of her inner conflicts revealed through the TOM and understood using a psychoanalytic lens. I think this is very useful for children who appear hidden or unseen.

I believe the study was limited by a lack of clear direction on using the children’s drawings to support the observational analysis. Although I was particularly interested in the work of Myra Levick and enjoyed a brief but precious relationship with her, I don’t believe I was able to take full advantage of her work in my analysis. However, I believe that the tentative analysis based in part on Levick’s framework and my own sense making informed by the observational data and experience, provided additional insight into the emotional experience of Tina and Arlia in their educational space.

I became aware, particularly during supervision meetings, of aspects of my experience that were painful or difficult that might undermine my sense making of the data. However, it has been argued in this thesis (M, p.149/52) that reflective practice within supervision provides space for a transparent approach, where emergent concepts can surface and provide a balance to personal perceptions (e.g., Hollway, 2012).

Despite these limitations, I hope that one outcome of this study will lead to educationalists becoming curious to discover how children are experiencing their educational setting and that the study might also raise awareness that children and young people are emotional beings with emotions can contribute usefully to their experience of the educational space and therefore their capacity to learn. However, hopefully the converse might also be appreciated, if their experiences are not understood there is a risk that this will impact negatively on their achievement. The study does not encompass the totality of human experience in educational spaces, nevertheless I hope it provides a demonstration of the commonality of psychic processes and the internal struggles both children and teachers face in their dynamic relationship.

## 7.3: Applications of the study

The nature of the research, a qualitative case study, limits its wide scale application. However, I hope that at the very least some of the ideas and issues raised will be reflected upon and initiate discussions about children’s experiences of their educational space. The literature considered here does not encompass the totality of psychoanalytic theory; nevertheless, I hope it provides a demonstration of the commonality of psychic processes and internal struggles both children and teachers face in their dynamic relationship.

The introduction of aspects of the psychoanalytic framework into the present-day pedagogy offers a useful perspective in understanding something of the complex inner life of children and how their unconscious needs interact with their environment. Acknowledging the unconscious preoccupations children have, and how they can influence not only their relationships but their ability to engage with all aspects of learning, shifts the focus away from behavioural approaches, present in many educational spaces today, towards a more empathic understanding. attention to the benefits for teachers in learning about how emotions influence a child’s experience. Elfer’s study (2017) suggested the adults engaged as researchers were able to use this information to understand and expand their skills in helping children to make the most of their educational setting.

The notion that psychoanalysis can make a useful contribution to educational purposes builds on work that has gone before. Early psychoanalysts, such as Klein and Anna Freud, Bion and Winnicott, showed interest in the implications of psychoanalytic theory for teaching and learning (Mayes, 2009). More recently other writers in the psychoanalytic field of education and learning have advocated for the introduction of its additional insight into how children can learn more effectively, for example Greenhough, (1994), Bibby, (2011, 2017), Salzberger-Wittenberg, Williams, and Osborne (1983) and Youell, (2006). Mayes (2009) suggested that ‘psychoanalytic knowledge would help the teacher better understand how and why he or she responds to students, especially certain students, as he or she does, which could only result in him or her responding to them better.’ (p. 559).

While some children may require therapeutic intervention when their anxieties feel particularly overwhelming, the study suggests that ensuring space and opportunity for self-directed play offers others an opportunity for them to manage their distress in a therapeutic way. Both Tina and Arlia were very creative in their use of play, and their engagement was entirely appropriate to their level of development, adapted to their capacity to explore their internal conflicts and anxieties. Tina also had the support of her teacher, and this seemed to be significant in the therapeutic benefit she gained from it.

The literature review highlighted how a preoccupation with educational outcomes could lead to emotions being overlooked, however, it was also noted that making links between emotion and cognition might be difficult for some teachers, particularly if it was not included as part of their training (Zinsser Denham, Curby, and Shewark, 2015). This study highlighted important aspects of Tina and Arlia’s lived experience that alert us to children’s preoccupations that may be overlooked if relational and emotional dimensions are left unacknowledged.

The usefulness of the TOM in offering opportunities to glimpse something of the children’s internal experience suggests to me that trainee teachers might find making the connection between cognition and emotion easier. For example, in Elfer’s study (2017) it was found that the researcher’s experience enabled them to use their experience to inform and expand their skills in helping children to make the most of their educational setting (Elfer, 2017). Included in his research were opportunities to engage in discussion groups and I wonder if training programme discussion groups could be organised to provide the necessary support in making inferences about what they have observed as well as the contribution made by their particular perspectives (Rustin, 2019).

Elfer’s (2017), the study introduced a considerable commitment to training and support for the researchers taking part. However, the regularity of the observations and the narrative write-up afterwards has been noted to develop a capacity for sensitivity not only to the child’s emotional states but also those of the observer (Elfer, 2017). Within present-day educational systems operationalising the TOM would require a supportive network of similar aware individuals to facilitate the process of understanding children’s individual meanings from the observer’s emotional response. Inferences require an environment of acceptance and a non-judgemental attitude from those that are part of the group.

I am suggesting that the introduction of work discussion groups might be operationalised to incorporate opportunities to explore psychoanalytic principles (Elfer, Greenfield, Robson, Wilson and Zachariou, 2018, Rustin, 2019). I believe it would be useful to know how we come to think and ‘be’ the way we are and to see how we all contribute to the way others are. However, Elfer highlighted those opportunities for reflection in the education sector ‘have not yet developed to give explicit attention to emotional experience as part of professional practice and part of a professional discussion, (2010, p. 902) and I am aware of how these ideas might be resisted within a political establishment that seeks to control performance of both pupils and staff.

Nevertheless, the concerns raised about the present pedagogy in the introduction and literature review are cause for concern, particularly for some children, like Arlia who may not have the capacity to manage the challenges presented in the social setting of formal learning. This study gives some indication of emotional aspects of children’s experience that contribute significantly to their experience in the educational space and this cannot be dropped. Mayes, makes this clear; ‘Despite limited and problematic responses of educationalists to psychoanalytical insights into education, psychoanalysts must continue researching and amassing a database regarding deeper psychic causes of specific learning problems and the best pedagogical responses to them.’ (2009, p.552).

## 7.4: Conclusion

Using a psychoanalytic framework and methodology to understand the role of emotion in children’s experience of their educational space has offered rich insight, highlighting how the interaction between their inner and outer worlds influence their engagement with their educational space. Psychoanalytic concepts have been invaluable in bringing together the emotional and cognitive aspects of learning in this study. The discussion argued that framing thinking and learning as an emotional experience, using a psychoanalytic perspective, offers new possibilities in the ways open to educationalists to better understand children’s experience thereby developing new approaches better associated with emotional growth and learning. A natural progression from this idea might be to consider ways that the framework could inform a hybrid approach, between psychoanalysis and education, to inform both teaching and learning.

Both Arlia and Tina opened new ideas for me to enlarge my understanding of children’s experiences in their educational setting. Despite my reluctance to initiate research in a setting where I had history, and which may have added complications to the research process, I feel privileged to have witnessed Arlia’s journey and hope I have facilitated the reader’s imagination to catch a glimpse of her.

From Tina, I began to appreciate the role of free play in the educational space and the importance for her of using other children to manage her emotions, something I found hard at times to stay with emotionally. I also witnessed the change in a classroom when examined by an Ofsted Inspector as observed in Tina’s school. The children and the teacher that I usually observed were lost on that day due to the anxiety that seemed to be held throughout the school.

Tina and Arlia offered contrasting experiences of the adults in their educational space, perhaps demonstrating the powerful influence their interactions with them had on their lives. Tina found another powerful woman to identify with in her teacher Miss G., but Arlia was often offered a reflection of a bad object and not seen for the child she was.

Play emerged not simply as a fun activity between sessions of ‘learning’ directed by the demands of the curriculum, it was an opportunity for Tina and Arlia to explore their inner conflicts while also giving their preoccupations expression through role-play and symbolism, thereby developing their thinking. In this way play became an important part of the learning process.

I was disappointed that I was unable to make full use of Myra Levick’s methodology for analysing the children’s drawings. However, I think the drawings presented a window through which I glimpsed their experience of their educational space and they also offered tentative support for the findings of the analysis. I would like to see children’s drawings taken more seriously as communication about their experience, perhaps further research using the LECARTA might be possible.

Although there were limitations in the study it has been extremely rewarding journey. I felt as if I was building a ship while at the same time sailing in it, gradually pulling pieces together and adapting to its changing shape during my journey.

One advantage of this was that I never knew how the ship would eventually turn out and where my journey might end, making the journey one of challenging discoveries. Nevertheless, I think the broad spectrum of data collected, the observations, reflective practice, and the drawings, provided a rich source of material with which to address the research questions, and in suggestions for possible applications.

## 7.4.1: Implications for the present pedagogy and some Key points to take away from the study

There are two implications arising from this research that need to be considered, particularly because of the well-being of both present and future lives of the children in the care of educational authorities for such a large proportion of their formative years.

The first relates to the atmosphere of the educational space and its reliance upon the adults’ understanding of how children’s maturational processes, outlined in this study, can influence their learning. There is, I think, a lack of opportunity for teachers to understand and pay attention to children’s emotional experiences and how such understanding might inform their professional practice. On the basis of this study, I would argue that the relationship children have with their teacher is pivotal in their learning process and this is not, I believe, reflected in their training. The possibility of reframing teacher training to include aspects of child development, with an emphasis on the emotional atmosphere of the educational space and its contribution to children’s learning. I regard such training to be vital and something I hope my work will contribute to.

The second relates to the significance of opportunities for the expression of children’s creativity to manage their anxieties arising from internal-world conflicts colliding with their outer world. The study demonstrated that both children used symbolism and play to explore the meaning of their experiences, trying to make sense of what was happening to them. With present-day concerns about the well-being of children and young people, it seems senseless not to provide the opportunity children possess to resolve some of their anxieties.

Going forward I will take any opportunities that arise to share my own learning experience as well as the experience of children in this study to illustrate the relational aspects of learning. It is my intention to present my findings in articles published in relevant journals and eventually shape them into a book to inform teachers about how children’s emotions influence their experience of the educational space and therefore their capacity to learn.

There are some points I would like to offer the reader to summarise what I hope will be useful to those working in children’s educational spaces.

1.      How I am feeling, as a teacher, in the classroom, or in any educational space e.g. the nursery, playground, dining hall etc., may influence my emotional availability for a child. I realise it is important for me to be aware of how I feel when I observe children’s behaviour and take a step back to consider what I feel and why.

2.      How children respond to learning tasks may be influenced by something that has happened previously, that could be something that happened on the way to school, at home or even when they were infants. Allowing them time and space to settle themselves to learn may be more useful than pushing them on to complete something they are not engaged in.

3.      Play offers children opportunities to resolve inner conflicts, play is not an optional add on and by making time and space for child-led play children may approach teacher-led tasks with less internal pressure from unresolved conflicts. Play also offers the opportunity for children to externalise their thoughts, making connections and develop thinking.  Their use of symbolism is useful in understanding their capacity for managing difficult thoughts.

4.      Loss of anything can be traumatic for children, and the loss may not be obvious to an adult without careful observation. A rupture in a relationship, the loss of a toy, a change of teacher, endings such as leaving the educational space, and leaving home in the morning, are just some of the many losses children experience through their school day. These losses may need to be contained by the teacher, by offering an understanding mind that appreciates the importance of the loss for the child. A graphic of Bion’s theory of containment (in Appendix 8) illustrates the process of containment and the cumulative effect of each containing experience.

5.      Finally, though not exhaustively, children’s emotions in the educational space hold meaning and need to be attended to for them to reach their fullest capacity to learn. By attending to their emotional state first their success and achievement are optimised.

To conclude I would like to share some thoughts on education from the originator of classical psychoanalysis:

*‘There is one topic which I cannot pass over so easily—not because I understand in particularly much about it or have contributed very much to it. Quite the contrary: I have scarcely concerned myself with it at all. I must mention it because it is so exceedingly important, so rich in hopes for the future, perhaps the most important of all the activities of what I am thinking of is the application of psychoanalysis to education, to the upbringing of the next generation. It is time for us as psychoanalysts to concern ourselves with this goal. (p.146) To achieve its goals, education needs the insights of psychoanalysis, and to achieve its goals, psychoanalysis needs the insights of education.[[7]](#footnote-7) Sigmund Freud (1933)*

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# Appendix 1

Information sheet and consent forms for Head teachers and Teachers.

Letter informing parents of research project and consent form.

Child information sheet and consent forms: Reception and Nursery

Information for Head teacher/Teacher

I am studying for a PhD at the University of Sheffield.

This information sheet is to inform you of a research study I would like to carry out in your school.

**What is the purpose of the study?**  
Research informs us that there are a number of different aspects of school life for children that may influence learning.

The purpose of this study is to find out what are the different aspects of classroom life that help children settle to learn. The study intends to understand the experience of children I would like to find out whether anything could be done to support children during these important times to enable them to settle more easily. The study will take a year to complete.

**How will the children be chosen?**Six children will be asked to take part in this study, two each from Nursery, Reception and Yr1. All relevant data will be written up as part of my Thesis any data not used will be destroyed at the end of the study. I intend to ask children who were born in September to participate because my experience as a teacher suggests that these children appear to be less vulnerable. Class teachers will advise on the children that might be suitable, with no underlying additional vulnerabilities that I may not be aware of. Apart from birth month there are no particular criteria for the choice, however if a child is likely to work with me in the future or has worked with me in the past it would be advisable not to include them in the study.

The teachers will also be given an information sheet and consent form to sign if they are happy for me to visit their classroom three times in the year to do an hour’s observation. No other data from the non-participants, both children and adults, will be included in the study and anonymity will be assured.

Once the children have been identified I will get in touch with the parents and invite them individually to discuss the study and review an information sheet with me. It is entirely theirs and their child’s decision as to whether or not to take part. If the parents are happy for their child to participate, they will be given the information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. The children will also get the opportunity to meet with me and I will explain to them about the study and request their verbal or non-verbal consent, by using pictures of thumbs up/down and observations of body language for very young children to ensure that they are only involved if they are happy for this. They will be free to withdraw at any time.

A decision to withdraw or not to take part will not affect the parents or the children in any way and all data collected in relation to the children will be removed.

**What will happen in the study?**After meeting with the parents to introduce myself and give them the information sheet I will seek their consent to include the child in the study. An initial meeting with their child will take place, with your consent, in the Rainbow Room to explain the study and to ask if they are willing to take part. The meeting will last for approximately 30-40 minutes but the child can ask to stop at any time. I will explain that they will meet with me three times over the year to play some games and do some drawings of the classroom and their teacher.

I will also spend time individually with each child to play some games and do some drawings. This will take place, with your consent, in the Rainbow Room, and arranged with their class teacher for a suitable time so they are not missing out on learning opportunities.

They will be informed that their name will not be used in any way in the study and that they will be able to ask to leave the study at any time if they decide not to continue. If their consent is given I will inform the parents and the class teacher, as well as yourself. The children who consent will be enrolled in the study.

A named adult, agreed with the children, will check in with the children at regular intervals to check the children continue to feel OK about taking part and discuss any issues with them.

All information will completely anonymous and the school, teaches, children and their parents will not be identifiable in any way.

**What are the possible benefits and risks?**  
The school may not benefit directly from the research, however, it is hoped that the study will contribute to the development of an understanding about the different aspects of classroom life that help them settle to learn.

Since children can feel inhibited by being overtly observed they and their parents will not be informed about the observational aspects of the study. If the class teacher or named adult has any concerns about my visits to the classroom on three separate occasions over the year I am happy to discuss this with them or they can come to you to share their concerns. Alternatively, they can contact my Supervisor through the details I will provide.

I realise that children may need to talk with someone in school about their time with me doing their drawings and it is important that someone in school is available to support them in school this way. The children will be made aware of a person in school who will be available to them should they want to talk about anything related to the drawing sessions. Following the drawing sessions, checks will be made by me with the agreed adult in school after one month and three months to establish that the children continue to be happy with taking part in the study. During this time period contact can be made with me by the preferred adult and/or parent if there are any concerns.

All children who participate in the interview will be offered a follow up session at the end of the research period when any questions can be discussed. The same will apply to their parents, teachers and yourself.

**What happens if research stops earlier than expected or if something**  
**goes wrong?**

If the research stops earlier than expected, reason(s) will be explained to you. In case of a complaint, please contact:  
❖ Researcher: *Lynn Stammers*: email / tel: [left blank for confidentiality]

If you feel unsatisfied with how your complaint is handled, you can contact:  
❖ Research supervisor: *Anthony Williams*: email / tel: [left blank for confidentiality]

**Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**All information collected during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Names and personal details will be removed from all information so that no one can be recognised from it. This means that children’s names or the school will not be identified in any reports or publications. Pseudonyms will be used instead of real names and place/setting. All data will be stored in accordance with the Local Authority data protection policy and in line with British Psychological Society guidance.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**The study will be submitted as a Doctoral Thesis to The University of Sheffield. The people who might read this in an official capacity are my project supervisor and external examiners. Additionally, my thesis (or summary) may be submitted for publishing in a journal and/or book. However, name(s) or school, any participants, their parents or school staff will not be identifiable in any way.

**Who will ethically review the project?** The research has received ethical approval via the Department of Education University of Sheffield’s ethics review procedure. You will not be identified in any report or publication.

**Contact for Further Information**  
  
❖ *Lynn Stammers (Researcher),* email: [lcstammers1@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:lcstammers1@sheffield.ac.uk)

Tel; 07731479255

❖ *Anthony Williams (Research Supervisor),* email: [anthony.williams@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:anthony.williams@sheffield.ac.uk)

Tel; 0114 222 8119

N.B. Participants will receive a copy of this information sheet, alongside a signed  
consent form to keep, if appropriate.  
☺ Thank you for considering whether you would like to participate  
in this study. If you do, please complete the consent form. ☺

**HEAD TEACHER CONSENT FORM**

**The title of the project is: The role of emotion in learning: how do emotions contribute to a child’s capacity to engage with the learning environment in the classroom?**

**Name of Researcher: Lynn Stammers**

Please initial box

1. I have read and understand the information sheet dated \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions and if asked, that questions were answered to my full satisfaction.

2. I understand that the children’s taking part is voluntary. They do not have to do it and are free to stop taking part at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I agree to allow Lynn Stammers to conduct the above study in this school.

**Name of Head teacher \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Name of researcher \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Signature \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

*(Signed and dated in presence of the participant)*

**N.B. A signed copy of this consent form, alongside an information sheet, will be sent to the Head teacher. The original will be retained securely by the researcher.**

**TEACHER CONSENT FORM**

**The title of the project is: The role of emotion in learning: how do emotions contribute to a child’s capacity to engage with the learning environment in the classroom?**

**Name of Researcher: Lynn Stammers**

Please initial box

1. I have read and understand the information sheet dated \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions and if asked, that questions were answered to my full satisfaction.

2. I understand that the children are taking part voluntarily. They do not have to do it and are free to stop taking part at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I agree to allow \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to take part in the above study.

**Name of teacher \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Name of researcher \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Signature \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

*(Signed and dated in presence of the participant)*

**N.B. A signed copy of this consent form, alongside an information sheet, will be sent to class teacher. The original will be retained securely by the researcher.**



Date: 23rd November, 2018

Dear Parents,

My name is Lynn Stammers, I have worked in schools for over forty years

I have always had an interest in how schools can support children in their learning. This interest has led me to follow a course of study at the University of Sheffield and as part of this I am doing a research project here in (School 1/2) and I am looking for a participant to help me with this. This opportunity is being offered to all members of this class but at the moment there is only one place available.

**The title of the project is: The role of emotion in learning: how do emotions contribute to a child’s capacity to engage with the learning environment in the classroom?**

The project involves me observing a child in this class for one hour per week for two terms, and also spending time with them doing some drawing. My observations will be done without any note taking and I will not be involved with their activities either in the classroom or shared area. I will be working with the class teacher to ensure there is as little disruption a possible to their school day.

The research is ethically approved by University of Sheffield and both Mrs . (headteacher) and the class teacher, have given their approval. I am supervised in my work by a tutor at University of Sheffield.

To do this research I need permission from the Head teacher, class teacher, parents and children. If you are interested in knowing more and considering allowing your child to participate, please indicate on the paper supplied and I will invite you to discuss the project further with you. I will also provide an information sheet outlining the project and if you are happy I will ask you to sign a consent form.

It is important for you to know that if you consent you or your child will be able to withdraw at any point in the project. Also all information gathered will be confidential and anonymised, so that it will not be clear to anyone which school is taking part or who your child is.

If you would be interested in knowing more about the project, I am happy to meet with you to give you more information, just inform the class teacher of your interest.

Sincerely

Lynn Stammers

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**The title of the project is: The role of emotion in learning: how do emotions contribute to a child’s capacity to engage with the learning environment in the classroom?**

**Researcher:** Lynn Stammers

(School 1), Infant and Nursery School.

**Name of Child …………………………………………………………….**

Yes, I would like to know more about taking part in this project.

**Parents signature ……………………………………………………………**

**Your signature does not commit you to the research and you are free to withdraw your interest at any time.**

**PARENTAL CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Study: What are the different aspects of classroom life that help children settle to learn?**

**Name of Researcher: Lynn Stammers**

Please initial box

1. I have read and understand the information sheet dated \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions and if asked, that questions were answered to my full satisfaction.

2. I understand that my child ’s taking part is voluntary. They do not have to do it and are free to stop taking part at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I agree for my child\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to take part in the above study.

**Name of parent \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Name of researcher \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Signature \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

*(Signed and dated in presence of the participant)*

**N.B. A signed copy of this consent form, alongside an information sheet, will be sent to parents/guardians and *[staff member]*. The original will be retained securely by the researcher.**

Child’s Information sheet

(To be shared with child verbally, face to face) Case Study 1

Thank you for coming to chat with me.

You can show me thumbs up or down whenever you want to let me know how you are feeling about anything I am saying.

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I am interested in how children play and learn in Reception, how they get on with their friends and the adults that work here. I wonder if you would help me understand what it is like for you? I would also like you to do some drawing about your classroom with your teacher.

I would like to write about how you play, but I will not use your name so no-one will know who you are and what you have said.

I will need your consent for you to take part by showing me a thumbs up and ticking a thumbs up picture on a consent form. You don’t need to do anything you don’t want to and if you don’t want to take part that is fine. Then you tick the thumbs down picture on the consent form.

Even if you want to stop part way through the year that will be fine. All you need to do is show me a thumb down and I will know you want to stop.

If you want to talk about what we have been doing to your mum or dad, your teacher or another adult in school you can .

Do you have any questions? Would you like me to explain more?

Child’s Information sheet

(To be shared with child verbally, face to face) Case Study 2

Thank you for coming to chat with me.

You can show me thumbs up or down whenever you want to let me know how you are feeling about anything I am saying.

A picture containing text

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I am interested in how children play in the Nursery, how they get on with their friends and the adults that work here. I wonder if you would help me understand what it is like for you? I would also like to do some drawing about nursery with you.

I would like to write about how you play, but I will not use your name so no-one will know who you are and what you have said.

I will need your consent for you to take part by showing me a thumbs up and ticking a thumbs up picture on a consent form. You don’t need to do anything you don’t want to and if you don’t want to take part that is fine. Then you tick the thumbs down picture on the consent form.

Even if you want to stop part way through the year that will be fine. All you need to do is show me a thumb down and I will know you want to stop.

If you want to talk about what we have been doing to your mum or dad, your teacher or another adult in school you can .

Do you have any questions? Would you like me to explain more?

Child’s Consent Form

Before we can begin the project I need to ask for your consent, but you can say no if you want just by showing me thumbs down.

During the project nothing you say will be seen, heard or spoken of with anyone else in school.

Anyone who reads about your ideas will not know the name of your school or your name.

If this is OK with you tick the thumbs up but if you are not happy to take part of this project you can tick the thumbs down.

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You can change your mind at any time during the project by either telling me or another adult you know.

My signature (Researcher) …………

Date ………………

# Appendix 2

1. Case Study 1: Observations
2. Case Study 2: Observations
3. Record of Observations School 1

NOTE: The children who feature alongside Tina are denoted in the observations with a simple initial, their names

The names of those children that featured in Case study1 analysis were assigned later in process and are provided here: B- Bee, K-Kia, C-Carie, BC-Billie, JC-Jack.

The letters HC denote the Home corner.

1. Record of Observations School 2

The names of those children featured in the Case study 2 analysis were as follows:

AM- Aziah, F- Farhana, E-Easha, Reema (pseudonym)

NOTE: The observations were written up as soon as possible after observation had taken place, sometimes usual attention to syntax, spelling etc. was not considered since the focus was on experience. The text may vary slightly in the vignettes that form the main body of the thesis, this occurred when trying to make the meaning clearer.

# Appendix 2A Record of Observations Case Study 1

# Observation 08/01/2019 (1)

Setting

A small infant and junior school in an area of economic deprivation, Predominantly white British. The school has low numbers, e.g. only eighteen in Reception when they are all in. A higher than average number of children on Pupil Premium.

Pre-observation reflections

Setting out this morning to begin the research phase of my PhD I am aware of mixed feelings. I feel excited to have finally reached this phase of my study, however my mind feels sluggish and I am not sure if I am going to be able to give my attention for a full hour to this observation, coming as it does after a term of dealing with the loss of my husband and the resulting need to focus on the many practical details involved as well as the emotional process of coming to terms with this loss. It is almost as if I sense a resistance in myself to switch my focus and attention to something completely different.

The journey to the school only takes ten minutes and I although I feel a little reticent I walk into the building and explain to the receptionist who I am. I have not seen her before and there is no sense of recognition of what I am there for. I say that I am there to do research in Reception and she responds with ‘so’. I wonder if there might be a problem. Fortunately, another person in the office recognises me and informs the receptionist that I need a visitor’s badge. I sign in and the receptionist takes me through the school to the Reception classroom, it is accessed through the staff room.

Observation

I have visited the classroom before when I first visited the school to discuss my project with the Head Teacher. My first impression is that there is a lot of noise, but not many children. I remember that there are just eighteen in the class.

I look around for the teacher (T) and see her on the carpet with six children around her in a circle. I also notice Tina is one of this group and with non-verbal communication confirm with T that I have the right child. T’s face seems open and welcoming, I immediately feel comfortable and accepted into the setting. I sit on a chair a short distance away in order to not feel overwhelming to the child.

Tina is very focused on the group activity, T is holding a set of cards with words on and dots underneath each letter, she tells the children a word and asks them how many sounds in the word, the children respond by showing fingers. Tina notices me, and I acknowledge her with a smile. Her smiled response seems like she is a little nervous but then shifts her attention to the activity again.

This activity lasts just over five minutes, I am not quite close enough to hear what Tina says but I notice that she sometimes gets the answer wrong, other children are a bit hit and miss also. T is very calm, there is no sense of her imparting that there has been a failure when the answer isn’t correct, she simply goes over the word counting the sounds. Her face continues to be warm and open. One of the children has offered a number of correct answers and, as the activity comes to a natural end, T informs this child, a boy, that he can put his name up on to the Rainbow.

The other children wander off to do their own thing. Tina goes to the home corner, I notice her glancing towards me and I wonder if she is checking to see if I am following her. I settle myself on a chair in the home corner. There is something about this part of the classroom that feels familiar to me, I become aware of my own experience as a child of playing in the home corner. I have been in several schools and seen different arrangements of the home corner however this one seems quite different. I wonder if it is the way it is contained on all four sides with a gap at one corner to allow entrance and exit?

K joins Tina in the home corner and they play together with dolls, bathing, feeding, cooking. There is a lot of conversation which I found difficult to hear, I don’t like to get too close in case my presence feels intrusive. There is a lot of co-operation between them and I hear Tina say, ‘you can be the big sister,’ I wonder how this directive will go down with K, she seems a confident and independent little person, how will she respond to this I wonder? K ’s response is ’yeh, Ok, I will be the big sister with black shoes.’ As she says this she looks towards me.

Meanwhile, Tina busies herself around the kitchen, boiling the kettle, washing the food and then cooking it for K to feed to the doll in the high chair. The doll is a female character from a children’s film dressed in costume. Tina decides to change the bib, puts the doll on the floor and tries to get the bib off over the doll’s head but K seems to be trying to pull it back on. Tina says, ‘no she needs this bib’ and proceeds to take one off and put another on, K tries to help. While doing this together Tina suddenly directs K to get the bath ready ‘let’s give her a bath’. K pretends to fill the bath in the sink and carries it to where Tina has the doll on the floor, then Tina puts the doll into the bath fully clothed. I feel surprised about this and very curious, I wonder why she didn’t take the doll’s clothes off?

K leaves Tina in the home corner, initially Tina doesn’t notice she has gone, and then a few minutes later she looks up and notices K sat at the craft table, there is a flicker of her eyes towards me and I wonder if Tina might follow her, but she doesn’t, instead I see her touch the doll’s face gently with her fingers.

Tina finds a square of fabric, I wonder if she is going to use it as a towel to dry the doll but instead wraps it around the cat, carrying it over to the bath. The doll is still in the bath and Tina lifts her out and puts her on the floor, there is no drying or gentle placing of the doll. Then she puts the cat in the bath and proceeds to pretend to wash it quickly and once again wraps the cat in the blanket and places it under a table for a few minutes before going back and lifting the cat up and places it on a cushion on a chair. The doll appears to have been forgotten completely and still lies there on the floor.

Tina glances at me and across at the craft table, suddenly shooting off to K and asking her if she will come and play with her, K says she is making a mask so Tina goes to another child and asks them to play with her but this child shows no interest in Tina and focuses on her mask.

Tina remains at the table but asks another child to cut the mask out for her, B seems very competent at cutting and does not seem to mind being asked to do this. There are crayons, sheets of tissue paper, scissors and glue. The task seems to involve sticking the tissue paper on the mask. There are five girls around the table and one boy, all engaged in this activity. There seems to be a high level of independent thinking and activity, with the girls generally talking to each other about being friends, sharing the glue, supporting each other in the task. Tina appears to be enjoying sitting at the table with the girls but her focus on the task is limited, while the others seem to have some sort of plan about how to achieve their task Tina seems a bit haphazard.

K is standing up now and begins chanting a phrase that sounds like ‘if you put that in my face I will slap you’. The girls laugh, and she repeats the phrase quite loudly. Tina puts the mask in K’s face and quickly takes it away again. K moves around the table and continues chanting her phrase. The girls don’t seem to be disturbed and begin to make their own phrases which include the word poo. Then K says she is going to stick Tina’s bum to the chair, although she is laughing while she is saying this I have a sense of an incongruous feeling hidden behind the smiley face. I wonder if there is something going on here that I am not aware of.

I wonder if the sense of co-operation around the table will be lost as a result of what I am observing. I sense something in myself, an unease about K maybe? Or an anxiety replacing a sense of ‘wonderment’ at the group working so independently and co-operatively together. However, the group continue to attend to their task and I notice there is no obvious sign that anyone is perturbed.

Tina goes to the toilet, there are four individual toilets in the classroom. I notice she hasn’t closed the door, but I remain seated by the craft table. She washes her hands and returns to the table. After a few minutes Tina asks B if she will play in the home corner with her, B stands up and they head into the home corner together. There is a table with paper and crayons and B sits at the table. Tina notices that there is a piece of paper with a drawing of Goldilocks and speech bubble, someone has written her name on the paper, she tries to read it and B helps her, B names the child who had written it.

Tina says she wants to write something but doesn’t know how to do it, B says she will help and offers to hold Tina’s hand to guide her with the writing. B does this in very supportive fashion. The T draws the children’s attention and they all stop what they are doing and lift their hands up for her to see. She calls them to sit on the carpet in a calm but clear voice, informing them that it is fruit time, she has a pleasant and relaxed face and the children make their way from wherever they are busy. A support assistant chivvies a couple of stragglers and encourages one or two to sit on the carpet.

Meanwhile the T has a price list for apples and oranges and some tubs of 1p and 2p coins. The children choose the fruit they want, and she asks them how much it is; with very little support all the children are able to do this when they choose their fruit. All the children seem interested in this task. Because there are only sixteen children in the group this task is completed quite quickly. There are no cross words or a need to be directive, the children generally wait for their turn or accept a quiet word to wait a moment for their turn. Tina is one of the first to choose and then she sits close to the teacher watching and eating her apple.

When the task is finished the T allows them to move away while still eating their fruit, there is a quiet transition as the children move to wherever they want to be next. T rewards one of the boys for counting the coins correctly and he puts his name on the rainbow. Another boy shows her some writing he has done and he is told it is good enough to go on the wall, a display of work the children can be proud of. I see Tina, noticing this, seeming to think about something, and she runs to where she has been writing in the speech bubble with the help of B. Picking the paper up she takes it to T who smiles with pleasure and asks Tina to tell her what it says. With T’s help Tina reads what has been written. The paper is then fixed to the wall. Tina’s has a very pleased expression on her face.

It is time for me to go, I say thank you to the teacher and goodbye to Tina and say I will see her next week.

I walk back the entrance of school, sign out and head for my car. I have enjoyed my first observation here very much but the content of my observation will take some time to write up, I hope I remember it all.

N.B. I was asked several times by different children, mainly boys, who I was and what I was doing, my response ‘My name is Mrs Stammers and I am doing quiet work’ was accepted by the children and they moved away.

# Observation 15/01/2019 (2)

Pre-observation reflections

I am feeling more positive today than I was last week. Although I am slightly anxious I think it is more about the time I know it is going to take to write the observation up.

When I arrive at the school this week they are ready for me and I am welcomed with a request for my name and a badge is waiting for me. The secretary accompanies me to the classroom and I notice the warm atmosphere of the school and comment on it to her.

Observation

The Teacher (T) is sat at a table with five children, Tina is one of them, she is sat next to the T on her left side. It is a guided reading session with simple phonically decodable words in simple sentences alongside illustrations. Tina, in princess dress over her school uniform, looks washed out, tired and yawning looking at T rather than text. Her fingers play around her mouth, I sometimes feel is she missed because T is opposite the other children and Tina is to left side, K is there, opposite occasional look towards Tina who returns her glances, I think I sense a competitiveness in their looks. Tina watches T carefully for cues to answers to questions.

A writing exercise follows, the children are asked to fill in the missing word, one of the words in a short sentence in the simple story they have just read together. Tina waits before committing to paper, others feel confident to go ahead but have misunderstood what was required. T uses fingers, to support their learning ‘how many sounds in mud,’ sounding each letter and raising a finger for each one then counting the fingers. Tina seems to rely on T not sure she has the right number of sounds. This is a long process but the T is patient and repeats the sounds while counting them. T says just another 2 minutes and then we will finish, one of the boys says ‘yeh’ very enthusiastically with his whole body, he seems re-energised. Tina leans to one side her head on her arm on the table. I wonder if she is tired, perhaps she had a late night last night. It has been 20 mins. since I entered the classroom and the group had been doing this activity before I arrived. Shortly T says ‘OK we won’t do any more you have been sat a long time’.

T says they have finished, and the children move away, the doors are opened by SA and all the boys get their coats and head outside. I feel relieved Tina wants to stay indoors, the outside is cold. Tina looks in a large grey box, for something, apparently wanting a cardboard tube, there are none, only two girls have them. B has cut hers in half and labelled both of them, when Tina says there are none left she offers to take name off one of hers so that Tina has one. Tina hesitates, B has a long and a short one, the one she is offering to Tina is the short one. C says name of boy who ‘took them all’. Tina goes to tell T who is involved in directing some children to what they will be doing next, Tina says ‘there aren’t any tube’s so and so took them all’ but as if to the wind, T doesn’t hear or notice.

Tina returns to the table and asks B if she would like to play in home corner (hc), they move in to HC, C follows and Tina directs B ‘You be the mum and you (C)can be the baby,’ B says you be the mum but Tina says no I am the princess. B and Tina seem to work together C seems to be slightly outside. Tina goes to a cupboard and asks ‘who wants a crown?’ B and C both say ‘I do I do’, and they try on different crowns from the cupboard, sometimes chosen by Tina sometimes and sometimes self-chosen. They seem to try on quite a few but then abandon them.

B moves away towards the tubes she was working on and offers one to Tina who accepts this time and says ‘I am going to put my name on,’ she finds the store available and accessible for the children, gets label, writes her name and sticks it on, however, I notice label peels up. Tina doesn’t notice and her attention changes again as B suddenly moves to the water and calls to Tina to come and play. Tina ignores her tube and removes princess dress, returning it to the dressing up box in the HC and then gets an apron.

They play for a long time in the water. It is near the door I wonder how cold it is, neither of them have long sleeves? I notice the water is blue with sparkles in. There is a large figure I recognise as Dora the Explorer, two children in a life raft and a number of wind up creatures, e.g. a frog, a fish, Tina says ‘You be big Dora I’ll be the little children,’ referring to two children in a life raft. The children seem to bounce on big Dora’s head, and there seems to be quite a lot of aggression directed towards this figure. During their play they sometimes swop roles, almost trying out what each role feels like. Being sent to prison features and Dora is sat in a corner which they identify as prison, but then Tina says ‘no all the water is prison’ and B agrees. When they become the children Tina and B become very baby like in the talk and behaviour, splashing in the water and making high pitched baby sounds.

I am not sure how it happened but Dora is declared to have died, B wants to make her better but Tina says she has to stay dead, ‘Mum’s dead, she can’t be brought back’ and Dora is tossed into water. All the animals are taken out of the water and put on a ledge at edge of the water tray and they’re for sale, Tina and B buy them for pets. They wind them up and they swim in the water, the girls put their hands under the water and notice they are blue, they laugh at their hands being blue under the water.

I have been in closer proximity in my observation this week, I have been sat at one end of the water tray, so close I have often been splashed by the water. As I sit there Tina comes around to my end of the tray and plays in the water, I am very aware of her closeness and feel rather amazed, even stunned that she has made this move. I wonder if this is an indication that my presence has been accepted? Since this is only my second visit this surprises me. Tina moves away only to return shortly afterwards and this happens a few times, each time I feel surprised. Then B also stands next to me while playing in the water, almost as if following Tina’s lead. This experience feels very accepting and I feel quietly pleased, while aware that there may be times in the future that I may not be so welcome.

The T brings a basket of fruit to a nearby table and informs the children it is fruit time and they can help themselves to fruit. Tina and B quickly take off their aprons and rush to the table, Tina is pleased there are some apples and picks one up. The apples seemed preferred by most children to the pears. The children help themselves, staying a few moments at the table and chatting about who likes what and then gradually moving away to their own activities.

Tina says let’s go to the carpet, B and C follow her. C picks up a book and begins reading the story sat on small chair decorated with images of story characters. B sits on the floor while Tina is on a cube cushion next to C, B seems to feel left out and says so. I am surprised Tina does nothing to ease B’s concerns, B has been tremendously supportive of Tina this week and last. B goes to sit on the teacher’s chair, C says it is not allowed, Tina says it is and tries to sit with B, B gets up and lets Tina sit on the chair but Tina returns to listen to C. B, sat on the chair again, says if you don’t listen to my story you are not my friend. Tina says she is her friend but wants to listen to C’s story. Tina stands up and goes to choose a book of her own. She chooses a Barbie book and B joins her on the carpet, Tina says the book is about Barbie and a mermaid. There are a few minutes of looking at the book together with B and then Tina says shall we go into HC; B says yes but C remains looking at her book.

