EMILY MEETS THE WORLD:
CHILD AGENCY ENCOUNTERS ADULT IMPERIALISM

by

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Children are endowed with agency, a fundamental trait of humanity which is accomplished through collective striving. This striving occurs as children meet, and create, their world and its expectations of them. I explore how one particular 2-year-old child, Emily, en-counters her world. The study focuses on Emily’s agency and power as she meets an adult society which extends control into her life. Through Emily’s life, I illustrate how this extension of control creates confined spaces of childhood which infantilize and regulate Emily. The socially constructed childhood Emily encounters denies and ignores much of her agency. Yet, Emily powerfully and irreparably alters the world she meets, generating novel landscapes as she pushes back against the world. Emily refuses to concede to the world presented to her; she instead takes the world and changes it.
I use ethnographic, idiographic methods to describe the extension of control into children’s lives as *adult imperialism* and locate Emily’s powerful agency in her transformative dissent and stance of opposition. Field observations occurred over a nine-month period; interviews were conducted with Emily, her parents, and her teachers. The Transformative Activist Stance, a critical expansion of cultural-historical activity theory outlined by Dr. Anna Stetsenko, is used as an orienting framework. All data was audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to offer a convincing argument regarding agency and imperialism in Emily’s life.

I argue that Emily’s transformative dissent is the social assertion of her agency and that she, like all children, deserves to be appreciated and celebrated for her capacity to matter in the world-as-it-is-being-made. Social accomplishments are implicated in the research as manifestations of individual agency: Emily matters because of how she engages with others. This research suggests a critical shift away from vertical adult-child relationships, which are presented in the data as defined by regulation and control, and towards horizontal relationships, oriented around recognition and appreciation. A horizontal relationship implies shedding developmental assumptions about children and ceding back to them areas of their own lives.
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N.M.H.
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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge about what it is to be a child can scarcely be described within the literature through children’s eyes. (Hogan, 2012, pp. 27-28)

Overview

Each person – meaning also each child – is endowed with agency, a fundamental trait of humanity. Indeed, notions of human agency are “fundamental tenets of Western thought and civilization” (Sugarman & Sokol, 2012, p. 1). This agency is realized – is made real – through the social act of en-countering humanity (Stetsenko, 2017). Agency is inextricably conjoined with humanity’s insatiable desire to overcome the world-as-it-is-given in order to engage with the world-as-it-is-being-made. Agency is thus implicated in the ongoing acts and never-complete journeys of both the creation of the cultural world and the becoming of the individual human. Each of those journeys – the creation of the world and the assertion of the self – are the joint focus of this study.
In turning this focus to include a 2-year-old child, this study exposes and addresses a critical fault in our contemporary, ubiquitous construction of childhood – there is little adult-regard for the child’s agency as she\(^1\) encounters the world. The young child has been disenfranchised through a system of thought and practice which ignores her agency and depresses her capacity to have her actions matter in the world-as-it-is-being-made. Despite these adult-acts of ignoring and depressing, the power of the child’s agency is still remarkably and undeniably felt throughout her world – and our (adult) world too, if we know where and how to look. Her power reverberates throughout her life, diminished though never extinguished.

To address this, this study explores how one particular child powerfully meets her world; the study ultimately yields a progressive vision for reciprocity of respect and bi-directional recognition of agency and rights within that place of intergenerational meeting. This research is therefore not about an individual child or her isolated agency but rather how a child’s agency comes to be \textit{real-ized} through her social engagement. This foregrounds the importance of social interactions for the instantiation of agency and the significance that those relationships have in the implications of the study.

Chapter I reviews the theoretical underpinning of the study and then turns to examine how the disenfranchisement of the child results not from any adult malfeasance nor nefarious cultural stances but rather through the accumulation of cultural and historical contributions. Chapter II then situates the problem by reviewing literature on the construction and control of childhood, agency in childhood, and related research methodologies. Throughout these sections I argue that adult-control over children is a

\(^{1}\) I use female pronouns throughout because the research participant is female.
culturally-constructed phenomenon that extends far beyond its biological origins. Chapter III describes the people and setting of the research, and Chapter IV states the methodology and methods. The ethnographic, idiographic study relies on participant field observation, field notes, and interviews, which took place from June 2017 through February 2018, a period during which the participant – Emily\(^2\) – encountered nursery school for the first time. In Chapter V I present an argument in which adults imperialistically extend control into Emily’s life; in Chapter VI I argue that Emily’s power and agency encounter that control with transformative dissent. Chapter VII presents implications for imagined possibilities of how adults might engage in more egalitarian relationships with children.

In this study, I rely on the theoretical tenets of the Transformative Activist Stance [TAS], developed by Dr. Anna Stetsenko (2008, 2009, 2015, 2017, 2019a, 2019b) as a critical expansion of Vygotskian theory and related cultural-historical works. Stetsenko has written recently that central to TAS is the understanding that

> reality is reconceived as that which is being constantly transformed by people themselves – and not as solo individuals acting alone, but as actors of social communal practices. (2019b, p. 5)

TAS advances a theoretical position which necessarily delivers research with an “activist agenda” inspired by the revolutionary spirit which permeates Vygotsky’s work (Stetsenko, 2019b), and “invites researchers to become activists in the pursuit of new social arrangements and practices grounded in ideals of social justice and equality” (Stetsenko, 2009, p. 140).

\(^2\) A pseudonym.
I employ an activist agenda in this study as I seek out and explore the transformational power – the constant transformation of reality – that a child brings to, and enacts through, her encounters. I approach Emily with reverence for her human capacity to matter in the world-as-it-is-being-made and I argue that Emily and other young children should be considered similarly in their encounters with adults. This is non-canonical science; it is part of an unfolding, non-finalized quest to overcome and move past our constructions of children and childhood. It is overcoming and not dwelling which has always pushed science forward, expanding our capacity to consider different constructions of our world. Therefore, I use this research to dispute an assumption of hierarchical control within contemporary adult-child relationships and instead offer a novel path forward in which children and adults engage together in relationships defined by mutual trust, rights, and respect. This research is a tool to deconstruct that canonical hierarchy and procure instead a vision of adult-child relationships in which subjugation is replaced by appreciation.

Who I Am and How I Got Here

In my first week as a teacher, September 2008, my head teacher asked me, “So, why are you a teacher?” I responded eagerly, “Because I think we’re like civil rights marchers, demanding that the world become a better place. But instead of signs and marches, we show up in the classroom and do our work there.” I have always approached my classroom as a place of hope, brightness, and advocacy. I believe school can be used as a tool by children and adults to make the world a more righteous place. My parents
modelled the value of social responsibility, a commitment to not just watching the world but engaging in meaningful acts to make it better. I have never let go of this stance and I pray that it reverberates loudly throughout this study.

My journey of inspiration for this research began after spending five years as a classroom teacher with 3-year-olds in a Reggio-inspired, progressive, private nursery school. My time spent with my students led me to critique common understandings of the relationships between teaching and learning and between adults and children: namely, that there is not a direct nor linear correlation between what is taught and what is learned, nor does the notion of adults “raising” children accurately reflect the complex reality we create together. It slowly dawned on me as a young teacher that my 3-year-old students were in fact far more than “students.” They entered the classroom with lived experiences and robust personalities, with intentionality and desire. *They mattered in the world*, in a way not recognized by the passive notions of adaptation and transmission inherent in prevalent models of teaching and learning.

This led me back to school as a student myself at Teachers College. I began there concurrently with moving from the role of teacher to school director, amidst the same year Shira, my wife, gave birth to Jonah, our oldest child; Solomon, our second, was born the month before field observations for this project began. These experiences as a student, parent, and school director shifted and widened my vantage point on the nature of school, teachers, children, and parents. I was granted greater access to the lives and thoughts of parents, allowing me to further explore my thoughts on the relationship between all of this.
I started with a literature review on what happens when a teacher stops “teaching” and instead watches students learn, which explored how teachers engage in non-didactic relationships with students. This proved to be a clumsy start, which nonetheless pointed me towards cultural-historical activity theory [CHAT], a framework outlined by Vygotsky (1978) and extended by succeeding generations of scholars (e.g., Cole, Rogoff, Stetsenko, Hedegaard & Fleer). CHAT presents a flattened, egalitarian landscape in which all social actors are known to be pedagogues (Rogoff, 1994; Rogoff, Matusov, & White, 1996).³ In this sense, CHAT democratizes notions of learning and development rather than sequestering the power of “teaching” to “teachers.” This proved a useful lens of analysis into the questions I wanted to ask, so I began to explore the literature around CHAT and early childhood. This work led to three successive qualitative pilot studies through Teachers College, each with a research participant between the ages of two and five. Here I explored the movement of the participant between home, school, and out in the city. My daily life field observations, capturing the participant moving through his or her day, were inspired by and modeled after ethnographic daily life studies of young children: One Boy’s Day: A Specimen Record of Behavior (Barker & Wright, 1951), Everyday Lives of Young Children (Tudge, 2008), and Play, Learning, and Children’s Development: Everyday Life in Families and Transitions to School (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2013). A short excerpt from the findings in the first study is in Appendix A; a map-timeline of the participant’s day, framed historically, is in Appendix B.

³ Rogoff moves away from the traditional binary of “adult-run” vs. “child-run” models of learning, and instead uses a “community of learners” model in which “learning involves transformation of participation in collaborative endeavor[s]” (Rogoff et al., 1996, p. 393).
In these pilot studies, I observed how the young child was constructed, from an adult perspective, as a passive object to be moved around during the day – a construction which repressed her (lack of) potential to matter in the world-as-it-is-being-made. The studies explored how this social construction of childhood was felt, and confronted, by children during mundane moments of their day: breakfast, stroller walk, story time, and at playgrounds. This also gave me a chance to review the literature on multi-modal child-oriented interviews and field methodologies found in contemporary research (Almqvist & Almqvist, 2015; Coates & Coates, 2016; Fincham, 2015; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Green, 2012, 2014; Guo & Mackenzie, 2015; Lokken, 2011; Moore, 2014; Meehan, 2016; Palaiologou, 2014; Salamon, 2015; Smith, 2014).

What I saw and heard in the pilot studies intrigued me and pulled me into exploring how children’s agency and voice speaks back to, and transforms, the world. During this time, Dr. Anna Stetsenko shared with me a draft chapter of hers titled *Transformative Activist Stance: Encountering the Future through Commitment to Change* (2017, Chapter 8). The theoretical stance around agency laid out in that chapter, and the book that followed, *The Transformative Mind: Expanding Vygotsky’s Approach to Development and Education* (2017), resonated deeply with me and has robustly guided my own use of theory, methods, and analysis. It was at this point that I began to lay out the framework for this study in my dissertation proposal, using Stetsenko’s theoretical stance on the social nature of agency to explore the relationships between children and adults. I dog-eared two pages of *The Transformative Mind*, from a chapter on the ontology and epistemology of TAS (Chapter 6), and underlined two sections which speak to the core role that this theory has had in forming my research:
human activities and social practices never end and can never be completely left behind; instead, these practices constantly evolve, moving forward without breaks so that the past activities and associated experiences are not completely eliminated. (p. 190)

This approach suggests that individuals never start completely from scratch and never completely vanish. Instead, they enter and join in with social practices as participants who build upon previous accomplishments and also inevitably and forever change (if only in modest ways) the whole social matrix of these practices, leaving their own indelible traces in history. (p. 191)

Jotted in the margins on these pages, I scrawled what would ultimately be chiseled into the research questions and title for this study: “How does this 3 yo [year-old] agentively inform the enduring practice she encounters?” My teaching journey led me to my learning journey, which led me to this work.

**Potential Significance and Relevance**

Exploring this topic is significant in that it can lead to different, divergent, and deeper understandings of children’s agency and an expansion of the human rights of young children. People have the right to be heard, particularly in matters which they are directly involved in; the research presented here seeks to expand the capacity in which children – as people – are heard through a critique of mainstream assumptions about childhood, child development, and adult practices within early childhood. Ultimately, this study offers a nuanced understanding of the child’s capacity to act as an agentive contributor during the process of encountering her world. Expanding the conceptual space in which we theorize children’s agency has the potential to drastically alter how we (adults) perceive, and act within, our relationships with children. These implications are
taken up in the concluding chapter by critically re-orienting the paradigmatic relationship between adults and children.

“Children may have different, not inferior knowledge to adults” (Smith, 2014, p. 529), opening up the notion that heeding young children’s agency can create new cultural possibilities as well as individual growth. This concept is gaining increasing attention in critical childhood studies literature (Corsaro, 2011; Fincham, 2015; Moore, 2014; Nicholson, Kurnik, Jevgjovikj, & Ufoegbune, 2015; Palaiologou, 2014) but has yet to gain a foothold in mainstream psychology, sociology, or education circles (Qvortrup, 2003). The voice of the child provides a greater sense of possibility through “the insights they [sic] offer about contemporary social life” (Pugh, 2014, p. 72) and by provoking adults to “ask new questions, [and] render the invisible visible” (p. 71).

Additionally, this study is poised to recognize the agentive role that a child plays throughout her life while she meets school for the first time. Whereas previous authors have researched children’s perspectives about their transition to school (Dockett & Perry, 2015, p. 167; see also Daniels, 2014; Santo & Berman, 2012), this study will seek to explore the role of the child’s agency in the process of meeting school. Just as school changes children, children also change school. Recognizing the impact the child has in this ongoing process of meeting and changing school has potential for shifting our practices around how children meet school for the first time.

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4 I use “meeting” here as theoretically congruent with Stetsenko’s theoretically laden “en-counter.” The child and school meet each other in an ongoing, historically-informed process of transformation and change. This departs from the notion that children can speak “about” their transition to school as if it exists “out there” in the world, and instead posits that children are active in their role of meeting – and changing – school.
Johnson (2012) describes the societal injustice at the heart of this research: “children are the last unheard minority, a group whose voice is seldom listened to” (p. 1); “justice for children” (Woodhouse, 2004, p. 230) is betrayed by the contemporary, paradigmatic adult-child relationships reviewed throughout the literature review (Chapter II). Critical childhood studies advocate for seeing “children as a minority social group, whose wrongs need righting” (Mayall, 2002, p. 9), and “aim to increase children’s human rights by strengthening children’s agency and voice” (Nicholson, et al., 2015, p. 1570). Research methodologies surrounding this topic are therefore poised “to give better voice to children in order to change practice and improve children’s lives” (Pascal & Bertram, 2014, p. 282). I use this research to contribute novel insight into how and why adults seek to control children, how and why children resist that control, and how the tension of control can be alleviated within the adult-child relationship in favor of mutual respect and co-dependence.

**Cultural Historical Context of Adult-Control over Children**

When a young child in the contemporary United States enters school, she is segregated from the daily activities of parents, caregivers, and siblings (Rogoff, 1990; Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü, & Mosier, 1993) while she participates in the classroom with her peers and teachers. The historical construction of family and of school has led to the removal of the child from adult society (Fass, 2016; Rogoff, 1990, 2003), and the subsequent development of “confined spaces” (Ariès, 1962) for children.
The two chief contextual factors for the study’s topic examined here are the confined spaces of childhood and the mass enrollment of 2-year-old children in nursery school. Exploring these two ways in which childhood has been culturally constructed is a vital component to understanding the setting of this research; contemporary life cannot be examined without an understanding of its historicity.

**Confined Spaces of Childhood**

The division into confined spaces and roles at an early age is not a predestined teleological phenomenon but rather a cultural-historical construction. The construction of these spaces and roles will be explored here through the lens of critical childhood studies as refracted through a cultural-historical notion of childhood. This leaves us with the concept that “childhood is a social construct, which changes over time” (Heywood, 2001, p. 9) and that only over the past few centuries has there been an “increasing separation of the worlds of adulthood and childhood” (p. 25). Rogoff writes that the “isolated nuclear family in European American communities stems from particular historical circumstances” (2003, p. 119). Ariès (1962) determined that those historical circumstances led to a desire for increased privacy, both from authorities and neighboring social classes. This has resulted in “key cultural differences” (Rogoff et al., 1993, p. v) for the developmental experience of the child in an American home, such as modes of caregiving and responsibility for the child’s learning. The isolation of the Western nuclear family, in contrast with more broadly inclusive social settings, helped to facilitate the emergence of the “confined space” of childhood (Ariès, 1962).
Ariès’ use of the phrase “confined spaces” is used throughout this work to describe the isolation and segregation of children away from normative social arrangements and physical locations and into relationships and spaces exclusively occupied by children. In this section I explore the historical underpinnings of the development of this notion of confined spaces and in subsequent chapters (V and VI) provide analysis of the present data around this notion. Confined spaces can both refer to physical and geographical spaces as well as relationships and relative social status. These spaces are “confined” as they are regulated by adults and as children are conscripted to exist “within” particular spaces of society.

Within twentieth-century family practices in the United States, children encountered “diminished opportunities” to assist parents with economic work and were “increasingly isolated” (Formanek-Brunell, 1993, p. 18) and “increasingly segregated” (Heywood, 2001, p. 29) from their parents at home and beyond. This resulted in “setting childhood apart” from adulthood, as families “were distinguishing children’s activities from those of their parents” (Fass, 2016, p. 19). The isolation of young children led to the creation of confined spaces for childhood within the family, as “organized amusement came to be located in the nursery” at home, and children were “given many more toys, books, magazines, clothing, and furniture made especially for them” (Formanek-Brunell, p. 19). In this “autonomous space of the nursery…children lived apart from parents” (p. 19). This trend has continued for over a century in American parenting and has led to the construction of children as needing “special toys and risk-proof furnishings”, in contrast

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5 Rather, near-exclusively, though the adult-presence in these confined spaces is typically one of supervision rather then participation or contribution.
to earlier cultural-historical childhoods in which “children were much more integrated into adult activities” (Fass, p. 25) at home.

Likewise, spaces dedicated for children’s play have alternately been created for physical fitness, keeping children away from risky behavior, or enhancing a child’s creative capacity (Chudacoff, 2008; Frost, 2009; Mintz, 2006). Playgrounds are themselves temporal structures reflecting the shifting and unstable notion of what, in fact, children’s needs are. These constructions represent a desire by adults in various contexts to control, shape, and form the space in which childhood takes place (Fass, 2016), in sharp contrast to the pre-Enlightenment era in which “children were free to roam around the streets and the countryside for much of the time” (Heywood, 2001, p. 97).

The construction of childhood in the United States has a long and complex history (Fass, 2016; Heywood, 2001; James & James, 2004; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). The construction of childhood in colonial America as evil and in need of correction is typified by a journal entry from a mother (b. 1669, d. 1742) about her son, reported by Newson and Newson: “Break his will now and his soul will live” (as cited in Burman, 1994, p. 51). Later, under Locke’s influence, the American child was constructed as an innately innocent tabula rasa (Mintz, 2006), and in contemporary times children are now seen by many as endowed with intellectual capacity from birth (Gopnik, 2000, 2009; Gopnik & Meltzoff, 1998). In conjunction with smaller family sizes, the contemporary construction of the child has also shifted from being an economic producer to an economic investment (Fass, 2016; Mintz, 2006; Senior, 2014).

The social practices surrounding the confined spaces of childhood has led to “the modern notion of childhood” (Burman, 1994, p. 53). The spaces of childhood were
created by adults for children; and yet, “children are not simply passive objects” (James & James, 2004, p. 25) who silently receive culture. This leaves open the intriguing notion that children do indeed have an agentive voice but that the magnitude of this voice is lost amidst the “separation” and “segregation” of the child’s spaces from the adults in their life. Compounding the problem, Axelrod (2015) writes, “the voices of young…children are often disregarded in research…rendering them silent on their experiences” (p. 124). It can be found that the “voices that are silent in constructions of early childhood education are the children with whom we work” (Cannella, 1997, p. 10). Scholars of children’s agency have noted that children are the “most silenced participants in the educative process” (Fleet & Britt, 2011, p. 142). As children have been confined into particular locations within life, their voices and agency have been stifled by the adult-construction of those spaces. The segregation of children away from adult life is situated in the extant literature in Chapter II and explored through data and analysis in Chapter V.

**Mass Enrollment of 2-year-olds in Nursery School**

Contemporary demographic trends highlight the need for a study investigating this topic. While school attendance in America has long been compulsory, nursery school has never been officially bestowed this status. However, parents in the United States are increasingly driven to enroll their children in a nursery school or other early education setting. There is now an atmosphere of “voluntary universal” (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001, p. 1) enrollment in early education settings, and a push to make these settings “universally available” (Zigler, Marsland & Lord, 2009, p. 141). Enrollment in
early education settings has come a long way since 1860, when the first kindergarten in
the United States was established; by the 1920s, 10-12% of 5-year-olds\(^6\) attended
kindergartens (Bloch, 1987, p. 47; Mintz, 2006, p. 175). The most recent number sits at
59% of children ages five and under, and 45% of 1-2 year-old children, attending center-
based care (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016). It can be said that
more children now have their inaugural encounter with a school setting at two years old
than at any previous point in the history of the United States. I will review four historical
factors contributing to this phenomenon: working mothers, academic expectations,
developmental psychology, and peer culture.

The first factor is the arrival of a significant percentage of mothers in the
workforce in recent decades; 61% of mothers with children three years old or younger are
in the labor force (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). This reflects a rapid rise in the
percentage of working mothers with young children, beginning in the 1960s and
continuing since (Mintz, 2006). This demographic trend has been linked to an increase in
the enrollment of young children in early education settings (Bowman, et al., 2001; Fass,
2016; Shonkoff, 2000).

The second factor is the heightened academic expectations throughout the K-12
years (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), and belief in the efficacy
of nursery school in preparing children for those expectations (Neuman, 2009; Pinkham,
Kaefer, & Neuman, 2012; Zigler, et al., 2009). With more to achieve in the primary

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\(^6\) The comparison to 5-year-olds in 1920s is not an oversight but rather reflects the fact that out-
of-home arrangements for children under five, before the advent of the modern nursery at the
onset of the twentieth century (Bloch, 1987), were mostly institutional settings such as
orphanages or “baby-farming” (Mintz, 2006, pp. 167-169). The current infatuation with nursery
school, when looked at in a historical lens, is a reminder of the cultural-historical construction of
the child. Our perception of childhood is fluid, not static.
grades, parents and teachers have been told that “school readiness” begins in the nursery 
(Heckman, 2005, 2013). Parents have been told that teachers, not parents, are most 
capable of preparing children for those experiences.

The third factor is the emergence of the scientific discipline of child study, which 
gained a foothold at the beginning of the 20th century\(^7\) and has since increased in strength 
and impact (Mintz, 2006): the number of scholars in America engaged in the scientific 
study of children grew from a “mere handful at the end of World War I in 1918 to 600 in 
1930” (Fass, 2016, p. 111), and from the period before World War II to the 1980s, the 
number of “scientific journals reporting research in child development” grew from “two 
to more than a dozen” (Elkind, 2007, p. 5). This has created “heightened awareness of 
children’s developmental stages” (Mintz, 2006, p. 186), which in turn led to a gradual 
increase in age-targeted interventions for children, leaving the field of early childhood 
education with “developmentally appropriate practices” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) for 
narrow age bands as the consensus “best practices” for teachers. Nursery school 
classrooms designed specifically for their target one-year age-band now enjoy the 
“imprimatur of science” (Kirp, 2007, p. 93). The idea that 2-year-olds have specific and 
particular needs has resulted in the creation of nursery classrooms designed specifically 
for 2-year-old children, creating one of the contexts for this study.

\(^7\)This is confirmed in primary source reports, as M. W. Shinn (1900/2013) writes about babies 
and young children: “very little has yet been done in the scientific study of this most important of 
all possible subjects …only in the last few years has scientific attention been drawn to the subject 
at all” (p. 1). Ariès (1962) finds that for the many centuries prior, childhood was a generic period 
covering a broad age span. He quotes a medieval text: “The first age is childhood when the teeth 
are planted, and this age begins when the child is born and lasts until seven” (p. 21). Scientific 
attention according to the specific age of the child, down to a one-year range, is a historically 
recent phenomenon.
The fourth factor is the ensuing development of peer culture along those age bands. Today’s families are more “clearly divided into two generations” (Mintz, 2006, p. 79) than previous generations. Families in colonial America often had siblings up to two decades apart within the same family, resulting in a dynamic in which “the oldest child…was a replacement mother or father” and “children raised each other” due to significant age ranges between siblings (Heywood, 2001, p. 88). The generational sprawl resulting from large families afforded children playmates and role models of a broad range of ages; 2-year-olds would regularly interact with a wide age-range of siblings and cousins. The absence of non-peer playmates from the house has contributed to the cultural expectation that children play with age-banded peers. The shrinkage of the American family to its current average of 1.88 children (United States Census Bureau, 2012) has created a profound generational demarcation and “set apart” the status of children, resulting in the “formation of peer culture” (Chudacoff, 2008, p. 69). This in turn has created “a resulting increase in the general institutionalization of children…[in] early education institutions shortly after birth” (Corsaro, 2011, p. 107). Smaller families have led to societal norms dictating that young children play with other children of precisely the same age, leading to an increased enrollment of 2-year-olds in nursery school. These four factors pinpoint the historical situatedness of this study. 2-year-olds, historically not recognized as a particular stage of development with distinct needs (Ariès, 1962), are now “categorized into age-graded intervals” (Burman, 1994, p. 51).
A Particular Non-Generalized Childhood

It is readily apparent, yet important to highlight, that the above factors are historical and contextual interpretations about the construction of a particular childhood in contemporary United States, and certainly do not speak to all children or all childhoods. The particular construction outlined here is further explored in Chapter III as my research focuses on an individual child and her singular childhood – defined as it is by proximal cultural and historical contexts. The factors reviewed in the preceding section thus correlate with the mainstream history and culture of predominantly white, Western families.

However, childhood research must carefully and explicitly maintain its stance towards the non-generalizability of the status and designation of “child” across social, cultural, and economic groups, to combat the oft-repeated desire in research and policy to see all children “as homogenous, equal, and monolithic…with pre-designated characteristics and distinctive features” (Johansen, 2017, p. 71). With an eye towards a particular, non-generalized childhood, Hammersley highlights the need for childhood studies to find inspiration in post-structural, post-human, feminist, and transgender theories in their “attack on ‘essentialism’” (2017, p. 116). This drives critical research towards the consideration that social identity – such as being a woman or being a child – may not have “any stable meaning at all” (p. 116). Bailey likewise notes the turn away from an “essentialist” definition of childhood as “reflecting similar reactions in feminist theory” throughout critical childhood studies (2018, p. 255). Horgan reviews the recent burgeoning literature reflecting this turn, noting that
child participatory research is gradually reflecting the diverse lifeworlds of children including those in the Global South (Ansell et al., 2012), in cities (Christensen & O’Brien, 2002; Gülgönen & Corona, 2015), in rural areas (Powell et al., 2013) and ‘lesser heard’ children including those with disabilities (Wickenden & Kembhavi-Tam, 2014), those living in the care system (McEvoy & Smith, 2011) and unaccompanied minors (Hopkins & Hill, 2008). Elden (2012), among others, argues that childhood studies have been a powerful tool in bringing the silenced voices of children into the debate. (2017, p. 246)

While “childhood” is a field worthy of study, it is not a pre-packaged concept applied to a broad swath of humanity. The research presented in the following chapters does not claim to represent a generalized childhood but only offer a rendition of one child’s encounter with her world. There is no “essential” childhood, there are only real people, designated as children, replete with their discursive, multiple, contradictory, and intersecting identities.

Heywood (2001) highlights that in the historical sources on children and childhood, it is difficult to “look beyond the literate minority” (p. 7). Consequentially, many of the extant historical pieces on childhood focus on those wealthy families who left a clear trail of childhood. Heywood extrapolates from this that while the historical record sheds light on what the dominant culture was stating about children (advice literature, statistics, etc), it is much less clear as to how widespread the adoption of certain practices were, and more acutely, which cultural subgroups were adopting which practices. This is obviously problematic as we seek to explore particular childhoods. The same critique can be made for large pieces of Ariès (1962) seminal work, which relies largely on artistic remnants of the last millennia. Ariès does not consider children, and their cultures, which were not represented (or underrepresented) in the artistic record he explores.
Examining the salience of Ariès work, Koops (2012) writes that the resulting field of childhood studies offers an exploration of the “cultural historical result of Western imagination of childhood” (p. 18); indeed, both Ariès and Heywood are explicit that their writings refer only to childhood in Western cultures. Mintz (2006) denounces the “myth…that childhood is the same for all children…in fact, every aspect of childhood is shaped by class – as well as by ethnicity, gender, geography, religion, and historical era” (p. 2). The childhood explored in this research is situated within and around whiteness, affluence, and cultural dominance; these characteristics are present throughout the research site and will be made further transparent in Chapter III. I seek neither to escape the privileged nature of the particular childhood examined nor to contrast it to differently constructed childhoods, but rather to understand it as one particular childhood with its own unique cultural-historical construction. By exploring the idiosyncratic life of one 2-year-old child, I embrace Cannella’s notion that

There is no particular way that a 2-year-old will act. In some cultures s/he may be skillfully cutting fruit or reproducing communication dances. In others, s/he may be assisting in caring for babies. In still others, s/he may be exerting independence by saying “no.” (1997, p. 150)

The ineluctable intertwining of culture and childhood – the definition of each by the other – leads me to the theoretical framework of the study, reviewed next, as well as my use of nomothetic methodologies, reviewed in Chapter IV.
Theoretical Framework

I use Stetsenko’s Transformative Activist Stance to stretch and inform my use of CHAT, orienting the analysis around an enhanced vision of children’s agency as they “en-counter” (2017) cultural practices. I will outline my theoretical framework here and it will be further elaborated throughout the paper. I use the theoretical framework presented here to push children out of a participatory (Rogoff, 1990, 2003) role and into one imbued with power as they *co-create and co-author the cultural activities they become co-terminus with*. Stetsenko writes that human development does not just take place in the world, as the notions of situated and embedded cognition and the metaphor of “being there” suggest; rather, these creative human acts of being, knowing, and doing *bring forth the world*, and the reality itself, essentially co-constituting the world as a collective forum of human deeds, a drama played out in and through individually unique contributions to collaborative practices. (2017, p. 252)

Neither the child nor the culture exists alone, in isolated fashion; the child, culture, and the encounter between them are all co-constitutive and co-terminus. This highlights a key element in Stetsenko’s development, and my use, of TAS:

> Even in cultural-historical activity theory, the theme of people *adapting to the world* [emphasis added] continues to permeate much theoretical work and needs to be consistently challenged. (Stetsenko, 2017, p. 177)

TAS is therefore used to shed the notion that the research participant is observed during a period of “adaptation” to her culture –her family, her school, her city – and instead embraces a vision of the child in which her agency is powerfully shifting *the-world-she-meets-and-co-creates*. I use TAS to provide a fertile analytic lens to examine the essential entanglement between the child and the world. Significant for the focus of this research, Stetsenko illustrates in TAS that “regardless of how powerless and
oppressed, seemingly insignificant and fragile this one person may appear to others or even to oneself” (2017, p. 216), each individual retains their capacity to matter through their agency as it is embodied and expressed in communal social practices. It does not take a powerful person to be powerful.

Stetsenko develops TAS from cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), which is a branch of cultural psychology (Cole, 1998) that situates human development in a “sociobiological” (Vygotsky, 1960, cited in Wertsch, 1991) or “biologically cultural” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 12) episteme. The broader notions of CHAT that I subscribe to are described by Cole (1996, pp. 98-115), and yet are also expanded by Stetsenko. Within CHAT, children learn and grow in a dialectical process of both becoming a part of their historically constructed environment and also contributing to and shaping that environment (Wartofsky, 1983). It is through a child’s encounter with the world that the self and the social are created (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). A child and her cultural context are not engaged in a binary (or even bidirectional), dichotomous relationship; their ongoing encounter is fluid, dynamic, and permeable, and is co-constitutive of both poles in this process, such that both come about through mutually recognizing and realizing (making real) each other.

In particular, the theoretical framework employed in this study centers around a primacy of agency, highlighted in Stetsenko’s notion that children are “agents of their own lives, agents whose nature is to purposefully transform their world” (2009, p. 138) as well as Wartofsky’s statement that, “the child is active in its own right, not simply imitatively, but as an agent in its own construction…in that sense of agency that concerns the initiation of actions by choice” (1983, p. 199). The critical contribution afforded by
The institutionalization of children at a young age into discrete peer groups subjected to culturally constructed *developmentally appropriate practices* and *normative expectations* has facilitated the creation of “increasingly diasporic” (White, 2011, p. 130) spaces of childhood. The regulation of these spaces of childhood by adults, and the adult-
controlled movement of the child between these spaces, renders the child as a “voiceless object” (p. 64). The child’s agency is not always tangible in a manner that is comfortably recognizable by the adult. Fincham lucidly states, “we are more likely to trust the voice of another adult than the voice of a child, especially a child who is still coming into a fluency of spoken language” (2015, p. 11). Hearing, listening to and trusting the voice of a 2-year-old thus takes time and patience, which is not necessarily afforded in the diasporic movement of the child amongst adult-controlled environments.

The notion that children’s voices deserve to be heard has been codified by the United Nations (though, deeply problematic to the agenda of this study, not ratified by the United States): Children have “the right to express their [sic] views freely in all matters affecting the child” (United Nations Office the High Commissioner, Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC], 1989, Article 12). However, this is quickly narrowed, as the “child” is qualified in the same document as “the child who is capable [emphasis added] of forming his or her own views” (UNCRC, 1989, Article 12). What children are capable of doing is itself a cultural construct and not a biological constraint (Rogoff, 2003). Critical, sociological, and historical accounts of childhood state that there are “changing expectations of childhood and what children are capable [emphasis added] of doing over the course of history” (James, 2004, p. 25).

When viewed as such, statements such as the UNCRC’s, and related child-centered visions of childhood, become tautological and obscure the child’s voice and agency: children have the right to a voice, but only when they are deemed capable; children’s capabilities themselves are constructed – and constricted – through adult
practices. If we infantilize children and deem them incapable, we ignore their capacity for voice and agency. Qvortrup reminds us that:

This problem arises not because of ill will, but is rather a problem of the sociology of knowledge… Adults are often intoxicated with the view of children as dependents and themselves as fair representatives of children. Adults simply “forget” to raise other perspectives. (1990, p. 87)

When our cultural expectations “forget” to heed the child’s agentive voice, we place the child in a “passive process of socialization and subjugation” (Archer, 2000, p. 33). What does this vision of childhood miss? How do young children show the world their powerful agency – and what would it take for us (adults) to see it and nurture it?

**Rationale and Research Questions**

This study acknowledges the child’s agency and explores where she matters in the world-as-it-is-being made. This study contributes to the recent “explosion” (Hill, 2006, p. 72) of interest in, and methods for, “the importance of listening to children in research” (Dockett & Perry, 2007, p. 47). Through methods oriented towards listening to the child, “children’s agency becomes visible [emphasis added] and children are given a means of expression” (Greene & Hogan, 2005, p4.). By working with multi-modal methods dedicated to the child’s agentive voice, this study can begin to piece together how her agency co-creates the world she encounters.

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8 Qvortrup continues to explain this problem by pointing out that in contemporary social settings and institutions, “children are ordered in accordance with parent’s income… occupation… education… and so on. The social background of children… is in fact a description of their parents’ status” (1990, p. 83). How can the voice of a child be heard when she is defined by her parents’ identity and not her own?
TAS offers a productive framework to approach the research topic, as a tool for understanding the inseparability of the individual and the cultural, and for tackling the problem of recognizing the child’s agency in a social milieu in which it is ignored and diminished. To tend to the agency of the child, I use this study to explore the child not as isolated and solitary but as she is embedded in and shaped by, while also shaping and acting in concert (or contrast) with, her cultural situation. This study employs an ethnographic methodology, inspired by Hedegaard and Fleer, who outline (2008) and implement (2013) methods built around emphasizing and highlighting the first-person perspective of the child. Their methods also break down barriers between the confined spaces of childhood and society by following the child’s movement throughout daily life.

The notions considered in this chapter bring me to my research questions:

1. How does one individual 2-year-old child, over the course of nine months and while she begins school, encounter the spaces of her daily life such as home, school, and out in the city?

2. How does the child create change and transformation in her world?

3. Where is the child powerful?

Summary

This study explores a 2-year-old child’s powerful agency throughout her life and as she encounters her first nursery school classroom. The cultural construction of increasingly confined spaces of childhood, which are separated and segregated from adults and other non-peer children, creates a phenomenon in which the child’s agency
exists but is ignored and diminished by adults. I am brought to this research by my experiences as a classroom teacher, nursery school director, and father. I am further inspired by an activist commitment to egalitarian social contexts and distaste for relationships of power and submission. This study therefore takes an activist stance, seeking to enfranchise the child and recognize her power by explicating both the contemporaneous cultural construction of her idiographic childhood as well as her active, agentive mattering as she encounters that construction.
Chapter II
LITERATURE REVIEW

The revolutionary energy of transformative agency that furnishes our world…is the province not of the select few but of all human beings [emphasis added]. (Stetsenko, 2019, p. 431)

Overview

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the agency of children as they encounter their cultural world. The emphasis is on children’s relationships with adults and the tension of power felt within that relationship. The general orientation of this chapter is inspired by Wartofsky’s paper, The Child’s Construction of the World and the World’s Construction of the Child (1983), which is an influential article in how agency is considered within TAS. Wartofsky outlined his idea of the dialectical co-construction of children and their world, and explained the title of his paper means that the child is not a self-contained homunculus, radiating outward in development from some fixed configuration of traits, dispositions, or preformed potencies; and that the world, in turn, is not some eternal and objective network of causal factors converging on the neonate to shape an unresisting, passive blob to its external, pregiven structures. To put this positively: the child is an agent in its own and the world’s construction, but one whose agency develops in the context of an
This chapter explores the “ineluctably social and historical praxis” that the child encounters and *through which* her “agency develops.” This chapter focuses on the child meeting the world.

Following Wartofsky’s heuristic, in this chapter I first outline various aspects of “constructing childhood” and later “child agency.” These elements are split here solely for the purpose of examination and not in an attempt to isolate one from the other. They must only be considered as coterminous;¹ they exist in tandem. Neither is capable of developing without the other. This heuristic will be taken up again in Chapters V and VI, in which the adult construction of childhood and the child’s agency are explored, respectively, as inextricably co-developing.

The “modern notion of childhood” (Burman, 1994, p. 53), reviewed in Chapter I as the historical context in which this research is situated, is defined by its insistence on developmentally appropriate practices applied to discrete age bands of children, separated from each other as well as from adult life. My research questions serve to further guide and pinpoint the notions of childhood within which this research is situated, by asking where children’s agency and power can be located as they encounter the world around them. This chapter seeks to contextualize those questions within the extant literature.

¹ I refer to Stetsenko’s meaning of this word, in a like-context: “We are coterminous with the co-construction, or *co-realization*, of the world that we come into contact with while changing it” (2017, p. 258).
The concept that “the child is essentially and eternally a cultural invention” (Kessen, 1979, p. 815) has become the calling card of scholars critical of “ahistorical, overgeneralized” (Cannella, 1997, p. 27) notions of childhood. Ariès’ (1962) history of childhood is the starting point for my examination of the invented nature of childhood. Ariès’ work had “become common knowledge” (Kessen, 1979, p. 815) already by the time Kessen looked at childhood as a cultural invention, and can be seen to have widespread influence in disseminating the concept that childhood is not a static, predictable entity (Heywood, 2001; Koops, 2012). Ariès turn the notion of an immutable and generalizable childhood on its head. He suggests that medieval culture “did not know childhood” and that “there was no place for childhood in the medieval world” (Ariès, 1962, p. 33). What Ariès implies here is that childhood as we know it did not exist, yet he does point to particular constructions of childhood found in the middle ages. The notions of childhood that did exist were broad catch-alls, such as one medieval text Ariès cites: “the first age is childhood…this age begins when the child is born and lasts until seven” (p. 21). A child was simply seen as “an adult on a reduced scale” (p. 35).

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Heywood (2001) also, and significantly, reviews a variety of critiques of Ariès’ claim that medieval society “did not know” childhood. These critiques, in general, are of the mindset that this claim is far too broad and sweeping to be considered historically accurate. Heywood confirms, however, that Ariès’ work is “seminal” (p. 11) in that it introduced to the fields of history, sociology, and education the notion that childhood is a cultural construct and not an innate unfolding of biologically pre-determined mechanisms. Of relevance to this paper, Heywood also draws a clear and direct line from Ariès’ work to the contemporary scholars of Childhood Studies, such as James, Jenks, and Prout.
“Cultural Determinants of Childhood”

To answer the question of praxis, Wartofsky points towards “institutional definitions of the child by the courts, the schools, the family, the economy, and the medical profession” (Wartofsky, 1983, p. 198) while James and James similarly suggest the structure of the school system; conceptions of the educational process and of the child’s health and welfare…the economic and political conditions which…exclude children from the world of adult work and confine them, instead, in the school room in the role of non-producers. (2004, p. 7)

To narrow in on the construction of modern childhood, then, the “cultural determinants of childhood” (James & James, 2004, p.7) must be reviewed in order to better understand the institutional definitions of the child’s world as created by adults. How are children and childhood defined, in the particular circumstance researched here, by medical, legal, and educational fields? How have those definitions come to delimit the “modern notion of childhood”?

Internationally, “childhood” is defined by the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund [UNICEF] as “a separate space from adulthood, [in which] children are the holders of their own rights” (UNICEF, 2005, para. 4) and as a “time for children to be in school and at play, to grow strong and confident with the love and encouragement of their family and an extended community of caring adults” (para. 1). This is an idealized and hopeful description, as this study will show how children are not “holders of their own rights” in many instances, despite the “love and encouragement” of those around them.

At the federal level in the United States, “minor” is used to encompass the range of people in all “underage” categories, such as infant, child, and juvenile. Individuals
under the age of 14 are considered children of “tender age”; upon turning 14, individuals are seen as “juveniles.” The distinction between child, juvenile, and adult has direct ramifications on the legal status of the individual. The path to adulthood is less clear. An 18-year-old is seen as an adult when joining the military, voting, or signing credit contracts; yet that same 18-year-old is seen as a “minor” in regard to purchasing alcohol. State law in New York holds that “children” are any people under the age of 18 and that children’s “best interests” are protected by the court system, in circumstances such as court-defined custody cases or neglect and abuse cases (New York State Family Court, Part 1, § 1012).

Definitions of the child in education documents further break down the age-banded determinants of contemporary childhood. New York State’s Early Learning Guidelines include learning and developmental prescriptions for all children from birth to five years old, a range which includes 1.25 million children. New York State Prekindergarten Standards are relegated only to 4-year-olds, which covers the 107,000 four-year-olds enrolled in NYS PreK classrooms. New York State’s Head Start Framework is a learning prescription for 3- and 4-year-olds, covering the 50,000 children enrolled in that program (New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council [NYS ECAC], 2011). When receiving support services for “special education,” children in New York State are identified as within an “Early Intervention” program from birth to 3 years old, followed by the “Committee on Preschool Special Education” from 3 to 5 years old, followed by the “Committee on Special Education” after the child’s fifth birthday.

