Assemblages of desire: Infants, bear caves and belonging in early childhood education and care

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Abstract
Belonging is emerging as an important concept in contemporary early childhood curricula, and calls have recently been made for belonging to be critically interrogated and further theorized. This article explores how belonging was operating for an infant in Australian family day care by looking at an episode that took place between the infant, a group of older children and the educator. The concepts of assemblage and desire from Deleuze and Guattari are used to problematize the episode and see something new. The complex and unresolved nature of belonging and infants' roles and capacities within the politics of belonging are discussed. The paper attempts to stretch our thinking about how belonging operates for infants and the possibilities for theorizing belonging in early childhood education and care.

Keywords
Family day care, infants, belonging, politics of belonging, Deleuze, assemblage

In a world that holds banality to be a virtue and originality a disease, Deleuze never stops asking the question of what other possibilities life holds open to us, or, more specifically, of how we might think about things in ways that would open up new regions for living.

(May, 2005: 3)

Following morning tea, Peter, aged fifteen months, is in the lounge room of his family day care (FDC) home. In the same room are the researcher Tina (using a hand-held video camera), the educator Cheryl, Peter’s three-year-old sister Ruby and three boys aged from 3 to 4 years. Peter has
been attending this FDC setting three days a week since he was around eight weeks old. Six weeks ago, he began taking his first tentative walking steps and is now quite a competent walker.

The four older children have made what they are calling a ‘bear cave’. With Cheryl’s assistance, a sheet has been placed over a child-sized table so that it hangs down to the floor creating an enclosed space. One of the boys has requested torches and Cheryl asks how many they will need. He counts, ‘one, two, three, four, five, we need five’. Cheryl asks, ‘Can Peter use a torch?’ ‘No,’ he answers. ‘No, so just four maybe?’ Cheryl asks. ‘Yep’ he replies. Once the torches are distributed one of the children asks for the lights to be turned off in the room and then all four enter the bear cave. During this time Peter has been at the other end of the room engaged with manipulating a variety of toys. Peter notices the children entering the bear cave and begins to walk across the room towards them before getting down on his knees and attempting to lift the bottom of the sheet (Figure 1).

Cheryl, who is standing back and watching says, ‘Look out, Peter’s coming’. She then asks, ‘Is there room in there for Peter too?’ The children immediately reply, ‘No, no, no!’ Peter lets go of the sheet and turns to look at Cheryl momentarily (Figure 2). Cheryl asks, ‘Is there room in there for all of you, or do we need …?’ At the same time as Cheryl questions the children, Peter begins to cry loudly, turns away from Cheryl and lowers his head (Figure 3). ‘Ooooh noooooo,’ Cheryl says.

Peter quickly stops crying, turns back to the bear cave and begins trying to lift the bottom of the sheet again. The children inside the bear cave are vocalizing loudly and waving their torches around. Peter cannot manage to lift the bottom of the sheet and turns his attention to standing and patting the top of the bear cave. Inside the bear cave, a child’s loud voice says, ‘Ay, go away! Go away, go away from here!’ ‘Now, that doesn’t sound very nice and friendly,’ says Cheryl. The child voice inside continues loudly, ‘Go away, go away, go away’. A second child voice says, ‘Cheryl, can you move Peter?’ Cheryl replies, ‘I don’t know, he’s trying to find a way in’. The first voice continues, ‘Go away please, because I don’t like you any more, aaah!’ By this time Peter is back on his knees and trying to lift the bottom of the sheet again. A child inside the bear cave asks Cheryl again, ‘Can you move Peter?’ A more quiet voice says, ‘I’ll go out and shine it in his eyes’.