Walking into the HC Tina looks around the floor and says this is a mess and B agrees that it is. B picks up a small wooden puppet theatre and says let do a show, she moves it to the only space available on the floor. They collect some puppets from a box and place them around the back of the puppet theatre, they go off and ask K if she would like to come to the show, K says she is busy painting, they ask other children who are all busy, but Tina and B are not deterred they decide to practice their play.

Returning to their theatre, they collect some more puppets or cuddly animals, one of these is the cat from last week, Tina says this cat is not going to be in the show but is placed in the audience, the cat seems to hold some significance for Tina.

They ask me if I want to see the show and I say that my time is up I need to go. I say goodbye to Tina and that I will see her next week, and then goodbye to the T who is outside and then leave. Once again feeling I have observed a lot and wonder if I can hold it all together enough to write it up.

# Observation 22/01/2019 (3)

Pre-observation reflections

I am feeling more positive about my observations today and head out feeling curious about what I will learn about Tina today. The secretary in the office welcomes me and gives me a badge. I am seen through the security door into the main school but from there I am allowed to make my own way to the classroom. This gives a feeling of familiarity.

Observation

As I entered the room the teacher was stood at the open door with her coat on ready to go outside. She smiled when she saw me, and I felt my presence was accepted as ‘normal’.

I looked around for Tina and located her in the Home Corner (HC) wearing the Princess dress, she and B were crawling on the carpet with big arm and leg movements. Tina looked at me and said, ‘we are spiders.’ I nodded in acknowledgement. K was also in the HC, absorbed in hair styling a large dolls head with lots of hair. I noticed that a bed had been created under a table, it looked very tidy and well thought out, around the table were baskets and boxes from the HC forming a barrier between the bed and the rest of the space. A princess doll was in the bod and there were other fluffy creatures around the bed. I noted that one of these was the cat which seems to have some significance for Tina.

As Tina a B crawled around they pretended to eat flies, then they seemed to be spitting them out. Spitting out. Tina crawls under the table, she speaks half to me and half to B ‘this is what a baby spider does when it talks ,’ and she makes some high squeaky sounds.

B crawls towards K and says, ‘We’re eating flies,’ K puts her hand out to B who eats from her hand and then spits it out then spits out. Tina crawls towards K who offers her hand and Tina pretends to eat from it and then spits it out. Tina a B continue eating and spitting out.

K has box with hairdryer etc. Tina and B sneak up and take some things out of box (jewels). Tina tells K ‘pretend you can’t see, pretend you don’t notice’ but K protests ‘no, no they are mine’ she tries to take them back from Tina and B. While she pursues B Tina takes more out, her expression appears to me to be provocative, as if she almost wants K to see what she is doing. K turns around, she looks upset and says ‘no, no’ and rushes forward to rescue her jewels. Tina says, ‘you’re mean; you have to share’. I have a strong feeling that Tina is the one being mean, and that K is being picked on. K leaves the HC and Tina and B move everything in the HC around the table with bed underneath. Tina says ‘This is our house we have everything.’ Rather than a boundary I now think it looks like a barricade. On reflection I sense a defensive position, but maybe I am the one feeling the need to be defended from my feelings of a task that presently feels overwhelming.

K returns and continues to brush and work on the dolls hair. Sometimes K is like mum, telling Tina and B to play nicely, then Tina creeps along and takes more out of box. B tries to alert K saying ‘mum, mum’ in a squeaky voice, as if she wants her to know what is happening. I wonder if K really can’t see I wonder about this ‘not seeing’ mode. This too seems like it might be a defensive response to something that might be perceived as threatening.

B and Tina are crawling around and there are lots of ‘let’s pretend’. B leaves the HC to go to the toilet and K has also left the area. Tina crawls under the table and gets into the bed, then she talks her way through the narrative, saying ‘now I am going to lie down,’ ‘now I am doing get up and crawl out of the door,’ describing everything she is imagining in her mind. I note that this is a lovely essential task to making up stories she will later create for herself when writing.

K returns to HC and Tina moves towards the box of Jewels and begins to empty it of everything, K is very upset, and I feel upset too, this feels so unfair. K seems to hurl what seems her only threat at Tina; ‘I’m not going to be your friend,’ friendship seems to be understood to be precious. Tina is not deterred, and I feel myself wanting to step in and offer some support for K, Tina wants something on K’s arm and when K refuses, hiding her arm behind her back, Tina says she is going to tell the T that K is being mean. Tina marches off outside taking her story to the T. I observe through the window, the T leans forward sympathetically and nods and smiles as Tina tells the story. K takes off the bracelet and gives it to B, I wonder if she is afraid that the teacher will believe Tina. When Tina returns both Tina and B resume their magpie game trying to take the jewels. K says, ‘no, no not that one, I like the bow’ and her hand darts into the box to pick up the small bow.

There is a lively dispute about the jewels, but Tina and B ignore K and take the jewels into the little house under the table. K looks beaten, aware perhaps that the odds are stacked against her and she can’t win. She turns away and goes to the dressing up box and picks out the fairy dress saying almost to herself that she will use magic. She leaves the HC and goes outside to T to ask for to help put it on.

B’s shoelace is undone, and she steps forward to me and asks me to tie it for her. I feel reluctant but think she might trip if she goes to find someone else to do it. I explain that I will tie it because I want her to be safe. (On reflection maybe, I shouldn’t have done this, if I hadn’t been there B would have had to go find another adult. And furthermore, the other shoe lace came undone later and having done it once I felt I couldn’t refuse this one).

Tina looks towards where K has gone outside and seems to be thinking of something. I wonder if she is concerned about what K may be saying to T, but then she gets an idea and goes outside to ask T something. On returning she says T says she can have the other jewellery box out proceeds to find another box with shiny things in it, one of them is a wand which she lifts up triumphantly. Turning to K she says she is going to change her into a rabbit with her magic wand. K seems upset and says, ‘no I don’t want to be a rabbit.’ But Tina says she has done the magic and that’s what she is now, she finds rabbit ears on a hair band and although K resists a little she allows Tina to put it on her head. Tina and B sit by their house, they tell K to ring the doorbell. K does, and they open door and K hops in, Tina gives her a cuddle and leads her to the bed under the table. Tina says pretend you’re not feeling well, come and lie down. K crawls under table and lays on the bed, Tina covers her with a blanket, K looks extremely contented. Tina advises K on what she needs to do; pretend you’re feeling sick, pretend you’re sick in the sick bowl, pretend you’re not well. B joins in the game and K follows their instructions.

Tina seems to have a very clear idea of what she wants to create in her narrative and is very controlling to get it.

B says she is going to be Dr and finds a mobile phone, she tells Tina ‘pretend you’re calling Dr.’ Tina has an imaginary phone and tells the Dr her bunny is being sick. B says, ‘Yes I will be there’. B knocks on the door, and Tina shouts for her to come in but B walks away. Tina waves through a pretend window but B doesn’t seem to be noticing.

Tina lays down her head next to K, touches her face, strokes and tells her it’s going to be alright. K looks calm peaceful and happy. This strikes me as a sharp contrast with her earlier behaviour towards K.

B returns to the HC and Ty joins them she wants to be a rabbit too, she finds another set of ears. Tina leaves K laying in the bed and talks to Ty for a few moments before returning to her stock of jewels and picking a few up she tries to put things in B’s hair, but B doesn’t want this and hides in a corner with her back to Tina, Tina persists and eventually manages to get a band around her pony tail. I wonder how strongly B feels about this.

T announces there is fruit on the table, but Tina and B are preoccupied and don’t notice. Most of the other children move towards the fruit and help themselves, I feel a sense of not wanting them to miss out, especially Tina, who I knows seems to like apples which appear to be very popular. It takes the noise of some boys shouting out that fruit is ready before they seem to become aware.

Tina chooses an apple, B a banana, they talk together, and B says how much she likes bananas. Suddenly Tina says the apple is awful and it is making her sick and she is pulling faces. I notice another child going to T saying she doesn’t like apple can she choose a banana. T says yes, just to put the apple in the bin. This seems a very generous act on the part of the teacher and I wonder if any other children will follow suit. Tina decides she would rather have a banana and tells T that her apple tastes funny. T allows her to choose a banana. The T leaves the children eating.

The children seem to be pretending strange things are happening, making ‘zombie’ faces for example and saying it seems strange that the apples didn’t taste nice.’ It was Magic, that happened and no one did it,’ announces Tina. And then some of the children, including Tina and B begin wiggling and declare that it is strange because they can’t help it, ‘I can’t stop, I can’t stop’ they shout. Tina and B finish their bananas, put the skin into the bin. Then wiggle their way into the HC, where Tina says she has something stuck in throat and collapses to the floor. B says it must be the apple and kisses Tina on the forehead. Tina opens her eyes and smiles. I had wondered if this might happen after the apple incident. Is this a re-enactment of a fairy story?

It is time for me to go, I say goodbye to Tina and that I will say her next week. She waves at me as I leave.

# Observation 29/01/2019 (4)

Pre-observation reflections

Feel less anxiety this week, after my supervision session I can see how I can manage collecting the data in a more manageable way.

The process of signing in and being welcomed into school is familiar now, though I appreciated the warmth of the welcome.

Observation

As I enter the classroom I see the class teacher putting her coat on ready to open the doors to allow children to play outside if they choose to. As I move towards the table where Tina is sat I feel the cold air rush in through the open door. Even though I have numerous layers on I feel cold.

Sitting down close to the table I hear the SA explain to Tina how to form a letter on the guide lines on the page. It sounds like a ‘g’ but I am not close enough to see. From what the SA is saying (there is just a hint of resignation in her voice that suggests to me that she may be a little frustrated that Tina doesn’t seem to have understood) she has already explained to Tina how to form the letter shape and Tina hadn’t quite grasped it. Tina bends her head down and seems to be focusing on forming the letter along a designated line. Her hand is very tight around the pencil, her head quite close to the page and her shoulders hunched over the page. Her posture suggests she is making a great effort. After the first couple of attempts she looks around watching the other children before returning to the task.

As I watch Tina I am sat opposite her but a couple of feet away from the table, I had noticed that K was on my left and engaged in the same task. K moved to stand in front of me, almost blocking my view of Tina. At first she moved partially blocking my view and then she moved again and my view was compromised. I have no idea if this was intentional or not. I think she wanted the teacher’s attention, but she didn’t attempt to make contact except to wave her book around a little.

Tina finished her line of letters and the SA said she had made a good try and she could go and play. As Tina moved away K moved round the table and took Tina’s place next to the SA.

Tina was wearing a princess dress, but different to the one I have seen her in the last two weeks, she entered the HC. I noted it was very tidy with the table nicely set with a table cloth and plates and cups with food on. The small bench settee had soft toys arranged in an organised fashion looking as if someone gave thought to the arrangement. I wondered who it was and noticed Tina looking a little bemused.

B entered the HC, she was dressed in the princess dress that Tina normally wore, she bounced up to Tina who said ‘it’s very tidy,’ and B said ‘I did it for you.’ Tina seems to complain, saying something about the settee and that there was no room to sit on it. I felt annoyed that she didn’t say thank you to B for her thoughtfulness and the effort she made for her. I wonder about this relationship where Tina seems to be on the receiving end of B’s generosity without any sense of appreciation.

B is called away by the SA to do some work, she is obviously in a different group to Tina. I wonder what Tina will do without B to play with. She busies herself at the table and then announces that she is going to have a picnic, she doesn’t look at me while saying this though I did wonder if she was telling me what she was going to do. She puts cups and saucers and plates, with food in a semi-circle around the soft toys sat on the settee. She talks to herself while she does it and I get the feeling that she is looking at me sometimes. I wonder how comfortable it feels for her to be singularly observed. My thoughts, when I notice them, seem to be about feeling cold!

Tina then begins to place furniture, chairs and stools, around the edge of the picnic area, almost demarcating the picnic area with a border. I recall she had done the same thing last week around a bed that had been created under a table. Almost like a series of semi-circles. I also remembered my observation in School 2 last week which featured a large wooden rainbow made up of semi-circles of different sized and coloured wood.

Tina moved in an exaggerated ‘don’t care’ attitude towards the drawing table and found a picture she wanted to colour out of a collection in a draw. It was of a spider and she focused intensely on colouring it, picking up felt tips or crayons very deliberately and holding again with a firm fist, reminding me of the way she held her pencil when doing letter formation. She chose red and black to colour the body and legs, but the colouring seemed more impulsive than planned. When the drawing was finished she stood up and took it to where the soft toys were and propped it up behind them and then returned and found another picture to colour. Her colouring was more erratic and less well-formed and as she finished she turned the paper over and drew a small circle in each of the corners before taking to the side of the cat and propping it there. Then returned got another picture to colour but this time just scribbled a little across the Christmas tree in pink before turning it over again and drawing four circles at each corner. I wondered about their significance and it occurred to me that maybe they represented blue tack that teacher’s use for putting pictures on the wall. Once again she went and placed the picture in the picnic area propped up against a stool.

I had a sense of feeling uncomfortable, was I seeing a response to being observed? I wondered how much of this feeling of discomfort was me and how much I was sensing what Tina was feeling herself. On reflection typing this up I did not feel any inclination in myself to try and make the situation easier for her, I was curious about how she might resolve this.

Tina left the drawing table and moved to an area of the HC in front of the barrier she had created and began sweeping and mopping up, followed by hoovering., then she placed the warning sign up to warn the floor might be slippery. She spent some time doing this cleaning and then put the utensils in another row behind furniture, creating an additional semi-circle.

The baby with the bottle was in a high chair and she tried to feed it with the bottle but seemed to get a little frustrated. In response she moved the high chair and baby into the outermost circle with the cleaning utensils and told the baby to watch and she could have her milk now. She also found another bib and put it around the baby, though she was unable to tie it. Tina talked to the baby but I was unable to hear her, she sounded soft but in command.

She pottered around the sink and washed her hands and said to herself she was going to make a cake. She found a pan in the oven and proceeded to put various things in it and to mix it up. She was intent on this task when B arrived back in the home corner.

B wants to see what Tina is doing but Tina acts quite defensively and uses her body as a barrier between B and the cooker, trying to keep B away from the pan, not even allowing her to look.

Tina says ‘lets pretend I’m the mum,’ and B uses a very childlike voice and asks mum if she can bake a cake too. Tina replies that she can get some more things to go in this cake, b is very obliging and picks up some of the toys in the HC and takes then to Tina who puts them in the pan. Each time B brings something she is sent away to find more. I wonder how much more will fit in the pan.

Tina suddenly drops the spoon and runs across to the SA to ask if she can get one of the toy boxes down. The SA suggests that she can take things out of the box but not empty it out completely. Tina comes rushing back ‘we use the toys out of the box,’ I notice that she has done this before with seemingly no qualms that anyone will refuse her request. I reflect how difficult I find it to ask for things and marvel at her confidence in the adults in her class.

B finds a magic wand and while various items are being added to the pan she pretends to do magic, Tina says ‘oh yes we need magic.’

B tidies the table up and decorates it while Tina puts the cake on the table then Tina turns to the box to find something to decorate the table. She lifts up an odd spaceperson and B says, ‘Oh I want that,’ but Tina says ‘well it’s just going to stay in here for now.’ B responds by suggesting they pretend; she tells Tina to pretend that she knows it is important to her and gives it to her as a present. Tina seems to pause for a moment and then agrees, saying ‘look what I have got you,’ and B acts very excited and says, ‘Oh thank you mummy, thank you.’

Things are accepted or rejected for the cake, other items that seem to hold special significance are used to decorate the table.

There is a shift in the sounds in the classroom and the boys seem to be excited around the table where the fruit is being placed. The SA must establish control.

Tina and B head for the fruit, they seem excited that there are apples, but then when they get them Tina whispers to B and they both go to put them in the bin.

The bin is on the carpet area where class and group teaching takes place. Another girl is playing there using the teachers finger pointer. Tina and B seem to take over and ignore this girl, Tina sits on the chair and says she is the teacher, the girl hands over the pointer to Tina, who waves it about and points to the sand timer and tells B and the girl to dance until the timer stops. B engages in the dancing immediately, but the girls seems a bit reluctant. K walks into the game and joins in, she moves with outlandish movements making lots of nonsense noises, I wonder if she is attention seeking, from me? But Tina stops the game, she appears to me to be quite controlling and she tells K to pretend that she is a cat. K does a very good job of pretending she is a cat and Tina is very affectionate, stroking her hair and face.

Tina suddenly runs off to the teacher and asks if she can draw on the whiteboard, I see the T say yes and Tina runs back looking delighted. She begins drawing on the board and B stands on her right with a pen also making a semi-circle and proceeds to put different patters underneath the arc. Tina has drawn something I am unsure about but think it almost looks like a pregnant woman from the side. I am curious about this.

I find it difficult to hear, there are some boys around me who seem to be trying to draw my attention. Then I notice K is allowed to draw and she draws a person, but the head body and legs are disconnected.

Tina rubs out her original drawing and draws a semi-circle, colouring and making shapes underneath.

It is time for me to leave. Tina and the T are both engrossed in their own activities and I don’t disturb them by saying goodbye.

# Observation 05/02/2019 (5)

Pre-observation reflections

Closer to home, this setting is so easy to get to. I know what I am doing in this school. The classroom is easy to locate. I feel more positive about this school than School 2.

Observation

Tina is easy to locate; she is sat on the carpet looking at books with C. They are sat side by side with Tina’s right-side touching C’s right. The books are Fairy tales. She is wearing a princess dress again. The books seem to have come out of a box meant to hold about 10 stories. Tina says, ‘when you have finished you put them back in here,’ she is holding the box in what seems a protective manner, as if she is in control.

Tina acknowledges me with a small smile then returns to the books. I nod slightly in return.

C tries to tell the story from the pictures, but Tina seems to be flicking through looking at the pictures. She points to an image of two rabbits, they are both looking upwards, their tails are close together and Tina says something that strikes me as curious; ‘look they are kissing,’. I wonder if I have not seen the picture correctly and I check again. The rabbit’s faces are not near each other, but their bottoms are side by side. I wonder what this might mean? Is this a growing awareness of sexuality?

Reflecting later I wonder about the proximity the girls are in and if it has any relevance?

Suddenly Tina stands up and walks toward T, she tells her that she has tummy ache, the teacher suggests that she get a drink of water and sit somewhere quiet for a while. Tina finds her bottle and goes to HC and sits on the settee. B, also in princess dress, asks Tina what is wrong, and Tina says she has tummy ache. I think she looks tired and wonder if the tummy ache is ‘real’ or something else. She sips at her water. B is talking but Tina has a faraway look in her eyes. I have a picture of me having tummy ache and being at home in a warm bed with a hot water bottle. I feel cold and notice the doors have been opened to allow the children free flow outside.

B is talking to Tina, but Tina doesn’t seem to be paying attention. Tina picks her nose and then wipes her fingers on her dress, she looks at me and I feel slightly embarrassed at what I am observing. I wonder if she might too, but her look does not convey embarrassment, she continues picking her nose and wiping her fingers on her dress. I find myself wanting to look away.

Tina moves to the craft table. There is a pre-prepared model of a Chinese dragon made out of an egg box and tissue paper. Tina begins to do a Blue Peter type demo of how to make the dragon. She seems in charge and sounds authoritative, like a teacher. I notice she seems to show this behaviour when in her peer group. Some of the children are trying to make a dragon but find it more difficult than they thought. There are no egg boxes available and they seem unsure of how to proceed.

She seems to lose interest when the other children want to know how to make their box into the dragon. She looks around and sees CL sat at a computer, she moves towards her and stands at the side saying’ we can find dragons on CBeebies.’ CL tries to locate the web page; they both try to spell CBeebies but miss the link. I wonder how this will turn out.

They click on a few different sites and find a History topic with a number of different windows. Tina says this box will be about Snow White and tells CL to click on it. The video is about Kings and Queens and horrible stories. They try different web links and finds some horrible things, there is a boy with blotches on his face and Tina remarks that he has chicken pox. CL moves to the adjacent computer and Tina sits down and begins clicking different sites with the mouse.

A boy comes along and says to Tina ‘Tina how do you make a dragon,’ and Tina leaves the mouse immediately moves to the adjacent craft table and begins to explain how to make the dragon. She continues for a few minutes. In the meantime, the boy claims her seat and the mouse. It takes a while for Tina to grasp what has happened, but she doesn’t seem upset. I expected her to protest but she stands next to him and watches the game he brings up. Tina says she was looking for CBeebies, but the boy ignores her. After a few minutes he stops and switches the machine off. Tina says, ‘Oh no!’ She turns it back on but can’t find her way to the web page.

After a few minutes of trying she leaves the computer and heads back into the HC, E is there. There is a small mess in one area of the HC and Tina says, ‘who made the mess?’ It has the sound of an enquiry rather than indignation. E says something I misunderstand at first; ‘I know it was e (her name?).’ But later realise she had said evil. Tina responds saying ‘Oh yes let’s shut him in something so he can’t get out.’ They find a plastic basket, like a wire supermarket basket, and turn it upside down but then decide ‘it’ could get out through the holes.

Instead they choose the sink cupboard and put a cushion across the hole at the top where the bowl would be. They begin to put things into the cupboard with the intention of them being itchy for whoever they have trapped in there; the idea seems to be to make life as uncomfortable as possible. They refer to something as what sounds like Peabody, but at other times sounds like pea. They check things in the HC to see if they might be itchy seemingly to make life difficult for evil pea/body? E has a teddy in her hand and Tina snatches it to put in the cupboard but E protests ‘no that’s my favourite,’ Tina hesitates and then hands it back to E.

C joins them and asks what they are doing, and they explain they are finding things that are itchy. Tina finds what she calls pepper and says if you eat it you will be dead. C looks at me and asks me ‘will we, if we eat it will we die?’ I shrug my shoulders but notice C looks anxious.

Tina finds a toy gorilla and says, ‘pretend the gorilla is scary,’ then puts it in the cupboard. They talk about finding more itchy things and Tina finds Snow White in a basket, they discuss if she is itchy and try different fabrics on the dress finally deciding the bow on her head is itchy and put her in the cupboard.

K appears and is curious, but Tina bars the way to the cupboard. B also enters the HC but Tina doesn’t include her in the game.

Tina and C move away together and head for the carpet area where a SA is sat with a small group. She explains she is going to do phonics. Tina and C ask if they can join in. The SA says they can watch if they want. She is waiting for another child to join them and Tina goes off to find him. When she returns with the boy he doesn’t look very happy, but the SA explains he needs to do his phonics. I have followed Tina to watch where she was going, I follow her back to the group. When we get there, she takes my chair and moves it towards the children and sits on it. I almost say that’s my chair but decide to find another one. She sits happily above the others and no one makes any comment.

The objective is to identify real words as opposed to nonsense world. Real words are treasure and are placed in a chest, nonsense words are put in a bin.

Each child has a turn but not Tina or C because they are not in this phonic group. Tina seems much more confident than I have seen her in her small group. When a child is having difficulty, she leaves her chair and goes and sits with her arm around them trying to help them decode the CVC words.

C leaves the group after it is clear she won’t get a turn.

I leave Tina sat on the chair.

# Observation 12/02/2019 (6)

When I enter the room, the teacher is sat with a group at a table, I receive a brief smile of acknowledgement as she is in the middle of explaining something to the children. I look around for Tina and notice she is wearing a princess dress sat at the table with the teacher. Her head is down, and she is leaning over her writing book with her pencil in her right hand. She appears focused on writing letters; the intention seems to be for them to write a sentence about the story ‘Red Riding Hood.’

At the top of the page there appears to be a printed text and I am curious about what it might say. I think it might relate to the learning objective and specify the marking criteria, but I can’t quite see to read it.

Tina hasn’t noticed I have arrived yet. She asks the T a question and is directed to the sheet on the paper which has pictures with words printed underneath, the vocabulary relates to the story and seems to be an aid to support their writing.

K has noticed me, and I notice a slightly static grin on her face, maybe anxiety? Immediately she says to the T, ‘I have nearly finished my book,’ while continuing to look at me. I wonder why she has said this, it seems out of context, although I can see that she is well over half way through her book her attention seems to have shifted away from the task towards trying to communicate something to me. I wonder if she wants me to be impressed with her?

Tina continues to form her letters carefully but then looks up and notices me. She smiles and shakes her head a little as she bends down again towards her book. She refers to the T again needing help with the next word in the sentence, the T says each word in the sentence using her fingers to help Tina see how many words she has written and what the next one is; it is the. She asks Tina, ‘how do we write the?’ Tina looks a bit blank, her head on one side. T goes and finds two cards, one with to and the other with the and she asks, ‘which one is the?’ Tina chooses the correct one and the teacher puts the card on the table for her to copy. Tina seems focused and when she needs help with the next word (which is wolf) she is told that it is on the prompt sheet on the table. Tina locates the word easily and copies it down.

When she finishes she lifts her book up and waves it at the T, her face has a big smile and I sense she has a sense of achievement at having finished. I notice that she is the first to finish in her group. The T is very pleased with her, she has a soft warm expression on her face and I can see from Tina’s face she finds pleasure in having received this positive response. Then the T says she can go and choose now, and Tina bounces off to the HC.

In the HC, E is already playing, E finds them both a crown from a box just outside the HC, they put the crowns on.

Two boys are there too playing with cars, running them off the table. I think to myself, the boys are using the home corner with a different intent that the girls. I notice the boys only stay briefly before leaving, I wonder if my presence has influenced their decision.

Because I was distracted by the boys I have missed a step in Tina’s play, as I look around I notice she has something under her dress, I immediately think of pregnancy and wonder if she has a doll tucked under her dress. A minute later she brings out a furry cat and strokes it. She holds the cat in her arms and then walks to a chair and sits down. Tina tells E to fetch the bath and then puts the cat in the bath. E is holding a small grey fabric Teddy and she puts this in the bath too. Tina talks to the Teddy as if it is a very young baby and there is a persona of ‘mum’ about her. I think she must have observed this behaviour and absorbed the nuances of the body as well as voice of a mother.

Meanwhile E has picked up a large bag and announces that they must pack to go on holiday. E puts lots of things from the HC into the bag and Tina makes contributions too. They are both excited and Tina says, ‘pretend you have forgotten this,’ holding a kettle. E responds saying ‘we don’t want that on holiday,’ but then looks inside and finds some vegetable,’ we do need these though’. They find some furniture and put it around the seating area. I have seen this activity in other weeks, when Tina has played with B. Tina picks up a very large square basket, which already has puppets in, puts it onto a stool, and begins to fill it up items from the house. Then Tina moves towards the large drawers and takes something out saying, ‘my little baby,’ it is a small colourful soft parrot. She holds it gently and strokes it.

E hears her group being called to do group work with the SA. For a moment Tina seems still as E leaves, then continues putting things into the large basket. As it becomes very full it topples over and it is quite cumbersome for her to pick up and rebalance on the stool. As she puts more in it falls again and this time she places it over a doll in the cot. She hasn’t noticed the doll, but I did, it had a lovely pink knitted outfit on and I feel some concern, but I am not sure what for. It is after all only a doll.

Tina packs more things around the seating area, rather as she has before creating some sort of barrier so that when she tries to sit down she can’t easily climb over the obstacles and instead sits on the end of the seat, packing cushions around her and resting her feet up on a black and white spotted puppet. She looks as if she is stretched out, relaxing but her gaze seems distant and she is talking to herself. I wouldn’t be able to relax if I was being observed and I feel a little uncomfortable thinking that she might like to not have me there.

She stands up and walks out of HC towards where E is sat in her group, then stands nearby as if she wants to say something to E. I feel curious, would she be allowed to interrupt what E was doing? But then she walks away and sits back on her seat with the cushions around her. I wonder if the cushions are protection from my gaze? Is it more difficult to tolerate when she is on her own?

Tina leaves the HC again and this time goes to the SA and asks if she can get something out of one of the storage boxes. The SA queries what she wants and then nods and says yes. I feel curious about she might want but Tina looks through the boxes but doesn’t take anything out.

She goes out of the HC again and this time stands next to B who looks a bit bewildered because she is in the middle of answering a question and her attention seems divided between Tina and the SA. Tina doesn’t say anything but returns to the HC.

K enters the space and says’ what’s all this?’ pointing to the accumulation of things around the seating area. Tina informs that her and E are going on holiday. K looks at me and then back at Tina. I notice that K has a more elaborate princess dress on while Tina has a well worn one with a hole in it. I feel that I would like to see Tina in the dress, and I notice my own irritation with K, but I am not sure why. Maybe if she wasn’t there Tina could have had the dress? I am surprised at my feelings, I have felt in the past that K was treated unfairly at times by Tina.

K looks at me again.

Tina sits at the writing table and picks up a writing board and pen, she writes some words down and her name then takes it outside to show T. The T gives her a smile and says something encouraging, Tina seems to glow, beaming across her face and hugs the board to her as she returns to the HC.

K takes her princess dress off and puts it in dressing up box then goes and gets her coat from the coat pegs.

Tina takes her dress off and rummages in a box and pulls out some sunglasses, she puts them on and then goes to get her coat to go outside. She walks around the play area a couple of times and then goes to the T wanting her to notice her sunglasses. The teacher bends down and says something to Tina, acknowledging the sun glasses. Tina is beaming again and walks towards the Wendy house; the door is open, and I notice what might be a throne. Tina sits on the throne, stays there for about 30 seconds and then leaves.

After walking around, seemingly with no purpose she opens a large box and takes out a ball. She tosses the ball up and catches it, then she sees a class visitor (school staff) who had been talking to the teacher and she goes to say hello, the staff member plays ball with Tina and Tina seems to enjoy the game. T returns and the person leaves.

Tina drops the ball. She walks towards K who is sat by the sand tray on a chair with a cabbage patch doll on her knee. I had noticed her there before and it had occurred to me that she wanted to put the doll in the sand. I suddenly become aware that I feel ambivalent, would it be wrong for her to put the doll into the sand or would it be OK because I sense something appealing about it for her? I want to put the doll in the sand but at the same time feel it isn’t acceptable.

Tina approaches K and begins to create a mound in the sand, saying it is a spider’s house. Tina makes holes in the spider’s house with her fingers. K is holding the doll on her knee and says she will help. As she scrapes the sand up to put it in a mound I notice Tina seems upset, but I am not sure why. She says something about her nose, did K hit her nose? If she did I didn’t notice it as an intentional action. K looks anxious as Tina goes to T, I hear her say that K has hit her on the nose. The T establishes that it was accidental and checks Tina is Ok. Tina goes inside and finds a paper towel, wets it in the sink and puts it on her nose. She stands with it for a few minutes and then puts it on the side of her head and goes outside and re-joins K at the sand tray and gets a chair this time to sit next to K.

K puts some of the sand in her mouth and then sits the doll in the sand and begins to put sand in the doll’s mouth. I feel uncomfortable watching this. K tells Tina to eat the sand too, just to try it and Tina takes a little sand on her finger and eats it. She seems uncertain about the feel of it. K suggests they put sand in the dolls hair, I wonder if it will come out of the curly hair. I am wondering if this doll is meant to be in the sand and if the T will be cross with them. It occurs to me that K had wanted to put the doll into the sand all along but waited for Tina before doing it. Did she want to spoil Tina’s good standing with the T or did she take some encouragement from Tina as a partner in doing something risky?

K tells the baby it is a bad baby and then tells Tina that she wants her to be mum. Tina says she doesn’t want to be mum. The doll has a lot of sand on her now and Tina says she needs a wash, K looks very excited about this. Then as they walk inside the SA notices them and comments that the doll needs to be in the HC not outside. Tina deflects this comment by saying something about it being outside, I think she means it was found outside and she hadn’t taken it out.

Tina and K head for the sinks which are hidden from the rest of the classroom. No adult can see what they are doing. Tina takes the dress off the doll and gets a paper towel, turns on the tap and wets it then proceeds to wash the doll. There is what looks like a biro mark on the dolls bottom and Tina gets some soap to try and wash it off, but K says it won’t come off.

They spend quite a few minutes washing the doll using more and more soap, the doll looks very clean now, though I notice near the hair line is grubby. I feel fascinated, wondering how long they will do this for? Will they dry her? I think to myself ‘I think that is enough’ but they continue. Tina is in control of the doll, but K is allowed to wash her too. They get more paper towels, wet them and soap them. I hear the bell for tidy up and fruit time and looking at the clock I realise it is time for me to go. I wish I could see how this game was going to end and just hang on briefly to see what might happen but they continue completely engrossed.

# Observation 26/02/2019 (7)

As I enter the classroom the CT is sat at a table with a group of children, she looks up and smiles at me, I smile back. Scanning the room, I don’t see Tina at first but then as I look to my right she is in the carpet area, leaning on a table with B, they both have large markers in their hands and are writing or making marks on a white board and then rubbing them out. I notice the board holds the marks and they do not erase easily. There is a comment about the stain still being there.

Tina is not wearing a princess dress today and I wonder what might have changed for her. Tina stands with one leg bent and her hip tilted to one side. She reminds me of someone in control, adult, giving instructions. I hear her say ‘no you have to do it like this,’ to B. Tina ticks something that B has done. Tina does a lot of scribbling that feels to me like it might be pretend writing. B makes a curved shape which she adds to, making it thicker each time. B notices me watching but Tina hasn’t seen me yet. She writes her name and begins writing some letters in the right, lower quarter of the board, she continues until there are over thirty letters in rows.

SA calls B away for group work. Tina notices me and turns to the board, she continues writing letter shapes, they are both upper and lower case but are not words. K arrives in the area and walks up to Tina. I am struck by how different K looks, her hair is in long small plats, with beads and ribbons woven in. I think she looks pretty. Tina seems antagonistic towards her, almost blocking her from accessing the board. When K tries to write a letter, Tina says ‘no you have to do it like this.’ And she demonstrates. Tina takes a board rubber and begins to rub out K’s writing. K rubs out some of the scribbles Tina has done and Tina retaliates with another erase of K’s marks. Then Tina points to her letters and says, ‘look I’ve done hard work,’ and places a boundary around them. She seems proud of what she has done. K looks but doesn’t say anything.

K leans forward to write something on the board and Tina uses her marker on K’s hair. I feel shocked at this action and curious about why she would have done something like that. K shakes her head and says, ‘stop it,’ Tina says something that seems like, ‘I didn’t do anything,’ but K looks as if she doesn’t believe her. K puts a mark on Tina’s hand with the marker and Tina says she is going to tell her off, marching over to SA to tell her what has happened. The SA asks Tina to ask K to come and see her, K goes over and the teacher tells her to say sorry and not to do it again. Tina has a look of … glee? Justification? On her face. K seems to be taking the brunt of Tina’s negative mood here.

Just then a boy walks across in a very determined way, straight up to the board, and rubs out Tina’s writing. I wonder what motivated him to do this? Had he seen Tina’s behaviour towards K and therefore has decided to punish her? She is upset, but doesn’t cry, instead she tells the SA what he has done. The SA calls him over and says its not fair to do that, and suggests he find something else to do. Tina says the stain is still there and she wants to write over the stain, but when she returns to the board C has already begun writing and drawing in the space. Tina says ‘hey, that’s my stain I want to write on it,’ someone says, ‘what’s a stain?’ Tina says, ‘it doesn’t come off ever,’ but C ignores her and carries on.

Tina flounces off to the HC and finds a marker, then starts a zig zag pattern on a piece of paper which she continues onto the table. This was not accidental but very deliberate. B has finished her group work and finds Tina in the home corner. Tina tells her that K has made a mark on the table, and they both decide to clean it off. I find myself thinking that the sense I have been feeling of Tina’s behaviour towards K as being sadistic is not misplaced. I think I was trying to believe it wasn’t true, and maybe hoping it would change. I am discomfited observing a child behaving in this way towards another child.

They go to the sink area and begin a process of ripping paper towel off the dispenser and wetting it thoroughly and rubbing soap on. Then they return to the HC and begin to wash the table, the things on the table are in the way so they push them off onto the floor or put the larger items on a chair.

There is an excessive use of paper towels and I wonder if this play might be discouraged if noticed by another adult in the room. It occurs to me at some point that I might be expected to blow the whistle on what they are doing and therefore might be considered as colluding with the children. Irresponsible?

The game becomes very involved and they make numerous trips to the sinks and bring back more wet, soapy, paper towels to clean the ‘stain’. Tina also washes the stain off her hand. I become aware that they are avoiding being found out by the SA sitting nearby by hiding their paper as the pass nearby. The CT comes in from outside and notices them, Tina says’ we are cleaning the stain off the table that K did,’ the CT says they need to dry the table now and put things back because it is fruit time. Initially they get paper towel to dry the table but quickly revert to the wetting and soaping again. All the time alert to the position of the SA in the classroom. I find myself with a feeling of collusion, I don’t want them to be caught! I feel caught up in their activity and have a sense of wanting to warn them whenever I think the SA might spot what they are doing.

The SA finally notices them and asks what they are doing, both Tina and B say K had scribbled on the table and they were cleaning it off. The SA says they can stop now, no more water, its fruit time. Tina and B turn to the rest of the house and begin to clean the stools, tables and the rest of the furniture and things in the HC, with their small pieces of wet paper towel. B goes to fetch some more but Tina finds the brush and mop with a small bucket and squeezes water from her paper into the bucket, then uses the mop to continue her cleaning. When B returns Tina tells her to squeeze water into the bucket too, this is very successful but then Tina tips the bucket up and the water spills out. They use the household tools to clean everything with and seem to have forgotten the fruit. Suddenly they stop and drop their things and head for the fruit table.

The fruit today is raisins but when they get there most of the packets have gone. Somehow Tina manages to get the last one, SA says she will go to another class to try to find some more. Meanwhile Tina takes hers into the carpeted area and pulls the packet open, lots of raisins fall onto the floor, I feel regret for the loss, especially when so many children wanted them. Someone says ‘yuck’, can’t eat them now.’ Tina picks them up and puts them in the bin.

I notice it is time for me to go and I walk towards the door.

# Observation 12/03/2019 (8)

I haven’t seen Tina for two weeks, the first week was half term and the second week she was ill with chickenpox. I wonder how I will find her today.

On entering the classroom I look around to see where Tina is and initially she is no where to be seen. I always feel slightly anxious when I don’t spot her straight away, on reflection I am not sure if this relates to the transition between being a classroom visitor and an observer, or about my concerns that I might not actually be able to ‘see’ her.

However, when I move forward further into the classroom I notice a lot of activity in the home corner and notice her there. I am immediately struck by a change in her demeaner. She appears very happy, her face has a wide smile and for the first time I notice she has dimples in her cheeks. Her eyes are bright and sparkly, and it almost feels like she has walked out of a fog, or a sleepy state. I hadn’t thought she was unhappy before but today her overall nature seems sunny and light.

Tina is playing with two boys, one of whom slapped her across the face in my last observation. I have not noticed this sort of interaction in any of my other observations. It occurs to me that she might be slightly flirty with the boys but there is nothing specific to suggest this.

She has a tiara in her hair that says ‘Birthday Princess’ and for a minute I wonder if it is her birthday accounting for her happy disposition. But then I remember she is an August born child.

