A struggle without an end: working with minor identities in school

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I want to start with a quote from the French philosopher and political activist Michel(le) Foucault who says,

> The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations (1984, p. 47).

Credit Rachel Holmes, Gabby Birelo and 1B

Identity is about sets of relations inside which we all live. Relations not only with each other, but also with other bodies such as communities, places, contents and surroundings that constitute the materiality and matter of the world. Whether we feel *in relation* to others or *isolated from* them, there is a particular cluster of connectivity that allows a pupil, a teacher and a place like school to be defined. Grappling with our sense of identity is partly about attuning to those relations as they determine how, and to whom we become recognisable in particular ways and at particular times.
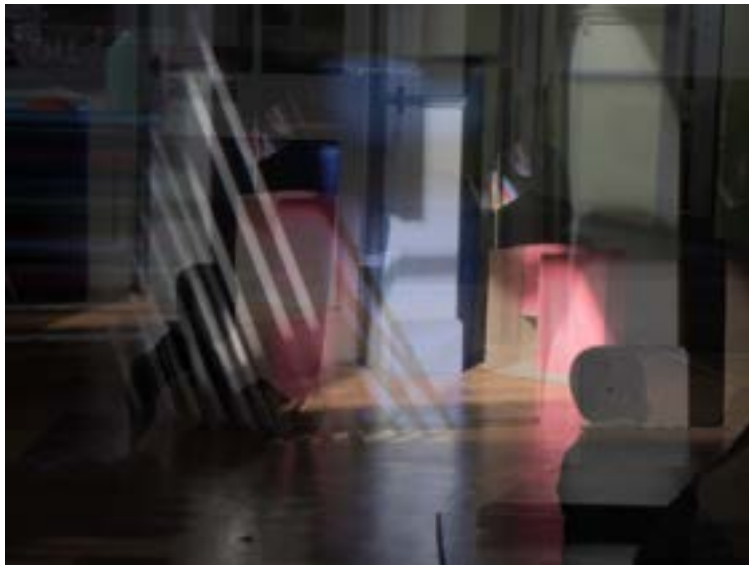
Credit Rachel Holmes, Gabby Birelo and 1B

Feeling different, lonely, or out of place at school is reported by increasing numbers of young people with disabilities or SEN, those who are in care or are care leavers, who identify as trans or queer, and many more. These feelings can have a detrimental impact on some YP's mental health, whilst others may occupy this space more confidently. According to the House of Commons Health & Social Care Committee (2021), NHS data indicates the mental health of children and young people in England has worsened since 2017, intensified by the recent pandemic, ubiquity of social media, peer pressure, schools' expectations and drive for academic achievement and success.

In 2017 the DfE claimed that the challenge to create school environments sensitive to young people's mental health needs continues to overwhelm the school system. Despite decades of educational interventions around anti-bullying, inclusion and wellbeing, some schools continue to be hostile environments for many children who fail to identify with, or fall inside the tolerable limits of what is seen as 'normal'. Discussing children on the Autistic Spectrum for example, Judith Hebron and Neil Humphrey (2014) note how other children often view them as 'odd', 'strange' or 'weird', and therefore they are prime candidates for bullying and teasing. Among young people, living with OCD, Carly Keyes and her colleagues (2018) found there was a strong sense of feeling 'different' and according to Mike Stein (1994) in a report called *Leaving Care* nearly all the young people reported feeling that they were the 'odd one out', the subject of curiosity, and of abuse.

Credit Steve Pool & Kate Pahl

This keynote will think through how identity plays out in school. My focus is on young people who at school, feel they do not fit in, are on the outside of friendship groups, feel the odd one out, or are lonely. These young people are not straight forwardly identifiable as being neurodiverse, or having a particular disability; being gender non-conforming or identify as queer and so on. Although very often research with YP who fall into those (and other) groups, suggests some feel othered or alienated in school. My concern today lies more broadly with how the process of identification inadvertently draws comparisons with an unsayable 'normal child' and an even less utterable 'ideal child', relations that lie at the heart of school-based measurements, assessments, diagnoses and interventions.

Markus Bohlmann, a gender studies scholar uses film and literature to examine what he describes as 'misfit children'. He notes how some children unsettle the assumed 'normal' trajectory of linear development, focusing on figures that he refers to as the not-yet-child, child-too-long, and adult-too-soon. He proposes that

> Childhood normalcy...involves a developmental teleology *up* to adulthood.
> This progression of the child along steps and stages toward adulthood
> brings with it the risk of missteps, regressions, delays, swerves,
> decelerations and accelerations that threaten to rerail its upward growth.
> To minimise these dangers and to maximize the possibility that children
> grow up 'normal' and 'normally' adults tend to children with a vigilant
> eye/I" (2016, p. xiv).