Cheryl approaches the bear cave and sits next to it, facing Peter. Peter looks at her and laughs. Cheryl indicates to Peter to watch her. Looking at Peter, she lifts the bottom of the sheet quickly up
and down and says, ‘Boo!’ Peter also tries to lift the bottom of the sheet and look in. It is difficult because some of the children have their feet on the bottom of the sheet. Cheryl repeats the lifting of the sheet, saying ‘Boo!’ One of the boys inside the cave comes out and waves his torch around. Peter looks at the torch and the light moving around the room and reaches for the torch. Cheryl says, ‘Oh that’s what it is, you want the torch do you?’ ‘Yeah, he wants the torch but I’m not letting him have a turn because he might break it. Says the boy.’ Peter loses interest in the torch and attempts to lift the sheet again. Cheryl assists him. The other boy re-enters the bear cave and Peter tries to crawl in also. A child voice inside says, ‘Can you let him out, it’s for special people’. Ruby places her hand on Peter’s forehead and pushes him backward. ‘But why can’t Peter play?’ Cheryl asks. ‘There’s no more room now,’ the voice replies. ‘Okay, what if I bring the other table and make a bigger bear cave? Could Peter come in with you then for a little while?’ Cheryl asks. ‘Yeah, he can go next of us’, replies the child. ‘So I’ll bring the other table and make a bigger bear cave will

Figure 2. Peter looks toward Cheryl. Reproduced with permission from the participants. Copyright 2011 by Infants Lives in Childcare project research team.

Figure 3. Peter cries briefly. Reproduced with permission from the participants. Copyright 2011 by Infants Lives in Childcare project research team.
we?’ asks Cheryl. The child replies, ‘Yeah’. ‘Yeah? Okay, alright so you look after him until I come back with the other table’, says Cheryl (Figure 4).

At this point Peter is inside the bear cave with the other children. While Cheryl is getting the other table the children continue to wave and discuss their torches and vocalize (Figure 5). Peter laughs intermittently, bouncing up and down.

Cheryl returns and makes the bear cave twice its previous size. Peter laughs again. Cheryl looks under the sheet asking, ‘Is he under there? There he is. Can everyone fit now?’ ‘Yeah,’ the children chorus. ‘And where are you?’ Cheryl asks. ‘We’re under here,’ comes the reply. Cheryl again lifts the sheet saying, ‘Aaah-boo!’ Peter and another child can be seen happily peering out of the bear cave (Figure 6). (FDC07-150211-18-TS)

First impressions of the bear cave

I filmed this episode as a research assistant in the Infants’ Lives in Childcare study. The purpose of the study was to try to understand what life is like for infants in child care, ‘to piece together fine-grained details of infants’ experiences, generated from multiple sources of data and interpreted from multiple perspectives’ (Sumsion et al., 2011: 115). In my video work, I made attempts to capture everyday experiences across all aspects of the infants’ day. This was the eighteenth visit I had made to Peter’s FDC home over approximately 7 months and I had become familiar with how things worked at the FDC home, becoming caught up in the rhythm of the daily routines. But every now and then something would happen that seemed significant or out of the ordinary. This was one of those events and I intuitively felt that something interesting, something important, had just occurred. Although I had seen the older children ask for Peter to be moved away from their play before, this was the first time I had seen Peter react to being excluded. Following his reaction the children’s rejection became more vehement and strongly articulated than I had previously seen. Cheryl also did something I had not seen previously, questioning the older children about why they were excluding Peter and attempting to help him achieve his goal of entering the bear cave.

My initial thinking about the episode was quite conventional. I felt that I knew what was happening in this situation. It seemed to me that this was a clear-cut narrative that represented the
infant’s desire to belong, to be accepted by and have a place within the peer group. It demonstrated the difficulties and upset that might be experienced by infants if their belonging to the group was contested by older children. It also represented the role that the educator plays in helping infants to achieve their desire to belong. The beauty of this narrative, it seemed to me, was that it had a happy ending, illustrated by the two smiling faces looking out of the bear cave at the end. It was the educator’s skilful handling of the situation that had led to this happy ending, to Peter achieving his desire of being accepted, of belonging to the group.