New York State has an explicit goal of using these age-banded definitions of childhood to pursue a maximum number of children participating
in high quality, nurturing learning environments, rooted in proven research techniques that maximize cognitive, social, and emotional development to improve school readiness. (NYS ECAC, 2016, “Who Benefits,” para. 1)

These definitions of childhood are predicated on New York State’s notion that “research has shown that 75% of brain growth and 85% of intellect, personality, and social skills develop before children start Kindergarten,” (NYS ECAC, 2016, “A Quality Investment,” para. 1) and that of the children within the birth to five age range in New York State, “most are cared for outside the home” (“There are currently,” para. 1). Further, New York City has recently declared that “The City is now preparing to bring all contracted birth-to-five early care and education services under the management of the DOE [Department of Education]” (New York City Department of Education, 2018, p. 1). This recent and increasing institutionalization of adult intervention into the lives of very young children is taken up in the following section as well.

As outlined here, “childhood” is created not solely by the gradual accumulation of culture but also by sharp definitions offered at international, national, state, and city levels. Society constructs childhood actively through its stipulations and regulation of a child’s status throughout her life.

**Historical Control of Childhood**

The designation of “child”, through the cultural determinants outlined above, has historically carried with it the weight, and burden, of subjugation and control by adults as the ruling class. Children have for centuries within Western tradition been culturally regarded as subordinate to adults in a manner that explicitly connotes a sense of
dependency. MacDonald reviews how prevailing cultural attitudes reflected within Greco-Roman sources establish that “Children, like women and slaves, are ‘by nature’ intended to be ruled” (2014, p. 10). Each of these three “classes” of humans are “subject to the kingly authority of the head of the household” (p. 10). Children were “required to obey” the adult-as-authority, defined by an “emphasis on submissive, obedient behavior” (p.9). These texts highlight the cultural – rather than biological – context of the “control” which adults seek over children.

The history of the involuntary subjugation of children – of control – is found as well in literature from post-colonial America. Block writes that “early republican literature projected…the primitive helplessness and servitude of childhood… [on to] Blacks and Native Americans,” who were also seen as “natural dependents” on the adults in power (2012, p. 88). Again, the parallel drawn between children and other biologically-capable classes of people – Blacks and Native Americans – highlights that, while children certainly have a degree of biological dependency on adult supervision, the amount of control imposed on them is culturally determined. Adult-control over children is a social phenomenon, subject to the whims of the prevailing cultural attitude. It is not a necessary fact of life. Burman furthers this argument by highlighting that in the 19th century the study of infants…was motivated by…similar ventures in anthropology and animal observation that were closely allied with European imperialism, maintaining the hierarchy of racial superiority that justified colonial rule. The child of that time was equated with the ‘savage’ or ‘undeveloped’; since both were seen as intellectually immature, ‘primitives’ and children were studied to illuminate necessary stages for subsequent development. (1994, p. 10)
Burman then cites an 1881 article titled *Babies and Science* which refers to studying “savage life…lower animals… [and human] infancy” (p. 11).

Placing these historical sources alongside each other, a picture develops in which young children have been culturally constructed by adults into a disenfranchised social status which requires control. Children have been placed alongside other disenfranchised groups, such as women, slaves, Blacks, Native Americans, “savages,” “primitives,” and “lower animals.” The crucial element here is that the way that adults control children is not inherently altruistic nor necessarily biological, but rather a cultural formulation through which adults extend their reach into children’s lives.

Turning towards the pedagogical implications of viewing children as a subordinate class of humanity requiring control, Chudacoff writes that post-Revolutionary American attitudes towards children were defined by “a campaign to ‘domesticate’ [emphasis added] children…so that they would become virtuous citizens” (2008, p. 39). As early Americans prepared their children for a liberal democracy, they became aware of the inherent conflict between the visible autocracy in previous modes of child-rearing and intergenerational relationships with the new model of participatory democracy the founders were building. Block writes that adults in this historical period began to move away from the fast-antiquated model in which adults imposed transparent requirements of obedience on children and instead began to focus on building intergenerational relationships focused on “cultivating voluntary consent” (2012, p. 153) from children.

While this seemingly empathic construction of childhood might be referred to loosely and broadly today as “child-centered” or “meeting the child where they are,”
Block (2012) makes clear that these drastic shifts in the nature of adult relationships with children were not driven by empathy toward the child or a desire for a more egalitarian social landscape among conspecifics. Rather, this shift was strategic; it was goal-oriented with a particular adult-desired end in mind. The shift in intergenerational relationships was the result of the “highly organized and deliberate activity” (Block, p. 21) of raising young children into committed citizens for the national project of democracy. Despite the laudable goal, the means to reach that goal led adults-as-authority to construct an “inescapable” process in which the child would essentially be forced to offer what was made to seem as “voluntary compliance” (pp. 160, 303) towards the new national project. This inescapable process led to “the coercive dimensions of liberal citizen formation” (p. 22), such as schooling, socialization, and conformation towards cultural norms, which would become rites of passage into adulthood. It can thus be seen that even an empathic turn towards children was itself a tool of control, wielded by adults over children as one generation mapped out the next generation’s future. The mechanism of control shifted from the “kingly authority” of the head of the household and instead became the adoption of forced consent into the new national project.

Fass explores the historical build up towards modern childhood and declares that in contemporary America “it is the striving for control” (2016, p. 266) that defines adult attitudes towards children. She continues, “Americans generally are looking to control their kids…control, above all, became the guiding principle of ‘successful’ parenting during the past thirty years” (p. 266). Heywood concurs, describing modern childhood as a construction in which children need “to be constantly supervised… to regulate their conduct” (2001, p. 38).
Contemporary Control of Early Childhood

Completing the historical trajectory, we are now in an era in which sediments of this control have ossified in an acute manner in the lives of very young children. This has occurred through a recent expansion of intervention in early childhood education, replete with “ever earlier intervention strategies and more tightly regulated” control of children, leading the field of early childhood education into a stance which “serves to further govern, regulate, and discipline children” (Roberts-Holmes, 2016, p. 455). Whereas children have ostensibly always been subject to the control of adults, as highlighted in the historical sources above, this control has become increasingly acute and targeted towards the early years. Control is now a defining quality in the attitudes of adults towards young children, with this control enacted through increasingly interventionist policies and practices in the early years. A small number of critical researchers have taken notice, and begun to explore “dynamics of power, equality, and social justice between adults and children” (Devine & Cockburn, 2018, p. 143).

Considering this control of very young children, Gallacher explored the social geography of a 2-year-old classroom and established that “the toddler room” is “a site of control, an adult space for ordering children” (2005, p. 245). Gallacher further determined that from the adult-perspective, early childhood has been contemporaneously defined as a period of life in which “adults [are] taking control and children [are] learning self-control in line with adult expectations” (p. 245). Furthering this notion, Moss writes explicitly that the seemingly ever-increasing intervention in the lives of young children
has created a paradigm in which “early childhood institutions are readily seen as places to govern children” (2007, p. 7). Gallacher connects the governmental control of children in a tightly supervised environment to Foucauldian panopticism, using classroom observations to describe how “panopticism is implicit in the methods used by nursery staff” (2005, p. 244). Cannella draws on Foucault to describe how “disciplinary and regulatory powers” (1997, pp. 81, 183) are employed in early childhood settings to maintain control over children’s lives. Using methods of conversation analysis on video recordings from nursery school classrooms, Church, Mashford-Scott, and Cohrssen found that, despite research showing their ineffectiveness, interventions that are “coercive…directing…[or] commanding” are the “most common” (2018, p. 93) strategies used by early childhood teachers during moments of conflict resolution among student peers. It can thus be stated that a prevailing attitude towards children in the regulated spaces of early childhood education is one of commanding supervision and control.

In a theoretical paper, Kallio and Häkli assert that a contemporary focus on young children’s lives as social, rather than political, has led to a paucity of critical research on nursery classrooms as “spaces where the presence of human relations is organized by power” (2010, p. 21). When considered politically, Kallio and Häkli asserted, it must be noted that “as minors, they [children] can rarely refuse to adopt the subject positions offered to them [by adults]” (p. 27). When early childhood practice is thus viewed politically, the conscripted nature of childhood becomes evident. Young humans, as a class, are exogenously labelled as “children” and organized accordingly within a seemingly indefeasible power structure. When considered against the historical backdrop
outlined earlier, the conscription of children is reminiscent of the “inescapable” (Block, 2012) “domestication” (Chudacoff, 2008) of children present in the origin and founding of America.

While such studies have begun to proliferate around 3-to-5 year-old children, this has yet to be embraced by researchers working with younger children (Cheeseman & Sumson, 2016). Bailey asserts that this lacuna results not only from the methodological difficulties of research with a very young child (taken up later in this chapter), but also from a tendency of critical childhood scholars to “maintain…an analytical focus on children” which leaves adults on the “margins of analysis” (2018, p. 254). While this effort has shown how adults are the “primary source of oppression” (Bailey, p. 254) in children’s lives, it has by-and-large left this “oppositional category” (p. 263) un-critically examined.

Adults as a group have largely been under-studied by scholars interested in the power and agency of young children, due to an over-reliance on a constructionist argument in which the culture of childhood is ostensibly self-determined by agentive children (Hammersley, 2017). Addressing this problem, Hammersley writes

> the lives of children must always be investigated in the context of the wider societies or historical periods in which they live, in other words to a large extent in the context of adult cultural practices and forms of social organisation. (p. 117)

Whereas the notion that children are controlled by adults within the practice of early childhood education is firmly established, research has not yet yielded a robust and intimate view of how these practices are manifested, beyond a policy level, in the
mundane, daily life of intergenerational interactions.³ TAS necessarily re-positions the researcher to seek out not only the agency of the child but also the adult control with which it is coterminous and is thus capable of productively addressing this gap in extant research. In the next section I therefore begin to situate within the extant literature a framework through which the adult control of young children can be approached and explored.

**Adult Imperialism**

The power that adults wield over young children, in the historical construction outlined above, has created a paradigm in which a 2-year-old child can be considered as “the ignored citizen – the citizen whose effort to contribute to their societal group is seen as invalid because he or she is unseen” (Bath & Karlsson, 2016, p. 557). Children occupy a controlled and regulated space in contemporary society which ostensibly denies their capacity to contribute. Children are here to be controlled, not to be seen, not to matter. Stemming from research including focus group interviews with children, Olsson found that children are frequently excluded from considerations about citizenship…based on the fact that they lack many of the rights of adults such as the right to vote in political elections and the right to enter legal agreements. Many researchers, however, claim that children’s citizenship, although different from adults’ citizenship, should be regarded as ‘equal’ or ‘full.’ (2017, p. 546)

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³ It is critical to note that my focus is narrowly on the relationship between adults and children and not on other powered relationships present within society, such as majority/minority or privileged/oppressed racial, cultural, or ethnic groups. The colonizing agenda of early childhood practices within those relationships is addressed and explored elsewhere (Bloch, Swadener, & Canella, 2014; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007).
Likewise, Bath and Karlsson used qualitative data from two pre-existing studies occurring in early childhood classrooms to display how in such environments “children have consistently remained outside all notions of democratic citizenship” (2016, p. 555). This denial of citizenship, contrasted with the claim that children are citizens, is not neutral. It is not only implicated in the developmental growth and maturation of children but also has a direct implication on the “particular political cultures, and principles and values” that children are exposed to in early childhood (Millei & Kallio, 2018, p. 34) and are available to them throughout life.

Salamon, Sumsion, Press, and Harrison (2016) applied practice architecture to early childhood education to uncover “taken-for-granted beliefs and the often hidden elements” (p. 431) of early childhood practice. They explored professional early childhood settings and assert that the “prevailing views of childhood and children” uncovered can leave adults “blind” to the “realities of the children’s experience and reinforce stereotypes and power relationships…between adults and children” (p. 432). Shalaby presents ethnographic research from two different early childhood classrooms and likewise claimed that adults are blind to the “indigenous…culture of childhood” (2017, p. 162). This blindness is both cause to, and symptomatic of, the adult domination of children.

As highlighted throughout Chapters I and II, this is not inherently teleological but is rather the intergenerational praxis of adult culture forced on children. It is precisely this un-balanced power structure which has been described by the literature and only begun to be explored by the research reviewed above. Through my research I develop this praxis into a conception of adult imperialism (Chapter V), which refers to the extension of
control by adults into the lives of children. I posit that this framework offers a productive contribution to the exploration of powered intergenerational relationships and expands on the relevant literature. I use the word *imperialism* not loosely nor metaphorically but rather to meaningfully describe the consolidation of power by adults and control over children, as reviewed in the sources above. In imperial fashion, adults exert un-escapable control beyond their own sovereign lives and into the lives of children.

I am directly inspired in my use of “adult imperialism” by Cahan, Mechling, Sutton-Smith, and White (1994), who described the “imperial practices” that adults use in interactions with children. They state, “Children have their own ‘native’ practices, as well as those imposed by the adults…while adults are striving to socialize the child into their world” (p. 201). They describe this extension and intervention into children’s lives as “the ‘imperial’ practices of adults…the imperialism here is of the adult world on the child’s,” further defining imperialism as “the flood of discourse and objects that adults aim at children in an attempt to socialize them into the world of adults” (p. 200).

It is significant, as Cahan et al. (1994) have shown, that adult imperial practices are not neutral but rather are accompanied by the explicit agenda of raising up children into the adult world. In this prevailing view of intergenerational relationships, children are seen as “incomplete” until they reach the “full human status” of adulthood (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007, p. 45). The imperial extension of non-neutral control into children’s lives is used not only to “contain and control” (Wartofsky, 1983, p. 200) but also to *actively strip the child of her indigenous culture and replace it with the imperial culture* – adulthood. The cultural – rather than explicitly biological – nature of this agenda is further realized as one considers the obviousness of phylogenetic growth.
Young humans become old humans, children become adults,\(^4\) with the passage of time. Regardless of the cultural relationship between mature humans and young humans, phylogenetic growth will continue to occur, albeit in culturally-contextual expressions (Rogoff, 2003).

Taking the use of this word “imperialism” from Cahan et al. (1994) in the context of intergenerational relationships, I turn towards Edward Said and his genre-defining text (1993) on imperialism to further situate early childhood and adult culture within this paradigm. Said defines “imperialism” as “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory” (1993, p. 9) and cites Michael Doyle to further explicate imperialism as

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\text{a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another… It can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social, or cultural dependence. (1993, p. 9)}
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I explicitly link my use Cahan et al.’s “adult imperialism” (1994) to Said’s description of imperialism (1993) as a relationship in which one body controls another. Said continues that while “imperialism… lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political-ideological, economic, and social practices” (p. 9). He establishes that these “practices” are

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\text{impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination. (p. 9)}
\]

\(^4\) A curious note here is that human phylogeny contains elements of neoteny, or the retention of juvenile qualities into adulthood, resulting in an extended childhood. Neoteny has been theorized as evolutionarily beneficial for reasons of elongated periods of learning made possible as a result of neotenic brain development (Choi, 2009). While the evolutionary benefits of neoteny are far beyond the scope of this paper, they are mentioned here to again show that adult imperialism is not rooted in a biological need for adults to actively encourage children to shed their childhood but rather is a cultural expression of control.
In broad agreement with the sources outlined earlier, Cannella likewise recognizes that “child development is actually a covert method for social control and regulation” (1997, p. 61). I assert that the paradigm of adult control over children, recognized by Cannella and broadly by critical childhood researchers, is itself a form of imperialism congruent with Said’s definition.

Tamar Schapiro (1999) adds further intellectual insight into the political and power discrepancy perpetuated by adults in their relationships with children. Schapiro ascertains that

To treat someone like a child is, roughly, to treat her as if her life is not quite her own to lead and as if her choices are not quite her own to make. [In modern society] each person is a sovereign authority whose consent is not to be bypassed…. (p. 715)

… [and yet] we do not feel bound by children’s expressions of their wills in the same way that we feel bound by adults’ expression of theirs. (p. 717)

Schapiro furthers this argument by describing “the condition of childhood” as one in which “the agent is not yet in a position to speak in her own voice because there is no voice which counts as hers” (p. 729). Schapiro explains:

Our basic concept of a child is that of a person who in some fundamental way is not yet developed, but who is in the process of developing. It is in virtue of children’s undeveloped condition that we feel we have special obligations to them… [such as] duties to protect, nurture, discipline, and educate…. We think of children as people who have to be raised, whether they like it or not. (p. 716)

It is this notion that a child’s life is “not quite her own to lead” that is critical in my understanding of adult imperialism. I hold tight Shalaby’s “indigenous…culture of childhood” and embrace Lundy’s assertion that it is a “breach of their [children’s] human rights” and “always wrong” (2018, p. 351) to exclude any class of people from meaningful participation in life. When children’s human rights are breached, when their
lives are not their own to lead, adults are implicated for their imperial control of childhood.

The inductive coding process (outlined in Chapter IV) I used to analyze the data (Chapter V) highlights that imperial control includes the related practices of “age-based segregation” and “infantilization.” I briefly situate these two strands within the relevant literature here, in order to provide a context through which Chapter V can be understood. Scholars have firmly established that young children have for centuries faced an ever-increasing and clearly demarcated separation from adults as well as children of nominally different ages as a result of adult policy and practice (Ariès, 1962; Bloch, 1987; Mayall, 2002; Rogoff, 2003). In this fashion, “school…is usually organized to keep children away from adult settings” (Rogoff, p. 140). Adult imperialism is thus predicated on the manner in which children are segregated from adult life.

This segregation leaves children “isolated from the rest of the world and regulated through a controlled exposure” (Cannella, 1997, p. 30). One large element of this “controlled exposure” is the concept of developmentally appropriate practices [DAP] (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), referred to in Chapter I. The culture of DAP is seen as a standard-bearer for the field of early childhood education and has accrued the imprimatur of many professional organizations (Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 2011). To establish a DAP, “we first think about what children are like within a general age range”

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5 This claim is made of the cultural context within which my research occurs and is clearly not intended as a monolithic claim regarding all children everywhere. Rogoff points to contemporary non-Western examples of communities where “children are included in almost all community and family events, day and night, from infancy” (2003, p. 133-138). In these communities, two-year-olds are intermixed in daily life with adult members of their family, accompanying them while they work during the day and sleeping with them during the night.
such as “the number of [puzzle] pieces 4-year-olds typically find doable” (Kostelnik et al., p. 20). DAPs are then broadly applied throughout the field in many settings. However, Heywood argues that through practices like these and the research underpinning them, “developmental psychologists have consistently underestimated the capacities of children” (2001, p. 39). This is confirmed in contemporary research, such as by Thomson, who states that “there is no biological ‘truth’ that suggests that being young equates with nothing to say” (2009, p. 1) and Brierley, who uses qualitative data gathered at nursery school and home for 2-year-old children and claims that "the cognitive abilities of 2-year-old children are underestimated and misinterpreted" in both policy and pedagogy (2018, p. 137) and urges policy makers and practitioners to “stop underestimating 2-year-old children’s cognitive abilities” (p. 145). Likewise, Palaiologou states that “dominant traditional views of childhood” have constructed children “as being incapable and dependent, not able to make decisions and understand the world” (2014, p. 690). Prevailing practices within early childhood render children as overly-infantile, failing to recognize variation among competencies and disallowing exposure to, and interaction with, a broader presentation of the world.

Arguing specifically against Bredekamp’s notion of developmentally appropriate practice, Canella posits that when “we believe that we know what children are like, what we can expect at various ages, and how we should differentiate our treatment of them” (1997, p. 30), we deprive the child of autonomy, individuality, and significantly for this research, agency. Burman extends this line of argument, noting that the “imposition of a standardised model”, through paradigms such as DAP, leads not surprisingly to a “standard childhood” (1994, p. 55). Ultimately, the use of age-based segregation and the
infantilization of young children leads to a “fixed, unilinear, and timeless” model of childhood which is “ethnocentric and culture-blind” (Burman, 1994, p. 59). This is a paradigm which is “oppressive” and “refuse[s] to recognize opportunities” (p. 60) for children. The practices of adult imperialism thus unnecessarily conscript children into subjugated and depressed roles within intergenerational relationships. This theme is analyzed in Chapter V.

**Nuances within adult imperialism.** Within this, I must highlight two nuances, namely, that I do not claim that adult imperialism is static nor is it encompassing of all aspects of adult control over the lives of children. Power within relationships is non-stable and always subject to local context. I certainly am not suggesting that all adults always exert a uniform control over all children but am rather positing that there is a very visible strand of imperialism felt within contemporary adult attitudes towards children. How this strand manifests pragmatically will invariably shift with local context and the lived experiences of both adults and children.

Likewise, adult control of children does not inherently equate with adult imperialism. Adult attention to, and control of, children’s lives has yielded many obviously beneficial initiatives, such as child labor laws, safety equipment (i.e. safety belts and car seats), and child sex abuse laws, to name but a few. There are also obvious areas of biological dependency in infancy, such as feeding, protection from external threats, and the need to develop positive relationships with caregivers. Cheeseman and Sumsion call this the “complex contradiction,” in which children’s “physical and emotional vulnerability is unquestioned” (2016, p. 278) and, yet, that very vulnerability
also leads to an impoverished, generalized vision of the child. That image is far too often concerned with “cautions and concerns” about children rather than “promoting [their] potentials and possibilities” (p. 278). Considering this complex contradiction, the notion of adult imperialism outlined here both appreciates the significant positive contributions adults make to children’s lives by recognizing their vulnerability while also critically highlighting the fallibility of generalizing that vulnerability into a catch-all need for control. The crucial point here is that adult imperialism is not monolithic but rather points to the extension of adult control into regions of children’s lives where it is not necessary nor invited.

The Child’s Agency

Having reviewed literature relevant to the first element of Wartofsky’s heuristic – “the world’s construction of the child” – I now turn to the “child’s construction of the world.” Whereas the previous sections reviewed ways in which adults imperialistically extend control into the lives of children, this section reviews children’s agency and their capacity to matter as they meet those adults.

Agency and the Transformative Activist Stance

Agency is a “fundamental tenet of Western thought and civilization” (Sugarman & Sokol, 2012, p. 1), and the transformative power of agency has thus been given considerable intellectual exploration (e.g., Archer, 2000; Lovell, 2003; McManus, 2011;
Sokol, Hammand, Kuebli, & Sweetman, 2015). Sokol et al. (2015) review that agency “refers to a person’s autonomous control over his or her actions – but also much more than this”, and it is the “much more than this” that the present research seeks to contribute towards. Sokol et al. describe the “more” as, “a sense of what individuals can accomplish themselves” and “responsibility or ownership over one’s actions” (p. 284). However agency is certainly considered not as a solely individual pursuit and is rather “constituted in the currents and connections of human relationships” (p. 308).

Agency, as broadly reviewed by Sokol et al., is thus concerned both with macro-level concerns such as physical causality and personal free will as well as the more grounded, local concern that an agent “gets things done.” This leaves open large questions, such as, does the individual have agency, or do cultural tools provide mechanisms for change? What is the interaction between self-determination and individual freedom? The broad, at times ambiguous, scholarly discussion of agency has led to “accounts of agency” which are “unsystematized” (Sokol, et al., p. 286) and therefore underexplored and “neglected” (p. 287) in the here-and-now. Within this robust-yet-diffuse contemporary attention to agency, it can be found that Stetsenko’s TAS offers a singular and productive contribution to the ontology of agency (Collins, Mackenzie, & McCartney, 2015). TAS joins the contemporary critical push to move beyond what Sokol et al. describe as the “Newtonian mechanical causality” which nonetheless continue to dominate mainstream popular conceptions of agency, such as “Event A causes Event B” (p. 290).

I will review here how the role of agency within TAS can be distinguished from other prevailing sociocultural models present in the relevant literature. TAS sees an
“ontological primacy” for the status of agency (Stetsenko, 2017), which is distinguished from distributed and sociocultural models, such as a nested model in which individuals develop within delimited proximal, social, and institutional settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1995), and a situated model in which individuals develop through membership within a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Agency in its present use is also distinguished from Hedegaard and Fleer’s cultural-historical projects (2008, 2013).

Within these works, “agency” appears only in a small portion of one chapter in each book and refers more to a context- and volition-dependent quality, which can either be revoked or granted according to the situation.

Likewise, agency within TAS expands upon Rogoff’s understanding of a child’s role in her own development. While Rogoff explicitly distances herself from the transmission-acquisition models for learning in which “children have little role except to be receptive, as if they could just open a little bottle cap to let adults pour the knowledge in” (1994, p. 211) she does not explicitly refer to “agency” in her work. Rogoff asserts that “humans develop through their changing participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities, which also change” (2003, p. 11). While this leaves the child in the powerful position of being able to change her culture, it also leaves a gulf between the child and the culture; the culture is still essentially “out there” in the world, existing independently of the child. Collins et al. write that Stetsenko’s contribution here is that she finds

an ontological position that accounts for the profoundly and utterly social nature of being human, and which sees that, not as the end of agency and of emancipation, but as their essential condition [emphasis added]. It is, we argue, by keeping structure as part of people that transformative action becomes truly

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6 The index in two of Rogoff’s seminal works (1990, 2003) contains no references to “agency” and I have not come across her use of this word in other works.
part of what it is to be human and what humans in fact do (routinely), rather than a special kind of action which is what some (special) people (sometimes) do. (2015, p. 11)

The suturing together of the child and her world eliminate the ontological gap between the “individual” child and the culture “out there.” Being coterminous, neither is made-real in isolation of their co-existence and co-dependency. The critical point here – and the departure which TAS makes from many theories of agency – is that the “utterly social nature” of humanity, and therefore agency, does not disavow the individual capacity to be agentive. Individuals matter. I will review the nuanced ontological complexity of this statement to clearly situate my use of agency throughout this work.⁷

Cole’s statement (1998) that mind is interiorized culture and culture is interiorized mind is paradigmatic of the CHAT literature on this topic, stemming from Vygotsky’s foundational assertion: “Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first on the social level and later, on the individual level; first between people (intermental) and then inside the child (intramental)” (1978, p. 57). Again, TAS critically expands this notion, positing both that already-and-concurrently-with intermental cultural development (between people), the child’s agency is robust and active, and that in intramental development (inside the child) the culture she encounters is never absent but instead actively negotiates with the child’s agency.

In critical childhood studies, James and James (2004) distill agency succinctly: “children are agents, whose actions have consequences” (p. 25). Critical childhood studies are acknowledged by CHAT researchers as operating within an episteme familiar to a cultural-historical framework (Hedegaard, 2009; Hedegaard & Fleer, 2008) but yet

⁷ The individual|social ontology of agency is taken up again in the preface to Chapter VI.
are used with caution in this study as they can be seen to understand children as solipsistically acting on society rather than working with and co-creating society. This leaves children (instead of “the world”) as “out there,” somehow existing proudly and fiercely independent of the cultural world.

Stetesenko refers to this critically as “a truncated reversal of traditional dualisms” (2017, p. 293) in which the original dualism (of individual|social) is not eliminated but rather…affirmed through a reduction of one pole on the dichotomy to the other which is de facto in line with the assumption that this dichotomy is legitimate in the first place. (p. 293)

Rather than embrace either “pole” of the individual|social dualism, TAS negotiates an ontological position in which

the [individual] mind is immersed in how people are positioned and situated in the world” and also an individual can “act from a distance [to the social world] – and, therefore, with self-determination and freedom.” (p. 294)

Hammersley likewise offers a similar word of caution around truncated reversals:

There is a danger here of treating agency in a dichotomous fashion that is misleading: simply opposing a passive model of children to one where they are wholly unconstrained or undetermined in their behaviour, and therefore can exercise autonomous will. (2017, p. 119)

Rather, Hammersley leans on Marx and offers a “sophisticated middle position,” continuing, “we can only make history, and ourselves, by drawing on the resources we have inherited” (p. 119). This overcoming-of-dualisms is a central project within TAS and is therefore crucial in understanding the data analysis and findings which come later in this paper. The child inherits a historical culture while simultaneously making that culture real (real-izing the culture) by being its proximal and temporal manifestation and also generating the future by having a unique and irreplaceable encounter (through individually unique contributions) with the inherited culture. This ongoing, never-
demarcated process represents the folding together of person, culture, history, present, and future. None of these constitutive elements are “out there.”

Indeed, Stetsenko emphasizes that “human agency…is a this-worldly process” (2017, p. 206). On this point, while TAS is at times congruent with similar progressive accounts of agency, “human” agency here is contrasted to notions of disembodied, performative, or situated agency by claiming that “it is human beings [emphasis added] who enact, perform, and carry out” (Stetsenko, 2017, p. 206) the very work of world-creation. This sets TAS apart from poststructural renderings of agency and related topics. For example, Deleuze and Guatarri describe a subject-free “assemblage,” which they describe as “neither an individual or a species…but a phenomenon of bordering” (1987, p. 245), and Erin Manning’s posthuman “ecology of practices” likewise displaces “subject-based identity” which accounts for the “volition-intentionality-agency triad” (2016, p. 123). Manning adopts Deleuze and Guatarri’s agencement as a “processual agency” which is itself “opposed to [emphasis added] agency” (p. 123). For Manning, “agency” implies a human-subject-based volition which is incompatible with her ecology of practices. Kafer, writing in disability studies about the cyborg figure, cites Erickson (2007) to describe the “functioning as a self and a unit” of Erickson with her personal attendants as they accomplish daily Erickson’s daily tasks such as eating and bathing. Kafer describes Erickson and her attendants as “both singular and plural, neither fully [emphasis added] ‘she’ nor ‘they’” (2013, p. 120). Within TAS, this positioning might be re-written as “both singular and plural, both fully ‘she’ and ‘they’. ” TAS continues to embrace individual human agency and subjectivity and also the “ontological primary of social practices” (Stetsenko, 2017, p. 214). The critical distinction made here is that
within poststructuralism, human agency shrivels because it lacks a human subject as well as object. In TAS, human agency is ontologically nurtured because agency is conceived of as the active human striving co-terminus with human engagement with the world. Social structures rely on individual humans; the social is made real by the individual.

Finally, to further distinguish and clarify agency within TAS, Stetsenko weighs in directly on the distinction between her model and those reviewed above, providing a clarifying perspective as she writes that CHAT is broadly consistent with…perspectives advancing ecological, participatory, situated, and social-interactive notions… [in that all of these frameworks acknowledge] that the only access people have to reality is through active engagement with and participation in it, rather than simply this access being a matter of people “being” in the world. … [And yet] these similarities notwithstanding, [TAS is distinct in that it] directly and centrally predicates development and learning on joint collaborative endeavors extending through generations… [providing] a foundation on which to overcome the traditional gulf that separates…individuals from society, history, and culture. (2017, p. 326)

This contribution by Stetsenko regarding the role of agency is now being used by a growing crop of contemporary researchers (Darley, 2018; Enciso, Edmiston, Volz, Lee, & Sivashankar, 2016; Van Dellen, 2018) but is “not evident in mainstream social theory” (Collins et al., 2015, p. 11).

Within TAS, it is understood that the “revolutionary energy of transformative agency that furnishes our world…is the province not of the select few but of all human beings [emphasis added]” (Stetsenko, 2019, p. 431). This human agency is a force which “can never be denied” even “from the first days of life” (2017, p. 349) in a process which “begins already in early childhood” (p. 283). Agency is a stance in which individuals seek “to always transcend both how the world positions us and its status quo” (p. 227), allowing for the “creation of novelty in transcending the given” as people “irreversibly
and irrevocably, forever change” the world (p. 283). Through this process, individuals are engaged in “creating a different future” (p. 255) in an ongoing, fluid process of change and generation. This reflects the ontological position that “reality is not ‘given’ – rather, it is taken by persons as social actors” (p. 255) and that individuals, through the entanglement of their agency with the social word, are engaged in “the process of inventing the future, rather than merely expecting or anticipating its ‘automatic’ arrival” (p. 233). Children are not members of the world, watching as history unfolds; they are authors of the world who write the future through their actions and engagement with the world.

**Agency in Early Childhood: Resistance and Reappropriation**

Having reviewed agency both in TAS and other prevailing sociocultural models, I will now turn towards contemporary examples of research on agency in early childhood settings. Rather than consider the field broadly, I will consider some of the analytic themes (Chapter V) developed out of my inductive coding process (Chapter III) to situate my findings within the relevant literature. The themes I will cover here are the resistance children show to adult control along with their capacity to reappropriate adult-agendas and re-make the world as theirs. For individuals “during the early stages of ontogenetic development” these agentive acts are typically felt in “modest ways and…on local scales” (Stetsenko, 2017, p. 183).

“Resistance” is a process recognized in the cultural-historical literature, as Rogoff described how “children refuse to engage in some activities and insist on others,”
and that “hesitance and resistance by children” play “crucial roles” (1990, p. 91) in defining their environment. Cole described this as the “infants’ ability…to wrest control from adults” and to deviate from the “script” (1996, p. 192) which adults provide.

Formanek-Brunell, has shown how children have “challenged adult prescriptions” through their “resistance” to “codified” (1993, p. 6) expectations. Likewise, “everyday studies” of children’s lives have revealed that children’s “opposition to adults” can be a way to “intentionally create conflict” (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2016, p. 216).

Studying children’s “agentic activities”, Bath and Karlsson explored nursery classrooms in Sweden and Britain, finding that “children will show resistance (dissent) to the teacher’s pedagogical position when they are defending their own or others’ rights” (2016, p. 561). In an ethnographic study, Karlsson (2018) explored children’s response to institutional regulations in a Swedish asylum center and identifies what she labels “their political acts of resistance” (p. 311) and their “tactical acts” (p. 316) as they “claimed their right” to play (p. 321). The children’s resistance often “remained hidden” (p. 321), which leads the author to the important reminder for those studying children’s agency that

resistance, in constraining contexts, can be expressed through a veiled struggle, when critique cannot be articulated in direct confrontations due to the risk of consequences. (p. 314)

In a theoretical paper which explored childhood and social policy across the European Union, Devine and Cockburn (writing from Ireland and the United Kingdom, respectfully) found that “as active agents, children reflect, resist, and position themselves with respect to…the absence of structural recognition of [childhood]” (2018, p. 151).
Recognizing the political power of children to resist those in control, Moss (2007) advocated for a re-envisioning of school as a place of democratic practices, through which children can actively express “a means of resisting power and its will to govern, and the forms of oppression and injustice that arise from the unrestrained exercise of power” (p. 7). The “democratic participation” of children in the aspirational school setting that Moss describes would re-frame their resistance away from being problematic and instead could be identified as “an important criterion of citizenship” (p. 7). Moss argued that the autocratic control of early childhood classrooms stifles the capacity for young children to act in politically resistant ways.

Millei and Kallio (2018), though broadly agreeing with Moss’ desire to see school as a place for the political practice of democracy, argued that children are already-and-always acting in politically subversive ways. They made the claim that it requires a recognition of children’s mundane acts as political in order to recognize that they take action in situations where things are going wrong from their perspective; they choose between different practices going on in the nursery to avoid subordination and to gain power; they take sides between different groupings for ethical reasons; and they follow and challenge the nursery rules as it seems beneficial. (pp. 34-35)

This subtle shift in comprehension of children’s actions – from social to political – allows the researcher to recognize the many ways in which children resist the adult-desire to control them. Children’s failing to conform to norms thus has the potential to be recognized as agentive resistance rather than developmental shortcomings or lack of maturity. This is of course not an essentialist statement but rather simply opens up new ways of knowing children’s behavior within different contexts.
However, the findings of the previous authors, generally situated in European and American settings, are in contrast to researchers working in Eastern cultures. Carter conducted interviews with ten 5- and 6-year-old children in Catholic nursery schools in Singapore, which embodied “collectivist ethics such as deference to authority” (2016, p. 32). Carter reported that

there was an unquestioning acceptance of the [teachers’] rules, with children implying it was taken for granted by teachers and themselves that they would behave according to the prescribed social customs. (p.36)

Concurring with Carter, Im and Swadener reported that in South Korea, also a “culture grounded in collectivism” (2016, p. 29), 5-year-old children “lack…experiences in challenging the practices of adults” (p. 33) and instead tended to seek out practices of conformity. The dissonance between these reports in eastern cultures on children’s resistance and conformity highlights the non-essential nature of childhood reviewed earlier (Hammersley, 2017).

Having reviewed “resistance,” I now turn towards “reappropriation.” The capacity of children to reappropriate their world – to do things differently and re-make it as theirs – is documented by historians of childhood, who have noted that children are often observed “incorporating and transforming spaces and objects for their own purposes” (Chudacoff, 2007, p. 184) and that children often have “different agendas” (Formanek-Brunell, 1993, p. 8) from their parents for the uses of their toys. In an iconic example, Chudacoff cites the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission 1981 report on playground use which lamented that children were observed to be “walking up and down a slide” (2007, p. 184).
Gutman and Coninck-Smith describe this as “children tak[ing] charge of their material culture…claiming and putting to unexpected uses the things and settings adults have given them” (2008, p. 7). Wartofsky situated this phenomenon ontologically, claiming:

Our entering the world, as active, needy, purposeful beings, already requires a reappropriation and a remaking of that world so that it becomes our world and thus involves more than simply accommodating the way the world has been made: it often involves changing it. (1983, p. 199)

Stetsenko (2017) provides further clarification to the process, adding that the “active work” to bring the “future into reality” is a process that is often against the odds, that is, even if a particular version of what is to come in the future is not anticipated as likely and, instead, requires struggle and active striving to achieve it. This applies in cases when a person struggles for one’s vision of “what ought to be” in spite of the powerful forces that might be pulling in other directions. (p. 239)

With the lone contemporary example I could locate in qualitative research, Gallacher explored 2-year-old classrooms and found that “children are learning…to take control for themselves…and manipulate others and negotiate the use of space to their own ends” (2005, p. 256). Citing Goffman (1968), this manipulation coheres to generate the “underlife” of the classroom, which is accomplished as 2-year-olds “appropriate and reconfigure space in the toddler room” (Gallacher, p. 244). Gallacher concluded that there are “two ‘worlds’ in the toddler room, the official world organized by adults and the peer culture” (p. 258).
Early Childhood Research Methodologies

Having explored the relevant literature around the frame of this study – adult imperialism and child agency – I now turn towards relevant research methodologies. I draw my methodologies, outlined in Chapters III and IV, from these extant studies to offer a unique contribute to the proliferation of methods within the field.

Paying Close Attention to Children

Early childhood research is currently the site of “increased attention to listening to young children…as active agents”, stemming from the belief that children “can tell adults about their lives” (K. Smith, 2014, p. 527). I will review these research methodologies in order to situate the methods of my research (Chapter IV) within the relevant contemporary literature. In this section I review recent research which pays close attention to young children and in the following section I review related interview methodologies. Contemporary methodologies calls for the child to participate in the research and data generation, rather than seeing the child as the object of the research methods (Einarsdottier, 2014; Smith, 2014). The inclusion of the child’s perspective contrasts with mainstream developmental research, which seeks data about the child in order to place her within a normed scale of development. Cultural-historical research

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8 A review of contemporary developmental psychology handbooks on early childhood (McCartney & Phillips, 2006) and childhood (Goswami, 2014) shows a total of 59 chapters researching the young child’s development, with none of these chapters exploring the child’s perspective on her own development, even in the few chapters in these textbooks dedicated to
seeks to understand “the child’s presentations of themselves” (Hviid, 2008a, p. 183), operating under the understanding that “how the child gives meaning to events that involve them is different from the interpretations of adults about the same events” (Johansson, 2011, p. 11). Within this epistemology, “children are…regarded as agentic and as experts on their own lives, capable of stating their ideas, views, and plans” (Einersdottir, 2014, p. 682).

Alison Clark and Peter Moss have often been at the front of this increased attention to “listening to young children” (A. Clark, 2005; A. Clark & Moss, 2001, 2011), and many of the recent studies focusing on the voice of the young child lean on, or extrapolate from, their “mosaic” approach to listening to children (Duncan & Te One, 2014; Green, 2012; Nicholson, Kurnik, Jevgjovikj, & Ufoegbune, 2015; Sumsion, et al, 2014; White, 2011). The mosaic approach propagated by A. Clark and Moss advocates for using a variety of verbal and non-verbal listening tools designed specifically to illuminate “the voice of the child” (A. Clark, 2005, p. 11). While the mosaic approach includes a range of diverse methods, they each rely on a set of common tenets: multi-method, participatory, reflexive, adaptable, focused on children’s lived experiences, and embedded into practice (p. 13).

Carla Rinaldi and her “pedagogy of listening” (2006) is highly congruent and is likewise employed by current early childhood researchers investigating the voice of the young child (Fleet & Britt, 2011; Meehan, 2016; Salamon, 2015). Rinaldi is well-known in those areas of the field inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach, where the notion is ecological or sociocultural notions of children’s development. The methods reviewed throughout Chapter II explicitly distance themselves from this paradigm, moving away from looking “at” children and instead turn towards looking “with” children.
embraced that children are “competent and strong...[and have] the right to hope and the right to be valued” as a stark contrast to “a predefined child seen as fragile, needy, incapable” (Guidici, Rinaldi, & Krechevksy, 2001, p. 79). Rinaldi writes that listening to the young child’s voice and recognizing her agency “takes the individual out of anonymity” (2006, p. 65). Rinaldi urges her readers to use the now-common notion, stemming from Reggio Emilia, of the one hundred languages of children in order to listen to each voice.

This field includes researchers working with children who are not yet verbally fluent; these researchers are seeking to explore how to “listen” to these young children. Fincham, seeking the toddler’s “voice” (2015, p. 110), wrote, “I began to wonder if you could interview a toddler...and consider[ed] how we might move away from the spoken and written word” (p. 112). Likewise, Palaiologou examined the question, “How can we design research projects that ‘listen to’ children?” (2014, p. 692) while working with children under five years old. By asking these questions and experimenting with new methodologies, these researchers have expanded the set of methodological tools available for research projects such as my own.

Accordingly, these methodologies have been used in multiple recent studies where researchers have found that young and pre-verbally fluent children can tell adults about their lives when the adults take the time to change their typical listening habits. Green showed that through painting and having children lead an adult to their “special places”, researchers can “understand children’s connection to place” (2012, p. 270) without relying on mature verbal capacity. Almqvist and Almqvist (2014) found that researchers can access children’s voice on the nature of power and authority in student-
teacher relationships by engaging the children in puppet shows, and by having children take pictures of salient moments during their school day. Einarsdottier found that through the photographs children took during their school day, researchers could approach an understanding about “children’s views on early childhood teachers” (2014, p. 693). Smith (2014) found that through drawing, artwork, and block construction, children can share productively disruptive views of safety, security, and risk-taking. Smith stated that listening to these ideas from children can lead to a more secure and safe world in comparison to having only adult-ideas of safety included in the conversation.

White and Redder showed how even infants under 1-year-old can voice their perspective on their “relationships with adults, peers, and artefacts” (2015, p. 1783) through “accessing the visual field of infants,” done via a “tiny nano-pod camera positioned on the head of both infants [two infant participants] and one key teacher…in tandem with a fourth camera” held by the researcher (p. 1786). These examples show how creative methods in early childhood research are now recognizing the stances children take on issues relevant to them. Taken together, these studies show how researchers are listening to the agentive voice of the young child. In Chapter IV I situate my methodologies within those reviewed here, ultimately showing how my work builds on the extant studies to offer a unique contribution to the field.

