

# "ALL OUR HANDS WOULD TELL ABOUT THE COMMUNITY"

## RE-IMAGINING (IM)POSSIBLE TEACHER/STUDENT SUBJECTIVITIES IN THE EARLY YEARS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL

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### ABSTRACT

In Australia, as in many countries across the world, our educational landscape is being shaped by an ever-increasing focus on the “globalized educational policy discourse” (Lingard, 2010) of standardised, ‘high-stakes’ testing, and the subsequent quantitative measuring and ranking of children, classes, schools, districts, states, and countries. Through this paper, we explore our research conducted with children, teachers and parents within a culturally, linguistically, and socio-economically diverse public school community. The paper draws on the voices of teachers, parents, and children who were co-researchers in Clare’s case study research at the school (using emergent, arts-informed methods (Clark & Moss, 2001; Cole & Knowles, 2008; Somerville, 2008)), and Sophie’s teaching and teacher-research experiences (using pedagogical documentation (Rinaldi, 2006)). We explore the children’s perspectives on how they were developing individual and collective subjectivities, how they conceived of difference and connection, and the ways they worked with difference to create a community of belonging in this highly diverse context. We also analyse the ways in which the teachers and school community sought to actively challenge hegemonic constructions of the “successful” student subject through discourses of trust, difference and connected-

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ness. Shaped by a theoretical framework informed by the philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), this paper highlights the ways this school community may disrupt “normalised” conceptualisations of pedagogical practices and contribute to the research literature that offers hope in opening up lines of flight to re-imagine possible subjectivities for teachers and students.

## INTRODUCTION

In an education landscape characterised by a “globalized educational policy discourse” of standardization and high-stakes testing (Lingard, 2010), the push to conform is strong, often leaving teachers, students, and school communities feeling disempowered and despondent, unsure how to honour a diversity of knowledge while also proving their abilities within the dominant framework. Yet, across Australia there are many schools still seeking ways to negotiate, and at times, resist this discourse, attempting to find educational territory that can allow difference to be present without it being a threat or an obstacle. The school in which we have both been involved, as a teacher (Sophie) and a researcher (Clare), offers one example of such negotiation and resistance.

The case school is a government school in inner-urban Melbourne, Australia. It is nestled within a community of high-rise government housing, light industrial buildings and residential dwellings. It has a history of thinking about education creatively, and at the time of research had a Steiner stream (Prep-Year 12) and a Reggio Emilia-inspired stream (Prep-Grade 5), followed by project-based and flexible learning programs in the middle and high school years. Our research is focused on the Prep-Grade 2 class community in the Reggio Emilia-inspired stream in which Sophie was teaching at the time (team-teaching with one other teacher, a class of about forty 5-8 year old children), and in which Clare conducted research for her case-study. This community is socio-culturally, economically and linguistically diverse, with students speaking a range of languages including Vietnamese, Tamil, Amharic, Turkish, Indonesian, French, Swahili, Somali, English, Greek, Mandarin, Arabic, Slovenian and Norwegian. There is an element of the student population which is also quite transient due largely to socio-economic pressures.

The teachers who work in the Reggio Emilia-inspired stream of the school draw from theories articulated by educators from Reggio Emilia in Italy and scholars such as Dewey, Foucault, Vygotsky, Bruner, Freire, hooks, Gardner, Deleuze and Derrida. These theories enable us to build a pedagogy that sees the child as being strong, competent, creative, curious, intelligent, thoughtful and engaged. It is a pedagogy that values time and giving children time to explore, create, build relationships and sharpen their skills. Knowledge is seen as socially constructed, contested and complex. It is not focused on information gathering, but on questioning, thinking and seeking to understand multiple perspectives.

Research forms another key aspect of our work as we see children as being researchers of the world and teachers as being researchers of how the children learn, how they work together, why they are interested in particular things and how we might support them to deepen and broaden their knowledge and understandings. Pedagogical documentation in the form of photographs, video, recorded conversations and work samples are used to support our teacher research and to guide our teaching planning, as well as being an important contributing practice to a democratic community. This documentation is used to listen to the children and establish how we can build on what the children know and understand and not to highlight their deficiencies. We will articulate more thoroughly the planning, research and thinking process of the teachers and their pedagogy in our presentation of some of the pedagogical documentation later in this article.

