



University of Dundee

Children's Voices through play-based practice

Burke, Lynsey Anne; Mercieca, Duncan

DOI:
[10.1108/QRJ-06-2023-0105](https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-06-2023-0105)

Publication date:
2024

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Burke, L. A., & Mercieca, D. (2024). Children's Voices through play-based practice: listening, intensities and critique. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 24(4), 358-370. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-06-2023-0105>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in Discovery Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Children's Voices through play-based practice: Listening, Intensities and Critique.

Abstract

Purpose

This paper offers a reflection of a research process aimed at listening to young children's voices in their everyday school life through a play-based context in a Scottish school. Throughout the research process, we were aware of the complexity of conducting this research as listening to children's voices presents methodological and conceptual difficulties and complexities. Reflecting on the research process after the data was collected, we critique the process using Deleuze-Guattarian ideas. The critique aims at opening and challenging each of us researchers, allowing us to think-again about the next research project aimed at listening to children's voices.

Design/methodology/approach

The research involved an observation study that took place over one week in a primary school in Central Scotland. Children had the opportunity to engage in free play throughout the day. Observations were chosen as the main approach to 'capture' children's voices in their natural settings.

Findings

The empirical research brought forth two main ideas, that of children as agents, and how children amplify their voices through play. The reflective part offers the possibility of understanding the intensities and forces when conducting such research and the possibilities of engaging with these.

Originality

This paper offers a critique of research aimed at listening to children's voices. The aim is not to limit engagement in researching children's voices but to open, or make complex, such processes.

Keywords: Children's voices, listening, play-based practice, Scotland, Deleuze and Guattari

Introduction

Children's voices, particularly within early childhood education, are being researched with increasing urgency and emphasis. This upsurge reflects the behest of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) that every child has the right to participate and to have their voices heard (United Nations, 1989). The convention provides three interlocking principles: protection, provision, and participation of children. The third provision has promoted research and policy development on how to best address this.

This paper contributes to this debate in the following ways: first, it contributes to the ever-increasing literature on listening to children's voices. The article reports a qualitative research project aimed at listening to young children's voices that express everyday school life through a play-based context in a Scottish school. The second part of the paper critically questions the research processes employed by the researchers in listening to the voices of children. Using Deleuzian-Guattarian concepts, the authors approached the voices of children through an understanding of voices as an intensity, rather than as knowledge about "what children want". This follows the call of several scholars (see, for example, Komulainen, 2007; Mazzei and Jackson, 2009; Spyrou, 2011) in childhood studies and research to 'acknowledge... and reflect... on the situated character of children's voices and their limitations' (Spyrou, 2011, p.152).

These two almost contradictory parts of the paper reflect the complexities of children's voices where, as researchers, we find ourselves caught between trying to 'capture' voices through research projects and the recognition that listening to children's voices is multi-layered, complex, uncertain (see, for example, Mercieca, 2011) and contextualised (Bakhtin, 1963). Yet even this complexity and uncertainty is often constructed on the idea of the humanistic subject (Mazzei, 2016), as in our research project. Frequently, the focus is not on 'voices' *per se*, as Mazzei (2016) would argue, when trying to find "that which constitutes 'voice' to what can be listened to, understood, or made sense of as a result of some of those methods... that can be attributed to a rational, individual humanist subject" (Mazzei, 2016, p.152). The tension emerges from our realisation of our research project as consisting of processes of listening to and wanting to access children's voices, thus constructing children as rational individual humanist subjects. Are our methods and ways of doing research with children constructing what we want to escape? Thus, echoing John Law's (2004) warning, methods construct how we understand the object of study. Reflecting with Deleuze and Guattari on our role as researchers and the research process, we will argue that we can move beyond this tension.

This paper is divided into two main sections. The first section will give an overview of the methodology used and summarise the main findings. The second part of the paper, through a Deleuzian-Guattarian framework, will question some of the processes of this research project.

This paper brings a novel approach to critiquing children's voices. Both parts are rigorous in their own right. This article is a reflection on how researchers can adopt a philosophical perspective to question their own approaches and methods. This paper tries to bridge the theory/research practice divide and it is a space where these elements come together.

2. First Section

2.1 Methodology and underlying principles of the research project

The Reggio Emilia approach is influential in 'understanding' children's 100 voices. To complement Loris Malaguzzi's belief in the 'rich' image of the child (e.g., Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012), Carlina Rinaldi (2021) highlighted the need for a correspondingly rich

1
2
3 pedagogy. Through the ‘pedagogy of listening’ that incorporates all the senses (Clark & Moss,
4 2011, p. 9), Rinaldi argues that children’s voices should be provided with space and time, where
5 all voices are valued. Hand in hand with a pedagogy of listening is, therefore, a pedagogy of
6 relationships, based on interactions and communication. The influence of Rinaldi’s listening
7 pedagogy is evident through the Mosaic Approach (Clark, 2017). As with Dockett, Einarsdottir
8 and Perry (2011), Alison Clark (who developed the Mosaic approach along with Peter Moss)
9 centres her work firmly in relation to the UNCRC, specifically Articles 12 and 13 (Clark,
10 Kjørholt and Moss, 2005), and designs her research to reflect her view of the importance of
11 childhood, rather than viewing childhood as preparation for adulthood. Children are ‘experts
12 in their own lives’, skilful communicators, rights holders and meaning makers (Clark and
13 Moss, 2005, p. 5). The Mosaic Approach is a multi-modal way of listening to young children’s
14 views.
15
16
17
18