In time my role within the study changed to PhD student. This new role led to a particular interest in belonging and an opportunity to work more closely with the video I collected as a research assistant. Still, the bear cave episode continued to interest me. I watched it many times and, after carefully editing it down to what I felt were the ‘highlights’, shared it with other members of the research team as well as at professional workshops. Many agreed that it was a
fascinating episode. Often discussion turned to Peter’s reaction when he was excluded from the bear cave. The way that he looked toward Cheryl before dissolving in tears, the very sound of his cry, evoked a strong response. For me this was exemplified by Cheryl’s comment to me after Peter was finally accepted into the bear cave: *He really wants to be included, doesn’t he.* (FDC07-150211-18-TS)

At other times, discussion turned to the skilful manner in which Cheryl dealt with the situation. Peter’s mother, after watching the episode, stated:

> I think it was interesting that Cheryl didn’t say, ‘You have to include Peter.’… He just gradually got to join the group and no one said to the group,… ‘You have to accept him’. You just widdled him in gently without saying, ‘Stop being mean’, or ‘That’s not nice’. (FDC07-300911-30-TS)

My initial focus was also on the educator’s role as the following note written after the visit makes clear:

> Peter is walking very competently now. He is very active. It is getting harder for Cheryl to negotiate the desires of the older children with those of Peter. The older children often ask for Peter to be taken away or say that he cannot join in. The bear cave footage is really interesting as Peter wants to be a part of the action with the older children but they don’t want him. (VSS-150211-18-TS)

**Thinking differently about the bear cave**

Returning to the bear cave episode in the context of my PhD studies and with the help of Deleuze and Guattari, I began to see that my search for simple answers, for the narrative with a happy ending, was perhaps not very helpful. Was this an example of the ‘transparent narratives that do little to critique the complexities of social life’ described by Jackson and Mazzei (2012: vii)? The data were simply acting to confirm what I thought I already knew, my common sense interpretation of the data. For Deleuze, common sense along with good sense combine in a dogmatic image of thought (May, 2005). May describes common sense as being ‘able to recognize what is obvious’ and good sense as ‘to know one’s way around what is there’ (May, 2005: 76). The dogmatic image of thought offers a model in which we fit our experiences into ‘categories that we already possess’, resulting in thought that is deeply conforming, uncontroversial and even pedestrian (May, 2005: 78). ‘What is a thought which harms no one, neither thinkers nor anyone else?’ (Deleuze, 2004: 172). What was the harm in my common sense interpretation? None, except that perhaps there was room for more. The philosophy of Deleuze, with its focus on ‘and… and… and…’ challenges us to look beyond endings and instead proceed from the middle ‘where things pick up speed’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 25). Philosophy motivates us to ask: ‘How can we see what we did not see before?’ (May, 2005: 22).

Deleuze challenges us to think differently. For Deleuze, the world is not made up of stable entities that can be recognized and accurately represented through thought and language (May, 2005). ‘Everybody knows, no one can deny, is the form of representation and the discourse of the representative’ (Deleuze, 2004: 165). Instead, there is always something more, something that overspills our attempts to pin things down, and to represent accurately. For example, the idea that I can develop a representation that accurately captures the truth of what is really happening for Peter in the bear cave episode is folly. It is precisely this ‘representational trap of trying to figure out what the participants in our study “mean” that leads to simplistic narratives (Mazzei, 2013: 107). This is not to say that attempts at understanding are not important and useful. The truth, however, does not matter to Deleuze, instead it is ‘the remarkable, the interesting, and the important that matter’
It is important to recognize that there will always be something more that has escaped representation. Might there be more to the bear cave episode than I originally thought? Something more remarkable, interesting or important?

Seeking problematizing thought is a way to move beyond the representational thought of good sense and common sense, which ‘merely capture the surface of things’ (May, 2005: 82). These are not problems that seek particular solutions, but problems that open up ‘fields of discussion, in which there are many possible solutions, each of which captures something, but not everything, put before us by the problem’ (May, 2005: 83). One way to achieve such problematizing thought in research is through philosophical concepts such as Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage and desire. For Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 16) ‘[a]ll concepts are connected to problems without which they would have no meaning’.

**Belonging in early childhood**

This paper takes another look at the bear cave episode. It will show how I was able to look differently at the episode and see something new by turning to the concepts of assemblage and desire. It is an example of what Olsson (2009) describes as data and a concept experimenting together, ‘to awaken something within each other, and bring forward something yet not known’ (Olsson, 2009: 98). It is an attempt to stretch not only our thinking about how belonging can work for infants in FDC, but also the possibilities for theorizing belonging within early childhood education and care (ECEC) more generally.