At the time that this teaching and research took place, this school was undergoing a government review to assess its conformity to government standards and improve its results in the Australian national testing program (National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy, or *NAPLAN*). The school community, therefore, was negotiating ways in which they might honour the flexible, contextual and diverse authenticity of the lived curriculum, while also “proving” their validity as an institution adhering to the requirements of compliance to government regulations through particular standardized formats, expectations and outcomes that are recognisable within dominant constructions of accountability, “proof” and evaluation in primary school.

In this paper, then, we aim to uncover some of the ways this school community might be working *under the radar* and *off the grid* to actively challenge hegemonic constructions of the “successful” student subject, as well as the ways in which children are taking up these alternative subjectivities in their highly diverse learning community. We have chosen in this article to focus on a particular aspect of a collaborative classroom project that lasted the whole year, to illustrate some of the ways in which the particular pedagogy and theoretical guidance being used in this school enabled teachers, students and parents to work *under the radar* and *off the grid*. We draw here on written and verbal documentation in the form of thoughts from children, teachers and parents to illustrate the work being carried out in this school. Due to the parameters of the journal article genre, we are sharing only a fragment of the written and verbal documentation, nevertheless it is important to acknowledge here that the pedagogical documentation and research around this long-term project did also include a wide array of rich visual, sculptural, performance-based and gestural languages. Ultimately, we argue that this school provides hopeful insights into ways teachers and students might be liberated from the essentialist (im)possibilities constituted within dominant discourses of standardization and normalization, through honoring the great learn-

ing capacities, skills and potentialities that exist in learning communities when trust, openness and diversity are valued.

## **TERRITORIALIZATIONS: (IM)POSSIBLE SUBJECTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS**

In our analysis throughout this paper, we have found it useful to draw on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of *territorialization* in understanding professions and professionalization. In particular we use their theories in understanding to make sense of how the teaching profession territorializes (and also de/re/territorializes) its functions in particular ways that mark out what the dominant assumptions of legitimated teaching practice may be. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987); "In animals as in human beings, there are rules of critical distance for competition: my stretch of sidewalk. In short, a territorialization of functions is the condition for their emergence as "occupations" or "trades"" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 321). Thus, by looking first at the ways the teaching profession has marked out the territory of primary schools through particular functions and expressions of territorialization, we believe we might start to understand the ways in which the case school may be 'launching forth' from the marked territory to create a new region, opening up a line of flight that potentially deterritorializes and/or reterritorializes elements of professional practice and functions of the profession.

For the purposes of this article, we are particularly interested in exploring territorialization as a helpful tool in understanding more about the dominant ways of imagining and enacting possible or impossible (student, learner, teacher) subjectivities in the early years of primary school. Through this, we can perhaps start to uncover hints as to the ways in which the territory of primary schools has been marked out through particular subjectivities, positionings and expressions of territorialization (What/who is "normal"? included? excluded? visible? silenced? possible? impossible?). For instance, many authors assert that we currently exist (in our particular point in time, place, politics) within an especially encompassing hegemony—a discourse of knowledge, allowing one version, one conceptualisation of academic success, of intellect, of teaching, of learning, of evaluation, accountability and assessment (Lingard, 2010; Luke, 2003).

It is often argued that the dominant discourses which territorialize knowledge, teaching and learning in primary schools are constructed in ways that allow particular versions (to be possible/impossible) of how, where and what children learn (see, for example, research by MacNaughton, 2005; Moss & Petrie, 2002; Youdell, 2006). This is a territory that has, at its core, the inevitability of hierarchy (Rinaldi, 2005), and in deference to this normalized hierarchical "truth" are its tools of standardization, normalization, measurement, ranking, regulation, sur-

veillance, and competition that both result from and perpetuate this encompassing discourse (Lingard, 2010). The multiplicity and complexity of schooling (of learning, teaching, community, collaboration, curriculum and knowledge) is thus reduced to the pursuit of a linear way to standardize, measure, or rank, placing somewhere on a rung of the hierarchy such things as children's minds and bodies, teachers, schools, districts, countries, as well as subject areas, teaching methods, rates of learning, and models of education.