Bohlmann's concern here around the coercion involved in growing up 'normally' urges us to think about how the process of schooling contributes to what Rebecca Mallett (2016) and her colleagues describe as the systemic workings of the taken-for-granted nature of

'normalcy' in school and its relationship with children's emergent identities as they unfold into that process.

Credit Jo ray & Amanda Ravetz

So, what do we mean by identity and why should we be interested in this topic here today?

Identity always sounds like something we should know about ourselves in terms of who we are, what we 'stand' for, and to which communities we belong. Although there seem to be some 'facts' about us that tell us something about who we are, the categories we take for granted such as age, socioeconomic class, ethnicity or religion, are profuse with a thousand tiny divergences. These are complicated by the intricate ways our biological, material, psychological, affective and social ways of being in the world intersect with one another in the always emerging structure of our subjectivity.
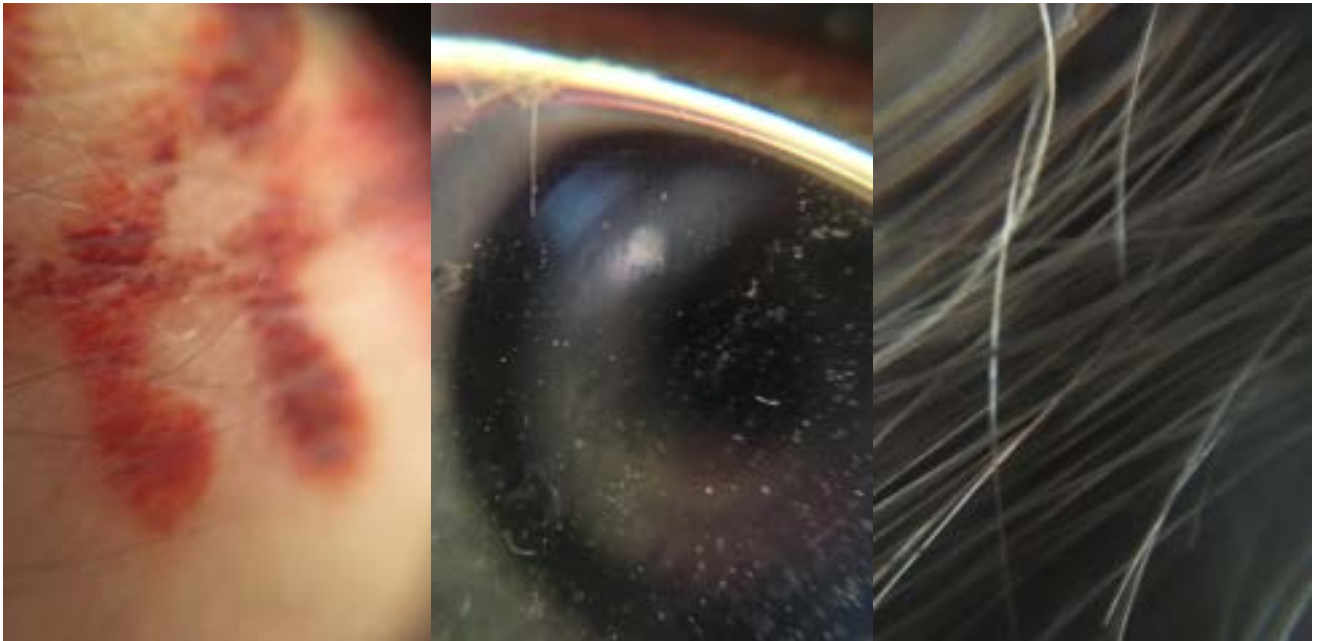
Credit Becky Shaw

Having an identity sounds like a constellation of fixing characteristics, as though we somehow grow into it or arrive at it at some point in our lives. When I say grow into it, identity seems to come from within *and* without – in as much as we become who we are, not in isolation, but in deeply entangled relationships with so many others. And by 'others' I refer not only to other people, but also to other things, species, systems, colonial and other histories, cultures, politics, and so on. Identification however, is the process of being identified *as* someone or something by others. We are so often identified from with-out as a certain type of person, perspectives partly informed by how others view our gender, our skin colour, our family, our age/stage, our hearing aid, and as adults, even our professional training. It's incredibly hard to escape the stickiness of being identified as some *one* with some *thing*.