19 In terms of a national context, recently published guidelines reflect the view that, regardless of
20 the age of the child, young children try to communicate and express their voices through a
21 variety of ways, one of which being play, (Education Scotland, 2020). In response, many
22 schools in Scotland are embracing the ‘play is the way’ philosophy. The pace of change is
23 gathering momentum to ensure that children in the early stages of primary school are immersed
24 in developmentally appropriate play-based pedagogies. The drive at the policy and practice
25 level in Scotland has originated from the increasing awareness that play benefits well-being
26 (through the potential for the development of social and emotional relationships) and cognition
27 (improvements in communication, thinking skills, and metacognitive awareness) (e.g., see
28 Yogman, Garner & Hutchison et al. 2018). However, the belief that play can be an important
29 pedagogical tool to amplify and listen to children’s voices is less well known. This project rests
30 on the perception that play is essential for children’s voices to be heard in a natural setting
31 (Harris & Manatakis, 2013; Zamani, 2016). The research question that guided this project was:
32 what are young children’s voices in their everyday school life through a play-based context in
33 a Scottish school?
34
35
36
37

38 The research project that is the focus of this paper involved an observation study that took place
39 over one week in a primary school in Central Scotland. Six children (four girls and two boys)
40 from two primary classes, their two teachers and one support for learning assistant were
41 observed to capture moments of children’s voices through play. The specific school identified
42 was one where their approach to play in the early years had been recognised locally and
43 nationally. The headteacher of this school was approached and was keen to participate in this
44 project. Following appropriate institutional and Local Authority ethical approval, the
45 parents/carers of all children in the Primary One and Primary One/Two classes were sent home
46 information letters and asked to return the permission slips if they were happy for their child
47 to be involved. Thirty-three letters were sent home, nineteen forms were returned with
48 approval. At the beginning of the observation week, the children with parental permission
49 gathered in their familiar classroom setting. Using puppets and Makaton (a method which
50 supports language and communication with actions and symbols), the researchers introduced
51 the project’s aims: to listen to your play; to look at your play; to learn from your play; and to
52 talk about your play. At the conclusion of the short, playful ethics session, children were given
53 the opportunity either to post their names in the circle with the puppets and the symbols or in
54 the empty circle. Five children placed their names in the empty circle, twelve in the circle to
55 show they would like to be involved, and two children were absent. The class teachers and the
56 researchers discussed those children who were willing to be involved and invited six children
57 for the observation week (four girls and two boys). Several factors and reasons influenced the
58
59
60

1
2
3 decision to identify these six children, for example, school attendance and availability of the
4 children. It was explained to parents and carers that only a small number of children would be
5 invited to be involved with the research study. The following day, one of the children who had
6 been invited to be one of the children being observed told Author 1:

7
8 *I told my mum about you last night. She asked what we did and I said you were in*
9 *school, and I said you were here 'listening to our play, looking at our play, learning*
10 *from our play, and talking about our play' – and I showed her the signs. But I said*
11 *don't worry, it's only if we want you to* (researcher's diary notes).
12

13
14 Observations were carried out over one week, during which the class teachers followed their
15 usual timetable. One researcher was with the classes full time (apart from PE time and
16 Assembly time), and the other was present for 2.5 days. This school follows a mixture of
17 teacher-led activities (either whole class or group interactive, planned sessions), teacher-
18 directed activities (which the children complete independently), and child-initiated free to play.
19 The teachers and the school value play, particularly child-led play. Children had the
20 opportunity to engage in free play throughout the entire day, not just at set 'play times' or once
21 more traditional forms of work were completed. Observations were chosen as the main
22 approach to 'capture' children's voices in their natural settings. Various studies have used this
23 approach to listen to children through a similar approach. The benefits and limitations of
24 adopting the method of observation in early years settings are widely documented (e.g., Clark,
25 2017; Montgomery, 2014).
26
27

28
29 Following the completion of the observation week, an inductive approach to thematic analysis
30 was taken following the Six steps of Braun and Clark (2022); familiarisation with the data,
31 coding, generating initial themes, developing and reviewing themes, refining, defining and
32 naming themes and writing up. Two overarching themes from our observation of the children's
33 voices in action are outlined in the table below:
34
35

36
37 Insert Table 1
38

39
40 The six children have been given pseudonyms.

41 **2.2 Theme: Agency**

42
43 *Children trying to control their narratives.*

44 Throughout the observation week, children were keen to know what the researchers were
45 writing down, to check it was being recorded accurately. One girl, when she had been engaged
46 in the play area writing messages, said to Author 1:

47
48 *I'm going to draw a love heart. I'll draw it on a Post-it, and you can stick it in your*
49 *notebook right there* (pointing with her finger at the researcher's notebook).
50

51
52 Similarly, during outdoor playtime, Ethan called Author 1 over to where he was playing
53 running games with Fraser. Ethan said to Author 1: *Can you write this down in your notebook?*
54 *Can you write: Two boys, Ethan and Fraser are racing. And Ethan won. We'll see who wins*
55 *the next one and I'll tell you.* Both boys then raced again. Ethan returned to Author 1 and said:
56 *I won [then after a long pause] because his shoe fell off.*
57