New ways of thinking are particularly relevant in relation to belonging in ECEC. The importance of belonging in early childhood is reflected in contemporary ECEC curriculum such as Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996) from New Zealand, Aistear (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009) from Ireland and Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) (Department of Education Employment and Workforce Relations, 2009). Concerns have been raised with regard to the use of belonging in the EYLF and its potential to be romanticized and simplified in ECEC (Sumsion and Wong, 2011). Sumsion and Wong (2011: 30) suggest that there is an ‘elasticity’ in the way belonging is used in the EYLF that invites critical interrogation and rigorous development from multiple theoretical perspectives. Peers and Fleer (2014) discuss the inadequacy of the everyday sense that is attributed to belonging in the EYLF. They acknowledge that belonging is not only an everyday concept, but also a theoretical or philosophical one, and call for further theorization of belonging to ensure the intent of the EYLF is realized (Peers and Fleer, 2014).

**Deleuzian belonging, desiring infant**

‘There are only different politics of assemblages, even with children: in this sense everything is political’ (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006: 72). I have previously argued for the productiveness of Yuval-Davis’ (2006) notion of the politics of belonging in addressing belonging in early childhood research (Stratigos et al., 2014). The politics of belonging recognize that belonging is a political process in which the boundaries of group membership are produced and reproduced (Nagel, 2011). It acknowledges struggles around who belongs and what belonging involves (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Sumsion and Wong (2011) expanded on the politics of belonging with their three axes of belonging – categorization, resistance and desire, and performativity. The three axes of belonging focus on how belonging operates and raise questions such as: Who can belong? Who is excluded? What are the terms of belonging? Who determines the terms of belonging? How permeable are the boundaries of belonging? How might externally imposed categorizations
of belonging and positioning be resisted, contested, disrupted or subverted? How is belonging and its associated subject positions performed through repeated conventions and practices (Sumtion and Wong, 2011)?

The work of Deleuze and Guattari has particular relevance for such questions. Deleuze (1995: 25) explains that he and Guattari were ‘interested in the circumstances in which things happen: in what situations, where and when does a particular thing happen, how does it happen, and so on’. Giugni (2011) argues that belongings in ECEC are produced through an assemblage of the human and ‘more than’ human including the places, people and purpose of the early childhood centre. I suggest that thinking belonging through assemblage has the potential to embrace the complexity of belonging while focusing on the politics of belonging in ECEC, just as DeLanda (2006) has argued for the usefulness of assemblage in addressing social entities in general.

For Deleuze and Guattari, assemblage is closely linked with desire. ‘Assemblages are passionate, they are compositions of desire… there is no desire but assembling, assembled, desire’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 399). Their conceptualization of desire, however, is radical. Deleuze and Guattari (2004: 26) suggest that ‘the traditional logic of desire is all wrong from the very outset’ because it ‘causes us to look upon it as primarily a lack’. Instead, desire for Deleuze and Guattari is a ‘productive force that forms relations between different aspects of an assemblage’ (Ringrose and Coleman, 2013: 125). Within ECEC, such a conceptualization of desire re-imagines the young child not as needy or lacking, but instead the child’s desire is viewed as a productive force that enables them to influence their own life within ECEC (Olsson, 2009). An infant’s desire has the potential to be revolutionary because ‘every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 126).

The bear cave as an assemblage of desire

The politics of belonging helps us to see that belonging ‘is not something that is achieved with any kind of finality; it is constantly in process, being enacted, contested and negotiated in the various times, places and groups in which we live our daily lives’ (Stratigos et al., 2014: 178). Within ECEC, therefore, a preoccupation with the binary logic that a child belongs or does not belong is no longer relevant because belonging is characterized by movement. Sumtion and Wong (2011) describe how belonging is an alluring term that speaks seductively to us. We want to feel that a young child has achieved a sense of belonging in ECEC, and we want to help the child whose belonging, we believe, is at risk. When we view belonging as constantly at work within assemblages of desire, however, the focus is no longer on achieving the final goal, or the happy narrative, but upon the dynamic movements of belonging. A more sustained engagement with the bear cave data reveals that the smiling faces looking out of the bear cave do not represent a final acceptance, or belonging, of Peter and in fact the situation is far from resolved. Peter spends approximately 3.5 minutes in the bear cave with the other four children before leaving voluntarily. Over the next approximately half hour, the children play in and out of the bear cave. Ruby decides to make her own bear cave under another table in the room from which she overtly excludes all of the other children. Peter moves around the room, interacting with Cheryl and a variety of toys. Inevitably, however, it seems that Peter’s desire draws him back to the bear caves over and over again. During this time Peter attempts to re-enter the bear caves nine times. The dynamics of the assemblage appear to have shifted again, however, and on each of these occasions he is denied access, either by the other children or Cheryl.