Credit Becky Shaw, Jo Ray & Amanda Ravetz

Not only every*one* but every*thing* or every object also has an identity that makes it more, or less recognisable - a staple, sand, a rabbit, a whiteboard, spit, a hole. Drawing on his scholarship in visual culture and media theory William Mitchell, reminds us that "objects are the way things appear to a subject with a name, an identity, or stereotypical template... Things on the other hand signal the moment when the object becomes the Other... becomes uncanny" (2005, p. 2). So, there is an important distinction being made in Mitchell's work between an *object* that is named and a *thing* which is far less recognisable and always lives with the capacity for becoming some *thing* other than itself.

I begin to wonder at this point how this openness and capacity for 'always becoming something else' could be thought about in relation to a child's, teacher's or Educational Psychologist's identity. As busy professionals, how can we practice what Jane Bennett describes as "the discipline of looking always at what is to be seen" (2010, p. 5), thereby resisting our eagerness to recognise something *as* something, for example, a behaviour as disruptive; a lack of language as delay; a decision as defiant. When we observe someone or something, we often see them or it as "already tending toward its usefulness" (Manning and Massumi, 2014: 8) – for example a door as passage way; a resource as a tool to teach about sharing; a refusal to conform as a way to reinforce desirable behaviour. Amongst busy

schedules and daily habits and routines, how can we make time to practice looking at what else there is to be seen? How might we establish spaces that allow us to suspend the rush to know and to fix, where the "multiplicity of a thing" can be studied, without "seeking to locate or construct universal principles or explanations" (Southerton, 2012, p. 125, cited in Coleman & Ringrose, 2013, p. 10).

Elizabeth Grosz (2010), an Australian philosopher and feminist theorist, proposes that as we move into a much less certain or predictable future, the conundrum of identity is more a struggle without an end rather than attaining and settling with recognizable positions and roles that are valued. What our time on the Odd project in Alma Park has afforded us is a place and space to notice the ways in which identity intricately emerges at the frayed edges of the personal and collective, as a mixture of internal and external, singular and intersectional, individual and social, political and theoretical. Identity flows, follows and often sticks; it is given, taken and claimed, weaving itself through biological, discursive, material and social forms as we make sense of who we *think* we are, who others *assume* us to be, how we are *known*, as well as the ways we relate and connect to other bodies and things in the world.

When thinking about the struggle *for*, and *with* identity, as well as *being* identified in school, I now want to spend some time working through five of the challenges I think we face.

**The first is how identity reifies 'normal'.**

Identity is all about difference, yet is regulated by its comparative relationship with what constitutes 'normal' and how the parameters of normality are patrolled in school. The term 'normal' is rarely uttered, yet finds itself embedded in every aspect of school life. Irrespective of whether or not we ever use this term, we often find ourselves referring to a sense of what's normal for a particular chronological age, or key stage, a culture, a time, a condition or disability, as we make professional judgements about progress, attainment and behaviour. In fact, from pre-birth, the foetus is tracked measured and documented against 'normal' developmental stages via pre-natal screening, new born behavioural observations, ASQs, EYFS baseline assessment and onwards into young adulthood. Intelligence, height, weight and many other aspects of the child's body as well as their social and emotional life are measured in comparison to what is considered 'normal'.

Dan Goodley and colleagues (2021) note how success, progress and development are measured according to how one fits with 'species-typical standards of human performance'. In Psychology and education, the 'normal' range or 'species-typical standards' are often depicted on a bell-shaped graph that offers a visual representation and statistical description of the limits of normal. However, they suggest that if, "left un-interrogated, normality allows for (unnoticed) oppressive cultures that cater only for those perceived to sit neatly within the bell curve (meaning the white, middle-class, non-disabled, cisgender and heterosexual male child)" (2016, p. 7). In other words, although there is long-standing recognition of inequities in society, if we do not scrutinise the various tools and apparatus we use in psychology and education for measuring development, progress and attainment, we continue to embed a form of cultural advantage and privilege that unfairly perpetuates social hierarchy in association with what, or who constitutes 'normal'.