The two boys are pretending to be rabbits, one has a pair of rabbit ears, the other is carrying a small basket of vegetables. They are pretending to hop, Tina says ‘pretend you are following me,’ and they hop out of the home corner following Tina who is wearing a long evening gown, unlike the usual princess dress, and has a tablecloth around her shoulders. She heads towards the carpeted area, boy with the bunny ears follows, the other boy hangs back and calls to her, ‘Tina I am eating big chunks, I’m eating the carrot.’ He seems to be trying to draw her attention.

Tina looks at him and says ‘we’re going to have a picnic,’ then proceeds to lay the table cloth on the floor. At this point the doors to the outside area open and the boy with the basket drops it and heads for the coat rack to get his coat and go outside. The other boy looks as if he is split between continuing the game with Tina or joining his friend outside. Tina calls after him saying ‘come back by twelve for our picnic.’

She sets the food out carefully on the tablecloth and while she is doing this C walks into the area carrying a baby, she sits down next to Tina who picks up the baby cup with juice in and places it in the baby’s mouth. They sit like this for a few minutes, both of the girls looking happy and occasionally saying something I can’t quite hear. It feels like an intimate moment. The C says, ‘would you like to hold her?’ Tina nods and C carefully puts the baby into Tina’s arms, saying something about being kind and gentle.

Tina sits for a long time holding the baby and feeding her with the baby cup. She looks almost blissful, as if she is satisfied/contented and needs nothing else. I notice her looking at me occasionally under her eyelids.

C returns a short while later, she arrives with more energy than I had been aware of earlier. She has a plastic wand in her hand and declares ‘I am evil and I have a magic wand I can make you do anything I want.’ E says she wants to be a rabbit and C waves her magic wand over her and says something about being a rabbit. E says she is going to get some rabbit ears.

C sits on the floor next to Tina and E sits next to C, there is some hugging and gentle hair stroking between C and E and Tina, still holding the baby, leans in between them and makes a joke, laughing then at what she has said. C and E seem to drop their intimacy for a moment and Tina pulls back again, focusing on the baby. But C and E move closer again, creating what seems to be an intimate space between them. E is still the bunny and C strokes her head.

Once again Tina leans in between them being slightly disruptive and laughing. The two back off and move away from Tina. C repeats that she is evil and will use magic on Tina. Tina replies that her wand is more powerful and can do better magic. Tina uses a pretend wand, pulling it out from behind her back, using her right hand, the baby is still on her left arm. I find myself wondering about the baby in the middle of this magic happening. Tin remains calm holding the baby, then she moves towards the table to crawl under the length of it.

Tina crawls, with the baby, under a table into a small space that has been created by some boys earlier. K wanders in to the area and sees Tina, she asks if she can come in too? At first Tina says no, and K stands and looks at her for a moment, then Tina says ‘Ok’ and shows her where the entrance is. K looks very pleased to be inside with Tina, she leans against the radiator and. With a magnetic card in her hand, proceeds to almost post it in the radiator cover gaps. She slides it down and pulls it back up, first one slot and then another, almost absentmindedly. I feel anxious, from experience I know things dropped into radiator covers are lost for a long time until the caretaker can get around to taking them out.

Finally she stops, but then puts one foot on the table and each arm on a support at each side, pushing herself upwards, she looks pleased with herself and repeats this up and down action a few times and then Tina holds K around the waist and helps support her. K suddenly stops smiling and looks behind me then steps down, I turn and see the teacher stood doing very purposeful watching, obviously signifying her displeasure at what K is doing.

Tina exits from the space, emerging from the front of the table by pushing a chair away, she hasn’t got the baby with her, she heads purposefully to the home corner. At first she seems to be looking around for something but not able to find what she is looking for she approaches the T and asks for a box with scarves in, the T says she will come and look in a minute and see if the HC is tidy before she gets the box out.

Tina moves quite quickly, returning to home corner and begins tidying up. There are lots of hair accessories, a dryer and a large head figure for playing with hair. Tina is very quick at putting everything in the box, almost without much thought. C joins her and Tina says she is tidying up so Miss R can see its tidy. Tina tries to put the box on the shelf, it is a bit high and because of the way things are packed it is difficult to push the box in, but she is persistent, and it slides in eventually.

While Tina is tidying a girl quietly stands watching Tina, running her hands through her hair, then she turns round and stands quite close in front of me. I notice she has a hair band in her hand and she looks at my with just a slight look of expectancy. I return my gaze to Tina, the child remains in the same position, passively.

Another girl, C2, enters the HC, I have noticed her before, her energy is different to most of the children. She is much bigger and I have not seen her accede to any of the other children’s requests. The thought of her reminds me of the saying ‘an immovable force.’ Tina leaves the HC and heads for the playdough table.

There is a large lump of playdough and Tina puts her head down with her ear in the play dough, she lifts her head and looks at the play dough, I wonder if she is trying to make and impression of her ear. She repeats this a couple of times and then puts her face, nose first, into the playdough, lifting it up and looking. Then she puts her fists in and presses down, there is an impression in the playdough, she puts her fists in a few times. The Quiet girl suddenly appears at her side, standing passively by, Tina has all the dough and I wonder if she will offer some to the girl, but she says something about there not being any more and proceeds with rolling the dough out and then cutting out shapes. I notice one of them is a rabbit. The girls walks away.

After a short while Tina goes back to the HC. C2 has the pram with a baby in and a cleaning trolley, somehow she is managing all these things together. She says to Tina, ‘you be mum, we’re going on a picnic.’ Tina skips along to the carpet area and C2 follows as best she can with all the stuff she is managing. C2 begins to tell children what to do, Tina says she doesn’t want to be mum and there seems a stand of here. Tina goes to T and reminds her about the box, the T stands up, explaining to the child she is working with that she will be back in a moment, and goes to the HC and lifts the box down. Tina is delighted and immediately takes some scarves out of the box and lays one of the on the floor. The quiet girl appears again and Tina informs her that she will make a bed for her. She lays down one scarf and then another one and tells the girl she can lie down. The girl stands passively watching. Tina tries to engage her but there is no response and eventually she gives up, gathers the scarves together and returns to where C2 is in the carpet area.

Immediately C2 takes most of the scarves from Tina and wraps the largest around herself. Tina looks dismayed and says she wants that one. C2 ignores Tina and heads off saying they are going camping.

The T calls the children to fruit time and they gather around her on the carpet. It is an opportunity for buying from a shop and after a shop keeper is chosen the children are asked to buy some fruit, the fruit is pears, different children take turns with the T guiding them to choose the correct coin/s to pay for their fruit. Tina is one of the first and sits happily munching at her pear while other children take their turn. I notice that K is overlooked a few times, in spite of the T trying to direct the choice to her.

As they finish this task Tina stands up and puts the stalk in the bin, turning around and saying to a boy that she has eaten the stalk and laughing, he says he has eaten his too and they laugh together.

Tina starts singing and a few other girls join in, the song seems to be one from a film that they are obviously all familiar with. One of them moves away towards a computer and the others follow, the girl finds a film clip on the web and the girls all sing together and copy the movements of the character on the screen. They are dancing to the music and Tina’s face is very animated, the T joins in from her place across the classroom and Tina smiles at her.

It is time for me to go, I leave them singing and dancing to the music. I enjoyed the song, something about a hundred dreams, and I feel light hearted as I leave the school.

# Observation 19/03/2019 (9)

As I enter the room I immediately notice Tina, she is sat in front of one of the computers but slightly turned to the right. K is focused on Tina’s hair, trying to put some clips in but it seems one of the clips is broken. Tina seems contented with K putting things in her hair. I notice her hair is looking tidier today, it looks less wispy and as if someone at home has taken time with it.

K looks up and notices me watching and moves away while looking closely at the hair clip which seems to be broken. I assume she is going to show it to the T, but she doesn’t she wanders around with it. Tina hasn’t noticed me yet, then she stands up and goes to the toilet and on her way passes me and I notice her chin goes up and a faint smile appears on her face, while her eyes look down. My feeling is that she is pleased to see me but maybe trying to not show it.

She goes into the first toilet and comes straight out again, glancing at me. Then she goes into the second toilet but doesn’t close the door. I hear her singing a song. When she comes out she goes to T and begins talking about the song she was singing, she skips and looks extremely happy. They talk about the ‘show’ and when it is going to happen. One o’clock, one afternoon. Then Tina skips off to the computer and finds a CBeebies show about the White Queen. I remember the songs featuring in last weeks observation.

Initially Tina finds it difficult to find the web page and she skips across to T and asks for help. I have noticed that usually Tina is very confident that T will listen and respond to her requests in a pleasant manner. There was just one occasion in an earlier observation where Tina’s words seem to be missed.

I find the T very patient and calm, able to reflect a little about what the children might be feeling and scaffolding small steps in the learning process. Her face always has a pleasant expression and her voice is quiet. She treats all the children with respect. I wonder if she could maintain this persona in a class of 30 Children? Today there are only 15.

The T accompanies Tina to her computer and scaffolds how to access the web page she wants. When it comes on there is no sound and she says, ‘ah we have had this problem before I think.’ Then she gets on the floor and sorts the wires and plugs before eventually the sound returns. She is now kneeling beside Tina and they engage in conversation, initially they discuss their favourite songs and then Tina says her mum is getting married soon, T nods and says yes it will be soon, are you looking forward to it? Tina looks very pleased, her face lights up and she nods. The she says ‘my little brother is ill, he has chickenpox, he keeps scratching it.’ T says, ‘Oh dear, how old is your little brother now?’ Tina doesn’t seem very sure and the T gives a couple guesses, Tina responds by saying he hasn’t had a birthday yet and he can’t walk. The closeness they share together, and the confidence Tina shows as she warms to the T suggest an ability feel comfortable in each other’s company. I reflect on how precious this is. It seems to me that the T demonstrates respect towards her pupils, valuing them as people.

I also appreciate the way she has accepted me into her classroom, she does not seem phased by having me watching and makes no attempt to communicate with me. I feel free to arrive quietly, do my observation and leave. Usually at the beginning there will be a very brief acknowledgement of me when I arrive but apart from that there is no communication.

The T stands up and attends to another child, Tina returns to the screen where a song is playing, then she opens other web pages and clicks on them, but the music doesn’t stop. She returns to the show that is playing and begins singing, I can’t hear the words, but it seems she knows them very well. Suddenly she stands up and skips towards T in the carpet area. The T is busy with another child, so Tina skips to the play dough table, rolls out the large lump of play dough as best she can and then begins pressing down different shaped cutters. Tina uses the cutters the opposite edge to the cutting edge so consequently the shapes do not cut fully through the playdough. She tries to extricate the play dough shapes but has difficulty. If the shape breaks while she is trying to take it from the cutter she abandons it to one side.

Abruptly after a few minutes she stands up and skips, beaming, over to the T. The T notices her immediately and Tina talks to her about the White Queen and how much she loves the songs. They talk about the upcoming show and T suggests that Tina might like to make some tickets, Tina says only 10 because only 10 can be in the band. The T suggests she might like to make a poster, it would need the time and date on and a title. Tina’s response is an increase in excitement and she skips to the table and begins finding some paper, she says she is going to make some tickets. She looks for scissors but there are none her in the writing space, she confidently sets of to the craft area and picks some up. First, she finds and envelope and after roughly cutting a square of paper and writing a 10 on it she puts her name on the outside of the envelope and a ticket inside.

There is another girl sat at the table, A, and Tina tells her excitedly what she is making, A says, ‘can I come too?’ I have a sense that this girl is shy and vulnerable, and I think I am aware that Tina could say no, for a moment I feel anxious and protective towards the girl. Tina answers her by saying that there are only ten tickets ‘but you should be able to come,’ the girl looks pleased and says, ‘can I bring my picture,’ to which Tina replies ‘yes of course.’

Tina is highly energised (maybe slightly manic?) and is cutting up pieces of paper and writing 10 on each one, placing them on a table next to the T chair but the tickets are on the far edge, away from the teacher. Her envelope is on the same table. There is a whiteboard displaying pictures from the Snow Queen on the table. B walks into the area, she was ill last week, Tina tells her excitedly what she is doing. The T finishes working with another child and comes across to see what the girls are doing. Tina explains that she is making 10 tickets for the band, only 10 can come. The T says you could do a poster too, with a list of the songs, ‘B says I’ll do the poster.’ So, B finds some paper and a pencil and tries to spell the first song. They are reminded to number the songs because it is a list. B writes a number 1 and then tries to spell the first song, the T suggests she sound it out and points to a poster to identify the letter shapes.

After the first effort B has managed the first three letters and says to Tina, ‘you can do the next one.’ I wonder if Tina might refuse but she accepts, picking up the pencil and saying the first sound which is ‘r’, (Rapunzel), she asks the T what the other sounds are, the T says, ‘what sounds can you hear next?’ Tina repeats the sounds in an exaggerated way and comes up with ‘p’, the T nods and says yes and Tina runs back to the table to write the letter. But she struggles with the next sound, even though both B and Tina try to work it out together they need the reassurance from the T. Tina identifies the next sound as ‘z’ and then hands the pencil over to B to write the next word.

Tina returns to making tickets, cutting out smallish rectangular shapes and writing the number 10 on them. Someone points out that she has more than ten tickets already, but she appears to ignore them. Both B and Tina are busy with their jobs and behind them are two girls playing a game that is a little noisy, one of the girls is A and together with M they are playing a throwing game, with lots of giggling. I notice that I am pleased to see A laughing and having fun with M.

B tells them, two or three times that she and Tina are doing hard work and they are being too noisy, but the giggling continues. B goes over to them and gently puts her hands onto M’s shoulders very gently, to get her attention, looks into her eyes and explains in a quiet voice that she needs to keep quiet because she and Tina are trying to do hard work. Tina watches and tries the same approach with A but almost immediately the girls dissolve into giggles. Tina and B return to the table. I wonder if this calm approach mirrors what they have observed in their T?

Just then C enters the space and asks what they are doing, B and Tina explain what they are doing and say that A and M are making too much noise. C asks if she can help making tickets, saying she will make a hundred million to which Tina replies I am making ten tickets for the band and she runs across to add another one to the pile. C makes tickets putting them in a different pile. B walks across to Tina’s tickets and counts them, she finds there are 21 and tells Tina who looks surprised. Tina goes to look but doesn’t count them, then when she returns to the table she writes 21 on the next ticket. A boy enters the space with a tray of fruit Tina skips over to him and they engage in light banter together, I am not close enough to hear but I notice they are very smiley with each other. I wonder if her relationship with boys is changing, I noticed last week some flirting with two different boys. Maybe an emerging awareness related to her mother’s forthcoming marriage?

The T walks across the carpet and sits next to the fruit, putting it higher up on a table next to the price list, she has set down three pots with different coins in, the children will pick out a coin to pay for their fruit. There are only about five children on the carpet and the T says they will need to wait for the other children to come in from outside. Tina is sat patiently; her back is straight, and her arms folded around her. The T engages in small conversation with the children while they wait. She doesn’t seem to be anxious about the waiting time. The other children finally arrive and sit down looking at the teacher. It is seeing them all sat down here I realise again what a small class they are, only fifteen today.

The T has some lolly sticks, with each child’s name on, in a box, she picks one out, it is the boy who brought the fruit in earlier and he steps up to the table waiting for each child to come and choose a fruit and then choose a coin to pay for it. He can choose the children by name to come and get fruit. Tina is one of the first, but I notice she doesn’t choose the correct coin; however, the teacher is talking to a child and doesn’t notice. Tina sits down and eats her pear, watching as the other children take their turn.

It is time for me to leave and I turn to walk through the door.

As I walk to the car I reflect that Tina wasn’t wearing a princess dress today, I wonder if that is significant?

# Observation 26/03/2019 (10)

I had had a very busy couple of hours, and I felt relieved that I had arrived at school for 10.00. I was going to be a couple of minutes late in the classroom but at least I was here.

As I approached the school, I heard children playing outside. I suspected that it was coming from the Reception class outdoor play area. The day was sunny and reasonably warm however, I decided to keep my coat on when I entered the classroom because it was likely that most of the children would be outside.

The office staff always great me in a friendly manner, one of them leads me to the door where I need to be let in because of the coded lock. She asks me how I am and I say that Yorkshire Water are digging my garden up trying to find a leak. Her response is that I must wish to be at home rather than here, I laugh and say yes, I think I would. However, that is the first time I realised that was in my mind. I wondered if this might influence my observation.

AS I enter the classroom, I stand for a moment allowing the door to close behind me. It is self-closing and I feel it is important to ensure it closes properly. The SA looks up and smiles, she asks if I am OK, I think that she can’t see the reason I am stood by the door, I say yes I am fine thank you, and then she informs me helpfully that Tina is outside. I feel slightly irritated, the classroom is empty, of course she is going to be outside.

On reflection I can’t imagine why I feel irritated. I wonder about my busy morning, I have been in control of the stream of things happening, making quick decisions to ensure things got done so that I could get to my observation. I think I was in a transitional period between my role in daily life to neutral observer.

When I walk out side I see Tina immediately, she is stood with K, B, and a boy I am coming to know as Jc, around a large black tray with some brown squidgy slimy stuff in. I notice Tina looks very happy her hands are flat in the brown stuff and she is moving them around, then she picks the slime up in her hands and squeezes it in her fists so it oozes out through her fingers.

Initially Tina doesn’t show any sign that she notices me, K glances at me then looks away and Jc turns around and sees me. He says what’s your name? What are you doing? I am aware that I don’t want a conversation, then K also asks what my name is. I decide I need to provide an answer but need to keep it brief. I reply ‘Lynn, I am here to do quiet work.’ Jc responds saying, ‘you’re very good at not talking.’ I smile and nod in response and they return to their play.

The conversation about the mix they are experiencing turns to a descriptive phase as they seem to try out words that might fit the sense of what they are playing with. I have realised by now that it is a cornflour mix, coloured a light chocolatey brown. K says it is poo, Jc describes it as pee, Tina says she is a Zombie, making a stiff zombie stance with expressionless face, and it is blood. She tells K, ‘pretend I came to your house and took all your blood,’ K says she wouldn’t let her and Tina responds, ‘no you couldn’t stop me I’d use powerful magic.’ K says she would use her magic to stop her, but Tina says that her magic is more powerfuller than hers. She squeezes the mix through her fingers and then shakes it off, it sprays out over her coat and onto the other children. I notice it on her face.

K pushes her hands along the bottom of the tray and makes an odd sound. Tina says you’re farting and the children laugh. K continues making the sound, she seems to be enjoying the sensation and I wonder if she likes the attention the children are giving her. I notice the children’s coats are showing signs of the mix on them. I know it will brush off when it dries and think what a brilliant idea for outdoors.

As this conversation continues a boy on a bike approaches Tina and tries to catch her attention, Tine turns and smiles at him and then turns back to her play. I have a picture in my mind of a teenage scenario and wonder if this is a type of flirting?

B goes inside and to wash her hands, she is the only one without a coat. When she returns she says that she isn’t going to put her hands in again but both Tina and K tell her to put her hands in, so B touches the mix with her fingers carefully and says it is cold. I wonder if she washed with warm water and the mix is cold in comparison?

Tina, K and Jc continue pushing their hands through the mix and chatting with each other about the properties and what it reminds them of. Tina continues to emphasise her connection with it to be blood. B announces that she is going to wash her hands again and Tina, K and Jc all decide to follow her. Tina has an extremely happy relaxed face and skips towards the sink area with the others.

Inside they turn the taps on and rinse their hands, at first Tina uses the liquid soap but then spends a long time lathering with the hard soap bar. They wander between sinks leaving taps running, I don’t think they are being deliberately wasteful, I think they are in a bubble of their own creation and are oblivious to expected norms related to turning taps off and not leaving them running.

K points out that Tina has mix on her face, she wants to wipe it off for Tina, but Tina says no and so K suggests Tina look in the mirror. Tina spends a few minutes looking in the mirror, sometimes K seems to try to push her away, replacing her image instead of Tina’s. Then says, ‘Oh gosh it’s all over my face,’ Jc stands next to her with his head next to hers, the two of them are framed in the mirror, they are smiling. I am struck by how comfortable they are with each other. Their faces look very relaxed. Tina moves away to get a paper towel, wets it and puts some soap on it then rubs at her face. Meanwhile K has replaced Tina in the mirror and Jc is stood next to her with both faces reflected in the mirror.

Tina asks K and Jc to move so she can see herself in the mirror. ‘Oh no its all over,’ she says. K looks and says, ‘its on your eye lashes, I can get it off you want?’ But Tina wipes across her eye with wet towel and checks to see if it is gone. Then she looks down at her coat and notices the mix has made quite a mess especially around the zip. She says, ‘I don’t like this mess I’m going to get it off,’ and takes her coat off quickly and lays it on the floor. I notice the floor is wet and I wonder if Tina realises her coat with get wet on the inside. I remain quiet, just watching.

Tina then proceeds to wet another paper towel, puts soap on it and rubs at the bottom of the zip, exclaiming that she doesn’t like it and saying that it was Jc that was responsible. K agrees with her and they both continue to accuse Jc of causing the problem on Tina’s coat. An are of concern is the zip tag itself, which Tina declares is gold, she repeats that she does not like this at all and that it is because of Jc that the mess has happened. They continue in a high state of indignation about Jc’s contribution, while bustling about wetting paper towels and rubbing the coat. Tina announces that she is not going outside ever again, and K asks why?

I notice that the water has been running for some time in more than one basin. The SA walks over and notices Tina’s coat on the floor. She tells Tina that her coat will get wet on the floor and that it needs hanging up. B has just walked in to wash her hands and the SA tells her to turn the taps off, as if it might have been B that had turned them all on. Tina picks her coat up and has an expression on her face I am not sure of. Her confident manner seems to have dissipated, and her head is tilted to one side, in fact I notice her whole body is slightly askew. She walks to the coat area and hangs her coat up. The term having a hang dog expression comes to mind. She stands for a few moments like this and I wonder what is going on in her mind?

She skips across the classroom towards the SA and tells her that Jc had got the mix on her coat. The SA asks if it was an accident and Tina says no, it was deliberate. Her expression has a ‘poor me’ sense to it. The SA says that it wasn’t very nice of Jc, she will have a word with him about it. Tina’s face brightens and she turns around and skips to the computer. K asks her if she wants to go out to play but Tina says ‘no’ and proceeds to access the Snow Queen video I saw last week. This time she opens a different song, it begins with a powerful image of the Snow Queen, stood pointing into the air and singing, ‘I have the power,’ The song expresses a sense of control through freezing enemies. Tina’s stance matched the character and she sings with a similar attitude.

On reflection I wonder if she is trying to shift her frame of mind out of a victim state, to feel more powerful and controlling. The Snow Queen is describing an omnipotent sense of being and I wonder if Tina is wanting to return to that feeling for herself. I notice her fingers are at times in her lap, sometimes thumbs and forefingers touching and at other times with her fingers interlaced. When she is singing the SA sings along sometimes as she is passing.

I am aware that I find the song powerful, it stirs a sense of power in me, I wonder if it has something to do with the problems I am trying to sort in my own life.

She changes the video to another scene, where the underdogs achieve their aim of reaching the Snow Queen’s Palace and releasing the frozen victims. She shouts to K, who has come in to wash her hands again, ‘look they’ve found the palace!’ K looks but says she has to wash her hands.

Tina flicks back and forth a few times between the videos. I wonder if they have provided an opportunity to regain her equilibrium after she was told to pick her coat up by the SA. The classroom is becoming busy now as children come in for fruit time. Tina sits happily, seemingly calm, smiling. The T notices her and says she did a good job yesterday selling the fruit. The children are restless and the T uses a few different strategies to draw their attention to her. As usual, she is quiet and calm when she does this.

The shopkeeper is chosen and then they choose a line of children to go to the front, pick their fruit and pay for it. Tina is one of the last to be chosen, but she waits patiently. During the time of waiting a boy behind her tries to get her attention she looks around and smiles at him.

As fruit time finishes the T says they are going to do some numeracy and asks what they were thinking about yesterday? A number of children put their hands up and finally some one says estimating. The T asks what is estimating? Tina is chosen to reply and she states quite clearly, ‘a reasonable guess.’ The T is pleased with her response and says well done.

It is time for me to go now, though I feel drawn to stay and watch what happens next.

As I leave the school I think about the contrast of seeing Tina stood by her coat and the move to the computer. I feel that I observed a significant moment at that point.

# Observation 02/04/2019 (11)

It is very cold as I walk towards the school building and I am wondering if Tina will be outside today. I wonder whether to leave my coat on or leave it in the staff room as usual. I decide to hang it in the staff room, my thinking is that Tina doesn’t usually spend much time outdoors when it is cold.

When I enter the classroom, one of the children, big K, is stood looking at me and her face breaks into a lovely soft smile, I smile back slightly phased because she is a large girl who I have found rather intimidating and who has not shown a great deal of empathy for the other children.

I notice Tina in the carpeted area, cuddling and kissing a small cuddly Koala, she is talking to C who has a cuddly toy too, they both look close, friendly and they seem to be sharing together in a warm confidential way.

I notice another adult in the classroom, not a visitor but I am not sure who she is, she seems to be observing too but I am not sure of the context. I wonder what the children make of two adults watching them? However, when they approach her she interacts with them.

Tina walks over to this observer and tells her how much she loves the Koala, she is smiling and obviously wants to interact with her. The Observer asks if the toy has come from home, which I had been wondering about, but Tina shakes her head and points to the HC saying she got it from there. I find this interesting because she has not taken any interest previously during my observations, in the Koala bear which seems very attached to today. The observer comments that the bear is very cuddly, Tina nods her head smiling and walks back to the carpet area where B is on the floor playing with a wooden railway set. Tina tells her that her bear is cuddly but B is focused on the train set, playing alongside two boys.

Tina turns in a twirly sort of movement and returns to C, they laugh together while holding their toys as if they were both babies. Suddenly Tina puts the Koala under her jumper, she arches her back and rubs her ‘bump’ laughing with C, she walks around in this pose, what seems a clear impression of a pregnant woman. I wonder if mum is having another baby?

Someone calls to them, maybe K, to play outside and C drops her toy and rushes to get her coat. I am surprised at the sudden shift in the relationship between C and Tina. Tina looks a bit nonplussed and after removing the Koala from her Jumper she hugs it close. She turns and looks at B lying on the carpet, engrossed in the train set, she asks her to play with her, but B says no she is busy. Tina’s expression is one of being fed up I think. She sits on the T chair nearby and pleads with B to play with her. ‘Please, B, please play with me.’ But B continues to refuse saying she is busy with the train track. Tina sits, looking a bit forlorn watching B, but I notice the Koala is not being held closely now.

Tina stands up and goes to talk with the observer again explain how much she loves her little Koala, her face is alite and I can see her dimples in her cheeks. The observer says it is cuddlier than the rest and Tina nods. A group of children rush in from outside and their faces seem full of excitement, as if they are on a mission. Tina notices them and asks what they are doing, they reply that the slide is wet and they need paper towels to dry it. The children all go to the sink area and pull out some paper towels from the dispenser, then she takes the Koala into the HC and drops it into the basket before going to get her coat. Then she gets a paper towel. She is moving quite quickly, I wonder about going to fetch my coat, but I don’t want to break my observation so follow her outside. It is cold, and I notice Tina hasn’t zipped her coat up.

Outside she wipes the slide down with the others, the SA acts as a regulator for the children’s enthusiasm with their drying, the job becomes quite vigorous and it occurs to me the job is more important that the slide itself.

Tina wanders away and moves towards the large black tray that has farm animals and bark chippings in. Tina picks up a cow and seems to be talking but I can’t hear what she is saying. Then she picks up a young calf and the cow and calf talk together; other animals are drawn into the conversation. Tina briefly places one horse across another horses back. I am not sure what she is intending here but it occurs to me that it is about one of the cows being pregnant. Then she says, ‘we need to tell the farmer’ and trots the animals over to a farmer figure at the other side of the tray. The farmer says he wants to make an announcement, the cow is pregnant, he wants the animals to line up.

Tina lines the animals up, initially they are all facing the farmer but then she moves them so they are looking at the wall of the tray. She lines all the animals in the tray facing the wall with the rear ends pointing to the centre of the tray. When she has done this she looks up and looks around, as if she is wondering what to do.

She moves slightly towards the water tray, it has lots of bubbles in it. The SA notices her interest and bursts some bubbles with her gloved finger. I am surprised she hasn’t taken her glove off. Tina is drawn towards the bubbles and pops some herself laughing as she does so. I wonder if she will put her hands into the water, it has been coloured blue and looks cold. I wouldn’t want to put my hands in cold water. Tina puts both her hands in and slides them under the water. The SA says ‘look it is blue’. Tina looks happy, she leans forward and pushes her hands across the floor of the water tray, she doesn’t cringe with the temperature, I wonder if it has been filled with warm water?

Finding a shark she squeezes it and bubbles come out of its mouth, Tina laughs and tells the SA sharks eat people, and the SA says yes they eat anything, they have big, sharp teeth and big mouths, demonstrating with her arms, they even eat people. I am not sure I think I noticed a brief look of concern on Tina’s face but she seemed to be enjoying the interaction with the SA. On reflection, I recall feeling slightly anxious myself about the topic of sharks eating people, I am aware that human interactions with sharks are not straightforward, there is more to this than sharks being people eaters.

The big shark now eats a smaller shark, and then begins to attack other creatures in the tray, including a smaller turtle. Later she picks up a larger turtle and declares it is the King of the sea, then changes it to the Queen of the sea.

Big K wanders over to the tray and puts her hands in, Tina says ‘it’s warm,’ and I feel relieved. I notice I haven’t noticed the cold so much, I think it might be because I am so engrossed in my observation. B arrives, I had noticed earlier that she was wearing a summer uniform dress with short sleeves and no cardigan she doesn’t seem to notice the cold.

B chooses a watering can and a metal pot from the shelf , Big K finds a watering can too and begins pouring water in using a pot. Tina finds some plastic beakers and sometimes takes B’s watering can to fill them up. B protests slightly ‘hey I’m doing that.’ Tina doesn’t seem perturbed and continues until B reclaims it for herself.

Big K tells the SA she is making her a cup of tea, B says that is what she is doing. They ask how many sugars and the SA replies she doesn’t take sugar; the girls are surprised. I am reminded of my childhood experience of not liking tea until I tried it without sugar. They off the tea to the SA who asks them to stand the beaker in the tray, then she pretends to taste it though not picking it up. I thought this was a bit unfair on the game and that she should have picked it up to pretend to drink it, but the girls appear not to be phased.

Tina says she is making hot chocolate and mixes the beaker of liquid with a spoon, she adds spoonful’s of bubbles. I notice that although she tells the SA what she is doing and spends considerable time mixing, it is never offered to her. Big K and B continue with their offerings, then Tina says her is going to be a milk shake with lots of magic in. The SA laughs and says ‘Oh yours is a magic drink,’ and Tina smiles and nods. Her smile lights up her face and I sense she feels very confident, though not sure if that is the right word.

Although Tina makes this drink she doesn’t offer it to the SA. Is this because she knows it will not be ‘drunk’. Big K seems to drink hers, Tina and B seem alarmed at this, and tell her she shouldn’t drink it. Big K says she is pretending.

The girls lose interest in the animals altogether and begin to put more containers into the water. The SA tells them not to get more things out because the tray will get too full. The three of them seem still for a moment as they take this in. But they move on very quickly, continuing to mix and pour.

Tina says she is cold she removes her apron and zips her coat up. B and Big K take their aprons off too. The SA shakes some bells, all the children stop and raise their hands, wiggling their fingers. I begin to feel the cold now and look forward to going inside, but the door is closed while the area is tidied up. There are eight children in the line, I think how much easier it is to have eight children line up rather than 30 or more.

AS we go back inside Tina says she is glad to be going in now and the SA says she will soon warm up inside. AS I pass the SA I say I am quite pleased to be going in too! She comments that I should have gone for my coat and I say I didn’t want to miss anything but yes maybe I should have. She advises me that I can put my coat in the cupboard in the classroom next time, I smile and say thank you, I will remember that.

The T says for the children to sit on the carpet, but informs them they are not selling fruit today, they are doing other number work instead. Tina’s row is chosen to get fruit first and Tina sits munching her apple right through the session, none is thrown away.

The boys struggle to stay focused and the T uses lots of strategies to engage them. The topic is three D shapes and the T puts a video on the smart screen, there is a visual alongside a rap tune, which I think appears very well put together. The children all sing along and seem to enjoy the song. It is time for me to go. Tina has been focused on the activity right through, I have a sense of containment, she seems to be in a good place, her experience that morning seems to have been a good one all round.

# Observation 09/04/2019 (12)

Although the day is cold it is sunny and as I walk towards the school door I decide I will keep my coat on this week, just in case Tina decides to go outside.

I ring the bell, and someone lets me in, I sign the visitors log and go to the window and request my badge. I am very surprised when I am asked about my status in school, am I a visitor, do I work with any children alone? I explain my role and say I don’t interact with children just observe one child in Reception. I feel anxious, why the sudden interest in my role, the person in the office says in a very quiet voice that they have Ofsted Inspectors in school, have I filled in one of their volunteer forms. I say no, I hadn’t been asked to sign anything. There is an immediate panic as people try to locate one of these forms and I am asked to sit and wait until I have signed it. Eventually a form is located, and I fill it in.

I am then led through the school to the classroom and formally introduced to the class teacher. This feels strange, apart from a nod from the T or SA my entrance is usually very quiet. As I enter I see an Inspector stood watching a small group of children and I feel slightly uncomfortable, standing watching in my coat. I notice Tina is working on the table that is being watched and I stand a little distance away, allowing space for the Inspector.

I notice Tina looks slightly different, her hair is tidier, she has plats in each side. She is busy cutting out and using glue to decorate what I take to be smallish egg shapes. She seems engrossed in her creation and doesn’t notice me at first, then she glances up and offers a little smile, I return the smile hopefully in the same way she smiled.

Tina picks up her creation and takes it to T saying, ‘Miss G I have made something for you,’ and the T looks pleased and says she will put that on her fridge at home. Tina is happy and skips back to the table saying, ‘I’m going to make more.’ As she sits down I notice K for the first time sat at the same table. I wonder how I could have missed her.

As Tina works on another creation she talks to herself as she is doing it, saying exactly what she is doing, drawing a picture, putting glue on and then sprinkling glitter on. She voices that it looks beautiful and seems inspired to do more since she goes to the resource trolley and picks up lots of egg shapes. As she puts them down on the table T comes along and advises them that they will need to move their work because she needs to work with children on that table. Tina and K gather their things together and move to the painting table. I notice Tina puts all her bits on a piece of paper to carry them and does this very carefully. The T comments on how well she is moving her things.

Tina sits at the table and picking up and oval egg shape she draws three hearts, I wonder if there is any significance in the three. She colours them in red felt tip pen and then puts glue on with a glue stick and sprinkles glitter onto them. T calls out the names of the children she wants to join her for group work, both Tina and K are included, Tina quickly puts glue and glitter on them, she seems to be rushing, then takes the creations to the T who notices them and asks where she is going to put them to keep them safe. It is decided to put them somewhere near the T’s table. Tina skips off and returns without them, sitting down next to the T, a boy sits on the T’s left and BK sits next to Tina. K’s name was called but K continues to draw, cut and glue. The T remains calm but asks several times for K to come and sit at the table with the other children. Meanwhile T and the children talk about adjectives and what words might describe the little Red Hen. In the end the T has to stand up and help K, calmly and without any fuss, to tidy her things together and promises she can have them back after they have finished group work.

K sits down at the table and looks towards me. There are just four children in the group. Tina and K are given a piece of paper to work on and K protests, Tina doesn’t seem disturbed by this. The T explains that she will stick the paper in the books later, then she mouths to me ‘Ofsted’ and I realise that the books are being scrutinised by Ofsted, I nod and smile to acknowledge I understand.

The children are difficult to engage in the activity which involves making a sentence using words to describe the Little Red Hen. The T does lots of scaffolding, leading them one step at a time, saying a sentence and then counting how many words and asking them how many words and which word describes the Hen. I think her intention was for the children to each come up with their own sentence, but she sets that aside as a seemingly impossible task and they focus on a sentence prompted by her. She writes the sentence on a white board and asks the children to help her with the spelling, full stops capitals etc.

There seem to be some measure of understanding about each individual thing, but they cannot hold them together when looking at a sentence. The boy is really struggling and playing around with his pencil and she tries to keep him engaged by focusing questions on him. This leaves the other three at a slight loss and although they try to join in they become a little restless at times. The T is very calm, I admire her patience. After writing the sentence on the white board they read it together and then she offers an opportunity to remember it before putting it face down on the table. Then she asks them to write the sentence. After the input she has provided I felt surprised at the struggle the children had to even begin to write the first sound, they needed her prompts and sometimes these were explained very thoroughly before each of them managed any progress. Their struggles were with the initial sounds, blended sounds, letter formation, they reminded me of young children needing help with a jigsaw but just can’t see how it fits together and the only way is very overt demonstration. I felt concerned, these children are about to enter their last term of their Reception Year and do not seem to have mastered some basic competencies yet.

AS they struggle the Inspector returns to watch. K in particular, seems to become more problematic in her demanding behaviour, while the others demonstrate they haven’t understood what was being demonstrated earlier. Though the T explains each step to them individually the children seem unable grasp what she is saying and transfer it to the page. Tina seems quite happy, as if she doesn’t realise the difficulty she is having.

I feel concerned for the T, I want to speak up for her, I want to tell the Inspector what a good T she is and that the children are simply not quite ready for the task and it is not because the T hasn’t done a good job.

I have the impression that K is playing to an audience and I find this annoying, because she is making the T’s job so much harder and it may reflect badly on the T.

The Inspector leaves and I feel relieved. The children begin to finish and when they present their work to the T she notes some of the mistakes and gives them a purple pen so they can ‘purple polish their work’ which means they rectify some of the mistakes by writing them again in purple. The children love this. Tina has made an effort to stay focused right the way through the activity and seems oblivious that it has been problematic for her. She seems happy with what she has done, and the T does not imply otherwise. I think the T has tried to support their efforts without giving any sense of judgement or failure.

I wonder how much of my observation affects her? I hope the T doesn’t feel any judgement from me, I want to reassure her that I think she is doing a brilliant job.

I notice I lose sight of Tina sometimes as I am distracted by the boy and K. While Tina doesn’t understand she doesn’t act in a disruptive way, while the behaviour of K and the boy seem to be making the difficulty more problematic, K seems very sulky, I wonder if they need a lot of reassurance? Has the presence of the Ofsted Inspector upset them? The T is patient and gives them a lot of support which means Tina and BK have to wait longer, sometimes they try to help each other but neither really understand what they are doing.

The T winds the activity down, giving feedback to each child as they finish, using different coloured pens to denote type of feedback. She asks Tina to write ‘is’ three times, Tina writes a row of ‘i’ then shows it to the T who says something about what a long row of ‘i’ and asks her if she can write ‘is’ next. Tina does a long line of the word and receives praise from the T.

As the children move away Tina looks happy and skips toward the carpet for fruit time.