**Expanding Interview Methods**

“Interviewing children is a special case” (Hviid, 2008a, p. 139), which has accordingly led to the development of particular methods within cultural historical
studies. Children have presented researchers with difficulties in determining the veracity or even intentionality of their responses, highlighted early in the history of child studies by the “five types of reaction” by the young child to the interviewer’s questions, outlined by Piaget, ranging from “answer at random” to “spontaneous conviction” (Piaget, 1929, p. 10). Early researchers found it difficult to correlate children’s interview “answers” with linear, logical thought, and therefore often excluded children from being interviewed (Scott, 2008). The non-adult thought displayed by the child in an interview setting can leave the adult unsure of “how much to listen and how much to interpret” (James, 2007, p. 162). The methods for interviewing young children have progressed greatly over the past century, and now children are no longer relegated to the sideline in studies about them. Piaget’s “five types of reaction” would certainly seem anachronistic and stiff when compared to current interview methods. I review contemporary methods for interviewing children here to create a context for the interview methods used in this study (Chapter IV).

Scott asserted that when interviewing, “different methods for different age groups” (2008, p. 90) are preferable. Examples of this include drawing, map-making, photographs, and tool-kits; in general, these age-modified interview methods seek to “reclaim the variety of ‘languages’ of children…through methods that demonstrate respect for those languages” (Palaiologou, 2014, p. 701). Each of these methods help overcome the hurdle that is present when “the very young child does not share the same semiotic language system as the adult, particularly the researcher” by adding “non-verbal forms of language” (White, 2011, p. 131) to the interview setting. The literature on these interview methods for young children can be broadly placed in two age-groups, for
children older than three and children younger than three. I will review them both here, as they both inform the methods used in Chapter IV.

Drawing during interviews is a popular strategy for researchers working with children three and older. Wong (2015) titled this the “draw-and-tell” method, while some researchers focus on child verbalizations while drawing. Dockett and Perry (2005, 2008, 2015) modified their interviews by “including drawing, photographing, and mapping their experiences” (2015, p. 167) within the interview sessions. Their interview data consists of “the informal conversations that accompany…the combined act of drawing and talking” (2015, p. 176). Coates and Coates likewise reported that their interviews with 3- to 7-year-old children are based on “listening to children as they draw” and “the accompanying dialogue” as children draw and scribble (2016, p. 61).

Guo and Mackenzie saw scribbling and drawing by a pre-verbal child as a communicative measure, in and of itself. They therefore saw a need “to move beyond cognitive questions [and instead] to focus on children’s creative communications” (2015, p. 85). According to these authors, from the young child’s perspective there is not a binary distinction between “writing” and “drawing”; rather, both are part of a singular notion of putting marks on paper to convey meaning. This is consistent as well with Coates and Coates’ statement that for the young child, “drawing stands for both print and image,” which leads to a great deal of difficulty for an “adult to appreciate” (2016, p. 60) the communicative nature of a child’s scribbling. This was also noted in my third pilot study, in which the research participant used the words “writing” and “drawing” interchangeably when referring to both her and my pen marks in my field notebook.
Hviid (2008b) and Fleet and Britt (2011) both encouraged children to draw maps during interviews. Fleet and Britt sought to “listen seriously to the children” (2011, p. 150) and found that when they did, “the construct of children’s agency [emphasis added]...emerged through the data” (p. 152). Research participants were asked to create a map of the places in their school; the places that the children emphasized in their map shed light on the differences between the ways in which adults and children encounter the world. The children emphasized “spaces where adults do not want to (or sometimes physically cannot) go,” and were seen as “secret, risky, or private” (p. 154), such as climbing on top of the perimeter wall of the playground or into a small space behind a water fountain.

Hviid sought to understand “children’s presentations of themselves” (2008b, p. 183) through interviews in which “children were asked to draw maps on big papers, illustrating the spaces they had been in” (p. 185). Michael, a research participant, described how, in contrast to the adult view of linear development, his personal experience with growth in school and home is

up-down, up-down, up-down...you are big and small, big and small. Last year in nursery, you are big, right? Then you get very small in kindergarten. Then you are big the last year in kindergarten. (p. 187)

These map-based interviews yielded an understanding of the child’s perspective which was quite a departure from what adults presumed.

Photographs are often included in interviews with young children. Dockett and Perry (2005) used photos alongside text to create a small book for their research participants, which the children accessed during interviews to illicit conversation.
Einarsdottier used photos taken by the children during interviews with 5- to 6-year-olds, but is careful to explain that the pictures were not to analyze…or look at them as true descriptions of daily life in preschool, but rather as an encouragement to, and platform for, conversation between the child and the researcher. (2014, p. 687)

Other researchers use a tool-kit approach, in which they rely not on a single interview strategy but rather a host of tools to be used at different times. These tool-kits generally revolve around, or are inspired by, A. Clark and Moss’ Mosaic approach (2001, 2011) and Rinaldi’s pedagogy of listening (2006), reviewed earlier. Green (2012, 2014) described her use of five “interactive methods” when interviewing children aged three to five: book discussions, representational art, child-led place tours, informal interviews, and puppets, and in another study gave children a choice of drawing, painting, molding, and building with blocks. Smith (2014) used dialogue, drawing and artwork, and block construction in her interviews with children aged three to five, while Meehan (2016) used role-play, drama, 3D constructions, stories, and drawing.

In the literature on children under three years old, some researchers still refer to “interviews” with children while others forgo the term and focus instead on a broader notion of intersubjective communication. Working with photographs in interviews with babies aged six to twelve months, Salamon reported that the babies started to bite and lick the photographs, and that he realized they [the babies] are more interested in doing their own thing [emphasis added] with the photos and have to let go of my debunked expectation of using them in a certain way… Essentially, the babies changed how using the photo documentation took place. (2015, p. 1025)

White (2011) used “multi-modal forms of communication” when conducting “interview sessions” with a toddler aged 18-20 months, including dolls, photographs, artwork, and
verbal language records. White described how “it seemed as if Zoe called on the dolls as a means of strategic orientation…representing a language act” (2011, p. 77). Lokken, working with 2-year-old children, wrote that because “the children were too young to put words to their actions, observing and experiencing the children in their everyday world was necessary” (2011, p.170) and therefore in lieu of an interview, she “transformed all actions, vocalizations, and verbal statements [from a field observation video] into concurrently written text” (p. 177). Likewise, Hvit reported that “toddler's construct ideas and share meanings with a high level of modality, using the whole body and multimodal expressions such as gestures, gaze, and body movements” (2015, p. 312). Each of these toddler researchers converge on what Lokken (2011; Johansson & Lokken, 2014), citing Pink (2009), refers to as “sensory ethnography.” These findings provide a guide for how to recognize the child’s agency not only in her verbal expression but also in how her body engages with the world. Fincham stated this cogently, describing that “in considering a toddler’s ‘voice,’ it is extremely limiting to focus on the word and neglect the body” (2015, p. 110).

With this critical and productive expansion of interview methods, stumbling blocks have also been identified. There are at least three limitations (likely many more) to these methods that must be considered. First, Moore cautioned that despite using child-friendly tools (i.e., the Mosaic approach and pedagogy of listening), she finds that,

it was noticeable that the children were not as interested in the idea of talking to me as I had envisaged. Our interviews felt stilted and artificial, and usually one sided. (2014, p. 7)

She instead suggests, “an interruption of the methodological approach of adult-contrived interviews” by moving away from “mechanical approaches to interviewing children to
obtain ‘data’ from them” and towards “authentically listening to children” (p. 4). Moore opens up this notion of non-mechanistic authentic listening by stating poignantly,

It was only when I paused my research techniques that I heard the children’s stories… Children do not always need ‘adult devised techniques’ to enable them to say something worthwhile. (p. 5)

These words of caution were profound in shaping the interviews described in Chapter IV and data in Chapters V and VI. “Stilted and artificial” can certainly describe the child-interviews throughout my pilot studies. Heeding Moore has allowed for interviews in this study to move from “adult devised techniques” towards “authentically listening to children.”

Second, each study relies on the epistemological notion that young children have powerful agency and accordingly strong voices. While this fits neatly within the framework of this study, the vast majority of research within these studies has been in “northern Europe, Australia, and, to a lesser extent, North America…there are few studies…from globally southern societies” (Im & Swadener, 2016, p. 28). This is consistent with the claim, reviewed earlier, that the history of childhood has primarily been written from the perspective of white, Western culture. Im and Swadener wrote that because of these cultural blinders, we have been left with a “universal [emphasis added] approach to addressing child participation rights” (p. 28). Therefore the methods employed in Chapter IV, to be consistent with the study, must be ideographic and particular to the participant rather than a nomothetic generalization blindly applied. This notion is taken up again in the Positionality section in Chapter III.

Third, the interview methods reviewed here, as well the notion that children have agentive voices, are themselves cultural constructions. Hammersley wrote, “it is not just
childhood that must be seen as socially constructed but also, for example, children’s voices and their rights” (2017, p. 118). Taking this into consideration, Salamon was wise to encourage the researcher to use methodologies for the child’s voice that “result from the concrete research situations rather than preconceived notions” (2015, p. 1021). This was a lesson learned during my third pilot study, which initially called for discrete interview sessions following each four-hour field observation. This was quickly modified to have interviews embedded within the observations, as the child was much more engaged and responsive during informal play sessions throughout her day than when I would create more formal interview settings. Salamon’s point is that the methodologies learned from these studies should be heeded but applied and revised in manners befitting the particulars of each setting.

Sensitive Methods for Consent

Concurrently with an expansion of researchers paying close attention to young children and new interview methodologies, the notion of “consent” has also been subject to critical revision among researchers. Working sensitively around children’s consent is increasingly the norm in child-centered research (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). In recent years, ethical considerations regarding the use of a young child as a research participant have asked the researcher to go beyond gaining the adults’ consent (C. Clark, 2011) in order to respect and acknowledge the participatory rights of the child (Hill, 2006). Scholars working with children have focused on “develop[ing] strategies that provide children with choices as to whether or not they wanted to share” (Green, 2012, p. 273),
and “provide children with a sense of control throughout the research process” (p. 282). Once consent is gained by the child’s guardian(s), “the researcher has to negotiate with the children by acting with respect and so to speak earn the child’s acceptance to participate and observe” (Sorensen, 2014, p. 194) in order to enter into a meaningful research partnership with the child.

Researchers are reminded that consent is “not limited to the [child’s] spoken word” (A. Clark, 2005, p. 491) and to heed the child’s non-verbal consent, or lack thereof, as displayed through body language or other expressions of displeasure with the presence of the researcher (Green, 2012). Salamon, in working with pre-verbal infants, wrote that consent “is gauged closely through infants’ expression and signals” (2015, p. 1021) such as “babies’ strengths of clear, active and responsive physical expression” (p. 1023).

The imbalance of power that the young child and the researcher each bring to the research relationship must be considered as well (Agbenyega, 2014). The child has not initiated this research protocol and is not familiar with the methodological tools traditionally used in qualitative research. This imbalance is compounded by the distance between child and adult in the domains of language, size, and social relationships (Corsaro, 1981, 2003, 2011). The powered research relationship limits the capacity of the child to be “strategically…involved in the research process” (Agbenyega, p. 157). Dockett and Perry (2007) reviewed the literature on children’s consent and concluded that a young child’s consent to research “involves ongoing opportunities to assess what is being asked of them as well as opportunities to agree to continue or withdraw at any stage” (p. 55). This “provisional consent” (Dockett & Perry, 2007) stems from the
understanding that young children often “do not appear to have a recollection” (Palaiologou, 2014, p. 697) of their earlier consent as the research project wears on; Palaiologou found this to be particularly true for children under three years old. This notion of “provisional consent” is picked up again in Chapter III. Researchers seek ongoing and provisional consent not only “due to the quite narrow attention span of children” (Almqvist & Almqvist, 2014, p. 582), but also stemming from “a mismatch” of what the child thought they agreed to and the actual unfolding experience (Palaiologou, p. 697). Palaiologou called for an emphasis on the child “as having expertise of the role they hold in the research project” (p. 701) to strengthen their participation.

Provisional consent thus requires ongoing opportunities for the young child to, first, understand her role in the research, and second, grant continual consent. Researchers have approached the first of these goals in a variety of ways: an “informational leaflet” in which “the study was explained through pictures and a short text” to 5- and 6-year-old children (Einersdottier, 2014), a puppet show for 3- to 5-year-old children (Green, 2014), and an “interactive narrative approach” which focused on “information, understanding, and response” for 3- to 8-year-old children (Mayne, Howitt, & Rennie, 2016, p. 677). The “interactive narrative approach” was used for this study and is outlined in Chapter III; I employed this as well during my third pilot study.

To achieve the second goal, Sumsion (Sumsion, Bradely, Stratigos, & Elwick, 2014) equipped the child with a metaphorical “light switch” (p. 181) which she could use to pause or exit the research situation. Sumsion et al. came to this idea through reflecting on the use of a “baby cam” which rests on a toddler’s hat or headband. The research team realized that they had inadvertently given the toddler an increased platform for her
agency in the research process as the toddler could take off the headband, effectively stopping the data generation, and therefore gave the child “some control over the situation and an opportunity to dissent” (p. 177). White and Redder (2015) used the same method for provisional consent with an infant, and reported that “infants could easily remove the cameras from their heads if they wished. In such cases, filming ceased for the day” (p. 1786), whereas Palaiologou (2014) reported stopping field observations after the child felt his space was “invaded” and informed the researcher “I do not like it”; the field note records the researcher’s description: “Child stops his activity and walks away” (p. 697). These methodologies around the consent of the young child are used to frame the methods described in Chapter III.

**Critically Examining “Transitions”**

**“Transition from Home to School”**

While notions of childhood and culture have been reviewed thus far, it is important to examine the literature that touches on the acute process investigated by this paper – the child’s inaugural encounter with a school classroom, which occurs during the timeframe of this study. This is commonly referred to as one of many instances of a “transition” in school and care settings. The term’s paradigmatic usage is found in early sources, such as the child’s “transition from home to school” (Zigler & Kagan, 1982, p. 85) and “transition from preschool to school” (Kagan & Neuman, 1998, p. 365). These early authors on transitions were writing about seeking continuity during the movement
of the child from one care setting to another (Kagan & Neuman, 1998), a notion that has remained persistent throughout the literature (Amerijckx & Humblet, 2015; Hare & Anderson, 2010; Higgins, 2010). Within the transition literature, “transitions to early childhood education and care are experienced differently to the transitions to formal schooling settings” (Hare & Anderson, 2010, p. 21). Therefore, the review here is limited in scope to transitions occurring in the early years.

The literature on “transitions” in the early years emphasizes the notions of separation and attachment. Higgins wrote, “When very young children begin attending an early childhood centre, the main issues to be considered are those of attachment and separation” (2010, p. 23), while Hare and Anderson add that “current research on the transition from home to an early childhood education setting tends to focus on separation” (2010, p. 20). These moments of separation can be potentially stressful for children, yet this stress is reduced when a secure attachment with a primary caregiver is present (Ahnert, Gunnar, Lamb, & Barthel, 2004).

However, the focus on separation during transitions “does not do justice to the complexity of this experience” and instead the focus should be broadened to include “all participants” (Dalli, 2000, p. 21), such as family members, caregivers, teachers, and community members (Hare & Anderson, 2010). During transitions, therefore, it is important to attend both to the child’s relationship with a primary caregiver as well as with the broader societal context in which they transition.

Additionally, a key characteristic of transitions is the differential between the previous environment (whether it was home or a different class) and the new class setting (Dockett & Perry, 2005). The ways in which the new environment is different, including
teacher expectations, peer behavior, and daily routines, then has the potential to influence the child’s behavior during and after the period of transition (Recchia & Dvorakova, 2012). Paying attention to the “social, cultural, and historical realities that shape the transition experience” (Hare & Anderson, 2010, p. 19) helps those involved further understand the differences between the environments which the child is transitioning between. Therefore, it can be found in the extant literature that children going through early transitions benefit from a secure attachment to a primary caregiver as they adjust to the norms and expectations of their new classroom setting; these norms and expectations are not isolated within the classroom setting but rather reflect a cultural and historical influence.

**Expanding Views on “Transitions”**

This is supplemented by researchers seeking to highlight both the agency and voice of the child in these moments of transition. This is made explicit by Fabian, who finds that while “research [on transitions] that gains children’s perspectives and explores children’s agency is increasing,” the current body of research is limited to the perspectives of “families, practitioners, policy-makers, and researchers” (2006, p. 3), notably missing the perspective of the child. Einarsdottir also found that “adults’ views on this period [of transition] in children’s lives have been studied widely; however, in recent years interest in looking at transition to school from children’s perspectives [emphasis added] has grown” (2006, p. 74).
This field, focused on the child’s voice and agency during transition, finds that children “are active in the construction of their lives from the first day at preschool” (Simonsson, 2010, p. 53). Einarsdottir (2003) cogently reviewed what researchers have learned from children about their early transitions, including that children’s view of teachers shift markedly during the transition from nursery school to primary school (Rasmussen & Smidt, 2002), that children see nursery school as a place for freedom and play and elementary school a place for difficult, serious, orderly work (Pramling & Graneld, 1995; Pramling & Williams-Graneld, 1993). Einarsdottir concluded this thorough review by summarizing that children expect a change from being able to play and choose in preschool to more academic work in primary school. They are also aware that there are new rules and norms that they have to learn and adapt to. (2003, p. 85)

However, Einarsdottir noted the limitations of these studies that rely on verbal interviews by stating that “the voices of children with limited language skills…might not be heard” (p. 86) in these reports. As a result, I found no studies which include the perspective of children as young as two years old on their first encounter with school.

I therefore use this study to expand the conversation by seeing the child not as transitioning into school but rather as encountering the classroom. The notion of encounter offers a nuanced view of transition by acknowledging the always-agentive child’s role in the process. Again, borrowing from Stetsenko, quoted in the theoretical framework in Chapter I, when the child and the classroom encounter each other, they “bring forth the world, and the reality itself, essentially co-constituting the world as a collective forum of human deeds” (2017, p. 10). When particularized for this study, this means that the child does not transition into the classroom, rather, they “co-constitute”
each other. Understanding that the child forcibly helps compose the classroom moves the research from looking at the world-as-it-is-given (transition) and towards exploring the world-as-it-is-made (encounter).

**Summary**

Childhood has been culturally constructed in different forms throughout history, resulting in a wide range of conceptions of what children can, and cannot, do and say. One contemporary paradigm of this construction of childhood is the adult-extension of control into young children’s lives, at increasingly young ages, which I term *adult imperialism*. Children in this milieu are believed to require specific age-targeted developmental constraints and interventions. However, a recent shift in studies on children has challenged this fixed view and instead sees children as active and agentive in their construction of the world. This “new” construction of childhood sees the child’s powerful agency as critical in understanding children and childhood. Concurrently, early childhood researchers have developed and experimented with a range of methodologies to reflect this changing notion of childhood. This shifting paradigm is felt also in the literature on *transitions into school*, a phenomenon for which I will use Stetsenko’s notion of *encounter*. This study is situated to offer fresh insight into the construction and control of childhood, the child’s capacity to agentively resist, and the tensions of power felt within intergenerational relationships.
Chapter III

METHODS: PEOPLE AND PLACES

Research…should not be on children but with them and for them. (C. Clark, 2011, p. 31)

Overview

This study is ethnographic, idiographic, and qualitative, and employs a methodology inspired from the cultural-historical approach to researching children outlined by Hedegaard and Fleer (2008, 2009, 2013) as well as, more peripherally, Barker and Wright (1954) and Tudge (2008). These everyday-life studies provide models of ethnographic “morning-‘til-night” field observations of young children, which are used in this study. I selected one individual participant for this study, Emily,¹ and conducted three four-hour field observations with her each month from June 2017 through February 2018. Emily began school for the first time in September 2018. In each month, one observation was conducted from approximately 6:30am-10:30am, one 10:30am-2:30pm,

¹ All names are pseudonyms, including school and classroom names.
and one 2:30pm-6:30pm, to encompass Emily’s waking hours. I interviewed Emily, her two parents – Kate and John, and her three teachers – Tanya, Yasmin, and Michelle – regularly during that time. Field observations and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

I will begin the methods in Chapter III by outlining my positionality and presence in this study, and will describe participant selection and consent. I will then offer descriptions of Emily, her parents, her teachers, and her school. In Chapter IV I will review the ethnographic methods of field observations and interviews used in the study, along with analysis, presentation, and limitations. I use the methods outlined in these chapters to pursue my research questions, stated in Chapter I:

1. How does one individual 2-year-old child, over the course of nine months, encounter the spaces of her daily life?

2. How does the child create change and transformation in her world?

3. Where is the child powerful?

**Researcher Positionality**

During the research and analysis period I actively sought out and acknowledged my subjectivities (Peshkin, 1988), including my identities as a researcher, teacher, school director, and father, and additionally my multiple privileges as white, male, urban-dweller, and middle-class income. Peshkin beseeches researchers to perform this exploration of subjectivity in order “to be aware of how their subjectivity may be shaping their inquiry and its outcomes” (p. 17). Peshkin provides a useful tool for exploring these
subjectivities, as he describes that he “looked for the warm and cool spots, the emergence of positive and negative feelings, the experiences I wanted more of or wanted to avoid” (p.18). Seeking out and acknowledging these “warm and cool spots” aided my understanding of my own positionality throughout the research. Topics, notions, and ideas that seemed alien or far-fetched to me brought me back to my own upbringing and highlighted my particular situatedness in contrast to the family I was spending the year with; likewise, I attempted to make un-familiar those areas in the field which were comfortable and congruent with my own life. I will highlight here three positionalities of mine during the research: a life in parallel to my participant, my own privilege, and a committed stance.

A Life in Parallel

During the nine-month research period from June 2017 through February 2018 my own life, of course, continued forward along with the field observations. I often felt I was running two lives in parallel with eerily similar contexts. This both helped me approach an emic perspective in the research and also highlighted nuanced complexities of Emily’s daily life I may have otherwise missed. When the research began, Emily was two years and two months old; my oldest child was three years and four months old and my youngest child was five months old. I was on a twelve-week paternity leave from work for the first three months of the study, shifting my role in my own family from working-father to primary-caregiver. I resumed my full-time work as a nursery school director at the end of August 2017.
My field observations seemed not so much a departure from my personal life but rather stepping into an alternate reality; the details were off but the frame remained. A 6:30am observation meant leaving my apartment while my family slept, arriving at Emily’s apartment – a short train ride away – as she woke up. I spent the morning with Emily and her family while they ate breakfast in their pajamas, brushed their teeth, and got ready for the day – while my family did the same back at home, without me. I walked with Emily and Kate to school – while my wife did the same with our children. A 10:30am observation meant leaving my own nursery school, stepping into Emily’s for four hours, and then going back to my own again – watching teachers and young children in both settings, through a markedly different lens. A 2:30pm observation meant staying until Emily finished dinner and began getting ready for bed, knowing my wife needed me back shortly to do the same for our children. I was grateful that Emily began bedtime just early enough, and my children just late enough, that on some days I would leave Emily’s apartment in time to put my own children to bed.

Emily’s mother, Kate, has a background in early childhood education and was a full-time classroom teacher before becoming a mother. She continued to teach part-time while caring for her children. Kate was present for nearly all of the field observations (except time spent in Emily’s school), and I enjoyed speaking with her as a researcher, a teacher, and as a parent. I found that both of our dual identities as parents and educators granted us a smooth compatibility while we discussed macro – the intertwining of family, religion, and culture – and micro – why she chose a particular stroller and her walking path to the grocery store. Our mutual familiarity with large elements of each other’s lives granted me comfort during my time with her family. My whole family was invited to, and
attended, Emily’s third birthday party, two months after the research period ended; the party was held at a local playground frequented by my children as well.

The congruencies between my life and Kate’s life, and my children’s life and Emily’s life, highlighted for me throughout the study my own inescapable role in perpetuating adult imperialism. The control of children – reviewed in Chapter II – is roundly present as well in my own relationships with young children, both at work and in my family. I face the same implications stemming from my analysis in Chapters V and VI, and am therefore not studying something foreign but rather found within my own practices as well.

Privilege

It is well-known in social research that exploring children’s worlds is important across race, class, and other contextual factors. This reflects the non-essential quality of childhood, which can be found to “reflect characteristics that they [children] share with adults”:

There is an instructive parallel here with Women’s Studies, where the significance of the fact that there are important differences among women soon came to be recognised: between those belonging to different racial or ethnic and social class categories, those with different sexual orientations, and those with and without disabilities. (Hammersley, 2017, p. 116)

Children are not isolated from broader societal notions; they, like all humans, are culturally situated. Within broader social inequities and situativity, it is important to acknowledge how race, gender, class, sexuality, and other cultural determinants contribute to the configuration of childhoods in variegated ways. Consistent with
qualitative traditions, I do not presume to study childhood writ large. The purpose of qualitative studies, specifically case studies with small numbers of participants such as this one, is to contribute to the collective stories that show the diversities of childhoods across and within cultural landscapes. My research explores one idiosyncratic childhood as a way to provide insight into how agency is taken up by this young child. Yet, I am always conscious of how contextual circumstances shape and situate her encounters with social and cultural activities. While I argue that children are bound to find various forms of engagement with – and resistance towards – adult control and authority, these encounters are intersected by the relative and personal socioeconomical, racial, and cultural communities which help form – and are formed by – those relationships.

I address the cultural situatedness of my research by exposing and making transparent my own cultural location as it relates to my positionality. The knowledge I can attempt to offer in this research is local; I arrived at my research topic and ensuant methodology through my lived experiences as a privileged white male. My own experiences with formal educational settings – first as a student, then as a teacher, currently as a school director and researcher – have consistently been experiences with well-resourced schools which serve a generally affluent demographic. I enjoyed a K-12 public education in renowned schools, which led me to a dual-degree undergraduate program between a religious seminary and an Ivy League college. I transitioned from there to teaching full-time in a nursery school with a mostly white and affluent student body, during which time I attended a private university for my master’s degree. When interviewing for both positions of teacher and later director my male-ness certainly stood out in contrast to other applicants. I then enrolled in a doctoral degree in a program
affiliated with the same Ivy League university I had attended for my bachelors. The present research, likewise, occurs in a predominately white, affluent nursery school, with annual tuition of over $20,000 for a school-day schedule (8:30am-1:50pm).

Affordances present within my experiences with institutionalized schooling include such characteristics as physical safety, functional facilities, involved parent-body, consistently high academic outcomes, lack of truancy, and more. To refer to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, in my time spent in schools the lower levels of the triangle – physiological, safety, and belonging – have all been largely accounted for, for myself and my peers. Accordingly, therefore, I do not presume to study “childhood” writ large, across those social categories, but rather the life of one, particular, non-generalizable child.

There is a congruence between Emily’s life, my research, and my positionality, to Lareau’s (2011) notion of “concerted cultivation.” Lareau describes concerted cultivation as when “organized activity, established and controlled by mothers and fathers, dominate the lives of middle-class children” (pp. 1-2). Lareau asserts that “this…plays an especially important role in institutional settings, where middle-class children learn to question adults” (p. 2). Through the lens of “concerted cultivation”, it is clear that both my positionality and the research setting offer specific culturally-formed versions of adult-control and child-resistance.

Emily is seen as powerful in Chapter VI not only because of her agency but also because Kate is supportive of Emily’s ideas, a hallmark of “concerted cultivation.” This highlights the ontologically social aspect of agency: it is not achieved by an isolated individual but rather always – inherently – reflects both the participating, contributing,
transformative individual (Emily) and also her social milieu (Kate, “concerted cultivation”) through which she generates and expresses agency. I should be clear this position does not infer the absent opposite (ie, a lack of parental support for child-ideas decreases agency); I only claim here that social relationships matter when discussing the agency of an individual. My positionality therefore situates my research questions as concerned with how children exert agency and power in a specific cultural and historical location. I attempt to location, define, and explore that location throughout the research. I robustly acknowledge that children in different settings, with different and distinct identities, struggles, and needs, are also concurrently negotiating their agency and power – and yet this is not the focus of the present study.

My research occurs in a privileged setting and therefore hopes to offer insight into how children encounter the world – through their agentive resistance to adult-control – specifically in social contexts which are resource-abundant. And yet, Emily’s situated wealth does not preclude her voice from mattering in the struggle for equal relationships within and beyond her – and my – local situativity. Accordingly, I do not attempt to center Emily’s experience – or my perspective – as predominant within global childhoods, as a norm to be deviated from or conformed to. Rather, I offer this rendition of one childhood as one voice among many, as one life among the de-stabilized, centrifugal teeming mass of young people across the world. It is my hope that future research can continue to offer nuanced, complex renditions of control and resistance among adults and children, continually expanding how adults understand and relate to the variegated worlds of childhood. It is by holding onto the particular voices of particular children that adults may come to better understand their younger conspecifics.
A Committed Stance

I am seeking out how children are powerful because I recall distinctly as a child feeling the tension between anti-authoritarianism and compliance, between acting out and following the rules. I remember the un-ending frustration of not having a venue for my voice because of my status as a child and the subtle despair as adults would bypass my own agenda – and then later the absolute bliss that came with forming a mature and competent voice as a young adult that came to be more robustly recognized by the world around me. I remember the joy of feeling that I can make an impact, that I matter.

I am morally frustrated as a teacher, director, and parent when I see adults equating unexpected child-behavior with deviance instead of creativity, pushing children towards compliance instead of novelty and creation. I agree with Thomson, who argues that “it is the right of children and young people to have a say about things that concern them” (2009, p. 1). I believe children have more to offer than we acknowledge, and actively contribute in ways that defy that non-acknowledgement. I believe our current set of intergenerational relationships with children center around control not because children need to be controlled but because we feel the need to control them.

This is compounded by my personal commitment that each person is responsible throughout their life to contribute to social change, encapsulated in the Jewish concept of tikkun olam, translated from the Hebrew as “repairing the world.” Rooted in my identity as Jew, I have long been inspired to interpret this as an incitement for social activism. My stance of commitment is rooted in my Judaism, from which I extract a commitment to
justice and social change. This is grounded in a quote from *Pirkei Avot*, a book within the *Talmud*: “If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?” (*Pirkei Avot* 1:14). I understand my own role in life is to meaningfully contribute to social change by critically examining elements of the social order in a pursuit of more just relationships. This stance of commitment brings me to the present study keen to explore and mitigate the powered relationship between children and adults.

I made sure to highlight this in my interactions with Kate and John (Emily’s parents) so they would not be surprised by my approach later on. In our first interview, I explained the notion of *encounter* at the heart of my research, and that I was seeking to critically examine the relationship between adults and children. John, in his typical dry sarcasm, remarked that indeed they had many “close encounters” with Emily. Later, as Kate and I were discussing Emily during a field observation, Kate remarked, “It must be hard for Shira [my wife] to parent with you!” due to my activism on the child’s behalf. In a later interview, I again made sure to be transparent about my agenda. As Kate and John discussed what it meant to “side” with children, I explained, “I imagine my work will be popular with children but not with their parents!” I made sure my commitment was transparent throughout the study.

I therefore embrace the notion that “knowledge production [is] always embedded within activist pursuits of broad social projects beyond the narrow confines of academia” (Stetsenko, 2019b, p. 1). My orientations outlined in this section do not detract from my research but rather serve to contextualize my presence in the research while explaining how and why I am undertaking this study. The Transformative Activist Stance embraces
the notion that there is no “pure and objective pursuit of naked evidence understood as knowledge… purged of all human dimensions and politics” (Stetsenko, p. 1). My politics, positionalities, and theoretical framework mandate that I am presenting this study framed through my own lived experiences. This is not “naked evidence” but rather my non-neutral rendition of the world. I offer this research as a way to consider how adults control children, how children resist that control, and how more egalitarian relationships can be pursued.

**My Presence in the Field**

Having considered how my positionality shaped my research, I will now review how I considered my presence while in the field. Greene and Hogan cogently state that the goal of the participant observer in a study with children is to be present and recognized, but to not overtly alter the child’s behavior:

> The aim may not be invisibility, however, but a desire to change children’s regularly occurring behavior in as minimal a way as is possible – to allow them the freedom to behave without the expectation that the observer will intervene to change what they are doing (which is not quite the same as doing exactly as they would were the observer not present). (2005, p. 125)

I was therefore a *participant*, alongside Emily, throughout her daily life – though despite my participatory stance, I did not intervene in her life by creating synthetic experiences or otherwise alter the circumstances of the field observations. I was there alongside Emily, in moments of life with her. I was involved in her and Susan’s inside jokes as they ate breakfast, I lay down as Emily operated on me with her pretend doctor kit in the
living room, I played “family airplane trip” with Emily and Susan while Kate made
dinner and I erupted in riotous laughter when they did.

A large consideration during my time in the field is that I am unavoidably “big,”
as Corsaro learned upon being named “Big Bill” by his research subjects (2003). I therefore heeded Corsaro’s suggestion “not to act like other adults” (1981, p. 130). This reflects Corsaro’s insistence that, when he entered children’s spaces, “it was essential the children perceive me as different from the teachers and other adults in the setting so that they would not suppress certain behaviors for fear of negative reactions” (1981, p. 130). Accordingly, I attempted to act non-adult during my time in the field with Emily. In addition to sitting or standing at her level as often as possible, this manifested itself in three ways:

To avoid infantilization, I attempted to speak with Emily in a conversational tone. I did not try to assist Emily on her tasks. I did not see myself as someone who should be asking a lot of questions. Instead, I defaulted to observing and participating alongside Emily’s everyday encounters. In short, I treated her with the respect I would afford any human.

For the most part, I did not reinforce rules for Emily. I made a decision to passively observe as she flouted rules of clean up in the classroom, preferring to continue to play instead. I did not instruct her in the appropriate use of games and toys when she used them in novel manners. However, I also decided to not actively take part in actions contrary to stated adult-rules. I knew that Kate did not allow Emily into her sister’s room, and so I was compelled to support this rule – largely due to my desire to be allowed to stay on in a research capacity! In Little Ones, Emily brought me a toy immediately after
being told by Tanya to put it away. As Tanya watched on, I felt compelled to tell Emily I had heard Tanya ask her to put the toy away.

Another consideration was how my presence would be explained to children and parents in the class (Corsaro, 1981). I followed the school director’s suggestion, who told me that she did not feel it was necessary to inform the other families in the class as to my presence. She explained this was due to the limited nature of interactions I would have with parents, as I would be present only at several drop offs in the morning and pick-ups in the afternoon during the research. Likewise, the teachers did not formally introduce me to the class. Rather, Emily slowly and gradually introduced me to her friends.

**Participant**

**Selection**

I set out to select one research participant who would begin nursery school for the first time during September of the research period. I contacted nursery school directors and shared with them an introductory letter to families (Appendix C). I shared this letter and reviewed the study with four nursery school directors, each of whom agreed to share the letter with their families who fit my selection criteria. After a few weeks, each of the directors explained they had difficulty findings potential families because the families I was looking for – who were just starting their time at the school – they did not yet have a robust relationship with. As a result, one of the directors recommended a former teacher
at her school who had a daughter who fit my criteria (her inaugural encounter with school would occur during the timeframe of the study); she suggested I reach out to the former teacher with my letter.

So, while I had anticipated using a blind and random selection process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) to determine which family to move forward with, I was ultimately offered only one family as a potential participant. The child fit my criteria and so I moved forward and sought out consent. I first e-mailed Kate and John, Emily’s parents, explaining how it came about that their name was suggested. I sat down first with Kate and John, and then their child’s school director, to review the parameters of the study. It was agreed that I would avoid being in the classroom during the first month of school, to allow the students time to grow comfortable in their new environment.

Descriptions of Participants and Adults

Emily. Emily usually wears a small ponytail, perched just above her forehead to the right side. The ponytail is held in place by a small red barrette or a black hair elastic, though on some occasions a large colorful bow is used; every so often, a small French braid replaces the ponytail altogether. The ponytail is more pragmatic then aesthetic, as her mother explains it “keeps her hair out of her face.” On some days, the pony falls out coincidentally, while some days Emily purposefully removes it at school. Emily refers to this as “crazy hair,” as in, “I want crazy hair today.” Her ponytail is always made by her mother: sometimes immediately upon waking up and other days not until they arrive at

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2 A list of the people described here is available in Appendix D.
the sidewalk in front of school. Usually Emily doesn’t mind her mother doing her hair, though sometimes she resists. When she does resist, her mother always wins.

Emily’s large collection of footwear includes red sandals, pink sneakers, pink sparkly low-cut boots, snow boots, black dress shoes, second-hand, battered, light-beige ballet shoes, and several pairs of cheap plastic high-heels that are used for dress-up at home. While Emily obliges her parents’ and teachers’ requests (demands) to wear shoes, she often seeks out opportunities to take her shoes off (and leave them off), such as when using the sandbox in her classroom or at a playground, or if her socks and shoes got wet on the school’s rooftop playground, or whenever she enters her apartment.

Emily had fading red nail polish for the first several field observations but never any other makeup or accessories. In the early mornings, Emily stays in her pajamas for breakfast, typically a full-body onesie, with polka dots or stripes. Usually, her mother would choose two sets of clothes for Emily to choose between in the morning. On a typical day, Emily might be wearing grey leggings with a loose-fitting pink or purple dress, adorned with stripes or colorful polka dots. Her clothing and general appearance are typically crisp. When she smiles wide, a dimple appears in her left cheek. Emily walks with a smooth gait, though when she runs at full speed her legs often bounce out to the side, with her ankles a few inches outside of her hips. She is near the 50th percentile in height and weight. She is, in many ways, remarkably unremarkable; she is a regular kid.

Emily loves frozen pancakes and mangoes, straight from the freezer. She likes watermelon and guacamole; she does not like chocolate or tomato soup. She has macaroni and cheese and an apple sauce “pouch” for lunch most days. She loves playing dress up around her house with her sister and mother; their preferred play tropes are
doctor or family. During dress up, Emily enjoys putting on “fancy” gloves, high heels with a blinking light in the plastic heel, and old leotards. She absolutely adores her sister, tailing after her and her friends. Many of Emily’s play themes are lifted right from her sister’s life, such as soccer, gymnastics, and “dance performance.”

I saw Emily at her happiest, most comfortable self alternately during quiet afternoons spent playing with her mother on the living room rug and summer days spent in the local sandbox. These happy moments stand in contrast to her displeasure at being carted around during the school year in pursuit of her older sister’s schedule for school and after-school programs, in particular during the deep winter months when she would need to leave the cozy confines of her apartment to pick Susan up from gymnastics at 4:30pm, with the sun already set and temperatures plunging. Emily nearly always objects to being placed in the stroller, often imploring her mother to let her walk instead. She does not like being told what to do – though this occurs quite frequently.

Emily enjoys being around other children, often pausing her activity to observe another child in class or at the playground. Emily developed several friendships with her classmates over the course of the research, eventually becoming bold enough to request playdates. While in school, Emily would regularly flout classroom rules and norms in order to spend more time with, or be closer to, her friends. Emily showed particular fondness to Susan’s friends, doting after them and basking whenever their attention turned her way, even pretending she liked certain foods (which she certainly did not) at one point so she could sit at the dining room table while they ate snack after school.
Throughout the research period, Emily could be described as convivial, gregarious, and chatty, almost always seeking out social engagement. The end of year report, prepared by the teachers for Emily’s parents, describes that

She [Emily] has penetrating bright blue eyes and a charismatic smile… Her emotional terrain ranges from quiet, attentive and pensive to playful and boisterous. Emily often seeks out preferred classmates.

Emily displayed a general calmness throughout the research period, only rarely, to use the colloquialism, throwing a tantrum. She is clear and intentional in her verbal expressions, often belying her biological age and surprising her parents, teachers, and strangers (this is analyzed as well in Chapter V). Emily turned two years old two months prior to the start of the study and over the nine months of research, Emily encountered milestones or transitions often associated with her age: her parents took the wall off her crib and turned it into a toddler-bed, she (mostly) stopped using her pacifier, and she began potty training.

**Emily’s family.** Emily is the youngest member of her family, which includes her older sister Susan (2nd grade), Kate (mother), and John (father). Susan attends a local private elementary school. Emily’s family lives in a comfortable three-bedroom apartment³ in a doorman building a half-mile from her nursery school. Emily and Susan each have their own bedroom; Emily’s is slightly smaller. Emily’s mother is a former early childhood teacher who is now a full-time parent; her father works full time in the financial sector. Kate and John are both Caucasian.

³ The layout of Emily’s apartment is provided in Appendix E. The layout includes notations of areas and materials mentioned in Chapters V and VI.
Emily’s family apartment is decorated with bright yet soothing colors and positive sayings, such as a framed yellow poster near the entry-way that reads:

NOTE TO SELF:

BE KIND
BE KIND
BE KIND
BE KIND

The heart of the apartment is a dining area abutting a living room, set up as two distinct rooms but with an open floor plan. Kate likes to play alternative rock and pop music in the background while home with the children. The space is intermingled with adult furniture and children’s toys. The living room has a couch and two armchairs, along with several baskets of toys for Emily and her sister. The dining room has an oval table with four chairs; on one side wall is an art table for Emily and her sister and on the other is a play kitchen. The kitchen is small but well furnished, with a dishwasher and washer/dryer along with a small breakfast nook.

Kate and John were unfailingly hospitable throughout the field observations, welcoming me into their home with a smile at all hours of the day. They were both generous with their time, itself a valuable commodity for a busy family of four. Kate and John were, without exception, gentle, warm, and loving towards Emily and Susan; they both displayed a general and unwavering stance of positivity. Mornings in the apartment were marked by yawns, coffee, and eggs, along with time to play and go over upcoming events; evenings, the family sits around the dining room table and shares about their day, though John sometimes arrives after dinner. Family departures in the morning and arrivals in the evening almost always contained hugs, kisses, and warm greetings. I met
Emily’s paternal and maternal grandmothers during the study, each of whom stayed over in their apartment at different times to help with childcare. I did not meet John’s father, though he accompanied the family on a vacation at one point during the year; Kate described her mother as a “single mom.”

Emily lives in an affluent neighborhood in a large city in northeastern United States. John’s annual salary places their family in the top 10% of household incomes within the city (though in the top 40% for their local neighborhood), also situating their family within an economic class more likely to send their child to nursery school\textsuperscript{4} – 69\% of similar-earning families (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016) – compared to the national average of 59\%, cited in Chapter I. Kate and John both spoke about growing up in different fiscal constraints than Emily and Susan. Kate remarked in our first interview:

Our parents raised us with like, just so little – compared to just the lifestyle that we live now with our kids. I mean, John didn’t ride in an airplane until he was in college, I didn’t go on a trip like that until I was in high school – and our kids have been world travelers.

Kate and John both recognized that they provide experiences for their children – such as vacations and material gifts – which their parents “couldn’t afford.” At one point during a school vacation during the study, Kate and John took Susan to Europe for vacation while John’s mom stayed with Emily; on another break from school, Kate took Susan and Emily to a water park. When Emily couldn’t go to school during the study, once because

\textsuperscript{4} In fact, all of Emily’s family characteristics bracket her into categories which enroll children in center-based care at least nominally more than the national average of 59\%, according to this NCES report. These categories include: white (61\%), female child (61\%), dual-parent family (61\%), parent with a graduate degree (67\%), labor force status – one full time, one not in labor force (74\%) (Kate was initially teaching part-time but dropped that during the study), and geographic location – northeast (62\%).
of a snow day and twice because she was sick, Kate was available to care for her. John commented on the impact of affluence:

I think you just have more resources, you can afford a baby sitter to go out and have a date night, or, do the things we need to do to take care of ourselves. We can afford to like, have things, activities, books, do like fun things, vacations and what not - I don’t know if any of it is "spoiling" but - clearly - like - they’ve been on more planes than - probably the first twenty-five to thirty years of my life. So!