Credit Rachel Holmes

It is only through bodily difference that contrasts with the species-typical standard that other, non-normative bodies come to matter. As Sue Chantler (2013, p. 73) argues, we identify or label only those deemed to be 'abnormal' and the phenomenon of labelling reflects how particular psy-disciplines such as psychiatry, medicine and psychology inform school practices in the construction of some children as 'disorderly or disordered'. Psy-disciplines is a term used by scholars Beth Barker and China Mills (2018) for the ways children are subjected to processes of identification, assessment and labelling typically used in schools. Labels help us to name that some thing of our identity that is in excess, spilling out and differing from, whilst trying to keep within the tolerated limits of 'normal'.
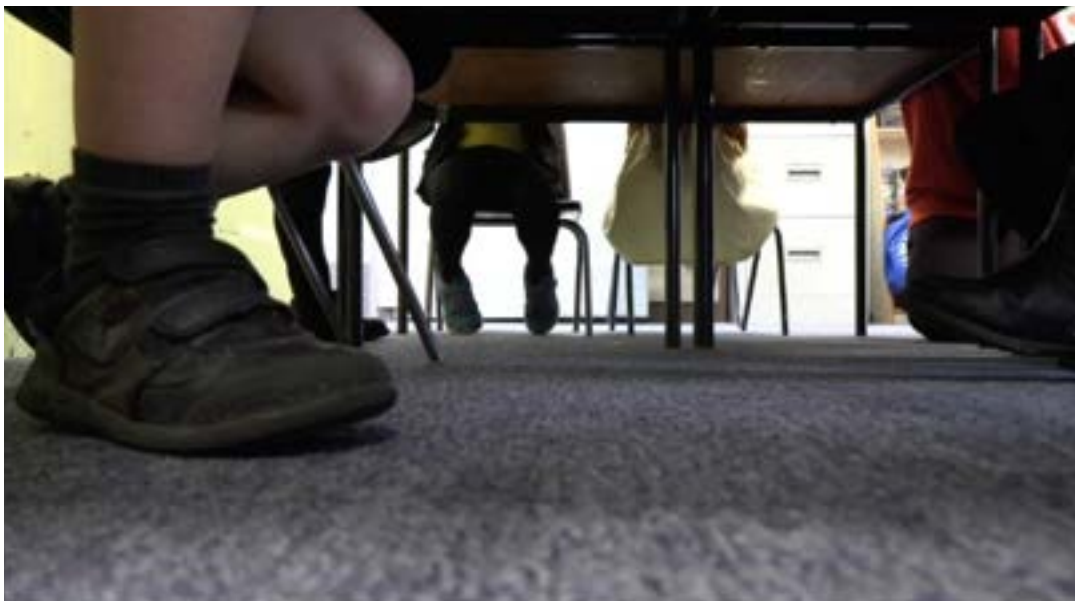
Credit Rachel Holmes

Anita Sanyal Tudela is a biologist, science teacher and scholar in the field of teacher education. In her body of work she notes how "students are constructed according to what has to be controlled in them or otherwise managed or changed in order for them to appear more like the ideal" (2019). This resonates with David Shannon's writings about a form of inclusion that could be thought of as,

> ... a rehabilitation that makes disability [(or difference)] disappear"
> (McRuer, 2006, p. 129) ... a process of closeting the divergent child,
> making them just- includable-enough by masking their most divergent
> tendencies" (2020: 228).

It also bears an interesting relationship with Homi Bhabha's post-colonial writings about mimicry and resemblance (1994, p. 110), whereby the ambivalence of the relationship between colonizer and colonized encourages the colonized subject to 'mimic' the colonizer, by adopting their cultural habits, assumptions and values. I'm not crudely comparing the process of inclusion here to the colonising work of imperial oppressors, but merely wondering how *appearing* like the ideal always allows for uncertainty in the rehabilitation work of the dominant group. Carolyn Smith-Morris notes how 'the rules of recognition' are set by the more powerful force, and yet in the struggle to be recognised, "... An agility of identity to find and enact different possibilities is a useful asset" (2020, p. 36).

Credit Becky Shaw, Jo Ray & The Afterschool Club

The second challenge we face is to think about how identity elides difference

The informal as well as more diagnostic process of identification, albeit sometimes explicitly on a spectrum, names and renders some *thing* of a particular person or object, recognisable. The mention of a child having English as an additional language for example, can trap our thinking in what Marcelo Svirsky describes as "... associative chains that lead our minds to look for always-already enacted contents" (2015, p. 60). The coalescing of our assumptions, beliefs, habits, and practices can render the specificities of some identities too alike. Often unquestioned assumptions about the characteristics, familial habits or struggles associated with particular categories of identification can lead us to elide or merge difference. The proliferation of divergence across the school community is then missed as thoughts, actions and particular identities become normalized through their repetition in everyday school practices. We can find ourselves assuming to know what autism 'looks like' or what intervention 'works' in a given situation without attending to the nuances of what more is there to be seen and sensed. Drawing on what Miranda Fricker (2007) calls 'epistemic injustice', this process of recognition and unthinking association can also negate a child's capacity as a knower of what it's like to live *as* that someone or *with* that something.