As the children come to sit down they are in a very unsettled mood, there is a lot of shuffling around, disagreements about where and who is sat where. T uses lots of strategies to try to maintain their focus. A child is chosen to sell the fruit and another boy, who had his turn yesterday becomes very upset and angry and gets up and leaves the carpet area with a lot of noise. T begins the process of selling fruit and then asks SA to take over while she sorts out the boy.

The SA finds a story video on the computer and most of the children settle to watch it while eating their fruit. I realise I have been distracted watching the other children and haven’t noticed Tina. I turn my attention back to her and see that she is sat happily eating her pear, she is looking at the screen but I notice occasionally she turns around and looks at the other children.

The T returns and brings the story to an end. She has a bag on her lap and asks the children what they have been learning about. Tina puts her hand up but the T asks another child, one that has been very belligerent, she draws him in by asking him more detailed questions. He seems to be very bright.

Then she puts her hand in the bag and uses descriptive words to describe the shape she has in her hand that they can’t see. I notice she doesn’t use the word ‘adjectives.’ Tina seems bright and interested the whole time.

It is time for me to go. As I leave I am relieved not to be part of the Ofsted process, and enjoy the idea that I can just walk away.

# Observation 30/05/2019 (13)

As I walk towards the school I try to decide whether to keep my coat on or not. The weather is not as cold as it has been but still not warm. I decide to hang it up when I go in.

After checking in at the office someone opens the security door for me, I hang my coat up and open the door to the classroom. The SA smiles as I enter, she is sat at the other end of the classroom facing the door. I look around for Tina, she is in the HC with B and E, as I approach I can see they are busy and talking to one another but I find it difficult to hear what they are saying. I find myself struggling to focus, to settle myself into the observer role, I settle my breathing and become aware of my feet on the ground, focusing on my surroundings and the task in hand. Gradually my focus settles but I am aware that I have missed the first few minutes.

Tina has a cup in her hand and is stirring something in it with a spoon. I hear the words ‘evil king’ and I wonder if this is related to the Snow Queen theme that has emerged for Tina over the last few observations. Tina looks up and notices me, there is no acknowledgement and she turns away from me while looking at whatever she is stirring in her cup. I wonder if she is surprised to see me, the children have been on their Easter break and it may not have registered that this was my day to be in.

The three girls talk about the evil king and that they need to do a poster to warn people, they seem to agree this needs to be done and head for the writing table where Tina and B get a piece of paper and sit down to begin their drawing. E says something that at first I think is ‘evil king’ but then sounds like ‘evil pea’. I wonder if I am hearing right. I find myself thinking it doesn’t make sense to me to have an evil pea, it must be evil king. Reluctant as I am to give up on my own idea, E nails it by placing a plastic clump of peas on a cushion and telling the other two that the evil pea is there. For a moment I try to make sense of the evil pea, it has taken me by surprise. I wonder where the idea has come from.

E then sits at the table asking someone to pass her a piece of paper please. Then she says she might want to go outside soon to play, Tina and B seem to feel reluctant and express their interest in their posters. E assures them she is going to do her poster first and picks up a felt tip pen and begins to draw.

Tina has drawn something that initially looks like a caterpillar, there is a round face with two large eyes on it. She draws a straight line for a mouth in black and goes over it a few times so that it spreads. She says her pea is sad, E says her pea is happy and draws a smiley face but no arms or legs. Tina draws something behind the face and I am not sure what it is. Then E says she is putting a cape on her pea, saying something about superman. E colours it green and then puts black spots over it. Tina draws a cape and she colours it green but her spots are much larger than E’s.

They co-operate with each other, sharing the colours then suddenly E notices there is a felt mark on the table and she says, I didn’t do that, but Tina says she did and pointing out that it can’t have been her because she is using a different colour. B also finds felt marks around her paper but denies she was responsible. There is a little discussion as they try to work out what has happened, each one not wanting to be blamed but not really wanting to blame each other. Then E says it must have been the evil pea and Tina and B pragmatically agree, of course that’s what must have happened. The idea that it might have been accidental doesn’t seem to occur to them. I wonder if something has been said by the teacher about writing on the tables? It occurs to me that this theme of blame seems to be a significant part of their thinking, not just Tina.

B is more interested in writing, asking Tina how to spell ‘the’, and Tina is able to do that saying the sounds; t, h, e, and then B says you need to do some writing. But Tina says she is doing a poster. Tina is intent on making the black spots on the cape and I wonder if there will be much green left when she has finished.

E says she wants to play outside now but both Tina and B say they want to finish their posters. E goes, taking her picture with her, and very shortly B follows her, Tina finishes something on her poster, picks it up and follows the other two to get her coat and go outside. I decide to get my coat too.

As I go outside I notice a group of children looking at something on the floor with the T. The three girls are there too. It is a ladybird, the T is encouraging them to be gentle, all the children are excited, but it flies up and they jump back surprised. They all laugh and move away to find other things to do. Tina goes into the wooden house, there are two rooms but no outside wall so it is easy to see them. There are pictures on the wall and they want to display their posters. Each of them finds a way of displaying their poster, Tina stands hers on top of a book. Then she sits at the table and begins confidently to make marks on a paper with a green pencil crayon. She is very intent on her task and when I catch a glimpse it looks like green rain. I wonder if she likes sitting with a pencil making clear confident marks?

E and B have found a plastic tunnel and are crawling into to it. Tina goes looking for a ball, she suggests they throw it but B and E are not interested, so she says I know I will hide the ball and you see if you can find it. The other two agree and seem quite enthusiastic. She hides the ball and B and E both find the ball easily, I think they watched her hiding it. Their interests is short lived and they return to the tunnel.

They return to the tunnel and Tina tosses the ball up and down, catching it. Meanwhile boys are whizzing up and down on a wheeled cart, they come near to bumping into the tunnel and Tina playing with her ball. Then a collision almost occurs, Tina just manages to step out of the way, the boy shouts out that if he had hit her it would have been her fault. This tendency to blame is occurring frequently, amazing I have never thought of it being so prevalent.

The girls decide to relocate the tunnel to a safer place and move to a space in front of the house. They collect small traffic cones and make a barrier, almost chanting no bikes allowed, no bikes allowed. C crawls inside the tunnel and Tina finds two blankets and spends quite a bit of time trying to place them just right over the tunnel. She uses the blankets to cover the ends providing an enclosed space. The SA watches and then asks them what they are doing, Tina says it is a place for the baby, the SA says do you know what it looks like to me? It looks like a Chrysalis. I wasn’t surprised that she said this, I had had caterpillars on my mind since I had seen Tina’s drawing of the Evil Pea. And the way the tunnel/tube moved reminded me of a caterpillar. The SA talked with them about what came out of the chrysalis, they all responded that it was a butterfly.

C was inside the tunnel and nothing had been heard from her for some time, she seemed to be curled up in there. I had noticed that she had had chicken pox and had been left with some unpleasant marks on her face. I wonder if she was enjoying being hidden, or did she miss being home being mothered by her mum.

Suddenly E declares she wants to go in and she wants C to come out, but C refuses. Tina and B try to negotiate with C while E continues to press C to come out. There is no aggression being shown, it feels like they are all trying to be very reasonable and manage the dispute.

Then the bell rings and everyone stops and holds up their hands. It is time to go inside. I am lost sight of C leaving the tunnel as I watch Tina run to join the line, the dispute over the tunnel seems to be forgotten. Usually they wait for everyone to line up, but the T accepts a reasonable line and they troop inside. It is near the end of my time, so I decide to leave my coat on. The children remove their coats and sit in front of the white board ready for fruit, or in this case carrots.

Tina tells the T she is very hot, and the T suggests she take her jumper off, Tina stands up and walks towards the T with her arms up in the air. It reminds me of a young child going to their mum fully expectant that mum would lift the jumper over their head and ease it down their arms. There was no rebuke from the T or suggestion that she do it herself. On the contrary she responded to Tina in a way that Tina had fully expected. As I watched the scenario play out I felt quite moved at the observation I was making. It felt like a very special moment.

Unfortunately, some of the boys, individually are acting out and demanding the attention of the T. I wonder if this is related to what they have just witnessed between Tina and the T? She remains calm, doesn’t create a fuss about them and uses strategies to praise children doing the right thing as well as noticing when one of the boys stops trying to be disruptive. Somehow, she manages to juggle all this while teaching numeracy

The carrots are handed out to those children who want them. Somebody says the word rabbits and I see a grin cross the faces of some of the children, one or two giggle. I wonder if this is some sort of in joke, the nearest they might get at this age to innuendo?

Tina sits through this session focused on the teacher, putting her hand up to answer questions, not always the correct answer but it doesn’t stop her from trying again.

Tina is sat nearer the front and it appears she doesn’t realise what is happening behind her. She seems totally unphased, even when the T has to speak to the boys directly. Deciding she has had enough of her carrot she stands up and puts it in the bin, returning to her place on the carpet without any fuss. Her focus is on the T immediately and she puts her hand up to answer a question. The answer isn’t the one the T wants and so the T repeats the question, suggesting they listen carefully. The T chooses someone else to answer, once again the answer isn’t what was wanted and the T attempts to clarify, suddenly lots of hands go up. One of the boys shouts out and the T says she will choose J because he has his hand up and isn’t calling out.

Watching the class, I have a moment of pride that Tina is sitting so well focused on her T, when there is some disruption around her. I wonder at the relationship she has with her T and respect she seems to give in moments like this. In most of my work previously I have focused on children who struggle with this high-level skill and relational interaction. I wonder what it would be like to observe the boys that are being disruptive, I wonder what sense I might get of their lives and the issues they are dealing with.

I realise my attention has been focused away from Tina and I wonder if I missed anything. I notice the time and know I must walk away. I have lots of wonderings as I leave, I know we can’t possibly know what happens at home before children come to school but watching the differences in the way children respond to the T I wonder what those differences might be?

# Observation 07/05/2019 (14)

I had completed my Supervision notes last night, it had been very thought provoking listening to the recording of our session. Recording and writing up the summary of Tina’s observations is presenting a challenge. However, I feel curious on my way in to School 1, wondering what I might see and feel. I am curious about my orientation towards Tina which seems to be more psychological than psychoanalytic. Tony had raised the point that there might be something in me that might be influencing this bias away from my feelings in the setting and it may be linked in someway to Tina.

As soon as I walk through the door into Tina’s classroom I notice K first, she is wearing a beautiful blue princess dress and a golden crown. She looks very regal, it has been a few weeks since Tina has dressed up as a princess. I wonder if the dress has served its purpose, or maybe she has found another way of getting the feeling the dress gave her when she has worn it.

I look across the classroom and notice Tina at a table with B,E,C. Her back is towards me and I see her raise her arms in some sort of joyful expression and I am curious to know what is going on. I walk across to the table and see that each of the girls has some large wooden dominoes. Tina walks around the table and sits next to B who seems to be building a house type of structure but with limited domino pieces. They are directly opposite C and E, both of whom are doing something different. E is setting up a domino line that it seems she is intending to topple; a boy is working with her. The boy then knocks the line down and E says she wasn’t ready, he seems annoyed and walks away, E begins to line the dominoes up again. C and E engage in conversation, but I am not sure what it is about they seem to be very close. I am curious about the way E has moved into the group, with C and B, I realise that K is very much an outsider now and seems to spend a lot of time playing on her own.

Tina seems to be building a wall then suddenly breaks away from what she is building and moves towards E. She speaks in a quiet voice and I have difficulty catching what is being said. Something about the way she, Tina, gave E power but they can’t use it in school, E mentions an object related to this power and Tina mentions horns on her head, but they don’t come out in school. They seem quite conspiratorial as if they are sharing something between the two of them that no one else knows anything about. Tina returns to her seat.

Tina is building something, but it isn’t clear what it might be. I notice that each of them only has a handful of dominoes each and not enough to build anything substantial. The children each seem engaged in their own project, B is very quiet, but E and C are chatting to each other. Suddenly Tina makes an announcement in what I would describe as an affected mode, ‘hey you guys,’ she says very dramatically, ‘I know what we can do, we can build a stage!’ As she ends she uses her hands in a gesture that seems to indicate some sort of presentation. I think she is anticipating a positive response from the two girls, as if her announcement is important. There is no response from C and E, they are apparently unaware of Tina’s announcement, for a fleeting moment Tina’s face changes and I wonder if she is disappointed they are not listening. I notice she seems to be tired, her eyes have dark rings underneath.

Tina turns to B and says something like ‘Look at those two they don’t know anything about building a stage.’ This seems like a bit of a put down of the other two, because they are not listening to her, too busy with each other. B looks up but doesn’t say anything in response. Tina returns to her building but takes some of B’s dominoes, I feel shocked, there is no remorse on Tina’s face and B is very upset. Tina says she needs more to build her stage. B pushes the others away and says, ‘right then I’m not going to build anything.’ The other three girls take her at her word and draw the dominoes towards them. But immediately B seems to regret it and tries to take some back.

C and E share the extra bricks and they appear very co-operative with each other. B has a very small number of bricks to work with now.

Tina turns away from the table at this point and goes to pick up an exercise book and show it to the T. She is beaming and there seems to be a lot of energy in her body as she wriggles while talking with the T. Tina shows her a page of what might be writing, saying she has done some writing. The T, getting down to Tina’s eye level, asks her what it says. Tina looks a bit flummoxed, she wriggles a bit and puts her hands behind her head, she seems unsure what to say about the marks she has referred to as writing. The T comes to her rescue and changes the question slightly asking, ‘what is the writing about?’ However, Tina is still unsure, but the T’s response sets the scene for me about what has been happening in Tina’s life. She says maybe it is about a little girl who goes to a wedding? And Tina beams, wriggling a bit more. The T asks some questions about the wedding like what colour were the flowers? But Tina didn’t seem to know, so she changed the question to were there a lot of flowers and Tina nodded her head vigorously, her face is beaming, and I reflect on the way she had been unable to disguise her facial expression when she couldn’t answer a question.

Tina takes her book and puts it away while the T attends to another child. Then she skips into the HC, picking up a broom and brushing the carpet. Suddenly she stops and looks around, seeming to notice for the first time the setting has been moved around and she runs to tell the girls, ‘hey girls …’ I don’t quite hear what she says but it is about the house being different. C comes to have a look and they both identify where things have been moved to, then C says she is going to do a poster for the show and Tina is enthusiastic about C doing this. E calls out to Tina something about ‘is this a stage?’ And Tina goes to look but says no its not big enough and E answers her saying it is a roof. And the triangular shape could indeed be a roof.

Tina returns to the HC and begins singing to herself while she carefully brushes the carpet, getting into all the corners, brushing the furniture and the walls. However, I notice a doll on the floor and Tina ignores it, ignoring the baby self maybe? Moving out of the early stage of dependence to a more independent phase? I can’t hear what she is singing but I hear the phrase ‘I love you,’ and I wonder if she is remembering something that happened in the wedding.

C returns with the poster and asks Tina how to spell something, Tina seems to struggle a little, but her voice gets stronger as she sounds it out and she seems to be very clear what the sounds should be. She tries to convince C that she is right, C goes back to the writing table and Tina follows her. I am not close enough to hear what they are saying. C is on a chair on Tina’s right and Tina has one leg up on the table as she leans across to watch C. I feel curious about the angle of her leg, but she appears very comfortable in this position.

Tina returns to the HC and begins building a barrier around the stage using some large soft cubes and other household things. She puts a doll (a black one, not the white one from the floor) into the highchair and fastens her in then places the high chair as part of the barricade. Tina has built these barricades before and I wonder what she is keeping out or maybe keeping in?

C shows Tina her finished poster and they go to the T and explain that they need blue tack to put it up on the wall. The T agrees and says they can get some from her draw. I am surprised, blue tac is like gold in the classroom with children constantly wanting some, sometimes removing it from the displays which can be very frustrating for staff. The two run off excitedly towards the drawer. They rummage around in the tidy drawer, locate the blue tack but then can’t get everything back in. I feel a bit anxious, but I am not sure if I am anxious about the mess or about the fact that it was the T’s drawer.

Eventually C manages to make the draw tidy enough to be able to close it and I feel relieved. The T comes into the area as Tina is sticking lumps of blue tack onto the back of the paper. Not in the corners but in a long line about half way across the middle of the page. The T alters the visual time table and I become aware that maybe things are about to change. I am just half way through my observation now and the T shakes the bells, the children stop and lift their arms and hands into the air. She praises those that have responded quickly, then asks the children to line up at the door. I think she means outside and feel a little confused when they all line up at the classroom door.

There is some disruption, C begins crying and though the T asks what is wrong there is no clear reason given. Tina puts her arm around C and has a very soft look on her face, she is trying to be comforting. Then one of the boys comes to the line with a cardboard cylinder and another cardboard box, the T says they are going into assembly and he needs to put these things back. He resists for a few moments, but she insists gently but firmly until he co-operates and puts them back. I wonder if he wanted someone to notice he was giving something up with this alteration in their usual routine?

Tina is asked to hold the door open and the line of children walks past. The boys usually say thankyou to her as they pass. She is beaming and enjoying her responsibility. She follows the end of the line and I am relieved she is near enough for me to observe. I have no idea where I am going or what will happen in the hall. I feel slightly apprehensive and wonder if I will be able to see Tina at all. It occurs to me that maybe I should leave but I decide to continue observing as much as possible for the rest of my time.

The class sit down in a line and the other classes follow, lining up in their respective class positions. It is the first time I have seen the whole school together. Tina and C are sat next to each other at the end of the line, after all the children have arrived and settled I move my chair to see Tina better. Tina looks around, I wonder if she feels a little overwhelmed at being part of such a large group. There are no teachers only support staff with a teacher at the front.

The T calls for the children’s attention and says they are going to do some singing, she is in a jokey mood as she tries to reassure the children about this unusual change to their day and puts a song from the computer onto the screen. It is a song, I learn later, from the film Greatest Showman called ‘This is me’ it is very much like the emotionally provocative song from the snow queen. Tina seems to know the song well, using arm gestures and a confident stance to engage with the song. It is another song based on empowerment and accepting ourselves with all our imperfections. I feel energised by the song and can appreciate how this might feel for the children singing it. Then I notice a boy, not singing, who is in my eye line just beyond Tina. He is older and sat with one knee up. His face is still but I sense he is trying to hold back tears. I can’t help watch him and wonder what is going on in his life that creates such emotion? I look around the hall and notice there are one or two children who are not singing and although they do not have the same emotional tug on my emotions as the boy I wonder about their emotional response to the song.

There is a break as the T tries to explain the meaning of the song and she relates a personal experience to illustrate. Tina takes her cardigan off and is restless with it. First she puts it over her knees, then around her shoulders, then tries to tie it around her waist. She sneezes and wipes her nose on the cardigan, and then rubs her eyes a few times, I wonder if she is tired? She then puts her hands down her trousers and it is there for a few minutes, I wonder if she is seeking some sort of comfort?

The next song is Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious, totally different, the older children seem to get the words but not Tina and younger ones, I am surprised at the lack of emotion it generates in me, it seems poverty stricken after the earlier one. Tina looks around as the older children sing the complicated song, it occurs to me that it may be she is suddenly aware of what she doesn’t know? I wonder about her need to be powerful and the control she likes to have, this situation seems to provide little opportunity for that.

It is time for me to go.

# Observation 14/05/2019 (15)

As I approach the school entrance someone opens the door for me, it is the head teacher she smiles and points to a sign on the door that requests quiet because tests are in progress. Everyone is very quiet and pre-empt my moves so that I don’t need to ask for anything. I am keyed into the main school building from Reception (Office) and notice again the quiet atmosphere. I wonder what I will find in the classroom.

I enter the classroom and look around for Tina, I see her at the opposite side of the classroom sat at a table with two other children and the T. I notice the outside door is closed, I wonder if the T is doing some sort of assessment. As I walk over I pass the computers and notice B and C singing and mimicking the Snow Queen song ‘I have the power.’ As I approach the table Tina notices the song and immediately joins in moving her body and singing to the music. As she looks up she notices me. I sit down on a chair nearby, wondering if it helps her to have this song in the background, or whether it is a distraction.

The writing process seems to be easier today for Tina, however she seems to need quite a bit of help from T and she refers to her each time she writes a new letter. The T is very patient in her explanations, sometimes helping her sound out and at other times pointing the letter shape out on an illustrative sheet. Tina can make the correct sound usually and is able to write it with little help. I am pleased that she is making progress. I notice her letter formation is greatly improved too.

K seems to be constantly demanding attention and is less focused on her work and more on trying to compete with Tina for T’s attention. The third child is BC and for quite a while she sits looking at me with the pencil playing around her mouth, sometimes across her eyes.

At one-point Tina struggles with the sound at the end of the word butterfly. The T tries to help her using a variety of strategies, but Tina looks confused. The T asks if she is stuck and Tina nods, she looks a little uncomfortable, and maybe I feel a little uncomfortable at watching her trying to find the answer. The T suggests that she might be a bit stuck and Tina nods her head. The T refers to the sheet and Tina’s face brightens, I think she is pleased to have got the answer. She writes the letter and then gets the T’s attention to show her, T points out that there is something at the end of the sentence that is missing? Immediately Tina puts a full stop. The T turns away to help K.

Tina tries to get the T’s attention again to show her she has completed her work and is rewarded with pink ticks at the end of the two sentences she has written. The T says the pen is pink because she is tickled pink at her hard work, then suggests that she might like to use the purple polish pen and Tina looks delighted. She uses the pen to form the letter b in a line at the bottom of her work and when she has finished the teacher says well done and that Tina can put her name up to the Rainbow on the wall chart.

Tina skips off and calls to B and C saying she is putting her name on the Rainbow, she is obviously very pleased, more than pleased I think she is proud of herself. The Rainbow is in the carpet area and after completing this task she turns to a large whiteboard on the floor which has a line of letters across the top and her name in the bottom right hand corner. It seems this may be something she began earlier. As she sits down she announces that she is going to do some writing, it seems that her success at the writing task with the T has motivated her to continue with her writing. Her legs, frog like, are on the board as she leans over to write letters, adding to the ones that are there. I notice she spends time looking at the letter display before writing, she writes letters not words. I think how impressive the long lines of letters look as she focuses for quite a long time on this task. She is constantly talking to herself, sounding out the letters, her letter formation, while not perfect, is close to the expected form.

She is engrossed and seems very comfortable in her position on the floor, sometimes she stands up to get a closer look at something but then returns to her writing.

Suddenly K arrives, and Tina looks up with a no nonsense look on her face, she says ‘you aren’t scribbling on mine, I’m doing my work writing!’ K answers, ‘I can do patterns though,’ and Tina doesn’t seem to mind the idea of patterns and says, ‘Ok patterns.’

K sits on the floor and finds a corner of the whiteboard away from Tina and begins making u shaped patterns using a black pen. Tina continues with her writing.

B and C enter the space together. They are talking about the Rainbow and moving names on it. C seems concerned that she may have inadvertently moved her name on the Rainbow without being told to. B seems to be trying to reassure her that it must have been when she was sat on the carpet and was noticed but C looks very unsure. They seem to notice K and whisper to each other, it sounds like they are saying K is scribbling and Tina overhears. She looks at what K is doing and seems concerned, ‘I said no scribbling I’m doing writing.’ There is a sense that the three are ganging up on K, she says to Tina ‘you’re not the boss in this classroom.’ Tina repeats that she is writing and doesn’t want scribbling, K finds a rubber and tries to rub the pattern off but the ink is too strong and it doesn’t make much of an impression. She tries to go over the pattern again. But B and C say it is scribbling, K says she is going to tell on them ‘I’m going to tell you off,’ and marches out of the area.

The T is walking back and forth preparing for the next activity. Earlier she had been watching when Tina was being harsh with K, Tina sensed her eyes and smiled at her a little. Then Tina walks over to the T and says something, I wonder if it is an attempt at appeasement? I couldn’t hear what was said I just notice the T’s face is not severe and Tina doesn’t seem upset in anyway. Later I noticed Tina’s response to K changed on reflection I wonder if that was when her behaviour changed towards K? She skips back to B and C.

Tina and the other two are left and they discuss K’s scribbling, they seem to think she is not as mature (?) as they are. A few minutes later Tina notices K watching across the top of a low wall, ‘I can see you K,’and she returns to the area where Tina says again ‘no scribbling,’ and K sounds compliant answering, ‘OK.’

B and C are now sat at a table together decorating a wooden heart that belongs to B. K is now on the other side of the board on Tina’s left side with a pink pen, she is making some shapes, letters may be, but I can’t make them out. Tina seems to accommodate to her being so close. K decides she wants the purple pen and notices that C is using it she goes over and asks for it but C resists and B backs her up. Tina stands up and tries to reason that K needs the purple pen but B and C are whispering to each other. K says they are putting Tina on the bad name list, but they insist they are not. In the end C gives the pen to K but their follows a long-winded dispute about the pen as they try and determine who needs to use it. Tina defends K and argues for K needing the pen to do some writing. I am surprised at the way she sides with K, I did not expect this response. I wonder if it is something to do with her feelings about B and C who seem to have become close over the last couple of weeks. At one point I notice C crying, B puts her arm around her and tries to comfort her. Tina notices and expresses concern briefly asking her what is wrong, but C just shakes her head. I remember C cried last week on the way to assembly and Tina soothed her then.

C recovers herself, but her eyes are red. The dispute goes on for some time and I find myself becoming disinterested, I look at Tina but there is no evidence of a decline in the energy she is giving to the dispute. There seems to be something here that I am responding to, I find myself thinking I wish they could move on to something else.

The T walks into the area and asks Tina to move her board to the side so her work doesn’t get spoiled, Tina does this and then sits down in her carpet space as other children come together on the carpet ready for fruit and a numeracy session.

These carpet times are fraught, particularly because two boys usually find the challenge of being part of this larger group very challenging. The T seems to know when to insist on something and when to let a behaviour go. I sense a part of me is annoyed with the boys even though I know that there will be an explanation for their behaviour. Tina sits eating her fruit and seems to accept what is going on around her, she does not talk to anybody but seems very aware of the T.

Using a slide showing Numicon on the white board the T introduced the topic of doubles, although this is a new topic the children do not seem clear by what is meant by the word doubles. The children have number fans and she asks them what the answer would be to the two Numicon shapes on the board, Tina puts her hand up along with most of the other children. Then they are asked what the number sentence will be and most of the children manage this easily. Tina is very enthusiastic but doesn’t shout out. The T rewards another child that hasn’t shouted out with a jewel in the reward jar. Then the T moves the slide on, past double 2/3/4 to two sets of 5 and asks the children to find the answer on the fan. Many of the children, including Tina, struggle because there is no number 10, they need to use the 1 and the 0 together. Even when the T has explained why they need the 2 numerals the children spend quite a long time trying to put the numerals together in the right order.

I wonder if this was a big jump for them? Maybe the concept of doubles was enough for them at this stage? Or perhaps she was trying to involve the two boys who seem to be very bright?

It is time for me to go now.

I stand up, put my chair away and leave the room.

Observation 04/06/2019 (16)

I haven’t been able to observe Tina for two weeks. Last week was half term and the week before she was absent.

As I entered the classroom I noticed two people, both female, in the classroom talking in an animated way to each other. I wondered if one of them was replacing the class teacher for the day but as I looked around I noticed her sat in the carpeted area with a group of five children, one of whom was Tina. The T was sharing a story with them, it was called ‘The Naughty Bus.’ The format was interesting. It was a larger format than most books but not as large as some used for whole class work. The pictures, according to a review on Amazon books, were drawn from a child’s perspective and the text was used to illustrate what was happening, for example dropping down the page at the end of a sentence to signify the bus dropping off the end of the table.

I found the story and the way it was written very interesting, however although the children seemed interested in the story the textual context didn’t seem to be significant for them. Responses to questions by the T about the story appeared limited too. At one point I remember thinking that the pictures were not very clear and although I thought they were well done it occurred to me that the children might not appreciate what was being depicted.

The sharing went on for about 15 minutes and had begun before I arrived. A few minutes before the end Tina was becoming a bit restless, one or two of the other children showed various signs of restlessness too.

The session ended with the T suggesting various ways they could take the story forwards, by making a list of what they had seen, drawing or making a model in cardboard of the bus, writing a story about what might happen at night. The children stood up and went to choose their next activity. I wondered how they would continue from the book sharing.

Tina joined B and C at the drawing table, it seemed that she had returned to what she had been engaged in before the group activity. The content of the story did not feature in anything that Tina did in this time.

In the proceeding activity between 5 children I was aware of a very high level of intensity that I am not sure I can capture in describing what I observed. I have noticed it previously, but it seemed to be amplified for me today. Everything was done with a high sense of purpose, so there was agreement and disagreement which seemed non-negotiable, it seemed to be all or nothing. B left the table with E, she moved with purpose, but I was unclear as to why. Tina was busy with a black cardboard box. She took out lots of ‘confetti’ previously made by B and put it in another box. Then she drew a picture on one of the flaps, it looked like a picture of a girl, flowers, a tree and sunshine. She then proceeded to make small cuts around the edges of the box lid. This looked difficult because the cardboard was thick.

E arrived just outside the area where the girls were working and said they should leave what they were doing and come outside to practise the band. This ‘practising the band’ has occurred in previous observations. Tina mentioned something about wanting to dance and E didn’t agree and turned away. Tina returned to her cutting and she discussed with C wanting a dance at the end of the band, it was to be ballet. C said she could do ballet and demonstrated a twirl on tip toes with her hands above her head. There was a lot of eye contact with me throughout the time I was observing Tina with C. C also sought Tina’s approval of what she was doing but Tina seemed absorbed in her cutting task.

Meanwhile BC arrived on the scene and demonstrated her version of the splits. C and BC engaged in pretending to do ballet, including the splits. There was lots of physical activity and requests for Tina to join them, but she declined saying she was busy. I was surprised since she had mentioned it first.

B returned and seemed to be trying to draw Tina and C outside to practice the band. BC was demonstrating her dancing and the splits and B joined in the dance activity with C too.

Tina had struggled to make the cuts she wanted around the edges of the lid and stopped to rub her fingers. C returned to the table as BC and B decided to play hide and seek. Tina asked C if she could finish cutting the box lid and C was happy to help. Tina folded the lid of the small box, where she had put the confetti, found a label and put B’s name on it. Meanwhile C had begun writing and they discussed how to spell something. They were unsure and both of them went to the T, who was sat behind them with a group, to seek advice. The T advised them to count the sounds on their fingers and try to write it themselves. The two of them tried to write the word, helping each other, they were thinking of but it wasn’t clear to me what that word was.

During the next five- or ten-minutes Tina began writing too and she made a number of attempts to connect with the teacher for advice on how to spell something. The T was focused on her group work and clearly signified she was busy. Tina continued with her writing, sometimes flinging a coloured pencil away when she had finished with it.

C had finished cutting the lid of the box and she wanted to demonstrate to Tina how she did ballet, she said ‘I want you tell me its good,’ which I thought was a clear request for affirmation, there was no subtlety or defensiveness about it. Tina made comments like ‘yes, not too bad,’ or ‘oh yes that’s better,’ and at one point she demonstrated to C how it should be done.

Tina seems drawn to the T for reassurance but notes that she is busy and wanders away again.

She draws a heart on her paper, a black outline and pink in the middle. C returns to the box and asks if she can put a heart on the box lid picture previously drawn by Tina, and Tina nods her head and says yes. C says she will colour hers red.

The T returns to the carpet area with fruit and Tina rushes over asking if she can ‘show’ her work to the rest of the class, T says they will see if there is time before lunch.

Tina puts her paper in a safe place indicated by the T and sits down. Other children join them. This process of sitting on the carpet appears never to be straight forward. The boys struggle with it and one or two become easily distressed when they are not allowed to break the boundaries. The T remains calm and focused and an adult in the classroom takes one of the boys to one side because he has become so distraught.

I find myself thinking there must be more boys than girls but as I count them I find there are actually more girls.

Tina sits quietly watching, eating her raisins, but there is no obvious sign of concern at the boy’s activities.

The T tells them they are going to be doing numeracy while they have their fruit.

It is time for me to go.

# Observation 11/06/2019 (17)

As I set off from home to go to the setting for my observation I am aware of feeling lighter, leaving for a short while the challenges I am facing in moving to a new house. I was looking forward to an hour where I was able to focus on something else, another aspect of my life, maybe of me?

The routine of signing in felt very reassuring, no change needing to be addressed here.

The day was cold and wet, and I wondered briefly whether Tina would be wanting to play outside and if I might leave my coat on so as not to miss anything if I needed it later. I decided to leave my coat in the cloakroom.

As I entered the classroom the T noticed me, smiled, stood up and walked towards me. I had anticipated her intention to talk to me since there had a been a delay in my receiving a classroom plan and some pictures. She looked a little apprehensive and I was aware of feeling concerned that I had added something else to her long list of ‘to do’s’ as the end of term draws near.

As she apologised I tried to reassure her that I understood. I found myself telling her that I was also very busy moving house and that the documents had arrived at a good time for me. On reflection maybe, I was responding in some way to my feelings about my own long list of to do’s.

I thanked her again and looked around for Tina, not seeing her I asked where she was, and the T informed me she was in the home corner.

It had been some time since Tina had played in the home corner and I was aware of feeling curious about what I would be observing. I anticipated the observation being an easy one where I would be able to sit down on a chair and lose myself in my observer role.

In the HC Tina was sat under the canopy over a stage holding a doll. There was a barricade around the space with Tina, a boy En and BC. Tina seems to be sat a little higher than E and BC, E is holding a handset to control the TV and he and Tina are talking to each other.

Tina turned to BC and asked permission to place the doll on top of some cushions, these were stacked so they seemed at least as high as Tina and a little precariously. I wondered if the doll felt safe? On reflection as I type this up I am wondering if the feelings I am sensing are related to my own sense of being in a precarious position, things at home seem precariously balanced and although I think I am managing it maybe I feel vulnerable to the possibility of things wobbling and falling?

I notice B sat outside the barricade and wonder if this was her choice, part of the game or if she was feeling excluded. B says something about wanting to play with Tina but Tina says she can’t because she is in the house playing with En and BC, but Tina notices B seems gloomy and asks BC if B could be a cat or a dog? BC says she can be a cat and tells B to go and sit ‘over there’ pointing at the farthest position from the contained space the three of them occupy. B moves to where she is directed, and her face looks as if deeply upset. I wonder what she might be thinking, it seems over the last few weeks Tina has moved away from the friendship with B towards others. B seems to have spent a bit more time on her own.

Tina stands up and steps outside the barrier sitting on a chair next to B who is sat on the floor and has pulled a highchair in front of her as if to hide herself. I can’t hear Tina’s words, but she seems to be trying to offer B an explanation for the way things are, this is how it is and if you want to be a cat that is fine. She is playing with En and BC and will play with her another time. B is hidden but there is no movement and she remains quiet. It seems that nothing Tina is saying is making any difference to B’s feelings, I think that she seems deeply hurt.

A bell rings and all the children stop to listen to the T’s instruction to tidy up their things and line up to go outside if they want. She then walks around and encourages children to clear things away before going outside. I notice Tina has immediately left the home corner for her coat, I watch for a moment before going to fetch mine. I notice her smiling brightly as she talks to a couple of children in the coat area. It is a friendly engagement, I have a sense of them feeling part of this experience together, secure in the familiarity of the shared environment. I think to myself what a precious experience this is and I feel privileged to observe it. As the move still talking towards the door I leave the room briefly to fetch my coat.

When I return Tina, E and a boy, Cb, are at the front looking through the glass door into the outdoor play area, I hear E say, ‘it’s beans, I bet its beans.’ Cb opens the door and shouts the name of the SA and asks if it is beans? The three children are very excited and keep opening the door and shouting to let the SA know that ‘it is beans.’ It seems important for them to show they know what the SA assistant is preparing, it feels a bit annoying to me and some part of me wants to say, just wait a minute so the SA can finish what she is doing.

The SA comes through the door with an empty bean can in her hand and I realise I had been thinking more about planting beans than canned beans. The children have to wait for just a moment while the SA fetches the other empty tins of beans and puts them in the bin. Cb pushes the boundary and stands outside the classroom.

E and Tina head for the beans, standing and looking at two large rectangular dishes with the contents of two tins of beans in each. E asks, ‘why beans?’ The SA replies its like the naughty bus story and then I understand this to be a continuation from the story last week. She tells them to get an apron, the aprons don’t’ fit over their open coats. They are told not to make a mess with the beans and I wonder how they can’t possibly make a mess?

There are spoons with the beans but no bus I feel disappointed, surely you need a bus to go into the beans. They stir the beans with the spoons, I wonder what else you can do with them? Tina says she is going to make a potion and stirs the beans with a spoon. E says she is going to play in the sand and takes her apron off. K arrives, looks at the beans and quickly goes to find an apron. K looks excited, the SA repeats the no mess rule, K puts a spoonful of beans to her mouth and the SA warns that the beans are cold and not for eating. She says beans need to be warm for eating. I wonder if she has ever heard of people liking cold beans?

K asks Tina where the naughty bus is, and they decide to go and ask the T if they can have some cars to go in the beans. This seems a logical plan to me and I follow them inside and observe as they ask the T if they can have some vehicles to go in the beans. The T says yes, and the girls appear delighted. They find the storage box, pick out handfuls of vehicles and dash outside, putting them into the beans. They run the vehicles through the beans, but they notice there is no bus and ask BC if she knows where it is, apparently En has it. K finds En and after she asks if she can play with it he hands it over and she returns to the bean trays.

K runs the bus through the beans, Tina is watching and asks if she can have it, K replies no, and Tina tells her she is mean, she needs to share. Tina sounds very whiney, pulls a bit of a sulky face and looks down. K spoons some of the beans in her tray and puts them into Tina’s. ‘look I’ve put more in yours.’ Tina then proceeds to spoon more of K’s into her own until K objects and takes some back, while all the time holding onto the bus.

Cb joins them, his face is alight, the SA tells him there is to be no mess and he responds ‘how can you play with beans and not get messy?’ But the SA doesn’t appear to hear him. Tina slops some beans on to Cb’s hand and he returns the same to her. But then he begins to toss the beans so the fall on to the floor and Tina warns him that they are not to be messy. He tosses the beans again and they land on the floor. Tina drops her spoon and walks inside, she goes to wash her hands. Running the tap she tells a boy that the water is lovely and warm, her hands were cold from the beans.

After drying her hands she rushes to her peg to hang her coat up and then tells the T, who is doing some writing with En, that the beans were cold, the T repeats what Tina has said and they laugh together.

Then Tina goes to the writing table where she finds a paper she was working on earlier, there are some letters that don’t make sense to me until she dances over to the white board where there is a sentence that says ‘I will sink,’ and I can se how she is trying to write this sentence. She needs frequent visits to the model to recall what letters need to come next but she is focused and appears very pleased with herself. When she has finishes, she goes to the T and shows her, she explains what she has written and the T seems pleased, acknowledging she has worked hard. She tells Tina that she can put it on the special work board and Tina goes to find the blue tack. After putting it on the four corners she looks on another wall for B’s work and places it next to that.

Observation 25/06/2019 (18)

As I set out for School 1 today I am aware that my journey will take slightly longer and follow a different route. I have moved house over the last week and there are number of ‘firsts’ to be experienced. This is one of them.