These territorializations through hegemonic discourses in primary school education “contain and shape the conditions of possibility available to school students” (Davies, 2006, p. 430); that is, possible and impossible student subjectivities can be seen as being constructed and maintained (or silenced or even unimaginable) within the parameters of these territorialized policies and practices. Deborah Youdell (2006) argues that the “processes through which subjectivities are constituted” for children at school are directly connected to “school constitutions of students and learners”, which, in turn, are couched within “marketising policies across national contexts” (p. 7). When we consider the construction of the “student self” within school contexts, we can locate layerings and intersections of (im)possible subjectivities within the overlaps of these multiple discourses that construct both *general(izing)* collective subjectivities and *individual(izing)* subjectivities of childhood/the student.

Some of these overlapping layers result in particular processes of constituting general(izing) collective subjectivities of (im)possible childhoods for children in Australian schools. The pursuit of “sameness”—couched within discourses of normalization and standardization, and practices of ranking, labelling and placing of children within essentialist and generalizing categorizations (of gender, culture, socio-economic status, behaviour, intelligence, and ability)—and the subsequent biases towards or against where children fall within these categories—serve to shape the construction of collective student subjectivities within schools (see, for example, Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; MacNaughton, 2005; Saltmarsh, 2011; Soto & Swadener, 2002).

Many authors also argue that the construction of particular (im)possible collective subjectivities of childhood are produced and maintained through hierarchies and inherent power imbalances in the adult-child relationship within broader society, and the subordinate positioning of children well below adults in the school hierarchy (Qvortrup et al., 1994). Often informed by sociological lenses and Foucauldian theory, this body of research suggests that status differentials between adults and children are particularly visible within primary schools, where children are at the bottom of the school hierarchy (Millei, 2005), and where “the balance of power is heavily skewed towards adults...Adults control children's use of time, occupation of space, choice of clothing, times of eating—even their mode of social interaction” (Robinson & Kellet, 2004, p.91).

Along with these generalizing collective (im)possible subjectivities are layered the pervasive individualized and individualizing discourses of the ideal “successful student” influenced by global neo-liberal economic discourses. Recently, much of the research critiquing dominant ways of being and knowing in education has focused on these neo-liberal managerial discourses shaping conceptions of evaluation, assessment and measurement, and consequently policy, curriculum, and teaching practices across educational contexts and particularly in primary schools. This “globalized educational policy discourse” (Lingard, 2010) creates cultures of competition, performance, “academic success” and individualism (Keddie et al., 2011; Saltmarsh, 2011), whereby “[n]eoliberalism heightens individuality and competitiveness seeking to shape each student as an economic unit of use in a market economy” (Davies, 2006, p. 436). These discourses work together to produce a construction of the idealized “successful student,” a student who is obedient and productive, efficient and competitive, individualistic and aspiring (Devine, 2003; Kamler et al., 1994), who “reiterate[s] the pervasive policy discourse that gives primacy to individual choice and meritocratic achievement” (Saltmarsh, 2011, p. 31). The “deskilling” of the teaching profession (Keddie et al., 2011) occurs as teaching is “restructured in narrowly technicist ways” (Reid, 1993, p. 136). This deskilling along with the current priorities of measurement, accountability and auditing in schools (due to increased suspicion and surveillance accompanying the focus on measuring and testing teachers’—and their students’—competency standards) have been seen as resulting in a growing “culture of distrust” (Davies & Saltmarsh, 2007, p. 3) within and between schools.

Indeed, beyond acknowledging that as a result of the commodification and standardization of prepackaged curriculum (Luke, 2003), children in primary schools are being “subjected to a largely irrelevant, fragmented, meaningless curriculum in the name of school reform and meeting standards” (Novinger & O’Brien, 2003, p. 4), and that, in many cases, schools are seen as places where children learn “to endure boring, meaningless shit” (ibid), it is important to also acknowledge that the increases in high-stakes standardized testing have been shown to substantially *decrease* learning outcomes and academic achievement for children, and to further perpetuate inequity and reinforce the marginalization of children from communities who are socio-economically disadvantaged (Lingard, 2010; Youdell, 2006).