**The third challenge we face is how identity exceeds labels**

Children and young people are often labelled, a process that constructs difference in rudimentary ways. Critical disability scholars such as Katherine Runswick-Cole (2016) believe that by offering information *about* those differences, labels manage uncertainty by containing and normalizing what she describes as "abnormal bodies and minds". We know that many parents embrace labels associated with SEN or disabilities such as ADHD, Dyslexia and ODD. This is not surprising in contexts in the global North, where labels seem to offer families and children explanations, new understandings, interventions, and resources to support a child's inclusion in school and the wider community. And yet of course, no child conforms exactly to any diagnostic category, so any relief a label offers is always and only temporary. As Runswick-Cole, Mallett & Timimi (2016) report, every child exceeds, or falls short of the label(s) they're given and becomes an abnormal version of the abnormal impairment category the label seems to offer. The promise of the label is simultaneously so often disappointing and unfulfilled in children's and families' lives—understanding, interventions, and resources can remain elusive.

However, identity is also a galvanising political force, much more than the sum of its parts for decolonial, feminist, queer and crip or disabled activism. Being recognised as Black, deaf, female or identifying as pansexual for example opens up a highly affective political space for representation and agency as young people and their families feel a sense of belonging to a particular community or set of intersectional communities. According to philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler, labels or identity categories are politically effective precisely *because* of their power to produce and constitute their own political field but simultaneously fail to ever fully describe or represent that which they name.

Credit Rachel Holmes, Steve Pool, Kate Pahl and Alma Park's deaf and hearing-impaired collective

The fourth challenge invites us to think about how identity is relational
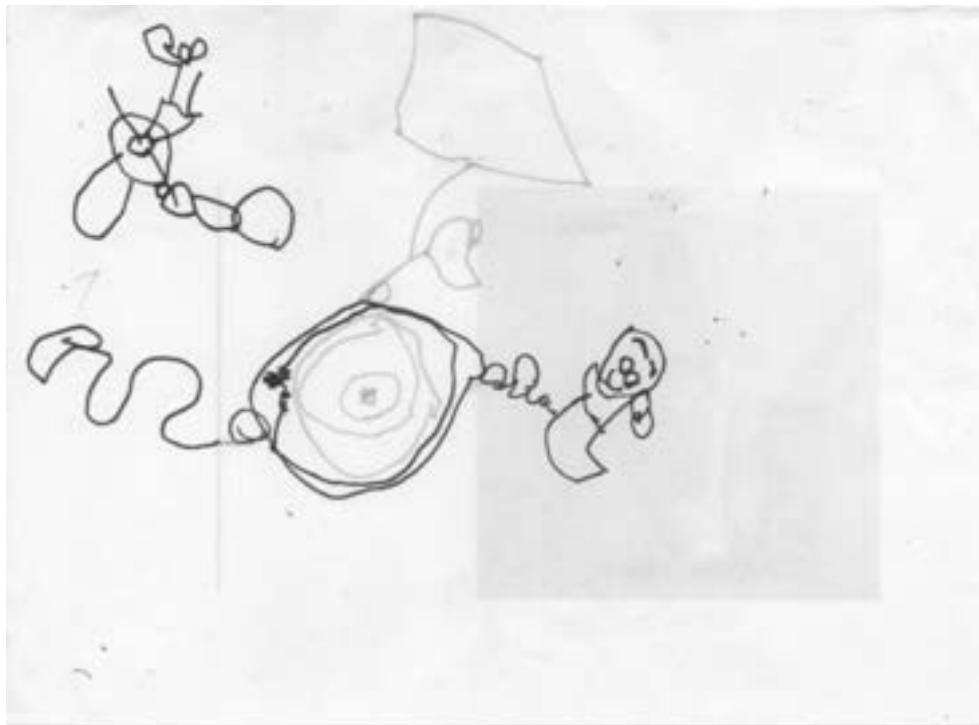
Credit Janan, Nursery

Identity is often thought to be something that belongs to each and everyone of us, somehow rendering us unique as individuals. However, it's the collectivity and relationality of identity that's critical in the work that we all do; as Steven Brown and Peter Lunt (2002) point out, the wholeness of a school, or of a class is derived from the assembled connections between individuals, a collection of heterogeneous elements - bodies, objects, furniture, bricks and mortar, equipment, materials and other matter - all of which have their own particular functions, sets of relations and indeed histories.