How, then, is belonging at work within the assemblage of desire of the bear cave? Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe two axes of an assemblage, each axis having two aspects: content and expression on the horizontal axis, and (re)territorialization and deterritorialization on the vertical.
Content and expression describe the kinds of roles that parts of the assemblage might play (DeLanda, 2006). The content aspect is ‘a machinic assemblage of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 88). Within the bear cave episode, such aspects include the bear cave made up of a table and sheet, torches, darkened room, the bodies of the children and educator.

The bear cave itself creates a territory and places Peter, literally, on the inside or the outside. Cheryl’s suggestion of creating a physically larger territory gives the impression of having resolved the problem at first. As the extended data reveals, however, the problem was never the size of the territory, but whether the children would accept Peter as belonging within the territory. By framing her initial question to the children around whether there was room in the bear cave for Peter; Cheryl placed the spotlight on the size of the territory. By suggesting that enlarging the bear cave might resolve the problem, Cheryl made it difficult, at that moment, for the children to exclude Peter. Indeed, it is possible that the children may have felt that allowing Peter into the bear cave was a reasonable penalty for the reward of a larger bear cave. Later, Peter repeatedly attempts to return to the inside of the bear cave territory. Cheryl responds by repeatedly, physically moving Peter to the outside. The children also respond to Peter’s attempts to re-enter the bear cave, for example by lifting the sheet to show him the way out, using feet to push him in the direction of the exit, or shining torches directly into his eyes presumably in an attempt to repel him from the bear cave.

Returning to the questions that Yuval-Davis’ (2006) politics of belonging and Sumson and Wong’s (2011) axes of belonging help us to ask, this machinic aspect of the assemblage can be seen as a physical struggle over territory or categorization: who belongs, who is excluded and who gets to decide. In an interview with Parnet, Deleuze asks: ‘What is my position in the pack? Am I outside the pack, alongside, inside, at the centre? All these things are phenomena of desire. That’s what desire is’ (Boutang, 2011). Peter’s determination to achieve his desire of being inside is apparent by his practice of repeatedly returning to the bear cave regardless of the response from the children or educator. It is important to remember that Peter’s body is a newly walking one. Hickey-Moody (2013: 274) argues that in Deleuze’s writing the child is presented as an ‘enfleshed desiring-machine’. The child’s body is a corporeal model of experimental life and subjectivity and can become a site of resistance and rebellion (Hickey-Moody, 2013: 275). Peter’s new ability to walk confidently affords him the capacity to resist being positioned as belonging outside the bear cave.

The expressive aspect of an assemblage is described as ‘a collective assemblage of enunciation, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 88). This component may include language; bodily expression; the way things are said and the choice of things which are discussed; expressions of solidarity, whether linguistic or behavioural; as well as expressions of hierarchy and acceptance of authority such as obeying rules (DeLanda, 2006). Olsson (2009: 148) explains that [i]n an assemblage the involved bodies are either expanded or restricted in their capacity to act. This is registered as “feelings”’. Peter’s look toward Cheryl followed by his crying when he is initially rejected from the bear cave can be conceived of as an expression of his feelings, of affect. Affect to Deleuze ‘is what happens to us when we feel an event’, the response an experience prompts (Colebrook, 2002: xix). My initial understanding of Peter’s affect, his crying, was that it signified him as needy. The concept of desire, however, helped me to see it in a new way, as a powerful and productive means for Peter to influence his world. Hickey-Moody (2013: 273) describes the Deleuzian child as a ‘vector of affect: an activator of change’. The child ‘effects change through affect’ (Hickey-Moody, 2013: 277). Peter’s affect appears to prompt Cheryl to change her approach to Peter and the older children, at least momentarily. She describes her usual position as follows:
Sometimes he’s interested in exploring what they are exploring but then there’s a lot of, ‘He’s disrupting our play, can you move him away?’ I’ve tried to instil that, so rather than having them pushing him out of the way or something like that for them to call me and I will move him. (FDC07-021110-11-TS)

