

# Introduction

C'est la marge qui tient la page

We embarked on this study with a clear and structured research plan and an orientation of listening to the voices of children as put forward by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations [UN], 1989). From there, we opened up to (post-)qualitative research in social sciences as a practice of encountering people-in-their-web that necessarily and continuously affects the research process and dissemination. In this introduction, we strive to do justice to the processual and relational character of this research project and the connective energy that was the driving force in every step of doing, thinking, writing and materialising this doctoral research. We hope to provide the reader with multilayered lenses: from where to go into composition with this dissertation, to discover what it can do and what it affects are (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) in pedagogical and research contexts where we encounter children.

For 30 years, the UNCRC (UN, 1989) has raised awareness to the child's 'right to express their views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child' (p. 5). However, throughout history, children have mostly been viewed as passive and voiceless and therefore excluded from research and public debate (Pincock & Jones, 2020; Tisdall & Punch, 2012) and overpowered (Allan, 2007; Conners & Stalker, 2007; Holt et al., 2017). As a result, children's perspectives in research and literature on education (among other areas in their life) were mostly absent (Jones & Liddiard, 2018). Carnavale (2020) refers to this dominant conception of children as a form of epistemological oppression. Allan (2007) considers children 'the most troubling absent voices in research' (p. 44). The 12th article of the UNCRC providing children with the right 'to be heard' boosted a debate that became known as 'the new sociology of childhood' and the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies, both criticising the lack of children's voices in studies of childhood (Facca, et al., 2020; Spyrou, 2016). These fields acknowledge that children can share their views in research and have agency (Garcia-Quiroga & Salvo Agoglia, 2020; Tisdall, 2012), and strive towards a deeper insight into childhood and (power) relations between adults and children (Ingulfsvann et al., 2020; Pincock & Jones, 2020; Spyrou, 2011). Scholars argue that only by accessing the silenced voices of children can we reach a better understanding of childhood and children's world (Spyrou, 2011).

## On voices

*The voice which I have been seeking to ‘capture’ and tame as clear, pure, and articulable is now only present to me as slippery, shifting, knowable, unknowable, certain, uncertain, audible, inaudible, and certainly unstable. Can I take comfort in this certainty of uncertainty? Can I know that I know when voice happens just because it is always already happening?*

(Mazzei, 2009, p. 45)

Many efforts to centralise children’s voices in research have rapidly evolved because of Article 12 of the UNCRC (Spencer et al., 2020). However, Lundy (2007) contends that Article 12 is one of the ‘most widely cited yet commonly misunderstood of all provisions of the UNCRC ... It is not just a model of good pedagogical practice (or policy making) but a legally binding obligation’ (p. 930). Tisdall (2015) notes this article of the convention is hard to implement since traditional views of children and childhood do not take children’s competence, capacities, and citizenship as their starting point. According to Lundy and McEvoy (2011) and Tisdall (2015), it is adults’ duty to make sure children’s right to express their views is respected in research on matters affecting them and assist children in formulating and expressing their views in research contexts. Participatory research in which children—as experts in their own experiences (Garcia-Quiroga & Salvo Agoglia, 2020)—are involved in all steps of the research process provides rich insights into children’s ways of relating to and seeing the world (Gibson et al., 2017; Nind, 2011).

Along with a growing number of scholars (Chadwick, 2020; Jackson & Mazzei, 2009; Mayes, 2019), we take a critical and posthuman stance on ‘the romance of voice’, whereby voice is pictured as an individualistic, disembodied, authentic, stable perspective through which hidden experiences can be understood (Chadwick, 2020, p. 1). Each chapter of this thesis plays its part in a powerful movement, slowly suspending the concept of a child’s ‘voice’ as a ‘singular, stable core self who possesses knowledge that may be transparently known and expressed’ (Mayes, 2019, p. 7). Children’s voices are entangled with many discourses running through childhood literature and research. These discourses are connected to childhood images (Grover, 2004), influence choices in methodology and ethics in research

with children (Graue & Hawkins, 2005; Lundy & McEvoy, 2011), and create a multitude of voices: voices about children, objective voices of children, dialogical voices with children and agentic voices, and the refusal of voices speaking for themselves (Mayes, 2019).