58
59 On another occasion, Bella said: *Author 1 sit down and write about us. Here is your ticket [to*
60 *the puppet show].* The children then picked up the puppets and acted out a very short show,

1
2
3 using animal noises only. Bella then came over to see what I had written. I asked her what
4 story she had told with the puppets, she said, *The big bad wolf came to find the horse and the*
5 *cheetah* and Bella watched me scribe her sentence.
6

7
8 In addition to moments like these, some children also frequently checked to see that what had
9 been written by the researchers accurately represented past events. At one point, when the
10 children were at the writing table making invitations for adults to come to their show (see
11 narrative below), Bella broke off her conversation with Debbie and asked the researcher: *What*
12 *are you writing now? What does that say?* When the researcher read out what was written,
13 Bella nodded and said, *that's good*, then resumed her conversation with her friend Debbie
14 whilst making invitations.
15

16
17 *Ensure routines and social conventions.*

18 When the researchers first arrived, three of the six children decided to act as 'guides' at
19 impromptu moments throughout the day. They provided narratives of what they were doing
20 and how their actions fitted within the wider class routines. It appeared important to the children
21 that both researchers were aware of the systems in place in their classroom and they took pride
22 showing and talking about the different areas.
23

24
25 On one such occasion, Bella and Amanda took Author 1 over to the puppet theatre.

26 Bella: *Have a ticket [to researcher]. We close these curtains and make a puppet show.*

27 Amanda: *We count backwards from 5 to 1. Then we do our show.*

28 Both girls then acted out a show, then the big finish - they threw the puppets out. They then
29 took the researcher to different areas, pointing out where they were and were not allowed and
30 what they could play within each section.
31

32
33 The children also used their voices with each other to regulate and ensure conforming to social
34 norms and expectations in the absence of their teachers. For example, when three children were
35 looking through a book together, Bella and Carys started discussing what they saw on one of
36 the pages. When Debbie saw the page, she shrieked in excitement and started talking over
37 Carys who was mid-sentence. Bella then exclaimed loudly:
38

39 *Shhhhhh!!! Carys was talking!!! I'm sorry Carys, go on.*

40
41 In a similar situation, in the construction area, Debbie was making a bed when another child
42 entered the area and started to use the materials to build something else. Debbie said:
43

44 *No, I'm not finished. You're not allowed to do that.*

45
46 Bella then entered and asked Debbie if she was allowed to join. Debbie agreed, and together
47 they continued constructing the bed. Then Carys entered the area and also asked if she could
48 help. Again, Debbie agreed. Debbie then pointed out the sign to the researcher:
49

50 *Work in Progress – So nobody can touch my stuff. Until it's the*
51 *weekend then you can knock it over.*

52
53 *Children using voices to influence their play environment*

54 The following narrative account took place over the course of the first day. An area at the side
55 of the play space held a whiteboard for children to write their suggestions of what they might
56 like the play space to turn into next. The children showed us this as part of the tour on the first
57 day and Amanda explained:
58

59 *This is the board to ask what we want the school to be [the play space in question was*
60 *currently set up as a school]. How do I write shop? SH O P/*

Amanda then asked another child: *What would you like?*

The child answered: *A Café.*

Amanda returned her attention to the researcher: *We write as many as we want [she then wrote CAFÉ on the board]. We find out how many votes there is. You get to have them if there are 15 votes of each you have to get 13. You get to have it where the school is right. We would get to help build it.*

Debbie then added:

We did have a house but then we wanted it turned into a school... Well first it turned into a house then a doctors then a school. We write what we want it to turn into. The teachers go check out that board. What we want is on the board.

Throughout the course of the day, the shop was created. The following researcher's diary note describes the subsequent process:

Through asking questions, listening carefully and valuing responses, the school staff members were able to solicit the children's suggestions and clarify what the children had in mind. The children's interests and suggestions were built on at that moment by responsive members of staff, but the children were leading the way.

2.3 Theme: Amplification of voices

Children involving adults to amplify their voices

In this section, we explore instances where children intentionally try to involve adults to give weight to their voices and views. In the following longer narrative, the child in this situation appears to look towards the adult for support to have her voice heard. When the adult (in this case, the researcher), remains silent, the child decides to use her own voice instead.

Ethan and Debbie were in the construction area, building a house with a selection of large open-ended resources. The roof collapsed. They tried together again.

Ethan: *We need to stable the roof.*

[He began placing bricks against the side of the roof.]

Debbie: *No! I need them [the bricks] for the roof.*

[She then turned to look at the researcher. When the researcher did not respond, she turned back to Ethan]

Debbie: *This will keep it up.*

She then kept placing bricks on the roof, whilst watching Ethan taking bricks and placing them against the side. She appeared to notice that he was taking more bricks than her and glanced at the researcher. She then quickened her pace to keep adding bricks to the top.

The roof fell over again. Immediately Ethan exclaimed: *By accident!*

Debbie: *No No No!*

Debbie again turned to look at the researcher. She waited, and then looked back to Ethan: *We are doing it like this.*

Ethan ignored Debbie and tried to add a chimney. The whole structure fell again.

Debbie: *NO!* [more loudly].

She looked at the researcher to see if she would intervene this time. When the researcher still said nothing, she said to Ethan: *I'll make it right. I don't want a chimney.*

Ethan left and Debbie kept trying until it fell again. She persevered, determined to fix it. She became frustrated.

