Processes of categorisation and the politics of belonging in early childhood education and care: An infant’s experience in multi-age family day care

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Abstract
Belonging is emerging as an important concept for early childhood education and care. However, it is one that requires further theorisation beyond everyday or romanticised understandings. The politics of belonging provides a potentially productive focus for thinking about belonging in early childhood education and care because of its attention to how belonging in all its complexity works. A key aspect of the politics of belonging is processes of categorisation, or how social categories influence who does and does not belong, who decides and on what basis. In this article, the author complicates the notion of categorisation by bringing it into an encounter with the concepts of lines and segmentarity from Deleuze. The author then uses these concepts to look at video data of an infant aged eight to nine months in family day care, in an effort to illustrate how processes of categorisation, lines and segmentarity were at work. The data suggests that the category of ‘baby’ played a complex and dynamic role in the infant’s experiences at family day care. Nevertheless, the encounter between the data and Deleuze’s concepts suggests that categories cannot ever tell the whole story, and that looking for situations in which categories no longer appear to work, in which they leak and rupture, might lead to new understandings about how belonging works in different early childhood education and care contexts.

Keywords
Belonging, Deleuze, early childhood education, family day care, infants, politics of belonging

In this article, I continue my project of attempting to open up new possibilities for thinking about belonging in early childhood education and care (ECEC) (see also Stratigos, 2015; Stratigos et al., 2014). In psychology, belonging has been theorised as a fundamental human need and motivator of...
behaviour since the 1930s (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). In early childhood, the importance of relationships with others for the health and well-being of infants and young children has been acknowledged for some time – for example, by Bowlby’s (1969) attachment theory and Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) ecological systems theory. More recently, in ECEC a specific interest in belonging has emerged (Stratigos et al., 2014). Belonging plays a central role in early childhood curriculum documents such as Te Whāriki from New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 1996) and Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (Department of Education, 2009). This has stimulated questions about the role of belonging in documents such as the Early Years Learning Framework (Peers and Fleer, 2013; Sumsion and Wong, 2011). Peers and Fleer (2013) and Sumsion and Wong (2011) argue that, for belonging to be a useful concept in ECEC, it is important to move beyond everyday or romanticised notions towards more critical, reflective and theoretical understandings of belonging.

For the purposes of this article, I focus on one particular aspect of belonging – processes of categorisation, as conceptualised by Yuval-Davis (2011) and Sumsion and Wong (2011). Processes of categorisation refer to the ways in which social categories influence who does and does not belong, who decides and on what basis (Sumsion and Wong, 2011). I draw on video data collected with an infant, Peter, in family day care (FDC), and bring this into an encounter with concepts from the philosopher Deleuze. In looking at how belonging and processes of categorisation were at work for Peter at FDC through a Deleuzian lens, I hope to open new possibilities for thinking about belonging and categorisation in ECEC more generally. Thus, I hope to contribute to an emerging research conversation about the ways in which belonging works and might be put to work in ECEC.

The article begins with an outline of the research context. Next, I introduce Yuval-Davis’s (2011) conceptualisation of belonging as a politics of belonging, with a particular focus on processes of categorisation. The notion of categorisation is further examined in terms of its relevance in ECEC. I then begin to trouble received understandings of categorisation by bringing it into an encounter with the philosophy of Deleuze, in particular his concept of lines and segmentarity as developed with co-authors Parnet (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006) and Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Next, I put these ideas to work in relation to the data with the aim of opening up new regions for thinking about categorisation and belonging in ECEC. Finally, I conclude with thoughts on the usefulness of processes of categorisation and Deleuze’s concepts of lines and segmentarity for thinking about the politics of belonging in ECEC.

**Research context**

This article stems from my doctoral studies, which are part of the Infants’ Lives in Childcare study. The broad aim of the Infants’ Lives in Childcare study was to attempt to understand what life is like for infants (0–18 months) in ECEC, and my doctoral research is particularly focused on belonging and how it works, or the politics of belonging. I have taken a case study approach, focusing on one infant. Peter was 8 months old when I began visiting him at FDC and 18 months at the end of the data collection. I made 26 visits to Peter’s FDC over 10 months and collected approximately 24 hours of video, with accompanying reflective notes. Short segments of video were also captured on baby cam, a head-mounted camera worn by Peter. I shared select segments of the video with Peter’s parents and his educator, Cheryl, and recorded the discussion this stimulated.