Focusing on these (im)possible subjectivities that are constituted through territorialized policies and practices in education leads us, along with many others in education, to wonder: What is our role as a profession in perpetuating inequities, and reinforcing marginalization of particular student subjectivities through taking up and replicating particular dominant policies and teaching practices? Are there ethical considerations that the teaching profession should acknowledge regarding the influence of notions of “normal” and “successful” student subjectivi-

ties on peer culture and relationships between children outside the classroom? Do these dominant discourses (both generalizing and individualizing), perhaps deny the complexity, interrelatedness, fluidity and multiplicity of possible subjectivities (St. Pierre, 2004; Taylor, 2005; Woodrow & Brennan, 2001)?

## **DE/RETERRITORIALIZATIONS: REIMAGINING (IM)POSSIBLE SUBJECTIVITIES IN SCHOOL**

Here, we draw together documentation from Sophie's teaching and Clare's research in order to provide an analysis of emerging themes that seem to suggest lines of flight, points of rupture, deterritorializations and hope for new ways of constituting subjectivities in the early years of primary school. Specifically, we ask: what might it mean when this particular school community in a contemporary urban Australian context actively resists hegemonic discourses and re-imagines (im)possible student and teacher subjectivities?

As this paper uses research from two people working in different capacities in the school (teacher and researcher) the methodological approaches are different but connected. Clare was involved in academic research and used an emergent arts-informed methodology. These approaches to research methodology were shaped by the key notion of research as *listening*: listening to/for multiple perspectives and shared understandings (case study); listening to/for many languages (arts-informed methods); listening to children (children's active participation and The Mosaic Approach), listening and researcher subjectivity (ethnography), and listening and uncertainty (emergent research methods). Clare's role as a researcher was thus to actively seek out ways of listening—to be open to uncertainty, surprise, unexpectedness—to be open to listen not only to what may fit into predetermined and assumed categories—to listen to (and ask) questions that may lead to more questions or very complex, ungraspable responses. Listening implies an openness to uncertainty (Rinaldi, 2006), to the unexpected, to differentiation and becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), to the emergent (Somerville, 2008). As mentioned above, we have chosen to focus on the conversational data created through this process due to the restrictions of length of paper and the particular issues on which we are focusing here. Sophie was involved in teacher research. As part of a team of teachers interested in how the children learn, how they use and negotiate many forms of expression and how they build knowledge together, this research methodology was closely related to pedagogical practices and planning of teaching and learning. We have used aspects of this teacher research in the form of pedagogical documentation to analyse in this article and to illustrate ways in which this school is working to challenge dominant and often restrictive views of children and learning.

For the teachers at the case school who were working in a learning community characterized by diversity in many forms (including age, gender, ability, ethnicity, language, socio-economic background, religion), issues of *difference* and *belonging* became prominent, ongoing pedagogical and ethical considerations. Alongside these challenges to honour diversity and foster belonging in this community was a strong educational discourse of individualization and competition that seemed at odds with values of multiplicity and interconnectedness. As a school community, we came, therefore, to ask ourselves these questions: If the dominant discourse is about individualization and standardization, how might we resist this? How might we speak back to this? How might we imagine other possibilities in which children can see themselves as connected to others, to many ways of knowing, to exploring, to possibilities and to belonging in their uniqueness?

Our teaching community attempted to enable the children to develop and demonstrate their sensitivities to diversity, belonging and multiplicity. We were guided by the work of many theorists (for example, Foucault, 1980, Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1993; hooks, 2003; Kincheloe, 2004) and endeavoured to keep our values, particularly that of *listening*, present in our planning, practice and reflections. This commitment to listening is strongly advocated by the educators of Reggio Emilia in Italy. Rinaldi (2006) demonstrates the multiple layers of their understanding of listening:

Listening as an active verb that involves interpretation, giving meaning to the message and value to those who offer it. Listening that does not produce answers but formulates questions; listening that is generated by doubt, by uncertainty, which is not insecurity but, on the contrary, the security that every truth is such only if we are aware of its limits and its possible “falsification”. (p. 65)