This doctoral research engages in the search for alternatives to the representationalist and normative humanist consideration of ‘giving voice’ that fails to value the entangled and collective ways in which children in connection with their context (parents, teachers, caretakers, peers, siblings, etc.) are present and present themselves in research (Chadwick, 2020; Teachman & Gladstone, 2020). Children’s voices affect and are affected by each other, by varying situations and interactions between themselves and others, and by the different and changing positions they embody (Elden, 2012; Ingulfsvann et al., 2020; Spencer et al., 2020). These positions are themselves mediated through material and discursive (historical, cultural, economic, psychological and sexual) practices (Alcoff, 2009); therefore, children’s voices are rather a messiness and multiplicity than an individual static property (Chadwick, 2020; Ingulfsvann et al., 2020). As post-qualitative researchers, we need to entangle ourselves in the multiple layers of voices and become aware of the epistemological assumptions they carry (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009)

With the help of post-qualitative frameworks and childhood literature, we reconceptualise children’s voices as present in many forms. They are dynamically flowing rather than separate, authentic or stable; pluralised, polyvocal and messy rather than attached to a coherent, self-knowing humanist individual (Mayes, 2019; Mazzei, 2016; Mazzei and Jackson, 2012); ‘endowed with a will, a freedom, an intentionality which is then subsequently “expressed” in language; in action; in the public domain’ (Butler, as cited in St Pierre, 2009, p. 221).

Chadwick (2020) offers a diffractive conceptualisation of voice as an unpredictable, transindividual process involving ‘breathy bodies’ that are entangled with more-than-human elements and discursive, ideological and socio-material interactions. Davies (2021) builds on Bennett to incorporate ‘thing-power’ into her research practice when referring to the ability of things to (intra-)act, affect and produce flows in ethico-onto-epistemological assemblages. For Bennet (as cited in Davies, 2021), ‘The “I” as a compound of human and nonhuman parts; is continually entering and leaving larger

assemblages made up of other sets of composite or compound bodies' (p. 51). Throughout this thesis, we look closely at the 'lively stuff of matter that is articulate and agential' (Davies, 2021, p. 57). The red helmet of a Lego minifigure, a green degraded school desk in the front row of a class, a red flickering light in a white room—these are seemingly insignificant things, yet they converse, desire, remember, represent, transform and intra-act (Davies, 2021) in the assemblages that make up children's voices as they appear in this research. Being open to exploring ourselves as part of and in intra-action with a material world—'a world of things' (Davies, 2021, p. 26)—enables us to let go of individual identities and resist essentialisation and simplification of 'voice'. It becomes an assemblage that thinks in terms of entanglements and relational enactments of bodies, objects, relations, spaces, times and utterances among others (Chadwick, 2020)—a process of becoming (Mazzei, 2016) that is sensitive to power relations as well as the role of the researchers and other (non-)human agents (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012).

In these terms, voice becomes a living movement that allows new ways of thinking to emerge (Chadwick, 2020; Mazzei & Jackson, 2012, 2017). It becomes a disruptive process that explores the world, theories and knowledges we build and questions the epistemic injustice we reproduce when we speak for/about others (Alcoff, 1991; Chadwick, 2020) instead of 'with' and 'to' others (Alcoff, 2009, p. 128). This posthuman conceptualisation of voice offers tools to explore the 'moral, ideological bodily-affective, socio-atmospherics and relational interferences that constantly interrupt, diffract and coproduce our tales' (Chadwick, 2020, p. 4). At the heart of these tales is that voice 'that escapes our easy classification and that does not make easy sense—the voice in the crack' (Mazzei, 2009, p. 48).

Reconceptualisation of voice is intimately connected to the question of how to value children's voices within academic discussions on competence, vulnerability, protection and participation. It encourages us to value the entangled, collective and supported ways in which children become present in research, and value their voices as emerging, mutually produced, fragile and full of potential. This offers an escape from paralysing debates in childhood studies that see the protection of vulnerable children and the participation of agentic children as unresolvable contradictions (Garcia-Quioga & Salvo Agoglia, 2020). Wall (2010) writes, 'What is needed in light of childhood is a deeper sense of the connection between human agency and human

vulnerability. These should be understood, not as a polar opposite, but as intertwined for all human beings in dynamic and creative tension' (p. 39). He unravels how the creative tension between vulnerability and agency is related to systems of social power and human rights. When we understand the right to participate as interdependent social creativity, children become included in the joint creation of society (Wall, 2010). Children are continuously moving between vulnerability and agency simultaneously, and we—along with uncountable other (non-)human agents—are always co-implicated in their search for participation and protection.