Like many other FDC settings, Peter’s was a multi-age one. Peter spent most of his time at FDC with up to four other children aged between two and four. Towards the end of the data collection, another boy, who was only 11 weeks older than Peter, joined the group one day a week. Peter attended FDC three days a week, and his older sister, Ruby, shared the FDC setting with him on one of those days. Most of the children at FDC were boys, with some days exclusively male and
only one girl attending on other days. Peter, like his sister before him, had been attending Cheryl’s FDC since he was eight weeks old. The wide age range of the children, smallness of the groups and family groupings often found in FDC mean that it provides a potentially productive focus for research into belonging (Stratigos et al., 2014) and, in particular, categorisation.

**Processes of categorisation and the politics of belonging**

In this study, belonging is recognised as being complex, dynamic, diverse and multidimensional (Stratigos et al., 2014). I draw on the notion of the politics of belonging as it is conceptualised by Yuval-Davis (2011). The politics of belonging provides a useful focus for ECEC research because rather than focusing on a sense of belonging which is subjective and can give the impression of being fixed, the politics of belonging focuses on processes of belonging, or how belonging in all its complexity and diversity works (Stratigos et al., 2014). Yuval-Davis (2011: 18) argues that the ‘politics of belonging involves not only constructions of boundaries but also the inclusion or exclusion of particular people, social categories and groupings within these boundaries by those who have the power to do this’. An important aspect of Yuval-Davis’s conceptualisation of the politics of belonging, therefore, is the notions of social categories, particular people and groupings.

Yuval-Davis (2011) uses the term ‘social location’ to refer to the idea that a person belongs to a particular group based on, for example, their gender, race, class or age. According to Yuval-Davis (2011: 13), these social categories construct the ‘grids of power relations’ at work within a group and have ‘certain positionalities along axes of power that are higher or lower than other such categories’. It is the intersection of and relationships between social categories that place an individual at a particular location on the ‘grids of power relations’. Similarly, Sumsion and Wong’s (2011) cartography of belonging identifies processes of categorisation as an important aspect of how belonging operates. They describe processes of categorisation as related to notions of insiders and outsiders, inclusion and exclusion, and power relations. While Sumsion and Wong (2011) and Yuval-Davis (2011) draw attention to the importance of processes of categorisation in the politics of belonging, they also acknowledge that categories may be contested, challenged and resisted.

Like other social settings, in ECEC, categories may play an important role in the politics of belonging. Entering ECEC is often children’s first experience of diversity and intensive contact with people outside their family (Vandenbroeck, 1999). Children’s understandings of the groups to which they do and do not belong begin to develop, raising questions about themselves and others (Vandenbroeck, 1999). Nutbrown and Clough (2009: 195) describe young children as being ‘keenly interested in difference’. Children’s understandings of differences and similarities can provide the basis for inclusion and exclusion, impacting on belonging. Woodhead and Brooker (2008) argue that the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are learned early in life, and the fundamental need to belong may result in the rejection of others. Nutbrown and Clough (2009) provide a list of 22 potential areas of inclusion/exclusion in ECEC settings, including age, disability, obesity, language and ethnicity. Australian research into belonging conducted in ECEC with three- and four-year-old children suggests a number of categories at work amongst the children, including gender, skin colour, culture, ethnicity (Skattebol, 2005; Taylor, 2007; Taylor and Richardson, 2005), stage of development and age (Skattebol, 2006). For children who are ‘different’, therefore, experiencing a sense of belonging may be more difficult (Kernan, 2010). It is important to note, however, that ‘[y]oung children have their own particular views of inclusion and belonging which are often different from those held by adults’ (Nutbrown and Clough, 2009: 202). In addition, the social categories that are relevant, as well as the boundaries and meanings of social locations, will be different in different groups, times and places (Yuval-Davis, 2011).
Yuval-Davis (2011) argues that the rendering visible of the social categories that affect different people in different contexts is crucial. An emerging research conversation about belonging in ECEC suggests that preschool-aged children are aware of and participate in the politics of belonging and processes of categorisation. However, little similar research has been conducted with infants or in FDC settings (Stratigos et al., 2014). We know little, therefore, about how processes of categorisation and the politics of belonging operate for infants in multi-age settings such as FDC (Stratigos et al., 2014). The literature provides some clues. Some conceptualisations of belonging suggest that a sense of fitting in based on a perception of similar or complementary characteristics is an essential aspect of belonging (Hagerty et al., 1996; Mahar et al., 2012). Such conceptualisations suggest that, ‘[i]f the individual does not possess or is unable to achieve similar or complementary characteristics, then their sense of belonging may be at risk, regardless of whether they feel that they are valued and involved in the group’ (Stratigos et al., 2014: 177). It could be proposed, therefore, that in a multi-age setting such as FDC, infants may experience barriers to belonging because of their difference from the other children in terms of their age, communication skills, size and physical abilities. This proposal is supported by Skattebol’s (2006) research with four-year-old children, which argues that perceptions of age and associated notions of maturity, physical size and posture are important aspects of young children’s membership claims to particular powerful categories. Skattebol (2006: 509) suggests that the children in her research may have been aware that there were certain ‘privileges of age’, and argues that notions of development and becoming older may be particularly important to young children. Although the youngest children were not a focus of Skattebol’s (2006) research, she briefly mentions that they were, on occasion, excluded by the older children because they were ‘little’. In addition, Singer and de Haan’s (2011) research with Dutch two- and three-year-old children in ECEC found that conflict around who can join in was the most common type of conflict between older and younger children. They also found that the smaller the age difference between children, the more likely they would become friends. Further research is required to help shed light on how processes of categorisation work for infants in multi-age ECEC. Next, I turn to the work of Deleuze in an attempt to begin troubling the notion of categorisation.