Following Peter’s reaction to being excluded from the bear cave, however, Cheryl appears to change her approach and instead question the older children about their rejection of Peter and help him to find a place within the bear cave. Peter was not always excluded by the older children. They often played alongside and interacted with Peter, at times inviting him into their play. The older children, however, typically had a lot of control over Peter’s level of involvement, particularly before he was walking. In the bear cave, however, the assemblage of desire appeared to be working differently, partly because of Peter’s affect, his power to mobilize Cheryl to assist him to achieve his desire.

In terms of the politics of belonging, Peter’s affect is an example of Sumsion and Wong’s (2011) *resistance and desire* axis of belonging at work: how might externally imposed categorizations of belonging and positioning be resisted, contested, disrupted or subverted? The effect of Peter’s affect, however, was short-lived as Cheryl eventually appeared to revert back to her original strategy of removing Peter from the bear caves. This repeated practice illustrates Sumsion and Wong’s (2011) axis of *performativity*: how belonging and its associated subject positions are performed through repeated conventions and practices.

The territorial dimensions of an assemblage relate to the processes in which the components are involved (DeLanda, 2006). Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 88) describe the territorial aspect of assemblage as having ‘*territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away’. Territorializing processes stabilize the assemblage by increasing its homogeneity or more clearly defining its boundaries (physical or otherwise), whereas deterritorializing processes destabilize these boundaries and increase heterogeneity within the assemblage (DeLanda, 2006). In the bear cave, the actions and expressions of the assemblage can be seen as territorializing Peter as other, as belonging on the outside of the bear cave territory. For example the child’s statements ‘it’s for special people’ and ‘he can go next of us’ suggest that for the older children, Peter is different and as such his place is not with them. Perhaps he will be allowed to be next to them so that their separate territory can be maintained. Presumably the children’s reasoning for excluding Peter is that he is much younger. For example, on a previous occasion when Peter had attempted to enter a similar structure in the outside environment, Ruby had clearly articulated the reason why he should be excluded: ‘No babies allowed’ (FDC07-021110-11-TS). In addition, Cheryl’s words, for example in the discussion of how many torches were needed, ‘Can Peter use a torch?’ and ‘Look out, Peter’s coming,’ also territorialize Peter as other. Peter’s territory, therefore, was on the outside. It is impossible to know from the data whether Peter feels that he is other, or has an awareness of his positioning as other beyond that he is not welcome in the bear cave. It is possible to conceive, however, that Peter may be attempting a deterritorialization in the bear cave assemblage: to show that with his new walking he is no longer a baby; and a reterritorialization as someone who belongs with the older children, on the inside of the bear cave.

In terms of the politics of belonging, the territorial aspects of the assemblage represent Sumsion and Wong’s (2011) *categorization* axis. The category of baby, of being other than the older children, is externally imposed upon Peter. Of course, Peter is significantly younger than the other children and, at times, it is important for the children to understand this. For example, Cheryl explained that when Peter had begun crawling, she had enlisted the children’s help to ensure his safety. The older children were able to open the back door, however they had to be careful of Peter because there were steps immediately outside. She explained the risk to them and described how the children took the responsibility on: ‘*As a group we were all watching out for Peter*’ (FDC07-300911-30-TS). She
went on to explain that the children had taken time to adjust to the change in boundaries once Peter was able to walk and negotiate the stairs safely. The limits of belonging in the bear cave for Peter lie not in being a baby, but in ‘being-called’ a baby (Agamben, 1993, as cited in Probyn, 1996: 24). Deleuze explains that desire does not want to be ‘oppressed, exploited, enslaved, subjugated’ (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006: 71). It is an ‘immanent revolutionary process’ (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006: 71). As such, Peter’s desire may be seen as attempting to construct a revolution, a deterritorialization of his categorization as other and reterritorialization as someone who belongs within the bear cave.