A posthuman reconceptualisation of voice is connected to the way researchers, pedagogues and (neoliberal) society think about the positions and roles of children in contemporary contexts of educating and growing up. Bozalek et al. (2018) posit we need to be worthy of our times and develop tools to handle contemporary complexities. This dissertation's purpose is to concretise and illustrate pedagogical concepts or fundamentals that help us think about the voices and positions of children in vulnerable situations in contemporary contexts of educating, growing up and research, in entanglement with our own roles, responsibilities and ethics in pedagogics and research. What matters when thinking about children's voices, roles and positions in pedagogical and research spaces entangled with our own roles, positions and ethics? When engaging with and listening to children in vulnerable situations, what supports the creation of intra-active encounters of genuinely listening that value children's perspectives and experiences?

## On listening to children

The idea of 'voices' is intimately linked to the question of how to do them justice, how to genuinely listen to these posthuman voices. Bronwyn Davies' (2014) work on 'listening to children' was a book we read and discussed with students at the start of this project. It continues to resonate throughout our work as an inner voice that pops up and slowly embodies us. It feels like a starting point and an endpoint at the same time. Davies (2014) describes 'emergent listening' as listening with all our senses to 'open oneself to the resonance of the other and become other through the process of evolution that takes one beyond the already known' (p. 107). Emergent listening is

about interrupting striations, letting go of judgement and old refrains and opening up to the not-yet-known—to imagining what is possible (Davies, 2021). It enhances awareness of ‘our capacity to affect each other; to enter into composition with others’ and with vital materiality (Davies, 2021, p. 23).

Rinaldi (2006) describes listening in (Reggio Emilia) pedagogy as ‘ethical relationship of openness to the other’ (p. xxvi) driven by desire and curiosity, uncertainty or doubt (Rinaldi, 2001). It aligns with considering knowledge as constructed and recognising the value in the unknown and the other; in difference (Rinaldi, 2006). In that sense, listening becomes a movement that ‘connects us to others; abandoning ourselves to the conviction that our understanding and our own being are but small parts of a broader, integrated knowledge that holds the universe together’ (Rinaldi, 2006, p.38). It is an approach to life that does not generate answers but questions and actions; therefore, it has seismic implications in pedagogy (Rinaldi, 2006). When pedagogical places become contexts of multiple listening, holding sensitivity to listen and to be listened to, a deep commitment towards change emerges (Rinaldi, 2006). Both Davies (2014) and Rinaldi (2006) describe listening as requiring hard work, time and energy to suspend prejudices, let go of certainties and open up to new ways of knowing and new possibilities of being. It creates an openness for multiple creative, assembled, polyvocal, posthuman voices to move and affect.

Listening emergently fits so well within the entanglement with children and their web in this research because it recognises listening as a vulnerable process—an openness to being changed while also recognising the extraordinary capacities and creativity that enfolds in intra-active encounters with children (Davies, 2014). This makes it possible for researcher and participant to be vulnerable and competent simultaneously (Komulainen, 2007) and be protected while participating borderless. Emergent listening is about decentring ourselves as researchers and opening up to many other ways of learning and knowing (Spyrou, 2017), to ‘difference in all its multiplicity’ (Davies, 2014, p. 1). Thus, it enables us to put children’s agendas to the fore and be guided by them through spaces of educating and growing up.