Deleuze and categorisation

According to Deleuze, much of our thinking assumes that the world is a stable entity which we can accurately conceive and represent in thought, knowledge and language (May, 2005). Deleuze (2004) critiques this kind of thinking, which he calls the ‘dogmatic image of thought’. Categories are a key aspect of the dogmatic image of thought because they allow us to organise what we perceive in a stable manner and ‘retain the integrity of strict borders, clearly marked boundaries’, between things (May, 2005: 74). May provides the following example of how the dogmatic image of thought works in relation to recognising a cow:

The cow is a cow and nothing else. Its image is the image of that cow and nothing else. The category is that of ‘cow’ and nothing else. And at every point, what is passed along is what is there and nothing else. (May, 2005: 75)

Such thinking conforms to the familiar as we fit our experiences into pre-existing categories (May, 2005).

Deleuze encourages us to abandon our old ways of thinking and be open to the possibility that there is more to the world than the dogmatic image of thought allows (May, 2005). This does not mean that we should entertain the notion that a cow may, in fact, be a house or a flower, but that
the cow may be more, might overspill what the category of cow, or any other category we may apply to it, allows. May describes it as follows:

Suppose we consider the possibility that there is more to our world than we can perceive, and more than we can conceive. Suppose the world overflows the categories of representation that the dogmatic image of thought imposes upon it. This is not to say that our particular categories are lacking something that other, better categories would give us. Our imagination must go further than that. We need to consider the possibility that the world … outruns any categories we might seek to use to capture it. (May, 2005: 81)

From a Deleuzian perspective, categorisation is problematic. No category is stable and no category can adequately capture the complexity of the world. Deleuze might seem an unusual choice, then, for research that is interested in processes of categorisation. Deleuze is not entirely dismissive of categories, however. Indeed, Deleuze accepts that categories are at work in the social world. For Deleuze, categories are a means for society to make sense of the complexity and variability of the social world:

Bodies are not static entities but exist in a state of continuous change. In order to make sense of this, bodies become stratified; arranged within grid-like categories such as sex, gender, colour, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, age and ability. Such categories can be extremely useful, for they create a stable sense of ‘self’ and enable the production of the thinking, speaking, political subject. Yet they are also limiting, for they reduce the body to particular modes of being and interacting; affecting not only how the body is understood, but its potentiality; its future capacity to affect and be affected. (Hickey-Moody and Malins, 2007: 5)

Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007: 5) go on to suggest that ‘identity categories might conceal as much as they express’, and that individuals ‘cannot but exceed the identity categories which seek to contain them’. Deleuze’s philosophy affords the possibility of acknowledging the categories at work in the social world while also opening the possibility that there is more at work than the notion of categories might allow. Deleuze does not deny that social categories are politically relevant, but he does deny ‘their exclusive right to determine our political thought’ (May, 2005: 135).