Researcher: *Would it help if you moved the sides a little?*

1
2
3 Debbie looked at the structure, then smiled and nodded. She began to move it closer.
4 She couldn't quite reach the top, so she looked to the researcher who helped her to
5 reach. Once Debbie had managed, she turned to the researcher and gave a thumbs up.
6 Ethan reappeared and saw the house was completed. He then said to Debbie,
7 *I helped you build your house. You got help.*
8
9

10 On each of these occasions, the child reinforced her original voice message after it became
11 clear that an adult was not going to make her case for her.
12

13 On a similar occasion, one afternoon, as the researcher turned the corner, she saw Fraser, who
14 appeared to be playing happily and chatting at the water tray, with another child. When Fraser
15 saw the researcher, he immediately began to shout, appeared distressed, and said: *He's stealing*
16 *all of the fish! I don't have any!* The other child calmly said: *That's a lie. If you look, I have*
17 *some and you have some fish.*
18

19 *Children involving other children as a way of having their voices heard*

20
21 Throughout the week, it tended to be the case that when the children were the instigators of
22 their play, they used their voices more authoritatively regarding how the play was to unfold
23 and how resources were to be used. The following example takes place again in the construction
24 area:
25

26 Amanda had designed a bridge across two large crates. When children came and
27 requested to join, she directed their play making requests of them such as: *You need to*
28 *wait your turn. You need to go after them. See when you go, you have to wait until the*
29 *other person goes around. Then you walk that way.*
30
31

32 One child accidentally moved the 'slide' from the crates. Amanda became annoyed and
33 said: *No! You moved the slide! You have to fix it! So now you have to wait for me to*
34 *come back with my shoes [the friend then waited]. Copy me now.*
35

36 The children moved across the crates and slid down. The other child knocked over the
37 slide accidentally again. This time, other children joined in admonishing the child,
38 seemingly protective on Amanda's behalf that the slide had once again been knocked
39 down.
40

41 The children continued traversing the bridge but singled out one child who had not
42 wiped her feet correctly before crossing. When the child continued to cross, Amanda
43 repeatedly shouted her name to get her to stop, but the child did not stop. Appearing
44 exasperated, Amanda turned to look at me. When the researcher said nothing, Amanda
45 sighed and put her head in her hands.
46
47
48
49

50 Another example of this was seen when Fraser and Ethan were building a large structure, which
51 they declared was a car garage. Ethan left the play, and later, another child joined and started
52 adding 'shelves' to the construction. Fraser became upset about this and shouted: *No! No! No!*
53 *It's not a shelf! Ethan doesn't want that there. He doesn't want that there!* It is possible that it
54 was Fraser who did not want the shelf added to the construction, but he felt more confident
55 saying it was Ethan who did not want it there instead.
56

57 **3. Second section**

58
59 [We have already referred to](#) John Law, who argues that the method creates the research. In this
60 section we explore the possible casualties of assumptions made about the research process that

1
2
3 data can be collected, processed and then written up as representative of children's voices. We
4 feel the challenge posed by Spyrou (2011, p.152) mentioned earlier and are provoked to inquire
5 what we did not pay attention to, and therefore also left out, because of this approach towards
6 research.
7
8
9

10 Intensities were mentioned in the introduction, and indeed, while physically present in the play
11 area with the children, we experienced such surges of energy and flows. We joined in
12 conversations, we laughed with and commiserated with the children when appropriate. Upon
13 leaving the setting after every day, we both reported experiencing joy, elation, confusion, and
14 these had an impact on the rest of the day. The children let us be with them in their play-based
15 activities. On our part, however, the agenda was clear that we would record what we could
16 capture and then analyse and present it in written form. We transformed and translated our
17 experiences with the children into data that could be understood and interpreted.
18
19
20
21

22 As we reflect on the research process, we become aware of our positioning of ourselves and of
23 children as humanist subjects^[1], where our intention of capturing their activity seems to have
24 transformed the children into beings who are constantly conscious, aware of their utterings and
25 actions and of the agency which these bring with them. In the above section, we have labelled
26 the first emerging theme as 'agency' - presupposing children 'who speak for themselves;
27 subjects capable of knowing others; and subjects in charge of their desires and identifications'
28 (Lather, 2009, p. 17). Despite poststructural paradigms, Mazzei (2013) argues that the
29 'humanist subject creeps back into methodological practices when researchers assert a reflexive
30 stance that assumes a posture of knowing in an attempt at greater self-accounting and
31 authenticity' (p. 733). Such an approach views voice, as Mazzei (2016) writes, as something
32 which is "there" to search for, retrieve and liberate' (p.152). Such an approach ties voice to a
33 subject who 'knows who she is, says what she means and means what she says' (MacLure,
34 2009, p.104 in Mazzei, 2016). This is what Mazzei (2016) terms as 'the problem of how
35 qualitative researchers limit that which constitutes "voices" to what can be listened to,
36 understood, or made sense of as a result of some of those methods' (p.152). Quoting Patti
37 Lather, Mazzei and Jackson (2009) argue that researchers, at times, fall into "too easy" ideas
38 about voices' (Lather, 2007, p. 147 in p.3).
39
40
41
42
43