I have only missed one week visiting the school but it feels longer. I notice again the twig sculpture of a figure on a bike just outside the entrance to the school, it’s always there but today its almost as if I see it again for the first time. I ring the bell to gain entrance and the receptionist recognises me and smiles through the window as she reaches for the door release button.

Inside the entrance hall feels familiar, I follow the usual protocol of signing in and collecting my visitor badge. I need access though the door to the school and the receptionist and I exchange pleasantries about the weather and the forthcoming end of term as she punches in the code. I enjoy this interaction.

After hanging my coat in the cloakroom, I open the door to the classroom aware that for the next hour I will need to focus on observing Tina. As I step inside, I stop for a moment to take in the classroom. It is familiar but there is a different adult here, she is very young and I wonder about her role at this late date in the year. I am aware that seeing someone so different seems to alter my initial perception of the room. As I step forward away from the door, I notice the T sat on the carpet with a group of children, she looks up and smiles, I return the smile.

I now notice Tina sat at a table where there are wooden circles like wheels with a central hole in them, pipe cleaners, glue, sticky tape, paper and felt pens. Also sat at the table is C and B. C has a pot on her left arm, suggesting she has had an accident and broken it. On noticing me Tina and C exchange a look, I wonder if I was missed last week and if Tina wondered whether I would appear this week.

Tina is colouring a wooden wheel using a blue felt pen, she tells the others that blue is her new favourite colour and B and C say what their favourite colour is. Tina asks if it is their new favourite or their old one, and both respond that it is an old one.

C has the container of pens close at hand, Tina asks if she can have the yellow, she likes yellow because it is the colour of her hair, but C says ‘so, I’m using it, you can have it when I have finished.’ Tina looks at the other colours and says ‘Ooh green, I like green,’ C hands it over.

C picks up a thick pen and then, in a teasing voice, says ‘mm who can I get to do this? Who will I choose?’ Who I choose will get a … will get … will get… a bracelet! If I can make one.’ At that moment I am unsure what C is referring to, but gradually it dawns on me she is referring to the pen lid which appears difficult for her to open with her pot on her arm. During this teasing statement Tina looks uncertain, it is not clear to me if she wants to be chosen for this particular task or not. B also looks uncertain, I wonder if they are protecting themselves from the disappointment of not being chose by C? Aware may be of being manipulated? Suddenly C stands up and turns around to BC who is sat behind her and I see her ask BC to open the pen for her. Both Tina and B look slightly upset, saying how it is not fair that she didn’t choose them. However, I have a feeling that they had anticipated C’s action and had prepared themselves for it.

A boy, D, picks up and swings a pipe cleaner that has wooden wheels threaded on, at the table where the girls are sat. I was not sure where the pipe cleaner had come from but noticing B’s face I believe it was hers, her face was full of emotion and she asked him to stop. He didn’t listen and the wooden wheels spun off the pipe cleaner and bounced around the room. B puts her head down and leaves the table abruptly, going towards the HC.

Meanwhile Tina is continuing to colour and to thread some wheels on a pipe cleaner. Tina and C say something about giving their T a surprise, excitedly they get a piece of paper and write her name on it. Tina returns to her wheels as BC arrives at the table, grabbing as many wheels in her hand as she can. Tina tries to protest but without much conviction that she will be heard. With a deep sense of … she also retreats to the HC.

As I follow Tina to the HC I notice four or five children appear to have taken refuge there, all sat reading books, B is one of them. I notice Tina glance up at me just for a moment while she settles with a book. I am not close enough to see which book she has chosen.

During the next few minutes a drama unfolds in the classroom which alters the usual routine to the hour I observe. A boy, Cb, rushes into the classroom from outside and climbs onto t wall dividing the carpet area and reading corner. The young woman is following him and approaches to try and get his co-operation. He remains belligerent and resistant to any co-ercion, there is an impasse with little hope that the strategies employed will be effective.

The young girl seems to have taken the lead here, and I wonder if she has been appointed as a SA for him. Meanwhile the T seems to be taking a back seat and I wonder if she finds this difficult.

The girls continue to sit in the reading area and look unperturbed by what is unfolding just above them. I notice the T move to the HC and tidy the books. Suddenly Tina stands up and says she is going outside to fine E. AS she heads for her coat I go to the cloakroom to find mine.

When I return and head outside I can’t see her initially, then notice she is at the far side near the hut that plays a variety of roles, today half of it is set up as a travel agents. Tina is shouting at E who is riding round on a bike with Jb standing on the back. As she rides past Tina she says ‘this is the greatest fun,’ her face looks happy, then she turns to me and asks ‘why don’t you say hello?’ I reply ‘I do quiet watching,’ she smiles pleasantly and I think she is a girl comfortable in her own skin. AS she has appeared in my observations over time she strikes me as pragmatic, accepting of things and people as theya re.

Tina busies herself, talking the whole time, trying to make a surprise for C. There is a sense of urgency as she constantly looks up to see if C is coming. E returns on the bike and Tina suggests, with a sense of urgency in her voice, they need to finish the surprise for C and E jumps off the bike to help Tina make a den for C to sleep in. Meanwhile Jb jumps onto the bike and peddles away.

Tina and E work together to create a covered sleeping place for C but there are not many scaffolding items to anchor the blankets they are using. E appears to have more strategies available, she uses the books as weights on the blankets though they only just do the job. The spend a long time doing this and Tina announces to any boy who comes near that boys are not allowed. This prohibition extends to K at one point without any provocation and I wonder why she is being so punitive towards her.

One of the boys walks into the hut and refuses to leave so Tina announces that he is in prison, whereupon he rushes out announcing that he is escaping. Tina chases him and then picks up a curved ball catcher and declares she will magic him with her wand. The boy also picks up a ball catcher and they use them to fight with. Both are totally engrossed when a bell rings and everyone stops.

The children are asked to line up by a gate and I notice the head and another teacher are in the yard too. The children are ushered through the gate into another part of the school towards the library.

In the library the children are told to sit quietly because some children are doing tests. The T in charge seems a little annoyed at the disruption, but the SA explains quietly that there are difficulties with Cb and they need to be out of the classroom.

The SA finds some stories and allows the children to vote on which story they would like to hear.

Throughout this change in routine Tina has been totally compliant, she sits on the carpet with a look on her face that might suggest she is Ok with everything but I wonder if she finds these alterations difficult to manage?

At that point, with about 10 min. left of my observation I develop a very tickly cough. It has troubled me on and off for over a week and I had used up all my mints and found I couldn’t control it. I decide it would be better for me to leave rather than disrupt the situation even more.

I leave the area and find my way back to the school entrance, sign out and leave.

Observation 02/07/2019 (19)

I enter the School Reception area and enter my details into the visitors book, I feel comfortable with this process, I have a sense of expecting everything to be the same which is suddenly altered when I am told that because it is transition day the children are in the Yr1 classroom in preparation for September. I follow the receptionist to the classroom, wondering what I will find.

As I walk through the door I notice the teacher looking at me questioningly, she asks if I have come for someone. It dawns on me that no one has prepared this T for my presence and, as it becomes clear that she is new to the school, I feel concerned that this situation might cause her a little anxiety. I reply that I am there just to observe. The T asks who and I nod to where Tina is waving at me, with a lovely big smile on her face, she looks very pleased to see me. I find her welcome reassuring, I feel as if I was expected welcomed.

It appears that the children have arrived just moments before me. The feeling throughout the session is an unsettling one. There seems to be a constant parade of adults in and out of the classroom, sometimes they want to ask questions of the T, at other times they mention the air conditioning and other organisational concerns. There is a sense for me that these adults ‘own’ this space, they feel totally ‘at home’ here and the children appear to be insignificant. I wonder how many times I have ‘owned’ the space without a thought that it was the children’s space too?

At one point someone comes to ask me what I am doing there, am I a supply teacher or something else. I say that I am a research student at Sheffield University, they look perplexed at first, so I add I have been observing in Reception since January. It seems that no one in Yr1 has been aware of my presence in Reception and this had created quite a lot of confusion when I suddenly appeared.

I am aware that all the children seem to be looking at me rather than the T, it takes me a few moments to regain my observer stance and focus again on Tina.

I find myself looking around the setting and find it to be very formal. There is no evidence of toys, paint or sand, but lots of tables that appear to be squeezed in. The displays are very ‘wordy’ with no examples of spontaneous work by children. I feel disorientated, unsettled, unable to connect with anything in the room. I have to remind myself that this is a Yr1 class.

While the T is talking to the children and asking questions Tina is smiling and engaged, putting her hand up more frequently than any of the other children. There are times when she is still and quiet, much as I have seen her in her own classroom in whole class settings. I wonder what she is thinking about in times like this. I have had difficulty in understanding her mind set at times like this. It occurs to me she is taking in all that she is observing, her face and body are still but her eyes are wide as if she doesn’t want to miss anything.

The T puts on some music on the smart board and asks the children to stand up and join in with the action song. Tina joins in enthusiastically, but she doesn’t seem to know the song and finds it difficult singing the words and doing the actions. After a couple of times engaged in the action song the children sit down and the T says they will shortly be going outside. Asking them questions about what they like to play with in Reception she informs them that she will get some toys, dolls, vehicles and perhaps paints, for the classroom in September. I wonder if she has noticed the lack of play experience for the children of this age.

A Yr1 SA advises that they can’t go out to play until the bell rings at 10.30. The T says that she was thinking of her previous setting where they were involved in free flow between the outdoors and the classroom. She asks if they can have fruit but is told they generally have it after play. I sense a tension about this turn of events, it is so difficult getting to know children in a large group like this, so much easier when they are playing.

The T asks the children if they would like a story and goes across the classroom to find one. The children are in quite a closed space and moving across them is difficult.

I am aware throughout these events that En is acting out and ignoring attempts to contain his behaviour. I also notice that Cb isn’t in today.

The children are mostly quiet, they appear unsure of this new environment and the adult who it seems will be their teacher in September. When she sits down with a book she asks them if they know the story, all the children shake their heads and mutter ‘no.’ While some of the children engage with the story Tina is the most engaged member of the class, pointing things out in the pictures, anticipating what is going to happen next and answering any questions. She is sat upright and focused and at one point announces that they have had this story before and she knows what is going to happen. I notice that this statement contradicts the earlier impression presented by the children that they have not had this story before.

The story ends and there are about 5min. before they are allowed to go outside, I sense a tension in the T as she continues to try and engage the children. Tina is talking with some of the children around her and most of the children appear to be restless now. The T asks them if they like to sing and some of them say yes. Tina and B are among them, nodding enthusiastically. I recall their spontaneous singing of the Disney films songs, B suggest the ‘Elsa’ song and the T looks surprised, she says she couldn’t’ possible remember all the lyrics to that. Boldly B begins to sing, Tina looks as if she might like to join in, she seems to be mouthing the words. But the T says that she was thinking of Nursery Rhymes, what Nursery Rhymes do they like? There is no response. Tina looks a little disappointed, I remember her enthusiastic spontaneous singing of the film theme songs. I question in my own mind the benefits of singing Nursery Rhymes that I have understood previously, while appreciating the emotional experience of some children engaging with these powerful emotional songs.

The T says she knows different words for one they may already know; wind the bobbin up. Tina looks unsure as the teacher sings it with lyrics that include pulling hair and shouting Ow. The children begin to join in and then a bell rings and the song is drawn to an end.

I sense a change in the room, I think there is a sense of anticipation about going outside, the T looks relieved. I note the relief I feel at being released from the room and look forward to observing Tina in what I anticipate being a more playful environment.

The children are asked to line up ready to go outside through a door that leads directly to the playground, the space available to do this is limited but they manage without too many difficulties. Tina stands ready to go.

The children file out first and I follow. Walking outside I see a large tarmac area with lots of painted coloured lines, squiggles, shapes etc to encourage games. Beyond that is a large grassed area with climbing and balancing apparatus. These are not accessible because the children are informed they are not to go on the grass.

Dotted about are small buckets with different items in them. There are skipping ropes, bats and balls, ankle skippers and maybe another bucket that I can’t remember. It seems that other classes are outside too.

I find myself disappointed at the flatness and lack of imaginative play opportunities. Tina is rubbing her arms and walking around looking disappointed, she has an expression on her face almost like her nose is smelling a bad smell. From the way she is rubbing her arms she regrets leaving her cardigan inside. I also feel the cold on my bare arms. The T approaches me and asks what it is I am doing, I explain that I am a Research Student at Sheffield University observing Tina for one hour a week, and have been doing this since January. She mentions that a friend of hers is doing a PhD at Huddersfield. I nod and smile, unsure what to say, she smiles back and wanders away.

Initially she wanders aimlessly and then joins E at the bucket with the ankle skippers, the two of them try to figure out what to do with them but give up after a few minutes. Tina wanders around once more rubbing her arms, her nose wrinkled up as she looks around. She notices the T holding a skipping rope with another child. Different children take it in turns to skp as the rope is turned. But no one can skip in time to the rope. Tina tries but it seems this is something they are as yet unfamiliar with. However, the children continue to take it in turns though and I admire their tenacity. Tina is looking happier now, and she is not rubbing her arms so much, despite the difficulty. I wonder if she is no longer cold or doesn’t need the hugging sensation anymore?

K watches at first, then asks the T if they can play the wiggly snake game, she gets low to the ground and shows the T how to do it. This makes the game feasible for all the children to take part successfully. After a few moments the T hands her end of the rope to another child and the game continues The RSA joins them making the squiggly rope and Tina’s face brightens considerably now until a bell rings again, the children stop and are told to put the things away and line up. I notice that Tina stops immediately but she no longer looks bright.

There are varying degrees of co-operation here, but children generally follow the instruction. The children line up outside their classroom doors. It looks very formal.

The children file in and sit on the carpet in the places they were in before going outside. Tina sits with her wide eye look as the T and SA discuss the fruit situation. The SA brings the fruit on a tray, the choice is limited, Tina raises her hand for raisins along with others, mainly boys. I notice that the T gives the boys their raisins first. I feel like pointing out that Tina wants raisins too and has been waiting patiently for them. She opens the packet and tips them into her dress stretched across her lap, then eats them from there.

While the children are eating their fruit the T says that they are going to talk about what class rules they might need for next year. It is time for me to go, I try to catch the T eye and I slip out of the door.

## Observation 16/07/2019 (20)

As I walk towards the School entrance I have a mixture of feelings; relieved that I have managed to complete the series of observations here and a tinge of sadness as I come to an end of my Observations of Tina. I have grown increasingly fond of her.

There seem to have been many occasions in the last six months when my commitment to observe her each week has been extremely difficult. However, now, looking back I am glad I pursued this path, it has been such an important step not only in its contribution to my thesis but in my own transitional process.

Personal Reflection

I feel very optimistic as I sign in to the visitor’s book, the busyness of the events of the months since I began to visit this school falls away. I feel I am well and truly here, and I breathe deeply, anticipating the challenge ahead of me, focusing on Tina.

I enter the now familiar classroom and as I look around I notice that the Class Teacher isn’t there. I look for her behind the cupboard door expecting her to bob up and smile her greeting, but although the door is open she is not there. I feel disappointed at her absence, I realise that although Tina is the one I have been observing the CT has made an emotional impression on me. As I write this up, I reflect on my feelings, wondering at the sense of loss I felt at her not being there.

I have been aware of her relationship with Tina but I wonder at her significance for me. There have not been many weeks when she was not in the classroom during my observations and looking back I think I missed her on those occasions too. However, this is an ending and I feel sad not to be able to share it with her. I was very aware of her support even though we rarely spoke, perhaps her consistency/constancy was important to me as I faced my own transitionary process where everything has been in flux. The flux is resolving itself once more into order, maybe it is time for me to move on.

Observation

I notice Tina sat at a table with two other children, she is sat to the left of a teacher I have not seen before. The T looks up as I approach the table, she looks puzzled and asks if I am there to observe someone? I reply that I am there to observe T, though I start to say Tina and the SA interjects with her real name. The SA is smiling and welcoming, I ask if the CT is in school today and I am informed that she is in a meeting. She asks if I need to give her a message and I inform her that I would like to meet with her to receive any feedback she might have. She says she will pass on the message.

I turn my attention to Tina, who is writing. I notice that she is much more focused today, able to respond to the T prompts to listen for the sounds in words. She struggles to hear the sounds ng in the word angry, I think to my self that this is a difficult task to both hear and identify the phonemes. She makes the sound with the teacher and then glances across the classroom, she says the letter names n, g. I am surprised she is able to do this and feel a surge of pride at her progress over the last two terms. I feel I have learned so much about the capacity for learning in young children through my observations of her. Previously my attention has been focused on children who are having difficulties in acquiring fundamental aspects of the curriculum.

As she finishes writing the word the T prompts her about the full stop required at the end of the sentence and Tina is praised for working very hard. She is told she can put her name onto the treasure pot, something that I have not noticed happen for Tina before. As she walks away she gestures with her arms and fists something of the incredible elation she feels. The gesture suggests a sense of power and achievement. Success and achievement seem to be important to her.

She skips across to the chart and moves her name up to the treasure pot, she is the only one who has her name there today.

Tina skips over to her friends, E and C, who are sat at the writing table and tells them what she has just done with a look of delight on her face. There is a muted response as they look at her, but Tina continues to beam and then move on to engage with an activity she had been working on before being called to the writing session. Apparently, they are making raffle tickets, cutting up small pieces of paper and putting numbers on. They seem interested in big numbers, a boy comes over and says ‘guys, look at this big number,’ but although he repeats himself a few times the girls don’t seem to take any notice of him. The are absorbed in what they are doing and chatting with each other. C wanders away leaving Tina and E. I have noticed a growing friendship between the two, E seems to have replaced B in her affections. E is in a higher group and I wonder if Tina’s growing cognitive skills and confidence are beginning to match E’s?

Tina cuts a large square out of a piece of pink paper and folds and glues it to make a triangle, she tells E that she is making a flag. The T comes to see what they are doing, E informs her that they are making raffle tickets and offers an envelope with tickets in, T takes one and E announces that it is a winner. T asks what the prize is, and E takes a moment to think of something, then announces it is a picture she will draw for her. The T expresses her pleasure at this.

T asks Tina what she is drawing and Tina announces it is an animal, I am surprised at the quick change, a flag has now become an animal. The T leaves them to get on and after sticking the triangle onto another pink piece of paper Tina colours the animal using lots of different colours, it looks like a rainbow. I wonder what animal she has in mind. She fills the space with colour and then cuts a smaller piece which she sticks to the top of the triangle and adds a face. I can see it is intended to be the head. As I observe her doing this I notice how her hair is tidy and has been arranged carefully by someone. It no longer looks wispy and I sense that my early impression of her as being so light she could be blown over with a puff of wind has changed. She seems much more substantial now.

Tina completes the picture with a drawing of a heart shape at the side of the animal, coloured orange and her name, stating that she is doing this for Mrs P, the T in the class that day. She stands up and skips across to the T, presenting the picture beaming as she does so. T is delighted and expresses this to Tina, then asks what kind of animal it is. I am very curious about the animal represented here by a triangle shape and move closer to hear. Tina states that it is a Kangaroo and once again I feel surprised. T asks her what Kangaroos have here, pointing to her tummy, Tina says babies. As she says this I feel this is significant and reflects a theme that has emerged across the observational series. The T also asks where kangaroos come from and Tina replies correctly, Australia. Tina twists slightly in a bashful way, stroking her hair with her right hand as she does so.

She skips back to where E has been joined by C, B, and BC. E seems to be talking more to these three than Tina at this point, Tina seems quiet for a few minutes, cutting and folding an envelope, I wonder if she is digesting something from the interaction she has had with the T.

The friends are talking amicably about parties, saying who is invited and where the parties are to be held. Tina joins in and announces, ‘I’m going to invite you BC.’ BC is sat on the floor, I had felt she was an intimidating presence previously, but she is quite benign in this context and seems friendly with all the group. This friendship seems to be reciprocated.

The T comes and seems concerned that some of the group are sat on the floor, there are only two chairs at the table, she directs children to sit at another table. I feel that the moment of friendship is being disrupted and I am disappointed. The group disperse, E also leaves, and Tina sits down in her chair, continuing to cut and fold envelopes until they are quite small and then drawing a smiley face on it. She stands up and looks directly at me with a beaming face, this takes me by surprise, she does not usually give such clear eye contact and smile at me. Then she finds the T and presents her with the smiley picture. The T is very appreciative, Tina is beaming, then turns and skips back to the table where she makes another smiley face from a cut and folded envelope. Once again she turns to look at me smiling as she skips over to the T and hands her the creation, then looking very happy she skips back to the table.

The T rings the bell and the children raise their hands, she announces it is fruit time and they need to tidy up. Tina leaves the writing area, quite messy now with lots of cut pieces of paper and unused envelopes, and heads for the HC where she begins to tidy up, picking plates and fruit off the floor and putting them away. The skipping energetic movement I had observed is gone. From her facial expression and the way she is moving now I have a sense of her being in a dreamy state, not really focusing on what she is doing, as if her mind is elsewhere.

She doesn’t finish the tidying but skips back to the carpet area and sits down. There are scissors on the floor and T asks Tina to pick them up and put them away which she does, but by the time she returns to the carpet the T informs her that the only fruit left is oranges, she doesn’t seem deterred and accepts the fruit offered.

The T says they are going to watch the next part of the Nimmo story, a film I haven’t seen but I am aware of a little of the story. Tina sits at right angles to the big whiteboard, she seems to be watching the smaller computer monitor while peeling her orange which seems a difficult one, the peel only comes off in small pieces which she places in a pile in front of her. She does this with very little visual awareness, she is totally absorbed in the film. The T comments that Tina needs to turn around to face the screen properly and Tina changes her position.

A shark appears on screen and some of the children express their fear, they don’t like the shark. C is sat next to Tina and seems very upset about the shark, Tina places her arm around her shoulders and C snuggles in to her. C tries to reciprocate by putting her arm around Tina, but it is the one with a pink pot on and it appears uncomfortable because she drops it almost immediately. Tina’s hand is on C’s knee.

There is a character in the film seemingly trying to entice a fish towards a party and Tina pipes up ‘Actually there is no party.’

The close position between Tina and C gradually moves apart, Tina has finished her orange and picks up the peel in her left hand, almost without looking and some pieces fall out of her hand, she picks them up almost without seeing them while continuing to view the film. She puts the pieces in a nearby bin, returning to her place on the carpet. It is time for me to leave.

# Appendix 2B Record of Observations Case Study 2

# Observation 08/01/2019 (1)

Setting

A large eighty place nursery, with a high proportion of British multi-ethnic children. The nursery is part of an infant school but is managed separately from the school.

Pre-observation reflections

Wondering as I set out what the experience of observing in Nursery will be like now that I no longer work in the school. The nursery is completely separate and it is not necessary for me to go into school at all. None of the children know me although there will be some children who are related to older children that I have taught or worked with in the past. Sometimes the family similarity is quite startling. I know all the staff and they know me, what I am doing and why. This means I can go straight in and do the observation without the need for more than a quick hello.

The route I take driving to the Nursery is exactly the same as the route I took when I worked in school and I wonder if memories will stir about my feelings about work before I retired. However, I am travelling at a different time of day and have used the same route for other things. The memory of my work commute is fading and I find that as with my earlier observation I am aware of a mixture of feelings as I make my way there, a sense of excitement as to what I am going to observe while also feeling a sense of sluggishness, almost like the first day back to work after a holiday.

Observation

As I approach the building through the outdoor play area the doors are open and children are milling about everywhere. I notice that there are some adults with younger children stood watching, dotted about both inside and outside. I realise that they are parents bringing their children in to prepare them for starting Nursery.

I find the Nursery Teacher (NT) and let her know I am here then go to find the child who has agreed to participate, Arlia. It takes me a few minutes to find her, one of the support assistants (SA) asks me who I am looking for and directs me to where she saw her last. I find her running around the Nursery with a slightly younger looking child (Reema) here with her mother. Arlia’s face is bright and smiling as she chases around, she appears to be very excited and it occurs to me that she is doing well not to trip up or bump into anyone.

Arlia takes Reema’s hand and leads her outside to the climbing frame. Arlia begins climbing the ladder slowly but when she reaches the top she can’t quite manage to negotiate her way off the top of the ladder on to the platform there. She needs to bring her leg over the top bar but can’t seem to do this in a way that feels safe to her. She climbs back down and looks around for Reema who has run off and is playing with some other children.

Arlia runs past Reema and hides behind a screen peeping out and watching Reema. This seems to be a game about hiding hoping to be found. As I watch Arlia picks something up out of a plant pot and puts it in her mouth, it takes me a moment to realise what she has done and I wonder if I have been mistaken. Arlia races around the area and I wonder if she is looking for Reema, an adult suggest that she go and get her coat because it is cold and she heads indoors.

There is a long half-wall with coat hooks and photos of the children to help them locate their coats. Arlia spends a few minute trying to find hers, lifting the coats up and looking at the photos, but she doesn’t seem to find her coat and abandons the search. Running off she finds Reema once again who has also returned inside and this time Reema takes Arlia by the hand and they walk around together.

Arlia’s face is open and smiling, I wonder if she feels she has claimed her friend and been claimed by her.

Arlia asks Reema if she would like to go outside again, Reema nods and they drop hands while Arlia goes hunting for her coat. Reema wanders outside and Arlia finds her coat at the opposite end of the coat hooks than she looked before. One of the sleeves is tucked inside the coat and Arlie pulls it out before she tries to put the coat on. She manages to put one arm in the first sleeve but can’t reach the other one. She tries to reach the sleeve but it seems to be just out of reach. After struggling for a few minutes she looks up at a passing mum for help, however this mum is intent on following her own offspring and walks passed Arlia.

I feel conflicted at this point, should I step in and help? Within a few minutes, after a persistent struggle Arlia finally manages to solve the problem herself and runs to a SA to help her with the zip before heading outside. As she walks across the soft play area she picks something up from the floor and puts it in her mouth, chewing it. I realise I never saw her spit out what she had put in her mouth earlier I wonder if she is swallowing something. I walk across the place where I saw her pick something up and notice large pieces of grit, I wonder if that was what she picked up previously.

Reema is playing on the bikes and Arlia walks over to the wooden benches where the NT is putting up some bottles in a line to be knocked down by children taking turns throwing bean bags. Arlia asks if she can play but there are already two children waiting and the NT suggests that she sit on the bench and wait for her turn. She complies with this and sits, swinging her legs, and watches the other children as they take their turn. Each child is expected to help set the game up for the next person.

Arlia’s turn comes and she stands up ready to try and knock the bottles down by throwing a bean bag, there are six of them giving each child the same number. She is hit and miss and gets closer in order to increase opportunity for success. But sometimes this is not successful either. At the end of the game she helps pick up the bean bags.

She is keen to have another turn and needs to sit and wait, she climbs on the bench, encroaching on the bench where the bottles are lined up, interfering and knocking bottles down. Gradually interference becomes more persistent and the NT asks her to either sit on the bench and wait or find something else to do. Arlia moves to a rope that is hung across a fence in the corner, swinging on it for a few seconds, then she turns and runs towards the bench with the bottles, she trips banging the side of her chin on the bench, and starts to cry. NT takes her inside patiently to put a cold compress on it and write it up in the accident book. While sitting with the cold wet towel on her face a number of adults come over to ask Arlia what she has done and she is able to tell them what has happened, though her explanation does not seem clear, however, they seem aware and understand what occurred.

After a few minutes Arlia goes to the play dough table and after rolling a piece and cutting a circle she puts it on her chin. She plays happily with another child making different shapes. Then I notice a change in body language, feels like there has been a rupture, her face has an exaggerated glum expression and she is sitting with her arms crossed across her body and her back slightly arched. I have missed whatever had happened to cause this response. An adult wanders by and notices Arlia, asking what has happened, Arlia says that the girl sat next to her won’t let her have one of the shapes. The adult smooths things out between the two, suggesting that her friend just wanted to make the shape and then she would share it. Arlia’s brightness bounces back.

As I continue my observation I notice her movements seem to have slowed down, there appears slightly less vigour in her actions, I wonder if she is tired.

I check the time, my hour is up and I tell Arlia I am leaving.

Letting the NT know I am leaving I set off to my car. I reflect that I feel positive about the observation.

# Observation 15/01/2019 (2)

Pre-observational Reflection

Feeling more positive towards the observation than last week. Curious about what I will observe today, though slightly apprehensive about Arlia’s preference for outside play, the weather is cold, so I have a few layers on.

Observation

Arlia is already outside, informed she has only just arrived, dad has brought her because mum has had to go to hospital on her G.P.’s advice.

I notice Arlia waiting for a bike outside, she is holding a sand timer waiting her turn, she is supposed to stay sitting on a crate but keeps wandering off. Crates are used to demarcate the bike riding area. NT keeps bringing her back. Arlia notices me, her face already has a smile on it so not sure if she smiles at me. I smile at her.

Another child also wants a turn on the bikes and the NT asks her to sit on the crate next to Arlia and gives her the sand timer to hold. Arlia sits next to her watching the sand carefully, every so often she calls out ‘teacher, teacher look,’ and points to the sand, but the sand has not reached its end and the NT points this out to her.

Eventually the sand runs out and it is their turn for the bikes. Arlia chooses a big red one. She finds it very difficult to ride, particularly on a slight slope, she perseveres though and manages to peddle more easily on the flat or slight slope back down. Unfortunately steering is a problem and while pedalling she keeps running into the crates positioned to create the track. She often stops pedalling and has to lift the bike up with the handlebars to move it. This continues for some time and she is totally focused on what she is doing.

Eventually Arlia abandons the bike for someone else and runs to the climbing frame. She climbs the ladder and slides down the slide. At the bottom she jumps off and steps away, looking down she notices a hole in the blue play surface, she puts her fingers and seems to pick something up and put it in her mouth. She runs around the play area managing to dodge people and things and then hides behind a post, peeping at me round the edge. I continue observing.

After a few moments she walks towards the door, I think we might be going inside, but she stops at a table with pegs and peg boards on and children playing. She picks up a board and begins putting pegs in. One of the SA comes along with F and says that Arlia needs to go in and have her milk, at first Arlia ignores this request, the SA says she needs to go inside with F to get her milk, Arlia looks up and sees F, she moves towards her and takes her hand. Meanwhile the SA is trying to encourage other children to accompany her inside for their milk, while her focus is distracted Arlia breaks away and picks up some pegs out of the pot on the table and runs away. The SA calls her back; she now has four children with her to go inside for milk. Arlia runs back to the table and puts some pegs in the board she had begun before being interrupted. She goes with the SA and the other children inside. The children remove their hats and coats, Arlia puts her hat on a small table, a short distance away from the coat hooks and then hangs up her coat on her hook.

There is a crowd of children all having milk around the milk table with a SA in charge encouraging them to help themselves to straws and milk. Arlia manages to put the straw in herself, she is leaning on the table. Then she stands up and turns away, still drinking, and talking to a couple of girls. When she has finished she knows exactly where to put her milk carton and straw, having done this she notices an activity going on with paint, a straw and bubbles. She stands and watches, popping the bubbles with her fingers and getting paint on them. The SA suggests she go and washes her hands. She does but doesn’t dry them.

Arlia returns and tells the SA that she wants to do it, she is told to watch and she can have a turn next. The child is just finishing and Arlia gets an apron and sits down. The SA explains that she needs to blow through the straw not suck and they do a practice run with Arlia blowing into the SA face. The she blows through straws. Initially all she wants to do is pop the bubbles with her fingers and it takes some gentle persuasion for Arlia to move on to the next task and place paper over the bubbles so they print on to the paper. Arlia makes squeaks of delight when she sees what she has done. She does this a couple more times successfully and then unfortunately sucks the straw instead of blowing, her mouth is full of paint. Immediately, though calmly the SA takes her to the sink and offers a cup of water, explaining that she needs to spit it out. Arlia does very well and manages to spit out most of the green paint. When she returns to the table she is more interested in putting her hands in the paint and the SA has to encourage her to go and wash her hands.

Arlia goes in to the low toilet sinks, she is rubbing the paint into her hands and watching through a mirror. A couple of times she sticks her tongue out and looks at it in the mirror, pulling scary faces and making claws with her hands. She glances towards me as if she has only just remembered I am observing her. However, she continues making faces in the mirror before she tries to wash the paint off her hands. Her hands are wet but she doesn’t dry them under the dryer, instead she returns to the bubble printing and watches another child engaged in the activity. She struggles to resist popping the bubbles, the SA includes her and another girl in the task saying you like popping bubbles and then allows them to press the paper down on them to make a print. I think this is very brave of her, the enthusiasm and vigour in Arlia’s actions could easily create a problem with the paint, for example knocking it over. Arlia still has her apron on and the SA encourages her to take it off so another child can have it. Arlia moves away, her hands are still wet and a little painty, she wipes her hands on another apron, then once again notices I am observing. I hope my face remains neutral. Having hung up her apron she moves away and picks up a piece of play dough but puts it down again and runs to the coat pegs and finds her coat then looks for her hat, I wonder if she can remember where it was she left it. Tempting to tell her because I can see it, however eventually she seems to remember and goes to pick it up.

Going outside she wanders to the digging area. The children dig inside a pit with a ledge all the way around. Arlia does not have wellies on so she remains on the ledge, sometimes standing, or bending over. Someone finds a worm and she goes around the side so she can get a closer look, the NT watches and advised that the worm needs to be allowed to go back in the soil and that it is not for digging.

Arlia wants to climb into the mud pit but the NT advises she has no wellies on. She goes to find some. She tries two pairs that appear too small and then puts a third pair on. She finds it difficult to balance and needs to position herself a few times so she can hold on to something while trying to push her feet in the boots. She seems to manage to get one foot in but the other won’t go down and she is walking with her foot half way up the leg, not comfortable at all. She goes to the NT and asks for help, but the NT says the boots are too small. She leads Arlia back to the boot rack and gives her her shoes and directs her to sit inside on the carpet to put them on. Arlia does this but puts her shoes on the wrong feet.

She goes outside and runs about before returning to inside and runs across the room to the quiet corner, where a SA working with a child on shape recognition. Arlia watches, I touch her shoulder and let her know it is time for me to go now, I say goodbye see you next week.

Observation 22/01/2019 (3)

Pre-observation reflections

I have had doubts about my ability to do this research. It has been such a challenge to set it up and focus on it. Part of me hasn’t wanted to fully engage sometimes and it has felt very much like a chore. However, today I am feeling more positive, I enjoyed my observation in School 1 this morning and I find myself curious about what I will find Arlia doing this afternoon.

Observation

Arlia is inside when I arrive, and I have a sense of relief because it is so cold outside.

I find Arlia using a black pastel crayon scribbling across a square piece of paper, the paper is not very big, and I notice she seems to be trying to cover the whole of the shape. Her hands are very black.

Arlia lifts the paper up and shouts to NT ‘Look’ and the NT responds saying, ‘you like to experiment, don’t you?’ Arlia nods and returns to her task. She looks up and notices me, looking for just a second then she smiles, and I nod in acknowledgement. She returns to her task. She seems very focused and is having to use quite controlled movements to stay with the shape’s boundaries.

Arlia puts the pastel crayon down and lifts her hands, wiggling her fingers, and shouts to the NT who says ‘I think you need to wash your hands now, ‘and Arlia goes off to wash her hands. Standing in front of the sink she turns the tap on but is distracted by seeing herself in the mirror. She tips her head back and then turns it to the side, I am not sure what she is doing. Then she turns around and tries to angle her body so that she can see her name tag which is pinned to her back. I am not sure why it is pinned to her back, but I have noticed over the last two weeks that some children have their name badges on their back. This is the first time Arlia has had hers on her back.

Arlia notices me watching her and then soaps her hands and rinses them, walking out of the toilet area the NT sees her and suggests that she might like to go and dry her hands under the dryer because they will get cold. Arlia follows this instruction but holds them under the dryer for a very short time. She shows them to the NT who says they are better but a towel would dry them better and keep them warm. The NT says she will show Arlia where the towel is, Arlia follows and wipes her hands on the towel.

Arlia goes to a table where there are some circular pieces of paper and chalks. She begins to colour with a chunky pink chalk, suddenly the paper is knocked onto the floor but when she leans over to pick it up she can’t see it. I can see it under her feet but her position when leaning over prevents her from seeing where it is. I hesitate, wanting to give her some indication of where the paper is, but I manage to refrain from interfering. She resolves the issue herself by choosing another circle and colouring that, again in pink. When she has finished she goes to the nearby shelves and picks up a hole punch which she tries to use to make a hole in the paper. She is struggling and the NT, who is sitting nearby, says she can ask for help if she wants. Arlia picks up the hole punch and walks to the NT who demonstrates how she needs to place her paper to make a hole.

Arlia needs help pressing downwards with sufficient force to make a hole. But the hole is not far enough into the paper to make a whole circle. Arlia looks disappointed, she tells the NT that she wants to put string through to make it for her dad. I wonder if Arlia can see that the string won’t work because the circle is broken, and the string will come out. But the NT discusses the string and encourages her to go and find some. Arlia seems a little confused and I am not sure if she wants the NT to find the string for her or if she is concerned about the inadequate hole.

After the NT making various suggestions to Arlia meant to inspire her to look for the string, Arlia goes looking but not where she has been told the string is. Finally, she returns to the table and tells the NT that she can’t find the string. The NT goes and picks up the string but on returning Arlia has found her original circle off the floor and is busy trying unsuccessfully to hole punch it. The NT sees her and suggests that there is another one on the shelf that might be easier for her to use. Arlia finds it and is able to punch holes herself. However, she seems to have lost interest in the string now. I feel a bit annoyed that Arlia has not followed through on using the string when the NT has made a special effort to find some for her.

Arlia spots another girl nearby and stands up and takes her hand, she says to a SA that ‘She is my friend’ and they walk around together. The girl, Z, is younger in appearance than Arlia. They walk to the quiet area where a SA is playing a game with a small group of boys. They are enclosed by a large settee and some shelves with another bookcase as a door. Arlia leans over the top of the shelves as she is watching and then begins to climb over. The SA tells her not to climb over the bookcase and Arlia’s facial expression seems to be quite defiant but after a few warnings she stops. However, she stops and rests on top of the bookcase.

She asks if she can have a turn and the SA says yes when she has played with the children on her list, later. ‘Am I on your list?’ Arlia asks but the SA says ‘not for today.’

Arlia turns around and sees a puzzle formed by semi circles of wood in different colours that all fit sequentially together to make a rainbow. She points to it and says to her friend Z ‘Look Z a rainbow.’ She picks it up, not easy, and puts it on the floor and begins to dismantle it. Z tries to do this too but Arlia is quick and Z doesn’t manage to hold on to many. Arlia spends a long time putting the puzzle together, sometimes thinking it is completed only to find another piece or notice a gap where something is missing. Z tries her best to add her bits but Arlia has claimed this for herself and doesn’t want anyone else involved. She is not really aggressive but very determined.

Arlia hears her name called for Milk and she and her fried make their way to the milk table. Arlia accepts her milk and straw but immediately begins to squeeze the carton and milk spirts out of the straw. The SA says don’t squeeze the carton but Arlia does, then she takes a couple of sips and walks over to the bin and holds the carton over the bin and squeezes a couple of times before dropping it into the bin.