Within this doctoral study, emergent listening received many forms of connecting with children and their web to open up to new ways of knowing, where the children show what matters. In Chapter 3, children become our guide towards places at their school that matter to them. We squeeze

ourselves into these spaces to understand them from the inside out and explore relational complexities in children's daily school life. The children take the lead in telling and materialising stories. We can still feel the vulnerability as a (beginning) researcher—sitting between piles of watching boxes and drawings; scrolling through many videos, audio tapes and pictures—not sure what they could mean or how to make them fit within a research project. It was only by opening ourselves to what the children wanted us to see that their stories could resonate and produce new knowledge. In Chapter 5, listening emergently is in being present in the middle of ongoing things that activate us to become a part of the team around Alex (a boy in an inclusive trajectory in primary education). Listening emergently was affirming difference as our starting point and prioritising connection to seek what can move from there in the collaboration. Thus, listening emergently can become an expanding ripple in still waters when other team members join in letting go of traditional ways of knowing and opening up to new ways of learning. It is a process that puts Alex and what he is able to do at the centre of the collaboration.

Emergent listening accentuates how ethics are part of every particular and changing relationship (Davies, 2014) and are always relational (Ellis, 2016). Bozalek et al. (2018) state, 'Every action I take is co-implicated with and connected to other bodies' (p. 94). This means 'there is no standing apart at the side of the field', we are always co-implicated and connected, never neutral or innocent (Bozalek et al., 2018, p. 94). Along with our conceptualisation of voice, ethical considerations become relational, negotiable, reflexive and never finished (Davies, 2014; Renold et al., 2008).

Taking up listening in a post-qualitative framework strengthens our shift from individual characteristics, categorisation and norms towards what we are in the process of becoming (De Schauwer et al., 2020) and how we become in entanglement with others. Van Hove and De Schauwer (2020) argue that 'Humans are relational all the way down, our being is rooted in a shared being' (p. 47). This posthuman position seeks to disengage from the normative human body and life and think about interdependency, connections and relationality. There is no 'I'; 'we' are always integral to assemblages, emerging in relationality and part of collective human existence (De Schauwer et al., 2020). The human subject becomes multiple, emergent, interdependent and indeterminate (De Schauwer et al., 2020).

As Barad (2014, p. 176) asserts, ‘This play of in/determinacy, unsettles the self/other binary and the notion of the self as unity. The self is itself a multiplicity, a superposition of beings, becomings, here and theres, now and thens. Superpositions, not oppositions.’ In listening to, connecting with and representing what we call ‘the posthuman voice’, we need to continuously question the ethical, methodological and sociopolitical implications of our stories (Chadwick, 2020).

### On intra-active encounters...

*We seek an encounter with the voice of difference on a path not drawn on our map, in an imperceptible crack in the floor, in the words not captured on an intertitle. We admit that we don't know the precise direction to take, and yet we continue on, uncertain of the destination, left with the certainty of uncertainty that impels us forward; 'keeps our passion aroused and hold us to the other (Derrida, 1992, p. 24)'.* (Mazzei, 2009, p. 59)

### ... in pedagogical spaces

Barad's (2007) concept of intra-action refers to ‘the unfolding process of becoming in relation to others; where each one is capable of affecting and being affected by the other’ (De Schauwer et al., 2016, p. 14). Barad (2007) states separate entities do not exist; rather, they emerge through intra-action: ‘Distinct agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements’ (Barad, 2007, p. 325). We emerge ‘as entangled becomings of the world’ (Davies, 2021, p. 89). The concept of intra-action suggests we affect our encounters while we are affected by them; this is how we effect change and are changed at the same time (Davies, 2021, p. 3). In post-qualitative research, we open ourselves to being affected; to being startled by material, by theory, by encounters and from there, we talk, write and listen.

This doctoral study is built around intra-active encounters within pedagogical spaces in Flanders. It means relationality and partnership with children, teachers, support workers and parents were central in every study.

We did not target children, families or class groups based on predefined conditions; rather, we were affected in the encounter and intra-action with them when they crossed our path. These intra-active encounters started with modest invitations we could not ignore: teachers or parents sharing small stories that illustrated the everyday impact of normative discourses on behaviour, on physical and mental development, and on academic performances confronting children with borders in their life; or sharing experiences that demonstrated relational complexities, issues of accessibility and legal discourses pushing children into vulnerable positions. These were always encounters that proved the necessity to think and work with children about their positions and roles within pedagogical spaces and the entanglement of diversity and belonging in their lives.