44 This idea of a 'too easy' voice challenges and questions our assumption about researching
45 children's voices and how the process occurred. The naturalistic expressions of children within
46 their space and time are extrapolated by powerful researchers and given the status of voices -
47 a voice that 'is laden with assumptions' (Mazzei and Jackson, 2016, p. 6). The children we
48 observed expressed themselves in various ways: laughing, crying, looking attentively, singing
49 and speaking, jumping, running, hiding and playing - all this within particular spaces and time.
50 The research seemed to involve translating these expressions into voices, where voices emerge
51 because of thinking about and constructing children as 'rational, individual human subjects'
52 (Mazzei, 2016, p. 152). Thus, voice is an act of translation by rational, individual human
53 subjects (the researchers) on rational, individual human subjects (the children). One can see
54 this process in the researcher's diary note above when it is noted that 'the staff members were
55 able to solicit the children's suggestions and clarify what the children had in mind. The
56 children's interests and suggestions were built on at that moment by responsive members of
57 staff, but the children were leading the way.' In the First Section, we authors use the phrase
58 'original voices', highlighting our desire as researchers to capture 'those voices' and translate
59
60

1
2
3 them into something understandable. The fluidity of the children's expressions given to us
4 researchers by the children themselves in their play is translated by us researchers into
5 understandable moments of children's agency, thus into voices. This idea of the child as a
6 conscious self comes across very clearly in the previous section through quotes presenting data
7 on authentic children's voices. We have presented 'data as if it speaks for itself' (Mazzei and
8 Jackson, 2009, p. 10). The data's transparency assumes and implies children's ability to voice
9 themselves and the adults listening to and understanding such voices.
10
11

12
13
14 Another way in which a linear and closed reading of this type of data can occur is the way in
15 which fragments of observations and conversations are translated into a clean, linear
16 understanding of the data that represents children in particular ways - what Mazzei and Jackson
17 (2016) call 'normative and containable data' (p. 4). Such approaches towards research are
18 totalising; they influence our thinking about what we see and hear, and we can struggle to
19 countenance alternative ways of thinking. Paul Standish (2005) argues 'there is something
20 curiously self-reinforcing, self-perpetuating and, for some, seductive about this entire way of
21 thinking' (p. 57) and 'that many people cannot think outside its terms' (p. 57). We question
22 whether we find ourselves resisting the challenge of thinking otherwise about our research
23 process and how we come to knowledge. Yet we are reminded again by Law (2004) that the
24 method produces reality, and therefore ask ourselves how our process produced our results and
25 conclusions. What has been a casualty of our process?
26
27
28
29

30 Following Gilles Deleuze (1983), bodies are defined as any whole composed of parts, where
31 the reality of these bodies 'is already a quantity of forces' (p. 40). For this paper, we are
32 thinking of the researchers and the research process as bodies, and research is seen as consisting
33 of multiple and complex forces. Drawing upon Deleuze's work, Claire Colebrook (2002)
34 argues, 'there "is" nothing other than a flow of becoming. All 'beings' are just relatively stable
35 moments in a flow of becoming-life' (p. 125). The idea of 'becoming-life' is intriguing and
36 challenging to think about in terms of research. What life is becoming through a research
37 process? This shifts the question from a performative one, 'doing' research in particular ways
38 by following established criteria and norms (which is based on an ontology of the child as a
39 human subject), to engaging in research that assumes an ethical and political dimension (which
40 moves away from that ontological and allows our engagement with forces and intensity). The
41 focus is not on describing how life is, but on how forces function. Rather than saying this is a
42 child who has a voice, we say there are voices, flows, intensities, spaces, play, time. Rather
43 than defining something, through this process and following Deleuze we are suggesting a series
44 of *ands* (see Deleuze and Parnet, 1987). Colebrook (2002) suggests that we see this through
45 Deleuze and Guattari's concept of machine, thus rethinking our understanding of ethical life.
46 The shift involves moving away from a 'reactive ethics' (p. 55) that, as already argued above,
47 works on a presupposed whole, to an 'active ethics' (p.55) that 'is immanent: not the production
48 of something by someone - but production for the sake of production itself, an ungrounded
49 time and becoming' (Colebrook, 2002, p.55). The word immanent comes from the Latin
50 'immanere' - to dwell in, remain. Thus, we can say that researchers dwell in or remain in that
51 moment of production, in that moment of forces and intensities - in that moment of becoming.
52 Colebrook's example to explain the concept of machine captures this idea of immanence:
53
54
55
56

57 Think of a bicycle, which obviously has no 'end' or intention, it only works when it is
58 connected with another 'machine' such as the human body; and the production of these two
59
60

1
2
3 machines can only be achieved through connections. The human body becomes a cyclist in
4 connecting with the machine; the cycle becomes a vehicle (p. 56).

5
6 This poses a great challenge to the way we 'do' and 'understand' research. Here the 'we' does
7 not only refer to us authors but also to the general community of researchers, particularly for
8 the aim of this paper, those researching children's voices. As the wider research community
9 influences the way we construct and do research and through our research, we authors
10 contribute to the larger body of knowledge of what researching children's voices means and
11 implies.