**Aria runs off to** find Z in the home corner and they sit together on a small settee. Z stands up and runs to the computer where a boy is playing happily. Z sits on a nearby chair but Arlia tries to sit on the chair where the boy is. He doesn’t like it and slides across to push her off. There is some resistance on Arlia’s part but eventually she stands up and goes around to the other side of the chair and tries again to sit on it. The boy tries to push her off. Arlia stands up and moves to the back of the chair and just stands and watches.

Z and Arlia hold hands again and walk to the quiet area; Arlia returns to the rainbow and Z finds the beads and thread and begins threading. Arlia looks in the drawer and finds a number of blue beads and takes them to the rainbow and lines them up alongside. Then she picks the rainbow up, quite a challenge because the puzzle is not a fixed one and moves apart easily. She carries it to a large tray with things to arouse curiosity, like a prism, large and small sunshiny metal balls and a hollow Toblerone wooden shape. She tries to put the beads inside, it is a struggle because they all roll out, but eventually she does it and pushes it up against the rainbow. Then she finds a hand held coloured plate and puts it at one end and looks in, I make it blue, I can’t see other side. Then in between the rainbow and wooden shape.

Meanwhile Z has almost completed threading beads on her lace, Arlia sits next to her looking in the drawer for a blue bead, I can see one but she can’t. Then she finds blue cubes and begins to thread them.

It is time for me to go, I say goodbye to Arlia and leave.

Observation 29/01/2019 (4)

Pre-observation reflections

As I enter the setting, unlocking and re-locking three gates, I notice lots of thoughts and feeling filtering through to my awareness. Last week’s Supervision session alerted me to a mind-set that seemed to side with the staff and the difficulties the child I was observing seemed to create for them by her behaviour. I noticed I was feeling disconnected to the child and felt very little curiosity about what I would observe today. I also felt disconnected from the setting, I had a sense of being an outsider, of not feeling included as a staff member because I retired from my role in the school to which the nursery is attached.

I was surprised to notice these feelings, I was very pleased to retire when I did and definitely would not want to return. I feel relieved not to be in a position of responsibility for these and other children in the school and never anticipated feeling like this.

On reflection now, while typing up the notes, I wonder if my own feelings are also giving me an insight into the child’s feelings that I am observing. As I recall the observation now and review my notes for both last week and this week it occurs to me that elements in her behaviour may be indicators of a sense of disconnect between herself and the other children as well as the staff. I think this may become clearer as I type up this observation.

Observation

Alia was outside on a bike, dressed up in outdoor waterproofs to protect against the weather. These are provided by the setting. I felt disappointed when I spotted her because she was outside and I was already very cold. The bike had two seats, one behind the other, and Alia was struggling to peddle forwards, she was on a slope and the bike just seemed to be sliding backwards. After a few attempts she told the NT she wanted to go back inside, the NT seemed disappointed and said she had only just got the outdoor clothes on and now she was going to have to take them off again.

Alia walked towards the door, she seemed weighed down and moved quite slowly, I wasn’t sure if she might change her mind and turn around returning to the bikes. But she didn’t and as she entered the door the SA inside was supervising the putting on and taking off of the outdoor clothing. As Alia entered the SA did not seem pleased to see her, again expressing her annoyance about Alia wanting to be inside when she had only just gone outside. She told Alia she would have to take the outdoor clothes off herself, she had put them on herself so she could take them off herself.

Although it was a struggle, Arlia managed to get out of the outdoor clothing and then went to hang her coat up. On her coat hook was an umbrella and she spent a few minutes trying to find a way that both her coat and the umbrella hung together on the hook. As she turned to go and play the SA told her not to play with certain children and remember to do the right thing. I had the impression that the SA was cross with Arlia about something that had happened before I got there. I could imagine the SA was cross about something involving other children. At that moment I felt unsure of what to feel, I recalled how I had felt last week, empathising with the staff but not Alia. I didn’t want to do that this week and tried to focus on Alia and noticed that her face seemed blank and I could not read how she was feeling.

**In the main play area of the nursery Alia flits around, not really connecting with anything or anyone**. There does not seem to be one single child she feels drawn to. It seems as though she is an outsider. Gravitating eventually to the HC there are girls there and their name badges suggest these are the girls she has been told not to play with.

She sits down and watches the girls playing with two doll’s, one of the girls says she wants a baby so Alia goes and finds one in a cot. But when she hands it over saying you can have this one,’ the girl throws it on the floor and says ‘ugh, smelly.’ The doll is white, the other dolls are coloured. Arlia looks surprised at first and then picks the doll up again and drops it on the floor saying ‘ugh, smelly.’

The girls continue their HC play, finding hand bags and planning where they are going to do some shopping. They put the two babies to bed together. There is chatter about what they want to buy. Arlia looks on but it feels very much as if she is excluded. She is following the SA instructions not to play with these girls.

Suddenly she looks under a chair and reaches for something, when she pulls it out it is a wooden egg, Alia shows it to one of the girls, ‘look an egg,’ but the girl is not interested. Alia turns away and places the egg in her mouth with her lips around it, it looks like she might be sucking it. I wonder if there is some oral gratification in this action?

Dropping the egg, she runs across to the lap top table and leans on it watching a boy who is playing a game. She doesn’t interfere, just watches. Then another child arrives and begins pressing all the buttons, the screen goes blank and the boy on the computer protests, he moves to the computer next to this one, away from the interfering boy.

Alia sits at the computer and switches it back on, but the interfering boy continues to try and disrupt her. Alia pushes his hand away and he protests to me. I sit on a small table behind Alia and look intently at the boy and say ‘I am doing quiet work watching.’ I repeat, I am watching.’ But he is unphased and hits the buttons again and the screen goes blank. At this point I receive a directive myself form the NT not to sit on the table because the children will want to do that, I need to get a chair. I had looked for a chair but they are scarce. I felt corrected and know she was correct but I still had a sense of unfairness. I wondered of Alia felt the same earlier? Alia looks annoyed and stands up and quickly moves away, heading for the water tray.

When she arrives the three girls she had encountered were playing with fishing rods trying to hook the different coloured fish with numerals on. She stood for a few minutes just watching and then finds a stick without a hook on. A SA points out that she needs an apron to play in the water so alia finds and apron and returns to find the fishing rod. When she tries to hook a fish she notices that there is no hook on the end. A passing support assistant notice there is not hook and helps alia by finding it in the water and screwing it back on the rod. Alia can’t easily hook using the fishing rod, so she places the fish onto the hook. She seems to favour the red ones and tries to get as many on the hook as she can. Meanwhile the other children are all concentrating on fishing, hooking a fish, some more successful than others. Eventually they seem to notice what Alia is doing and some copy her.

Two of the girls are called to do some painting leaving Alia in the water tray and a couple of boys. She focuses in collecting all the red fish to herself and tries to hold them all in her hands. She is singing while she does this but the words are not clear. After a little while she dries her hands on a towel and removes her apron, hanging it up, then moves across to watch what is happening with the painting. It is a printing activity using wooden templates of dinosaurs and paint pads. She asks if she can have a go and the SA suggests that she choose a piece of paper ready for her turn. Alia chooses a circle to print on and as the girls move away she sits down and explores the dinosaur shapes, curious about the handle that enables them to be used for printing to keep hands free from paint. I am not sure she understands the shapes, she asks where the head is, and the legs and tail. Eventually she tries her hand at printing and keeps repeating the print to get a better impression on her paper. Because it is circular it is difficult to fit the dinosaur prints on the paper. Sometimes they overlap or print over the edge of the paper.

Her hands get paint on and she tries to wipe it off on the table cover, the SA assistant says its OK she can go and wash them, she has finished now. She follows the directive to put her painting on the drying rack then runs off to wash her hands. In the toilets she stands in front of the mirror and pulls faces at herself, flapping her hands. She does this for a few minutes and keeps her eyes on the mirror even when she is washing her hands. She wipes her hands on her clothes to dry them.

**She runs to the quiet corner** and returns to the task she engaged in last week. She found the triangular shape that she had filled with blue beads last week and I thought she might be going to do the same. But she went to the draw of beads and spent quite a few minutes picking out all the blue ones again and then, on a circle of artificial grass she seemed to make a circular pattern, but the ends didn’t appear to meet to complete the circle. Then it looked as if she might be making a face, though I wasn’t sure, there was no symmetry about it.

I checked the clock, it was time to go and I moved out. My mind didn’t seem as busy and I found myself thinking I would go home and drink hot chocolate to warm me up.

# Observation 05/02/2019 (5)

Pre-observation reflections

I am aware that I feel differently as I approach this observation. There is a sense that School 1 is easier, better than School 2. I seem to have designated one school as good and the other bad.

Observation

I am greeted warmly by one of the SA she asks how I am and I reply that I am fine thank you. Are you looking for Arlia? She is inside, the SA points her out ‘in the pink top’. I am relieved she is inside; I don’t want to feel cold standing outside.

**I spot her as she runs** across the room, I am not sure if she has seen me arriving. She attaches herself to a small group of three girls, I recall these are the three girls she attached herself to last week. She follows the girls as they wander around the room, she notices the café area which looks as if it is prepared for Chinese New Year. The entrance to the café seems blocked and I wonder if there is a reason for this. Arlia makes her way inside, squeezing past the piece of furniture that blocks the door. She doesn’t touch anything, almost as if she knows not to, and then she exits. She goes to the quiet area and finds the three girls there making shapes with thick Perspex jigsaw pieces, the pieces are different colours and all fit together uniformly except for the edges. Arlia creates her own shape, the shape builds up as she fits different colours together but struggling to fit some pieces in when they are adjacent to a piece with a straight edge.

I think this is a wonderful way of introducing the idea of how jigsaws fit together. I have a sense in myself that I would like to play with these pieces, they are chunky and look very tactile. I am attracted to the ease of how the pieces fit together and puzzle about the sense Arlia makes of the edges which are problematic in creating a cohesive shape.

‘Look at mine’ she says to the girls at the table but no one takes any notice. **She does not appear to connect with anyone in particular, not the children or the staff.** Arlia looks up at some of the other children and their creations, in choosing another coloured piece she sings ‘Nan, na, na, na, I’ve got pink.’ The other girls ignore her and Arlia continues with her pattern. Although she spends time with these girls it is always alongside and never seems to be inclusive. Part of me feels like I should notice her by saying something to her, another part of me feels slightly disinterested, as if there is an emotional distance between Arlia and me.

I wonder at this pattern I have noticed of being ignored. Although I want to be ignored I have also felt unsure of my place in this setting. When watching her I notice I struggle to focus on what she is doing?

A group of children from Reception stream through with their SA, they head for a door to another part of the building. This happens each week and although in the first couple of weeks the SA acknowledged me this week she doesn’t seem to notice me. I realise I am becoming less important. **Arlia rushes after her** and tries to get through the door after the other children have passed through. The SA has difficulty in stopping Arlia from moving through the door and needs a nursery member of staff to ease her away from the door so it can be safely closed. I almost wish I could go through that door too.

The nursery member of staff has a clipboard with names on and she calls out some names, including Arlia’s, saying they are going to watch a video. I find myself feeling relieved that watching a video will be easier for me to do.

The children follow the SA across to where the video is set up on the smart board. I feel curious about what I am going to see. The SA says it is about the Chinese New Year and reminds the children about things in their room that have been set up because it is Chinese New Year.

Arlia sits with the other children and focuses on the video. The video is about the Chinese dance of the Lions; I find it fascinating as I watch the movements made by people in the costumes. I wonder what the children make of what they are seeing; how much sense will they make of something so beyond their own experience? They all sit seemingly entranced.

A second video is about two children practicing the moves so they can become the Lion and take part in the dance. Arlia notices a Lions head mask that is white and pink, it only appears fleetingly in the background but she shouts out ‘that one pink!’

When the video ends the SA says they can all go and play now, but the children remain on the floor as if unready to move on. I wonder if they want to see it again. The SA assistant says they have seen the video and now she needs to get another group; then the children stand up and slowly begin to move away. I feel as if I don’t want to move, I stand up and put the chair back where I found it. Then look around for Arlia.

I am aware of some resistance; I don’t want to follow her but know I must. I have a sense of being cold, I still have my coat on and could take it off but find I don’t want to. I wish my session could end now, I feel as if I have had enough. I have an overwhelming feeling of being disinterested and not at all bothered about what she is doing.

I find Arlia back in the quiet area, stood watching a boy as he puts the jigsaw pieces together. She is picking her nose. The boy is using one particular colour and Arlia sees some of the colour on the floor and picks them up and gives them to him. He appears very enthusiastic about his creation; his face is animated as he fits each piece together. Arlia watches him and I wonder what she might do. He begins to break one or two pieces off his shape and Arlia moves in and does the same but drops them on the floor; the boy is upset and goes to tell a SA that she is breaking his jigsaw. Arlia follows him and the SA warns her that if she finds the jigsaw pieces on the floor she will be cross. Arlia returns to the table and picks up the pieces from the floor and then looks in hidden places at the side and underneath and discovers more pieces. The boy is happy now and accepts Arlia’s finds, fitting them to his pattern. During this time her face was rather empty of expression, I wonder if it is guarded or frozen.

**She moves away and runs towards the door**, turning around when she gets there in order to go to where her coat is hung up. She puts it on but doesn’t fasten it up. I am aware my time is coming to an end and that my time outside will not be a long one.

Outside she heads for the bikes, choosing to sit on one that has a second seat out to the side rather than behind. I have not seen one like this before. The girl peddling is smaller and lighter in stature than Arlia but somehow is able to propel the bike and manoeuvre it around the area. I have some sense of being aware of **Arlia being weaker than she looks.**

The construction of the bike makes it look as if Arlia is swung out as it corners, and Arlia laughs loudly, I imagine that it is quite a thrilling feeling, being propelled as if unattached to the bike. I want to laugh myself at the delight Arlia is getting from this experience and feel a broad smile on my face. This is the most animated I have seen her; she is experiencing great delight in these moments.

It is time for me to go, I almost regret having to leave her, then she steps off the bike and heads for the door as I turn to go.

As I walk away I ponder about the warm feelings I had towards Arlia as I left, I found myself really enjoying watching her delight on the bike. I wonder how much I maybe hadn’t wanted to feel earlier?

Observation 12/02/2019 (6)

As I approach the nursery there are two gates that I need to negotiate, opening them is awkward but today I seem to be having more of a problem. A SA assistant calls to me ‘are you having a problem?’ And then opens the second gate for me. I laugh with her about my difficulty and thank her for opening the gate.

I look around for Arlia and don’t see her initially, the NT says hello and asks how I am, I say I am fine but can’t see Arlia. She points to where four girls are stood on a bench looking over a large board watching other children on the bikes. I still don’t see Arlia but then as I look a bit closer I notice her features and identify her. She has lipstick on and with her short black hair cut close to her head I think she has a very open face which lights up when she is laughing. She is laughing now with her friends, but I am not sure what is causing the laughter.

A SA calls across to the girls and tells them to get down which they all do and then they run around as if escaping or being chased by something. Arlia glances at me but continues running. She is at the back of the group and at first, I wonder if it is her that they are running from. She gets close to AM, Arlia always uses both first and last name, she tries to hold her hand, but AM says ‘NO!’ very firmly. Arlia looks disheartened but then returns to running about.

Another girl in the group, F, tries to get AM’s attention but is ignored and she stands and looks sulky, Arlia tries to talk with her but F turns her back and ignores what seems to be an attempt to be friendly. Arlia looks as if she doesn’t know what to do but recovers quickly and continues her chasing game. AM and another girl, E, are with some other children on a grouping of plastic shapes for climbing on that includes about four steps. The children stand on the top step and jump off. Arlia climbs up and jumps off, I am pleased she managed it but notice her attempt is not given as much loud praise from SA as a smaller child. On her second attempt the SA seems to notice her and comments more enthusiastically.

Arlia continues to jump and the next time she looks at me just before jumping. She is taking her turn with the other children and I feel glad that she is not on her own, she seems more connected to the other children today. I notice I feel more connected to her today.

Arlia runs to the shape table where small wooden shapes are hammered into place with a pin. She experiments with the hammer which has one flat surface for hammering and one surface that is on a diagonal. The NT tries to explain that she needs to use the flat surface to get the pins in properly. The board already has a few shapes pinned across its surface, I have a sense of wanting to take them off so that she has an open space to make her own pattern. Then the NT suggests that she would have more space if she took the other shapes off the board, but Arlia doesn’t seem to be listening or maybe hasn’t understood what she is being told.

She seems to be investigating the shapes, pins and the hammer. Sometimes removing the shapes on the board sometimes putting them back. After a while she drops the hammer on the table and walks across to another table with a magnet activity. There are large, colourful, wand magnets, tin lids and stables as ell as smaller round magnets. Using two lids and some paper clips and magnets she creates a magnetic sandwich which she takes to AM, but AM ignores it, maybe unsure of what Arlia is giving her. This feels rejecting, Arlia seems to want to connect with AM but her attempts are not reciprocated. Arlia runs to the magnet table and drops the sandwich there before running off towards the climbing frame and slide.

Arlia climbs up the ladder to the top of the slide and waits while another child goes down first. Then she sits on the slide herself and slides down it, jumping up at the bottom and running around to climb up again. I notice she is smiling. Other children are around this climbing frame and she must negotiate around them to reach the top of the slide. She waits for another child to go down and then sits on the top of the slide, she doesn’t immediately move but sits there and looks at me. A boy is waiting for his turn and he tells her to ‘go on,’ wanting her to move. But she continues to sit there, the boy pushes her with his hands on her back, Arlia pushes herself against him backwards. This happens a few times and I wonder if she is enjoying this pushing and shoving, her face is turned towards me, is she waiting for me to respond?

After a few moments she descends the slide and the boy takes his place for his turn. She runs around, her eyes seem to be searching the children’s faces, spotting AM she goes up to her and takes her hand, intent on holding it. The two of them run around together, AM looks a bit steadier than Arlia who looks like she could easily trip up. AM seems surer of where she is running and how to avoid obstacles. They are both laughing with exhilaration and I wonder if Arlia liked the uncertainty and challenge of negotiating the play area while holding hands.

They finish their run and arrive at the plastic obstacles linked together for climbing on. AM breaks the link and climbs on, her legs astride the big round cylinder with a tall rectangular shape in front of it. AM says she is going on a car journey and both Arlia and E want to climb on, but AM chooses E first and Arlia must sit at the back. AM and E are chatting together, but A is unable to join in. Suddenly they all jump down and head for the bikes. (I have a gap here, I can’t quite recall how this scenario is set up) Arlia sits at the back of E who peddles around the circuit. Arlia is no lightweight but E, who is very petite, is managing to manoeuvre and peddle very well, negotiating the objects.

Then E climbs off the front of the bike and they swop places. I wonder how Arlia will manage, in the last few weeks I have noticed she has not seemed to have the strength in her legs to propel the bike forwards even without anyone on the back. Arlia struggles but keeps trying, E doesn’t seem perturbed that they are not travelling very far, she looks around observing the other children in the area. Eventually Arlia gets off and returns to the shapes again.

The boards are clear now and Arlia spends some time, choosing three small circles and placing them on the surface she tries to hammer the pins into the centre. This takes some time, she wants them just touching and they move when she is hammering. But she is focused and doesn’t stop until all three are fixed where she wants them.

Another girl brings the magnet wands to the metal support post next to the shape table and sticks them there, she lines them up, they look organised in different colours. Arlia notices and returns to the magnet table and remakes her magnet sandwich. I wonder if she might offer it to someone else, but she repeats her offering to AM dancing on the mat to music from a tape recorder. She says ‘No!’ The sandwich is dropped onto the magnet table and Arlia goes to the mat and joins AM dancing. Arlia looks at me and says, ‘I can do this’. They change the music and continue dancing, Arlia says about AM ‘that’s not as good.’

My time has ended, and I leave them dancing together on the mat. I sense that Arlia has begun to connect with other children this week, but she has chosen AM who is a very popular child and not short of people to play with. E is a definite favourite with AM, but Arlia has managed to spend some time with both.

Fortunately the weather has not been too cold today and we have been outside for the whole hour.

Observation 26/02/2019 (7)

It is the first week back after half term week. As I approach the nursery I negotiate the gates easily this week. The air is warm, and the sun is hot and as I expected there are a lot of children playing outside. They do not have their coats on and look as if they are enjoying being outside. I expect the outdoor staff appreciate the warmth rather than the freezing temperatures experienced before half-term.

There are more children outside and I find it difficult to find Arlia. I move around the outdoor space trying to locate her. On reflection I think this feeling permeated my observation today. The NT says hello and asks how I am, I say I am fine but can’t see Arlia. She says she had been playing round the sand pit and I head over to this area looking for her. I still don’t see Arlia, so I wander inside. The room seems quiet, there are only a handful of children inside and I still can’t see her. I ask a SA if she knows where Arlia is and she tells me that she is outside somewhere.

As I go outside I ask another SA if she has seen Arlia and she points her out sat next to the NT who has pointed out to her that she has her shoes on wrong feet. I realise I had been aware of this conversation as I had walked in side. I had walked passed Arlia without recognising her. I wonder what I had been expecting to see and why I missed seeing her?

Arlia’s physical body appears to be more developed than most of her peers. But the way she walks and interacts with her environment gives me the impression that she is developmentally much younger. She has a look of a child that is closed to things and people around her, especially when adults are talking to her, as if she doesn’t quite know how to deal with them.

She swops her shoes over and the NT says that looks much better. Then she runs off. I notice I don’t feel as connected with her today, I have a more solitary feeling in myself, she hasn’t acknowledged me in any way either.

Some children are playing in the mud pit (more of a dirt pit because it is so dry and hard packed) and Arlia stands and watches. There is a worm under scrutiny by children who have small garden forks and trowels. The NT advises the children not to hurt the worm and one of the boys reiterates her words, he is stood back watching the other children as they perform various actions to try and intimidate or get a reaction from the worm which is lying perfectly still.

Arlia stands at the side of the mud pit watching what is happening, then she reaches in and picks up some mud between her thumb and forefinger and puts it into her mouth. She seems to be watching the boys to see if they are noticing what she is doing. She repeats this action about four times. I notice there is no expression on her face while doing this.

She moves around to the other side of the mud pit and stands in it watching as E and another girl try to put a bucket over the top of worm, there is some screaming from some of the children, boys as well as girls. Arlia is stud in the mud pit in her soft, canvas, sparkly pumps, not the wellies that are provided for this purpose. Her face is expressionless, I have no idea what she makes of what is happening. I feel sorry for the worm, for the children it seems to be something alien and scary, I know they are curious, but I wish I could scoop it out of the sand and put it somewhere safe, under a bush where the soil is softer, and it can find its way down into a safer environment. It has been still but finally it tries to wriggle away and the children scream again.

Arlia steps out of the pit and heads for the door back into the nursery, she looks at the wellies on the rack and then notices a rubber duck on the floor along with buckets and gardening tools. She picks the duck up and moves towards the door, on her way in one of the SA emerges with a tray of milk cartons heading for a table outside. She tells Arlia to come and have some milk, Arlia follows her and accepts a milk carton, removing the straw stuck to the side and piercing the top with it. She stands for a long time drinking much longer than the other children, and for most of the time she holds the duck to her cheek, gently stroking it.

She puts the duck down on the table while she puts the milk carton in the bin, as she goes to retrieve it another child picks it up and runs indoors. Arlia chases after him and there is a tussle as she tries to retrieve it from the boy, he is holding tight and I think she is about to give up when a SA interrupts and wants to know what is going on. Arlia drops her hands and puts them behind her back, her expression is blank. She tells the children to bring the duck to her and the boy hands it over. There are many questions about where the duck has come from: where should it be, why have they got it, why is Arlia trying to take it from A??? I feel she has already assumed that Arlia was trying to take the duck away from A. I feel annoyed, it seems like Arlia has lost the duck twice and it seemed to have some sort of comforting effect on her while drinking milk. The SA says she will keep the duck since they can’t share it. I find myself wondering if the SA is moderating her words because she knows I am watching and have the thought of the saying about a swan gliding on the surface but paddling madly under the water.

Arlia turns around and goes outside. There is a table with plastic buildings based on films or cartoons that a couple of boys are playing with. One of the houses is for Spiderman the other is more like a castle. Initially she watches the boys and then tries to join in, she picks up a dragon and tries to play with Spiderman’s house but is rebuffed by the boy, so Arlia moves around to the other building. She picks up a figure that looks like a very nice witch, another child snatches it off her and Arlia tries to get it back but at that moment a SA walks past and sees her, assuming Arlia is the one who is wrong. She tells Arlia to give it back, it is wrong to snatch. There is no expression on Arlia’s face, but then I wonder if it is resignation, it must be so frustrating when it is other children instigating things and she is blamed.

She continues to play at the table, with the dragon, sliding him down a slide, trying to fit him in different places. Then she sees another boy with the witch and snatches it away from him and gives him the dragon instead. I watch, wondering if the boy will protest but he doesn’t he looks to see what is in his hand and continues to play with it. Arlia plays with the Witch and I hear her say something that sounds like ‘magic’. She tries the witch down the slide and although it fits easier than the dragon her hat is still a problem in terms of preventing her sliding down. Arlia doesn’t seem to mind, twisting the witch slightly to facilitate the ride.

She tries the witch in different places, there is a large round door that reminds me of an oven and she puts the witch in there, but the door doesn’t close, she tries a few times before finally taking the witch out. I wonder if the figure of the witch represents someone. It could be the SA’s, wishing to put them somewhere they can’t see her or maybe it is me?

She suddenly drops the witch and turns around and runs off towards where AM is playing with another child. I feel a bit lost at this moment I think, and as I write up my notes I have a gap at this point. Another child, a girl M, shouts to Arlia, ‘play hide and seek?’ At first Arlia ignores her and watches AM and another girl playing together. M shouts again and the three of them seem to hear this time and together run away while M counts.

Arlia has some confusion of where to hide and finally struggles to climb into a barrel, but M has seen her and finds her quickly. She climbs out while M finds the other two children. E notices what they are doing and joins the game, Arlia is the one doing the counting now, she closes her eyes and counts to eleven, then her numbers get a bit random. The other children have run up to the small, wooden, outdoor, house and go inside. Arlia sees them as she opens her eyes and goes to find them. There is great excitement as she looks in the door and they are found. E takes a turn at counting now and the others, including Arlia, go to the back of the house to hide. E seems to know where they are but as she moves around the back Arlia and the others come down the opposite side and she peers around the corner. E comes out at the back behind them and they shout with excitement. Someone else has a turn at counting and the girls return to the back of the house, just as excited when they are found.

The girls run around and Arlia goes to where there is a long tray with pebbles on, the SA says it is tidy up time now and she is putting the tray away. She takes the pebbles out of the tray and puts them in a container. Arlia puts the palms of her hands onto the tray floor and moves them around in the dust using circular movements, the SA says the tray must go away now, Arlia stops her hand movements, and as she walks away she turns her palms to face her and licks them as if she is licking the dust off them. AM is close by and notices, her face suggests disgust but Arlia doesn’t seem to notice.

After a minute or so of licking she notices AM and another girl painting the floor with brushes and a bucket of water. Arlia goes up to them and picks up a bucket and walks away with it, the girls look shocked but Arlia seems to be oblivious to them. Then she suddenly turns around and walks back with the bucket, as she puts it down a SA (the one who took the duck away earlier) asks her what she is doing with the bucket and Arlia says something about washing something. The SA says that the water is dirty would she like to get some clean water? Arlia says yes, then the adult proceeds to empty the bucket out on the floor, I feel shocked and notice the girls who had been playing with the bucket also looked surprised. They seem to recover though and begin to paint the floor with the spilled water and their brushes.

I follow Arlia and SA into the Nursery room, they walk to the sink and Arlia is encouraged to wash the bucket out. The SA asks if it is clean and Arlia says it is, but the SA says, ‘Oh no look there is still dirt there’. Arlia washes some more and finally the bucket is clean. I lose something here, I am not sure what happened to the bucket.

The next thing I notice is Arlia at the sand-pit with some other children. She doesn’t get in but picks up sand between her forefinger and thumb and puts it in her mouth, she repeats this a few times. A SA says they need to help with tidying up now and they all come out of the sand. It is time for me to leave, I say goodbye to the NT and head for the gates. I am feeling very hot, the sun has been strong this week, a complete contrast to previous weeks.

Observation 03/05/2019 (8)

The gates seem easier to negotiate this week and as I arrive in the outdoor play area I notice that once again there are a lot of children outside. The weather is bright and sunny, not as warm as last week but very pleasant.

I look for Arlia, feeling sure she will be outside, I find her easily and notice her by the swing with AM and F. They are talking about something while another child is on the swing. I am not sure what the topic of conversation is but notice AM is showing Arlia something on her hands. Suddenly Arlia runs inside and I follow her, she finds a SA. She is breathless and seems to be highly aroused as she tells the adult that AM has something in her hand. I wonder what was in AM’s hand to make Arlia so agitated.

Arlia’s language structure makes it difficult to understand what she is wanting to communicate, it seems that AM has something in her hand, Arlia says something about A, B, C but her meaning isn’t clear. The SA tries to get Arlia to explain again and Arlia repeats A, B, C then adds F. The SA looks bemused, I wonder if AM has written something on her hand, but I am not sure. The adult is not sure what to make of Arlia’s communication and says ‘OK. Thanks for letting me know.’ Arlia looks satisfied that she has been heard.

The NT is in the Kitchen, which has a half door so that the children can talk to whoever is inside but is prevented from entering. Arlia asks what she is doing, the NT tells her that she is making pancakes like they had seen in the video they watched earlier. Arlia repeats the word pancakes? The NT says yes, can you remember the ingredients? Arlia recalls flour, eggs, sugar, and the NT prompts her showing a carton, Arlia says milk. The NT says well done. I feel surprised that Arlia was able to recall the ‘ingredients,’ and even more surprised that she knew that collective noun for them. The NT asks, ‘What do we do with the ingredients?’ And Arlia says ‘mix them,’ demonstrating with her right arm, mixing very hard. ‘Yes, and now look, what am I going to do now?’ The NT shows Arlia the pan with a pancake in and immediately she uses her hand to explain what she can’t say, ‘that’s right, I’m going to try and toss it. But I’m not sure I can do it, shall we see?’ She then tosses the pancake and it lands back in the pan. Arlia laughs and says, ‘Can I have one?’ She is told that Mrs N will find her when it is her turn. The NT asks what topping she would like on the top and she says honey.

Arlia wanders over to where Mrs N is sat cutting a pancake into 4 and asking four children what they want on the top of their pancake. There is Golden syrup, Honey, sugar and lemon juice. After standing and watching a few minutes she turns around and heads back outside to find AM and F, she tells them she has seen pancakes. They don’t seem to be taking much notice, Arlia turns around and goes to the outdoor pancake kitchen, obviously set up for Pancake Day. She watches at first, there are three other children at the table, then picks up a pan, stirs it with a spoon and pretends to add ingredients, then stirs again. She notices a boy has a plastic fried egg and when he leaves the table she picks it up and puts it in her pan. But the boy returns and wants the egg, the SA walking by tells Arlia she must share and give it back until he has finished with it. She points out that she has a pancake in her pan already, and there is a paper one. Arlia stirs the pancake again as the boy disappears, she puts the egg back in her pan and goes off with it, carrying the pan.

She walks up the hill to where a SA is sat talking to AM and F as well as a few other children, a mixture of both boys and girls. Arlia says she wants to give the SA some pancake and they discuss toppings. The SA asks if she is going to share it with the other children and Arlia lets them pick the egg out of the pan and I am surprised to see them bite into the plastic fried egg. Arlia looks on smiling as the children receive her gift. The talk about the toppings they like with the SA.

Arlia returns to the pancake table and begins cooking again, this time trying to toss the egg. She doesn’t quite manage it and then rushes inside with the pan, she wants to share it with the NT, who happily pretends to take some and eat it. The Mrs N comes along and asks Arlia if she would like some pancake now, she nods and the is told to take the pan back outside and then come to the table. Arlia rushes outside and when she returns there are already 4 children at the table, I feel anxious that Arlia might miss her turn. But it seems one of the children has already had hers and is just watching.

The SA cuts up the pancake into four and asks one of the children what topping her would like and then passes the pancake with topping on to him. She goes to ask another child, Arlia anxiously says ‘can I have some?’ And the SA says she can but she must wait her turn. I notice that the other children are smaller than Arlia, I wonder if her larger size influences how she is perceived?

Arlia finally gets her turn and chooses lemon juice, I am surprised, the others all chose sugar. The juice will be sour, I wonder if she understands that she can choose sugar with it? The SA doesn’t ask anything but only puts a very small amount on the pancake, I feel relieved, though wonder what it might taste like. Arlia walks towards the door with her pancake in her hand, the SA calls her back saying she needs to stay by the table while she is eating. Arlia nibbles very small miniscule bites and in between sucks the pancake, I wonder if it might be sour. The nibbling and sucking last for quite a time, I wonder again if she likes it. The she suddenly puts the whole into her mouth and chews it.

She walks outside and goes to another SA and tells her she has had a pancake, when asked about the topping she replies ‘lemon’, and is asked if she had it with sugar, Arlia says ‘no.’ The SA looks a bit taken aback, she did not expect Arlia to eat a pancake with lemon but no sugar. She asks her if it was nice and Arlia nods and opens her mouth. I don’t know if the pancake is still there.

The she runs off to tell Am and F that she has had a pancake. They are sat waiting for a bike, F is holding the timer, she sits down and tells them about the pancake, explaining also that they will get a turn. The timer runs out and Arlia joins F on the two-seater, with the side seat. F seems to take time to get going, I am surprised, I thought last time she was quite competent. She finally gets moving and peddles around easily. A boy tries to push them off but the SA shouts ‘No! You need to sit with the timer if you want a turn.’

A boy on a scooter is pretending to do wheelies, I feel annoyed and irritated with him but no adult seems to notice him. Another boy tries to take a scooter from another child and has to be stopped. I feel like this is almost a policing job!!

I notice to my left that there is a commotion and a girl is crying, two SA’s head over, one of them says I saw what happened. Apparently three boys had advanced on the girl who was riding a bike and pushed her off. One of the SA’s takes the boys to one side while the other one soothes the girl. Arlia has been watching and walks over to ask what has happened. The SA says she has been knocked off her bike and is upset, AM says the boys need to say sorry and walks over to where the boys are talking with the SA. Arlia says ‘maybe she needs a hug’ and the support assistant says, ‘what a kind thought, would she like to give D a hug?’ Arlia gives the girl a gentle hug.

The SA says what are our hands for, Arlia does a sweeping movement with her hand, as if slapping, the SA says they’re for painting, drawing and what else can we do with our hands?’ arlia doesn’t look sure, so the SA strokes her shoulder and says ‘ they’re for being kind to our friends.’ Arlia nods her head.

Arlia returns to the bikes but finds a different one that she has to peddle, she tries for a few minutes but then jumps off and runs towards AM who is talking to SA with some other children. Now it becomes clear what Arlia was trying to explain about Am’s hand earlier. Am is holding a foam letter that is broken, apparently it has come from home though there are some in Nursery. I think Arlia might have been anxious that it had belonged to Nursery earlier.

The SA explains that things need to be looked after, even if they have come from home and suggests fixing it with Sellotape. She tells AM to find the Sellotape indoors and bring it to her for fixing. Arlia runs ahead and finds the Sellotape first, brining it back for the SA who sellotapes the two pieces together.

Arlia and AM decide to play hide and seek, Arlia hides, AM can’t find her then in house. Arlia counts AM in barrel goes for pancake. Inside Mrs T what are you doing? More pancakes for grown ups. I wish I didn’t have to go.

Observation 12/03/2019 (9)

As I walk through the outdoor play area I scan quickly to see if Arlia is playing outside. She seems to like being outside and has spent time outside even when the weather has been cold or wet. I don’t see her so walk towards the door, a SA says hello and in a quiet voice tells me Arlia is inside playing with her friends today. Apparently Arlia had said she didn’t want to play outside today because it was raining, then she said, ‘I thought you might be pleased,’ I laughed and said I was! All the staff spend large amounts of time outside to ensure that the children can experience free flow between to the two areas. This happens every day, regardless of the weather. I admire their commitment to making this provision available, with smiley faces too!

Inside she is once again difficult to identify, I am standing by the large sand tray, I notice her friends playing there first and then suddenly notice Arlia, she has her head down so her face isn’t visible, but she looks up and I see her, I smile to acknowledge her. She returns to her work in the sand. AM, a friend of Arlia’s stands up and looks at me, ‘why don’t you talk?’ she asks. I say I am doing quiet work watching, and she says ‘us?’ I look at Arlia who is watching me, I wonder if she will say anything, and I make a vague action with my hands to convey something I intend to mean ‘who knows,’ Arlia has no expression on her face. I wonder what she is thinking?

There are two boys playing in the sand and one of them says that Arlia is angry, she gets a fierce look on her face, I have not seen that look before, and then she growls but I am not sure what she is growling at. Her hand movements in the sand are quick and I wonder if she is acting out her anger, she takes some sand from other children, one of them a boy opposite her, He protests, and she stops but continues trying to increase her pile of sand from elsewhere in the tray.

There is some pouring happening between AM and E, it looks a bit risky, the sand is flowing over their arms and almost over their heads. I move to avoid looking on and feeling anxious.

Arlia is moving the sand around with her hands, the movements are quick and firm. She seems insulated from the others playing alongside. She looks in one of the boxes and finds a crane with a grabber bucket and spends a long time scooping the sand up and closing the grabber bucket to hold it in and then letting it go. I wonder if she is holding something in, something she wants to let go?

The NT comes to ask AM if she would like to go with her to do some sewing. Arlia watches and after a moment she follows, standing beside the table where NT is sat with AM. Arlia says ‘can I do it?’ The NT says she can when she has finished with AM, later. Arlia returns to the sand. She searches through the metal items to find something she seems to have in mind, two nice metal containers that I think are mini cooking items for Asian dishes. She spends time in the sand half burying then and then filling them, smoothing them carefully before tipping them out and repeating the process. She is very careful with the smoothing which seems to be an important aspect of levelling them. After a few times of doing this she picks them and looks around, she goes to the NT and offers them to her, ‘for you,’ she says. The NT stands up, leaving AM and takes her to the sand tray, I know she is trying to make the point that the sand needs to stay in the tray. I sense guilt in myself, does she think that I should have done something here? But I don’t dwell on it. I was apprehensive though when she moved on to other people with her sand offerings in case she dropped the sand, which she didn’t.

When Arlia offers the containers the staff ask what she has made. Arlia told the NT it was a strawberry milkshake and strawberry ice cream, the NT said that she would like the milk shake but not the ice cream. Drinking the milk shake she made pleasurable sounds, Arlia wanted her to try the ice cream even though the NT said she didn’t like strawberry flavoured ice cream. The NT expressed dislike of the ice cream. Arlia watched the NT face carefully, without expression on hers. After this scenario, Arlia looked around for another member of staff, this time she said the contents were brown, and when questioned further she said they were chocolate. The SA expressed her delight with both offerings and Arlia looked pleased this time. I wonder if she changed the content of the dishes in response to the NT dislike?

Arlia went to two more members of staff but this time reverting to strawberry flavours, they all liked them and expressed their pleasure. There seemed to be a light in Arlia’s face no.