To listen to children requires recognition that they have something important to say, that they have the ability to know before and beyond school and that what they learn at school finds connections to this body of knowledge. More than the romanticising of listening such that it becomes a “benevolent gift” (O’Donnell et al., 2009, p. 436), this pedagogy of listening seeks to allow “alternative discourses to emerge through hegemonic registers” (McLeod, 2011, p 187). One of our central pedagogical practices, therefore, was “listening” through the recording of the children’s ideas, perspectives, ponderings and theories in pedagogical documentation, a practice which, according to educators in Reggio Emilia:

Makes visible (though in a partial way, and thus ‘partisan’) the nature of the learning processes and strategies used by each child, and makes the subjective and intersubjective processes a common patrimony. It enables reading, revisiting and assessment in time and in space, and these actions become an integral part of the knowledge-building process. (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 68)

Pedagogical documentation is also advocated by other early childhood researchers, such as Dahlberg et al. (1999), who see this practice as an opportunity to challenge dominant discourses and to “contribute to a deepened self-reflexivity” (p. 152).

The excerpt of pedagogical documentation that we present here is connected to a conversation in which we were discussing with the children what they think a “language” is. This had itself emerged from an exploration of *story* and different ways of telling and reading stories. The conversation revealed to us the children’s complex understanding of language and communication, and we were particularly interested in the possibilities of a contribution Jules offered to the conversation when he stated: *“If you’re deaf, your hands are like your mouth, that, like your hands talk, if you’re deaf.”* This, we thought, offered our students a way of expressing themselves and communicating that honoured their strength in gestural communication and connected it to an exploration of identity and belonging. It also offered an opportunity to further open the concept of language and potentially challenge some things we may take for granted related to the dominance of English as a form of communication and deficit conceptions of those deemed to have a “disability”. It gave us an opportunity to honour different languages and to see deaf people as creative, strong, thoughtful, communicative beings and to acknowledge and build on the children’s richly diverse linguistic and expressive histories and experiences. At the same time we were able to continue to develop many of the skills deemed important within the dominant discourse, such as reading, writing, speaking and listening in Standard Australian English (those things that tend to be recognized in dominant educational policy and practice as “literacy”).

We presented Jules’ theory back to the children and asked them to form a hand gesture that communicated a feeling, which we photographed and they then wrote about and painted, traversing many forms of expression. We have written more extensively previously about this work around language and diversity (in Britt & Rudolph, 2012). A small group of children then came together to reflect on the question, *“If we put all our hands together what would it say about our community?”* They had some discussion around this question initially and then reflected individually; their thoughts are recorded below.

People bring feelings from their home and their minds and from their Mum and Dad and little or big brothers. And everybody’s hands are different and everybody’s stories are different. If we put our hands together we’re sharing our hands and stories. —Malaz, aged 6

If we put our hands together it might mean we work together and it might mean we help together. Sometimes I bring stories from Vietnam to Australia and my hands make me remember Vietnam. Some other people might bring stories

from Japan, Thailand, China, Canada, Sudan, NSW, Egypt, Africa, Sri Lanka, Singapore and Cambodia. When we come to that country we could share our story. —Tiffany, aged 8

If we put our hands together we can't work but if we leave them alone they can do everything and they work. The stories we hold in our hands come from Vietnam, China, Sudan, Eritrea, Istanbul, Sri Lanka, Paris, Egypt, Africa, Singapore, India, Cambodia. My story comes from Level 13 and from my country, Sudan. —Esraa, aged 7

Our hands are different colours and they've got different patterns and they are different shapes and sizes but they are the same thing, hands. —Jules, aged 6

If our hands went to the circle in our places we could pretend that they were littler thoughts and when we put them all together they are one big thought. If we put them together in the circle we are one big community and we work together. —Fergus, aged 7

I think that people bring feelings to help each other and the feelings are like a classroom going on and on. The story about hands is that all around the world there are feelings that are the same but we do different things in different times. —Akinesh, aged 8

I think our hands show when we share our love we are having lots of fun. —Jonathan, aged 5

When we put our hands together it might tell stories about our life and last year and the past of each other. It will also tell us about nature because nature has the same feelings as us. Our hands will tell us about our school and the place where we meet and share games and stuff that other people might not know about. —Xander, aged 6