12
13 If we follow Deleuze/Guattari, we argue that the research process leaves researchers open to
14 the intensities they encounter in the research process, without necessarily knowing how to
15 capture them or to write about them. It involves including feelings of being overwhelmed,
16 getting lost (Lather, 2007), which in themselves are part of the "data" and part of the "process".
17 In sensing the research as flows, it is important to note how one affects and is affected (Deleuze
18 & Guattari, 1987, p.xvi): "[A]ffect is not reduced to why not a feeling or emotion but is a
19 powerful force influencing the body's ability to exist" (Semetsky, 2010, p.4). What are those
20 powerful forces influencing the research process's ability to exist? While anyone conducting
21 research can name several of these powerful forces, the relationship between them is
22 fundamental for Deleuze.

23
24 The parts that constitute bodies stand in some definite relation to one another and can be
25 affected by other bodies (Deleuze, 1988, p. 123). The difference between the parts is seen as
26 fundamental as it is that which attracts the other forces. There is a desire for differences (rather
27 than sameness) to be affected by connecting with other forces. For Deleuze, this is an
28 assemblage: a multiplicity of forces coming together, even if at times for only short periods,
29 that allows for new possibilities and becomings to emerge and challenge what is static and
30 linear. The material world needs to be emphasised, which goes beyond the human. A good
31 example is given by Bradley, Sumsion, Stratigos and Elwek (2012) when they describe an
32 infant day-care: 'The assemblage connects a variety of heterogeneous elements. Human and
33 non-human, animate and inanimate, including highchairs, bottles, researchers, technologies,
34 ideas, regulations, food, gravity, and our attempt to enunciate and engage with mealtime' (p.
35 141, in Clark, 2019, p. 238; see also Author, 2013).

36
37 We argue the need to think of research processes as made up of forces connecting with other
38 forces and that the limits of their bodies in particular spaces and time are the limits of this
39 connectivity. The researcher, the research process, and, for this project, the children, are not a
40 unity or self-sufficient whole. Rather, we see the research as a 'multiplicity', as made up of
41 multiple layers and having numerous connections, and where endless 'and, and, and' (Deleuze,
42 1987) allows for various possibilities. When thinking of forces, we do not have to do so in
43 terms of their activities and outcomes. 'Since forces are relations of relative motions and rests,
44 speed and slowness, no relationship between forces can be repeated; the relation is always in a
45 struggle and somewhat temporary' (Mercieca, 2012, p. 45). Mazzei (2013), following Deleuze,
46 argues that the 'human being is an assemblage, an entanglement, a knot of forces and intensities
47 that operate on a plane of immanence and they produce a voice that does not emanate from a
48 singular subject but is produced... in an enactment among research-data-participants-theory-
49 analysis' (p. 733; see also Jackson and Mazzei, 2016). It is 'allowing ourselves' as researchers
50 to deterritorialise our research territories that often are ingrained with predetermined origins of
51 doing research as mentioned earlier. Colebrook (2002) argues that 'deterritorialisation occurs
52 when an event of becoming escapes or detaches from its original territory' (p. 59). What was
53 'escaping' and 'detaching' from the research project that we researchers were engaging in as
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 described in the previous section? Did we 'allow' for such deterritorialisation and did we try
4 to map (see Deleuze, 1985) this?
5

6 There are various examples of such research processes. Interested readers can look at Tom
7 Billington (2000), Patti Lather (1997), Author (2013). We reflect on two examples that
8 challenge us in our journey of becoming researchers.
9

10 The first is the work of Bronwyn Davies' (see 2014, 2016) who, influenced by
11 Deleuze/Guattari's work amongst others, distinguishes between 'emergent listening' practices
12 and 'listening-as-usual' (2016, p. 73). Listening-as-usual implies listening 'in order to fit what
13 we hear into what we already know' (Davies, 2014, p.19). Emergent listening means 'opening
14 the ongoing possibility of coming to see life, and one's relation to it, in new and surprising
15 ways' (Davies, 2014, p.19). We only highlight two points from the powerful work of Davies.
16 The first is that both types of listening often occur simultaneously. Yet it is the 'joyful
17 encounter with another' (Davies, 2014, p. 10) that 'moves the soul' (Deleuze, 1990, p.140 in
18 Davies, 2014, p.10). As researchers, we did say in the first section that being with children
19 moved our souls - that is, we were affected by them. The question is, why do we then close,
20 through research processes, this moving of souls? One of the authors has argued elsewhere the
21 importance of desire to be with children as the force that that moves our souls (Author, 2013b).
22 This leads us to the second point which concerns being open to intensities (for us it was the
23 children with a given space and time) which involves 'being vulnerable to being affected by
24 the other' (Davies, 2014, p.10). How can the research and the identity of researchers allow for
25 vulnerability to be fundamentally part of its very own being, when common practice praises
26 robustness as opposed to vulnerability?
27
28
29

30 The second example is taken from Alison Clark (2019), one of the originators of the mosaic
31 approach, used the work of Deleuze as a new theoretical insight to 'think-again' her seminal
32 participatory paradigm involving the Mosaic approach (Clark, 2017). The phrase 'think-again'
33 is taken from Jean-François Lyotard (1986), who argues that thinking is often seen as wasting
34 time in a post-modern world. Blake et al, in their book *Thinking Again* (1998) promise that
35 their work will not save time as thinking-again is thus to waste time twice over. In 'wasting her
36 time', Clark uses the idea of quilting (see Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Rather than a systematic
37 and neatly rigid designed quilt, Deleuze and Guattari argue for a crazy patchwork quilt, 'which
38 fits together pieces of varying size, shapes, and colour, and plays on the texture of the fabrics'
39 (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 544 in Clark, 2018, p. 239). The quilt is an assemblage of
40 different (leftover and often reused) cloth.
41
42
43