- We encounter two groups of children in special education participating in a European study on children with disabilities' experiences of children rights in the digital environment (see Chapter 2). During the research encounters, we felt many unspoken things were at play in the situation of the group interviews, the discourses impacting on them, and the positions the researchers and participants took/were given.
- We encountered the teacher of Garfield Class (see Chapter 3) for the first time several years ago within the scope of a master's thesis, in which the teacher elaborated enthusiastically about participation and co-creation with her students. When we met her again in 2017, she described the 'explosive' character of her current class group—the children's socio-emotional backpack and the many differences in developments and labels affecting the dynamic of the group and the everyday search for belonging.
- We encountered the teachers of Martha and Louisa (see Chapter 4) through their appearance in media at the moment the girls were expelled from the country. We had worked with teacher Gert before when he participated in making video diaries on an inclusive trajectory within a master's dissertation. The mutual bond based on diversity thinking and a preference for participatory and creative work with children ensured we would meet again.
- We encountered Alex and his web (see Chapter 5) in 2015 when supporting Alex as an intern. Out of this grew a strong partnership with Alex, his parents, and his support worker. When we met again in 2018, Alex

was about to make the step from preschool to primary education. Anticipating this step goes together with many expectations, preparations, as well as a push-and-pull-exercise trying to nuance normative deficit thinking and make room for diversity thinking at the school level.

Children are educated and grow up in the middle of boundary-making practices and normative discourses where the potential of exclusion is lurking (De Schauwer et al., 2020). It appears there is a thin line between the ‘child in danger’ and ‘the dangerous child’ in our contemporary society (Vanobbergen, 2014), and some groups of vulnerable children are more likely to be criminalised or excluded than educated. These movements in our present-day contexts, where children and young people are educated and grow up, are intimately connected to how our society and politics thinks about and engages with the roles and positions of (diverse groups of) children. Moreover, they have consequences when it comes to (violation of) their rights, to (in)justice and (in)equality in their lives; to the question of living a flourishing life. Also, the COVID pandemic has pointed towards some sharp edges and vulnerabilities in pedagogy and pedagogical places in Flanders, making it more important than ever to think about pedagogical places in terms of connections where students’ questions and necessities can find a safe haven (Vanobbergen, 2021). Following Rinaldi (2006), pedagogical spaces have the potential to entangle politics and ethics in rejecting classifications and normative outcomes in favour of affirming difference and connection: ‘It is our historical responsibility not only to affirm this but to create cultural, social, political and educational contexts which are able to receive children and dialogue with their potential for constructing human rights’ (p. 128).

As pedagogues, we work in the margins, where people find themselves in vulnerable, exclusive situations because of a mismatch with dominant discourses, mainstream (neoliberal) expectations, normative pace and selective ‘democratic’ structures. Philippe Meirieu (2007) quotes Godard when he says, ‘C’est la marge qui tient la page [It is the margin that keeps the page together]’ (p. 132). In the margins is where pedagogues find their duty to offer resistance, to trouble and agitate to the best of their abilities, to stimulate a uniting sense of growth (Meirieu, 2007) and flourishing. According to Meirieu (2007), democracy and pedagogical spaces need each other in

this undertaking that connects people to each other and the world. Lawy and Biesta (2006) acknowledge that all children's lives are integral (and thus vulnerable) to and affected by the wider social, economic and political conditions, which is why pedagogical spaces should be entangled in nurturing an inclusive and relational conception of citizenship 'in a continuously shifting and changing world of difference' (p. 37). According to Biesta (2011), learning democracy should always be about learning-in-context and learning-in-relationships while being actively part of the world. Zembylas and Bozalek (2017) describe 'socially just pedagogies' as pedagogical practices that 'improve the learning and life opportunities of typically underserved students, while equipping and empowering all students to work for a more socially just society themselves' (p. 2). Socially just pedagogies critically investigate injustices (Zembylas & Bozalek, 2017), motivate us to stay alive to what happens in the world (Bozalek et al., 2018), and desire possibilities for transformation (Zembylas, 2007). It gives way to new forms of pedagogy, allowing affective connections that promote creative potential, criticality and politicisation within the scope of 'imagining a different kind of society' (Zembylas, 2007, p. xvii).