All our hands would tell about the community. Everyone's hands are different but we share feelings and stories and space. If we put our hands together every hand would be together so it would say that we work together and are a community. —Jemima, aged 7

These profoundly poetic and philosophical reflections give insight into the depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding these children have around issues of community, communication, emotion, connection, difference and multiplicity. As teachers, we found that this opportunity to reflect on these issues allowed the children to negotiate the complex struggles of being part of a diverse community, of how to allow difference and multiplicity to be present and still find connections. It also highlighted to us the importance of embracing the complexity that comes with difference and not enforcing sameness in order to measure or rank the children against each other. Thus, in examining this excerpt of pedagogical

cal documentation, we can begin to uncover some of the ways that the teachers in the school community might be working “under the radar” to actively challenge hegemonic constructions of the ideal “successful” student subject, as well as the ways in which the children themselves are taking up these alternative subjectivities to create a community of belonging in this highly diverse context.

### *Multiplicity, Difference, Belonging and Trust*

Disrupting and deterritorializing the dominant educational discourses of individualism and competition, in this excerpt of pedagogical documentation we find an overt seeking out and valuing of notions of diverse community of belonging. For the teachers and the children, time and space are given within the curriculum to explore the importance of interconnectedness and the centrality of social relationships through notions of listening, respect and dignity. For example, in the excerpts above, Malaz, Tiffany and Esraa focus particularly on their specific connections to other people and places, the stories that their hands and identities are bound up with and how this influences their interactions with other members of the learning community. Esraa refers to her layered story and identity when she mentions the influences from her birth country, Sudan, and her current home in a large block of flats. Akinesh and Jonathan pay special attention to “feelings” within the concepts of difference and connection. Akinesh notes that the world contains “feelings that are the same” but that we perhaps interpret or experience them differently in different places and contexts, and Jonathan simply recognises the importance of love!

This conscious and deliberate foregrounding of interconnectedness and relationships as key elements of pedagogical practice was also raised in a discussion that Clare had with Lyn, a parent from the school community. When asked what she thought was special, or unusual about the school, Lyn said:

It’s the relationships. It’s that they focus so much on the relationships between kids and kids, between kids and parents, between kids and teachers, between teachers and parents, it’s that all of those relationships are considered to be important, and need work. They don’t take any of them for granted. They all need work. And that, for us, was the real catalyst. That was the difference. —(Excerpt of Transcript from Conversational Interview with Lyn, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2008, 3pm)

And later, in the same conversation, Lyn articulated in more detail what she saw as the careful and intentional authenticity, responsibility and reciprocity involved in the creation of these relationships:

But it really is the relationships, and *since* then, I’ve really realised that “everybody is responsible for their own actions”, is *really* reinforced here. Whereas it isn’t elsewhere. Here they do. And *they help*, certainly, they don’t expect kids to do things that aren’t reasonable, but *everybody*, teachers, everybody is respon-

sible. I've heard teachers upstairs apologise to kids, when the kids are saying, you know "I asked you to do this, and you didn't do it", "Oh, I'm sorry, I got held up and I shouldn't do that, next time I'll try and be more careful". You don't get people doing that in other schools.

The excerpts of pedagogical documentation suggest, too, a disrupting of the dominant discourses of standardization and normalization, through a foregrounding of multiplicity and difference (as values rather than "problems" to be erased or smoothed over). We see here, in the teachers' pedagogical practice and in the children's responses, an openness to difference and multiplicity, and an active seeking out and celebration of difference: different ways of being, of knowing, different roles and different possible subjectivities.

In the example above, Jules and Fergus each in their own way articulated the simultaneous presence of difference and connection. Fergus, in particular, draws attention to the ways each of us can bring something of ourselves ("littler thoughts") to create something together ("when we put them all together they are one big thought") and Jules identifies uniqueness within similarity. Similarly, Xander and Jemima weave together complex notions of connections across difference—and of difference as an integral and valued element of what it means to belong in this community of learners. Xander describes place as being both specific to a particular community ("our school and the place where we meet and share games and stuff that other people might not know about") and more general or far-reaching ("the past of each other" and "nature has the same feelings as us"). Jemima too, links concepts of difference with "feelings and stories and space"—foregrounding the shared human experiences of this very diverse, but very connected community of belonging: "all our hands would tell about our community".