Kate added:

Our parents didn’t make nearly as much money as we have - but - we also grew up close to like our family - where it’s not like our parents never had babysitters - they did, it was our grandparents! Our parents help a lot when we travel but I don’t remember having babysitters, I just went to my grandma’s house.

As outlined earlier in the “Positionality” section of this chapter, relative economic affluence colors Emily’s life in clear ways, such as her street address and access to nursery school, material goods, and vacations.

While I never heard any of their family members mention religion or church during field observations, I inquired into the subject on occasion. John attended a Catholic church with his family as a child, and Kate attended a “non-denominational Christian church,” which she said,

became a place of really good friends, and this community that helped me grow, and I met a lot of people, and I did a lot of cool things because of my church experiences.

When I asked how this plays out for their children, Kate and John offered conflicting responses. Kate answered that they “really do want to find a community and a church to do it. We just haven't found the right space,” though John countered, “I dunno if I see a burning need. I wonder, the community, I don’t know, I don’t think it’s like a ‘must do,’ they can find it on their own.” This went back and forth one more time, with Kate explaining,
There are some foundational lessons that I think are kind of nice. Kind of like, learn to trust other adults in a church - I had my first choir, I met really good people.

Catholicism and Christianity therefore played a subtle role in the background of Emily’s life, mostly played out through Kate’s values-orientation. The role of religion in Emily’s life was not explicitly embraced by her parents nor mentioned by Emily.

**Emily’s school.** During the research, Emily attended a private nursery school called Rainbow House; her classroom is titled Little Ones. Rainbow House is on two upper floors of a multi-purpose building constructed a century ago; the school was “grandfathered in” when codes restricted early childhood programs from being higher than the second floor. The single elevator often leaves small crowds waiting in the lobby during drop-off times. The Little Ones classroom\(^5\) shows the gentle grooves and odd angles of decades of love and use. Her three teachers keep the room intentionally sparsely decorated and stocked, with each shelf holding one or two toys and no more than six wooden unit blocks of a particular shape.

Little Ones has eleven students, including seven boys and four girls. The students were all two years old prior to the first day of school; none would turn three until March 2018 (the month following the study). The children all lived within a two-mile radius around the school. I was not privy to the children’s socioeconomic background; while there was a limited amount of financial assistance available at the school, most families pay near 100% of the $20,000+ tuition. The tuition was more than double the national average yet also belied the relative wealth of Emily’s classmates as it reflects the trend

\(^5\) A layout of Emily’s classroom is provided in Appendix F. The layout includes notations of areas and materials mentioned in Chapters V and VI.
that nursery school tuition spending increases in relation to family income (Whitehurst, 2018). In addition to English, Emily’s classmates spoke Spanish, Russian, and Hebrew. Morning drop-off was done mostly by working parents while afternoon pick-up was done largely by caregivers. This placed Kate in the minority in the afternoon, as most other children were picked up by caregivers.

There are four classrooms in the school, each titled in reference to the age of the children – Middle Ones (two classrooms) and Big Ones; Little Ones is the youngest age group. The rhythm of the school day stays mainly consistent: entry and playtime (8:30am-10:30am), snack and (sometimes) short circle-time meeting (10:30am-11:00am), roof playground (11:00-11:30am), lunch (11:30am-12:00pm), nap (12:00pm-1:50pm), pick up (1:50pm). Some students, but not Emily, stay after school until 6:00pm.

**Emily’s teachers.** There are three main teachers who work in Little Ones: Michelle, the head teacher, and Yasmin and Tanya, assistant teachers. A fourth teacher, Evie, works only in the after school hours and so is not included in the study. While Michelle was the head teacher, her voice was the softest in the classroom and her relationship with Emily the least-present as compared to Yasmin and Tanya. Emily gravitates towards Michelle and builds a strong relationship with her. Tanya is Emily’s “primary caregiver,” a role the teaching team decides together in the opening days of the school year. Each teacher is responsible for a small number of children known as their “primary group.” Responsibilities towards the primary group include diapering, supervising at lunch, and writing the end of year report. These relationships are reflected
in Chapters V and VI, as Tanya has by far the strongest presence, Yasmin appears frequently though not as often, and Michelle appears only sparingly.

As a group, Michelle, Yasmin, and Tanya could be described as gentle, warm, and loving – qualities oft-associated with nursery school teachers. I never saw them raise their voices with the children. They were always thinking about how to engage their students with the materials in the room, responding to children’s idiosyncrasies as best they could. They each stated that safety was a paramount, and overriding, concern in their classroom. When safety was not an issue, they described that they preferred to follow the child’s interest rather than insert their own. Michelle stated in our first interview that collectively, they strive to “cater to children’s individual needs,” and Tanya explained that, “we try to put out something [in the classroom] that each child likes.”

Michelle is the head teacher, despite being the youngest and having the least experience on the team, because she has her master’s degree in early childhood special education. Born in the United States, Michelle came to Rainbow House right after her graduate work; she said the job “kind of just fell into my lap.” The study occurred in her second year of teaching. When talking about the age of her students, Michelle said, “I actually never knew where [age-wise] I wanted to be [as a teacher]… I ended up with toddlers. I was a little nervous because I was like, ‘They’re so young’.” On her role as a teacher, Michelle said

I want to be there to help them grow and support them, and hopefully see change in the things they struggle with or enjoy doing. Just observe them and support them. It’s just this balance, when you really need the child to do what you’re asking, or you have to think about, “Is this coming from me, what I want them to do, not necessarily what they want to do or what they need to be doing?”
Michelle spoke on occasion about a “shared power” between the children and teachers, yet understood that, ultimately, “we ARE the teachers so there is obviously always gonna be that.” She added to this later, commenting,

We technically do whatever we want, right? They [students] are in our [teachers] control, right? [But] I would never want to be THAT teacher, where I am projecting how I’m feeling or like be the rule-enforcer.

Michelle’s ambiguity over how to wield power would stay in my mind throughout the research.

Yasmin has been at Rainbow House for nine years. Born in Mexico, she was a student at a community college prior to teaching and later transferred to a private university. Yasmin has three younger sisters, putting her in a role that indelibly shaped her life:

I’ve always been more of a mother figure to them, my mom and dad worked full time, so I stayed home a lot with my sisters. I was born into it, you know? Just a big sister taking care of the younger ones, and I think it just grew from there. I know I wanted to be with children.

The study occurred in her third year teaching in Little Ones, before which she worked with 4- and 5-year-old students. Yasmin told me that,

I thought I loved working with fours and fives but then I went into Little Ones and I kind of fell in love with it. And I love working with the 2-year-olds. I feel like their curiosity is so strong, the way they wonder at that age that leads to endless options.

When we spoke about her role as a teacher, Yasmin reflected:

I think sometimes we forget that they are little individuals, they are humans just like us. A lot of times as adults we think that we can control these little humans because they don’t know everything yet. But they are so smart and they have feelings and knowledge, you know? And just acknowledging that goes a long way.
Emily showed a particular fondness towards Yasmin, hugging her repeatedly throughout the study with an intimacy not found in her interactions with the other teachers. Emily also took particular joy in mispronouncing Yasmin’s name (replacing the Spanish “Y” with an English “J” and calling her “Jasmin”) for the first several weeks of class. Emily made a birthday crown for Yasmin the evening before the latter’s birthday and presented it to her in class. Emily was delighted to hear the next day that Yasmin had brought the crown home and shown it to her three sisters.

Tanya told me, “I come from a very different setting.” She was born in India and “came to this country at 26” with a background in political science. She moved in nearby Rainbow House, and over the course of several years became familiar with the program. When she was first approached by a friend about teaching there, her first response was, “Are you kidding me?!?” Yet, the idea grew on her after she spent a year babysitting: “the kid loved me and it just clicked.” As she settled in to Rainbow House, “it was hard in the beginning” due to vast cultural differences between her childhood and the children she was working with. She credits the school director for “open[ing] [her] eyes to look into children. From that point forward, things started to change. That was a new experience.” She spoke about learning from the director about “Reggio Emilia – Il Bambini’s book about documentation. The child’s work, the process, the description. Patricia Carini, descriptive review.” Tanya told me that she tries to keep the child’s interest in the center of the classroom:

When I do a project, it’s [the child’s interests] always in my mind, what the child is going to bring. And, “Is it for me? Or is it for the child?” And another thing, where did it come from? The idea for the project. Is it my idea that I want to do, that I want to see this accomplished? This is the part that I have learned from [the director] and that I’m still learning. I’m still struggling. I still fumble.
When I asked about her relationship with Emily, she explained, “I treat her as any young adult. I don’t do baby talk with anyone because children are very intelligent. They want to be treated as an adult. They want to be treated with respect.”

As Emily’s primary caregiver, Tanya was responsible for taking her to the bathroom and changing her diaper, for sitting with her at lunch, and for helping her quiet down and fall asleep at nap time. Emily in particular liked playing with Tanya’s long hair and would ask her permission to do this. Tanya and Yasmin both concurred that while Yasmin’s relationship with Emily was more of a “friendship,” Emily saw Tanya more as the “teacher” who had to be obeyed (or alternately disobeyed).

Consent

John and Kate completed both an informed consent form as well as a parental consent form, consenting to their and Emily’s participation, respectively. As the school year began, Emily’s three teachers likewise each completed informed consent forms. Due to the theoretical framework employed and the activist stance taken towards the rights of the child, I also pursued consent from Emily. In accordance with the methods reviewed in Chapter II, Emily’s consent was understood as provisional and thus requiring ongoing expressions of consent. This required an “adult-child alliance…of access and trust” (A. Clark, 2011, p. 45) which allowed a relationship between Emily and me in which we produced data together (Monk, 2014). Throughout the research period I “cooperate[d] with” Emily (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2008, p. 203), establishing myself as her “partner” (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2013, p. 44). The difficulty in doing so was compounded by the fact
that “few children have had the experience of being approached by an adult who wants them, the kids, to teach her [sic], the adult, about their lives” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 80). It was vitally important to me, both as a matter of methodology as well as personal outlook, that I worked towards a meaningful, respectful relationship with Emily during the research. This proved to be a continual, and ultimately successful, quest.

To obtain ongoing consent, I used Mayne et al.’s “interactive narrative approach,” reviewed in Chapter II, which focuses on “information, understanding, and response” (2016, p. 677) as three crucial ingredients of informed consent. The method is appropriate for “a small group of children, or a single child, where time is available for relationships between the researcher and children to develop” and “aims to support children as co-researchers” (p. 679). My goal was to give Emily access to information about what my study was as well as offer ongoing opportunities for consent. I followed Mayne et al.’s recipe for using this approach, who describe making a narrative booklet to share with the child:

The first section of the story informs the child about the research project, while the second section describes what participation would involve and how the child might signify consent or otherwise… The second part of the story would provide details of what the child’s participation would involve, including how data would be collected… The final pages of the story would provide value-neutral information about making a participation choice and signifying consent. Factual images are key to describing the research and would include photographs of people involved in the research and the research setting. (p. 680)

I first visited Emily in her living room for one hour before the study began, on May 15, 2017. In that visit, we played blocks together along with Kate. I talked openly with Kate and Emily about the plans for my research, and about how either of them could withdraw Emily from the study at any point. I took pictures of me and Emily together and used those pictures to create the booklet described by Mayne et al. (Appendix E). Kate and
John shared the book with Emily, and I read the booklet with her on my first visit. The book was used as a tool for consent upon each visit.

The first few minutes of the first field observation were spent reading through the consent booklet together with Emily, after which I gave her my field notebook, pen, and audio recorder – each of which were pictured and described in the booklet. I asked if Emily wanted to explore how to use them each, to which she said “yes.” She turned on and off the recorder four times, creating recordings of several seconds long. We then played back and listened to the recordings together. As we would continue to look through the booklet at each subsequent observation, Emily often insisted on getting the same play-sunglasses that we wore in one of the pictures in the book, taken during the May visit. As I took the booklet out of my bag, she would rustle the sunglasses out of her bedroom, and we would read, bespectacled, together.

Emily took to writing in the booklet as the research wore on, ultimately covering most pages with marks from my pen. I interpreted this as her taking ownership over not only the research but the tools of research themselves; at one, point she pointed to her pen-marks in the book from a previous session and remarked, “I did it! I did it! I did it!” and another time, “I just colored that.” Emily additionally was granted full access to my own notebook, as I would often show her what I was writing. Her older sister Susan was involved in this as well and would at times confirm that I had indeed written down what I said I had. On a few occasions both Emily and Susan used my notebook and pen to write and jot down their own marks.

Emily was not shy or apprehensive about my role as a researcher in her life but rather actively sought to expose me to her friends and draw me into her life. Later on, in
the morning of the first observation, as Emily, Susan, and Kate were leaving the apartment to take Susan to school, I hung back several feet in the hallway as they waited for the elevator. I was hesitant about crowding the family on the very first observation. Emily looked back, noticed my distance, and stated, “No, you need to wait for the elevator,” and motioned me over closer to her. On the second field observation, Emily eagerly showed the consent booklet to her sister, proclaiming “Look look look!” Towards the end of the research Emily told a classmate who was looking at me, “His name is Noah by the way. He’s just the worker that works on his page.”

In typical examples, Emily looked at me as she walked towards a new activity in her classroom and said, “Noah, come with me”; she asked me, “Are you ready?” as she was getting in the stroller to leave the playground. Instances like these were common throughout the field observations and assured me that Emily was indeed providing provisional and ongoing consent. She would regularly turn around to see where I was, whether in her apartment, classroom, or walking in the neighborhood, and motion me towards her. When she was preparing to leave a space (home, school, playground, museum) she would ask me, her teachers, or parents if I was coming with her to the next space.

By the third field observation Emily showed a solid grasp of the tools of research:

Emily: OK – can I have that book - I’m gonna show you write on this [the consent booklet] - ok, “research” -

Noah: You wanna write “research” on there again?

Emily: Yea – can I have the – phone? [This is what she called the recorder in the early part of the research]
Noah: Hm-hm, you can have the recorder.

Emily: "Hello??" (into recorder) This one? [asking which button to press]

Noah: Yea, right now, it's on “hold” - which means none of the buttons will work - you can push them but they’re not gonna do anything -

Emily: How about you -

Noah: - what do you want me to do with it?

Emily: Just - do research.

From that observation forward, I would hand the recorder to Emily, so she could press “record” to formally begin the observation and likewise “stop” at the end. On the next field observation, I met Emily’s babysitter Amanda, who Emily eagerly showed the consent book to:

Emily: (To Amanda) I show – I show you what my research is. See!

(Amanda) (Giggles)

Amanda: You and Noah have sunglasses! (Both giggle) this looks so cool

Emily: Look! Look at us - hanging out - were doing that. Look at us, were doing that. See, look at us. Look at us - we're at school, see?

On the ninth field observation, as I joined Kate to pick Emily up from her third day of school, Emily rushed to give me a hug as soon as the classroom door opened.

There were two occasions during the research in which I stopped the audio recording and did not take any field notes. The first was when I arrived for a field observation and noticed immediately that Emily was crying, yelling, and flailing her body, in a loud and visceral argument with Kate. While I observed, I did not document the incident out of respect for Emily and lack of opportunity for ongoing consent. As
Emily regained her composure. I then asked if she would like to begin the audio recording. The second time was in her living room mid-observation, as Emily stood up from playing and walked behind a large arm chair, obviously seeking privacy. I stopped the recording and asked her when she returned if I could start recording again. Her mother explained to me, watching with a smile, that Emily likely went behind the chair to poop in her diaper.

My use of the consent booklet, sharing the tools of research, and being transparent with my agenda afforded ongoing opportunities for Emily to express consent. As reviewed in Chapter II, consent with a young child is nuanced, complex, and sensitive; as such, the clear and explicit consent possible with adult participants was not present. Rather, I was left to interpret Emily’s behaviors and actions and consider them against both the particular context of the research as well as the relevant topical literature reviewed in Chapter II. Emily and I engaged in what I believed to be a trusting alliance which respected her presence and power.
Chapter IV:

METHODOLOGY: ETHNOGRAPHY

In a cultural-historically framed study, the researcher pays very close attention to capturing the perspectives of the child. (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2008, p. 110)

Data Generation

Having reviewed the role of the researcher and introducing the child and her surroundings, I now turn towards the cultural-historically informed ethnographic methods used to generate and analyze data for the study. In a seminal study which seeks the child’s perspective, Hedegaard and Fleer follow four individual children, throughout their day and over the period of a year, in order to “study about children during the period when they transition into school” (2013, p. vii). The methods and methodology for the study, and a general framework for cultural-historical studies interested in the perspective of young children, are laid out by Hedegaard and Fleer in an earlier work (2008). Hedegaard and Fleer’s methodological approach focuses on the local and particular child and culture (2008, 2013) and is accordingly used as a guiding resource for the methods
Ethnographic Methods

Ethnography has been the “primary method” of cultural studies on children and is used to “understand how others make sense of their social and cultural worlds” (Greene & Hogan, 2005, p. 113). Likewise, ethnography is also found to be “a method suitable [for] infants and toddlers” (C. Clark, 2011, p. 13). Therefore, ethnographic participant field observation is the chief mode of data generation in this study, and is supplemented by interviews (Bernard, 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). These methods are then nuanced and modified for the purposes of working with a 2-year-old child (C. Clark, 2011; Fleer & Ridgway, 2014; Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011; Johansson & White, 2011). Consistent with the Mosaic approach, the methods presented here “combine the traditional methodology of observation and interviewing with the introduction of participatory tools” (A. Clark, 2011p. 13).

Hedegaard and Fleer (2008) and Tudge (2008) both provide an explicit link between cultural-historical methodologies and ethnographic field observations. Hedegaard and Fleer lean on the ethnographic methods of Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) and E. Smith (2005) in order to “include the child’s perspective” (2008, p. 48) in their methodology, while Tudge uses ethnographic methods in a cultural-historical
project in order to “examine what young children do in their everyday lives…rather than show what children can do in certain circumstances or in particular settings” (2008, p. 23). Ethnographic methods are therefore not chosen simply because they are ubiquitous to naturalistic social research but rather due to the theoretical connection they have been shown to have by previous scholars with cultural-historical research.

In addition to field observations and interviews, other forms of data generated during the study, catalogued in Appendix F, include: school documents such as monthly newsletters, school calendar, and parent communication forms, text messages with Kate, and inventories and maps of materials such as toys, books, and furniture found at home and school. These documents added nuance and context to the field notes: the monthly newsletter yielded insight into how the teachers displayed the Little Ones to parents; Kate’s text messages included context on when Emily got sick and other idiosyncrasies of family life; inventories of material goods, and maps of home and school, captured the physical environment Emily’s life occurred in tandem with.

**Validity**

Validity is alternately understood in qualitative research as “a measure of the fit between researcher and respondent perceptions” (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013, p. 234) and “the degree to which researchers actually have discovered what they think their results show” (p. 320). Validity is therefore concerned with the perceived accuracy of the study’s findings. Accordingly, I provide compelling evidence in Chapters V and VI, in the form of interview and field observation excerpts, that my findings are, indeed, based
directly in Emily’s lived experience during the course of the research. To that end, Chapters V and VI offer a fine grained, in-depth, and nuanced analysis of the tension between Emily and her world. This is approached through exploring the minutiae of Emily’s life and stitching these many small moments together into larger patterns of meaning, grounding my findings to the particulars of Emily’s daily life.

Hedegaard and Fleer outline a qualitative cultural-historical approach to validity:

Validity is not the operationalization of the child’s reactions in relation to different inputs, as is common in classical experimental designs. Rather…validity is connected to how well the researcher can explicate the historical tradition [emphasis added] of [the research context]. Validity…is a conceptualization of…the social situation of the research participants [emphasis added] in relation to different perspectives. (2008 p. 43)

Accordingly, my research is designed to understand Emily’s historical situatedness and re-conceptualize her social situation. My goal in Chapter III is thus to establish methods to yield a new understanding of how Emily meets her world throughout her daily life.

Historicity

Inspired by cultural-historical researchers, this study is concerned with the historicity of the child as she moves throughout her life (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2008). I note a connection in the literature here with Lewin’s concept that to understand the child, research needs to focus on “a particular child at a particular time” (1946, p. 791), rather than an iconic and generalized child. The child’s historical becoming matters; children are not acultural nor ahistorical – like all humans, they belong to and with a time and place. This moved Lewin’s research away from the behaviorist clinical research that
dominated psychology at the time (Horowitz, 1994; Watson, 1913). Cultural-historical scholars explore the historicity of the child by “studying in motion the living history” of the particular child (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2008, p. 88), in order to “see the present historically” (Vygotsky, 1978, cited in Hedegaard & Fleer, 2008, p. 153). Wartofsky (1983) speaks of an historical epistemology and an historical psychology as frames through which to view the growth of the particular individual child. The historical dimension of the child comes from seeing the actual child’s encounter with, and construction of, the present world concurrently with an explication of the cultural and historical forces which have helped to generate that world.

This study is grounded in a thirst for historicity, understanding the child’s encounter with the world as a historical occurrence which takes place as history-is-created. This historical epistemology is one in which agentive individuals encounter the world and are creating the future in the present – affirming the future-to-come [emphasis added] and thus realizing it in the here and now. This is the process of inventing the future [emphasis added], rather than merely expecting or anticipating its “automatic” arrival. (Stetsenko, 2017, p. 5)

“History” is used by cultural-historical scholars to refer not only to cultural-historical constructions (such as childhood, outlined earlier), but also the actual movement and motion of the developing child.

Research which acknowledges this seeks to describe a “child participating in the process of becoming” (Bang, 2008, p. 118). The child is never a static entity, in a moment frozen for the researcher to investigate; the child is a historical being, both informed by history and actively creating history. In this sense, becoming is epistemologically distinct from developing, the latter of which represents a teleological unfolding with a destined
end-point of adult maturation. A historical becoming rather acknowledges the always-moving while never-complete status of human individuals regardless of their ontogenetic growth. This points towards a key distinction for my study from Barker and Wright’s psycho-ecological work (1951, 1954), despite the many congruencies (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2008, p. 5) noted in my methods. Barker and Wright describe their research focusing on the “cultural and psychological habitat of a child” as similar to displaying “a pressed flower in an herbarium…useful to botanists” (1954, p. 1); in essence, they offer a description of an intimately studied-yet-frozen moment in the child’s life. Rather, within the presently described episteme, historicity is seen as movement, not fossilization.

Field Observations

The timing and location of my field observations were designed to provide a record of Emily’s experiences through the course of a typical day. This is inspired by Barker and Wright’s foundational study, which consists of a “record of what a seven-year-old [sic]boy did and of what his home and school and neighborhood and town did to him from the time he awoke one morning until he went to sleep that night” (1954, p. 1). Barker and Wright’s study was “an inspirational source” for Hedegaard and Fleer’s (2013, p. 8) work, and is found to be consistent with my theoretical framework. I followed Tudge’s description for this method:

We do this [field observations] in such a way that we cover the equivalent of a complete day in their lives, observing on one day when the child wakes up, another day the hour before he or she goes to bed, and on other days during the hours in between. Using this technique, we try to get a good sense of the types of

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1 Tudge’s cultural-historical research program (2008) involves research participants between 28 and 48 months old and is therefore a particularly appropriate model for the current methods.
activities in which the child is typically involved, the partners in those activities, the roles taken and so on. Data are gathered…during four-hour sessions. (2008, p. 91)

The study occurred from June 2017 through February 2018, with three monthly field observations each lasting approximately four hours. Each month included a morning, mid-day, and evening observation (Appendix G). Field observations began in June in order to develop rapport with Emily before school began as well to observe her life before her inaugural encounter with school. The locations of the field observations were wherever Emily was during a “regular” day, again following the studies of Barker and Wright (1954), Hedegaard and Fleer (2013), and Tudge (2008). To keep the study focused on Emily’s everyday life as she encountered school, observations were only made on weekdays, and beginning in September only on weekdays on which school was held.

Field observations were each recorded using a small audio recorder,² alternately worn around my neck on a lanyard, held in my hand, or placed casually on a surface. It was Emily’s responsibility to push the “start” and “stop” buttons, which meant the recordings themselves generally began several seconds after I arrived and ended a few seconds before I left each observation. I kept hand written jottings in a notebook³ during field observations, to fill in moments that were either hard to discern strictly from audio (i.e., describing Emily’s play, mood, or appearance) or when the soundscape proved difficult for the recorder to catch voices (i.e., walking on the sidewalk to school during morning rush hour). I also used the notebook for theoretical, methodological, and

² I used a Sony ICD-UX533BLK Digital Voice Recorder, approximately four inches long by two inches wide.
³ I used a few different slim, lined, spiral bound notebooks, containing approximately 80 sheets each.
analytical notes (Bernard, 2006; Schensul & LeCompte, 2013) to shape my research as it proceeded. Over the course of the research I filled four notebooks with jottings.

**Interviews**

During field observations, I interviewed Emily 11 times, primarily facilitated by Emily’s use of Duplo Legos as a means of play and expression. These Duplo interviews lasted 10 minutes to one hour and occurred at least once monthly from August through January, each taking place in her living room in the midst of a field observation (Appendix H). Emily’s mother was present for each of the interviews but mainly receded into the background, busying herself in another area of the apartment.

The timing of the interviews was informed by my third pilot study, in which I learned that the artificiality of conducting interviews with children when field observations ended only stifled their content. The blurred line between interviews and field observations within a cultural-historical framework is explicated by Greene and Hogan:

> Most of us (and here we mean ‘us’ not simply as researchers but as people) do not spend our time interviewing children as a way to find out what they are thinking and feeling. We talk to them, listen to them, watch them, engage with them, listen to them talking about other people. (2005, p. 124)

As a result, Emily and I had a sort of dance around the interview times – at some points, I would ask if she wanted to play Legos and do an interview, at other times, she would initiate with a similar request, and at other times, we simply found that an interview grew organically as we played on her living room rug together. The main constraint around
interviews was that we did them when Susan was not present, as her proximity tended to interrupt the interview (though it enriched the field observation). Kate generally gave Emily and I more space to ourselves when we settled in to an interview, taking the time to work in the kitchen or prepare for the next activity. She occasionally listened and peeked in, intrigued and at times humored by the information Emily was sharing.

Schensul and LeCompte’s notion of “in-depth, open-ended exploratory interviewing” (2013, p. 134) was used throughout these interview sessions embedded in the field observations. This framework calls for the in-depth “exploration of any and all facts of a topic in considerable detail” and does not require the interviewee to “select from a series of alternative choices” but is rather “open” to respond in any direction they see fit (p. 134). Rather than have a prescribed set of questions or formats, they arose as we played. Emily and I both generally kept the interviews on themes of school (Emily often called it “playing Rainbow House”) and her family, though we at times strayed as our minds wandered. This was the point of the open-ness of the interview; it captured both pointed lines of inquiry as well as tangential thoughts that came up. While the interviews were certainly not set up – nor could or should they be construed as – play therapy, I am familiar with Axline’s basic principles of non-directive play therapy (1947, 1964) and could not help but avoid considering “non-directive” guidelines as Emily and I played and interviewed.

The Duplo Legos used for the interviews sat in a large plastic bin in Emily’s living room and were often used by Emily and Susan during non-interview times as well. They were a staple toy for the apartment, which made them such a useful tool during interviews; Emily was already confident in her manipulation of them. The set contained
several people-figures as well as animal-figures, and enough volume and variation of bricks that our interviews could entertain seemingly limitless possibilities.

While Duplo Legos wound up being the primary tool for the interviews, I had anticipated using a broader range of multi-modal toolkits (A. Clark & Moss, 2001, 2011), described in Chapter II, as I entered the field. My anticipated use of these multi-modal toolkits was predicated on the literature stating that materials may be used by the child to represent, either abstractly or pictorially, an element of her life under discussion (Dockett & Perry, 2005, 2008, 2015; Fleet & Britt, 2011; Hviid, 2008b), in addition to being used non-representationally to evoke conversation among the researcher and participant (Coates & Coates, 2016; Wong, 2015). Reviewing the literature in Chapter II thus helped prepare me not to use a specific, prescribed interview tool or method but rather position me as open to any of a variety of expressive competencies that Emily may bring to the situation. As Emily displayed early her literacy in, affinity for, and easy access to Duplos, I abandoned the other potential tools and focused solely on Duplos. This seemed to suit Emily fine, as our interviews occurred approximately monthly and were consistently robust and talk-filled. The interviews came to contain some of the most enjoyable moments in the research, as Emily seemed casual, relaxed, and eager to share.

I interviewed Emily’s parents together three times, her three teachers together one time and individually once each. These interviews lasted approximately one hour each. The interviews were semi-structured rather than open-ended and designed to “explore systematically areas that already have been deemed of importance in the study” (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013, p. 172). I kept my focus on how history contributed to the creation of Emily’s life, on how adults saw – and acted within – their relationship with Emily, and on
particulars of the data. Interviews with Kate and John each occurred at their dining room table in the evening; I would wait in the lobby while Emily and Susan fell asleep and Kate would then send me a text message to come back upstairs. Despite the timing – at the end of John’s workday and after Kate had just put both children to bed – Kate and John were engaged in the content matter and eager to talk about Emily. Evenings with the three of us around their dining room table felt like an intimate and special space, lights dimmed and the house quiet after a busy day. Kate and John were often nostalgic in conversation, reflecting back on their upbringing, their parents, and the early days of their parenting. The group teacher interview occurred in Little Ones while the students were not there; the individual teacher interviews each took place in a diner on the same block as the school. These felt very different from the interviews with Kate and John – the diner was bright, loud, and public. While each teacher shared personal insights into their own past and Emily’s current situation, the conversations never felt as fluid and organic as they did with Kate and John. Appendix I contains a list of interview times and questions.

**Analysis**

I lean on the analytic protocols laid out by Hedegaard and Fleer (2008, Chapter 4), in which they nuance the standard ethnographic practice of coding qualitative data to match their methodological demands. They outline a tripartite analytic concept of “common sense interpretation” (objectifies the data), “situated practice interpretation” (transcends single observations, linking them together to find conceptual patterns), and “interpretation on a thematic level” (using theoretical concepts directly related to the aim
of the research to develop explicit relations between themes) (pp. 58-62). This is accomplished through a process in which “the collected research material becomes an object for interpretation” as the researcher “tries to *build* and *use* [emphasis added] a conceptual frame in order to create and understand the material in relation to the research aim” (pp. 56-57). My analysis in Chapters V and VI follows Hedegaard and Fleer’s outline: the “object for interpretation” is my transcribed data, the “conceptual frame” is oriented around how Emily encounters her world, and the “research aim” continues to be a pursuit to recognize and acknowledge Emily’s agency. Essentially, I use the data to “build” (Chapters V and VI) and “use” (Chapter VII) a new conceptual understanding of Emily’s encounter with her world.

At a pragmatic level, this involved the transcription of all audio recordings, including field observations and interviews, in combination with notes from my field notebooks. This generated 1,397 pages of field notes. I read and re-read each field note, writing a memo and summary to capture essential empirical and theoretical elements within each. These field notes provide a robust and comprehensive look at Emily’s life during that time, aiming to meet Geertz’s marker of ethnographic research that it “rescue[s] the ‘said’… from its perishing position and fix[es] it in perusable terms” (1973, p. 20). These field notes did indeed become perusable and allowed me to pursue the thematic interpretation described by Hedegaard and Fleer.

I then coded the data, following LeCompte and Schensul’s ethnographic handbook (2013, Chapter 6). I stopped generating codes when I approached data

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4 I manually transcribed all recordings using a foot pedal (Infinity USB Digital Foot Control with Computer plug (IN-USB2)) and an annual subscription to Transcribe (https://transcribe.wreally.com), an integrated website allowing the use of text and audio in the same interface.
saturation, as the codes become settled and were no longer shifting (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2008, LeCompte & Schensul, 2013). The codes used were deductive as well as inductive. The inductive codes were both generated “spontaneously,” in the lived experiences of the research situation, and later, after removal from the research situation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 178). It must be stated that the codes explained below do not represent some finite, complete, or incontrovertible understanding of the data set. Rather, they reflect the theoretical framework and my own positionality.

I used eight categories of deductive codes (Appendix J) to organize the data, each with its own set of subcategories (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013). For example, “people” was used as a coding category to catalogue which people Emily came into interaction with; subcategories included her sister, peers, babysitters, new adults (essentially, strangers), and descriptions of Emily herself. “Milestones” was used to catalogue moments when Emily appeared to be working at what might be commonly thought of as developmental milestones for 2-year-olds; coded subcategories include pacifier, stroller and walking, diaper and potty, sleeping and napping. Including other categories such as “schedule” and “locations,” the deductive codes represent conventional ways to catalogue an individual’s early life.

Inductive codes (Appendix K) were developed both while in the field and while reading the fieldnotes, coalescing around data that seemed to have potential analytical or theoretical relevancy to the research aim. These inductive codes represented ways in which theory came to life during the field observations. As such, they were not developed ex nihilo but rather grew out of my application of the theoretical framework and literature relevant to the research setting, much of which was reviewed in Chapters I and II.
Accordingly, inductive codes were developed at points of tension in the entanglement between Emily’s agency and her world. The inductive codes and analytic themes that arose around them were then re-considered within Chapter II, lending congruency to the literature review and the findings.

As with the deductive codes, each inductive coding category encompasses several variants. For example, “rules” was used as a coding category to note any time rules were invoked; subcategories emerged such as: adults telling Emily rules, rules about appropriate use of material objects, and Emily herself saying rules. “Infantilizing” was used as a coding category to note any interaction in which Emily seemed to be treated in a particular manner solely because of her age; subcategories include adults talking about (rather than addressing) Emily, adults talking down to Emily, adults quizzing Emily, adults doubting Emily, adults doing tasks for Emily that she was seen to be independently capable of, and lying to or deceiving Emily.

I applied the inductive and deductive subcategory codes to the raw transcript, in an iterative fashion adding or tweaking codes until they seemed to saturate, and be saturated by, the data. While coding, I asked Kate a few questions to member-check and clarify some of the data. By the end of the coding process, the subcategories were applied a cumulative total of 1,850 times to the fieldnotes. The deductive and inductive codes were then used to organize the data and to make it more easily perusable for analysis and presentation. For example, I collected and organized all of the data marked with “stroller” codes, to be able to more closely examine the many times that Emily encountered her stroller throughout the course of the research. This organization was done for many of the subcategories, such as “new adults,” “age-based nomenclature,” and “material culture.”
The grouping together of coded instances of data allowed me to explore and better understand how Emily encountered different areas of her life throughout the study. The deductive codes in particular were used to give context and order to the data, such as the creation of a schedule of Emily’s typical day and week for the duration of the study, as well as a calendar of family events and significant moments for Emily over the course of the year. This allowed me to begin to see the data not as isolated moments but rather contextualized within the rhythm of Emily’s life.

Ultimately, I printed the organized data, collating it in a three-ring binder with several tabs for quick reference. I kept the main transcript (1,397 pages of field notes) in digital form. Writing Chapters V and VI was an iterative process and occurred mainly from April through December 2018. During this period I perused the three-ring binder innumerable times, further marking up and commenting on the organized data. The binder came with me wherever I was; it was on my desk while I was at work, on my night stand while I slept, under my arm while I commuted on the train. I ate, slept, and breathed the data. I kept the main digital document of the field note open on my computer while writing and frequently dove back in, to better contextualize the organized data in the binder. This zooming in and out allowed me to stay close both to the empirically observed experiences as well as the emerging conceptual themes.

**Creative Encounters**

While developing the inductive codes, I continued to come back to what Stetsenko describes within the Transformative Activist Stance as a “creative encounter
with the world,” in which “we simultaneously greet and are greeted by the world” (2017, p. 253). This notion seemed to aptly describe chunks of data that jumped out at me as poignant and relevant, and so I used this idea of “creative encounters” as an inductive code to situate the forces of agency and culture in Emily’s life and better understand how they grappled with each other. These creative encounters could help answer my research questions by exploring how Emily, like all humans, is “grappling and striving… in efforts to transcend and transform… [and] always moving beyond the status quo” (2017, p. 257). This code became a chief guiding light throughout analysis because the data in each creative encounter encompassed elongated scenarios in which Emily displayed an active, engaged resistance to the forces she encountered.

Overall, I identified 27 creative encounters (Appendix L), which range from 10 minutes to 90 minutes; most are between 30 and 60 minutes. Creative encounters each follow a loose rhythm: each begins with a “spark” – a moment in which Emily or an adult sparked a particular agenda (getting in the stroller, cleaning up, playing with toys, etc), followed by an often intense exchange of child and adult ideas about how to proceed, after which it can be seen how Emily powerfully shaped history-in-the-making. The creative encounters ultimately served to cohere my interpretation of the data and connected disparate codes, which were likewise represented within each creative encounter. For example, the 45-minute segment in which Emily and her father play train tracks together one morning (reviewed in depth in Chapter VI) was coded as a creative encounter; within that chunk of the fieldnote, dozens of other subcategories were also

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5 Stetsenko further explains the human presence in this creative encounter with the world: “This notion can be expanded… to suggest that every human act… is part of our overall uninterrupted striving, our efforts at achieving broader goals of becoming” (p. 254).
coded, such as when her father says rules about how to use the trains, when Emily mentions her classroom teachers, and when her mother checks in with her about her diaper.

It must also be noted that while I use creative encounter as an inductive code it by no means stands to represent discrete, episodic data points. Indeed, encounters as described within TAS are “not reducible to a chain of single discrete episodes” but are rather a “continuous flow” through which “social practices connect individuals and generations of people” (Stetsenko, 2017, p. 182). The uninterrupted nature of creative encounters highlights Emily’s actions as coterminous with the social practices she transforms. I therefore use creative encounters to describe sections of the data which seem poised to offer ripe analysis of such transformation, highlighting Emily’s capacity to matter in the flow of social interactions.

**Peter Pan**

While I was in the early stage of coding the data, my oldest son and I were reading *Peter Pan* (Barrie, 1911/2016), a few pages each night at his bed time. I was struck by the stance Barrie takes, in the early pages of the book before the Pan narrative unfolds, on the nature of children’s minds and the adults around them. Three excerpts stuck with me, and I kept them on post-it notes on the back of my data binder. They came to be an auxiliary source of inspiration, adding a sense of whimsy to my pursuit of meaning.
In the first excerpt, 2-year-old Wendy is in a garden while her mother, Mrs. Darling, laments out loud that she will miss Wendy’s toddlerhood when she inevitably grows up. The narrator states, after Wendy has heard her mother’s lamentation, “Wendy knew that she must grow up. You always know after you are two” (Barrie, p. 1). This is at the heart of both Peter and Wendy’s relationship and my research: Is it the job of a child to “grow up”? Why? How do children come to know this? In the second excerpt, Wendy’s mother, Mrs. Darling, is tucking Wendy, John, and Michael in at night after they have fallen asleep. The narrator describes Mrs. Darling as “tidying up her children’s minds” by “rummaging in their minds” (Barrie, p. 3). This is an intriguing notion of how and why adults pry into children’s lives, as well as what the parent’s responsibility is in relationship with her children. In the third excerpt, the narrator describes the genesis of the rest of the book: “In her travels through her children’s minds, Mrs. Darling found things she did not understand…she knew of no Peter” (p. 5).

These last two phrases – “found things she did not understand” and “she knew of no Peter” – resonate deeply with me and my data. What “things” in Emily’s life did her adults “not understand”? What was her “Peter”? While these three excerpts did not play directly into my analysis, I kept them close as I wrote Chapters V and VI and often referred to them in dry moments while searching for where to turn next.

**Presentation**

The presentation of ethnographic research attempts “to describe the culture of another people for an audience that is unfamiliar with it” (Goodenough, 1970, p. 105) and
I use that to frame my presentation in Chapters V and VI. I present my analysis by assuming a position alien to (I imagine nearly all) adults, one which situates Emily as a powerful social agent who matters in the world, as a human individual engaged in meaningful relationships with other human individuals. This re-conceptualizing of the child thus portrays a cultural situation which is indeed “unfamiliar” to my audience, presumably adult researchers, practitioners, parents, and other adults who interact with children.

I take the position that adults look “down” at children as they try to raise and teach them; this brings forth the assumed corollary that children look “up” at adults as they mature and learn. Chapters V and VI represent my making this relationship “unfamiliar” by re-orienting it: I shift from a vertical axis, defined by teaching-learning and raising-maturing, to a horizontal access, defined by mutuality and reciprocity. I present Emily’s culture in an unfamiliar way – I do not look down at her or up at adults but, rather, across. How does Emily’s world appear when the assumptions about the direction of the relationship – that adults are required to teach and raise, and children are required to learn and mature – are dropped? The presentation of my analysis in Chapters V and VI seek to “describe” Emily – and her encounter with the world – in order for the reader to become more familiar with this new perspective. This presentation is theoretically and methodologically aligned with the precepts laid out in Chapters I-IV, stemming from an ontological belief in the robust agency of all humanity and a committed stance on critically deconstructing relationships of power and seeking out relationships of trust and equality. This re-orientation is then further explicated in Chapter VII.
Limitations

The chief limitation addressed here is my inescapable adult-status while researching Emily’s world. While I use relevant literature, research, and theory to approach Emily’s life, I can never shed my outsider-status to the encounter I am exploring. I have crossed the Rubicon and left my childhood behind – I will always be Mrs. Darling, peering into children’s worlds but never belonging to them. I cannot fully grasp Emily’s world. The research presented here is therefore rife with conjecture and speculation. As Geertz reminds us, the ethnographic process – with humans of any age – is “inherently inconclusive,” “intrinsically incomplete,” and “essentially contestable” (1973, pp. 20-27); ethnography is necessarily interpretative. Interpretive ethnography acknowledges the tension between the researcher’s inherently etic perspective and the research participant’s emic perspective (Brantlinger, 2005), which is further muddied when the emic perspective is that of a young child (Quiñones & Fleer, 2011).

This occurs because of multiple reasons: the child lacks familiarity with methods the researcher uses (Graue & Walsh, 1998), a power imbalance exists between the researcher and research participant (Corsaro, 1981), and that children frequently “invent their own unique and sometimes temporary systems of communication” (Guo & Mackenzie, 2015, p. 78) which trouble the adult-researcher’s ability to listen and interpret. The distance between myself and Emily here is one of age-based practices, and the profound differences that age creates in our lives. I therefore write with detail and
reverence throughout Chapters V and VI as I peer into her world and attempt to create a portrait of what I see. I seek to recognize those oppressive elements of her intergenerational relationships which are un-seen by adults and describe them with depth and precision to the adult viewer.