In 1958 Arendt wrote:

*In education it is decided whether we love the world enough to take responsibility for it ... in education we also decide whether we love our children enough to not banish them from our world but to prepare them on their task: to renew a common world.*

(p. 35, own translation)

This connects with Masschelein's (2012) proposal of pedagogical spaces as 'unlocking' and 'opening' the world—as spaces that share 'our' (instead of 'your') world with children within the scope of creating an entanglement, a relation with this world. It is not a static relation where bodies and people are appointed to places and where competencies are related to individuality and uniqueness. Rather, it is a transcending relation of movement, experimenting, intimacy and proximity (Masschelein, 2012). Masschelein (2012) concluded that pedagogical spaces have the potential to become spaces in which individuality and normative discourses lose their weight; where children are detached from their predicted place, and we centralise the question of 'how to relate towards each other and the world?'. Focusing on

intra-active encounters in pedagogical spaces resonates with this call to put relationality and connective forces forward so citizenship, democracy and educational places can receive new forms and content in the contemporary and future worlds where children are educated and grow up. It becomes the role of pedagogues to take responsibility for life, for children in becoming, and for the continuation of the world (Arendt, 1958).

### ... and in research

Barad (2007) writes, ‘different intra-actions produce different phenomena’ (p. 58). Being entangled and co-implicated in research intra-actions means we are always accountable for the effects it produces (Barad, 2007). It means every intra-active research encounter is an ethical one. This dissertation does not contain a separate section on ethics; rather, it is one contribution to relational and embodied ethics itself. Ethics is everywhere when we talk about an attitude of emergent listening, about co-implicating ourselves as researchers, about affecting and being affected, about our ability to respond, about positions and relationality, about living flourishing lives. Ethics is not separable from methodology, theory, material, intentionality; rather, it is always on the move in all of them. Therefore, Barad (2007) put the term ‘ethico-onto-epistemology’ to the fore: ethics is integral to the unpredictability of post-qualitative inquiry and it never ‘lets the researcher off the hook of considering how their emergent thoughts and actions matter’ (Davies, 2021, p. 9). An entangled ethics of ontology and epistemology works to trouble standardised institutional ethics that work through normative practices and refrains. It recognises how researchers can never be separated from the questions they raise, the language they use, the people they investigate, or their own embodied selves (Davies, 2021). For Barad (2011):

*Ethics is ... not about right responses to a radically exteriorized other, but about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming, of which we are a part. Ethics is about mattering, about taking account of the entangled materializations of which we are part, including new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities.* (p. 69)

An ethics of response-ability must be accomplished again and again (Davies, 2021). It becomes a matter of relations, materialisations and attunements (Bozalek et al., 2018).

Throughout this dissertation, we repetitively use post-qualitative theoretical concepts in entanglement with the data to show how theory, practice and qualitative data continuously compose and transform each other. Davies (2021) describes new materialist methodologies in which ‘thinking and doing are intimately entangled, where they intra-act and where invention and creativity impose their rhythms on the rituals and repetitions’ (p. 5).

- Chapter 1 utilises the methodology of a collective biography to explore early memories of becoming abled. Collective or similar patterns in these memories are used to put post philosophies at work to further develop our thinking upon becoming abled.
- In Chapters 2 and 3, we ‘plug theory into data into theory’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013) to analyse key incidents that emerged during the research process. This approach helps to sensitively analyse the multiple layers within these key incidents to draw implications on the complexity of voice in qualitative inquiry with children.
- Chapter 3 uses Jackson and Mazzei’s (2013) thinking on ‘flattening and folding’ with material and theoretical concepts to avoid binaries between data/theory and researcher/researched and maintain awareness of the multiple ways we are co-implicated in our theoretical work and the children’s creative work.
- Chapter 4 engages with an assemblage of qualitative research material to draw on connections between heterogeneous and lively materials that intra-act and open up invisible and unheard perspectives of ‘missing’ children. Folding theory into this assemblage boosts the development of the four metaphors of ‘the empty desk’.
- Chapter 5 applies a diffractive analysis to think ‘with’ material, people and assemblages in ethnographic research instead of ‘about’ them. We work with qualitative materials to make connections between words, images, memories, objects and people, and give them a new existence in the context of the research question on connective collaboration in Alex’s team (Gullion, 2018). It was not about the static but about the development, the relational, the social interactions through which

people, phenomena and assemblages take shape—assemblages of which the ethnographer themselves are a part (Gullion, 2018).