The key notions of interconnectedness, difference and a disruption of the individualizing and normalizing discourses of competition and standardization were also raised in many of the discussions that Clare had with the school community as a part of her research. Difference, diversity and multiplicity were seen as integral components of the curriculum at the school, and, equally, as important in conceptualising the "student subject" within the school community. Tania, a parent of Riley (who had started at the school earlier that year), described her joy at discovering the school's philosophical and pedagogical stance on difference:

[The principal] talked about that they weren't into grading the kids in terms of *pushing* them to learn at a certain standard by a certain time frame because all kids have their own little spurts and ebbs and flows in learning, and I'd already experienced that with Riley [...] I spoke with Bianca [the teacher], and I said "What's the difference, here?" and she said, "Oh well we *do projects*, where the *kids* come up with their ideas", and she gave me an example of one of the projects [...] and I just thought, "Oh wow!" Cause I know my husband had talked about

at school he just *hated* sitting still and listening. And auditory comprehension's not my strongest area either. I know that Riley's more visual and tactile. And I just didn't want to break his spirit in a traditional school, where he would have to sit a lot and be expected to listen. And if he was forced...you know if they had lessons planned and he was doing this business (*hunched shoulders*) "I don't want to do it", I just thought that's going to stifle his learning. And with having Stanley and Bianca talk about how they *avoid* that, I thought, "Oh, this would be fantastic for Riley". I need an environment where he will feel *free* to explore, rather than be *controlled*, I guess..." (*Excerpt of Transcript from Conversational Interview with Tania, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2008, 12.30pm*)

These themes of the importance of difference, authenticity and connectedness were revealed again when, as a part of Clare's research, a group of children talked about their perspectives on their learning at the school. There is a strong current here of the notion that their experience of learning is not individualistic or competitive, it is not segmented into separate and distinct subject areas, but rather learning is connected in a fluid and authentic way between people, across disciplines, and over time:

Malaz—I want to answer the question about "What do you learn about here?". We learn about Aboriginal people, and British people and time and dinosaurs and things like that. The past.

Clare—And how do you decide what to learn about?

Dharani—Well I think the future and the past and a *lot* of things we've learnt about.

Malaz—because some people were talking in the circle and we were looking at the circles and the shadows

Dharani—and Tanner's shadow?

Malaz—Huh?

Dharani—Tanner's shadow.

Malaz—Yeah. And I think I've talked about all the things now! (*laughs*)

Clare— So how do you decide what to learn about? Who decides what you learn?

Dharani—Well teachers really decide, but every term we draw something like on this coloured piece of paper, and we draw what we want to learn about, and if the teachers think it's a good thing to learn about we learn about that thing, because last year [...] well Grace, a girl in our class, we were doing *body* things first, and then Grace said, when Grace was doing body things she said "I wanna learn more about *animals*" because she loves animals, *then* we got onto our animal

project. Then the preppies came and we got onto new projects, so we've learnt a lot of things.

Asha—Then after Grace, then we learnt about the plants with Grace and the shadows with Grace... —(*Excerpt of Transcript from Group Discussion with Asha, Dharani, Malaz, Huda and Esraa, 25<sup>th</sup> June 2008, 11am*)

Through this discussion, Malaz, Dharani and Asha draw together and articulate the complexity and connectedness of both the processes and content of their learning. Their cataloguing of the content of their learning (“Aboriginal people, and British people and time and dinosaurs and things like that. The past.”; “the future and the past”; “the circles and the shadows”; “Tanner’s shadow”; “body things”, “animals”, “plants”) is not listed in a random way, but connects chronologically to the flow of the project over the course of the year, and the ways in which each area of learning was connected to the next. This connectedness is then expanded by Malaz, Dharani and Asha, who explain (with their examples of “some people were talking in the circle” and of “Grace”) the agentic position that children can also hold in negotiating the development and flow of the curriculum through their Project—offering a disruption of the assumed hierarchy within territorialized notions of generalized student subjectivities.