One way in which my outsider status is made clear is the initiation of the research process. Despite the considerations detailed earlier regarding the ongoing consent of the child, a fundamental issue which I have not been able to overcome is the process of selection of the participant. At the point of inception, the relationship between myself and the participant is already imbued with strategic power: I selected Emily, while she simply consented; she was involved in a research design initiated by me, not by her. The selection process also brought in Kate and John as collaborators of mine before we turned to Emily, diminishing her role immediately from the onset of the research. I am interested in creative solutions to this dilemma, which could afford future researchers opportunities to engage with children in a process of mutual selection. In this situation, the child would bring herself to the research rather than be selected by the researcher. Lacking a valid methodological approach to accomplish this, I settled on selecting Emily’s family, obtaining consent via her parents, and then approaching her for ongoing consent.

A second manifestation of this limitation is the inherent difficulty of translating Emily’s encounters with the world into a final, adult-authored product. This limitation – of the adult penning of a child’s world – leaves open curious potential pathways for future research to authentically represent and include the child’s voice at later stages of the research process. Kellett (Mann, Liley, & Kellett, 2014) provides an interesting take on how to move methods closer to theory in this area, as she co-authored a chapter with
two 11-year-old children, Mann and Liley. Her chapter “helpfully documents the process and challenges of child-led research” (Miller, 2014, p. 429). Of course, this is a suitable method for an 11-year-old participant; adapting this idea to a 2-year-old child remains considerably difficult. As a way of tending to this limitation, Chapters V and VI include vast tracts of verbatim transcript from Emily, attempting to display her voice robustly throughout the analysis.

Sumsion, et al., (2014) discuss the limitations of their participatory methods for working with young children, saying they are “an engaging means of encouraging discussion about infants’ experiences…[but] ultimately, WE construct what we call the infants’ experience” (p. 188). This is consistent with Geertz’s position that “cultural analysis is guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses” (1973, p. 21). While I strive to pay close attention to Emily’s perspective on her world, ultimately my use of ethnography is interpretive in Geertz’s use of the word.

A third expression of this limitation is that my methodology is created within the adult-generated academic milieu. Moore writes about how her research on children’s voice led her to understand how profoundly difficult it is to see the child’s world with adult-tools:

While methodologically I understood knowledge construction in the research process to be a shared endeavor with the children…I was often working from an interrogative perspective. Therefore, despite having carefully described the methodology in one way, in reality my default dominant position meant that I was still heavily influenced by power-imbalanced adult/child roles. In practice, this meant I inadvertently slipped in and out of a dominant researcher position thereby not consistently respecting, listening to the children’s words or being attentive to their body language throughout the study. (2014, p. 8)
Despite Moore’s theoretical orientation around the agentive child expressing her voice, her inescapable adult-identity interfered by obscuring and obfuscating her research goals.

Reporting on a series of unsuccessful interviews with young children despite a solid theoretical and methodological grounding, Moore comes to understand the need not just to use child-oriented methods but to assume a humble position in following the child and withholding her own adult-agenda:

I became aware of the need to quietly listen to the children, rather than controlling the conversation based on my own predetermined priorities. It became evident that when I stopped dictating an adult-dominated line of enquiry and quietly listened, I started to hear the children’s stories. (p. 9)

Moore concludes her exploration of the tension between methodologies and children’s voices by emphatically stating:

regardless of research methodology designed with child-centered participatory intentions, children do not always engage with nor need ‘adult-devised tools’ to create knowledge as data. (p. 9)

Similarly, Sumson suggests “overt humility” (2003, p. 19) in research with young children. The child may very well simply not need the researcher’s presence, questions, or tools in order to engage with the research problem.

Acknowledging these limitations, I do not claim any particular clairvoyance in this research, only an honesty and earnestness: I listen to Emily, I respect her presence, and I acknowledge her agency. Like any other emic perspective accounted for in research, I use my own lens to re-interpret the data as I transcribe and analyze. As Geertz reminds us, ethnographic work is not austerely composed of the participant’s voice; rather, it is bracketed by the researcher’s rendition of that voice. My study represents an amalgamation of my adult ideas about Emily and her world. The whole undertaking is potentially quixotic: Who am I to suggest that children need adult-contrived tools in order
to give vibrancy to their agency? Who am I to presume that my research techniques are necessary for Emily’s agency to be heralded? Yet, the “provisional and fallible” nature of “truth” (Stetsenko, 2017, p. 112) within the qualitative research tradition does not put the research – or researcher – in a weak position. Rather, leaning on Harding (1991), by identifying the limitations and tensions around “truths” posited through research, the researcher can approach “strong objectivity” in the sense that “others can object to” (Stetsenko, 2017, p. 112) the “truths” suggested within the research. I therefore acknowledge these situated limitations and submit this study humbly. I pray that Emily would take delight in the opportunity for her world to be shown in a new light to the adults in her life.

Summary

This chapter outlines a productive methodology for exploring the child’s encounter with her world, inspired in large part by Hedegaard and Fleer (2008, 2013). I used ethnographic, qualitative, ideographic methods to conduct research with one research participant, Emily, from June 2017 through February 2018. The research includes 26 morning-til-night field observations, 11 interviews with Emily, four interviews with her teachers, and three interviews with her parents. All observations and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. I sought out meaning from the data and created a new conceptual understanding of Emily’s encounter with her world, presented in Chapter V and VI.
INTERLUDE

Overview of Chapters V and VI

The following two chapters take up my research questions, re-stated from Chapter I:

1. How does one individual 2-year-old child, over the course of nine months and while she begins school, encounter the spaces of her daily life such as home, school, and out in the city?
2. How does the child create change and transformation in her world?
3. Where is the child powerful?

Chapter V takes up the first question by responding to how Emily encounters daily life during the research while chapter VI takes up the second and third questions by describing how Emily transforms the world and locating where she is powerful. This framework captures the entanglement of “adult imperialism” in Chapter V with “child agency” in Chapter VI. This entanglement is the conceptual framework in which my analysis occurs.

In Chapter V, I came to recognize a process in which adult imperialism imposed itself on Emily. This was instantiated as adults sought to:

… segregate Emily based on her age,

… infantilize Emily and suppress or ignore her competencies,
... and regulate Emily through rules and expectations.

In Chapter VI, I came to recognize that, in a process co-terminus with those elements of adult imperialism, Emily used her agency to:

... resist adult expectations and agendas,

... reappropriate imperial adult agendas by replacing them with her own,

... and generate a new future through her agentive resistance.

These labels correlate loosely and colloquially to instances when Emily says no (resistance), does things differently (reappropriation), and creates something new (generation). Emily’s agency (her resistance, reappropriation, generation) is co-terminus with adult imperialism (age-segregation, infantilization, and regulation), in a mutually-dependent process through which she ultimately creates a new future as she meets the world. Throughout Chapters V and VI, I present data excerpts and analysis to convincingly support these analytic points.

Chapters V and VI are thus split for ease of reading and not as a result of an ontological separation between adult imperialism and child agency. Stetsenko writes:

“each human being joins in with the ongoing practices and thus continues, carries them on, yet all the while also resisting, challenging, and ultimately always changing them too” (2017, p. 190). This existence-through-resistance – of both individuals and social practices – implies then that “the world [is] constantly created and recreated, invented and reinvented, changed and transformed, and thus – realized by and through human agency” in a process that “bring[s] forth the world” (p. 206). “The world and our acting are not ontologically separate” (p. 261). The social practices of adult imperialism, and Emily’s agency as a member of those practices, are constructed of, by, and for each other.
They cease to exist if they are separated in the world yet are split over the following two chapters for heuristic reasons.

Some of the words used in the following chapters are heavy with the weight of history – imperialism, segregation, resistance – and, accordingly, they are not used frivolously nor cheaply. They are used non-metaphorically to describe the idiosyncratic life I observed as I watched Emily encounter the world. The struggle for freedom and recognition is one that all humans are engaged in and yet is often denied in our cultural understanding, and construction, of children. The analysis here is one that transparently embraces the struggle for freedom, acknowledgement, participation, and dignity which all humans strive towards, and accordingly, locates that struggle in Emily’s life as she encounters her world.
Chapter V
FINDINGS – Adult Imperialism

The traditional mythic models of childhood are all nervous attempts to conceive childhood in terms of what we can contain and control. (Wartofsky, 1983, p. 200)

Preface

How does Emily encounter daily life? She meets a world defined by its attempt to control her. I label this control “adult imperialism” and explore this control through the three facets of segregation, infantilization, and regulation. This chapter will explore how Emily encounters forces of control in her daily life at home, school, and around the city. The findings here are grounded in the relevant literature and rely on an understanding of the cultural historical context that the research occurs within.
Age-Based Segregation

Overview

This section examines age-based segregation, which I define as cultural boundaries created by adults which serve to divide young people into discrete social groups based on their biological age and subsequently deny access for those age-cohorts to “mature community activities” (Rogoff, 2003). Age-based segregation thus creates niches within childhood and then separates those niches from each other and the broader community. When viewed through the lens of adult imperialism, age-based segregation is one way in which adults extend control into the lives of young people. The defining, delineating, and separation of childhood is the result of the cultural paradigm in which the adult-control of children is assumed as necessary.

Emily’s life is saturated by encounters with age-based segregation. These are particularly felt at moments when Emily desires to enter a space and yet is denied access. This is then made further clear by the manner in which Emily’s slice of childhood is defined by adherence to standards deemed appropriate for 2-year-olds. The division and denial of age-based segregation thus co-occur with the creation of a particular “confined space” (Ariès, 1962) for children. This space is often depicted as less-real, or less-meaningful, then the “mature community activities” to which Emily is denied access. This denigration of childhood highlights the non-neutral implication of adult imperialism. Age-based segregation imperialistically divides up swaths of population, leaving one class (adults) in a superior position to another class (young children).
This section therefore considers the following questions: What divisions and boundaries of childhood (Jenks, 1996) does Emily encounter? How is Emily denied access to “mature community activities” (Rogoff, 2003) due to her status as a child? What “confined spaces” of childhood (Ariès, 1962) does Emily inhabit? I explore these questions below, identifying how Emily’s childhood is divided according to age, the subsequent denial of access into desired places, and the creation of her confined space of childhood. Brief examples of “age-based segregation” include Emily’s mother’s use of the phrase “not for kids” when referring to some household items and Emily’s teachers stating, “You have to be two,” as the sole requisite factor for being a member of her classroom.

“You Have to Be Two”: Division and Denial

The age divisions within Emily’s life were ubiquitous. I will analyze here how she encountered division and denial of access because of her age at school, art class, summer camp, gymnastics, and at home. Entering Rainbow House, there were a number of signs which indicate, based on age, who belongs where. The sign on the door into the school read:

RAINBOW HOUSE

BIG ONES ❤ LITTLE ONES

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM
In Emily’s hallway, there were two classrooms facing each other at opposing ends of the hallway, each with signs again stating their relative age-band: “WELCOME TO THE LITTLE ONES” and “WELCOME TO THE BIG ONES.” The division between “little” and “big” was felt as Emily befriended a child in Big Ones early in the year, yet the connection slowly languished until it disappeared mid-way through the year. They had exceedingly few opportunities to interact outside of chance meetings in the hallway or bathroom, and playdates outside of school were scheduled solely with other Little Ones. Her desire to engage in the friendship was thwarted by the age-based division present in school.

Emily’s classroom teachers explained to me the prerequisite for being a member of the classroom: “You have to be two to be in this classroom, officially when you start.” When I asked her teachers what they knew about Emily when they first met her, the initial response was, “Um, just her age?” to which her name and street address were later added. Age is both the sole requisite factor for entrance into the class and, therefore, the first lens through which the teachers come to know the child.

When I spoke with Kate about her decision to enroll Emily in Little Ones, it was again clear just how significant age was in making the decision. While Kate was attracted to Rainbow House because of “the vibe” and her “experience” while touring the school, she told me that the decision to enroll Emily in this specific class was largely “because she’s just so little,” and that “if she [Emily] was like a little older,” she would have enrolled her in different hours in Rainbow House.
Emily was clear during our Lego interviews in her understanding that older children did not belong in Little Ones. When Susan once tried to join Emily’s Lego interview, during which we were enacting a school scenario using Lego bricks and figures, Emily explained to her sister, “Um sure, but you can’t come in - you have to go to your own school - to elementary school. That’s elementary school - over that way.” Emily pointed Susan to an imaginary school on the other side of the living room. Emily had internalized the age divisions present at school and recapitulated them in her play schemes at home.

A sign on the door of the “Wee Studio,” a classroom at the art museum Emily frequents, likewise delineated which children belong where, based on their age. The sign read:

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WEE ARTS

Drop-in

Ages: Mobile – 5 years
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This was complemented by a sign inside the classroom which reads:

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YES, make art + be messy

NO, food or drinks in the WEE STUDIO

Please 😊 Thank you
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The first sign established the age-banded parameters of the space, while both signs used the nomenclature “wee” to confirm that the space is for small children, in similar fashion to the Rainbow House sign delineating based on “big” or “little.” The age-segregated nature of the Wee Studio was further confirmed by Kate, who told me as we enter the museum, “So they have a lot like for Susan’s age – but THIS room…we’re all together,” suggesting that other areas of the museum are appropriate for Susan but not Emily. Emily belonged in the Wee Studio because she was wee, she was within the “ages” stated on the sign, and because other areas of the museum were deemed not suitable for her.

Emily’s age was likewise used as a reason to deny her access to the institutions which Susan participates in, despite her stated desire to join her sister for summer camp and gymnastics class. One summer morning as they prepared to take Susan to camp, Emily asked Kate if she could stay at camp with Susan. Kate explained that Emily was only joining for drop off and not for the actual camp day. Emily repeated her request to “go to camp” with her sister, to which Kate replied, “You’re not gonna go to camp yet.” Her request was enthusiastically repeated as they arrived at the camp building and watched Susan ascend a staircase to her group:

Emily: Mom can we go upstairs?
Kate: I think we’re just gonna drop her off here.
Kate: Well, they’re gonna go upstairs; we’re gonna go upstairs when it’s time to pick Susan up.
Emily: Mom, I wanna stairs.

Emily could not attend “yet” because the camp’s website reads that it is only for children four years old through ten years old, and the camp registration form requires the applicant to check a box indicating the age of the camper. The camp literature clearly emphasizes the biological age of the child as the sole requisite factor for entry.

In similar fashion, Emily’s age was used as the decisive factor for keeping her out of Susan’s gymnastics program. Kate informed me as summer camp ended in August that Susan was now enrolled in a gymnastics class:

Kate: City camp is over for Susan so now she’s just having gymnastics.

Emily: And I’m gonna do gymnastics.

Kate: You’re gonna do gymnastics too?

Emily: Yea!

Kate: We’ll see…

Emily: And I’m gonna be on the team!

Kate: You’re gonna be on the team?

Emily: Yea!

Emily repeated her desire later that afternoon, announcing that she was going to be “on the team.” Susan adamantly responded, “No way! She’s not gonna be on the team.”

Emily again asserted, confidently, “I’m on a team.” Kate explained to me, “Pre-team, she goes to Foundations.” Foundations is the group that runs Susan’s gymnastics program, and also offers age-banded programs for younger children as well. Emily was
denied access because of her age across these institutions – to older children at school, to summer camp, and to gymnastics.

This age-based segregation was felt at home as well. Emily was denied access to her sister’s bedroom because of the small toys that filled the room. When Emily walked quietly into Susan’s room while Susan was out at school, I asked Kate, “Is she allowed in Susan’s room?” to which Kate responded, “No… it’s like, there’s so many little things in there.” Kate brought this up again a month later, commenting that Emily was not allowed in Susan’s room because “all of her toys are small.” The use of “small” and “little” toys by Kate as a motivating factor in denying Emily access to Susan’s room can be seen as a local expression of the “Small Parts Regulation,” published in the Code of Federal Regulations under 16 CFR, Sections 1500.18(a)(9), 1500.50-52 (Office of the Federal Register, 2019) and further specified in the Consumer Product Safety Commission’s [CPSC] Age Determination Guidelines (Therell, 2002). The regulation serves to “ban certain toys intended for use by children under 3 years of age…because of small parts” (Therell, p. 1).

This “ban” was felt as a division when Susan’s friend, Ruthie, came home one afternoon for a playdate (Susan and Ruthie are five years older than Emily). As they all settled into the apartment, Emily’s age was used as the reason she was split from Susan and Ruthie:

Kate: So, big girls, what are you guys gonna do?
Susan: We’re already just playing a game.

(Susan and Ruthie are playing a game in Susan’s bedroom)
Emily: I wanna come with them.

Susan: No.

Several minutes later, the door to Susan’s room slowly opens, and Emily eagerly asked, “Are you guys coming out? Are you coming out guys?” Her question was not answered and she did not get a chance to play with the “big girls.”

Age-based segregation was felt at home not only by the division between Emily and Susan outlined above but also by how Emily was denied access to certain items and was instead given materials which are deemed “for kids.” One afternoon, Emily got a scrape and asked her mom for a band aid, to which Kate replied, “Let’s get some of your band aids, not daddy’s.” While Emily was denied access to her father’s band aids, they were replaced by materials more specifically for children. Emily’s Crayon Bandages, manufactured by Care Brand and labelled as item #CRA5261 are, according to a distributor’s website, “fun bandages…for kids. Kids will love the color variety” (Mountainside Medical, n.d., “Crayon Plastic Bandages,” para. 1). Emily is explicitly denied access to “daddy’s” bandaids and instead presented with bandaids that are “fun” and “for kids.”

Likewise, when Kate was packing up some boxes, Emily asked her, “Can I help with the tape?” Kate informed her, “No, not this tape, this isn’t kid’s tape.” The denial of access was strictly contingent upon the age of the user. Kate’s tape was kept in a closed cupboard which Emily did not have access to; the “kid’s tape” was kept out on the art table alongside other materials “for kids.” The tape roll that sat on Emily and Susan’s art table had a “safe plastic cutting edge,” according to the product website (ECR4Kids, n.d., “Description,” para. 1). A full list of art materials found in Emily’s apartment,
along with their age-banded definitions provided by the manufacturer, is available in Appendix M. The phrase “not for kids” was used on several other occasions as well by Kate to explain to Emily what she did, and did not, have access to around their apartment.

The presence – or lack thereof – of specific toys was also cited by Kate as a reason to deny Emily an opportunity to join her on a trip to the dentist. One morning while preparing for the day, Emily and Kate disagreed about Emily’s access to, or segregation from, the dentist. Within the dialogue, Emily stressed her desire to join, while Kate attempted to explain why she cannot:

Kate: I have to go to the dentist.

Emily: And me gonna go to the dentist?

Kate: No, you don’t have to go to the dentist today.

Emily: Why? Go to the doctor?

Kate: You’re not gonna go to the dentist.

Emily: Yea I am!

Kate: So, Emily, Amanda’s (a babysitter) gonna come soon, cause I have to go to the dentist.

Emily: Ohhhhh. Can I come with you to the dentist?

Kate: I don’t think so.

Emily: Yea!

Kate: It won’t be very fun, ‘cause you’ll just have to sit there.

Emily: Why?
Kate: Well, they’re not gonna clean your teeth, I’m not going to the same dentist [that you go to]. My dentist doesn’t have a TV or toys or the treasure box. There’s magazines there.

Emily: They have toys for you?

Kate: No toys!

Emily: Does he clean my teeth first, and then your teeth? My teeth, and then your teeth.

Kate: Well today I’m gonna go to my own dentist.

Emily: Can I come with you to the dentist?

Kate: Remember Amanda’s gonna come?

Emily: Mommy can I come to the dentist?

Kate: You wanna come with me to the dentist? No… remember we said, it’s not gonna be a fun dentist, it’s not like Dr. Jim (Emily’s dentist).

Emily: Yeaaaaa (Emily starts raising her voice and becoming visibly emotional) – I want – I want to [she starts profusely crying].

Kate: Oh. Remember, Amanda’s coming?

Emily: No – noooo – NOOOO – mom I want to go with you to the dentist. I want to go with you to the dentist – I want to GOOOO.
Kate: Remember we said there’s no TV there, there’s no prizes. (The doorbell rings and Amanda enters)

The dialogue fit an ongoing rhythm in Emily’s life, wherein she stated plainly and clearly her desire to have access to certain areas of life only to be flatly rejected because of her age. This was similarly expressed in regards to the hairdresser. Kate stated that Emily joined her once while getting a haircut: “My first haircut after I had her, we were just not at a place of good sleep. So I wore her [to the haircut].” Kate was clear that this was a non-desired and non-repeated anomaly. The hairdresser, like the dentist, was not a place for young children.

The lack of “toys” and “prizes” as a motivating factor for denying Emily access to the dentist can again be connected to the CPSC’s Age Determination Guidelines (Therell, 2002). The guidelines describe “appropriate and appealing toy characteristics” (Therell, p. 7) for discrete age bands, such as “19 through 23 months” and “2 years” (p. 7) (Emily was 27 months at the time of this interaction). While the guidelines are established out of a motivation for safety precautions, their presence is translated culturally as age-based segregation – spaces which lack those “appropriate and appealing” qualities for 2-year-old children are thereby deemed implicitly inappropriate for 2-year-olds.

Each of these episodes, while mundane and seemingly innocuous on their own, can be seen together as an extension of adult control into children’s lives through the division of children into discrete age-bands and subsequent denial of access for those age-bands into certain areas of life. Emily’s world is divided into two categories: one which she is denied access to, and one which is explicitly “for kids,” in particular those
who are “wee” and “little.” The data presented here serves to make visible the divisions of Emily’s childhood, which I turn to in following section as the parameters of her “confined space” (Airés, 1962). This segregation was not sought out by Emily; it was imposed on her by imperial adults as they ordered and categorized the lives of children based on their biological age.

“It’s Not Real Class”: Confined Spaces

What is Emily left with after the carving away of much of non-2-year-old society from her life? While the above data primarily focused on aspects of society which excluded Emily because of her age, I turn now to areas in society which included Emily because of age. These elements of society became the world that Emily knows – the world she was granted access to by imperial adults. Here again I take up Ariès’ concept of “confined spaces,” as explored in Chapter I, and explore how this notion is actualized in Emily’s experience. This lens allows insight into how Emily’s world is partitioned according to adult-desires and yields a novel understanding of how different elements of Emily’s life were constructed by the adults around her.

These confined spaces of Emily’s world are often depicted as less-real and less-meaningful than their adult-counterparts. I will analyze how this is felt in Emily’s life as she got her haircut, attended gymnastics class, went to the playground, used toys at home and school, and ate meals with her family.

As Kate picked Emily up from school one afternoon, they started talking about Emily’s haircut, which they were heading to next. The mother of one of Emily’s
classmates overheard, and asked Kate, “Where are you going [for the haircut]?” to which Emily replied, “Kidville.” Both moms laughed, exclaiming, “Where else would you go!” and, “Is there another option?!?” Kate and the other mother made clear that not only is Kidville the obvious choice, it is the only choice – if a child gets a haircut, it must be within this confined space. As Kate pushed Emily’s stroller towards Kidville, I asked her for more about Emily’s experience around haircuts. She replied, “She’s learned that a haircut means that you can watch a show, sit in the car, and sometimes got a lollipop.” Kate provided a similar perspective in an interview two weeks later, as she commented that, “She [Emily] just likes, you know, the fun experience – go and sit in the little car.”

This mirrored elements of the dentist dialogue, in which Kate described how the lack of toys, TV, and prizes at her dentist meant it was not a space for children; here, the presence of TV, a “little car” (the barber chair at Kidville is the driver seat in a plastic car), and a lollipop-reward make Kidville a space explicitly for children. It is significant that Kate described Emily’s experience with haircuts not in relation to the actual activity taking place – the cutting of hair – but to the ostensibly child-appropriate features of the place. Kate emphasized Emily’s relationship with TV, toys, and rewards. From an adult-imperialist perspective, Emily’s world was understood as necessarily framed outside of the “mature community activities” of adults and inside of what is seen as appropriate for young children. I use this scenario to highlight that Kidville was crafted as a confined space in which Emily could get her haircut; it seemed implausible to the adults that Emily’s haircut could occur outside of this space.
I argue that confined spaces such as Kidville impede Emily’s expression of agency as a result of the cultural, developmental assumptions that are made about her in these settings. Emily, as a child, is placed in spaces deemed ostensibly appropriate for children. She is accordingly treated like a child (reminiscent of Schapiro’s insights in Chapter II), reifying the need for her to exist in a space for children. There is no path “out” of the confined space for Emily; as long as her status is “child” this is the only plausible place for her culture to place her. I use the data below to argue that Emily’s conscription into confined spaces of childhood, such as Kidville, served to ossify the social construction of “child” onto her social status.

Arriving at Kidville, Emily watched as a young girl got out of the barber shop chair-car with a lollipop in each hand. The hairdresser next hoisted Emily up into the chair and, after discussing with Kate her requests for hairstyle, addressed Emily: “All right, do you want to watch, um, Daniel Tiger?” When Emily responded quite positively, the hairdresser remarked with dry irony, “How did I guess!” With the show turned on, the hairdresser begins her work. Again, the actual activity was only referenced with Kate, whereas Emily was immediately directed away from the authentic subject matter and towards the TV. Shortly, the hairdresser was ready to work on the back of Emily’s head, and so placed a small plastic bucket with a few toys in it on Emily’s lap. She used this to entice Emily to look down so she could work on the back of her head: “Oh my god, I have a question. Can you do me a favor? Can you look in this bucket? Do you see a zebra in there (at the bottom of the bucket)?” Emily responded yes, and the hairdresser countered with
Oh my goodness you found it right away. Now look deep deep deep inside – do you see a horse? Look deep down in that bucket. Stay just where you are. Do you see the green frog? Good job, you can watch TV now.

Emily was once again not included in any meaningful conversation about the activity at hand and is instead manipulated through the use of toys. Emily’s confined space appeared to be defined (by adults) by the presence of appropriate material goods and not an authentic connection to the goings on around her. In the confined space of Kidville, Emily was constructed as a child, denied opportunity to engage in the actual, authentic subject matter (the haircut), and presented instead with artifacts “appropriate” to childhood such as a Daniel Tiger episode and plastic toys.

Emily’s confined space of childhood was likewise depicted as less-real then the mature version when she attended her first gymnastics class. While her desire was to join the gymnastics team like Susan (above), she was instead enrolled in an open-play class in the same space. Her class was specifically for children aged six months to four years, though the staff member at the desk outside informed me that children join the program “usually more like one year [old]” and when I asked Kate what the age range was she told me, “I think it might be like 18 months to three or something.” The day I observed the program, there were six children participating, all of whom appeared quite close to Emily’s age. Three of them (including Emily) were from the Little Ones class, and were thus all within the same seven-month age range of the class. So while the stated age range of the program stretched three and a half years, in practice it was much narrower. Other programs offered by Foundations were similarly age-banded: the flier
outside the gym space offered classes called “Almost On My Own 19/24 mos” and “On My Own 2’s.”

As I observed the class, Kate described to me that, “It’s not REALLY like a class – more like an open gym.” Watching from the side as Emily participated, Susan described to me the difference between her and Emily’s programs, or in Kate’s words, the difference between a “class” and “open gym”:

Noah: Susan, is that she same stuff you do?

Susan: No way! We have REAL coaches.

Noah: Who’s the lady here? [A Foundations staff member]

Susan: She’s just watching them.

Noah: OK so who are your coaches?

Susan: She’s one of my coaches.

Noah: Oh so she IS a coach?

Susan: Yea she’s a coach.

Noah: But is she coaching right now?

Susan: No, she’s not coaching, because they’re just – [searching for the words] …being free. But for me, you have to stretch, run, like – they [Emily’s group] just come in and play – we have to do like actual things, like floor, beam. They’re just free – like they can do anything.

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1 These age-bands are nearly exactly the same as the ones provided by the Consumer Product Safety Commission: “19 through 23 months” and “2 years” (Therell, 2002, p. 7).
I spoke to the staff member, who corroborated Susan and Kate’s statements:

No class, just open play. We just supervise it, to make sure, nothing outrageous is going on, and if there is, I’ll stop it. We’re pretty open, like if I see something that’s like, outrageously like crazy, I’ll stop it.

This was further supported by the Foundations staff member at the desk outside of the gym, who explained to me, “It’s an open play, it’s more of a free play.” While Emily asked to join the gymnastics team, she was instead given a gymnastics experience which had “no coaching” and instead featured “open play.”

It is significant that the word “just” was used by both Susan and the coach: the children “just come in and play,” are “just free,” and have “just open play.” The presence of the word here denigrated the activities, implying they were less-than their mature counterpart. It would have seemed odd for Susan to describe her own gymnastics as “just” a team or for the coach to say she was “just” coaching the older group; Susan in fact explicitly calls her coaches “REAL.” Accordingly, Emily’s gymnastic experience, just like her haircut, can be understood as dis-connected from the actual activity – gymnastics – and instead defined by germane aspects of childhood such as free play and supervised un-structured time.

This distinction was drawn again later in the session as Emily and her peers were moving the gymnastics equipment around. While Emily and her peers had access to the same materials as the older children – American Athletic Balance Beams, Mancino Training Shapes, Tumbl Trak Tumbling Mats and Tramp Board – the lack of a coach to guide their use of those materials meant that in practice, Emily and her peers used the materials for non-gymnastics purposes. Emily and the other children began to re-purpose the Training Shapes (arches and wedges) to create an enclosure in which they were
hiding. They then began shrieking, tore down the structure, and built it again. The staff member smiled as she looked at Kate and remarked, “I was gonna say something and then I was like, ‘It’s not real class! It’s like, open gym time.’ So -” The gymnastics mats and materials are turned into play-items for the children and stripped of their intended use in actual gymnastic activity. Emily’s activities can be understood as less-meaningful because they took place outside of the mature community activity of the gymnastics team and occurred instead inside of the confined space of childhood. The coach didn’t bother saying anything because, after all, she was not really coaching. Emily wanted to “be on the team” and yet was confined to “open play.”

In a similarly age-banded episode, Kate, Susan, Emily, and I entered a large park and approached a playground after school one day. Emily called out:

Emily: Let’s go to the Baby Playground.
Noah: “Baby Playground”? This one?
Mom: Yes, (laughing) we call it that.
Emily: Let’s go mommy!
Noah: … how’d it get “Baby”?
Mom: Her school (Susan’s) doesn’t play here.

As was the case for Kate denying Emily access to Susan’s room (due to “small” and “little” toys) and to her dentist (due to lack of toys), the nomenclature used for the Baby Playground shows how prevailing societal forces come to dictate, at the local level, division of young children and the creation of confined spaces.

The Baby Playground was restored and reconstructed ten months prior, and, according to a website detailing the reconstruction, the newly-restored playground is
specifically “geared towards pre-school-aged children.” This age-based construction was accomplished through “increased toddler swings” and the “creation of organized play experiences for 2- to 5-year-olds within the central zone of the playground.” This is part of a systemic focus on age-based construction and equipment use in playgrounds, mandated by the New York State Department of Health’s [NYS DOH] statement on playground safety (NYS DOH, 2018) as well as the CPSC’s Public Playground Safety Handbook (CPSC, 2015). The NYS DOH document on playground safety asks parents to “make sure your child uses age-appropriate equipment,” and outlines that “children ages two to five should not climb higher than 60 inches” (NYS DOH, 2018, “What Playground Equipment,” para. 1). Similarly, the CPSC document includes a section titled “age separation,” which states that “the landscaping of the playground should show the distinct areas for the different age groups” (CPSC, 2015, p. 6) and also offers “examples of age appropriate equipment” (p. 7).

It became apparent that the playground’s re-construction was designed for Emily’s age-band and, accordingly, Susan’s school did not use this playground. Consequentially, as Kate described, the playground came to be known to Emily’s family as the Baby Playground. It was named so not because of who it was designed for (Emily’s peers) but rather who avoided it (Susan’s school).

A defining feature of Emily’s confined space of childhood was the presence of material goods which were designed and selected intentionally by adults for children of a particular age. One example of this at home was a Melissa and Doug Geometric Stacker Toddler Toy (Item #567), which rested on top of her toy shelf. According to the company website, the toy was designed for “2+ years” and is “great for building early
shape, color, and size differentiation skills” (Melissa & Doug, n.d., “Details,” para. 3). The Compliance Manager at Melissa and Doug shared with me the “list of the factors used to determine age grading of our toys.” The document references the CPSC Age Determination Guidelines (Therell, 2002), which is referred to throughout this chapter and is found to have an outsized influence in the manifestation of age-based segregation in Emily’s life. The factors included in the Melissa and Doug document ultimately determined that the “appropriate” label for the stacker toy found in Emily’s bedroom was “2+ years.” The material objects of Emily’s life were not accumulated as a result of her experiences and movement throughout her world but were rather the local manifestation of broad cultural structures which give shape to age-based segregation. This presence of this stacker toy in Emily’s bedroom did not represent anything particular about her life but rather displayed the extension of adult regulation into her life.

Emily also encountered age-banded toys at Little Ones. One example at school was the PlanToy Geometric Sorting Board, which had printed on it the label, “2+ years.” A portion of the company website describes how knowledge about child development guides the age-banding of their toys, and explains that the sorting board is an “appropriate toy for 2- to 3-year-olds” (PlanToys, n.d., “2-3 Years,” Para. 1) because of the “intellectual stimulation” it provides (PlanToys, n.d., “Intellectual Stimulation,” para. 1). The Product Management team at PlanToys told me that they “follow the age grading guideline of CPSC” and gave further information for this specific toy:

For the Geometric Sorting Board, we set the age for 2y+ as the kids will start to compare and order the objects and learn to solve the problems. This item helps

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2 I was given permissions to “loosely reference” this document yet asked to keep the specific contents of the document confidential.
encourage kids to develop problem solving skill, fine motor skill, and recognize
the shapes and colors. (Warintorn P., personal communication, January 5, 2018)

I asked Tanya how toys are selected for the Little Ones, to which she told me they
needed to have “age appropriate toys” and reviewed how certain puzzles are “within
their ballpark.” A broader sampling of age-graded toys present in Emily’s life is
available in Appendix L.

Similar to the age-banded nature of her toys, Emily used plastic dining-ware
during mealtimes, in contrast to those used by adults around her. Kate blushed and
laughed lightly when I asked her why: “Emily hasn’t thrown a plate on the floor since
she was eight months old. But I don’t know, we still keep giving her plastic plates.”

John mentioned that when they recently took Emily to a restaurant, they gave her a
plastic water bottle to drink out of and “she threw a fit because she wanted the fancy
restaurant glass” that Kate and John had. Kate and John acknowledged that this is
typical, as John explained, “I think she senses it sometimes. Like, she wants the ‘big kid’
fork. Like, there is something different and she wants the cool thing,” to which Kate
added, “the thing that everybody else has.” John concluded: “I think that she sees us and
Susan, and then she’s like, ‘I don’t want this stupid kid thing.’ She doesn’t SAY that,
but…”

Kate then volunteered that, “there’s just so many examples of kids’ stuff,” and
mentions “kid shampoo vs. adult shampoo – Susan uses adult shampoo now so
sometimes Emily uses adult shampoo too.” I pressed Kate on this, asking why she has
different shampoos for the girls. Kate considered the question and softly whispers, “I
dunno…so it doesn’t sting their eyes? I don’t know. Made for sensitive…” I asked if in
fact it does sting her eyes when she uses it. Kate again laughed lightly, incredulous now
about the age-based distinction: “No! Neither of them have ever been stung in the eyes. They’re like totally fine.” John joined in, feeling duped: “Ah! We’ve been marketed to!”

Emily’s confined space was constructed by her parents as one in which her age was equated with potential mishaps, such as breaking silverware and glasses and reacting negatively to shampoo. This age-related potential, absent of empirical experiences with her actually doing these things, was then used to dictate the material goods that made up her space of childhood. Ultimately, Kate and John recognized that Emily was capable of engaging with adult materials such as plates, glasses, and shampoo, and yet their adult-aversion to this prevents her from doing so. She was segregated from elements of “mature community activities,” which were replaced with versions ostensibly more appropriate for her age.

The confined spaces reviewed above – Kidville, gymnastics, Baby Playground, materials goods (toys and utensils) – were crafted by adults for Emily to inhabit. Their existence, content, and orientation revolved around developmental assumptions about who Emily was. These assumptions and the environments they were correlated with came to define the cultural spaces in which adults allowed Emily to exist. The adult assumptions present in the confined spaces of Emily’s life were thus experienced as core qualities which reverberated through Emily’s life as she moved between these spaces. The presence of these confined spaces led to a life in which Emily was subjected to the persistent, ubiquitous forces of developmental assumptions and expectations.
Summary

The data presented here shows how Emily was segregated from mature community activities, and concurrently confined to particular spaces of childhood, based on her biological age. Emily was denied access to several areas of life that she desired to become a part of. These areas of life included her sister’s camp, bedroom, and gymnastics program, and adult-only spaces such as dentists and hairdressers. Meanwhile, the spaces she was confined to – and the material items found within those spaces – reflect societal systems designed to create a specific world for 2-year-old children, such as the playground, classroom, art studio, and gymnastics class. These societal systems include federal and state guidelines such as CPSC age-grading guidelines and NYS DOH playground safety guidelines, which are in turn instantiated at the local level by Emily’s parents and teachers. Thus, adult-imperialism can be seen to impose upon Emily a system in which she is alternately segregated from, or included within, discrete parts of the world by adults based on her biological age.

Infantilization

Overview

Infantilization is a process in which, co-occurring with age based segregation (Heywood, 2001), adults “take some fairly obvious biological feature of the age in
question and graft on to it a series of more general qualities” (p. 40). Heywood here takes the horticultural technique of grafting, which involves inserting tissue from one plant into another such that the host plant comes to display qualities of the new tissue. Likewise, infantilization, as explored in this section, occurs as the adults Emily encounters insert “general qualities” into her life which ultimately serve to restrict and suppress her competencies. Grafting, as analyzed in Emily’s world, is accomplished through the adult-insistence on age-based nomenclature and corresponding adherence to associated developmental expectations. This represents a second arm of adult imperialism, as adults extend control into the lives of children by denying them the opportunity to use, express, and develop their skills and competencies.

Emily was seen to be infantilized by the “particular group of people with power over” (Canella, 1997, p. 63) her, as cultural expectations mitigate her displayed competencies. Burman furthers this argument, noting that childhood has been culturally constructed “as a period of dependency” (1994, p. 55). In this manner, “dependency” is seen as a “general quality” which, while biologically true for some areas of Emily’s life, is grafted throughout her life in a denial of the areas in which she is not necessarily dependent. Brief examples of infantilization, covered in depth later in this section, include Kate’s demand that “We’re going to get in the stroller” despite Emily’s requests to walk, as well as Emily’s classroom teacher preforming basic tasks for Emily (such as eating her lunch and taking her jacket off) that at home she does for herself.
“She is Still a Toddler”: Inescapable Nomenclature

Wee Studio, Little Ones, Baby Playground, Kidville, Toddler Toy – the names and titles in the previous section suggest that nomenclature plays a clear role in demarcating Emily’s childhood. In past centuries, nomenclature for children – especially young children – was largely ambiguous and interchangeable, as Ariès (1962) cites, among others, a 1688 book on children that “admitted that there were no terms…to distinguish” between varying ages of childhood and that “there was virtually only one word in use,” which was the French “enfant,” translated by Ariès as “child” (p. 25).

Canella shows how the prevailing cultural attitude towards children in the later decades of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century became one in which specific “years and months dictated capacities and achievements” (1994, p. 16). Consequentially, names and labels were added to those years and months. This was true in Emily’s life, as displayed in the end of year report prepared by the classroom teachers. The introductory lines to the report explicitly highlight and connect Emily’s date of birth, classroom title, and current age in years and months:

**EMILY WALSH**
D.O.B.: [--]
Classroom: Little Ones (2017-2018)

Emily is a 2 years and 11 months old girl...

It is significant to note that the names and titles that sharply demarcate Emily’s world are themselves relatively recent cultural inventions, displaying the historically fluid and temporal nature of childhood. I use data in this section to examine how nomenclature
associated with those “years and months” and “capacities and achievements” was imposed on, and experienced by, Emily.

Adult imperialism is not neutral; the imposed control over children’s lives – in this case through the use of age-based nomenclature and the subsequent grafting of general qualities onto Emily’s life – was felt by Emily in mundane moments. Titles matter, and bring with themselves general qualities. At the conclusion of an extended discussion about whether or not Emily can eat a peach (included at length in Chapter VI, in “Resistance”), Emily offered a clear display of how this nomenclature mattered to her. Emily adamantly rejected a small slice of peach and explained her reasoning by stating that she is dis-similar to the peach:

Emily: You put a little peach in here? (her bowl)
Kate: - and?
Emily: I'm not little! I don’t need to eat a little peach!
Kate: You don’t have to eat it.
Emily: This is a LITTLE PEACH!
Kate: I know - it was just the - from cutting it - it was so hard, it was hard to get it, in like, perfect little, slices.

Emily connected her status as “not little” with her rejection of the “little” peach. She rejected her status of “little” through her rejection of the peach. Yet, as is shown in the data here, nomenclature was not easily swept aside by Emily. These age-based words – small, little, toddler, baby – held real, unmistakable and undeniable sway in Emily’s life. They were ever-present and never-avoided.
The importance of age-based nomenclature, and the general qualities which come grafted with relevant titles, was recognized by the adults in Emily’s life, including her teachers, her mother, and her babysitter. When I asked the teachers about the name of Emily’s class, Tanya described that “Little Ones” is “an identification - it’s an identity…you belong to Little - when the child is entering, that he belong [sic] to Little Ones’ room.” The teachers used the phrase “Little Ones” to refer to the children during typical classroom moments such as group time and transitions, something I observed repeatedly. The consistent use of the phrase seemed to describe a category of people and was not necessarily restricted to its use as a title of the classroom. Whereas other hypothetical class names do not carry a sense of student-description – the Blue Room, Classroom 2, etc. – the phrase “Little Ones” both labeled the classroom and served as a very present adjective for its inhabitants. This was the omnipresent reminder in Emily’s life of who her world saw her as. She was little and she belonged in Little Ones.

Consistent with this view, Kate described to Emily her maturation through the use of age-based nomenclature on three occasions. On the first occasion, Kate related to me an anecdote from the previous day:

She [Emily] was calling herself a baby, and then I said, ‘You’re not a baby you’re really a toddler.’ And we happened to be in a cab –and Susan reached over and said ‘I’m a toddler’ – she was pretending to BE Emily talking – and then it started this whole back and forth, Emily is saying, ‘I’m a toddler’ and Susan is saying, ‘I’m a toddler’ – like, it was a whole cab ride - back and forth.

This phrase “I’m a toddler” grew to be an inside joke between Kate, Emily, and Susan and was often repeated with mirth in the following weeks. It seemed to serve both as a joke and also a topical index, through which Emily could explore what, in fact, it meant
to be a toddler. Two months later, Kate and Emily were walking home after school and revisited the nomenclature:

Kate: We’re gonna go to “Infants and Toddlers” tomorrow (a class Kate formerly taught at a different school), even though you’re not a baby – or a toddler really – you’re a Little One.

Emily: Um, I’m just a toddler.

Kate: Oh, you’re still a toddler?

Emily: Yea.

Kate: Ok.

Emily explored the subject again with her mother a number of weeks later:

Emily: Mom, when did I become a baby?

Kate: What?

Emily: When did I become a baby?

Kate: When did you turn a baby?

Emily: Uh-huh.

Kate: Oh – well – you were a baby when you were born - and then maybe – I dunno – maybe when you were like one, we started calling you a toddler, remember?