Returning to the sand tray, Arlia tips the containers up and puts one container over the top of the other one, making a whole space. The she drops them in the sand and wanders over to the NT again, she is still working with AM, Arlia watches and the NT says she will find her when it is her turn so she can go play. Arlia walks across to the HC, there are a several children, boys and girls playing there. Arlia seems to ignore them having one thing in mind. She picks up a plastic round of spaghetti and then begins to look through the cupboards for something else, I wonder what it is. A SA passes by and Arlia says ‘I can’t find two,’ and I realise she is looking for another spaghetti round that is the same as the one she has. The SA says she must keep looking. Arlia continues for a minute or so but is unable to find it.

She wanders over to the NT again who says she won’t be long now she can go play and she will let her know when it is her time. Arlia goes over to the fruit table where there is a large plastic bowl of small orange pieces. She takes out a small handful and eats them, then she get a bigger handful and pushes them all in her mouth, she looks like she might spit them out but she manages to chew and swallow. The stands next to the NT again, says she can sit down on the chair. Arlia looks pleased but then rubs her eye as if it is irritating her. Meanwhile the NT is showing Arlia what she will be doing and encouraging her to thread the plastic needle. Arlia is curious about if the needle will hurt but the NT reassures her by showing a metal needle and comparing it to the plastic one and explaining about the sharp point. Arlia continues to rub her eye and can’t concentrate on threading her needle. The NT sends her off to get a piece of tissue, on the way back Arlia picks up a very large handful of oranges and carries them over to the NT. The NT is not happy, saying she is only supposed to take one or two, not so many otherwise there will be none for the other children and she puts the oranges into a paper towel, placing it on the table away from the sewing.

Arlia’s eye is still not right and she continues rubbing it. I wonder if it is sand but then it occurs to me that it might be the acidic juice from the oranges. The NT fetches a wet paper towel and places it on her eye for a moment. This seem to do the trick and Arlia is at last able to focus on her stitching. Each time she puts the needle though and pulled on the thread to make the stitch she drops the needle, the NT says she needs to keep hold of the needle but Arlia doesn’t seem able to do this. I wonder if this is about holding more than one thing at a time in her head? Eventually after lots of encouragement she completes a stitch and retains the need in her hand.

As she finishes her sewing the NT gives her the oranges and reminds her next time that she needs to think of the other children. Arlia skips away, I haven’t seen her skip like that before. Her friends are in a corner playing with another girl whose badge has the same name as Arlia. Arlia stands next to her and the other girls seem to be comparing them, they count the arms, the legs, their heads, all the time looking for what is the same. Arlia looks pleased with this game.

It is time for me to leave, I say goodbye to the NT and walk to the door.

# Observation 19/03/2019 (10)

As I walk towards the final gate to enter the outdoor area of the nursery the NT is stood there talking to a child, she looks up as I approach and smiles, the child holds the gate open for me, I say thank you and greet the NT teacher saying’ good afternoon, isn’t it a nice day?’ She smiles and agrees with me, then informs me that Arlia is outside. I am not surprised, she seems to enjoy being outside if the weather is not too bad.

I find it difficult to find Arlia and the NT points her out to me. I wonder to myself about this difficulty in locating her. Is it that she doesn’t have a place in my mind, or that she doesn’t have clothing on that I am able to recognise? I think today she is in a new coat.

Arlia is chasing AM around the outdoor area, she notices me, and I try to understand how she might be feeling about my presence, her recognition is fleeting but I sense from her expression she may be ambivalent about it. As she runs past the fence both Arlia and AM stop in front of the fence, the other side is the under two provision and a support assistant who is usually in the Nursery is stood in this area. Arlia and AM are curious, Arlia says ‘what you do there,’ and the SA says, ‘I’m in here today.’

The SA comments on Arlia’s new coat, apparently her Daddy bought it but she didn’t know which shop it had come from. The SA begins a game, saying she likes Arlia’s coat so much can she try it on? Arlia hesitates at first and then says something about her zip, I have the impression she is anxious about putting the coat back on and not being able to zip it up. The SA response doesn’t feel very reassuring, she seems to suggest that Arlia will be able to do it. However, Arlia takes her coat off and hands it over the fence to the SA who tries to put it on, meanwhile Arlia runs off and then returns as the SA says it is too small. She then asks if Arlia would like to try her coat on, Arlia nods and the SA passes the coat over to her. The coat is huge, Arlia’s face is smiling but also, I wonder if it is a little bit overwhelmed? She takes the coat off and the SA hands her own coat back which Arlia puts back on. She can’t do the zip and Arlia runs off the find another SA to ask for help with the zip. The SA encourages Arlia to try to do this zip for herself and when Arlia struggles the SA says she will start the zip off for her and then she can zip it up. Arlia still struggles to pull the zip up but the SA keeps encouraging her and showing how she might help herself.

I wonder about the interaction with the SA swopping coats, I wonder if it was for my benefit, there seemed to be a condescension about the scenario that I wasn’t comfortable with. At the time I thought ‘this is sweet,’ but I didn’t feel comfortable describing it like that.

Arlia turns around and sees AM doing a lift out jigsaw, Arlia stands at the opposite side of the table, the jigsaw is upside down from her perspective, but she can identify which shapes fit the spaces quicker than AM who seems unsure of where the pieces go. I feel surprised at Arlia’s skill in this activity. She has shown some difficulty with balance and co-ordination in gross motor skills but the ability to match shapes seems good.

The SA calls the children for milk, Arlia and AM go for theirs. Arlia drinks it more quickly than previous weeks and when it gets near the bottom she tips the carton up and tries to drink out of the hole. The SA says for her to use her straw but Arlia shakes the carton and says its empty, so she puts it in the bin. A SA calls Arlia to go and work with her inside and Arlia runs to her and follows inside. Arlia takes her coat off and hangs it up on her coat peg and then runs to find the SA who is sat at the painting table.

Arlia puts an apron on and sits down. It is a paint ball rolling exercise, Arlia chooses a colour pot, green, with a ball inside and the SA tips the ball into tray with a sheet of paper in the bottom. Arlia tips the tray to move the paint around and create a pattern from the textured ball. After a couple of minutes, the SA suggests that she change to a different colour, Arlia chooses yellow. As I watch it seems to me that the ball needs more paint, the track it is making is very light and in places is invisible. The process is over quickly, and it seems the potential for curiosity has been lost. The SA tells Arlia to put her paper on the drying rack and wash her hands. Arlia doesn’t seem to respond at first, she stands looking at the tray, then wipes her finger over a paint splash and licks it, repeating this a couple of times. The SA looks surprised and says something about not licking the paint but Arlia doesn’t take any notice.

The SA repeats her instruction, removing the paper from the tray and giving it to Arlia who puts it on the drying rack. Arlia puts it on the rack and the SA tells her to go wash her hands now, Arlia runs to the toilets but before washing her hands she licks some paint off. I wonder if this is related to her ingesting pieces of grit as she has done before? I am curious about whether she will look in the mirror as she has done before, but today she focuses on removing the paint from her hands. She dries them in the dryer.

Arlia walks out of the toilets and passes the playdough table, there are four children around it each with playdough, I notice there is none spare. Arlia goes to one child and takes playdough from her, the girl is quiet, but her face seems surprised, she doesn’t seem to know what to do. One of the children goes to a SA saying that they have no playdough and that Arlia has taken it. The SA asks Arlia to go over to her and she explains that she needs to share with the other children and that she needs to ask and say thank you. Arlia returns to the table, the SA reminds her to say thank you, which she does but to no one in particular.

Arlia tries to find an extruder but they seem blocked with playdough. She notices AM and, holding on to the playdough, she follows her, with the playdough in her hand, to the window, looking out they can see E and F playing together at a construction table. They laugh together, I think it is about being able to watch them without them knowing, then they bang on the window to catch their attention. E and F finally notice and laugh, running to the window, they all shout through the glass and laugh, seemingly enjoying being so close but unable to touch. A SA tells them not to bang on the glass and to go outside to see their friends. AM goes outside and Arlia walks with the play dough in her hands. The SA tells her to go to the play dough table if she wants to play with it or put it down. Arlia puts it on a shelf behind the table. I notice it is in the play dough area, but she has removed it from the main activity. She goes to find her coat, but struggles to put it on, I notice it seems a bit tight, I don’t remember it being so tight before.

Outside she joins her friends at the drawing table. She stands next to AM. Arlia seems to take some time choosing a piece of paper, initially she chooses a white piece, but looking around the table she notices the others have a purple piece each. She finally chooses the same colour. On one side of the table, E and F are together on the opposite side. Occasionally she struggles with her coat, she doesn’t look comfortable and I wonder what the problem is.

Standing next to AM she chooses the same crayon colour as AM and, leaning on the table she scribbles a little as if following AM’s lead. She does this for a few minutes and then announces that she wants black but looking through the large felt pens she can’t find it, there are lots of colours but not black. Arlia seems frustrated and becomes whiney, saying in a whiney voice ‘I want black,’ a few times. Then she pulls something out of her left-hand pocket that might be a burst balloon. She looks mischievous, ‘I have something in my pocket from home’ she says and, while still holding the pencil in her hand, she puts her hand into her pocket but doesn’t pull anything out. E and F run to the NT and say that Arlia has put a pencil in her pocket and the NT comes over to the table and tells Arlia that she mustn’t put Nursery things in her pocket, Nursery things need to say at Nursery.

I try to remain calm but feel this is another incident of Arlia being blamed for something that she hasn’t done. I want to speak out but I know this is inappropriate for me as a neutral observer. Arlia returns to her paper but I notice her scribbling becomes far more intense and now all over the paper. I wonder if this is a way of dissipating angry energy? Is this the beginning of symbolism? A visual representation of what she is feeling inside. Replacing the need for manic racing about?

The NT notices that the pencil is blunt and suggests to Arlia that she sharpens it using the pencil sharpener inside. Going inside she notices the line of coats and stands looking at them, she removes her coat and lays it on the bench and then goes to where a similar coat is hung and lifts it down, it was her coat peg and when she puts her coat on it is easy to see it fits better than the other one. I notice there are at least three coats that look like Arlia’s.

Looking more comfortable she finds the pencil sharpener and takes it outside to the NT who asks her if she can sharpen the pencil, Arlia puts the pencil inside the sharpener but she is unable to use it. The NT says I will start it off for you and then you can do it. Arlia manages to use the sharpener then. Returning to her paper AM drops her pencil and runs inside Arlia follows. AM goes to the toilets to wash her hands and Arlia stands in front of a mirror and looks at herself. Then they both run outside. Arlia turns to watch me following her, she seems to be looking at my feet.

They return to the drawing table, she picks up a large pick felt tip pen and scribbles over the earlier crayon, the pink seems ineffectual, as if it might be running out. There is a discussion between AM, E, and F about the black felt pen. AM has it but F wants it. Arlia seems to be ignoring them focused on her own paper.

It is time for me to go.

As I pass the NT I mention the incident with the pencil in the pocket and explain what I saw. She told me that one of the three doesn’t seem to like Arlia and has noticed in the past that they try not to include her in their games. I acknowledge that as a neutral observer I see things that the staff just can’t observe because there are forty children they are dealing with.

Walking back to the car I have two things on my mind. The first is whether I should have said anything to the NT about the pencil incident, a difficult decision, will my action be beneficial of maybe make things more difficult? Secondly, I found such pleasure in watching children negotiate their environment, playing, following the expectations set out for them re; hand washing, putting things away, being friendly and learning to share. It occurs to me that many of the children are careful and co-operative with staff and each other, mastering some complex processes. It feels like a positive experience for many of the children.

# Observation 02/04/2019 (12)

I walk towards the Nursery, entering through the third and final gate. I am greeted by one of the staff who smiles and says hello. I look around for Arlia and, once again, have an initial difficulty locating her. Today she is stood on a fence on the bottom metal strip. She has her two arms inside wrapped around the bars. I notice her hair does not look as tidy as usual, on the back of her head it looks like she has rubbed her head into the pillow while she slept. It is afternoon, I wonder what time she got up today?

Arlia is stood with AM watching younger children play in the fenced off area next to Nursery. They stand watching for some time. I wonder if they are wistfully wanting to be part of the younger children’s provision? A return to a younger state?

Suddenly they jump down and run to the other end of the fence where a SA is playing with the little ones. They climb a bit higher, putting their feet on a bench at the other side of the fence. They can see over the fence now and call to the SA who walks over to them, both Arlia and AM ask in pleading voices ‘please can we come and play,’ meaning with the younger children. The SA says not today but maybe tomorrow if there are not too many little children. Both Arlia and AM ask why, as if they have not heard the SA’s response. The SA tries to explain again, and AM jumps down and runs off to play but Arlia remains and persists in her request to join her in the younger children’s play area.

The SA tries to distract Arlia by getting things out of her pocket, she has lots of bits and pieces, from tissue and string to cough sweets and small pieces of toy. Arlia says ‘why you have so much in your pocket?’ Her face looks like she is trying to understand something. The SA explains she has cough sweets for her cough, a tissue for her nose etc. Arlia asks again, ‘why you got them?’ The SA seems to attempt another diversion and asks Arlia about her cousin, who is having a baby, Arlia’s response is not clear and sounds like she is saying her mummy has a baby in her tummy. The SA is surprised, Arlia is one of a large family and a baby would be unexpected I think. Arlia says no but the SA wants to investigate further, ‘has mummy got a baby in her tummy?’ Arlia says no, the SA asks if she has food in her tummy, no, has she got water in her tummy, no. Finally, the SA is satisfied that Arlia’s mother is not having a baby. She suggests now that Arlia might like to go and find something to play with, Arlia turns around and sees the swing is empty, she shouts, ‘the swing,’ and runs towards it.

As she sits on the swing a boy comes along and sits on a nearby log seat, waiting his turn. I have noticed this boy before, he finds waiting hard. Arlia speaks very confidently ‘sorry, you can’t have a go, my go, you have to wait.’ She repeats this, and I have a sense that she knows she is doing the right thing, that this is the rule and almost feels safe/confident (Does this rule offer a form of containment?) knowing that.

The boy jumps up and begins shaking the rope, Arlia laughs, then the boy bites the rope with his teeth. I feel anxious, could this behaviour harm him? He is looking at me. Suddenly he stops and slaps Arlia across the face, Arlia jumps off and runs shouting ‘teacher, teacher A has hit me, my turn on swing.’ Her voice is very whiney and the NT comes across to meet her, asking her to explain what happened. She takes charge and says Arlia can have her turn and A can sit and wait. She says she will count to 20 and then A can have his turn. The NT counts to 20 and Arlia struggles to keep the swing moving during this time. However, she jumps off at the end and A climbs on, the NT says she will go and find the sand timer while Arlia counts to twenty. Arlia knows the numbers but gets muddled with the order and meanwhile other children line up for a turn. When the NT arrives back she asks Arlia if she counted and Arlia begins to count again, this time with adult support. But when they get to the end the NT suggests that the other children need to have a turn now because they are waiting. She suggests that Arlia hold the sand timer.

Arlia sits waiting, some of the children drift away, she hands the timer to another boy and bends over picking up bits from the dirt floor and putting them in her mouth. The pieces and more like dust and she tips her head back and pours it into her mouth. She repeats this a few times, the boy on the swing looks horrified and looks at me, I wonder if he is expecting me to intervene. She spits a little bit and rubs her tongue with her hand. Her tongue is very dark from the dirt. It occurs to me that she finds the waiting hard? Is it the social mores of her extending world that are hard to digest?

Suddenly she runs over to the mud pit, she stands looking in at the children, Arlia asks if she can go in, the NT says the sand pit is full at the moment and tells her she will need to find some boots. Arlia immediately turns and runs to the boot rack, after removing her own shoes she tries on various boots, initially the ones she seems interested are quite large abut have a lovely floral pattern on them, they are too big, and she takes them off. The next pair are white with a decorative black bow on them, AM is also finding boots and she tells Arlia those boots belong to one of the adults, so Arlia abandons them and searches for some more. Finally, she settles on some pink ones, I think they look a bit small and she has great difficulty getting her foot in. F and E are also looking for boots, they offer to help Arlia, but she ignores them. Finally, she manages to get her feet in, but they are on the wrong foot and the feet look very squashed.

She runs to the mud pit and steps in, the NT is busy trying to protect a worm from several very curious children. Arlia watches and says, ‘it’s a worm, it’s dead.’ The NT says it isn’t yet, but it soon will be! She manages to scoop it up onto a trowel, saying she is going to take it somewhere it can feel safe and have a sleep, carrying to a quiet, over gown bit of the garden.

Arlia finds a small fork and, alongside her little group, AM, F and E, they dig around where the worm was looking for another one. They think they have found a worm and the children become very excited, there are lots of little screams from both boys and girls, but there is an excited look on their faces. Arlia doesn’t scream but steps back a little and looks at the other children. There isn’t a worm, it turns out to be a rusted paper clip that has been straightened out.

The children are called by name for their milk as the SA walks past with a tray of milk cartons. I wonder if Arlia will want her milk as she doesn’t seem to have been in the mud pit very long. Arlia, AM, F and E, all climb out of the mud pit and go to get their milk. She stands and drinks it after putting the straw in the top. She stands watching the other children until the carton is empty, and she puts it into the bin. Her friends finished before her and they are already in the mud pit, Arlia runs to join them. She steps over the low edge and suddenly stamps her feet and makes crying sounds, (I wonder if her feet are uncomfortable) the other girls look at her and wonder what is wrong. Arlia doesn’t say anything but bends down again and picks up a small fork and begins digging. E pats Arlia on the back, this is not a gentle pat but a very firm one and does it a few times. At first Arlia doesn’t appear to take any notice, then E does it again and this time Arlia does the same back. Then all four of them hit each other and laugh as if it is a game. Arlia is smiling seeming to have forgotten her earlier distress. Then they all climb out of the mud pit, change out of their boots and into their shoes, Arlia doesn’t hang her boots back up, she leaves them on the floor, then they run up the hill towards the swing.

AM, F and E all notice some small flowers on the floor that have fallen off the blossom tree and they bend down to pick them up, collecting them in their hands. Suddenly Arlia begins crying, there are no tears, I can’t tell if she is really crying or if she is pretending. She tries to snatch the flowers out of E’s hand, but E pulls her hand away, this is repeated with F all the while Arlia is crying, though no tears. I am surprised at how long it is going on for, I wonder what she is distressed about, there are lots of flowers on the floor enough for all of them to have as many as they want. The NT approaches and asks Arlia what is wrong, Arlia says that AM won’t give her flowers, the NT says that there are lots of flowers she can get her own if she wants them. Arlia looks sulky, as if she can’t see the solution to the problem and she continues to cry.

It is time for me to go. I reluctantly walk away, wondering how the scenario will work itself out.

# Observation 09/04/2019 (13)

The weather is sunny, but it is cold and as I walk towards the Nursery I think that I should have put another layer of clothing on. A SA says’ Hi, it’s a cold one today,’ as I enter the outdoor area and I smile and agree with her.

I look around and feel relieved that I spot Arlia easily she is standing by a table that has some construction equipment on, AM is with her. I stand watching, AM moves away to something else, Arlia looks up and notices me, she gives me a small smile and I return it, trying not to be too overt. The smile causes me to wonder if it is a sign of acceptance. Arlia asks a question, she asks, ‘what do you do here?’ I feel uncomfortable saying I am watching you[[8]](#footnote-8). On reflection now, typing up my notes, I wonder what I was afraid of? Instead I respond with ‘I am doing quiet work.’ Arlia repeats, ‘yes you do quiet work,’ then runs off to the swings.

I follow her up the hill, the wind is sharp and biting but she doesn’t have her coat zipped up. However, she doesn’t see to be bothered by the cold, her face looks bright and cheery. She sits on the swing, an amazing contraption with the seat positioned on ropes attached to poles at each side it swings very low and the children can propel themselves in a moderate and safe way without an adult.

Reluctantly I put my hood up on my coat, fastening it right up to my chin. Then Arlia, while swinging, begins to ask me more questions; Do you want to sit down? Do you want to play on the swing? Do you want to play on the bikes? Do you want to play in the house? Do you want to play cooking? Do you want to play trees? Do you want to play flowers? I respond shaking my head to each one. She seems very confident asking the questions. Finally, she says ‘Do you want to stand there?’ And I nod, I think with a small smile.

Arlia sees M coming up the hill towards the swing, she shouts out ‘I’m on the swing, you can’t have a turn, its my turn.’ M turns away, she looks a little dejected. Arlia swings enthusiastically and she has a very bright smile on her face, she seems very happy. I wonder if she feels confident because the ‘rule’ she has in mind allows her to stay on the swing.

After a few minutes, during which she falls off both backwards and forwards and laughs aloud each time with pleasure, a boy approaches up the hill. He looks very unsure of himself as he approaches she shouts out ‘I’m on the swing, you can’t have a turn, it’s my turn.’ Her sense of power in this situation seems to come through now, she swings strongly and falls off again but laughs loudly as she gets back on. She swings looking at the sky and looks sublimely happy. It strikes me as completely different to last week when I left her whining and crying. The boy stands still for a few minutes watching her but then turns around and walks back down the hill.

AM approaches up the hill and Arlia tells her ‘I’m on the swing, you can’t get on.’ AM replies, ‘you’ve been a long time, I want a turn,’ she sounds whiney and looks a bit sulky. A game begins now, instigated by Arlia who shouts to AM as she begins to walk away, but as AM turns around to return Arlia laughs and says, ‘no it’s my turn,’ and laughs. AM walks further down the hill this time and Arlia chases after calling her name, but when AM turns around Arlia runs back to the swing. AM returns to the swing area and Arlia offers to share the swing with her but they don’t seem to be able to synchronise themselves to sit together. F walks up and Arlia repeats that it is her turn. F has a very whiney voice, saying Arlia has been a long time, she looks sulky. AM and F seem to link up and head off in another direction together. Arlia shouts to them and says ‘look!’ they turn and Arlia falls off the swing in a comical fashion and laughs loudly. AM and F laugh too, they stand looking at Arlia, maybe to see if she will let them have a turn, but she doesn’t.

The teasing game begins again, with Arlia calling, sometimes running towards the girls and then running back to the swing. Initially the girls laugh but after a couple of times they give up on Arlia totally and do their own thing. Arlia swings contentedly.

After a few minutes she jumps off the swing and runs down the hill towards the bikes. She finds a scooter which she manages to push a long but struggles to manoeuvre. She bumps into things and other children, unable to stop in time to avoid collisions. After a few minutes she seems to find the two-seater trike attractive and leaves the scooter to sit on it. A small girl is peddling and Arlia is sat on the back. The girl looks a little intimidated, Arlia keep calling out to ‘go on, go on,’ but the girl is immobile, I wonder if she is not strong enough to peddle with Arlia on the back. Arlia seems to get frustrated and climbs of then somehow pushes the girl off the front seat. As she sits down herself she is called in for milk, she seems to consider this request for a minute, but then jumps up and heads inside. I follow her, enjoying the warmth of the heater as we go through the door.

Arlia stands drinking her milk through a straw. There is a lot happening around the table, a small girl wants to sit on a chair occupied by a boy. I am not sure what happens, but the boy is now sat on the floor very upset and the girl is on the chair. I am surprised he is usually quite confident, and it seems somehow, he gave up his chair and then sat on the floor crying about it. Arlia stands and watches.

Finishing her milk, she puts the carton in the bin, runs outside and returns to the bikes, where the little girl has claimed the two-seater again. I wonder what will happen now? The T walks over and says she wants to zip up her coat because it is cold. The T chats a little with Arlia while she does this I am not sure how Arlia feels about this. When she finishes Arlia suggests that AM has her zip done as well and the T repeats the process with AM. I am not sure of Arlia’s motivation here.

She sees AM and F run over to the large plastic climbing shapes and runs to join them. She seems to ignore AM completely, trying to push her off so that she can get on in her place. AM gets a bit whiney, and another child behind AM is also competing to sit in AM’s space. Arlia moves to the other end of the combination and climbs up and stands on top of the barrel. Am struggles to climb up now, Arlia looks quite confident stood up on this curved surface. She climbs down and moves to the climbing frame, next to the plastic shapes, F is trying to climb up one side but is struggling, Arlia climbs easily and stands on the bridge, once again she seems to be confident and tells F that she needs to put her leg over the top bar to climb over. AM arrives and stands in front of F trying to help her climb over the top step. AM is very hands on, trying to lift F’s foot over the bar but F does not feel safe enough. She climbs down, and AM runs around and climbs up the bars next to F. The two of them have their heads down and I can hear a whining sound, at first, I think it is F but then realise it is AM. Meanwhile Arlia slides down the slide looking very happy, jumps up and climbs up to go again. When she returns to the platform instead of going down the slide she goes on to the bridge where F has managed to reach. F begins jumping and Arlia starts whining and shouting ‘miss, miss, she is jumping,’ F stops and Arlia begins jumping. I am amazed she feels safe enough to do this, there seems quite a lot of movement in the bridge.

Then AM heads off to the outdoor game area, Arlia follows, and they begin throwing small beanbag like shapes at each other with a boy I know to be A. I am considering if they could be hurt by this activity, they are throwing them hard, but I don’t think there can be any harm caused by the bags. A T (I think supply because I have not seen her before) comes across and advises the children that this is not a good idea and instead encourages them to stand the bottles up that are part of the game and throw the bean bags at the bottles instead. The children don’t seem in the mood for playing the game and continue throwing them around. One goes over the fence to a place understood to be out of bounds, the T says leave it.

They continue throwing and another one goes over the fence. The children (Arlia, AM and F) go to find an adult, but two adults are with a child addressing an incident, the girls watch. Finally, the SA notices them and says she will take them down to get the beanbags, she advises them that they must only go down with an adult, never on their own. There are quite a few toy pieces to be found and they pick them up and bring them to the storage area. The SA says thank you to them.

The girls run to the drawing table and find paper and pens. Arlia chooses a big black pen and covers her paper with it. Then she scribbles on F’s paper, but she doesn’t seem to notice. She scribbles on AM’s paper and AM protests. There appears to be no emotion on Arlia’s face and I am not sure how she is feeling about this.

I would like to stay and continue observing but it is time for me to go.

# Observation 30/04/2019 (14)

As I walk through the third gate I am greeted by two children, they come from different directions and they have broad grins on their faces as they run towards me saying ‘hello,’. I know I have a big smile on my face and I wonder at their pleasure in seeing me. I have not interacted in anyway with these children but their delight at my appearance is very heart warming. This sets the session up for me today. I was amazed throughout my observations at the way these little humans (in terms of height and weight) engage with their environment. Generally, they negotiate the expectations and routines of their setting with amazing adeptness. They make mistakes, experience small, sometimes large, successes, experience rejection along with acceptance and submit to adults directing them and trying to teach them, regardless of the competence of the teacher[[9]](#footnote-9).

I glance around the outdoor area but don’t see Arlia, initially I wonder if I am unable to see her, but I sense something in myself that informs me she is not there. I say hello to a SA and she responds with a smile. I say is Arlia inside? And she replies she is. As I step through the door I see her immediately. I am aware of a sense of relief in myself, I didn’t like the thought of not being able to see her which featured in my earlier Observations.

Arlia is stood at the painting board, I notice she is using pink paint to paint a circular piece of paper. I stand nearby and watch. The paint seems a nice consistency, not too runny and not too thick. The brush is slim, and I wonder if it might be frustrating to fill the shape completely with paint using such a slim brush. She has an apron on and I notice her butterfly dress underneath. Arlia always wears nice clothes, simply nice not elaborately like some of the girl’s dresses.

A young boy is leaning on a table next to the painting board watching a SA working on some craft activity with another child. I think the child watching is waiting his turn. He is a white child, one of three or four members of the afternoon session. I have a vague awareness that this family have raised concerns concerning issues with older siblings. He looks at me and very directly asks who I am. I say Lynn, but he doesn’t seem sure. He asks Arlia who in turn asks me and I repeat Lynn. Arlia says ‘what?’ I repeat ‘Lynn’, but once again she says ‘what?’ She asks the question a third time and I respond, ‘Mrs Stammers,’ and this time she looks satisfied and tells the boy what I have said. His attention reverts to where it was before this interruption. It is interesting to me that Arlia did not want to acknowledge me as anything other than Mrs Stammers.

Arlia returns to her painting, this time she is singing with a lovely lilt in her voice, repeating ‘painting, painting, painting,’ she sounds very happy. Gradually the circle is covered and there are just a few spots without paint on. Sometimes she uses up and down strokes and other times she does a wavy line that goes slightly beyond the boundary of the paper. I wonder what she might do when the paper is covered. The magnets holding the paper on the board will not have paint underneath and as I watch she paints on top of them. Does she know there will be spots underneath without paint? She licks the paintbrush, then licks the paint on her arm. Her singing continues, and I am mesmerised by her whole-body engagement with the task and the focus she is giving to it. I recall my reading this week by Winnicott and appreciate the creativity she is displaying.

Suddenly we are interrupted by a support assistant who suggests she might like to get another piece of paper. Arlia looks confused and makes a sound like ‘eh?’ The SA says her paper needs to dry, she can get another one if she wants to keep painting. Arlia hesitates for a moment, looking at her circle, the SA moves the magnets and says, ‘look he has two eyes.’ Arlia lifts the circle off the board and puts it on the drying rack. The SA suggests that she get another piece but Arlia shakes her head, so she is advised to wash her hands.

I watched this scenario feeling upset, I was looking forward to seeing how Arlia would conclude her painting. Somehow the ending has been lost, I feel Arlia has lost something important without even realising it. I feel I have lost something and the thought of moving on is difficult. Moving on is a feature of my life at the moment, and losses seem to be felt keenly. I wonder if this is influencing my response to Arlia

I follow her to the small toilet room where she washes her hands, rubbing them together to take the paint off. She looks at herself in the mirror, but her face, though not sad, is not as animated as it has been before.

After washing her hands, she walks away with her hands wet, towards the large door leading to outside. Going outside she finds AM and they run to the swing together. Arlia tries to hold AM back, reaching out and grabbing her arm. Somehow she manages to reach the swing and climbs on it first. AM runs down the hill to a SA, Arlia calls after her something like ‘AM you can go,’ meaning I think that she is willing to let AM go on the swing. I wonder if the game I had observed in a previous session was going to play out again or if AM thought it might. Arlia calls out a few times but AM doesn’t return. Then I see the SA go into the garage, used for storage, and come out with a sand timer. Handing it to AM who then quickly runs up the hill to Arlia smiling. Her actions seem to make sense as if AM knew there might be a difficulty with Arlia letting her have a turn and she decided to pre-empt this difficulty. AM sits on a log and holds the timer. She is happy to wait.

Arlia laughs, I think she is relieved, and begins swinging. I notice how long her legs are and how difficult it is for her to keep her feet up. A young girl approaches the swing and Arlia shouts out, ‘it’s my turn, you can’t go,’. The girl stands by the pole, almost hiding behind it. Suddenly Arlia jumps off and the girl rushes forward and tries to get on the swing. Arlia turns and immediately returns to the swing. There is quite a tussle as Arlia tries to reclaim the swing for herself. I find myself wanting her to succeed, it didn’t feel fair that the girl had jumped on the swing when she did. And AM was waiting for her turn, so even if Arlia had finished it should have gone to her.

On reflection I wonder why Arlia jumped off? It occurred to me that maybe she was being provocative? I wonder if she wanted an opportunity to make a point?

Meanwhile AM is sat with the timer and seems not to be showing any feelings about what she is observing. Eventually Arlia regains control of the swing and the girl hides behind the pole again, she looks a little upset.

Arlia jumps off again and the girl immediately claims it once more. AM stands up with the timer and Arlia tries to push the child off but the girl has a better grip this time and refuses to yield. Arlia seems to realise she will not regain the swing this time. She sits next to AM. The girl topples over off the swing and AM laughs, then Arlia joins in. The girl likes their attention and performs a few funny stunts, falling off the swing. Then she does an amazing somersault backwards, I think I gasp, I hope she is OK. AM and Arlia laugh.

A SA approaches and is concerned that the girl might have hurt herself, but she seems OK. AM holds up the timer and the SA says is it your turn now? AM says yes and the SA tells the girl to sit and wait so she can go on after AM. Arlia says she wants a go, but she is told she has already been on and will need to wait until the girls has had a go. I feel a bit defensive for Arlia knowing that she lost part of her turn earlier.

Arlia sits on a log and begins to pick up bits of dirt and chew it.

Another SA arrives and asks me if it is OK to take Arlia to play a game, I reassure that it is fine, I will just follow. She collects a boy on the way inside. I find what I saw next difficult to describe and I struggled to be a benign observer.

The memory is a little blurred in terms of exact language used. The SA offers a tin of jewels and tells the two children to take as many as they want. The children are very excited and compete with each other to take as many as they can. She tries to say they have enough, but they continue to grab handfuls of the sparkly objects.

The children are more interested in looking at the jewels than listening to what the SA wants them to do with them. She is trying to set up a counting activity. She asks them to find 5 jewels, but they don’t seem to understand. So, she asks them if they have five jewels, the boy says yes, and Arlia looks at him and says yes.

I am not sure the children understand what is being asked. Do they know the question refers to the number five? Are they aware of what five is and because they have so many there are obviously five there? She asks them if they have five or more than five and the boy replies yes and Arlia, still looking at the boy says yes. She asks them to put the jewels in a line and count five. The children spend a lot of time trying to line up the jewels, there are a lot of them. In the end she tries to stop them and take some away. The children look confused. She asks Arlia to count five, Arlia goes on to thirteen and then gets a bit muddled so the SA shows her how to do it, but she counts right to left not left to right. Arlia copies her. We seem to have lost sight of five at the moment.

When the children count I notice they want to count the jewels that are all the same colour and don’t want to include certain colours, different for each of them. This doesn’t fit with the plan the SA has in her head and she finds it difficult to accommodate. It occurs to me that the children are in a completely different place in relation to the task than the SA and where she expects them to be.

Suddenly the SA says they can go play now and they both jump up and run off. I wonder what they have learned? The unfortunate issue for me is that the SA seemed to have no idea what the experience was like for the children, there was no demonstration of appreciation of where the children were in their learning process, no ability to adapt the task to suit them.

Arlia joined AM again outside, she is chalking on the floor. I realise that I haven’t seen F or E and wonder if this is why AM has been willing to engage with Arlia persistently through this session.

Arlia sits on the floor and watches AM while rolling chalk between her hands. The girls show each other their chalky hands and I wonder if Arlia might lick hers, but she doesn’t. Arlia points to a rainbow AM is drawing and Arlia says she is going to do a rainbow. She draws different coloured arcs parallel to each other. Each line is quite distinct, whereas AM’s are blurred together. A SA passes a large chalk that had rolled under the fence to the younger child area. AM rubs it on the floor and then sits back and looks at it. She declares that she doesn’t like it and the SA says something like ‘you don’t like the red,’ but AM says its not red but dark pink. Arlia joins in and says she doesn’t like it either, she likes light pink. I wonder what it is they don’t like, I see it as red, not in anyway pink., it reminds me of the colour of blood and I wonder if that might be part of the problem. AM throws the chalk to one side and they resume their pattern making on the floor.

I notice Arlia is absorbed and seems to have a sense of contentment, the floor is hard and she is getting covered in chalk, but Arlia seems happy alongside AM and it strikes me that there is a sense of sharing the experience together.

Then AM stands up and picks up the bucket of chalks running towards the swing. Arlia follows and tries to grab the bucket off her. She succeeds, and AM responds with ‘OK’ and shrugs her shoulders slightly, turning and heading towards the bikes. Arlia follows. When they get to the bikes AM claims a bike, she is there first, but Arlia, dropping the bucket of chalks, tries to wrench it off her. A SA sees what is happening and asks Arlia to sit with the timer and wait for her turn. I see Arlia sit on the bench.

It is time for me to go, but I have questions in my head about what she might do next making it difficult to walk away. However, I do, saying goodbye to a member of staff as I leave, making my way through the three gates.

# Observation 21/05/2019 (15)

Walking towards the setting I wonder how it feel for both of us having missed two weeks due to Arlia being absent. Entering the final gate, I look around and decide that she is definitely not outside, I notice it’s important to me to be able to locate her and I feel confident that I haven’t not noticed her, she isn’t outside.

As I enter the building the NT draws me to one side saying she has the drawing I requested. We go into the small kitchen, away from the children and she explains to me how drawing the picture evolved. She has provided a typed account of their conversation and at first glance it seems that her drawing of self is a huge improvement on the first one. The other significance is that Arlia has included AM and in conversation announces that ‘AM love me.’ This seems important to note and the observation highlights something about their relationship and its different facets.

I express my appreciation for the NT contribution and walk back into the main indoor play area. I notice Arlia immediately she is with AM and E, she seems concerned and I notice that AM is crying. I am trying to understand what has happened and a SA notices me and explains that ‘her friend has had a fall,’ I wonder if the SA thought I might be wondering if Arlia had anything to do with AM crying?

AM walks away, heading towards the outdoors. Arlia and E seem to be following but then E says something and both E and Arlia head for the toilets. I am not near enough to hear their conversation but there seems to be some unrest between them. E seems to be a little annoyed with Arlia and Arlia seems a little defensive, almost surprised that E could suggest whatever it is. I then have the impression that the tables are turned and Arlia points at a hand rail covered in paint and tells her that she knows she did that and then mentions something about telling the teacher.

Both girls run outside to find AM and head up towards the swing. There is a girl sat on the swing and Arlia tells the girl that she wants to get on and so the girl must get off. There is no response to Arlia’s request and Arlia tries to be calm while repeating her request and then suddenly Arlia forces herself onto the swing at the side of the girl. While not pushing the girl off she (the girl) whines a little and Arlia has made the swing a bit precarious for her because she can’t reach the rope at one side to hold onto. Arlia tries to help the girl a little to feel safe but the efforts of the girl to try and maintain her balance thwart Arlia’s efforts to enjoy the swing. After a little while she shouts at the girl aggressively and gives her a shove, the girl seems to sense what is coming and jumps off, leaving Arlia looking pleased with herself. She calls out for an ice-cream to AM and E who are in the wooden house serving ice cream through a window. AM and E seem not to have heard.

As Arlia swings her body is tense and she seems to be using a lot of aggressive energy working the swing. Her face looks hard and determined, I notice no one else ventures near the swing now. She falls off and laughs then announces, ‘I can do it myself.’ I wonder what has led to this self-talk that she can manage something without help? Does she mean without adult help or does it include her peers? Is she trying to resolve something she wants but can’t get, i.e. ice-cream?

Arlia shouts ‘No!’ at E and AM who are nearby crouched down looking at the ground and picking bits up. I am not sure what she doesn’t like, then she threatens them with telling the teacher. After a couple of minutes AM and E walk away towards what looks like a circle made of logs with a dead Christmas tree in the middle. It reminds me of a fire pit. Arlia continues on the swing for a couple of moments and then follows them. The three are leaning over a log and searching through the twigs and bits of dirt, picking handfuls up and looking through them. Then Arlia puts something into her mouth and chews it. E expresses disgust but Arlia takes no notice and wanders to another part of the circle and searches the dirt for something else, then picks it up to eat it.