In this article, I attempt to look in a critical way at processes of categorisation as they occurred for Peter at FDC. I do so by bringing the data into an encounter with Deleuze’s philosophy. In my previous work, I have conceptualised the politics of belonging as an assemblage (see Stratigos, 2015). In this article, I look particularly at the lines that Deleuze and Parnet (2006) argue are always at work in any assemblage. I draw on Deleuze’s discussion of lines and segmentarity in Dialogues II, with co-author Parnet (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006), and A Thousand Plateaus, with co-author Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). I will now briefly introduce Deleuze’s concept of lines before putting it to work in relation to the data.

Deleuze and Parnet (2006: 93) begin their discussion of lines by stating: ‘Whether we are individuals or groups, we are made up of lines’. They go on to describe three types of lines that are tangled up together in the politics of the social world. The first kind of line is characterised by rigid segmentarity – ‘they speak to us, saying: “Now you’re not a baby any more”; and at school, “You’re not at home now”’ (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006: 93). Rigid lines work by binaries ‘of social classes; of sexes, man–woman; of ages, child–adult; of races, black–white’, and ‘cut us up in all sorts of directions’ (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006: 96). The rigid line is made up of recognisable categories (May, 2005), such as those that might be at work in the politics of belonging in ECEC – for example, child–baby, boy–girl, walker–crawler. According to May (2005: 135), these lines are ‘not rigid in the sense that nothing can get past them’. However, ‘the fiction that there are only segmentary lines prevents us from seeing other ways of living’ (May, 2005: 136).
The second kind of line is still segmentary, but in a more supple way. These supple lines ‘trace out little modifications, they make detours, they sketch out rises and falls’ (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006: 93). Because this line is supple, ‘[m]any things can happen on this second kind of line – becomings, micro-becomings’ (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006: 93). Rather than the cut of the rigid line, the supple line is associated with a crack that can cause categories to leak. The supple line is more ambiguous and ‘shakily drawn’, vascillating between the rigid line and the line of flight (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 201). It is a ‘compromise’ that ‘seems to resist the cut [rigid] line while still fearing it will sink into the rupture [line of flight]’ (De Miranda, 2013: 116).

Deleuze and Parnet (2006: 94) describe a third kind of line as being ‘even more strange: as if something carried us away, across our segments [rigid lines], but also across our thresholds [supple lines], towards a destination which is unknown, not foreseeable, not pre-existent’. This is the line of flight that is associated with rupture. According to Blaise (2013: 191), ECEC is ‘criss-crossed by lines of flight and it is on these lines where something new, including the acceptance and production of difference, can be made’. Lines of flight happen in ECEC as children interact with each other, ideas, materials and adults (Blaise, 2013). Because the line of flight is new, we cannot know what it might look like before it happens.

For Deleuze, no line is better or worse than the others. It is not the case that the line of flight is good and the rigid line is bad. Instead, they each have their advantages and their dangers. For example, Deleuze and Parnet (2006: 103) argue that, although the rigid line is necessary because ‘it is so much a part of the conditions of life; including our organism and our very reason’, it is also dangerous because it is so reassuring that it calls us to retreat, to revert back to the known. Likewise, the line of flight not only runs the danger of reverting back to a rigid or supple line, but it also holds the potential of destruction ‘in spite of its message of joy’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 205). Deleuze encourages us to look for the lines at work in the social world. I now turn to the data and attempt to look for the lines at work in the politics of belonging for Peter at FDC.

**Tangled lines**

For the purposes of this article, I have chosen to draw on 10 hours of video footage collected when Peter was eight and nine months of age, before he could crawl. I am particularly focusing on the data when Peter was the youngest because this is the period in which he is most different to the older children in terms of his size and abilities. In this way, I hoped to maximise the opportunities for seeing categorisation at work. I looked for examples where it seemed that different kinds of lines were at work and played a role in Peter’s experiences at FDC, particularly with respect to his relationships and interactions with the other children. Many such examples were identified; only a few can be presented here.

The most obvious rigid line illustrated by the data created a baby–child binary. Peter was often referred to by both Cheryl, his educator, and the older children as a ‘baby’. This line often appeared to create separation between Peter and the older children. For example, during meals, Peter sat in a highchair separate from the other children, who sat together around a small table and enjoyed interacting physically and verbally with each other (see Figures 1 and 2). During these times, Peter often watched the other children at the table, but there was usually little other interaction between Peter and the older children.