These methodologies have an important commonality: their power is not in the knowledge they produce but in what they do, in the thinking they make possible, in the knowledge that is always in the process of becoming through multiple encounters (Davies, 2021). Entangling theory, material entities and embodied experience makes tangible the binaries and striations that hold the status quo, and imagines an openness for the unknown, for multiple layers, complexity and movement (Davies, 2021).

By being open to unpredictability, we find our way out of the discourse of those ‘who believe that “scientific” means without emotion, without passion, without heart: those who believe that without these qualities science is truer and more objective’ and we become able to see ‘the strong force which comes from creative—and thus learning—freedom. The freedom of the unknown, of doubt, of the unfamiliar’ (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 130).

Materiality (in many different forms such as old pictures, Lego, letters, pixelised images, scripts) is prominent in this dissertation. Not to assess it from a distant objective judging point but to mobilise and be mobilised, to touch and be touched by the not-yet-known and open up creativity (Davies, 2021). We situate ourselves in and as part of the world, defending an idea of ‘knowledge production as embedded, embodied, affective and relational’ (Bozalek et al., 2018, p. III). As part of entangled materialisations and immanent assemblages, we need to account for new configurations that come to matter (Barad, 2011). A careful ethics of responsibility becomes important.

## Chapter outline

So far, we have pointed out the core aspects of this research and provided the reader with multilayered lenses to continue the readings in the following chapters. In this section, we seek to guide the reader through what comes next: five articles that carry this doctorate. Based on publication dates, it seems as if these chapters occurred in chronological and linear order. However, they emerged together, entangled, in intra-action with each other and

through continuing dialogue with (co)promotors. While we remained loyal to our objectives as put forward in the original research proposal, the project and this dissertation emerged in forms and through processes we could not have planned. Here, we make clear every article's role in the becoming of this doctoral study.

Chapter 1, 'Desiring and critiquing humanity/ability/personhood: disrupting the ability/dis-ability binary' (De Schauwer et al., 2020) was an important step in the process of becoming a PhD student in disability studies within our research group ('de Jardin') attracted to post-qualitative philosophies and new materialist inquiry. The process of the collective biography under the lead of Bronwyn Davies challenged us to take up this literature and discover concepts and language through which thinking about difference and humanity can transcend categories and normativity. This acquaintance offered us concepts such as 'emergent listening' and 'intra-action' that became genuine guides throughout this research. The collective biography and subsequent writing process functioned as an intra-active encounter through which we discovered a desire to write, read, share, write again and see this process as the practice of qualitative inquiry. In this chapter, we use the methodology of collective biography to explore our early memories of becoming abled. Our memories emerged out of pictures, evolved in stories, and became shared meanings. Throughout the process, our stories revealed a collective desire to be (considered as) human and fulfil normative expectations. Discovering the collectiveness in this desire motivated the attempt to stretch beyond the ableist meaning of the 'human' and embrace differences. This chapter is an important product within this dissertation because it sets the tone for critiquing binaries and normativity that dominate many aspects of contemporary life. It chooses an affirmative approach towards difference and vulnerability as part of everybody's process of becoming and everybody's search for belonging and fitting in. It takes a first step in centralising relationality in this doctorate by describing humanity as interdependent, intra-active and emergent in a (more than human) world.

The opportunity to write Chapter 2, 'Becoming-with research participants: Possibilities in qualitative research with children' (Daelman et al., 2020) felt like a gift falling into our lap. We invited two groups of children in special education within the scope of a research project for The Council

of Europe (under the lead of Professor Lundy and the Centre for Children's Rights at the Queens University of Belfast), assembling perspectives on the experience of children's rights in the digital environment. Being engaged in this project offered intra-active research encounters with children where many (ethical, methodological, environmental and material) things were at play—all impacting the way children-as-assemblages became research participants and shaping the way their voices were expressed and genuinely heard. In the chapter, we take a post-qualitative perspective on the construction of and taking up positions and roles by children and adults in research. This chapter feels like a driving force in the process of this doctorate as it brings relational ethics to the fore: it helps us conceptualise ethics as part of every intra-active encounter and necessarily unfinished. In this chapter we also find the first tools to rethink voice in research and pedagogical encounters with children and connect it with our own response-ability. At the end of this chapter, we touch on the concepts of 'becoming-with' and discover its potential in listening to children in vulnerable situations.