44 Deleuze and Guattari have used several terms to explain assemblages: smooth and striated
45 spaces, the nomadic and sedentary, war machine and the space of the state apparatus. These
46 are not binary spaces and time but entangled and intertwined. Focusing on the smooth and
47 striated spaces, Clark explains that patchwork contains both. Striated spaces is, 'tightly
48 prescribed in the form of the woven fabric with its warp and weft - with a fixed top and bottom,
49 with two elements vertical and horizontal that intertwine' (Clark, 2019, p. 239) and smooth
50 space, 'like felt-with no separation of thread where the fibres are entangled by rolling back and
51 forth. Felt is in the structure infinite, open and unlimited in every direction. Without top or
52 bottom or centre' (Clark, 2019, p. 239). Applying this to her work on the Mosaic approach,
53 Clark explains that the idea of a mosaic tile was adopted as each small part was pieced together
54 to make a whole image (Clark, 2019). However, she argues that 'the name mosaic may also
55 suggest a fixed pattern, cemented down' (Clark, 2017, p.72), which may diminish the flows
56 and intensities which researchers experience when engaging in children's spaces. Clark gives
57 numerous examples from her research projects that can be read through smooth and striated
58 spaces, allowing a play of forces, newness and 'lines of flight' to take place within research, to
59
60

use the words of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). The complexity of this idea is that the newness that emerges from multiple research forces coming together is not predetermined or often known. At the same time, the emphasis should not be solely on having smooth spaces, as this will not sustain life, but on finding ways within research to allow for smooth and striated research spaces to continually come together. This brings us back to Mazzei's question: 'what kind of voices, what kind of being can be thought once voice no longer is present, emanating from a unique, essentialist subject conscious to itself?' (Mazzei, 2016, p. 154).

4. Conclusion

It can be said that we are emulating Clark's quilting example through this paper, as it incorporates both smooth and striated spaces. In the First Section, we have reported on a research project that aimed at listening to children's voices in play-based spaces and times. This research contributes to the Scottish literature on listening to children's voices. This might be seen as a more striated space where we try to 'capture' and represent the children's authentic voices based on assumptions that children are rational, individual human subjects. We have argued that one of the roles of the research process seems to be to translate children as having a voice.

In the Second part of this paper, we have 'thought-again' about the research and questioned such a process, thus bringing in a smooth space in the assemblage of this paper. This has challenged us with questions and also critiqued our understanding of researching with children. As Spyrou argues, the intention is not to engage in reflexivity which has a "paralyzing" effect on empirical research but to engage in "a process which can, potentially help improve research" (2011, p.162). We encourage readers to continue engaging in research while still giving attention to what could be *other* to guard "against the risk of forgetting that this is incomplete" (Author). We draw upon Richard Smith's (2007) suggestion that acknowledging this incompleteness may be a helpful way to engage with research as an 'assemblage where research-data-participants-theory-analysis' (Mazzei, 2013, p.733) are forces constantly interacting and opening and challenging each other. This could include incorporating innovative and creative ways to amplify children's voices, and listening to children's views about the ways in which they might like their voices to be heard.

□ There is extensive literature about the posthuman child and posthuman methodologies. Research that is not carried out within this paradigm often still constructs the child and childhood with a humanistic perspective, as our research has done. As post-humanist methods can be very helpful, at times power relations are not given enough focus. This can be supported by Indigenous and borderland onto-epistemologies literature.

References

- Author: [REDACTED]
- Author: [REDACTED]
- Author: [REDACTED]
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1963) *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaja literatura.