A conversation one morning between Cheryl and Ryan, an older child at FDC, further illustrates this rigid line at work and the cut it created between Peter and the older children:

Only Peter and Ryan have arrived at FDC this morning and they are having breakfast. Cheryl explains to Ryan that two of the older children who usually attend FDC will not be attending today. Because Ryan’s usual playmate will not be there, Cheryl asks him: ‘Can you play with Mitchell today?’ At the end of
breakfast Cheryl mentions the mess that Peter has made under the highchair. Ryan comments: ‘Peter’s still a baby’. Cheryl replies: ‘He is, yeah, he is a baby’. (FDC07-310810-9-TS)

In such daily occurrences, it is possible to see rigid lines at work. Peter was sitting in his highchair as usual, physically removed from Ryan. When Cheryl discussed who Ryan would play with, there was no suggestion that he might play with Peter. Presumably because Peter is a baby, he is not considered a potential playmate for an older child. These might seem like small, insignificant examples, however, for Deleuze, ‘small, everyday encounters’ are significant (Blaise, 2013: 189). Children’s lives in ECEC are made up of these kinds of daily encounters and routines.

At times, cracks appeared in the binary that separated Peter from the older children, and the rigid line became a supple line. On such occasions, the children interacted with Peter and sometimes made him the focus of their activities and play. Although this was a supple line, it was still segmented baby–child, as the children engaged with Peter as a baby, often in quite stereotypical...
Thus, the supple line made its ‘little modifications’ (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006: 93) to the baby–child binary, making it a point of connection rather than separation. For example, the older children often wanted to kiss and cuddle Peter (see Figures 3, 4 and 5) – something they never did with their similar-aged peers.

At other times, the older children’s interactions with Peter almost seemed to move beyond a ‘baby’ categorisation to objectifying him as an object to be played with. The following episode between Peter and his sister Ruby (aged 3 years, 4 months), which lasted around seven minutes, illustrates these ways of interacting with Peter:

Peter sits on the floor surrounded by small toys which he is manipulating and mouthing. Ruby approaches and begins sweeping the toys away from Peter, removing toys from his hands and throwing them away. ‘I’ll fix you up’, she says, and begins tugging Peter towards her. Cheryl, the educator, asks: ‘Are you right with him Ruby?’ Ruby asks if Peter can sit on her knee and Cheryl positions Peter on the floor between Ruby’s outstretched legs. ‘We’ll have to move some things [toys] close because he wants to reach them’,
Regardless, Ruby removes toys from Peter’s hands and throws them out of his reach three times. Peter often tries to lean away from Ruby to reach for interesting objects or get into a more upright sitting position, however Ruby continually pulls Peter back so that he is leaning against her [see Figure 6]. At one point Ruby says she wants Peter to lay on her lap. Cheryl counters with comments such as ‘He doesn’t want to lay back, he wants to sit up so he can see clearly, doesn’t he?’ and ‘I don’t think he likes it. Have a look at him, do you think he is struggling to sit up?’

When the three older boys push large trucks past, Ruby pulls Peter towards her and wraps her arms around him, saying: ‘Don’t run him over’. Cheryl asks: ‘Are you protecting your brother from getting bumped, are you Ruby?’ ‘Yeah’, Ruby replies. After Cheryl reassures Ruby that the boys do not pose a threat to Peter, Ruby turns her attention to directing the boys as they push their trucks by again, saying, ‘Go, go, go, guys, go, go go’, and waving her arm in the direction they are travelling (see Figure 7). Peter watches the boys go past.

Mitchell approaches and kneels down beside Peter, reaching out to stroke his head. Ruby pulls Peter away with a jerk, saying: ‘Don’t!’ Peter kicks his legs and waves his arms (see Figure 8). Ruby looks angrily at Mitchell, saying: ‘I will poke your … ’. Cheryl intervenes but, in the meantime, Mitchell has moved away.
Throughout the seven minutes, Ruby engages in a number of other interactions with Peter, such as leaning forward to look at his face and saying ‘Peek-a-boo, little man’, patting his tummy, kissing his cheek and head, closing her eyes and rubbing her cheek on the top of his head, singing to him and rocking him from side to side (see Figure 9). Peter appears to ignore many of these interactions. Some he appears to enjoy, laughing, kicking his legs and waving his arms. These interactions are punctuated by comments from Cheryl, such as: ‘Just be gentle, not too rough a cuddle or he won’t like it much, will he?’