Emily: But I'm not a toddler.

Kate: You’re not? What are you now? Now you're a Little One.
Emily: Mm-hmm.
Kate: You're not even a toddler anymore!?
Emily: No! (She seems proud and happy)
Kate: Okay so you were a baby and then you are a toddler and now you're a Little One. What are you going to be next?
Emily: I dunno.

Extracting the key lines from each piece of data, it became clear that while Kate used nomenclature in a linear progression from small to big as Emily grows, it was not always done in consonance with Emily’s self-descriptions:

When Emily described herself as a baby, Kate said, “You’re not a baby you’re really a toddler.”
When Kate said, “You’re not a baby – or a toddler really – you’re a Little One,” Emily said, “I’m just a toddler.”
When Emily said she is not a toddler, Kate said, “You were a baby and then you are a toddler and now you're a Little One.”

For Kate, there were clear titles for each of the stages of life which Emily passed through. Emily was taught these titles, and their progression through her life, as they were applied to her.

Later, I asked Emily “what is a toddler” during an opportune moment in her play with Susan. Susan had picked up a pretend microphone and initiated a “podcast” in which she “interviewed” Emily while Kate was in the kitchen. While Emily initially
answered, “A toddler is what we are talking about – a toddler is you, you’re the toddler,”

Susan provided a more adult-definition, which Emily deftly aped:

Susan:  It’s not a baby – but its –
Emily:  - it’s not a baby –
Susan:  - it’s a young – it’s a young –
Emily:  - it’s a –
Susan:  - it’s a three or a –
Emily:  - it’s a young –
Susan:  - it’s a 2- or 3-year-old – 2- or 3-year-olds are usually toddlers – so (turning to Emily)

– What’s your name?

Emily:  Emily.
Susan:  Oh thank you! This is Emily Dylan Walsh – can you say
Emily Dylan Walsh?
Emily:  Emily Dylan Walsh.
Susan:  THAT is a 2-3-year-old – and she is a toddler.

Emily came to understand her specific cultural title as she heard others, such as Susan and Kate, describe to her how her age dictated what she is.

Amanda, Emily’s babysitter (two or three times a week during the summer, less frequently during the school year), was less nuanced in her nomenclature than Kate, and more plainly used “little” as the dominant descriptor when talking to Emily, typically in a more pejorative fashion. When Emily asked to leave her high chair before she has eaten, Amanda called Emily “little girl” in a humorously scornful and gentle tone; when Emily
pusheed the elevator button, Amanda thanked Emily for being her “little helper”; Amanda noticed Emily’s tiara and told her she looked like a “little princess”; Amanda exclaimed “Look at you, your little Wonder Woman costume!” as she highlighted Emily’s outfit one day. Amanda suddenly changed course after a several-week stretch in which she did not see Emily. Her comment betrayed an insistence to see Emily through a lens of big-or-little: “You're so big! You’re getting so so big - and you're gonna be up to here one day! You’re gonna look down on people! And say, ‘Oh my god you’re so little and I’m so big’!”

While listening to Amanda repeatedly label Emily as “little” I could not help but consider Emily’s forceful statement towards the peach, “I’m not little!” In the data above, showing how Kate, Tanya, and Amanda use age-based words, nomenclature is not abstract or metaphorical, but rather is used to describe to Emily who she is and what her status is. Through this repetition, a sense of location-of-age, a subcategory of childhood, was grafted onto Emily’s life. Essentially, the titles are verbal reifications of the age-based segregation explored earlier. This confined Emily to particular spaces within childhood in strict adherence to her biological age: she was a baby (when she was born), then a toddler (around one year), now she is a Little One (as she starts school, at two years five months); she is little, but then becomes big, and will later be “so big.”

In contrast to the use of age-based nomenclature by the adults in her life, Emily does not describe a linear progression of her growth. Emily described herself throughout the research as variously “little,” “a toddler,” “a baby,” “a little baby,” “two,” “a baby,” “a bigger one,” “just a toddler,” “a Little One,” “not little,” “not a toddler,” “a big girl,” “not a baby,” and, “a big kid.” Her use of the nomenclature of childhood is congruent
with Hviid (2008b), who examined the notion that while adults see children as on a linear developmental journey from “small” to “big,” children are more prone to understand age, growth, and size as paradigmatically fluid and contextual. As Hviid noted, reflections from children in her study produce a “zig zag” understanding of growth: as the school year ends, they are “big” because they have grown in relation to the classroom setting and relative to the beginning of the year, and yet as the next school year begins, they are “small” again, as they are now placed in ever-“bigger” classroom settings, into which their bodies must now grow. Emily uses the nomenclature of childhood to suggest a discursive relationship between growth and time. Emily was a “baby” and “two” on the same day in August; she was a Little One but “not little” in October; she was a “big kid” and yet also “so small” in February.

Titles for Emily were contextual and fluid rather than teleological and linear. On an unusually warm winter day, Emily and I played together at a playground. The day before, Emily had been explaining to me that she does not use pacifiers anymore, and that she does use the potty (she was potty training), because she is a “big kid.” Yet at the playground, she described herself as “small”:

Emily: Let’s swing (from the trapeze bar).
Noah: I can’t really swing, because my body is different than yours.
Emily: I know, because mine is so small.
Noah: I’m very curious at what you just said - that your body is so small. Yesterday you told me that you don’t use the paci because you’re not a baby, and that you do use the potty
cause you’re a big kid - so I’m a little confused - are you small or are you big?

Emily: Big. Because I’m not a baby.

Noah: How do you feel - do you feel big or small?

Emily: Um - small - cause I can’t reach those.

(Points to an element on the playground structure)

Noah: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Mm-hmm - cause I can just reach this (the trapeze bar) - I can reach this.

Noah: Up here?

Emily: I can reach this.

Noah: But not that one?

Emily: Yea – cause that’s so high.

This excerpt makes clear that Emily was aware that some things in her life make her big – discarding her pacifiers and starting to use the potty – while other things in her life make her small – like comparing her body to mine while using playground equipment. She used these terms in a nuanced fashion, connecting them to milestones (“not a baby”) or physical capacities (“I can reach this”).

Yet, Emily’s flexibility in self-application of these terms was in contrast with their static and stubborn adult-application. It is clear that in Emily’s world, age-based nomenclature – Little Ones, little, small, toddler – does not only describe who she is but also delimits what she can do. These titles and their connotations are inescapable, as it was found that adults in her life are explicit regarding the intransient connection between
titles and competencies. Accordingly, Emily was not allowed to display a competency outside the expected range of her title; I will explore data which supports this argument from Emily’s interactions with adults around the connection between her competency and age-based titles.

In an interview one evening after putting Emily to bed, Kate stated that Emily “has the rationality of a 2-year-old, [but] she is able to articulate it, what she is thinking.” Kate here was recognizing Emily’s clear ability to pursue her own goal by verbally negotiating with teachers and parents but also denigrating Emily’s cognitive abilities. Kate disregarded Emily’s competencies (articulation and verbal expression in the pursuit of goals) due to Emily’s inescapable status as a “2-year-old.” Kate mentioned this same notion again in a later interview, explaining, “I feel like I can communicate with Emily (laughing), and I’m like… ‘Oh right… [she’s two].’

The same sentiment was echoed by the teachers throughout the research. In the end of year report, Emily was described as having “an articulate and comprehensive vocabulary.” She spoke in long sentences using sophisticated words in the correct context, sounding almost adult-like. Michelle added in her interview that

She [Emily] is so verbal, but she also, um, she's still going through - through things. Especially with adults, she can just talk to you and connect with you. It was definitely surprising, she came in with so much language.

Tanya echoed this sentiment in class one afternoon as she mentioned that Emily is “smart, observant - her language is very sophisticated for her age.” She continued and described Emily’s growing competencies in peer social play and independence with classroom tasks, but paused for a moment to reflect and consider these new skills.
contextually: “It’s just, she is still a toddler, no matter how mature she acts - she is still a toddler.”

Tanya’s use of “still a toddler” displays how age-based nomenclature is found to be inescapable despite clear behavior by Emily which would require adults treating her differently. This was displayed clearly by Kate as she described Emily’s recent visit to her dentist. At one point during the visit, Kate and the dentist were attempting to convince Emily that it was time “to say goodbye to all of our pacis.” At that point, Kate described,

Emily launched into this five-step reason, you know, why she couldn't not have her pacifier. ‘How am I going to go to sleep?’ ‘I really need them.’ ‘Who's going to have them if I don't have them?’ ‘I just can't go to sleep without them’. [The dentist] looked up at me and at the dental hygienist and said, ‘I think she might be a lawyer! Well she kind of convinced me, but no! The answer is still no. We have to get rid of these!’

Kate reflected on the anecdote, describing Emily’s argument as “really cute” and that it was a “really super cute little moment.” The dentist aw Emily’s competencies as a sign of something she might become in the future – a lawyer – while disregarding their authentic use in the present; Kate likewise noted Emily’s argument as robust (“launched into”) yet infantilized her by dismissing the same argument as “super cute.”

The difficulty and tension in both respecting a child’s (often growing) competencies while also adhering to the “general qualities” grafted onto the child’s age makes conditions ripe for infantilization. When Emily’s competencies betrayed the adult-expectations associated with her age-based nomenclature, they were ignored by Kate and Tanya in order to maintain an adherence to cultural norms. As described by the adults in the data presented here, Emily was communicative, smart, articulate, sophisticated, and convincing. Yet, due to the inescapable nature of the qualities grafted
onto the culturally constructed nomenclature of Emily’s childhood, these competencies are recognized only long enough to be swept aside and replaced with notions of a “cute” “toddler.” Emily may be a lawyer one day, but for now, she was pointedly denied the opportunity.

“No You’re Not Gonna Walk”: Restriction and Suppression

Inescapable nomenclature in Emily’s world coexisted with the restriction and suppression of her competencies. The latter phenomenon is explored here in depth by reviewing three ways in which this was practiced by teachers and parents during the research. I will first review Emily’s socks and shoes over the course of a day at Little Ones, then lunchtime tasks in Little Ones, and lastly, the prevalence of Emily’s stroller. Through these examples it can be seen that adults in Emily’s life restricted her ability to practice or gain certain competencies and likewise suppressed the ways in which she was able to use those competencies.

Coming down from a snowy rooftop playground one day at Little Ones, Emily waited by her cubby in the school hallway. My field note read, “Tanya is stripping down Emily – jacket, boots, socks.” This occurred repeatedly throughout the year, as I recorded in my fieldnotes at different times:

Emily starts to take off jacket by herself. Tanya holds her [Emily’s] right arm, finishes taking off her jacket for her, holds her arm briefly while tending to other children, then lets her go, and gives her her jacket.

Tanya takes Emily’s hat and jacket, puts her hat on, puts her jacket on, Emily does none of it, then zips her jacket up all by herself.
On this particular snowy day, Tanya told Emily that her “socks are completely wet” and so “I’m going to change your socks.” Over the remainder of the day, she was infantilized by a string of adults – Tanya, Michelle, Yasmin, and Kate – around the fact that her socks were first wet and then missing. I argue that this represents infantilization, as a leg of adult imperialism, because the adults grafted the quality of dependency onto Emily’s status as a young child in an inescapable manner by suppressing her competencies. Emily was made to be dependent, out of no volition of her own. Tanya took off Emily’s socks, a task I had observed Emily do independently on numerous occasions; Tanya knew this too, which she confirmed the next month: “She can put her socks and shoes on by herself, she does it.” Emily then entered the classroom, barefoot, and sat down on the rug with other students listening to Michelle read *Froggy Gets Dressed* by Jonathan London (“Ages 3-5 years”).

The synopsis of the book acutely captures the local infantilization that Emily was in the midst of being subject to: “Rambunctious Froggy hops out into the snow for a winter frolic but is called back by his mother to put on some necessary articles of clothing.” The book’s narrative revolves around a pattern in which Froggy goes out into the snow, only to be called back by his mother each time because he has forgotten an item of clothing. Michelle turned aside from the text after one of these narrative cycles to tell the children: “Do you see? Froggy has no pants. Silly froggy!” I jotted down in my field note as this was happening, “Children are humorously incompetent, so we do everything for them.” This seemed to be the connotation both of the Froggy narrative and Tanya’s removal of Emily’s socks.
Emily stayed barefoot following the book during lunch and naptime. After she woke up from her nap, Tanya was no longer in the classroom and the remaining teachers seemed to blame Emily, not Tanya, for the circumstances leading to her bare feet:

Yasmin: Emily can you find your shoes? Is this one yours?
Emily: No, Adalia’s.
Yasmin: OK, so I found one of Adalia’s.
Emily: These are mine.
Yasmin: But where is your sock?
Emily: I don’t know.

Helen: I thought everybody was going to start putting their socks inside their shoes so that when we want to get them out we can find them.

Yasmin: Okay let me just give this to Adalia. Oh did you find your socks?
Emily: No.
Yasmin: Oh your socks are wet
Emily: My socks are wet.

Kate then entered the classroom to pick up Emily, and again Emily’s ability to do a task for herself was denied.

Kate: Hi!
Emily: Mom my socks are wet -
Kate: Oh we have other socks -

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3 Helen is a fourth teacher, present after nap time until the later 6:00pm dismissal
Emily: - so I'm not going to wear them.
Kate: No you are. I'll get the ones in the box.
Emily: I need my shoes.
Kate: OK we can do it.

Kate put Emily’s shoes on for her; my field note reads, “Kate puts Emily’s shoes on very rushed and rapidly, because she did not want to miss the elevator.”

The string of actions made it hard to not see Emily’s suppressed competencies as parallel to the way Froggy was portrayed as “silly” by Michelle. The data here shows with clarity how the process of infantilization works. After Tanya took Emily’s socks off, she stayed barefoot until after nap, at which point Emily did not know where her socks are – because Tanya had taken them off and not told Emily where she placed them. Helen then reminded Emily of the new class expectation and Yasmin was surprised that Emily was barefoot. Tanya’s earlier repression of Emily’s abilities led to the further suppression of her competencies.

Just as Froggy became “silly Froggy,” Emily was constructed as incapable and dependent by her teachers. The presence of *Froggy Gets Dressed* in the data was not ironic or coincidental but rather part of the process of grafting general qualities onto particular biological ages. Michelle belittled Froggy as “silly,” congruent with the book’s own description of him as “rambunctious,” and elicited a laugh from the students at his lack of competency to get himself dressed. Meanwhile, Emily was prevented from dressing herself through Tanya’s infantilization of her. She suddenly found herself as Froggy – not because she couldn’t get herself dressed but because adults around her did not expect her to.
This process of restricting and suppressing Emily’s competencies through infantilization was also displayed during Emily’s lunchtime interactions with Tanya. During these moments, Tanya routinely does mundane tasks for Emily that she was certainly capable of doing on her own. Tanya does these tasks for any number of nuanced, interrelated factors; there is no “single” or even “unified” motivation or factor which determines her behavior here.\(^4\) Tanya in fact states in an interview that she prefers for Emily to do these tasks by herself, showcasing that there is more going on here than any simple explanation can provide. As such, I do not imply that restricting Emily was the intended goal or motivating factor for Tanya’s actions, but rather to argue that the reality experienced by Emily because of those actions was that her agency was depressed as these activities were done for her. Emily’s ability to operate agentively at her lunch table was suppressed because her teachers preformed certain actions for her without her invitation. Below I provide examples from the data for how this occurs.

One day as lunchtime drew near, Emily checked in her hallway cubby to get her lunchbox. Seeing that it was not there, she went back into Little Ones, where Tanya took her by the hand and led her to her spot at the lunch table, where her lunch box had already been placed on the table. As Emily sat down in her chair, Tanya opened up Emily’s pasta container and poured the food out onto a paper plate. As Emily started eating her pasta, Tanya held up a container of grapes and asked, “Emily do you need me to help you with this?” Tanya promptly opened the container without waiting for a response.

\(^4\) Given the context of the data – during a busy lunch period in a nursery classroom – a multiplicity of factors is certainly at play, likely including an adult-desire for efficiency and cleanliness, an adult-perception of Emily as simply incapable (which, if the case, would be inaccurate), and an adult-rendering of Emily as immature and too-silly to be trusted with such a responsibility.
response. Tanya followed with another question, placing a yogurt container and vegetable pouch in front of Emily, asking, “Do you want this or this?” Emily picked up the yogurt and hands it to Tanya, who quickly opened it and placed it back down on the table. A few moments later, Emily handed the vegetable pouch to Tanya. Tanya held the pouch and says, “All done? You want to squeeze it? Squeeze it here.” Tanya placed the lip of the pouch in Emily’s mouth and squeezes the remaining vegetables out. A few minutes later, Emily stood up from the table and Tanya threw out the paper plate that had been filled with pasta.

This was typical of Tanya and Emily’s interactions around lunch. On another occasion, Tanya unpacked the items in Emily’s lunchbox and placed them on the table, poured her pasta from the container on to a paper plate, placed her vegetable pouch next to the plate along with crackers and goldfish, and then opened up her carrot container. Tanya denied Emily the opportunity to do any of these tasks for herself: get her lunch box, find her seat, open the pasta container, pour the pasta on a plate, open the grape container, open the yogurt, squeeze the pouch, and throw out the plate. These were not isolated tasks but rather connected together to become the whole sequence of lunch time. This was an entire swath of action that Emily was restricted from displaying her competency within. Despite Emily clearly demonstrating the requisite physical and cognitive skills for these tasks, Tanya continuously set up Emily’s lunch for her, opening and closing containers, and at times physically feeding Emily. Emily could do these tasks; she was not allowed to through infantilization.

Likewise, Kate restricted Emily’s ability to walk and suppresses her growing stamina in walking through her repeated insistence on using Emily’s stroller despite
Emily’s many protestations. Kate explained that her intent in the use of the stroller is to get both daughters to school early:

> We have to take Susan to school at a given time. And so it’s not free flowing. I like to get her there early because I think it’s easier to transition to the room. I just like them to be early.

> I like to be early. There is an added benefit if you get there early because you get to have this whole interaction with your teacher.

Kate’s intent here – to be on time – was not nefarious or ill-considered; she was seeking out what she considers a good outcome for her daughters. Yet, while the intent was benevolent, it *played out in Emily’s life* as a denial of her requests and a suppression of her capacity to walk. I do not attempt to deny the multiple, overlapping, and nuanced reasons why Kate, or Tanya and the teachers in the previous data, chooses this course of action but rather assert that the adult-agenda drives the formation of a social situation in which Emily’s agency is restricted. Emily’s agenda – to walk – conflicted with Kate’s agenda – to be on time. In these moments of conflict, Kate’s agenda pushed aside Emily’s because of the control that Kate employed through adult imperialism.

Kate and Emily aired their conflicting agendas one morning as they prepared to leave the apartment. As Kate hoisted Emily up and into the stroller, Emily voiced her disagreement: “No I wanna walk.” A version of this phrase was oft-repeated around this moment by Emily, on various days saying, “Mom, I want to walk all the way” and “Mom I wanna walk for a little bit.” On this particular day, Kate explained, “It’s too far.” Emily, of course, re-asserted her claim: “I wanna walk,” to which Kate offered that she can walk to the elevator and through the lobby, to “say hi to Norman (the doorman) and then you’re gonna hop in the stroller.” This was Kate’s oft-repeated counterargument, explaining on another day, “You’re gonna walk, you’re gonna say hi to Jimmy (a
different doorman), and you’re gonna hop in the stroller.” On this day, the back and forth continued:

Emily: - I’m gonna walk.
Kate: No, you’re gonna walk downstairs, say hi to Norman, and then you’re gonna get in the stroller -
Emily: - Then I’m gonna walk outside.
Kate: No you’re not gonna walk all the way to the grocery store. There’s Norman!

(Walking through the lobby, they exit the building and step onto the sidewalk)
Kate: Alright you may go to the corner, and then get in [the stroller].

Emily walked to the corner, at which point Kate hoisted her up into the stroller. The same pattern played out again weeks later with striking similarity:

Kate: OK when we get outside we’re going to get in the stroller.
Emily: No
Kate: Yes
Emily: No!
Kate: We’re going to say hi to Jimmy, and then we’re going to get in the stroller when we get outside, ok?
Emily: No, no. I want to walk!

(They exit the building and step onto the sidewalk)
Emily: Can I walk for a little bit?
Kate: Not this morning.
Emily: Ahhhh (whining as Kate then hoisted her into the stroller).

On a particularly busy day, Emily and her mom made four successive stroller trips: to and from Susan’s gymnastics class as they drop her off, followed by an hour of play time at home, and then to and from Susan’s gymnastics class as they pick her up. The class was 0.6 miles from home, a distance Kate and I both knew Emily was capable of walking. During the four trips, Emily made her desire to walk abundantly clear, making the following statements over the course of the strolling:

Can I walk a little bit?  
Mom don’t buckle me.  
Mom can I walk?  
Can I walk?  
Mom can I walk?  
Can I walk?  
Mom can I walk a little bit?  
You can’t do it [put me in the stroller], I wanna walk.  
Now can I walk?  
Can I walk around there?  
Can I walk?  
Mom can I walk?

Emily’s requests were denied; she was not allowed to walk during the four trips that afternoon. This string of comments was ignored by Kate as she successfully adhered to her goal of arriving promptly for drop off and pick up. Emily’s voice here was simply ignored in the favor of an adult-agenda.

In each of the above scenarios, Emily expressed clearly her desire to walk and Kate constrained Emily by physically picking her up, placing her in the stroller, and buckling her in. With rare exceptions, Emily did not walk distances further than a block

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5 As early as September 15, and repeated on four other occasions (October 25 and 26, December 21, January 23), when allowed to, Emily walked on the sidewalk for over ten minutes, twice walking the entire one mile between home and school.
or two. Through the repetitive exercise of suppressing Emily’s walking, dependency on the stroller became “grafted” on to Emily.

Summary

The data presented here shows how infantilization works through inescapable nomenclature, correlated developmental assumptions, and the restriction and suppression of competencies. Age-based words saturated Emily’s life, even as she consistently showcased verbal capabilities which disrupted the terms adults applied to her life. She repeatedly displayed competencies in daily tasks such as eating, dressing, and walking which were restricted and suppressed by her teachers and parents. This was accomplished by the adults in her life through the use of “grafting” certain “general qualities” onto Emily: Emily was “cute,” not “articulate”; Emily, like Froggy, was incapable; Emily was dependent on adults at lunch; Emily strolled, she did not walk.

Each of these points represent areas in Emily’s life in which culture – in the form of adult imperialism – overrode her competencies. Emily was restricted through the process of infantilization. The world that Emily encountered imposed certain qualities on her; whether or not these “general qualities” match Emily’s current competencies was irrelevant for her teachers and parents. Adult imperialism extended control into Emily’s life as adults turned their agendas and expectations into the parameters of what she could and could not do.
Regulation

Overview

This section examines how adults extended control into Emily’s life as they regulated what she was allowed to do in particular moments. I highlight how rules saturated Emily’s use of materials and then turn to how adults regulated Emily’s time. Regulation of student behavior was coordinated in Little Ones through adult collaboration, as the teachers made clear to the students that they were each equal-enforcers of the rules. While enforcing a rule in Little Ones, Yasmin commented to a child that “Tanya will give you the same message and Michelle will give you the same message.” Michelle, having overheard, stepped closer and said, “You are right!” Yasmin then drove the point home: “So even if I go away, there’s another teacher that’s going to give you the same message.” This occurred at home as well, as John and Kate made clear statements in support of each other’s rules. In this manner, “regulation” was not something that occurred within individual relationships or nuanced contextual situations; rather, Emily experienced regulation as something that was done by adults and imposed on children.

“They Are in Our Control, Right?”: Imposing Rules

Rules were everywhere in Emily’s life. They were usually enforced regardless of Emily’s consent, typified by Amanda’s statement that, “I know you don’t want to,
but…,” and her mother’s remark, “Sorry, that’s the rule.” Breaking rules could result in consequences, as Emily heard from Yasmin, “If you do it again Emily, you’re going to have to take a break from the sandbox,” and from Tanya, “If you guys will fight, then I will take it away.” Likewise, John described a scene of peer conflict over a toy in the sandbox, and the need for an adult to become involved: “Without intervention, they might just start grabbing toys” from each other. Rules represented a set of permissible behaviors, as John stated in an interview: “There are certain boundaries that they need to be aware of…some undefined, ‘This is OK behavior’.” This is supported by Evie, a support teacher, who mentioned in the group teacher interview, “We have the judgment call. We decide.” I explore here first how rules in Emily’s life typically ignored and subverted her agenda, and then how rules were often stretched beyond their originally-stated safety-purposes.

At the expense of Emily’s agenda, rules regulating her use of materials were imposed according to adult proclivities and preferences. I turn first to how these rules were experienced around keeping particular areas well-organized before, during, and after play. Emily tried to take out additional toys to the ones she was playing with, and was told by John, “If you’re gonna play with something else sweetheart, you need to put these trains away,” and later, “You can’t leave stuff everywhere.” Emily heard the same from Kate: “OK if you take that out (a new game) you need to put all the jewels (from the previous game) back – put them back in and then we’ll start the next game,” and, “You gotta put your trains in the container.” Similarly, Yasmin told Emily that “We need to put the blocks away” before moving to a new activity and Tanya tells her, as she was attempting to take a Ziploc bag filled with paint away from the table it was initially
placed at, that, “These paints are for the table, this is not traveling everywhere, you play only on the light table.” Through these rules, Emily’s use of the toys was regulated to the particular organizational expectations of her parents and teachers.

These sentiments mirror Kate’s interview statement that she expects her children first to take care of remaining tasks (in this case, putting a toy away) before they can play (with a new toy). This is not an inherent requirement for childhood, this is a cultural standard that adults impose on Emily. In a differently constructed setting, Emily could play with all of her toys and then clean them all up at the end of the playtime, or could play with her toys and then expect them to be cleaned up by an adult afterwards. There is no incontrovertible reason why toys must be organized in a particular manner. In each of the data presented here, Emily had an intention for the toys that differed from her teachers and parents. Presented with diverging viewpoints on how the toys should be used and organized, in each instance the adult response was to regulate Emily’s usage of them rather than engage in her perspective.

Additionally, Emily’s use of toys was regulated during her play (not only for organizational purposes), often in conflict with Emily’s agenda for their use. Rules were used to tell Emily what adults see as the proper and appropriate use of the toy – what the toy can and cannot be used for. At school, Yasmin told Emily not to put a plastic sand shovel from the sandbox on the floor: “Oh – careful with that – don’t step on it, this one will break. It is plastic and if you stomp on it, it will crack and then we won’t get to use it anymore.” At home, John told Emily how her toy train cars are supposed to be used: “That train only has one side, so that train HAS to be in front.” On another morning, Emily was holding a balloon by its string as she and Kate prepared to leave the apartment
and indicated that she wanted to hold it in her hand as Kate pushed her in the stroller. Kate removed the balloon string from Emily’s hand and tied it to the handle of the stroller (behind Emily and out of her view), explaining, “This way it won’t break.”

This was a frequently occurring phenomenon in the data throughout all areas of adult imperialism – the assertion of an adult-agenda over and on top of Emily’s own inclination. Kate assumed that Emily wants the balloon when they arrive at the playground and so took it away from her, placing it safely on the handle of the stroller. Emily however had not indicated that she was opposed to the balloon “breaking” – her sole desire had been to hold the balloon while sitting in the stroller. Likewise, Yasmin privileged the future use of the toy in an appropriate manner over Emily’s current use of the toy as an object for stepping on. The rule imposed in both situations did accomplish the adult agenda yet thwarted the possibilities that Emily had inserted into the situation.

In Emily’s life, these rules can be seen to spring from safety concerns yet become exaggerated in their application. I turn to this phenomenon now and explore how rules regarding safety came to be stretched and saturate Emily’s mundane actions. Emily heard plenty of health-and-safety rules: put your coat on; don’t put your head in the fence, it might get stuck; don’t touch the wall in the subway station; don’t stand in the bathtub; stop walking when you get to the corner; don’t lick the fruit before it’s washed; hold the railing while descending stairs; don’t drink from the water table in Little Ones; don’t eat food off the floor. While each of these rules were oriented around Emily’s health rather than adult expectations (such as toy organization), it was difficult to note this distinction in practice. It’s not that there shouldn’t be rules, but that rules crowded Emily’s life with such density that they came to regulate far more than is necessary to keep her healthy.
Adults in Emily’s life were often seen to use the density of rules in Emily’s life to stretch a rule from its original intent (often safety) into further-reaching regulation. Emily was playing at school with her plastic spork (combination spoon-fork) at lunch, and Tanya stated, “Don’t do that - Emily you’re going to cut your hand - it’s not safe - see? Its pointy edges, it’s going to cut it.” Observing Emily as she played, the spork was plainly not sharp enough to cut her hand. While the points of the spork were pointy, and could have hurt a child if poked in the eye or rammed hard again sensitive parts of the body, there was really no way that Emily’s hands appeared in actual danger from her playing with the utensil. The expansion of regulation above and beyond the initial motivation of safety displays the forced nature of many of the rules imposed on Emily and her classmates.

This was true throughout Emily’s time in the classroom, such as when she was tossing small wooden cubes onto the floor and Yasmin told her, “If you want to throw something we can throw the soft balls, these are not for throwing.” Likewise, Emily put small plastic toys into her cup of pretzels one afternoon, mixing them together and saying she is making a birthday cake. While she was no longer eating the pretzels and instead using them as a source of dramatic play, Tanya told her, “You know it’s not a good idea to mix food and toys together.” In both instances, despite the context – Emily was not throwing the cubes at any persons or objects and did not seem to be about to start eating the plastic toys (something I never her saw her come close to doing) – safety was deemed an over-riding concern and led to the regulation of Emily’s behavior by a teacher.

There are, of course, very real safety considerations for young children, and Emily’s teachers repeatedly state that their priority in the classroom is safety. It must be
stated clearly, therefore, that my analysis is not implicating regulation, writ large, as inherently nefarious, ill-informed, or mal-intended. Rather, I seek to highlight how, through the lens of adult imperialism, these safety-rules are not narrowly applied to keep children safe but rather seep into broader areas of behavior-regulation and adult-control. While safety is admittedly a nuanced area in which to apply this analytic lens, my argument here is that there is not always a necessary and direct line from safety concerns into regulation of children’s behavior. There can be room to recognize a child’s competency, to flexibly understand varying levels of safety concerns, and to engage in authentic learning with the child around proximal safety concerns. Each of these possibilities were foreclosed when Emily’s adults regularly turned from an agenda of safety to one of general regulation; as shown above, these regulations were at times rooted in adult-preferences and ideals.

The dual tensions in the data above on toy-use and safety-rules –between adult agendas and Emily’s agenda and between rules that are required for safety and the stretching of those rules to cover larger tracts of Emily’s life – was felt by her teachers. Michelle explained in the group interview that she seeks “shared power” with the students to avoid the feeling of (she uses an exaggerated teacher-authority voice for this) “I’m the teacher and I’m sitting there on my big chair” (an ironic phrase, given the fact that the teachers did sit on the big chairs). However, she quickly then acknowledged that, ultimately, “We ARE the teachers so there is obviously always gonna be that.” She added to this in a later interview:

We technically do whatever we want, right? They are in our control, right? I would never want to be that teacher where I am projecting how I’m feeling or like be the rule-enforcer… You struggle with that safety line, and if a child is not listening to you – how you should handle that… It’s just that balance, when you
really need the child to do what you’re asking, or you have to think about: Is this coming from me, what I want them to do, not necessarily what they want to do or what they need to be doing? Why does she need to be sitting when I give her a high five? I want her to be, but it’s coming from what you want versus what she wants.

Ultimately, Michelle settled on “giving them a sense of control or choice but still holding that role [of power].” Yasmin agreed, stating that when it comes to applying rules:

It’s so tricky! It’s kind of hard. I mean, they are little individuals. They are humans just like us, and I think sometimes we forget that. I think a lot of times as adults we think that we can control these little humans, because they don't know everything yet. You know? But at the same time, they are so smart, they pick up on everything. And they have feelings. And they have knowledge. You know?

Yasmin added in a later interview, “I don’t like to dictate a lot of what should be happening with her learning experience. I feel like she needs to figure it out on her own.”

I ask Yasmin why she used the phrases “little individuals” and “little humans” and she responded she used it instead of “‘children’ that you could just tell what to do and control.” It was clear that Yasmin and Michelle took pains to provide spaces of freedom and exploration for Emily and attempted to cede control in these spaces.

Yet, the tensions between adult and child agendas, and the at-times arbitrary nature of adult rules, is highlighted throughout Emily’s time in Little Ones. Emily absconded her clean-up duties after playing one day, leaving her blocks on the floor while her classmates and teachers began a class-wide clean up. Yasmin told Michelle, who had begun to pick up the blocks Emily had been using, “Don’t pick them up.” Michelle backed away, leaving Yasmin to complete her instructions to Emily: “I saved these blocks for you. I can help you: you put one away, I’ll put one away. I know you don’t want to but we need to.” Emily and Yasmin had diverging agendas; Yasmin enlisted Michelle to support her and together they ensured that Emily submitted to
Yasmin’s agenda around toy-organization. Adult-rules dominated and overwhelmed Emily’s agenda.

Likewise, one afternoon Michelle was handing out cantaloupe to the Little Ones during snack time, requiring them to sit in their chair in order to receive food. Two rules were highlighted in this scenario: adults (not children) control the distribution of, and access to, food at snack time, and adults (not children) control the timing and transition from one activity to the next. Both of these rules were acknowledged routinely and commonly throughout the classroom day; they were accepted as part of the backdrop of daily life in the relationship between the students and teachers. On this day, Yasmin was on the roof with two children, and Tanya was setting up mats for rest time. The class schedule called for music with David after snack, followed by rest time. As Michelle attempted to control the children, her grip on the class became tenuous (likely because Tanya and Yasmin were otherwise occupied). As the children were clamoring for more cantaloupe and more milk, and the requests were piling on faster than Michelle could accommodate them, Emily and two other children left their chairs and began walking around. Michelle was becoming visibly rattled by the volume of requests and general cacophony rising from the table.

At this point, Yasmin re-entered the classroom and proclaimed out-loud, though seemingly directed at Michelle, “So David is here, are we ready for David?” Michelle, relieved for support and at the prospect of transitioning out of snack, quickly said, “OK!” and let out an audible sigh. The adult ability to control Emily and her classmates – as allowed by the two rules outlined earlier – was strengthened as Yasmin joined with Michelle and together they re-asserted control despite student resistance. “Resistance” is
explored further in Chapter VI, where data highlights the capacity of Emily’s resistance to, at times, shape and form her world. In contrast, the data in this section illustrates moments in her life in which adult-control *denies* her the opportunity to meaningfully resist. The collaborative adult insistence on the children following the rules – in regards to food-access and activity-transitions – effectively shut down Emily’s capacity to resist in this moment.

Yuval (Emily’s classmate) disagreed with Michelle and Yasmin, stating, “Let’s finish [snack],” and another classmate chimed in, “Let’s finish milk and water.” Yasmin pushed forward, “So yea, if you’re ready, let’s go sit on the rug.” Yasmin and Michelle then sung together, “Let’s make a circle circle circle, let’s make a circle.” This re-directed most of the students away from the snack table and towards the music rug – except for Emily. Emily was adamant in her resistance (Chapter VI): “No, I’m not done!” to which Yasmin responded, “Emily, David is here. But if you want, later when he leaves we can give you a little more, alright?” That settled it – snack was shut down and Emily begrudgingly proceeded to music.

In both instances – with blocks and at snack – Emily’s teachers collaborated to regulate her behavior, bypassing her agenda and insisting on the static application of rules. The rules were to clean up the blocks and finish snack; Emily’s agenda was swept aside as a result. In a cultural setting not implicated by the control of children through adult-imperialism, an adult could perhaps have either put away the blocks or left them out for later use, and could postpone music class to extend snack time, allow students to bring the snack with them to the rug, or allow Emily to linger at the snack table as music began on the rug.
The data above shows how adults regulated Emily’s use of materials, including how they are organized and when and how they are used. Her parents and teachers had certain un-avoidable expectations which were translated into Emily’s actions through the unwavering enforcement of explicit rules. Emily frequently expressed her resistance to these rules (taken up further in Chapter VI), yet her agenda was typically bypassed as adults collaborated to mandate conformity. These rules often emanated from a concern over child safety yet were found to at times stray beyond their original intent. This was a contextual constraint, betraying broader societal concerns about the safety of young children in institutional settings which guided the teachers.

“Time to Clean Up”: Regulating Time

Emily’s time was not her own; it was regulated by the adults around her. I never observed an instance in which Emily was free to decide when an activity would begin or end, or when she would move from one location to another (such as home, school, or playground), save for one singular scenario in which Kate wanted to go to the playground and Emily wanted to stay home, and Kate acquiesced and stayed home. Emily was instead consistently presented with a world in which adults use time as a tool of regulation, moving her from place to place and activity to activity. I argue that the time-based regulation found in the data below is not biologically necessary but is rather a manifestation of cultural norms which extend control into Emily’s life, embellishing the practice of adult imperialism. I claim that the data presented here depicts an
overwhelming regulation of Emily’s time. I review how this occurred first at home and then at school.

I turn first to how Emily experienced the regulation of time at home, primarily around her leaving the apartment in the morning and her nap in the afternoon. I begin with her parents’ approach to timing in the morning. Each school morning, Emily routinely heard her parents call out, “You only have thirty more minutes before leaving”, “We’re gonna leave in like ten minutes OK?”, “Five minutes and then we’re gonna go,” and, “It’s time to go, remember? Five seconds.” While Emily regularly wanted to engage in a play activity before school, she was told she cannot because of the timing. Kate and John’s decision that the children should eat and get dressed before playing was repeatedly enforced during my observations. One morning as Emily wanted to play before school, Kate remarked about Emily’s choice of toy, “That’s not really a good thing to do before school because it takes a long time,” and on another occasion, “Oh no – no – we’re not gonna do that, we’re not dressing up before school.” On another instance Emily’s assertion that “I wanna play a game” was met with Kate’s statement, “No Emily, we have to go.” There was a clear sense of order and timing which Emily was required to adhere to.

Kate explained the order of activity in the apartment in the morning: Susan and Emily “eat first, get dressed, and then brush their teeth, then you can use the rest of it [time at home before leaving] as your free time to do whatever you want to do.” However, I observed that a number of Emily’s classmates routinely ate breakfast at arrival time at school. On mornings when Emily did not finish her breakfast at home, she finished it at school as well. This shows that Emily’s nourishment for the day was not
strictly dependent on eating and getting dressed “first” in the morning, because she could play longer at home and simply eat her breakfast at school with some of her peers.

Kate acknowledged that the order of activity in the morning is a matter of personal preference rather than absolute requirement: “So, I think that’s kind of a typical standard, you know? Get your work done, have free time. That’s just how I operate.” Kate’s use of “a typical standard” shows how cultural standards are pervasive in home life: Emily was required to eat breakfast and get dressed before playing not because it was the only way for her to successfully navigate the day, but because Kate adhered to a cultural standard in which you work first and play later. Kate extended this standard into Emily’s life through the regulation of Emily’s time. It is not that the schedule itself is problematic, but rather that it was arbitrarily imposed on Emily in conflict with her stated desires in those moments. The imposition of Kate’s standards on Emily’s time left her without the freedom to choose and decide about her own usage of time.

I now turn towards the timing of Emily’s nap, which was also often subject to adult-regulation. One afternoon at home Kate told Emily that they are going to “clean up some things and then get ready for nap time,” to which Emily responded, “No, I’m still make it,” in reference to the structure she was building. This was repeated on other observations, during which Kate told Emily: “Stop playing with your toys, it’s time for nap,” “Don’t go to sleep now Emily. Don’t go to sleep now ‘cause we’re gonna have some lunch and then go to Susan’s [camp to pick her up],” and “We’re gonna take an early nap today, ‘cause we have to pick up Susan for school.” Emily typically initially mildly (though at times forcefully) rejected the nap before acquiescing to Kate’s expectations.
Kate knew that Emily’s body benefited from a mid-day nap, and I locate her insistence on a nap as outside of adult imperialism. The imperial regulation here is rather the requirement to nap at particular times unrelated to Emily’s particular sleep needs and timing. This is not a fault of Kate’s – she did not intentionally push this on her daughter and does her best at juggling the competing demands of a family. The programmed nature of Emily’s day and calendar displayed considerable congruency to Lareau’s (2001) “concerted cultivation,” in which a parent’s control of the child’s calendar is the quintessential spine. While the intention here was benevolent (similar to the discussion of stroller versus walking in Infantilization), the result for Emily was that the timing of her nap was subject to the control of outside forces such as schedules and activities. Were Emily’s childhood constructed differently, she may not have been subjected to regulation in this manner. Alternate childhoods might shed the need for imperial control of nap: Susan might be at home rather than at camp (Emily could nap because Susan wouldn’t need to be picked up), Emily might be at camp rather than at home (Emily could nap at camp), or Kate might have her daughters in a different circumstance all together (Emily might nap on the move, in a different location, etc.).

Concerted cultivation was felt again one day as Emily and Kate were walking home from school with Yuval, Emily’s friend from Little Ones, and Stacy, his caregiver. Emily and Yuval had been spending a lot of time together at school, and Emily tried to make a playdate with Yuval:

Emily: Mommy, mommy, tomorrow can I have a playdate with Yuval?

Kate: Oh tomorrow?! (Kate seems excited that she is asking)
Emily: Yea. Tomorrow?
Kate: I need to look, I’m not sure what’s going on tomorrow.
Emily: Me and Yuval - can -
Stacy: You want to have a playdate with Yuval?
Emily: Yea!
Stacy: (To Kate) We have to get Ori (Yuval’s big brother).
Kate: I know! We both have to pick up other kids, it’s hard to do it.
Emily: Both have to pick up other kids.
(Kate and Stacy look at their calendars on their phones, looking for a date in November)
Kate: Wednesdays are awesome for us because I don't have to pick up her older sister until 5:30
Stacy: Mondays, both boys have something. Then - I’m not here, Tuesday, Wednesday - (trying to find a time) the best is going to be to talk to Yuval’s parents.
Kate: I'll text Yuval’s mom and see what she says
Kate: (Turns to Emily, sheepishly self-mocking) Alright it’s a complicated answer Emily. We’re working on it. We’re working on a playdate ok?
Emily: Today?
Kate: Definitely not today. But. Another time.
Ultimately, Kate did connect with Yuval’s mom, and brought Emily to his house for a playdate the following weekend. Emily’s timing was complicated by the presence of her older sister Susan and the “confined spaces” of childhood – there are particular places which the children need to be at particular times. This was exacerbated by the full schedule that Emily and her sister kept. The regulation of Emily’s time, as with each aspect of adult imperialism, occurred within local, particular contexts. Emily and Yuval had school for most of the day, and Stacy said that Yuval and Ori “have something” afterwards on Mondays. For Emily, Susan’s gymnastics schedule often dictated her afterschool activities.