Conclusions

I cannot deny that there is another assemblage at work here, the research assemblage that includes me as research assistant, PhD student and writer, even this paper and you the reader. My own desire has been flowing through this assemblage: the desire to say something interesting about belonging, about infants and FDC, the desire to interpret and find meaning in the bear cave episode. Words like meaning and interpretation, however, no longer work when Deleuze and Guattari are brought to bear in research (Mazzei, 2013). In an interview with Parnet, Deleuze stated that his concept of desire was about ‘telling people: don’t go get psychoanalysed, never interpret, go experience/experiment with assemblages, search out assemblages that suit you’ (Boutang, 2011). This paper is the result of an experiment with a research assemblage that brought together the data, the researcher and concepts from Deleuze and Guattari. Key to the concept of assemblage is that it is not a static term, ‘it is not the arrangement or organization but the process of arranging, organizing, fitting together’ (Wise, 2005: 77). When heterogeneous elements come together in particular ways to form an assemblage, they do something, express something, function in a particular way – the properties of the assemblage emerge from the interactions between the parts (DeLanda, 2006). The arrangement and interactions of this research assemblage afforded the possibility of viewing the bear cave data in a different way from the obvious or common sense, leading to new possibilities for thinking about infants and belonging.

The new thinking that is afforded by a theoretical lens such as assemblage and desire can assist researchers and educators to move away from the simplistic, everyday and romanticized sense that Sumsion and Wong (2011) and Peers and Fleer (2013) warn against in their discussions of belonging in ECEC. Sumsion and Wong (2011: 39) advocate for the rigorous development of belonging, which they believe has a powerful ‘potential for radical transformations of early childhood settings’ and ‘building a more socially just society’, from multiple theoretical perspectives. Thus new thinking such as that afforded by Deleuze and Guattari is important for both researchers who attempt to further understandings about ECEC and educators who work with concepts such as belonging on a daily basis.

I do not pretend that this is the only way or the best way to view the data, but just another way. The bear cave episode might be called a moment ‘frozen in time’ forever captured on a video tape, a computer,… but when it is brought into contact with the other elements of the research assemblage, all elements of the assemblage are transformed. Not only am I as researcher transformed, and therefore the thinking I do and the writing that I produce, but also the data and the very concepts themselves appear different somehow as all the elements of the assemblage interact. This transformation means that a different bear cave narrative can be constructed, one that is different to the happy narrative that began this paper. The stories that research can tell will always be mediated by the methods and theoretical perspectives chosen (Stratigos et al., 2013). The research narrative that I construct does not change Peter’s experience of the bear cave in that moment; however, it does afford researchers and educators in ECEC new possibilities for thinking about infants and belonging more generally. Deleuze
suggested that writing should not aim solely to archive individual affairs, but that these affairs should have a relationship with and help us to grasp something else (Boutang, 2011).

The research assemblage revealed the dynamic movements of belonging as something that is complex, political and always unresolved. It moved the focus away from the binary logic of belonging/not belonging and instead revealed the role played by objects, bodies, words and repeated actions in the continuous politics of belonging. The concept of desire afforded a vision of the infant’s role and capacities within the complex negotiations of belonging in ECEC. May (2005) describes the purpose of philosophy as not to settle things, but to disturb them. I hope that this research assemblage goes beyond the bear cave and disturbs thinking about infants and belonging more broadly.

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Note
1. Family day care, also known as family child care and childminding, is early childhood education and care that takes place for a small group of children in the educator’s home.

References


**Author biography**

Tina Stratigos is a PhD student at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, Australia. She has worked as an educator in preschool, primary school and outside school hours settings. She is completing her PhD as part of the Infants’ Lives in Childcare study with a particular focus on how belonging operates for infants within family day care settings. Tina is interested in the use of visual methodologies and working with Deleuzian concepts in her research.