In the final minute, Peter becomes increasingly upset. He begins to vocalise unhappily, wriggling his body around and trying to lean away from Ruby. Ruby continues to try to keep him on her lap, pulling on his shoulders and shirt collar (see Figure 10). Peter’s distress increases when Cheryl leaves the room to help another child in the bathroom. When Cheryl returns, she removes Peter, saying: ‘Alright, Ruby, I think we have to let him go now because he’s not happy with all those cuddles, is he?’ (FDC07-100810-3-TS).

Many of Ruby’s actions can be viewed as responding to stereotypical ideas about babies – for example, that babies are rocked and cuddled, sit or lie on laps, and need to be protected and, in
Ruby’s words, ‘fixed up’. Thus, although this is a supple line allowing interaction and play between Peter and the older children, it is still segmented baby–child. Ruby plays what appears to be a ‘caring’ role. In enacting this role, however, Ruby seems to be playing a game in which Peter is more a baby doll to be controlled and played with than a human baby with feelings, desires and rights. Yuval-Davis (2011) argues that relations of care are associated with asymmetrical relationships and particular positions of power. The caring role allows Ruby to control Peter’s access to resources, physically restrain him and control his bodily posture. Just as the segmentarity affords particular roles for Ruby, so Peter is expected to play his role – of the passive and compliant baby. Throughout the episode, Ruby appears to be continually disciplining Peter’s body to comply with her expectations, at one point even commenting that he is being a ‘wriggly worm’.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that segmentarity can occur in a circular fashion of ever larger circles. Circular segmentarity recognises that we belong to several different groups and networks (Blaise, 2013). When all of the circles converge to resonate with a single centre, the
segmentarity becomes increasingly rigid (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). It is possible to see the convergence of circular segmentarity in this episode. The segmentary circles of baby, brother and boy resonate together, making the segmentarity more rigid. This is illustrated by Ruby (the only girl at FDC) incorporating Peter (her baby brother) into her game, in which she ‘protects’ him from the boisterous play of the older boys, and controls his bodily posture and his access to toys and other children. Thus, although the supple line allowed for interactions between Peter and the older children, its segmentarity meant that these were particular kinds of interactions based on his categorisation as a baby. The convergence of multiple categories led, at times, to this supple line becoming more rigid.

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 216), ‘[t]here is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organizations’. It is possible to glimpse a line of flight at Peter’s FDC. On such a line, binary segments such as baby–child completely rupture and are no longer relevant, as the following episode illustrates:

Ryan, Peter and Cheryl are in the sandpit. When Cheryl enquires what he would like to do, Ryan responds that he wants to go on the see-saw and walks across the grass away from Peter and towards the see-saw. Two others boys want to go on the see-saw with Ryan. One waits nearby while the other goes first. Peter watches the boys across the yard, grasping the edge of the sandpit and using it to pull his body up and forward, leaning towards the see-saw and the boys [see Figure 11].

Soon, Ryan asks Cheryl: ‘Can Peter come on the see-saw with me?’ Cheryl looks down at Peter and says: ‘We could do that because you like see-saws, don’t you?’ It sounds as if Peter says ‘Yeah’. ‘Yeah, you do’, says Cheryl. ‘Will we go on the see-saw?’ she asks, as she picks Peter up. ‘Oh, he’s excited, his legs are kicking’, says Cheryl, as she carries him across the yard. Cheryl positions Peter on the seat and holds his waist and the back of the seat. Peter holds onto the handles and Ryan begins to work the see-saw (see Figures 12 and 13).