The argument here was similar to Emily’s nap: were there different cultural constraints on Emily’s childhood, her clear and obvious request – “Can I have a playdate with Yuval?” – may not have encountered adult regulation. Were Yuval and Emily’s childhoods under different constraints, they may have been free to play with each other on their own time instead of being de-prioritized by adults. Under “markedly different child-rearing environments” (Rogoff, 2012, p. 119) children may alternately move on their own volition throughout the day (Bodenhorn, 2000), have older siblings or cousins at home in caretaking roles rather than attend afterschool activities (Mintz, 2004), walk long distances routinely by themselves (Rogoff, 1990, p. 91) or enjoy unsupervised time (Brooks, 2018). The regulation of Emily’s time was not a biological necessity but rather a cultural construction, represented here through adult imperialism.

I now turn to classroom settings, and review clean up at the Little Ones as well as transitions at Wee Studio, Emily’s day at Rainbow House followed a set schedule which could be flexible by a few minutes but was generally adhered to. This is the panopticism
which Gallacher and Gallacher (2005) researched in a nursery classroom (Chapter II).

The main tool used to control time in Little Ones was the “timer.” One afternoon Yasmin told the students, “We’re going to put a timer on for five minutes,” which Michelle quickly followed up with the reminder, “Little Ones, we have five more minutes left to play.” Five minutes later the timer goes off and Yasmin said:

Did you hear that? The timer went off and it's telling us it's time to, (Singing) Clean up, clean up, everybody everywhere, clean up, clean up, everybody do your share. I'm closing the water table, okay Emily? Emily, we need to head over to the block area [to clean up] and I’ll be right next to you ok?

On different occasions as the timer is set, the teachers said, “Little Ones, we have five more minutes left to play. Five more minutes. I’m going to set the timer for five minutes,” and, “Little Ones, we have two more minutes until clean up, two more minutes.” And when the timer goes off, they said, “Time to clean up, [singing] clean up, clean up, everybody everywhere, everybody do your share,” and,

OK Little Ones, it’s time to clean up [singing] clean up clean up everybody everywhere clean up clean up everybody do your share. [Singing a different song] It’s time to put the toys away, back to the shelf where they will stay - we’ll take them out another day - it’s time to put the toys away.

While the reason why the timer was used as a device to regulate time in the classroom was never explained to the children, Tanya discussed the use of “five minutes” in our group teacher interview:

We would tell them, ‘You have five more minutes. In five more minutes we start cleaning up.’ Any transition - at this age - we give them time. Nothing ever happens abruptly. We never expect, you know, rapid right away. We go to each and every child and say, ‘you have five more minutes.’

Tanya employed an age-based, developmental explanation for the use of “five minutes,” as she explained why they use this strategy “at this age.”
A similar strategy was employed by the teachers at the Wee Studio during Emily’s art class. Discussed earlier in “Segregation,” time at the Wee Studio followed a pre-established schedule, set and controlled by adults. In the studio, the adults in control were called “Teaching Assistants.” They told Emily and other children, “We’re gonna play downstairs for a bit, then go upstairs.” Five minutes later, another Teacher Assistant announced, “Upstairs is open if anyone would like to go up there.” After thirty minutes passed, a Teacher Assistant proclaimed, “It’s time to put finishing touches on those paintings, it’s almost music time.” Music began with, “Good morning everybody! Who’s ready for some singing today?” The final transition came twenty minutes later: “I think it’s time for a story! Let’s put all our drums down.”

While the space of the Wee Studio was ostensibly for creative expression and exploration of materials, Emily’s time spent there was under strict adult regulation. This was confirmed as I spoke to the director of the studio program, who explained that the “first premise” of the class is to have “exposure to art materials” and the “second premise” is “clear time parameters – ten minutes downstairs, ten minutes upstairs” always followed by music and then story. This “second premise” was designed specifically for “kids that age” and was “paced to hold kids’ attention.” The program director further explained

Once you’ve curated your materials [first premise] and given the parameters of time and space [second premise], then its complete child-driven freedom to explore the materials as they would choose. (Program Director, personal communication, August 17, 2018)

This confirmed that the regulation of timing in Emily’s art studio was not the flexible response of the Teaching Assistants to what they saw as the particular needs of particular
children, but rather the static and homogenized insistence of adult-regulation of children’s time.

This appears to result from the adult assumption that young children have short attention spans and thus need to be shuttled from one discrete activity period to another. In a widely used contemporary textbook on developmentally appropriate curriculum, the authors indicate that “many youngsters of this age (3-5 year-olds) are just beginning to attain the self-control necessary to pursue a task in depth” (Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 2011, p. 152). This framework is also found in various online parenting resources, through such statements that “in order to calculate what a ‘normal’ attention span is for a child, take your child’s age and multiply by 4 minutes” (Matheis, n.d., para. 1), and that one can “gaug[e] children’s attention spans by multiplying chronological age by 3 to 5 minutes for each year of age” (Wesson, 2011, para. 2). Kostelnik et al. provide a sample schedule for a “full-day program” which contains idealized time constraints for each activity throughout the day based on assumed needs of a three year-old child, in the following minute-spans: 10, 15, 30, 45, 10, 15, 10, 35, 10, 10, 45, 15, 15, 45, 30, 45, 10, 15, 10 (2011, p. 156). These sources show how the time-based control in the Wee Studio is an outgrowth of cultural assumptions about young children.

A separate textbook on “effective practices in early childhood education” describes how the above assumptions about attention in young children are problematic:

Young children are often thought to have short attention spans; however, the amount of time they engage in small-group activities that they have chosen is often considerably longer than adults would expect. (Bredekamp, 2011, p. 241)

This serves to highlight the cultural situatedness of practices within adult imperialism. There was no inherent reason why the time constraints in the Wee Studio or Little Ones
needed to be in chunks of five or ten minutes. The Wee Studio class could have been arranged as a free, open exploration, imposing no time constraints on Emily.

Emily certainly appeared to be deeply engaged in each activity when the allotted transition time came and she was told to leave the area. For example, Emily had picked up a toy car, dipped it in a paint bucket, and was starting to move it around on her paper, just as the art teacher told her and the other children it was “Time to put finishing touches on those paintings.” Emily’s time here was controlled not because she in particular has a short attention span but rather because it was culturally assumed that she does (as in infantilization, above).

The explanations offered here by Tanya and the program director, and correlated developmental assumptions, are reminiscent of argument outlined earlier in which Canella asserts that “child development is actually a covert method for social control and regulation” (1997, p. 61) and Block describes the “domestication” of children through “highly organized and deliberate activity” (2012, p. 21). As evidenced through Tanya’s notion of “at this age” and the Wee Studio director’s association of “kids that age,” Emily’s teachers use developmental assumptions about her particular age to create a regulatory system through which children are expected to be, in Block’s words, “willing, active, and enthusiastic” (p. 22) about participating in tasks like clean up.

Emily’s time was regulated at home due to the forces related to concerted cultivation, such as a full schedule and the supervision of parents, and in classrooms due to the assumed short attention span that was grafted onto her age as a general quality. Both at home and at school, adults imperialistically extended control into Emily’s life by requiring that she be in certain places at certain times and mandating what activities can,
and cannot be, done in those places at those times. Emily had to leave the apartment on time and had to dress and eat before playing, nap according to Kate’s balancing of the family’s schedule, clean up in Little Ones when the timer goes off, and move within the Wee Studio when the Teachers Assistants tell her to.

**Summary**

Emily was subject to the imperial regulation of her parents and teachers through rules regarding materials and time. These regulations ultimately served to tighten the control that adults maintained over Emily’s life. The data in this section shows how this occurred during mornings at home, naps in the afternoon, and scheduling playdates, in addition to how Emily’s toys were organized and used. Safety concerns, especially in the classroom, were often the motivating factor for rules but were at times stretched beyond their stated intent. Adult collaboration was used to ensure compliance with rules, especially at times when Emily had a clearly divergent agenda. Emily’s life was regulated in a way that ignored, bypassed, or subverted her agenda in many circumstances.

**Summary of Chapter V**

In this chapter I have argued that Emily encountered adult imperialism through the forces of age-based segregation, infantilization, and regulation. This occurred pervasively throughout all corners of her life, such as sleeping, eating, walking, and
playing. *Imperialism* is used here non-metaphorically to locate those three forces, as present within Emily’s life, as “linger[ing]…social practices” with a requisite belief that certain people require subjugation (Said, 1993, p. 9). In this chapter I have explored adult practices, institutions, and collaborations which facilitate control over children, all of which occurred with little visible adult-skepticism or dissent regarding the presence of control in Emily’s life. The idea that adults control Emily was so ubiquitous it was taken for granted and rarely re-considered. This was un-invited control over a conscript – Emily was segregated, infantilized, and regulated because of how culture sees her.

Adult imperialism, as with all cultural phenomena, is situated within broad social, cultural, and historical practices, reviewed in Chapters I and II. The proximal cultural forces around imperialism as presented here are highly congruent with the practices described as “concerted cultivation” by Lareau (2011). Emily’s childhood, like all cultural identities, is located locally and this chapter, accordingly, describes a local imperialism. This is Emily’s life: these are her parents and teachers, her apartment and her classroom, her sister and her friends. By paying close attention and leaving behind assumptions about what childhood is supposed to look like, I have presented how Emily’s life can be understood through the ways in which adults attempt to control her.

My argument is not that any one of these particular expectations, rules, or regulations matter. It is that they *all* matter; they cohere together to create socially constructed norms and regulations concerning impositions on children’s agency. In isolation, many of the areas of control outlined here are benevolent or innocent and appropriately fit the context of Emily’s life: 2-year-olds are different than 7-year-olds; her body is smaller and less capable than an adult’s; organization and timeliness are
commonly-held societal values; there are necessary safety concerns in a classroom of 2-year-old children. Yet, when examined together, the data presented here displays how the landscape of Emily’s childhood – the confined spaces of society which she was separated into – was defined by the saturation of adult-control.

Adult imperialism was felt in Emily’s life through the three forces outlined in this chapter. Absent in the social construction of these forces is Emily’s voice or other conspecific representatives; children are ignored as their world is constructed by adults (reviewed in Chapter II). Using the Transformative Activist Stance as a theoretical guide in locating Emily’s agency, I move in the following chapter towards identifying how Emily speaks up, out, and against the constraining nature of the imperialism defined here.
Chapter VI

FINDINGS – EMILY’S AGENCY

We do not passively dwell in the world, but instead co-create and co-author it together with other people, while *inevitably changing it* [emphasis added]. (Stetsenko, 2019, p. 439)

Preface

Where is Emily powerful? She is powerful as she rebuts the world, as she *counters* what is asked of her. I use the theoretical tenets of TAS to locate Emily’s agency as the mechanism through which she en-counters the forces of adult imperialism. Emily’s agency emerges through her distinct, identifiable actions which occur inevitably within a social context and relationships with others. In this sense, the social is never “only” social and the individual is never “only” individual. Emily’s agency does not exist “outside” of her, and yet, at the same time, agency is not solopsistically located only “inside” of her. Emily’s agency is real-ized – it becomes real – by her dissent towards
the societal forces she is conterminously entangled with, described here as adult imperialism. I use this chapter to identify and describe that agency; I use this preface to re-orient and ontologically situate my use of agency within the Transformative Activist Stance.

Opposition is an ever-present stance of human agency as individuals seek to overcome the enduring-yet-malleable cultural-historical context they encounter (Stetsenko, 2017). It is this penchant to overcome, this striving for something novel, which illustrates Emily’s agency. Emily is necessarily positioned to dissent from the adult-forces in her life. I locate her agency in that dissent and use this chapter to explore how this can be described in her mundane daily life. I will present my argument for how Emily’s agency – her resistance, reappropriation, and generation – ultimately served to “invent” (Stetsenko, 2017, p. 233) the future – to create new landscapes.

It is crucial to grasp the “active work and effort” (Stetsenko, 2017, p. 253) by the individual human entailed in this conception of agency. An insistence on the ontological import of human striving (and the location of that striving within the unit of the individual, actual human) in the ongoing becoming of the world is a critical component of TAS which cannot be understated and therefore must be foregrounded before my analysis turns from imperialism to agency.¹ TAS is centrally concerned with “human power and agency,” “the role of human agency,” and an “emphasis on human subjectivity” (pp. 4-5). Stetsenko writes that

The key emphasis is on active work because meeting the world, and becoming a partner in such a meeting, requires more than passively “being there,” as if merely waiting for the meeting to happen, in order for the other (the world) to encounter us. Instead, meeting with the world requires that we actively relate to, participate in, dialogue with, and ultimately do the work, or the labor, of carrying out our

¹ This was reviewed in parts of Chapters I and II as well.
encounters with the world. This process is about facing the world, even confronting it, in what is an active and passionate striving in the face of challenges and dilemmas. (p. 253)

My argument in this chapter is that Emily’s active work can be noticed clearly in her resistance to the adults in her life, in her reappropriation of their expectations, and in her generation of novel futures. I attempt to present a convincing argument in which I describe these three instantiations of Emily’s agency as her “active and passionate striving in the face of challenges and dilemmas.”

In this manner, TAS stands apart from “distributed” theories in that individual humans are not understood to be dwelling in, or simply experiencing, the world; events do not “just happen” in people’s lives. Rather, transformative agency is understood as the subjective striving of individual humans. This orientation locates agency in the active human work which occurs in co-terminus fashion with an individual’s confrontation and engagement with the social and cultural world-as-it-is-being-made. Accordingly, to seek out possible approaches to my research questions (especially the second and third), I present an argument in which Emily’s agency is the change she brings about. This change is achieved through her individually unique contributions to collaborative social practices.
Resistance

Overview

Emily was clear and articulate in her resistance, telling Kate one afternoon, “I don’t want you to say no I want you to say yes.” Emily had asked if she could do something at home and Kate had told her no. I asked Kate about this later, and she told me, “She says stuff like that all the time.” Indeed, throughout Emily’s life, she repeatedly resisted the control of adults. The clarity and pervasiveness of Emily’s resistance to adults jumped out at me early in the research and frequently throughout our time together. “Resistance” is used here to connote the ways in which Emily rejected the adult control of her life, challenged adult prescriptions for how to behave and interact, and ultimately re-positioned herself in relation to adult imperialism. The analysis will explore how Emily resisted adult imperialism and ways in which her resistance led to the creation of sought-after futures. My goal here is to display Emily’s stance towards the adult entitlement over her life as one of robust repudiation. I argue that Emily’s resistance represents a core, crucial tenet of her agency.

“No, I Don’t Want To”: Saying “No”

Emily used the word “no” as a proclamation of agency. “No” was one of the strongest tools in her arsenal as she rebutted adult imperialism, and she used it frequently throughout my observations. I begin with “no” because it highlights the oppositional
nature of agency within TAS. Emily augmented this tool (“no”) with an almost casual persistence – she routinely settled into a dialogic pattern in which she consistently and flatly rejected an adult expectation or instruction. This was often countered by a parent or teacher’s efforts to convince, or manipulate, Emily to capitulate. Frequently, Emily’s persistence simply outlasted the adult desire for control. It was her stake in the ground, a line from which she typically would not deviate. The data here shows how Emily used this tool to create futures different than adult imperialism would expect or envision. I will use data first from field observations and then from interviews with Emily to illustrate the robust use of “no” throughout her adult-relationships.

I begin by exploring a paradigmatic section of the data, a lengthy transcript in which Emily wanted to eat a peach, and then continue by supporting this anecdote with various other interactions. I present the episode in its entirety in order to display the absolute firmness of Emily’s resistance and her capacity to use “no” to completely turn around a given scenario. The episode began in the lobby of Rainbow House as Kate and Emily left school and began to walk home and ended nearly an hour later at Emily’s dining room table. Emily was unwavering in her quest to eat the peach, despite her mother’s repeated warnings that the peach is not ripe. Emily initiated the conversation by asking if she can eat the peach:

Emily: Today? (Holding up the peach, asking if she can eat it now)
Kate: No, tomorrow.
Emily: No NOT TOMORROW.
Kate: It will be too hard.
Emily: It’s not hard!
Kate: It’s not?
Emily: Yea!
Kate: Ok.

(Emily squeezes the peach)
Kate: But don’t squeeze it too much ‘cause that will make it bruise, it will get a yucky spot.
Emily: No! I want a piece. I just really want a piece.
Kate: Well, feel it - isn’t it really hard? I know you want it, that's why I got them.
Emily: How about I have one piece?
Kate: It’s too hard!
Emily: When I get home?
Kate: Ok – let’s get walking - You won’t like it.
Emily: I will like it.

(Emily begins to cry and whine. Mom picks her up. Emily’s limbs flail sideways.)
Kate: How about this - I’ll give you a peach to hold. When we get home, we'll wash it and you can try.
Emily: Ok. Why?

(A few minutes of quiet pass as we walk/stroll. Emily addresses me with her next line.)
Emily: I almost ate that (the peach). It’s just my peach.

(She now addresses her mom again.)
Emily: It’s not hard.
Kate: It’s not? It’s not? Don’t squeeze it too much, it will just make it yucky.
Emily: Can you please not cut this? I need to go, like that.
(Shows mom that she wants to eat the peach, whole.)
Kate: Oh you’re gonna eat it like that?
Emily: Yea.
Kate: Like an apple?
Emily: Yea.
Kate: Just remember there’s a pit inside, that big seed.
Emily: Ok. Can you take it out?
Kate: Well I can’t take it out unless I cut it.
Emily: Ok. Then cut it.
Kate: So you can decide - do you want me to cut it, or just eat it like an apple?
Emily: Just - it’s ok if you wash it and cut it.
Kate: Ok. We can decide when we get home.
Emily: Mom there’s a pit inside there?
Kate: Yea there is.
Emily: Why?
Kate: That’s what’s inside of a peach, that’s how it grows.
Emily: Why can’t I eat? In the pit?
Kate: The pit is really really hard - you'd hurt your teeth -
(Emily has peach in hand, fondling it, ALMOST eating it a few times. We enter the lobby of their apartment building.)

Kate: Emily we’re gonna drop off our stuff, have a snack, and then maybe go to the playground. It’s so nice outside!

Emily: Let’s take off our fruit!

Kate: We’ll have the fruit at home (we enter the elevator).

Emily: Can we have the fruit at home?

Kate: Yea! You can see, if it’s good or not.

Noah: Can I feel it?

Emily: Yea.

Noah: Ooo what does it feel like?

Emily: It feels like, it’s not hard.

Kate: Feels like it’s not hard! (Laughs.)

Emily: When you eat it, it’s not hard. The pit, is so hard.

Noah: The pit is so hard.

Emily: Yea. Hurt your teeth. See those white things, those are hard, so -

Kate: The white things, your teeth?

Emily: And that’s my tongue.

Kate: Oh don’t lick it! We haven’t washed it yet.

Emily: This is when you lick.

Kate: Don’t lick it!

Emily: I - I - I LICKED IT! (She is gleeful)
(We enter the apartment and linger in the entry way as we settle in.)

Kate: Ok. You want me to wash this? I don’t think that you should eat it, I don’t think that you'll be happy with it.

Emily: Yup. I’m gonna be happy with it.

Kate: Oh you are?

Emily: Yup. I’m gonna be happy.

Kate: What did you decide, cut it or not?

Emily: Cut it.

Kate: Cut it? You want me to cut it?

Emily: Did you wash it?

Kate: I did, I already washed it. OR! I can make you a pear?

Emily: How ‘bout just make a peach.

Kate: What do you think – pear, or peach? (She has a ripe pear.)

(We move from the entryway into the kitchen. Mom starts cutting the peach open.)

Kate: Look how red it is inside

Emily: Aahhh! Let me see - hmmmm! Yea.

(Emily starts eating the peach.)

Kate: Want me to cut the rest of it? Want more? Or just, four (slices)?

Emily: More (she is eating the first few slices already).

Through her persistence in this extended dialogue, Emily successfully navigated her mother’s initial response – “No, tomorrow” – and reclaimed her agenda. Emily’s
agency was visible here because she dissented from her mother’s position – “No NOT TOMORROW” – and then stayed persistent in her resistance. She was un-wavering as she forcefully resisted her mother’s desire and invented a future in which she did eat the peach. This was Emily “taking” reality and “inventing” the future.

Put plainly, Emily’s intention to eat the peach brought a certain reality into being that otherwise would not have existed; she shifted the world rather than submit to it. I locate Emily’s agency in the act of executing her desire to eat the peach in direct resistance to Kate’s statements. This highlights the conjoined nature of individual agency and social relationships: the simple, “isolated” act of eating the peach is not where Emily’s agency is found. Rather, the social act of dissent is the location of her agency. It is the tension between the adult-expectation and Emily’s agenda for the future which produces Emily’s agency. Eating the peach is agentive because it is an act of dissent.

The stanchness with which Emily asserted herself creates a pathway for her to take control of the situation as she rejected her mother’s agenda. Emily’s persistence was a hallmark of her agency, as it allowed her to stand up and push back rather than fold and submit. Ultimately, as her sought-after-future came into being, Emily was proven correct about two things: she did eat the peach, and she was happy about it. She did not simply disagree with her mother or imagine alternate futures – she actively strove to bring about her sought-after-future. Her statements above display how she wrote her own future through her use of “no” as a tool of resistance.

Emily’s persistence, her refusal to concede, litters the data; seemingly at every turn is another instance of Emily saying “no” to her parents or teachers. Throughout my time with her, I observed as Emily didn’t want to get dressed in the morning, didn’t want
to get in the stroller leaving the apartment, didn’t want to do whole group activities at Little Ones, and didn’t want to, generally, heed the instructions adults give her. Her use of “no” in all of these scenarios displayed the strength of Emily’s agency as she resisted the adult-desire to control her. I will offer two more exemplary moments in which Emily showed her oppositional agency. The first is Emily’s response to Tanya one afternoon in Little Ones:

Tanya: Emily, if you’re all done (playing with blocks), come, let’s bring the blocks to the shelf.
Emily: No, you can.
Tanya: No, you bring some, I will bring some, OK? Can you bring these two blocks? These two? Let’s bring these two.
Emily: No, I don’t want to! (Her voice sounds angry)
Tanya: You don’t have to put it on the shelf, you can just leave it here. Look – and we’ll all pick it up together.
Emily: Noooo. (Emily walks to another part of Little Ones)

A similar scenario took place at home as Kate attempted to get Emily ready to leave their apartment and pick up Susan at the end of her school day:

Kate: What are you gonna put on your legs, and your arms - how about a sweater?
Emily: No.
Kate: How about shirt?
Emily: No.
Kate: Dress?
Emily: Yea! Dress.
Kate: A dress? And what about your legs?
Emily: Um nothing on my legs.
Kate: Too cold - you were just outside! You don’t remember how cold it was?
Emily: Uh-huh!
Kate: You had to leave the playground because you were so cold!
Emily: I know.
Kate: How about some tights?
Emily: No. I said no.

(Emily goes to her bedroom, puts a dress on, and re-emerges in the living room to play until it is time to leave for Susan’s school.)
Kate: What shoes are you going to wear?
Emily: These (loafers).
Kate: Those are not the warmest!
Emily: These ARE the warmest!
Kate: I can see your socks (because the loafers are low on her ankle)! It’s too cold. Why don’t you wear two boots? Or, something that covers up your socks so that you’re not cold–
Emily: - No! (She now has one sandal and one boot on.)
Kate: OK, well. Alright - hat and gloves
Emily: Can I use the glasses? (Sunglasses)
Kate: No it’s getting dark out -

Emily: - But I need my glasses (she puts them on) - I have sunglasses.

Emily left the apartment, wearing a dress (no tights), a boot, a sandal, sunglasses, and a jacket. Emily’s persistent resistance to the clothing that her mother wants her to wear was on clear display throughout this episode.

In each of the above instances, with Tanya at school and Kate at home, Emily successfully used “no” to resist adult expectations and re-structure the situation. This was felt in mundane activities such as clean up, getting dressed, and eating. Again, as in the peach scenario, these acts in “isolation” are not themselves agentive; it is the social nature of their unfolding and Emily’s resistance to social expectations which generates Emily’s agency in each situation. The “pure” act of not cleaning up blocks or wearing a dress is not in-and-of-itself agentive but is made agentive through Emily’s active human striving, expressed here as social dissent and resistance. Emily’s baseline status often appeared to be one of resistance, as she quickly and comfortably rejected the requests of teachers and parents. Emily was clear about this in her interviews as well, which I turn to now.

Throughout our Lego interviews, Emily would routinely slip into patterned resistance to rules. I turn to those interviews to further explore Emily’s use of “no.”

Emily and I built Rainbow House and Little Ones out of Legos and used the Lego figures to enact playtime in the classroom. Throughout the interviews Emily and I would fluidly assume different roles, such as narrator, teacher, parent, student, and Emily in particular. During one interview, I assumed Tanya’s role to explore Emily’s resistance:
Noah-as-Tanya: I’m Tanya and it’s time to clean up.

Emily-as-student: No, I don’t want to.

Noah-as-Tanya: I expect you to clean up the blocks.

Emily-as-student: I know – I don’t want to. I don’t want to.

(We moved on and continued playtime. I picked up the topic again several minutes later.)

Noah-as-Tanya: OK Rainbow House, Little Ones, it’s time to clean up the cars! David’s here for music!

Emily-as-student: I don’t wanna clean up! Ugh!

Emily was immediate and firm in her use of “no” to resist “Tanya” in the interview, in a manner reflective of her resistance in Little Ones. The immediacy and firmness of Emily’s resistance came about again in another interview, in which Emily had the Lego figures playing on the rooftop playground at our imagined Rainbow House:

Noah-as-Tanya: Time to go back to class!

Emily-as-student: No I wanna stay here!

Noah-as-Tanya: Time to go back to class!

Emily-as-student: Noooo I don’t want to!

Several minutes later in the interview, Emily transitioned the students downstairs to lunch time. I turned aside from the Legos and asked Emily directly, “I notice at lunch time Tanya always asks you and Sarah to sit down in your chairs.” Emily responded with a peevish “No!” I continued, now asking, “I wonder why Tanya tells you to sit down in your chair.” Emily was petulant as I push her on this, and she responded accordingly: “And then we say, ‘I don’t WANNA sit in my chair!’”
The use of “no” seemed to be central to Emily in her relationship with her teachers. In other interviews, Emily and I switched roles as she continued to display an insistence on the oppositional nature of the student-teacher relationship. Acting as a new student in the class, I asked Emily to “tell me – who makes the rules in the classroom?” Emily assumed the teacher-voice and rapidly responded, “I do! ‘Cause I’m the teacher.” I protested that “I wanna make the rules too,” to which Emily responded again with a teacher-voice, reminding the “children” of some rules: “OK - children - we are being nice to each other! Be careful - you guys are being so bad!” Emily continued to position the teacher-voice as controlling the children’s behavior. I explored this further by bringing a new Lego figure to the scene and stating, “Emily says, ‘I wanna stand UP at food time.’ What does Tanya say?” Emily, now taking Tanya’s voice as hers, said “no” quickly and then again firmly when I protested (as Emily). After this contestation between my Emily-figure and Emily’s Tanya-figure, Emily takes my Emily-figure from me and brings it to another part of the scene, outside of the classroom. She now assumed both her mother’s voice as well as hers, and engaged the Emily-figure with a mom-figure:

Emily-as-mom: What happened?
Emily-as-Emily: Somebody couldn’t let me stand up at lunch time.

Emily-as-mom: Well, you have to listen to your teachers
Emily-as-Emily: But they say, “No you can’t stand up”
Emily-as-mom: Listen to your teachers, ok?

I pushed in here, circling back to my earlier question: “This is what I’m wondering - why do the teachers get to make the rules?” Emily, breaking out of
the Emily- and mom-voice, responded immediately: “Because.” I was curious how Emily-as-teacher would respond to the type of persistence child-resistance that I observed in Little Kids; Emily responded with a variety of voices – teacher, then narrator, then parent – all of which cohered around the need for the children to follow the adult-rules:

Noah-as-student: I’m Yuval and I DO want to stand up!

Emily-as-teacher: No!

Noah-as-student: I’m Sarah and I DO want to stand up!

Emily-as-teacher: No!

Noah-as-student: I’m Sarah and I wanna stand up and I think the rules should be different.

Emily-as-teacher: No! You have to go to your mommies, you have to go to your daddies.

Emily-as-narrator: Here’s your daddy, and here’s your daddy

Emily-as-parent: But you can’t stand up. Let’s try this again, OK? You guys can’t stand up, ok?

Noah-as-student: OK we won’t stand up anymore, we’ll listen.

Emily-as-parent: OK you have to listen, OK guys?

In this interview, Emily predominantly played the roles of teacher and parent and displayed how an oppositional stance is critical to their relationship with students and children.
Emily used “no” as a frequent response to adult-demands. Emily showed this through the quickness, firmness, and repetition with which she adopted a resistant stance as Tanya’s rules were invoked in our interviews as well as in her daily interactions with Kate and Tanya. This is Emily’s oppositional agency; she is positioned to resist and overcome the world she en-counters. I locate her resistance in her use of the word “no” as it highlighted her contrasting vision of the future. Emily’s use of “no” in the above data, and in the way described by my analysis, appears consistent with the generalized context of “concerted cultivation.” In this sense, Emily can be understood to use “no” as an individualized agentive tool emerging from the social milieu she is located within; this tool is co-authored by Emily, her parents, and her teachers.

Agency is profoundly social and contextual, and so thus Emily’s oppositional agency is located within the particular cultural, historical, and social phenomena present in her daily life. Using “no” with regularity towards her parents and teachers is congruent with Lareau’s description of the adult-nurturance of the child’s negotiating capabilities and propagation of an at-times critical stance towards adult-authority. This is reminiscent of the ontological exploration of agency in Chapter II: Emily and Kate are both fully individual and plural, both fully “she” and “they.” Emily’s tool of “no” is co-created by her individual power and her co-terminus social situativity.

Acknowledging the situated nature of oppositional agency, I argue that Emily’s agency is found in her capacity to use the tool of “no” as she resists and pushes back against alternate agendas for her future. When Emily says “no” to these futures – Kate’s push to wait until later to eat the peach, Tanya’s directive to clean the blocks after playing with them, and Kate’s expectations for her clothing – her resistance opens new
pathways which become her future. In this manner, “no” as a tool of oppositional agency is part of the multiplicity of mannerisms through which Emily agentively informs her world-as-it-is-being-made. It is highlighted here as the first of several of those mannerisms which will be further explored throughout this chapter.

“Let’s Just Do It”: Rejecting Adult-Expectations

Emily was continuously rejecting adult expectations regarding her behavior. Emily often did not heed adult invitations, directions, or requirements regarding what she should be doing in a certain moment, instead electing to follow her own agenda. Emily used her agency in those moments to re-write the future as her resistance deviated from the compliance her teachers and parents expect. I begin by highlighting two exemplary sections of the data, in which Emily made clear her absolute rejection of adult-expectations. I will first review this exemplary data and then turn to broader patterns of Emily rejecting adult expectations.

Emily was playing in Little Ones as the timer went off and cleanup was announced (“Regulation,” Chapter V). A classmate told Emily, “Time to put it [the toy in Emily’s hand] away.” Emily quickly responded, “No, I'm not putting this away. I'm not putting the toys away.” Tanya intervened, asking Emily to help clean up some loose toys on the rug. Emily acquiesced, walking towards the rug; I watched as she spent several moments organizing the toys. Emily suddenly reversed course, turning towards me with an invitation to play “doctor”:
Emily: Can you be the doctor? Can you lay down please? You have to lay down because I'm the doctor.

Noah: I'm not going to play that.

(I pointedly glance around at the students and teachers cleaning up the room.)

Emily: Let's just – play doctor right now – let’s just do it.

Noah: You can't play doctor you have to clean up.

Emily: We're just going to do it now

Noah: You can't. You have to do clean up.

Emily: You check me and then I'll check you.

(The doctor’s “checkup.”)

Eventually, Emily abandoned her hopes to convince me – but not her resistance to cleaning up – and enticed a peer to play with her instead. They continued to play doctor for several minutes as the teachers and other students cleaned the room. While Emily initially complied with the teacher expectation to participate in cleanup, she ultimately rejected completing the activity and instead insisted on playing “doctor,” first with me and then with a classmate. Her resistance paid off and she accomplished her agenda: she got extra time to play and avoided cleaning up.

In a lengthier section, Emily rejected multiple overtures by adults as they attempted to align her behavior with their agenda. She consistently rejected each of them and agentively built her future through her oppositional stance. In this data, David, the music teacher, was leading the Little Ones in song on the rug. Emily had been on the rug for several minutes, dutifully singing along while sitting in Yasmin’s lap, when she
suddenly rejected the activity and ensuing adult-expectations. Emily stood up, walked to the easel on the other side of the classroom, and picked up a baby doll on her way. Tanya followed her, asking her to bring the doll to the rug. When Emily ignored the request, Tanya asked, “Emily, what’s going on with you?” At this point, Yasmin left the rug and walked into the hallway to do an unspecified task. From the easel, Emily visually tracked Yasmin and asked if she would come right back in. As Emily began to walk from the easel to the doorway, following Yasmin out, Tanya determined that Emily’s actions were not acceptable (“Regulation,” Chapter V). Tanya followed Emily from the easel to the doorway, lifted her up gently-yet-firmly by her torso, and carried her back into the classroom.

Dropped off back at the easel by Tanya, Emily now put the baby doll in a chair next to the easel and sat herself down in a chair next to the doll. Emily briefly perused artwork on a shelf next to the easel, and soon began jumping along to the beat of the music, which David had continued on the rug with the rest of the Little Ones. When David passed out instruments to the students, Emily came briefly to the rug to take two small shakers, which she then placed on the easel next to her baby doll. Tanya, continuing to monitor Emily, told her, “We leave those,” implying the shakers belonged on the rug and not the easel. Juliet, a student teacher occasionally in the classroom, dutifully tried to bring Emily back to the adult-agenda, saying, “Emily come dance with me, hold my hand!” Emily glanced at Juliet, offered no response, and continued to jump and dance by the easel with her baby doll and shakers.

David then took out mallets to use on a tambourine, which piqued Emily’s interest. She sauntered back to the rug, exclaiming, “David David David, I need one!”
and reached up towards David as he handed out the mallets. She repeated, “I need one! I need one! I need one!” With mallets in hand, she walked back to the easel area and continued to dance. After a few moments, she put down the mallets and took a bead maze out and began to play with it. Tanya walked over and moved the bead maze back where it came from; simultaneously, Michelle walked over and Emily held her hand. Michelle gingerly walked Emily back to the rug, seeming to finally re-assert adult-control over Emily. David was beginning to wrap up his session:

David: OK everybody back to your seat!
Michelle: We’re gonna say good bye to David and then we’re gonna go to the roof.
Andrew: Bye bye David!
David: If you're sitting down, I'll give high fives.
Yasmin: Everyone sit down so you can say bye to David - sit on your bottoms.

(Emily does not sit down – instead she attempts to walk out of the classroom. Michelle nods to Tanya, who follows her.)

Tanya: Emily, do not go out, we are not going out yet. Close the door, close the door please, thank you - come, come back - let’s all sit.
Yasmin: So we can say good bye to David – he'll come around and give you a high five, ONLY if you're sitting down.
(This section is reminiscent of adult-collaboration in “regulation,” Chapter V.)

Andrew: High five!! (Very excited)
David: Go sit!
Yasmin: Sarah go sit, do you want to give David a high five? I do!
Sit on your bottom, sit on your bottom.

Emily: High five! Here. Come here!

Emily was standing on the periphery of the rug while David gave high fives to children sitting down. David, however, obliged Emily’s request, and walked over to her and gave her a high five while she was standing. Emily’s resistance paid off – she avoided the control of her teachers for the bulk of David’s music session and was even able to receive a coveted high five from David without following the instructions to sit down.

Emily made clear in this data that while she may follow adult expectations by initially sitting down and participating in music, she did not feel bound by them. She understood it as her prerogative to depart from the activity at will and re-envision how the classroom and its materials can be used. She left the rug and sets up her own area by the art easel, including a baby doll, shakers, and mallets. From her new camp, she then perused her choices: she could follow Yasmin out (thwarted by Tanya), play with the baby doll, come to the rug when she wants (to get instruments), or play with the bead maze (also thwarted by Tanya). Her rejection of the music activity, as defined by David and the teachers, established a new operating scenario for Emily to act from. With music class ending, Emily re-asserted her rejection of adult-expectations regarding her behavior, refusing to sit down while still pointedly demanding that she receive a high five.
Present within the data are overtones of concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2011), displayed by the allowance of the teachers for Emily to negotiate the boundaries of acceptable behavior. In different early childhood settings, rules may have been enforced such that Emily’s resistance – her oppositional agency – would have been thwarted earlier and more completely; she may have been told she was not allowed to leave the rug, or held tightly in a teacher’s lap, or sent out of the room for misbehaving. In this particular context, Emily was allowed to navigate how her agency can re-write the situation. She took advantage of the context by forcefully asserting herself and rejecting many of the expected behavioral norms, such as staying on the rug for the duration of class and sitting down while waiting for a high five.

In both of these exemplary pieces of data – rejecting clean up and music class – Emily was not wanton nor exaggerated but rather stated her rejection plainly and firmly. She did not seem to take offense to the expectations given to her – they were not wrong or uncouth – she simply did not desire for them to apply to her. This was similar to her use of “no,” in which she casually but firmly denied the adult-overture to claim control of her behavior. I write with reverence about Emily’s agency here because of the backdrop of adult imperialism with which she contended. This is no easy feat, avoiding and rejecting the expectations of coordinated and collaborative adult ventures.

I turn now to explore how rejecting adult-expectations includes Emily’s imperviousness to adult-definitions of safe behavior, in particular in the bathroom and hallway area around Little Ones. These are often areas of transition – from the class to the bathroom and back, or for morning drop off or afternoon pick up – and Emily exploited these transitional moments to subvert the adult-agenda. In a typical situation,
one afternoon Emily was waiting in the Little Ones bathroom while Tanya changed other children’s diapers. Emily scurried around Tanya’s feet, hiding in the cabinet of the diaper changing table. Tanya repeatedly beseeched Emily to be safe, making her expectations clear:

Emily! It’s not safe!

Look at Tanya – be careful!

I’m trying to keep you safe – Emily – listen – I’m asking you to move.

All I’m trying to do is keep you safe

I have to keep you safe, I’m trying to keep you safe.

At no moment in the interaction did Emily appear to consider the request to “be careful.” Emily instead rejected each of Tanya’s admonitions, continued to hide in the cabinet and ultimately turned the time in the bathroom into a game of hide and seek with Sarah and Yuval (explored in-depth later in “generation”).

During a later observation, Emily and a classmate, Andrew, were playing in the loft in Little Ones, an elevated platform tall enough that the teachers cannot see directly into it. On the loft, there was a narrow bench spanning the length of one wall; there were two horizontal full-length mirrors above and below the bench, seemingly designed to provoke the children’s curiosity. Emily and Andrew were engaged in what my field note described as “delightful, joyful, peer collaborative play” – they were alternately positioning themselves above or below the bench and peering in the respective mirrors. Their rapid movement, the wooden bench, and the wooden loft-platform combined to create a lot of loud bangs. Tanya, standing in the classroom looking up at the loft, was concerned that Emily was not being safe:
Tanya: Be careful with your body.
Andrew: Ahhhhh (shriek of joy)
Tanya: Be careful, be careful with your own body.
Emily: We’re gonna fall down in a bit!
Tanya: OK then you can get hurt, you know right?
Emily: Well, I’m just gonna do it for real.
Tanya: OK (said with resignation).
Emily: Whoa (jumps from bench onto loft-platform)!

Emily boldly declared her explicit rejection of Tanya – “I’m just gonna do it for real” – and, together with Andrew, pursued her agenda at the expense of Tanya’s.

On a separate occasion, Emily and her mother were packing up her belongings in the hallway outside of Little Ones as they prepared to head home. Sophia, a classmate, was also getting ready to leave with her caregiver, Melanie. Emily and Sophia spontaneously hugged each other, initiating a pattern in which they hugged, released, and then hugged harder. My field note read that the hug was “getting a little bit rougher each time.” Melanie, Sophia’s caregiver, intervened and expressed her concern about the girls’ safety:

Melanie: You're going to fall, both of you. Be gentle or you’re going to fall down. Gentle, gentle.

(Emily and Sophia hug, crash, and fall, eliciting a gasp from Melanie and Kate.)

Kate: Are you OK?!
Emily: Again again again!
Kate: No this is not a good idea!

(They do it again.)

Melanie: You're going to fall and hurt yourself. Stand up. A hug is just really gentle. Just really like this. That's it (telling her to stop). That's it that's it that's it, Sophia!

Emily and Sophia continued to vigorously embrace each other until all four of them entered the elevator to leave school. Again in this scenario, Emily rejected the adult expectation to “be gentle” in favor of pursuing her own agenda. Her rejection was forceful and complete.

In all three of the above scenarios, in the bathroom and hallway, Emily displayed how she used her agentive capacity to resist adults and re-write the future in scenarios revolving around “safe” behavior. Emily prioritized her resistance, while adults prioritized safety. She hid in the diaper changing table, she jumped off the bench on the loft, and she vigorously hugged Sophia – all acts of resistance against the efforts of adults to control her. Emily rejected the notion of safety that adults introduce into her life and instead built activities that suited her own agenda.

Another area in Emily’s life in which her rejection of adult-expectations was observed was around the age of her playmates. While age-based segregation is covered in depth in Chapter V, there are three lonely instances in the data set in which Emily meaningfully interacted with children across age-segregation lines. These moments were joyful, proud moments for Emily and displayed the rewards of her resistance and rejection. I will review these three instances in the data here.
Emily befriended Clyde, a student in Big Ones (down the hall from Little Ones, two years older than she is) during their time on the rooftop playground. Two classes from Emily’s school used this space at the same time, creating happenstance opportunities for cross-age interactions. Emily’s fondness of Clyde was evinced as she regularly mentioned him in our interviews, and corroborated by Kate, who mentioned that Emily is “super pumped about him”, and Michelle, who said that Emily and Clyde “do gravitate towards each other, on the roof they play a lot together…. When they see each other, I think they just get like a little bit happy to see each other.” Later in the year, Michelle said that she spoke with the Big Ones’ teachers about the friendship:

We did discuss something with Daniel [a teacher in Big Ones], like, ‘Oh, I think they have a connection,’ just to like watch out and make sure they’re playing nicely and everything.

Emily’s affection for Clyde, two years older than her, brought about the only sustained interaction she had with a non-family member who was not her age throughout the research period.

Emily was wrapping up at the Wee Studio when she had a more isolated but similarly-joyful cross-age experience. Having finished art class and preparing to exit the Wee Studio, Emily was intent on going “upstairs” to a different part of the museum (note that in “age-based segregation,” Chapter V, Kate had made clear that while the classroom was age appropriate for Emily, other parts of the museum were not). Kate protested but Emily insisted: “Mommy! Mommy! Go upstairs! Let’s go!” Emily rejected her mother’s expectations and headed out. Kate trailed behind, asking Emily to slow down and apologizing to the people Emily was worming her way in between. Emily had left the “confined space” of the art classroom and was now navigating a multi-age
terrain. There were school-aged children and adults loosely scattered in the part of the museum she was working her way through.