Although Fatima is known as a 7-year-old female child, having recently arrived in the UK with her family, has EAL and is eligible for FSM, these categories that somehow identify something of her do not 'explain' anything when analysed as characteristics belonging separately to her biological, discursive, material, psychological or social being. They are meaningless when analysed in isolation from the particular sets of relations arranged across history, geography, family, politics, socio-cultural structures, institutional policies and practices of which she is a product. How, for instance, does the dominance of literacy and language in school, the politics of inequity, the lived realities of her family's economic circumstances, and the school environment itself, etc. work as forces that co-create Fatima's identity? Terms like FSM and EAL become siloed and solidified over time, 'normalising' and making more 'recognisable' certain forms of individualised identity.

Credit Rachel Holmes, Amanda Ravetz & the Reception Class

Credit Huw Wahl, Anna Macdonald, Amanda Ravetz and the movement workshop collective

Maggie MacLure and her educational colleagues concluded some years ago that acquiring and maintaining an identity in school is never the sole responsibility of any one child. Definitions of the 'good' child, 'proper' conduct, or 'normal' development are shaped by institutional policies and practices that profoundly affect 'who' a child will become. Furthermore, as Valerie Walkerdine (1999, p. 2) argues, these polices and practices are strongly informed by developmental psychology, and 'privilege a particular model of normality, to the extent that it is certain children, who are "Othered", who become the object of pathologisation. Children who fail to act, or to be *recognised* as acting in accordance with what is deemed normal and expected for children of their age are at risk of being judged a problem.

So, there is an inevitable and uncomfortable relationality in the narrative about identity as individualised and its relationship with the class collective: specific behaviours come to be read as signs of deviation from the normal path; yet the integrity of the normal path is consolidated by the identification of those very deviations. In other words, we need the anomalous child as example, to understand more about, and reinforce to other children what it means to belong to the crowd.

The fifth challenge we face proposes that identity holds us still

Drawing on the psychoanalytic work of Felix Guattari (1984), Steven Brown and Peter Lunt (2002) suggest that an individual is always fragmented, a collective unto itself. But this collective can   achieve a temporary kind of wholeness, as it passes through different social identities. However, they go on to propose that identity can become captivating, even becoming a form of fetish, no longer a temporary resource but a thing to be invested with desires for its own sake. This fetishization of identity is particularly strong under neoliberal education, where children and all educational professionals are actively encouraged to over-invest in their (and others') educational identities. The task is then to understand how, under school's cultural and historical conditions, children, teachers, Educational Psychologists, researchers, become 'captured' by forms of identity, and what the effects of this capturing are in terms of re-producing the 'proper' pupil, the 'orderly' body and the 'outstanding' teacher.

Credit Steve Pool, Kate Pahl & the Odd Lab collective
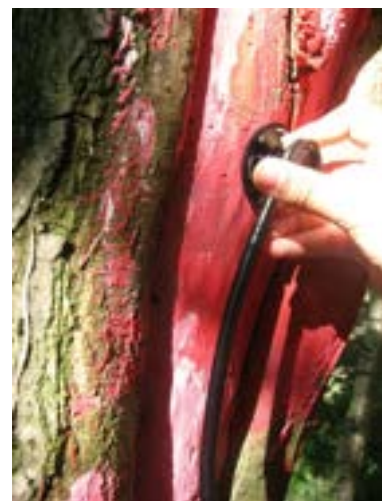
Credit Becky Shaw & the sensory research collective

Importantly for us here today, schools are key sites where the entwined tendencies toward normalization and idiosyncrasy deeply affect the identities and futures of the children who are caught up in their forces. This matters to those young people who find themselves positioned and captured as troublesome, troubled, awkward, disruptive, troubling, defiant or withdrawn, caught in a system that seeks assimilation through inclusion-as-rehabilitation. It also matters to the parents or carers who are exasperated by the incongruities, the misunderstandings, the demands and expectations, the blame and shame associated with parenting a child who refuses school's order. And it matters to the teachers, classroom assistants and Educational Psychologists who care for the wellbeing of all children, whilst being themselves tangled in the systems that assess, categorise, standardize, taxonomise and diagnose divergence as a particular identity or subject position.

Feeling different, a minor rebellion

I now want to turn to the idea of *minor identities* in order to begin to unsettle some of the challenges I've outlined above. The Canadian dancer, cultural theorist and political philosopher Erin Manning (2016), proposes that subjects do not organize experience but are organized by it. This prompts the question how are we organised by our experiences of school, of being a teacher or Educational Psychologist? Furthermore, what space is there for small openings, glimmers of (f)light where we might see and do things differently within that major organising principle?