AM looks at me and asks, ‘What’s your name,’ I reply ‘Mrs Stammers.’ E asks ‘why don’t you talk?’ I reply I am doing quiet work.’ They have asked these questions before and seem satisfied with my answers and return to what they are doing. Arlia is stood up looking at something in her hand and chewing on something she has picked out of the dirt.

One of the SA calls all the children to sit under the shade of the tree and have their milk. Some children say that they don’t want milk, but they are told to sit under the tree anyway. I understand that it is a hot day and the staff are trying to regulate the amount of heat the children are experiencing.

Arlia, AM and E refuse their milk when it is offered. I wonder if this is joint or individual decision? AM is sat on the floor and Arlia wants to sit next to her. There is a space on the left of AM but Arlia wants to sit where E is, on the right-hand side of AM. Arlia pushes E aside, whining all the time, saying she wants to sit next to AM. After a few minutes E yields resentfully, her space and sits on the left of AM. But then Arlia decides that she wants to sit there now and pushing and shoving continue with AM in the middle. It seems that Arlia wants not have E near AM at all and this saga repeats itself. It seems it is not enough to be friends with AM she wants to be her only friend, part of a dyadic relationship rather than a triad. AM leaves them to sort it out themselves, but I can’t help wondering how she feels in the middle of the two. I am not sure if she is resigned to this dispute or if she is used to being the centre of others affections?

Suddenly a new figure becomes part of the equation, another girl sits behind AM and puts her arms around her giving a hug. Arlia watches, it seems to me she is almost surprised at first. Arlia seems to get frustrated and tries to stop the hug but the girl persists. This last for a few minutes and then Arlia settles down, noticing that AM has some grass in her hands and is picking pieces up and using them like a puppet, saying ‘hello’ to Arlia and then E. Is she saying she wants to be friends with both of them? the three are occupied with the grass and toss it up a little way in the air. A SA passes by and tells them not to throw the grass, they stop and pick up some little twigs instead, using them in the same way as the grass pieces, like puppets. The SA sees them and once again tells them not to pick twigs up saying, we don’t pick twigs up in Nursery. I find this a bit mean, but I am aware that I have negative feelings towards this particular SA. The girls have been occupying themselves in a harmless way and there was no sense of danger in what they were doing.

Arlia continues to play with the twigs, E is outraged, she tells Arlia that the SA has said don’t and she should put them down, Arlia and AM continue to play with the twigs and E stands up and goes to another SA and tells her what Arlia is doing. The SA, Mrs N, directs E’s attention to something else and ignores the issue with Arlia.

Milk time has ended and the children go off to do their own thing.

The three head down to the play area, there are two child sized orange plastic cones, AM climbs into one and Arlia looks around for the other which is a little distance away. For a second she looks uncertain, choosing the same activity as AM removes her from close proximity, I wonder if this is causing a conflict in her wish to identify with AM. She chooses the other cone and this leaves E outside in a way and I wonder if this was a contributary factor in Arlia’s decision. E pushes AM’s cone around and it moves in a circular and an up and down motion. I think it must feel wonderful to move that way. Arlia is struggling to get herself moving so she shouts out ‘somebody push me!’ E leaves AM and crosses over to where Arlia is and begins to push the cone around. Arlia looks blissful, much as I have noticed her at times on the swing. There is something she enjoys in this experience. She is looking up at the sky, I don’t look up but I am aware that it is blue with very little cloud. Some of my most blissful moments have been when I have been able to pass time just looking up at the blue sky. I remember it from my earliest childhood.

AM leaves her cone and E follows her on to the climbing frame. Arlia looks around and then climbs into the cone vacated by AM, laying there for a few moments and then climbing out. As she does so she notices a SA M singing an action rhyme with a little boy in a separate part of the play area specifically for two-year olds. Her face lights up and she runs towards her but doesn’t stop, she seems almost too excited to stop and runs past and circles around the area before returning and climbing onto the fence. It was as if she needed to use up some energy before she could settle to talk to M.

Standing on the fence she speaks to M but I don’t quite hear, M repeats ‘ah its like looking through a window?’ I think Arlia is thinking that looking through the fence is like looking through a window. I find it difficult to hear what Arlia is saying but M’s response makes it clear that they are discussing plans for Eid which will be the week after half term. I make a note that I must check if Arlia is in Nursery on the day I am to do my next observation. It seems that Arlia has a special pink dress for the celebration and red lipstick. M asks about her hair and Arlia says that she is growing it, they discuss how she might have two bunches in her hair for Eid.

She finishes the conversation abruptly and runs up towards the swing where AM and E are balancing on a bench, pretending to be wobbling and shouting for help. The bench forms part of a square around a tree.AT first Arlia ignores them and goes on the swing, but she looks towards the other two who seem to be having a lot of fun, laughing and giggling as they balance and almost fall over. Arlia stands up as if to join them but then someone approaches as if to go on the swing and Arlia quickly returns to it and says, ‘it’s my turn.’ When Arlia doesn’t feel threatened by anyone close to the swing she joins E and AM balancing on the bench. They stand on one leg and put the other up behind them, Arlia does the same, she seems to be enjoying this game, sometimes she puts her hands down on the bench and one foot up in the air. She wobbles and pretends she is going to fall. AM and E jump down and seem to be heading for the swing but as Arlia runs towards it they veer away. It seems they don’t want to come into conflict with Arlia over the swing. Arlia climbs on the swing and AM and E return to the bench. They begin a new game pretending another child is coming towards them and squealing and hiding behind the tree. Arlia is watching and jumps off the swing to join them. They huddle behind the tree giggling, then peep out and spot someone heading towards them, squeal again and huddle giggling behind the tree. This is repeated by the three of them a few times. E sometimes holds on to Arlia’s dress if she doesn’t join them behind the tree. She pulls quite hard as Arlia is balancing, eventually Arlia gives in and joins them.

Suddenly AM and E run down the hill and into the Nursery. Arlia follows them and the three head for the paper store and choose a piece each. Arlia wants the same colour as AM but there is only a slightly smaller size left and she tries to get hold of AM’s paper to measure hers against it. Am doesn’t want Arlia to have her paper and she resists holding it close to herself with her arms wrapped around it. Arlia continues trying to take the paper away from AM and she runs outside to the mark making table. Arlia follows and eventually AM holds the paper in her hands looking at it. It is very crumpled and Arlia comments on it but AM doesn’t respond, instead she takes the paper to the table and then picks up a couple of the pencil boxes from a shelf in one hand and places them on the table. Arlia does the same with two more boxes.

Arlia picks up a thick red pen and makes a mark on her paper. Am says she wants red but Arlia refuses. Am looks in the boxes for another red pen, she finds a pen with a red top and Arlia says ‘that’s a red pen’, but when she takes the top off it is blue, she looks disappointed. Arlia laughs as AM looks for another red pen, each pen she picks up, regardless of colour, Arlia says ‘that’s a red pen.’ AM laughs with Arlia and there seems to be some meaningful exchange going on between them as they repeat the scenario repeatedly. The paper and pens seem to represent something other than writing instruments.

AM is scribbling on her paper in blue and Arlia begins to do the same, then she moves away and continues on the top of some shelves a couple of feet from AM. They exchange odd snippets of conversation which I don’t quite catch, they both focus on covering the paper in scribble. AM finishes first and runs inside. Arlia continues and when virtually all the space is covered she runs inside with it, she makes her way to the home boxes and begins looking through them until she finds the one with AM’s picture on top. She looks at it and then at hers before putting her own into her home box.

She turns around and heads towards where AM is talking to a member of staff.

It is time for me to go.

# Observation 03/07/2019 (17)

Walking through the gates of Nursery I am aware that it is a Wednesday rather than a Tuesday and have been informed that it will be a busy time since some of the children who will be coming in September will be visiting today with a family member. I feel curious about how Arlia will be around these little ones.

I had decided against my usual day for my observation because it was common transfer day and Arlia would have been visiting her new Reception class in preparation for September. I was aware that my presence in that department might present some issues for me. I haven’t been in to school since I retired last year, and I knew there would be people wishing to talk with me, particularly because my husband died since then. I wanted to avoid these conversations if at all possible.

However, as I entered the Nursery outdoor area I saw one of the SA approaching me, for a moment my heart fell, I thought she was going to say that Arlia was not in school today. I was informed that Arlia had gone on a visit to Reception with some other children. I was aware that this was part of the settling process for September, but I was unsettled as I realised I hadn’t avoided the issue as intended yesterday. I was given a lanyard and key fob and let myself into the school building via the hall which was set out for gymnastics. I had a queer feeling as I walked across the room, wondering who I would meet and what I would say.

My purpose was to observe Arlia but when I entered the Reception unit a number of people approached me, all smiling. I lost my observer stance tried to be brief in my greeting, but it was difficult. The protocol I had established in Nursery was lost and I floundered. I had been close to one member of staff in particular and she asked me questions about my husband that I found I couldn’t avoid, we went in to her classroom so that Arlia wouldn’t hear what I was saying. I found returning to the purpose of my visit very challenging.

When I turned my attention to Arlia I found her wandering aimlessly, without expression on her face. Her hair was held back from her forehead and she had smudged red lipstick. I also thought she had put on weight, she looked much fatter than when I saw her last week. She seemed lost and reminded me of the child I had observed initially in the early months of this year.

She stands at a table with a laminated fish pond on it, fishes attached by Velcro and a small square of artificial turf, another girl was sat at the table, she immediately tried to impress me by what she could do, crawling through a small space behind her. On reflection maybe, I was over sensitive after been distracted by the adults earlier. Arlia asked her if she could take the fishes off the pond while tugging one, the girl said no just as Arlia pulled the fish off its Velcro strip. She then proceeded to pull all the fish off and stick them back on again.

She asks the girl what the grass is and the girl replies that it is to feed the cows and the sheep. Arlia finds a cow and a sheep and puts them on the grass, moving them as if they were eating. A boy arrives at the table and picks up the grass square, he pulls at it and tries to eat it. I wonder if Arlia might be influenced by this and feel it with her mouth but when he drops it and walks away she pulls at it a few times but when she looks at her hand there is nothing there. She drops the grass and turns around, wandering apparently aimlessly around. This is not her first visit and I wonder if it is having more of an impact as it is dawning on her that she will be leaving nursery and moving into this new setting soon. Maybe as a result of her more prolonged visit yesterday.

Arlia wanders to where the dressing up clothes are displayed. A number of scarves are wrapped around a pole over a box. She tries to unravel a black one, I wonder if she will manage it because it is tied on to stop it falling off, but she manages to undo the scarf competently, and holding it up she asks the same girl if it is the teachers, the answer is not clear but seems to explain they are for anyone. I noted Arlia seems surprised or even incredulous that this scarf should be there, I wonder if Arlia will put it over her head, but she doesn’t, she returns it to the rail and wanders away.

There is a dressing table with a mirror on and some hair styling tools nearby. Arlia looks at them carefully. The girl wanders towards her and Arlia tells her to sit down, saying something else that I think refers to Arlia wanting to do her hair. The girl says no and resists Arlia’s attempts to sit her on the chair. Arlia says, ‘you’re not my friend, AM is my friend, do you know her?’ The girl shakes her head and reluctantly sits down. Arlia tries to brush the pony tail but the girl tries to resist, Arlia persists but then the NSA lets her know it is time to return to Nursery. I feel relieved at the thought of returning to the setting I am used to observing Arlia in.

Arlia follows her to the door where some of the other children from the group are waiting, but apparently one is missing, as she looks around one of the group, a boy, pulls Arlia’s hair band and she protests loudly. The NSA is very patient and asks him to hold her hand, explaining they are waiting for D to join them. Arlia runs off, I wonder where she has gone but as I watch she locates D and explains she needs to join the group. Meanwhile, the NSA asks me if the boy had grabbed Arlia’s hair and I nodded that yes, he had. On reflection I wanted to defend her.

We must return through the hall and there are three members of staff I know very well in there. Their faces light up when they see me but since they are in the middle of a lesson there is, thankfully no opportunity to talk.

As we walk through the door into the Nursery play area Arlia runs off, her face expressionless. It looks like she is looking for someone. The first person she connects with is E, who takes her hand and leads Arlia around the outdoor setting, Arlia’s face continues to be expressionless. I am surprised that Arlia didn’t look for AM. E seems to have taken control leading Arlia around the whole area, she seems to be trailing a little behind E almost like a child holding her mother’s hand being led reluctantly, but there is no attempt to escape. I wonder if she needs to feel led? They go up to the wooden house, there is a very young boy in there, he looks apprehensive as they approach, Arlia refers to him as a baby girl, E, authoritively says he is a baby boy, what do you think? Arlia changes her answer to include boy. She lets go of Arlia’s hand at that point and leans on the window, looking inside, Arlia joins her.

After a few moments a small girl arrives and Arlia puts her arm around her waist and tries to lift her, there is a call immediately from one of the staff telling Arlia not to lift her. Arlia stops and then turns to the boy and strokes his cheek as she runs off.

E has run off to pursue her own interests now and Arlia wanders around seemingly looking for someone, AM appears but there is no sign of connection between them. Arlia climbs on the slide and appears to enjoy repeating the climb and sliding down. Her face seems more relaxed and almost smiley now. I notice to that at the side of F, another large child, Arlia is much bigger. I wonder why I am noticing this today?

Standing at the edge of the soft play surface I see Arlia put her finger down the edge and pull out a paintbrush. I had half expected a stone or something similar that she might eat.

After repeating this activity Arlia walks around and finds a bucket which she picks up and takes to a large water bucket. Filling the bucket she carries it and the brush, stopping occasionally and painting marks on a surface. She approaches the mud pit with a ledge all around and paints water lines along the ledges, her body seems more relaxed and seems to be enjoying the movement. Then she stops and notices a hole in the wood, a result of decay, and stands looking at it intently finally she says ‘ugh, spider.’ She runs away with the bucket and pours it out near the bucket it came from. Then she runs to find AM and E telling them she has something to show them, they follow her and are fascinated by the hole, Arlia tells them there is a spider and they are trying to see it. It appears and they are delighted, laughing together. A SA tells them not to put their fingers in because there is a nail. I am not sure they would put their fingers anyway!

It is time for me to go. I am relieved to have seen some of the Arlia I have begun to see blossom returning as she settles into her familiar environment.

# Observation 09/07/2019 (18)

I had been advised to call before setting off to find out if Arlia was in Nursery because she had been absent on the day before. I had been relieved to be told that she was there and I wouldn’t have to re-arrange my observation. It is close to the end of term, just one week after this one and my time was limited.

In some ways I am sad to be ending my observations, I have found the process very challenging, however, Arlia has provided opportunities for me to learn not only about the challenges facing a young child in this setting but also about myself, particularly how my emotions colour my perceptions.

My initial experience, as I walk through the Nursery outdoor setting, is that I can’t find her. This creates anxiety in me, I don’t want her to be that unseen child I noted her to be in the early stages of my observations. One of the most valuable lessons I have learned, particularly through Arlia, is the importance for a child of being seen. I would like to think that in return for her consent to being observed I have been able to contribute a sense of being seen, held in my observer’s gaze, and hopefully contribute to her sense of self as a valued individual.

A SA I have not met before asks me who I am looking for, I have to think for a moment for her real name rather than her pseudonym. It is interesting how her real name somehow doesn’t seem to fit her. The SA directs me to where she thinks Arlia is playing, she is in a quiet area just off the main Nursery. I had looked there but not very well. I feel relieved to find her.

Arlia is sat on the floor playing with what seems to me an exciting small replica of a pirate ship. I have something similar at home myself and I am curious about the similarities between the two. The wooden figures are the same. Its interesting how this connection with home sparks something pleasant inside me. Arlia is holding one of the figures, she notices me and stands up and walks towards a boy who is holding something in his hand, she snatches at it but he holds tight. I can’t see what it is but I wonder if it is a treasure box. There is quite a tussle between them and I wonder if Arlia will get what she wants. But the boy did not allow Arlia to succeed and finally Arlia abandons the tussle and joins AM and Z on a leather settee just behind her looking at books. I notice I feel relieved that Arlia didn’t manage to take the box from the boy, she has been very insistent on holding on to the swing, usually winning, maybe it’s a good thing for her to experience that she can’t always get what she wants in this way.

Arlia plonks herself on the leather settee next to AM who is talking to Z about a book. Arlia watches them and then chooses a book for herself. The book is Brown Bear, Brown Bear, what can you see? She opens the cover and says in an animated voice ‘oh look, a rainbow,’ as she turns the cover to find lines of different colours inside. Her face is alight and she looks sideways at AM and Z to see if they are watching. She moves to partially turn the page, revealing just a portion of the picture on the following page and uses language, tone and intonation that an adult might use when engaging children with a story. AM and Z respond, they clearly know the story well and are able to give a response that Arlia expects and she continues enthusiastically, repeating the hide and reveal performance at each turn of the page.

I note that I feel excited, is this Arlia taking on the role of a teacher, modelling her behaviour on the adults she has experienced as story tellers. This seems significant and important in her developing sense of self. She has observed something in adults that she has wanted to emulate and she is enjoying the feedback that she is receiving from AM and Z.

After a few pages however the two girls lose interest and begin chattering to each other, ignoring Arlia, even though she puts even more energy into the story telling role. But the two girls are absorbed in their own conversation and are laughing quite loudly with each other. Arlia shouts ‘stop!’ and hits the leather cushion and immediately continues with the story in her story telling voice and facial expression to match. AM and Z listen again and participate in the story telling experience, Arlia seems very happy with this.

The story comes to an end and Arlia sits for a moment, I wonder if she feels a bit flat after her energetic efforts to keep AM and Z interested. She stands up and puts the book back in its place then wanders over to the table where the boy had been playing with the treasure box. She picks up one of the figures lying there and looks at it, her face seems to have little expression, but maybe she is thinking? The figure is a pirate, I wonder what meaning it has for her?

She lifts her top up and places her hand on her tummy, stroking it. Then she turns around shows the girls her tummy laughing as she does so. AM rushes forward and tickles her until she turns away and pulls her t-shirt down, but a moment later Arlia repeats revealing her tummy and the girls take it in turns to tickle her tummy. This game is repeated a few times, each time they get giddier and giddier. Arlia tickles AM and Z and soon there are all very excited. Suddenly Arlia pushes Z who pushes back, AM tries some pushing of Arlia too. But the main locus of the action lies with Arlia and Z. Arlia pushes quite hard and Z falls backwards against a table, she pulls a face suggesting she is hurt. Looking unhappy she sits on the sofa next to AM. There is an atmosphere that feels like they are aware that maybe they have gone too far.

Arlia says, ‘pushing hurt, yeh?’ And Z nods. ‘You don’t want me to push you?’ Z shakes her head. ‘If you hurt you cry?’ And Z nods her head. Arlia looks at the lollypop sticks with a laminated, cut out photograph of the children each in a group pot. She finds AM’s and Z’s pictures, AM finds Arlia’s. I think that either AM or Z suggest hiding their lollypops, Arlia ignores this for a few minutes and they use the sticks as puppets, then Arlia suggests playing hide and seek with the sticks, she sounds very enthusiastic, I seem to recognise the inviting tone she had when she was telling the story.

The three girls play hide and seek, they take it in turns to hide their sticks but often try to hide themselves with the sticks too. The help each other find the hidden sticks, very excited to found, wanting to be found they lead the searcher to them.

Another rupture occurs, this time instigated by Z, she pushes Arlia who pushes back. I feel completely absorbed watching them, forgetting any responsibility I might have had for their safety in an adult support role. A member of staff from another part of the provision, the under-two’s walks past and speaks very firmly to the two girls about kind hands and feet and they stop. As she passes me I notice her glance towards me, I wonder if she is thinking I should have intervened. I wonder if there had been an accident if I would have been responsible? I let the thought go. My role has been made clear.

I am very surprised when Z goes towards Arlia again and pushes her. To my surprise the NT is stood watching out of my view and she tells Z to stop, reminding her about kind hands and feet. I am even more amazed when Z stops for a moment and then goes to push Arlia again. The NT steps forward and says, in a very quiet and patient voice, that Z can’t stay there if she is going to do that. She takes Z’s hand and walks her away.

Arlia and AM sit on the settee together and are commenting on what happened. I assume they are disgruntled with Z, maybe even blaming her for the trouble they were in. But they were actually feeling sorry for her, upset that she had been taken away! I feel very surprised and find it hard to understand. The two of them decide after a few minutes to go and find her, they search the indoor area and then head outside.

Z is sat on a little sit and ride bike. AM finds a similar bike and Arlia finds a larger peddle bike. Her ability to peddle is much improved, but she still has some difficulty manoeuvring. She moves the bike to the edge of the demarcated biking area, on a slight slope and then sits on it and peddles down to another boundary where she is able to turn the wheel and miss hitting the crates that area used to make the boundary. She is able to peddle up hill, but at times she resorts to lifting the bike by the handlebars as if she doesn’t think she can manoeuvre it while riding it.

A boy is causing some disruption to the children on bikes. He is walking around the bike area sometimes standing in the way and at other times pushing bikes. He puts his tongue out at the children as they ride past. I notice Arlia, AM and Z put their tongues at him.

Arlia gets of her bike and goes to Z saying she wants to ride the little bike, Z refuses and there is a bit of an altercation. A SA intervenes and suggests that Arlia sit with the timer and when it runs out it will be her turn. Arlia sits on one of the crates that boundary the bike area, she looks quiet, I am not sure if she feels flat or resigned to the situation. She tilts the timer away from her and then brings it back, the SA notices and kneels down beside her to explain that the sand will move more quickly if she has the timer upright and demonstrates this. Arlia holds the timer more upright now.

Arlia sits right through the wait time and when time is up she shows the SA who says she can go and have the bike. The SA watches from a distance as Arlia goes up to Z and says it is time for her turn. Z gets off the bike and Arlia sits on it. She is far too big really and her skirt keeps getting trapped under the wheels. The skirt waist is under her tummy and gets pulled down further. Arlia puts her hand up her back and seems to rub it. I wonder if she can feel the gap between her t-shirt and her skirt. But she gets off her bike and foes to the SA saying something about wanting her to look at her back it is red. The SA looks first at the lower part of her back, there is nothing there, Arlia says no here, is red and points to the top part of her back. The SA says yes she can see it is red what happened? Arlia says her brother pulled her down the stairs, the SA says she can see, it looks like a carpet burn. She asks Arlia if she told her mummy and Arlia says yes and nods her head. Did mummy tell him off? And Arlia nods after a pause. Was she unsure of this or was there some other reason for the pause?

Arlia gets back on the bike and scoots over to Z who is sat on a little wall with AM looking a bit glum. Arlia asks ‘you want little one?’ Z nods and Arlia gets off the bike and hands it to Z, finding a large bike for herself. She sets off peddling.

It is time for me to go. I have a lot to think about.

Appendix 4

Levick tables (see p. 148)

# Appendix 3: Further reflections

## Reflection1: A dream

**Journal entry** 12/05/2020: The density of the connections is overwhelming. The more I work with the data and the more I read alters the shape that is emerging. I feel anxious about being able to shape my writing in a way that answers the RQ.

**Reflection:** During this time, I had a dream about being in a large building of a learning institute where I was aware of a lot of activity, people packing their suitcases and moving on. I was aware of a fire in the basement where I had suitcases and boxes stored. I felt unsure how much I should risk my life to rescue these things, no one else seemed to be interested. Could I live without them or was I giving up on them too easily. I decided to try a rescue but as I descended into the basement the ferocity of the flames surprised me and I returned upstairs.

While I sense a multitude of possible meanings to make sense of this dream, my own take was that much of the understanding I had created in earlier writings, stored away, was under threat by what was new, would losing it threaten the new or should I try to retrieve it, burnt and damaged though it maybe. An interesting point in psychoanalytic thinking that I find helpful is the idea that learning requires a letting go of what you think you know; this can be difficult for both children and adults.

The process I am in is resulting in the development of some risky ideas that can feel threatening, perhaps too hot to handle, as they challenge my own teaching and therapeutic practice, highlighting just how difficult it is to engage in some of these ideas. Awareness can feel very uncomfortable, threatening strongly held ideas contained within our own perception of ourselves as teacher’s. It can feel safer not knowing something, once awareness seeps in there may be powerful emotions that may get in the way of new perspectives and this presents a challenge for me as I try to communicate the ideas in this thesis

There was no resolution in my dream, I share it here to communicate something of the struggle I was feeling about handling the data. The messiness of the process left me with a feeling at times that as I exposed myself to supervision and new reading, I left a trail of charred papers behind. Sometimes as I tried to handle the ‘old’ material it seemed to crumble in my hands. However, the newer stuff felt much crisper and succinct, and recognising this I was able to allow some of the older material to crumble.

## Reflection 2: An example of containment

Reflecting on how adults can provide a containing experience for children who find it difficult to manage their emotions I am reminded of my experience of the first child to visit the Rainbow Room. An account given in a journal article (Stammers and Williams, 2019) briefly described my work with a child I named Hamzah who had very limited relational skills. My intention in writing the article was to share from personal experience how Bion’s (1962) theory of containment was useful in understanding how adults supported Hamzah to provide a sense of safety and enable him to engage constructively with the educational space. I include extracts here for the benefit of the reader hoping to elucidate the containment process. First I offer a description from the article:

‘His impulsive behaviour was erratic and unpredictable, there was no sense of personal organisation or the ability to reflect on his own behaviour. Hamzah was disengaged with the environment, refusing to co-operate with any group activities led by adults, engaging with children only when it involved running and chasing around the unit. His level of verbal communication with both adults and children appeared to be limited and eye contact extremely difficult to gain or maintain. Hamzah did not seem to express his own needs very well, he wore a pull up nappy but seemed to lack awareness of when it needed changing. There was a sense that he could not contain either his behaviour or his bodily fluids and maybe his speed kept at bay intrusive thoughts that he found unbearable at that time.’ (Stammers and Williams, 2019, p.36)

Here is my description of the containing environment the staff and I put in place to support him:

‘By providing an attuned, containing experience through our relationship as well as the growing familiarity with his environment, in the Rainbow Room and then the Reception Unit, Hamzah felt contained and safe enough not to feel overwhelmed by his emotions. Staff, alerted to his needs, thought for him so he was not required to sit too long on the carpet, any sign of restlessness and he was allowed to leave and do something else. This led to a slowing down which facilitated his play with toys in a creative and imaginative way and his ability to create drawings that held some sense of meaning for him began to emerge. It was as if the disintegration he seemed to feel was slowing down, leading to the possibility of integration of the disparate parts of himself that had been split off; projected on to the adults around him, as a result of past experience (Klein, 1996). Gradually signs of development began to emerge. The nappy during the day became no longer necessary, his class teacher reported an improvement in Hamzah’s concentration, sustaining his focus in a small group initially for around 10 minutes.’ (Stammers and Williams, 2019, p.38)

# Appendix 4: Levick Tables

Table 1: Developmental Lines of Cognitive, Artistic, Psychosexual Sequences and defence Mechanisms of the Ego, appropriate for those periods of development.’ (1983, p.61).

Table 2: ‘Definitions and Criteria for identifying Defences Manifested in Graphic Productions.’

A close-up of a document

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# Appendix 5: Example of Excel Spreadsheets

The abductive process for data analysis was supported using Excel spreadsheets, one for each Observation. These were too bulky to include in the appendices and examples have been copied onto Word documents and included instead.

However, the full data spreadsheet is available electronically on request.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Data from Case Study 1 Observation 2** | | | | | |
| Row identification | **Notable Observational Data** | **Contextual influences: environment/group learning/class learning/play opportunity** | **Identifying feelings** | **Relative perspective/psychoanalytic theory** | **How have feelings influenced context and emotional capacity to learn?** |
|  |
|  |
| 1 | Tina, in princess dress over her school uniform, looks washed out, tired and yawning looking at T rather than text. … The text itself did not seem to interest her, she seems to be needing something from the teacher. 1/2/1 | Tina, in a princess dress, is sat in a small group reading task at a table with Teacher. Looking to teacher for answers, not able to think for herself. | Needy, tired , feeling disconnected from learning task. | Learning as feeding, task offers connection with teacher. | Loss of focus, wanting teacher to supply what she needs. |  |
| 2 | Her fingers play around her mouth, 1/2/1 Tina watches T carefully for cues to answers to questions. 1/2/1 | Small group learning task related to reading | Anxiety. | Oral erotogenic location of emotion. Related to soothing anxiety? Or maybe anxiety of taking in feeding, giving out? Learning as feeding | She knows the teacher has the answer. The teacher can feed her. |  |
| 4 | A writing exercise follows, the children are asked to fill in the missing word … Tina waits before committing to paper ... T uses fingers, to support their learning ‘how many sounds in mud,’ sounding each letter and raising a finger for each one then counting the fingers.Tina seems to rely on T not sure she has the right number of sounds. This is a long process but the T is patient and repeats the sounds while counting them. Tina leans to one side her head on her arm on the table ... T says ‘OK we won’t do any more you have been sat a long time’. 1/2/1 | Small group writing task. Teacher patiently presenting words phonetically but Tina and other children are struggling to stay engaged. Teacher recognises that the children have had enough. | Lethargic. Feeling of wanting to give up, escape from task. Its all too much, Tina has gone beyond interest and curiosity, sleepy energy. | Learning as feeding. Content needs to be broken into smaller pieces to make it more digestable. Teacher responds to message from children that they have had enough. Recogntion of need, maybe a little late, but 'good enough' . Apathy (defence in extreme situations) or boredom (due to blocking of expressive activity ...) R. | Thinking, modelled by teacher.  Cutting word into small pieces to make connection between phoneme and grapheme. Teacher receives communication that Tina has had enough and ends session. |  |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Data from Case Study 1 Observation 3** | | | | | |
| Row identification | **Notable Observational Data** | **Contextual influences: environment/group learning/class learning/play opportunity** | **Identifying feelings** | **Relative perspective/psychoanalytic theory** | **How have feelings influenced context and emotional capacity to learn?** |
|  |
|  |
| 1 | Tina, in princess dress over her school uniform, looks washed out, tired and yawning looking at T rather than text. … The text itself did not seem to interest her, she seems to be needing something from the teacher. 1/2/1 | Tina, in a princess dress, is sat in a small group reading task at a table with Teacher. Looking to teacher for answers, not able to think for herself. | Needy, tired , feeling disconnected from learning task. | Learning as feeding, task offers connection with teacher. | Loss of focus, wanting teacher to supply what she needs. |  |
| 2 | Her fingers play around her mouth, 1/2/1 Tina watches T carefully for cues to answers to questions. 1/2/1 | Small group learning task related to reading | Anxiety. | Oral erotogenic location of emotion. Related to soothing anxiety? Or maybe anxiety of taking in feeding, giving out? Learning as feeding | She knows the teacher has the answer. The teacher can feed her. |  |
| 4 | A writing exercise follows, the children are asked to fill in the missing word … Tina waits before committing to paper ... T uses fingers, to support their learning ‘how many sounds in mud,’ sounding each letter and raising a finger for each one then counting the fingers. Tina seems to rely on T not sure she has the right number of sounds. This is a long process but the T is patient and repeats the sounds while counting them. Tina leans to one side her head on her arm on the table ... T says ‘OK we won’t do any more you have been sat a long time’. 1/2/1 | Small group writing task. Teacher patiently presenting words phonetically but Tina and other children are struggling to stay engaged. Teacher recognises that the children have had enough. | Lethargic. Feeling of wanting to give up, escape from task. Its all too much, Tina has gone beyond interest and curiosity, sleepy energy. | Learning as feeding. Content needs to be broken into smaller pieces to make it more digestable. Teacher responds to message from children that they have had enough. Recogntion of need, maybe a little late, but 'good enough' . Apathy (defence in extreme situations) or boredom (due to blocking of expressive activity ...) R. | Thinking, modelled by teacher.  Cutting word into small pieces to make connection between phoneme and grapheme. Teacher receives communication that Tina has had enough and ends session. |  |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Data from Case Study 2 Observation 6** | | | | | |
| **Notable Observational Data** | **Contextual influences: environment/group learning/class learning/play opportunity OR What is tina interacting with? Peer/adult/activity or some mixture of the 3Contextual influences: environment/group learning/class learning/play opportunity** | **Identifying individual response to interaction All interaction is to some degree emotional  (Intersubjective)** | **How has the response (emotional) influenced capacity to learn? (Intrasubjective)** | **Relative perspective/ psychoanalytic theory to make sense of response  Associations   Representations** | **Additional notes** |
|  |
|  |
| I look around for Arlia and don’t see her initially, the NT says hello and asks how I am, I say I am fine but can’t see Arlia. She points to where four girls are stood on a bench looking over a large board watching other children on the bikes. I still don’t see Arlia but then as I look a bit closer I notice her features and identify her. She has lipstick on and with her short black hair cut close to her head I think she has a very open face which lights up when she is laughing. She is laughing now with her friends, but I am not sure what is causing the laughter. (p.1) | I arrive at the nursery and have difficulty locating Arlia. I ask a support assistant where she is and although she points her out I fail to recognise her. Her face is different with lipstick on and her hair newly cut close to her head. I refer to the girls she is with as friends, they are the three she has associated with over the past few weeks. | Arlia seems to be happy, sharing a sense of being part of the group. | Arlia seems to share a focus that creates laughter as part of a shared experience. | An increasing sense of being part of a group. | Oedipal complex. |  |
| A SA calls across to the girls and tells them to get down which they all do and then they run around as if escaping or being chased by something. Arlia glances at me but continues running. She is at the back of the group and at first, I wonder if it is her that they are running from. She gets close to AM, Arlia always uses both first and last name, she tries to hold her hand, but AM says ‘NO!’ very firmly. Arlia looks disheartened but then returns to running about. (p.1) | The girls are being playful on the bench but the support assistant deems the bench unsafe to stand on. They run away from the bench but I wonder if it is something else they are running from. I am not sure if the three girls are running away from Arlia. She tries to get close to AM, trying to hold her hand, but AM does not want Arlia to do this is emphaitically says no. Arlia seems disappointed by this response. | Arlia feels disapointed at AM's rejection. | Arlia's feelings seem overwhelming and she runs around as if trying to dissapate them. | Excreting bad feelings. |  |  |

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| **Data from Case Study 2 Observation 17** | | | | | |
| **Notable Observational Data** | **Contextual influences: environment/group learning/class learning/play opportunity OR What is tina interacting with? Peer/adult/activity or some mixture of the 3Contextual influences: environment/group learning/class learning/play opportunity** | **Identifying individual response to interaction All interaction is to some degree emotional  (Intersubjective)** | **How has the response (emotional) influenced capacity to learn? (Intrasubjective)** | **Relative perspective/ psychoanalytic theory to make sense of response  Associations   Representations** | **Notes and Refelctions** |
|  |
|  |
| When I turned my attention to Arlia I found her wandering aimlessly, without expression on her face. Her hair was held back from her forehead and she had smudged red lipstick. I also thought she had put on weight, she looked much fatter than when I saw her last week. She seemed lost and reminded me of the child I had observed initially in the early months of this year. (p.1) | I had arrived in Reception to observe Arlia and found her wandering aimlessly. Her appearance conserned me, her hair was held away from her face and she had smudged red lipstick across her mouth. She reminds me of how she was in the early days of my observation. | Feeling lost. Arlia seems to have lost her purposefulness that had characterised so much of her activity in nursery over recent weeks. | The lipstick seems to add an inappropriate adult aspect to her face, almost as if she is trying to grow up, ready for the next stage in her education | Developing self, maturational development (Winnicott). |  |  |
| She stands at a table with a laminated fish pond on it, fishes attached by Velcro and a small square of artificial turf, another girl was sat at the table, ... Arlia asked her if she could take the fishes off the pond while tugging one, the girl said no just as Arlia pulled the fish off its Velcro strip. She then proceeded to pull all the fish off and stick them back on again. (p.1) | Arlia seems to know that she needs to ask before intervening in someone's game, but she goes ahead and pulls the fish off its velcro pad before the girl playing there can answer. She pulls all the fish off their velcro strips and then puts them back again. | Arlia's impulsiveness prevents her from being able to take into account anothers feelings. | Arlia does not seem to be able to prevent her desire to pull something off the velcro strips. I wonder if this pulling represents in some way her feeling at having been pulled away from her usual setting. |  |  |  |

# Appendix 6: Bion’s theory of containment

# Graphic describing the feeling of being contained.

Bion’s theory of container/contained

NB: The curved lines indicate the circular nature of experience and

the way experiences are cumulative

v) Over time the infant experience of containment is extended to other settings and thinking framework is extended.

i)Infant somatic experienced

e.g. Hunger

vi) Educational space: Child has confusing experience

ii) M/other imagines infant’s distress and responds with empathy. Containing the experience for the infant.

iv) As the experience is contained in this way consistently the infant learns to tolerate the experience. The infant is able to link experience to thought.

vii) Teacher imagines child’s confusion and responds with empathy. Offering a containing experience.

iii) Infant senses calming voice and action of m/other. Feels soothed.

viii) As the experience is contained in this way consistently the child learns to tolerate the experience. The child learns to link experience to thought and develop an understanding of cause and effect.

1. ‘Figure 1. Percentage of pupils gaining National Curriculum Assessment level 4 or above at age 11 (i.e. end of primary schooling, also known as the end of ‘Key Stage 2’ (KS2) of the National Curriculum). Source: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/. Notes: 1995: first ‘full run’ of English and maths test at age 11 (end of ‘key stage 2’ (KS2) of the National Curriculum); 1996: first ‘full run’ of KS2 science; 1997: first tests under New Labour government elected in May 1997; 2002: first national target date set by New Labour government – the target was 80% of students reaching level 4 English at KS2 and 75% reaching level 4 maths at KS2. Both targets were missed; 75% of students reached level 4 or above in English, 73% reached level 4 or above in maths. For other sources of test results data, prior to DfES on-line archiving, see Torrance (2003)’ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It may be of interest to the reader to learn about Myra and this link leads to more information. [Myra F. Levick, psychologist who helped establish the field of art therapy, dies at 96 (inquirer.com)](https://www.inquirer.com/obituaries/myra-levick-art-therapy-hahnemann-hospital-medical-college-drexel-university-dies-died-obituary-20200921.html)) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Laing, R.D. and Esterson, A. (2017). *Sanity, madness, and the family.* Routledge Classics [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. # Pope, C., and Mays, N. (1995) Qualitative Research: Reaching the parts other methods cannot reach: an introduction to qualitative methods in health and health services research *BMJ* 311 doi: [https://doi-org.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/10.1136/bmj.311.6996.42](about:blank) 2

   [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Paparini,S., Green J., Papoutsi, C., Murdoch, J., Petticrew, M., Greenhalgh, T., Hancke, B., and Shaw, S. (2020) Case study research for better evaluations of complex interventions: rationale and challenges *BMC Medicine* 18:301 (https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-020-01777-6 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [Pupil premium - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium/pupil-premium) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Psychoanalysis and School Psychology Laura Barbanel, PSYCHOANALYTIC PSYCHOLOGY, 1994, 11(2), 275-283 Copyright© 1994, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Even though I know, in an experiential way, that these observations often have a positive benefit, there is still a part of me that feels anxious that a child might experience my gaze as intrusive. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This is a reflection that grew during my observation. The relevance of that last comment will become clearer later in the observation. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)