Chapter 3, 'Visiting borders in education: A creative approach with children in primary education' (Daelman et al., 2021a), required time. It was under construction for the largest part of the trajectory. In this chapter, we put 'listening to children' to work in the Garfield class—a regular group of children, among them children with labels and backpacks. We invested time in carefully thinking about methods and materials that would enable the children to co-create in messy and multivoiced ways; in thinking with children to try to make sense of complex relationalities they brought to the fore and in finding suitable concepts to work 'flattening and folding' with the materials the children gave us so generously. It becomes clear how normativity, questions of access, the desire for belonging and social positioning are very present when discussing relationality in their school experiences. This chapter is the point in the study when the humble integrity and richness of small stories really start to play out: small stories of sharks, sardines, red and white helmets point to vulnerable spaces along shifting borders in pedagogy and pedagogical spaces. The question towards our response-ability becomes clearer. It shows how research with children receives the form of intra-active encounters where children take the lead and show what comes to matter when negotiating borders, inclusion–exclusion and belonging.

Chapter 4, ‘The empty desk in class: a metaphor in the lives and classrooms of expelled immigrant children and their teachers’ (Daelman et al., 2021b) was the chapter we never thought we would write, yet we enjoyed writing it so much. Once we started to dismantle and play with the metaphor of the empty desk, it was as if it embodied us—as if we were pinned down on the empty desk and response-able for reverberating the many voices that reached us—until the story was told, could resonate as a minor gesture, and play its role in claiming change. The metaphor of the empty desk adds another layer to our reconceptualisation of voice. It shows how an absence can create a space for a multitude of voices—assembled perspectives carried by peers, teachers, parents, support workers—to converge. This centralises the child-in-their-web. It was the moment when it became genuinely clear to us that researching with children is never without material and immaterial contexts: parents, peers, teachers, classrooms, closed migration centres. By emerging in two small stories, this chapter acknowledges that the role pedagogical spaces and educators play within a sociopolitical context is never neutral and has transformative potential. When we as pedagogues fulfil our ability to respond and take children’s rights and relationalities seriously, children can learn democracy in socially just and safe pedagogical spaces. Response-ability becomes the central matter in these intra-active encounters with two teachers and two missing children-in-their-web.

Chapter 5, ‘Connective collaboration around Alex: A constant searching around inclusive education’ is a chapter close to our heart because of the warm partnership that supported our continuous presence in Alex’s class and the emergence of this chapter. Encountering Alex, his family and his team is a constant movement towards affirmation of difference. In this chapter, we abstracted four connective movements out of the inclusive trajectory of Alex and the team around him. Four doing words that emphasise a process that is never complete. ‘Purposefully encountering’, ‘exchanging’, ‘negotiating’ and ‘confirming affirmatively’ encourage a continuous development towards connection in the interaction between Alex, his individually adapted curriculum (IAC), the classroom environment, his family and all education and welfare actors involved. This research process is a strong demonstration of the role of small stories when learning for larger systemic and structural pedagogical contexts. Chapter 5 brings the radical relationality in children’s lives in pedagogical spaces and research to the fore. Encountering children

is always about encountering children-in-their-web. In intra-active encounters with children, this chapter is a strong example of affirming difference and thinking in terms of move-ability—we move and are moved together in pedagogical spaces where relationality is our starting point.

In the concluding section, we give content back to pedagogy and qualitative inquiry. Without claiming to have a step-by-step approach or manual, we present central concepts that hold connective energy, create an open attitude, and put relationality first in intra-active encounters with children. The concepts boost our thinking about the voices, positions and roles of children in relation to our own roles, responsibilities and ethics. They function as a metaphorical little bell in the back of our heads that transforms every encounter with children into an intra-active one, in which we take up the care for the children to take up the care for the world (Masschelein, 2014).

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