The word minor is interesting. It can refer to a young(er) person, something small or slight, musically the minor key often denotes pathos or a particular melancholic atmosphere. However, the minor is also a way to think about undoing the major systems that organise us all on a daily basis. Within the education system there are many pre-existing structures that determine and shape (our) practice such as child development theory; policy and statutory guidance including admissions, assessment, curriculum, behaviour and attendance, safeguarding, SEND Code of Practice; the BPS' Code of Ethics and Conduct, and Practice Guidelines; as well as Ofsted regimes, school improvement initiatives and best practice. These all organise us in the work they do.

Credit Alice Pool and the Alma Park research collective

Yet, running through these are the nuanced rhythms of minor tendencies that initiate subtle shifts, opening up daily life in school to new kinds of indeterminancy. Minor events such as the unexpected disturbance; the indescribable feeling; the perplexing moment; the uncanny gesture; the sudden eruption; the counter learning with, rather than about something that reorients our experience towards the potentiality of new encounters. The minor drives through any and all major structures, unravelling, tilting, turning and queering their organising principle. If we think about minor identities, they undo something from the inside of the major categories of gender, race, dis/ability, class and so on. The children we all work with attune to minor's rhythms, reminding us to look always at what there is to be seen,

> The child is not an empty vessel hoping to be filled by content devised by adults. Nor is the child a neutral entity moving along a pre-constituted developmental path. A child is a researcher of life, and a maker of worlds. The indefinite runs through the child, protecting it from the frames we so eagerly wish to impose on it ... [often] the child knows something the adult has not yet attuned to, too concerned, as is often the case, with the presumed overlay of content and form" (Manning, 2020, p. 7-8).

Erin Manning's reflections here invite us to reconsider how a child is far less certain of her world, being much more attuned and open to its sense of continuous change. She goes on to propose that a pre-existing subject with an identity-position is a fallacy of what Alfred North Whitehead refers to as a 'misplaced concreteness' (1925, p. 51-52) as it infers a static arrangement of connections that misses the push and pull of relation. Those relations could be with other children, adults, the environment and surroundings that the child finds herself navigating. The New Scientist (Robson, 2020) got me thinking more about connections and relations in terms of identity. It featured a piece about how a spider's mind extends beyond its body; spiders think with their webs, the fine, fragile silk threads help them to sense and remember their world. I wonder how does the child's sensing or knowing of herself, others and the world extend beyond her mind/body out into and incorporating her surroundings?

Credit Jo Ray

Thinking about children's identities in ways that incorporate the particular and always changing milieu of their busy lives allows us to unfix ideas about who a child is. What constitutes 'normal' shifts fluidly as children move in entangled relations across and with different surroundings. For example as they move between home and school there are different expectations; as they gather together in Mosque and school assembly, practices vary; wearing school uniform renders children recognisable as pupils and may or may not engender a sense of collectivity, while becoming a Storm Trooper or Ninja Turtle always empowers and energises, saving the world from oblivion and corruption; making and sharing food at home can be a varied, and is always a culturally specific event.

In school however, communal eating can be experienced as noisy, smelly, unfamiliar, demanding, and an emotional affair; playing on the street with neighbourhood friends can be full of danger, risk and adventure, yet in school a child becomes caught up like a starling in murmuration, flying around the playground, or maybe finding herself alone with no-one she quite connects to; there is an exquisite attentiveness with which a child cares for her blue pony in class, retrieved from her tray as she explains "I feel like a wizard in a world of muggles" as well as being able to share all you need to with your companion species at home. So the particularness and materiality of each environment makes a difference to what's accepted as the norm and with this, unsettles any sense of stability about who the child is, what she can do, and what we can ever know of her. Changing connections over geographical spaces and across social relations proliferates difference in ways that allows any label given to a child to overflow at the edges. In different places, spaces, communities and company, with divergent expectations and routines, a child's sense of belonging takes different forms. It moves in, out and in between what is un/familiar and inclusive/exclusive, honouring the relational aspect of identity and disconnecting it from belonging solely to any bounded individual.

Credit William Hall

So, given the realities and urgencies of our daily work in school how can we make time to attune better to a child's interestingly divergent trajectories? If minor identities reject the idea of being fixed, stable and individualised, how can we reflect on the structuring forces in school? How can children, ourselves and others in the world of education find creative

escapes from authoritative institutional territories, and unsettle the grip of major structures from the inside?

Credit Steve Pool & Kate Pahl

If we work with one another along with others working in different disciplinary fields and with the young people we encounter on a daily basis, we can push at the limits of our taken-for-granted practices. We can look for minor practices that dislocate, unhinge, and de-familiarise ourselves from our habits of mind, as Isabelle Stengers writes, "Approach a practice ... as it diverges... feeling its borders, experimenting with new questions ... rather than posing insulting questions that would lead [you] to mobilise and transform the border into a defence against the outside" (2005, p. 184).