In this discussion, as in Tania’s comments above, we can also locate a disruption of the dominant individualizing construction of the ideal “successful student”, and the associated discourses of competition, isolation and normalization. Here, rather, we are presented with the children’s perspectives on a diverse and interconnected learning community. There is an interesting balance in their words between the sense of “shared” learning, from the perspective of collaboration with the other children and teachers in their learning community (where for every question that was asked that contained a second person pronoun: “What do *you* learn”, the children’s responses indicate that this pronoun has been interpreted by them in the plural: “*we* learn”, “*we* draw”, “things *we’ve* learnt about”, “*we* were looking”), alongside an acknowledgement of the connectedness to, and contributions of individuals in shaping the content and processes of the learning community (Jemima’s ideas about including the brain in the map of the project that added elements of metacognition to the group’s reflections on their learning; Tanner’s shadow and Grace’s love of animals that prompted new directions for the Project to take). This openness to possibilities, openness to multiple perspectives (“lots of different ways”), and openness to children’s agency in the decision making around their own learning can be seen as a deterritorializing line of flight from normalized constructions of student subjectivities, and also of versions of “knowledge” that present certainty, the “one way”, “one answer”: fixed, rigid and hierarchical conceptions of teaching and learning that prioritise standardised, opaque, unquestioned systems and truths.

Rather than positioning children within subjectivities of standardization, containment and obedience, the teachers at the case school actively worked to constitute possible subjectivities for students as capable of engaging with complex, authentic, challenging learning—and, more often than not, learning which involved grappling with (often marginalised or silenced) issues that are seen as “difficult knowledge” (Britzman, 1998) in many educational settings (see Rudolph, 2011). Lara, one of the teachers, explained:

I think that’s one of the ways that we *challenge* what children can do. [...] coming from a place where we *expect* children to do really important things, and to get involved in really important things, and think about really important things. I don’t think that’s necessarily an assumption in schools and...I guess that’s one of the ways we challenge what education can be... —(*Excerpt of Transcript from Conversational group discussion with the teachers: Lara, John, Sophie and Bianca, 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2008, 1pm*)

Thus, here we can follow another line of flight towards the importance of *trust* in this school community—a line of flight that can be seen as actively disrupting and deterritorializing hegemonic educational discourses of surveillance, suspicion and of deficit constructions of children. The teachers here subvert (im)possible student and teacher subjectivities by establishing relationships characterised by trust and openness, by trusting children to think, and by trusting in the processes of uncertainty inherent in authentic and lived pedagogical practice in a diverse community.

## CONCLUSION

The active reconstruction of these shared understandings of (im)possible student subjectivities can be seen as one way that this school community questions and resists the constrains of current hegemonic discursive positionings, responding to Bronwyn Davies’ (2006) assertion that, “We must take responsibility for examining the documents and discursive practices that are taken for granted in our schools and universities, and ask: what conditions of possibility are they creating and maintaining for us and for our students?” (p. 436-437)

As well as (and sometimes in spite of) negotiating dominant regulatory neo-liberal territorializations of standardization, measurement and surveillance, this school community is finding ways to work “under the radar” to create “conditions of possibility” that place the importance of trust, relationships, connectedness and dignity at the centre of pedagogical practice. We find here a school community committed to shifting from normalizing discourses of individualism and “personal success” to what might be seen as the (currently marginalized) broader social goals of schooling: ongoing social justice and equity issues. We suggest that,

through illuminating examples of lines of flight from territorializations, *robust hope* (Singh & Han, 2007; Sumsion, 2007) might be offered in imagining possible ways of *enacting an ethics of care*, or *local, situated ethics* within schools (and other sites of education) (see Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; St Pierre, 2004; Taylor 2005; Woodrow & Brennan, 2001).

Hope, too, is offered through the school community's reconceptualizing of possible subjectivities as murky, complex, fluid, shifting, interconnected, changing and multiple (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), whereby children and the school community inhabit and are connected to the specificity and particularity of relationships within their schools in authentic (and multiple, shifting) ways. Thus we conclude with a final line of flight, joining Affrica Taylor's (2005) call to:

recognise that we cannot know ourselves completely except through others—we constitute each other and are vulnerable to each other. We are enmeshed rather than separate, responsible for *others* not just for ourselves. This is to insist upon a radical *intersubjectivity* (p. 9).

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