- 1
2
3 Billington, T. (2000) *Separating, Losing and Excluding Children Narratives of Difference*.
4 New York: Routledge.
- 5 Blake, N., Smeyers, P., Smith, R. and Standish, P. (1998) *Thinking Again: Education After*
6 *Postmodernism*. New York: Bergin & Garvey.
- 7 Bradley, B., Sumsion, J., Stratigos, T. and Elwek, S. (2012) Baby Events: Assembling
8 Descriptions of Infants in Family Day Care. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*.
9 13:2, 141-153.
- 10 Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. Sage Publications Ltd.
- 11 Clark, A., & Moss, P. (2005). *Spaces to play: More listening to young children using the*
12 *Mosaic approach*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- 13 Clark, A., & Moss, P. (2011). *Listening to young children: The mosaic approach*. Jessica
14 Kingsley Publishers.
- 15 Clark, A. (2017). *Listening to young children, expanded third edition: A guide to*
16 *understanding and using the mosaic approach*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- 17 Clark, A. (2019) 'Quilting' with the Mosaic approach: smooth and striated spaced in early
18 childhood research. *Journal of Early Childhood Education Research*. 8:2, 236-251.
- 19 Clark, Kjørholt and Moss (2005) *Beyond listening: Children's perspectives on early childhood*
20 *services*. Bristol University Press, Policy Press.
- 21 Colebrook, C., (2002) *Gilles Deleuze*. New York: Routledge.
- 22 Davies, B. (2016) Emergent Listening, in (Eds) Norman K. Denzin and Michael Giardina
23 *Qualitative Inquiry Through a Critical Lens*. New York: Routledge.
- 24 Davies, B. (2014) *Listening to Children. Being and becoming*. New York: Routledge.
- 25 Deleuze, G. (1990) *The Logic of Sense*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 26 Deleuze, G. (1988) *Bergsonism*. New York: Zone Books.
- 27 Deleuze, G. (1985) *Foucault*. Paris: Minui.
- 28 Deleuze, G. (1983) *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. London: The Athlone Press.
- 29 Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus* (B. Massumi, Trans.). London,
30 England: Continuum. (Original work published 1980).
- 31 Deleuze, G. and Parnet, C. (1987) *Dialogues*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam,
32 London: Athlone Press.
- 33 Dockett, S., Einarsdottir, J., & Perry, B. (2011). Balancing methodologies and methods in
34 researching with young children. *Researching young children's perspectives: Debating*
35 *the ethics and dilemmas of educational research with children*, 68-81.
- 36 Education Scotland (2020) *Realising the Ambition: Being Me. National Practice Guidance for*
37 *Early Years in Scotland*. Education Scotland.
- 38 Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. (Eds.). (2012). *The hundred languages of children:*
39 *The Reggio Emilia experience in transformation: The Reggio Emilia experience in*
40 *transformation*. ABC-CLIO.
- 41 Harris, P., & Manatakis, H. (2013). *Children as Citizens: Engaging with the child's voice in*
42 *educational settings*. Routledge.
- 43 Jackson, A. Y., & Mazzei, L. A. (Eds.). (2009). *Voices in qualitative inquiry: Challenging*
44 *conventional, interpretive, and critical conceptions in qualitative research*. London,
45 England: Routledge.
- 46 Jackson, A. Y., & Mazzei, L. A. (2016). Thinking with an agentic assemblage in posthuman
47 inquiry. In C. Taylor & C. Hughes (Eds.), *Posthuman research practices in education*.
48 Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 93-107.
- 49 Komulainen, S. (2007) The Ambiguity of the Child's 'Voice' in Social Research. *Childhood*.
50 14:1, 11-28.
- 51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 Lather, P. (2009) Against empathy, voices and authenticity. In A. Jackson & L. Mazzei (Eds.),
4 *Voices in qualitative inquiry: Challenging conventional, interpretive, and critical*
5 *conceptions in qualitative research* (pp. 97-113). London, England: Routledge.
6 Lather, P. and Smithies, C.(1997) *Troubling The Angels Women Living With Hiv/Aids*. New
7 York: Routledge.
8 Lather, P. (2007) *Getting Lost Feminist Efforts toward a Double(d) Science*. SUNY
9 Publications.
10 Law, J. (2004) *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*. Routledge: London.
11 Lyotard, J. F. (1986) *Le Postmoderne Expliqué Aux Enfants*. Galilée: Paris, France.
12 MacLure, M. (2009). Broken voices, dirty words: On the productive insufficiency of voices.
13 In A. Jackson & L. Mazzei (Eds.), *Voices in qualitative inquiry: Challenging*
14 *conventional, interpretive, and critical conceptions in qualitative research* (pp. 97-
15 113). London, England: Routledge.
16 Mazzei, L. A. (2016) Voice Without a Subject. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*.
17 16:2, 151-161.
18 Mazzei, L. A. (2013) A *Voices without organs: interviewing in posthumanist research*.
19 *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. 26:6, 732-740.
20 Mercieca, D. (2011) *Beyond conventional boundaries: Uncertainty in research and practice*
21 *with children*. Brill Academic.
22 Montgomery, H. (2014), "Participant observation", Clark, A., Flewitt, R., Hammersley, M.,
23 and Robb, M. (Eds.), *Understanding research with children and young people*, Sage
24 Publications Ltd, 122-135.
25 Rinaldi, C. (2021). *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching and learning*.
26 London, England: Routledge.
27 Semetsky, I. (2010) The Fold of Experience, or: Constructing the pedagogy of values.
28 *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 42:4, 476-488.
29 Smith, R. (2007, September). *Romantic thinking for educational research*. Paper presented at
30 European Conference on Educational Research, University of Ghent, Ghent, Belgium
31 Standish, P. (2005) Towards an economy of higher education. *Critical Quarterly*. 47, 53–71.
32 Spyrou, S. (2011) The limits of children's voices: From authenticity to critical, reflexive
33 representation. *Childhood*. 18:2, 151-165.
34 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), (1989)
35 Yogman, M., Garner, A., Hutchinson, J., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R.M., Baum, R.,
36 Gambon, T., Lavin, A., Mattson, G., Wissow, L. and Hill, D.L., 2018. The power of
37 play: A pediatric role in enhancing development in young children. *Pediatrics*, 142(3).
38 Zamani, Z. (2016). 'The woods is a more free space for children to be creative; their
39 imagination kind of sparks out there': Exploring young children's cognitive play
40 opportunities in natural, manufactured and mixed outdoor preschool zones. *Journal of*
41 *adventure education and outdoor learning*, 16(2), 172-189.
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Table 1: Themes from data

Theme one: Agency	Children trying to control their narratives; ensuring routines and social conventions; using voices to influence their play environment.
Theme two: Amplification of voices	Children involving adults to amplify their voices; children involving other children as a way of having their voices heard.

Qualitative Research Journal