Odd: feeling different in the world of education
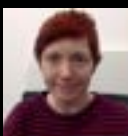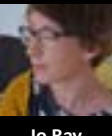
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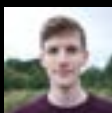
With a sense of minor identities in mind, I finally want to turn to the Odd project, which was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council between 2018 – 2021. The project was focused on how we might use minor research practices to ignite different ways of attuning to the school and its young community.
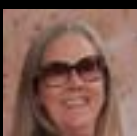

This interdisciplinary research was based solely at Alma Park Primary School in Levenshulme. It recognised the ethical necessity of tackling 'difference' innovatively so as to respond to the daily struggles some children face in a stifling school culture where the pressure to conform is overwhelming. It brought together perspectives from art, anthropology and educational research to explore how we might *all* feel and experience odd-ness at different times in our lives and to attune to those feelings, examining how they affect our bodies in ways we often cannot put into words.

The research collective

Rachel Holmes   Becky Shaw   Steve Pool

Jo Ray   Kate Pahl   Amanda Ravetz

Odd Research Team

Anna Macdonald
Dance Artist

Miles Umney
Filmmaker & Photographer

Rebecca Wright
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Anti-Bullying Alliance

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Extended Research Team and Steering Group

Denise Samuels
Play Therapist

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Yr 1 class teacher

Steve Burnham
School Caretaker

Charles Parfitt
Head teacher

Karen Houghton
Special Educational Needs
Co-ordinator

School-based Research Team

Credit Rachel Holmes with Amanda Ravetz, Steve Pool, Kate Pahl & the Alma Park research collective

Research Collective

The Odd project – against the grain of much educational thinking - appreciated school as an odd place, where children from 4 years of age learn about themselves and find ways to live with one another. School is a place packed with fascinating cellars, objects, corners, corridors, playgrounds, halls, cloak rooms, store cupboards: strange spaces, nowheres or passages, hauntings, full of histories, routines, rituals and practices that a young child might experience as odd without necessarily experiencing distress. However, schools are also places where a child's (possibly enduring) experience of being 'odded-out' can begin: where structures come together for some children as an institutional 'scene of constraint' (Butler, 2016). Some are identified as both lacking in some essential capacity and, simultaneously, too excessive in others (Bohlmann 2016). 'Treatment', 'rehabilitation' or special interventions are generally prescribed, with hopes of developing a child's ability to 'fit in' better. However, this remedial attitude to difference renders society fixed and ill-equipped for change, and leaves major school structures largely intact, with enduring consequences for some children.

This project wanted to intervene in those major structures and interrupt any deficit views of difference by paying close attention to hidden forces in school.

Odd was interrogated as always on the move; a curious frisson, a startling moment full of vital life, a chaotic menagerie of many things, of queer intensities.

Credit William Hall

In the school context, the Odd project refused odd*ness* as a characteristic, settling on bodies or with individuals. Odd was interrogated as always on the move; a curious frisson, a startling moment full of vital life, a chaotic menagerie of many things, of queer intensities. The oddness we were interested in had connections with, but did not stick to,

become absorbed into the identity of, nor define events, behaviours or individuals. Oddness shed light on processes of potentiality.

The seminars, workshops and extra-curricular activities you'll engage with today are descriptions of, and reflections on the research we undertook in Alma Park, as well as opportunities for you to have bodily experiences of our work. Not all the experiences may seem immediately translatable into your own practice, but we want you to spend time today tuning into your bodily responses - how do you feel, what do you sense, what affective impressions do you take away from these sessions?

I'd like to propose that the schools represented here today in relationship with Catalyst Psychology are capable of effecting a break-through in the processes of identification. As an emerging and reflective collective, it's important to keep refusing the status quo that stabilises how we construct children as subjects of this current system of education and instead embrace a state of permanent provisionality (Moss, 2016) or becoming, in ways that lay our own internal structures open to scrutiny, challenge and internal questioning.

I leave you with the words of poet Pádraig Ó Tuama, whose work centres around the impacts of imperialism and sectarianism that have divided Ireland. Discussing what he describes as Ireland's fierce culture and colonial violence and the need to revive our connections to place and to each other, he writes,

"I am interested in ways in which difference and unsameness can be seen like an invitation, rather than a threat"

- Pádraig Ó Tuama, 2010

Credit Becky Shaw and Jo Ray

So with that, our invitation is open to you.....

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