Hugh approaches and asks: ‘What is Peter doing?’ ‘Well what do you think he’s doing?’ Cheryl asks. ‘Going on the see-saw’, Hugh replies. While on the see-saw Peter excitedly kicks his legs back and forth, laughs and vocalises, and Cheryl discusses with the children that this shows he is enjoying it and wants more. Soon Mitchell asks to go on the see-saw with Peter also. Cheryl asks Ryan to allow Mitchell to have
a turn. Ryan acquiesces unhappily but stays close by, climbing on the climbing frame. Eventually, Peter becomes distracted by the play of some other children and Cheryl takes him off the see-saw. Peter spent around 8 minutes on the see-saw with the two boys. (FDC007-2500810-8-TS)

When Ryan walks away from Peter towards the see-saw, it seems as if the rigid line is at work again. Peter is separated from the other boys physically and he cannot move his body towards them. It seems as though he has no chance of riding on the see-saw, although his body language suggests he would like to. A line of flight emerges, however, that ‘disturbs the binarity’, the segments, and ‘carries them off’ (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006: 98). Perhaps Ryan noticed Peter’s bodily communication, because soon he invites Peter onto the see-saw. Peter appears to respond to the

Figure 12. Peter on the see-saw with Ryan, as Mitchell watches on. Copyright 2011 by Infants’ Lives in Childcare project research team.

Figure 13. Approximation of Peter’s view while on the see-saw captured by a head-mounted camera worn by Peter. Copyright 2011 by Infants’ Lives in Childcare project research team.
invitation by communicating with a word. Peter then engaged with the older boys in an activity that was highly valued by them and not typically considered a baby’s activity. It appears that the rigid and supple lines have become indiscernible or even ruptured. Hugh appears to notice this change when he asks what Peter is doing, despite the answer being obvious. For a short period of time, the ‘baby’ category appears to have disappeared altogether.

Concluding thoughts

I began this article by arguing that processes of categorisation may play an important role in the politics of belonging in ECEC, particularly for infants in multi-age settings such as FDC. The data has illustrated that, for Peter, being categorised as a baby by the educator and older children played a role in his experiences at FDC. The role played by the ‘baby’ category, however, was a complicated one. At times, being in a different category to the others at FDC appeared to create a sense of separation between Peter and the older children, supporting the notion outlined earlier that children who are ‘different’ may find experiencing a sense of belonging more difficult (Kernan, 2010). In contrast, at other times, the ‘baby’ category appeared to become a point of contact rather than separation between Peter and the older children. At these times, it appeared that it was Peter’s difference from the older children that became the basis for his inclusion in the group, affording a particular kind of belonging to Peter. In the final data episode, it appeared that the ‘baby’ category was no longer discernible or relevant. The role of categories in the politics of belonging in ECEC, therefore, is complex and dynamic.

Peter’s experience suggests that it is important for ECEC educators and researchers to remain open-minded about the role categories might play in particular settings, rather than assuming that difference always suggests exclusion or that particular categories might always be stable and relevant. The alternative is to risk falling victim to the ‘dogmatic image of thought’ that Deleuze warns us about. The danger is that the ‘baby’ category becomes, to adapt Hickey-Moody and Malins’ (2007: 5) words, ‘limiting’ in terms of how an infant is ‘understood’ and its ‘potentiality’ to belong in multi-age ECEC. Thus, while categories do play a role in the politics of belonging in ECEC and are a productive focus for researchers and educators working with belonging, it is important to remember that categories cannot ever tell the whole story. Looking for situations in which categories no longer appear to work, in which they leak and rupture, might lead to new understandings about how belonging works in different ECEC contexts.

Finally, it is important to remember that Peter spent his time in FDC, a distinctive ECEC context. There are aspects of this setting that are not commonly found in centre-based ECEC – small, family, multi-age groupings with one consistent educator. Also, the gender balance at Peter’s FDC setting was unusual. It is possible that the line of flight that led to Peter being included on the seesaw may have been influenced by his categorisation as a boy, the dominant gender in this setting. Perhaps when it comes to this kind of physical play, being the ‘right’ gender is more important than being the ‘right’ age. It is possible that, as one line is rigidified, it can create leakages in another. There are many tangled lines at work in the politics of belonging in ECEC. Some are rigid, some are supple and some are lines of flight. Attention to all of these lines may lead to a fuller picture of how belonging works, and might be put to work, in ECEC.

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I certify that this text is original and has not been published or submitted for publication elsewhere.

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Notes

1. Family day care, also known as family childcare and childminding, is early childhood education and care that takes place for a small group of children in the educator’s home.
2. For further information on baby cam, see Sumsion et al. (2014).

References


**Author biography**

Tina Stratigos is a PhD student at Charles Sturt University. 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 the politics of belonging works for infants in family day care. Tina is interested in the use of visual methodologies and working with Deleuzian concepts in her research.