Emily reached her destination, which was an incline covered in nooks and crannies, arranged almost like crags on a rock-climbing wall, enabling a child to crawl up or down the plane. The whole surface covered up a staircase and seemed to be intentionally set up for people to crawl rather than climb the stairs. Emily scrambled up the ramp and turned around to look back down at me and Kate. As stood up at the top of the ramp, a small crowd of children, perhaps twelve years old, celebrated Emily’s accomplishment by raucously applauding. This was a singular moment in the data, as Emily’s accomplishments – stemming from her rejection of her mother’s expectations – were celebrated by older children. Emily beamed with pride as she noticed the older children clapping for her. Significantly, this cross-age recognition could only occur outside of the confined space of the studio, in an area that Kate had not intended to be part of their trip and asked Emily not to go to. Emily’s stance of resistance initiated the creation of this joyful moment for her.

On another occasion, Emily and Kate were waiting outside of Susan’s school to pick her up. Emily had been crying and screaming on the way there, displaying her disagreement with Kate about whether she had to stay in the stroller or could walk to Susan’s school (“regulation”, Chapter V). Emily and Kate both seemed spent and exhausted from the extended argument; Emily was slumped in her stroller with tear-streaked cheeks. However, Emily perked up as the school door opened and dozens of 8-year-olds streamed out. She noticed Ruthie (one of Susan’s friends, mentioned in “age-based segregation”) and became exuberant. Emily hopped out of her stroller, navigated
her way through a now crowded sidewalk, walked right up to Ruthie and started calling her name loudly. Ruthie affectionately embraced Emily, and the girls held hands. A few moments later, Susan exited the school building, and together – Emily, Ruthie, and Susan – began walking towards home, as Kate and I trailed behind.

As they walked, Emily was positioned in between Ruthie and Susan; they were all holding hands. Emily seemed transformed, almost as if she was a different person – she was gazing up at Ruthie and soaking her in. In kind, Ruthie acted motherly towards Emily, speaking in a sweet, tender voice with her. Emily stumbled lightly while walking, and Ruthie gently told her, “Emily, let’s go,” placing her hand on Emily’s back and urging her forward. Emily, just moments earlier despondent in her stroller, found new energy: she took off down the street about ten feet in front of the girls at a brisk jog, forcing Kate to hurry to follow. As Emily continued to run, I considered that I hadn’t seen her run this much during our time together. Emily embraced her freedom, and yelled out to no one in particular, “FAST! I’M GOING FAST!!” Squealing with glee, she was completely ecstatic as she galloped ahead. My field note read, “Emily is in a DELIGHTFUL mood, complete contrast to earlier.”

While Emily was segregated from Ruthie’s activities (“age-based segregation,” Chapter V), her rejection of those boundaries created what seems to be a wondrous moment. Her walk with Ruthie stood out in the data as one of the most enjoyable moments I observed for Emily. She shook off the previous demands of her mother to stay in the stroller, she denied her isolation as a 2-year-old, and she vigorously embraced her hard-earned freedom as she alternately held Ruthie’s hand and ran squealing down the sidewalk. In each of these instances – with Clyde, at the Wee Studio, and with Ruthie –
Emily reveled in the rewards that her resistance had brought about. Resistance is a tool of Emily’s agency which affords her the capacity to “take” reality and “invent” the future.

**Summary**

Emily’s resistance was at times victorious – as she sees the changes she seeks – and at other times thwarted – as her voice was denied. However, Emily’s proclivity towards resistance did not appear to wax and wane according to the perceived or actual efficacy of her actions. Rather, she seemed to be engaged in an ongoing, never-ending *stance* of resistance, as evidenced through field observations and Lego interviews. Her stance of resistance was at the core of her agency, indicating her desire to overcome the constraints she encountered from the adults in her life. Emily took up this stance in clear and direct opposition to the ways in which those adults seek to conform her to their expectations. From this stance, Emily used her agency to firmly reject adult-expectations about her life.

I present the data in this section to argue that Emily’s oppositional stance represents a core tenet of her agency, as it displays her capacity to matter in the world and work towards her sought-after future. Resistance defined her stance in her encounters with adults; Emily did not state or imply that adults are wrong or ill-intended but, rather, that she matters and her agenda is worth pursuing. To take Kate’s words from the introductory data in this chapter – that Emily “says stuff like that all the time” – I assert that Emily is indeed resisting “all the time.”
Overview

Having built the argument for Emily’s resistance to adult entitlement over her life, I now turn towards “reappropriation” as the next leg of Emily’s agency. I use reappropriation to refer to the manner in which Emily takes material elements of her life back from adult control and imbues them with her own agenda. Reappropriation is highlighted by Wartofsky, covered in Chapter II, as the remaking of that world so that it becomes our world and thus involves more than simply accommodating the way the world has been made: it often involves changing it. (1983, p. 199)

This section of the chapter focuses heavily on how Emily uses toys and other materials in manners they are not “supposed to” be used. I highlight how Emily’s novel use of these materials contrasted with adult-expectations, imbued the items with a new script, and created different possibilities as a result.

Emily’s resistance set the stage for her reappropriation, in that it allowed her to push back against adult expectations and cleared the way for her to fill her world with her own interpretation of how materials and spaces should be used. Emily made clear that she would not be subducted or consumed in the tectonic engagement of agency and imperialism. She pushed ever onwards, refusing to concede and submit to adult forces. With this push, Emily took the world and altered it. I now take up the questions of what “different agendas” (Formanek-Brunell, 1993) Emily brings, what “unexpected uses”
(Gutman & Coninck-Smith, 2008) she makes of material culture, and how these actions “reappropriate and remake” (Wartofsky, 1983) her world. I first review data in which adults present hurdles to Emily’s reappropriation and then turn towards less-encumbered moments of novel material use.

“These Are All Mine and I’m Playing This”: Supposed to Be Used

Emily reappropriated elements of her life as she correlated their use, and meaning, with her own agenda. This necessarily entailed moving away from the adult-agenda which permeated many materials in her life. As argued in Chapter V, adults imposed particular regulations over Emily’s life which included the particular ways that certain toys be used. Emily’s opposition to this regulation established her reappropriation of toys as she brought a new meaning to her interactions with them than adults had previously established. The enduring nature of adult-control created hurdles to Emily’s reappropriation which she had to consider: navigating in pursuit of her agenda or abandoning in conformity to the adult-agenda. I will highlight one exemplary section of the data to argue this point and then support this argument with a broader pattern of data. In this section Emily showed how she reappropriates the “script” which “anticipates” how children’s toys are used (Brembeck, 2008, p. 270) until Kate joined the play, adding an element of control.

Emily brought a “different agenda” to board games in her family’s living room one day after school while Kate and Susan read quietly on the couch behind her. Emily opened up the large ottoman which stores a dozen or so board games, and announced to
me, “Let’s play a game.” She showed me how she used four different board games, each time re-purposing the material items in the game box for her own purpose. Midway through the first game, Emily seemed very happy, displaying confidence and competence, despite not setting up the game in “proper” fashion. She enjoyed using these materials to suit her purposes, in ways that are far afield from the game designers’ intention. Emily said enthusiastically while perusing the games: “We can play this, we can play this, let’s play this! Okay?” I offered no agenda of my own and followed her use of the games.

Emily first settled on Life Jr. and took the board game out of the ottoman. The game was intended for “Ages 5+” and the box read:

![Warning]

CHOKING HAZARD-Small Parts. Not For Children Under 3 Years.

Both of these age-graded labels (explored in “age-based segregation,” Chapter V) suggested that Emily, at 31 months old, was already transgressing cultural norms simply by using the games. Opening up the box, Emily announced, “We take this out, and then we take this out, and we take this out.” She asked me “What do you want to be?” and handed me a yellow playing piece. I said, “I will be yellow like you gave me” and she replied with, “I’ll be green – and I’ll be all these colors.” Emily then placed the board on the floor and instructed me to place my yellow piece on the start square. She used an announcer-like voice to get the game started, offering up an unintentional malapropism as she did: “Are you ready? Spin – the – FERRIS WHEEL!” Emily did follow a loose format for board games but disregarded the rules – she either knew them and ignored
them, knew of them but did not ask for them to be reviewed, or did not consider that rules might accompany the game.

Emily promptly moved my piece after the spinner stopped and told me, “So I’m going to be all of these colors [all the pieces, including the yellow] …and you won’t have any colors.” I submitted to her directions. Emily briefly paraded the pieces around the board, not using the wheel, and then grabbed all the pieces and stood up. She walked over to the living room window sill and gently placed each game piece in a line. Emily began softly narrating to herself and the pieces under her breath (quietly enough that I do not hear what is said). She had taken the pieces deliberately away from the game and invented a new use for them. After narrating with the Life Jr. pieces for several moments, Emily said to me, “Let’s start putting this away,” and then carefully to the game pieces, “Goodbye guys!” as she placed them back in the game box.

Emily continued, and now proclaimed: “Let’s do THIS one now! Let’s do this one” as she picked up Blokus Jr. This game had the same label with the word “Warning” printed on it, along with a stated age range of “Ages 5 to adult.” Emily announced she’d be red and tried to fit a plastic red Tetris-like piece onto the board. However, Emily became frustrated when the piece didn’t snap into place firmly, as Legos or Duplos might; Emily appeared to think the pieces were supposed to snap in yet the game was designed for them to simply rest in place on the board. As she picked up another piece, she reconsidered, and said simply, “I know – maybe let’s not do this.” When she realized the game could not be bent to her agenda – snapping the pieces in – she refused to use it rather than comply with the games’ script. Emily’s stance here seemed to be reappropriate where possible or else move on.
Now Emily said, “So – let’s do it!” as she took out Scrabble Upwords Family, a game for “Ages 8+.” Kate slid down from the couch to the rug, joining me and Emily. Emily excitedly took out the dozens of small plastic letter tiles and began to place several of them in a straight line on the board. With an adult interloper now present, Emily encountered more constraints around her ongoing reappropriation. Emily placed several tiles in a line:

Emily: Look at this! This is going to be a train track!

Kate: A letter train track?

Emily: Yea, a letter train track.

Kate: Mmm… (Pondering)

Emily: L – C – S –

(She is naming each letter as she places it. She is correct about C but not L or S.)

Kate: (Light giggle) Do you wanna make your name?

Emily: Uh-huh (yes) – this is my name.

Noah: Where is your name?

Emily: This (gestures to the “train track” she is making) – there’s a big train track – I don’t wanna make my name!

Kate: OK (pause) I think in this game you’re supposed to make words. (Kate puts out tiles for B-O-O-K) “Book.”

Emily: Noooo – those are mine! (The tiles)

Kate: Oh, those are all yours? I like how you are arranging them. Do we have enough to fill the whole thing?
Emily: No, we don’t.

Kate: Oh, OK. You have an order you’re doing?

Emily: I’m making a train track. E for Emily! A for – Emily!

(She identifies each of these letters correctly as she places them on the board.)

These are all mine and I’m playing this.

I’m going to put all of these in the purse.

Kate: Oh great. (Sarcastically)

Emily: Or a bag – mom do we have any purses at home? I need a purse that has a handle.

Emily played with the letters in the purse for a few minutes and then announced, “We need to start cleaning up.” Emily had a clear usage for the letter tiles – to make a train – which her mother disagreed with. Kate’s initial hesitation (“Mmm…”) convinced Emily to start labeling the letters, but Emily firmly rejected her claim over how the tiles are “supposed to” be used (“Nooo – those are mine!”). Kate acquiesced (“I like how you are arranging them”) which gave Emily the freedom she needed to continue to reappropriate (“These are all mine and I’m playing this”). With her hard-earned freedom, Emily continued to deviate from the game’s script, now taking the pieces off the board entirely and depositing them into a purse.

After putting the game away, next Emily took out Scrabble Jr., which again contained the same cautionary “Warning” and also for “Ages 5+.” Emily opened the box and removed the four small plastic figures – letter tiles with hands, feet, and a small platform so they can stand up. She left the rest of the game alone, and took the figures
back to the window sill, where she played earlier with the pieces from Life Jr. She spent a moment narrating the figures at the window, then came back and carefully placed them upright on the ottoman. Emily surveyed the line of figures and selected the red one, which she placed in her palm. Emily walked towards the kitchen for a snack. She left the games behind but kept the red figure with her until we left the apartment to drop Susan at gymnastics later in the observation.

In each of these four games, Emily took charge of her material culture, putting it to “unexpected uses” (Gutman & Coninck-Smith, 2008) in opposition to the way the toys were “supposed to” be used. In Life Jr. Emily reappropriated the pieces as she narrated their adventures on the windowsill; in Blokus she abandoned her efforts to re-purpose the pieces; in Scrabble Upwords she determinedly created a train instead of using them to spell anything; in Scrabble Jr., she again used the pieces to narrate a scene on the windowsill. Emily was re-making the world as she used it for novel purposes, imbuing material culture with new meaning and direction. These pieces took on new meaning because of her engagement with them and escaped the constraints of the “script” they were designed with, the way they were “supposed to be” used. Emily was unencumbered in her reappropriation until Kate interfered briefly only to cede to Emily’s agenda. Her re-purposing the game pieces displayed one way in which she contributed to shifting the future as she encountered the world.

The phrase “supposed to” came up again when I asked the teachers during our interviews what happens in Little Ones when a child uses a toy in a non-scripted manner, seeming to display a general adult coherence around the idea that materials are meant to be used in a certain way. Yasmin offered up puzzles as an example. She explained that
when she sees children using puzzle pieces for novel purposes, such as when students might not place them [the pieces] on the board, but just take them off and just play with them there, or they start stacking [the pieces] … We’re OK with that, because eventually we see that they learn how to use the material the way it’s supposed to be used. … We kind of want them [the students] to notice that they [the puzzle pieces] are shaped differently, you know, why this piece doesn’t fit with this piece. So eventually, one child picks up how it goes – and fits – they’ll teach the other child how it goes and fits.

Yasmin used the same phrase, “supposed to,” that Kate used to describe the board game. This is the script with which materials items are imbued in Emily’s life. The same phrase, “supposed to,” was also used in an interview with Michelle, in which she described a similar situation with puzzles:

She [Emily] was like taking pieces from the puzzles that were out and supposed to be used and manipulated as puzzles, and would bring them to the dramatic play area as cookies. But… Tanya provided her with animal shaped magnets and gave those to her to use as cookies.

Yasmin offered a nearly-identical prescription in a separate interview:

Let’s say they [the students] take a material and instead of building up [motions up and down], they’re building across [motions side to side], and it’s not meant for that [emphasis added]. Then, we’ll take out a material that’s meant for that [motions side to side again]. And we’ll show it to them.

Emily’s teachers here were navigating the very uncertain terrain of what it means to be a child-centered classroom situated within a paradigm of adult-control over children. When Tanya recognized Emily’s reappropriation of the puzzle pieces, she swapped the pieces for toys that are “supposed to” be animals; Yasmin was “OK with” reappropriation of puzzle pieces because it eventually leads to conformity in material use, not out of recognition of other possible student-uses for the pieces; when students use building
materials in a manner they are “not meant for,” the materials are swapped for ones which are “meant for that” purpose.

I asked Yasmin, “If the children are not using them as you expect, the implication that they are not -” Yasmin interrupted and finished my sentence with, “Learning? Um – not the way that material is set up.” Yasmin explained that her goal with puzzles is for the children to learn about curves and lines, so they can determine which pieces go together. In Little Ones, when a child reappropriates materials in a novel manner – such as stacking puzzle pieces instead of completing the puzzle – the teachers see this as an early stage in a developmental journey that the child will eventually correct as she learns to use the material how it is “supposed to” be used, in the way it is “meant for.” Consider Yasmin’s use of the words “learn” and “teach” as she describes how children use puzzle pieces. Children “eventually…learn how to use the material the way it’s supposed to be” which then allows them to “teach the other child how it goes and fits.” The implication here is that the more appropriately a child uses the materials, the more learning they are displaying; less appropriately, the more they have left to learn.

A similar reaction to reappropriation in Little Ones was described by Yasmin when we spoke about the classroom’s dramatic play area. The teachers had set up dramatic play materials in a particular place in the classroom, adorned with a table and chairs, a play kitchen, and loose materials such as utensils and bowls. However, Emily and her classmates consistently took the loose items and brought them under the loft, rather than play with them in their intended area, a phenomenon I observed on numerous occasions. Yasmin described:

For some odd reason this year, a lot of the kids move all of the dramatic toys to other areas in the classroom, underneath the stairway. You know the little Loft
area? They like to set up kitchen, little scenarios. So, we encourage them to go somewhere else. I don't know why they don't want to stay where there's a table, where there's a chair, where there's mirrors. For me it drives me crazy that they don't use that area for dramatic play. For the most part, we let it happen. We let it flow. But then it comes down to safety. And I'm still trying to figure, I think all of us are trying to figure out what we can do to encourage them to stay in that area.

Tanya also explained that they recognize that their students often move materials around the classroom, running counter to the teachers’ expectations for how spaces should be used:

Sometimes we give up. If the child has a big preference, to bring the kitchen toy into the sand [there is a small sandbox in the classroom near the dramatic play area], how do you argue with a child when the child is having a [pretend] thing of food in the sandbox, and wants to bring a cup and a spoon?

The teachers had set up very deliberate areas in the classroom, intended to be rich playscapes for the children. They were surprised when Emily and the Little Ones reappropriated the materials by bringing them to new spaces in the classroom. The teachers generally worked to bring the materials back to where they were supposed to be (“encourage them to stay in the area”), though at times acknowledged the child’s power (“a big preference”) and ceded the territory. Tanya positioned this as a moment to either “argue” or “give up.”

It is perhaps because of this dynamic in Little Ones that I observed Emily’s reappropriation taking place more robustly outside of the classroom. On many occasions in Little Ones, Emily or her classmates would casually re-assign objects to new roles: moving toys from one area to another or using materials in subversive ways. Yet in most of these occasions, due to near-constant adult-presence (Canella’s panopticism) and consistent with the manner described by the teachers in the interviews above, the materials were either required to stay in their original area (Tanya: “You know what?
Keep the bears at the water table”) or were swapped out for more “appropriate” toys (Yasmin, in “Regulation”: “If you want to throw something we can throw the soft balls, these are not for throwing”).

“Can I Knock It Over?”: Enduring Yet Malleable

I turn now to data in which Emily’s reappropriation of toys and materials was not compared to how they were “supposed to” be used but rather was considered to be an acceptable re-writing of the script. Emily was often casual in her reappropriation, softly inserting her ideas in a manner which typically seems surprising to adults but commonplace to Emily. This was evinced in a brief interaction with Tanya at the snack table. Tanya was attempting to have Emily use a toy in its intended manner and asked her why she was using the toy in this particular, novel manner. Emily responded casually: “I dunno. It’s just fun, for us.” This gentle proclamation arrested me in the moment for its simplicity and clarity. Emily had a vision of the world, and throughout her day she went about enacting that vision. Sometimes her vision aligns with adult agendas. When it does not, she reappropriated what was given to her in order to fit the world she wants to create. Emily was always overcome. I argue here that reappropriation represents the manner in which Emily’s agency took an enduring social or cultural practice and overcame it by rendering it malleable through her unique presence. I will support this argument by

2 The analysis here is inspired by Stetsenko’s notion, quoted in the second section of Chapter I, that individuals “enter and join in with social practices as participants who build upon previous accomplishments and also inevitably and forever change (if only in modest ways) the whole social matrix of those practices” (2017, p. 191).
providing examples of Emily’s reappropriation of mundane play schemes and materials such as catch, blocks, sand toys, and books.

At home one afternoon, Emily invited me to play catch with her: “Noah, here! Noah, here! You have to play catch.” I used the quiet moment at home to explore what would happen without a corrective adult to intervene.

Noah: OK great, where should I stand?
Emily: You have to play catch right over here.
Noah: OK am I in the right spot?
Emily: Yea. This is where I can go – when I’m done you can do it.
Noah: OK you show me what to do and I’ll go next.

Emily threw her ball towards me and I caught it. I figured I knew all about catch. I was wrong. The game now twisted as Emily reappropriates “catch”.

Emily: No, that’s MINE!
Noah: Oh – so what do I do, throw mine this way?
Emily: Yea (she hands me a second ball).
Noah: OK, you ready?
Emily: I’m ready.

Emily set me up, crouching, about six feet away from where she was standing. She instructed me to look her in the eyes while we each threw our own balls towards the other person. As we threw, Emily called out a new instruction:

Emily: I’ll get you yours.
Noah: And I’ll get you yours!
After a few tweaks, and more instructions from Emily, this is the “catch” she taught me: Throw the ball, do not catch it, fetch the opposing person’s ball once it has rolled to a stop, roll the ball back to its owner, and then repeat. I had not observed her play catch at all during the research. It seemed to me that Emily was making this game up as she went along – there appeared to be no previous versions or times she had played this game.

Emily was displaying how scripts are enduring – she did use the ball to throw – yet malleable – “catch” for her did not actually involve “catching” the ball. Emily’s agency provides the tool with which she can escape the enduring script of “catch” and render it malleable through her novel contribution.

The enduring-yet-malleable nature of material scripts in Emily’s world was also on display at the Wee Studio. The Teacher’s Assistant, Tom, proved to be more accommodating to Emily’s reappropriation than the Little One teachers. This data provides a glimpse at how Emily’s reappropriation in a classroom setting occurs when supported by the teacher. During the time in which the children were instructed to “play downstairs for a bit”, Tom, a teacher’s assistant, motioned for Emily to join him in a fairly enduring script: building with large blocks. Tom had already built a tower approximately Emily’s height, and invited her to place another block on top. Emily accepted the invitation, taking the block out of Tom’s extended hand. She then promptly and vigorously knocked the tower over, leaving Tom with a rather surprised look. This was the moment in which Emily deviated from the script that Tom had imbued the blocks and began to reappropriate the materials towards her own agenda. Emily’s agency brought malleability to this encounter.
Tom offered no criticism or re-direction of Emily’s demolition and instead responded by building another tower. This time Emily asked him directly, “Can I knock over?” Tom answered yes, and she did. Tom was now on-board with Emily’s agenda and invited further demolition: “Let’s use lots of blocks – lots and lots.” They settled in to a pattern: Tom built a tower, Emily knocked it down. Emily was not interested in building with the blocks, only knocking them down. This initially surprised Tom, whose invitation had been to build, not demolish. Tom quickly capitulated as he learned Emily’s agenda, and ultimately served to support Emily’s re-making of the situation into one in which knocking-down was the agreed-upon agenda. The script here was enduring – blocks were used to build a tower – but malleable – the goal of the activity became destruction, not building.

In a similar instance of build-and-destroy, Emily and her babysitter Amanda had diverging agendas while in the sandbox at a local playground. The excerpt here focuses on how Emily changed the “script” for the sand toys. In this data Amanda was not quite as accommodating as Tom but not corrective like the Little Ones teachers. She instead seemed to lightly include Emily’s agenda in her play yet continued to attempt to bypass it:

Amanda: Now, what if we try making a sandcastle, or a tower?

(She holds up the bucket; this is the enduring practice, the use of the bucket according to its script in the sandbox)

Can you help me put sand in the bucket? We’re gonna try to make a sandcastle.

Emily: What are you making?
Amanda: You know what we should do? We should dig… dig all the sand.

(Amanda shows her what she means – scooping sand with her hands and placing it in the bucket.)

Emily: Oh. How? What we do?

Amanda: To make a sand castle.

Emily: What are you making?

Amanda: This is for a sand castle. Let’s see if this works…

(Amanda turns the bucket, full of sand, upside down and pats the bottom).

Emily: You made one?

At this point, Emily introduced a novel element: though Amanda’s invitation was to build, Emily began to destroy the sand castles. Her only verbalization over the next several minutes was “smush it, smush it,” as she used her rake to gently and intentionally knock down the towers and smooth over the sand. My field note captured the pattern:

Amanda has a plan to make a castle, Emily continues to subvert it. Amanda makes a castle, despite Emily using her rake to rebut Amanda’s plan. As soon as Amanda gets a castle up, Emily continues raking, on top of the castle – slowly levels the castle and continues to rake. Amanda and Emily are “playing together” albeit with different agendas. Amanda is “making” things, Emily is raking and knocking them down.

Despite their diverging agendas, they seemed to be operating contently in parallel.

Amanda indicated her comfort with Emily knocking down her sandcastles, at one point pausing to ask, “Should we do another one?” to which Emily said yes. Amanda had successfully defended the enduring use of sand molds – to make sandcastles – and yet
also incorporated Emily’s novel contribution – the rake them smooth. Emily’s agency here turned an enduring practice into a malleable one.

The pair shortly wrapped up in the sandbox and moved to a bench, where they ate snack. Amanda reflected on their time in the sandbox and emphasized the enduring-practice associated with the sand bucket:

Amanda: Remember? We were making the train and the airplane, and the sandcastle, too.

Emily: Why?

Amanda: Why? ‘Cause that’s what we do when we go to the sandpit, we try to make different shapes out of the sand.

Emily’s actual experience in the sandbox was not defined by “making different shapes” but rather by raking over the shapes that Amanda made. Upon reflection, Amanda stuck with her own enduring description of reality. This occurred in my second field observation, and my field note here captures how this data began to shape my analysis:

This is an inaccurate description of what happened – for the most part, Amanda tried to “make different shapes out of the sand” while Emily mostly moved sand around with the rake. This is what I now see as ‘adult imperialism’ – the overlaying of adult-perspective, and truth/reality, ONTO the child’s world, with a (benevolent) disregard for the child’s lived reality.

Despite incorporating Emily’s play into hers while in the sandbox, Amanda re-iterated her own agenda rather than addressing Emily’s. Emily co-authored the actual sandbox experience by agentively reappropriating the materials – turning the play into build-and-destroy – and yet, Amanda erased this contribution by reifying sand castles as “what we do when we go to the sandpit.” Emily’s agency here is both hard-fought yet also slippery.
She must constantly work towards enacting her vision of the world, which is seemingly always subject to adult intervention and control.

Kate likewise experienced some turbulence while grappling with Emily’s reappropriation, though one afternoon in particular she seemed to deftly comprehend Emily’s agenda and pursue it with her. Emily and Kate were playing together with magnatiles on the living room rug when Emily suddenly interrupted the play and offered a new idea. Emily’s idea, and use of material, would reappropriate and dominate the play scheme. Kate was initially surprised (as Tom was at Wee Studio) and confused (as was I), but deftly learned Emily’s agenda and did her best to follow it:

Kate: We could make, a path, a train track - we could make a rainbow, we could make a bracelet -

Emily: Come – I said, “pipe out” - I show “pipe out” in the book

Kate: Hmmm?

Emily: Show “pipe out”

Kate giggled lightly, uncertain what was happening. Emily stood up and walked into her bedroom, returning a moment later with *Mighty Mighty Construction Site* by Sherri Duskey Rinker (“Ages 2-5”). From here, Emily pursued her agenda with the book, sidestepping Kate’s earlier suggestions of play themes:

Emily: Where's pipe out? (Flips through book) I’m trying to look - trying to find - the part.

Kate: Which truck is it on?

Emily: Where's pipe out?

Kate: I don't know what pipe out is -
Emily: Where's pipe out mommy? Where's pipe out?
Kate: Pipe out?
Emily: Yea. Now you look for it
Kate: It's in the book?
Emily: Yea
Kate: I'm not sure what you're talking - I'll look through every page
Emily: You know what pipe out is?
Kate: No, I don't (slightly exasperated, but searching)
Emily: You know pipe out is?
Kate: No
Emily: What is pipe out?
Kate: This? (Pointing, in vain, to book)
Emily: No - pipe out. Where's pipe out?
Kate: I'm gonna look - um, there's - oh is it this?
Emily: Nope
Kate: Um, let's see - there's the crane - the crane truck - oh - are you talking about, when the guy is yelling, “Hey, pipe down”?
Emily: Pipe down! Pipe down! Pipe down! Pipe down! She found it!

At this point, Emily erupted into riotous giggling, which her mother promptly joined her in. Emily had remembered the phrase wrong but corrected herself as Kate located the phrase in the book. She continued to use both iterations throughout the extended interaction:
Emily: Where pipe down? Oh - where pipe out - where pipe down
- PIPE OUT! Pipe out! Now you watch me say pipe out -

“PIPE OUT!”

Emily eventually explained that John had read her the book the previous night at bedtime, and somehow “pipe down” had emerged as very prominent to Emily. She took this phrase as the focus of the book, and continued to use both “pipe out” and “pipe down” as central in her play for the remaining thirty minutes of the field observation. Kate and Emily put the book down and turned back to magnatiles, though Emily kept the play focused on “pipe down”:

Kate: What are you making?

Emily: A pipe down! A pipe down - which means -

Kate: - I’m not sure this is a good addition (to the magnatiles structure)

Emily: - pipe down means -

Kate: - what does pipe down mean?

Emily: - It's like - it's like – you had - do you know why? There is pipe down. Get out, pipe down! I said, get out pipe down! I said, get out pipe down!

Kate: Can you - can you make a window, for somebody to, pop their little head out?

(She is attempting to replicate the pipe down scene in book, in which a person pops his head out the window to yell the phrase)
Emily: It’s a window - you can see outside- and it’s called, a - window.

You know what, pipe down means? - Yea we are making a school with you, and me and you and you and you - yea - that will be - that will be - what are we making a pipe down. Pipe down! Pipe down! And it means - means - how when – here's, pipe down! Pipe down! Pipe down! Pipe down! Pipe down! Pipe down! Pipe down! Pipe down! Pipe down!

Pipe down! Pipe down! - Mom why you making a subway?

After initial surprise (“I don’t know what pipe out is”), Kate eventually learned Emily’s agenda – to take the phrase from the book and use it in her play – and was able to accommodate and support Emily’s reappropriation. Kate recognized both the novelty and value of Emily’s idea: “That IS funny! I’ve never read that part before, I always skip it.”

While Kate still had some turbulence, when she wondered about Emily’s addition being “good” and again when she worked on a subway that did not fit Emily’s vision, she overall found agreement with Emily’s agenda: she located the phrase in the book, joined in Emily’s laughter, and helped build a window through which the phrase could be yelled. Emily reappropriated the book from an object which Kate reads while Emily passively listens – as is the expected, enduring use of a book in Emily’s relationships with adults – into one in which she (Emily) is the protagonist and the expert on the book-content. Emily introduced a phrase (“pipe out”) which was novel to Kate and used it to re-position how the book would be used that afternoon. Emily then brought the phrase into their magnatile play, creating a new scenario with the toys. Emily’s agency here shows how she is able to turn an enduring practice – the reading of a book – into a
malleable one through her novel contributions as she creates new possibilities for the book’s use.

**Summary**

The data presented throughout this section highlights Emily’s capacity to reappropriate her world. She consistently took elements of her world that were presented to her by adults with an ostensible script and subverted their prescribed use by replacing it with her own agenda. Emily did this throughout all elements of her life, including the mundane objects presented here. Emily’s novel use of materials, contradicting how adults expected her to use them, showed how she was constantly taking the future by refusing to submit to others’ expectations. She engaged with the world in inventive ways as she gave enduring objects new purposes and meaning. Emily agentively took enduring social practices – board games, catching a ball, building towers and sand castles, reading books – and made them malleable through her unique presence.

Emily’s reappropriation encountered a range of adult interactions, which created different possibilities for her agentive contributions. Her agenda was at times thwarted, as adults attempted to correct her behavior towards what it was supposed to be. Exploring these different adult behaviors around Emily’s reappropriation – acquiescence or correction – provides compelling evidence to support Stetsenko’s claim that

For agency to develop and be effectual, not only do individuals need to engage with their society but society also needs to develop the necessary means and spaces to allow for individuals to act as truly agentive participants who are empowered and welcome to make a contribution to society through enacting transformative changes in it. (2017, p. 212)
Emily’s agency was never silent, yet was diminished when her agenda of reappropriation was thwarted and embellished when this agenda was embraced.

**Generation**

**Overview**

Emily’s resistance and reappropriation, as social expressions of her agency, are part of her *uninterrupted generative engagement with the world*. The ongoing and generative nature of this encounter is explored in this section by highlighting data in which Emily used her agency to generate new futures as she encountered the world. I argue here that each act, by each person, at each point in life, matters. Each of Emily’s moments of encounter invented a new future. It is not that any one moment, or collection of moments, matter – it is that they *all* matter. The data in this section will show how Emily’s “modest,” “local,” and “mundane” (Stetsenko, 2017)3 actions accumulate over history – the moving forward through time of her encounters with the world – to generate novel futures. I will support this argument first through the voices of Emily’s teachers

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3 Stetsenko (2017) uses these three words in her treatise on the Transformative Activist Stance to illustrate how transformative agency is not necessarily (though can be) a visibly and immediately powerful force: agency can be felt “in modest ways and merely on local scales” (p. 182), “even seemingly mundane events…are starkly agentive and transformative” (p. 220), and “activist contributions…always matter (if only on a small scale) and typically, in modest ways” (p. 259).
and parents, and then in vivid scenarios that I describe as creative encounters\(^4\) in which Emily’s transformative agency was displayed.

**“I Think She Knows What She Wants”: Adults on Generation**

The adults in Emily’s life – her teachers and parents – were lucid about the power that Emily brings to her encounters. This was exemplified by Michelle, who described Emily’s “ability to know what she wants and when she wants it.” Pondering this further, she added, “She’s so strong and independent.” This “ability,” coupled with strength and independence, would prove to disrupt many of the strategies of control employed by adults. I will review Kate and John’s remarks on this topic, followed by the teachers, to frame the creative encounters which follow.

Kate and John noticed many of the modest, local, mundane changes that Emily brought to her encounter with the world. During our interviews, they readily shared these examples on a small scale: Emily fighting to do her toothbrush by herself, her insistence on reading the same picture book three times in a row at bedtime, her resistance to getting into her stroller, her desire to wear high heels out of the house, her demand that she get a whole apple instead of apple slices for snack, and her penchant for eating pancakes frozen instead of microwaved. Kate and John, rapidly ticking off these examples, made clear this was just the tip of the iceberg – this type of “mattering” was rampant in Emily’s life. Kate encapsulated this sentiment one afternoon while we chatted on the walk home from Little Ones: “Now that Emily has her own ideas, it’s like this whole new world!”

\(^4\) My use of this phrase is explained in the section on Analysis in Chapter IV.
When stepping back from the particular examples and commenting on Emily’s general proclivity to insert her own agenda, John mentioned that the frequency of this type of encounter – in which Emily inserted her agenda and transformed the activity – was “every day” and “growing.” Kate also commented that during these moments Emily “is so intense about her requests and wishes. She’s very clear. She is able to articulate it, what she is thinking.” Kate and John recognized the clarity and frequency with which Emily’s mundane demands shifted their daily lives on a small scale. As these shifts accumulated, it became clear that Emily’s intensity of requests and ideas transformed Kate and John into a new position as parents. Kate described, “We have all these little things that we do that are just like, our Emily-way-of-doing-things – which I don’t think that we were really like that with Susan.” In a later interview, Kate again hit on this theme, commenting, “I’m catching onto patterns” regarding Emily’s behavior, such as the timing of her nap and meals, and also that “I feel like I’m still just trying to figure out ways to make it easy for both of us.” Kate and John’s role as parents was being actively shaped by Emily’s agency; Emily was transforming her family around their “Emily-way-of-doing-things.”

This includes doing things that ran counter to Kate and John’s expected future, such as reading the book three times and feeding her frozen pancakes. John commented that “sometimes I get annoyed reading the same book three times” while Kate mentioned in relation to the books as well that “it’s not our preference a lot of times.” In regards to the frozen pancakes, John stated that “I feel like, at this point, if we can accommodate it and it’s not harming her – it’s like – well, OK,” and Kate concurred by adding, “Who cares, right?” John, with a smile, added, “It’s not like raw meat. Who cares?”
Kate and John’s sentiments that Emily was “very clear” in communicating “her own ideas” was roundly agreed upon by the Little Ones teachers. At a home-visit by the teachers to Emily’s apartment before school began for the year, Michelle noticed that “Emily was taking control” by “showing us what she does and she likes to play with.” This was echoed by Yasmin, who described:

I think she knows what she wants. When she goes about her work, I think she has a plan and I think she just is strong willed. I think she knows – I think she like has intention for what she’s doing.

Tanya nodded her head and provided an example from the dramatic play area, in which Emily articulated the ideas she brought into her play:

… So I just say, “Are you making salad?” [Emily responded.] “Yes - this is a salad party.” I didn’t mention the word party and then she [Emily] says “salad party.” She included, “I’m putting cucumber, tomatoes, now we have to mix it,” - so THESE are the steps. That’s her plan.

Tanya included this notion in the end of year report, stepping back from particular examples to summarize her understanding of Emily’s creative contributions:

Emily’s play creations are well conceived and often contain a storyline, based upon her experiences that she gleans from her social environment. Her ability to create imaginative play scenarios is evident…. Her ability to work without support provides her with the persistence and courage to continue forward in her discoveries.

“Persistence” aids Emily’s pursuit of her goals as well, also described in the report:

She [Emily] will persist in getting her message across until she is satisfied that she has been heard. For example, on a very cold day, Emily insisted on wearing her Dorothy style shoes to the roof, against repeated instructions from the teachers and only relented when a compromise was made, where she could wear her boots but would carry shoes in her coat pocket.

The acknowledgement of Emily’s persistence and insistence “against repeated instructions” showcases her existence-through-resistance. Tanya recognized Emily’s persistence as the stance in which she confronts adult control.
As described by her parents and teachers, Emily was strong, independent, and persistent. She had her own ideas and knows what she wants. These qualities combined to generate new playscapes at school and new approaches to parenting at home. I will use the following section on creative encounters to explore how this occurs at a local, mundane level.

**Creative Encounters**

In this section I present data from creative encounters in which Emily agentively engaged in the shaping of the world. In each of the creative encounters shown here, Emily resisted, reappropriated, and ultimately generated a novel future. These encounters are chosen to highlight how Emily’s “own ideas” served to shift adults’ interactions with her and how her “persistence” and “power” generated novel futures. Emily’s agency is not ahistorical but rather deeply contextualized within the social practices that she simultaneously changes. Her agency does not exist outside of social practices; it was real-ized and embodied through her engagement with, and opposition towards, social practices. I therefore use these creative encounters to display how Emily’s agency accumulated through her social engagement and stance of opposition. The first

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5 The data presented here represents typical scenarios throughout the research period. The creative encounters presented here are by no means singular or outstanding. The transformative dissent and generation of novel futures found in these examples was oft-occurring during the research period in all areas of Emily’s life. The examples here are selected for their ability to represent the local, mundane manner in which Emily changed her world. These were actions she was continuously engaged in.
encounter (train tracks) is offered as an exemplary piece of the data and is then supported by exploring two additional condensed accounts of similar creative encounters.

“**We’re gonna play train tracks.**” At home one morning, Emily announced one of her ideas to no one in particular: “We’re gonna play train tracks.” This modest declaration initiated an elongated scenario in which Emily’s and John’s ideas regarding the train tracks were pitched against each other. I present this data to support my argument that Emily’s persistence – her existence-through-resistance – defined her encounter with the world and ultimately shaped the future. I explore how this occurred throughout this creative encounter and follow the analysis by supporting my argument with two similar but abbreviated examples from the data.

Kate, John, and Susan were getting ready for the day and I was sitting next to Emily, on the bare wood floor in her family’s dining room, as Emily made her train-track proclamation. My field notes describe Emily as “busy, chatty, and productive” for the duration of the scene. As she settled into her train play, Emily stated that she was making a “big tunnel, that we use for trains,” slowly and intentionally adding particular pieces in particular locations. This portion of the train play unfolded according to Emily’s agenda – the idea to play trains was hers, and she was executing her plan. She continued to assert her agenda on the trains, labelling one “Yasmin.” Emily turned to the train: “Hi Yasmin! It’s going to fall down, and I don’t want you to do that, ok? It’s not safe!” Emily was using the train tunnel as a means to explore Yasmin’s character and the trope of rules and safety emanating from school.
Hoping to spend a few minutes playing with Emily before leaving for work, John sat down next to her and asked, “Do you need some help with your train tracks?” Emily answered yes, and John sat down. Almost immediately, the clash of their agendas was apparent, despite the mutual desire for collaboration. As was often the case throughout the observations, the adult offer of “help” came with a subliminal – though at times explicit – agenda of re-directing Emily’s actions. Initially, Emily acquiesced to John’s agenda; this was similar to her initial acquiescence to Kate’s reminder of how game pieces are “supposed to” be used.

John’s first comment in the play was, “Should we connect these tracks?” and this idea came to briefly dominate the play. Emily said yes, so John continued: “Great – you wanna do it? You just gotta flip it [a piece of track] around – there!” Emily and her dad cooperated briefly on his agenda – connecting the trains and making them bigger. Emily was impressed: “Whoa, now it’s huge!” Emily’s agenda of “tunnel” and “Yasmin” had been seemingly forgotten in favor of John’s prompt to “connect the tracks.”

However, as John pushed his agenda further and said they should “change the direction” of one of the curved tracks in order to “connect this into a circle,” Emily adamantly declared “No!” Emily’s sharp rebuttal of John’s agenda here displayed her capacity, as Michelle stated, “to know what she wants and when she wants it.” While Emily was happy to have John join her play, and even gracious enough to initially incorporate his agenda, she resisted further encroachment and instead re-asserted her own agenda. Emily then explained that, instead of connecting the tracks in a circle, she wanted to place a bumper on the end of the track; her proposed piece would terminate the track instead of form a completed circle. John was seemed confused in response to Emily’s
assertion, reminiscent of Tom’s surprise as Emily reappropriated the Wee Studio blocks and Kate’s confusion when Emily started looking for “pipe out.” Unsure, John responded, “Oh that just stops it – we don’t want it to stop, do we?” John seemed to be supplanting Emily’s plans with his: Emily wants it to stop, John does not.

Emily, always-persistent, quickly explained that “we have to” add the bumper piece “so they [the train cars] can sleep there.” She was explaining that the bumper piece would stop the cars, allowing them to sleep. Emily continued to rebut John as they played:

John: Now do you want to connect these two?

Emily: No.

John: (Ignoring her) Here Emily get this piece right here, and then, we can probably connect them –

Emily: Nope.

John: Oooo – if you have one more curvy piece, maybe we can connect them – why don’t you put that there?

Emily: Well that would stop them!

At this point, Emily was protesting John’s activity, raising her voice and beginning to appear agitated. Her initial acquiescence to his idea had evaporated and was replaced by her resistance:

John: Can I try one thing?

Emily: What?

John: What about, this?
(He makes the “connection” he initially wanted, completing the circle)

Emily: What about – NO! NO!

(Emily continues to raise her voice and begins to wail)

John: No? OK.

(Emily is now calm again, a rapid shift)

Emily: And then this one will go right here, and then you can connect it, and then it’s my turn to do this one, and then, it can go around! This is a circle!

Emily disconnected John’s circle and instead inserted the bumper she initially suggested. The “circle” that she proclaimed is actually a loose spiral, with the bumper terminating the track. John, watching Emily’s ideas in action, softly said, “Mmm!” Emily told him, pointing to the bumper, “That’s where they sleep.” John, now in the position of acquiescence, accepted Emily’s statement: “OK.”

Emily continued to play as John intermittently watched and joined, more careful now to follow Emily’s agenda. Emily carefully lined up the train cars on the train track, and then in deliberate fashion placed them on their side on the wood floor next to the track. The trains on their sides, she told John, were asleep: “they [the trains] can go to the apartment to sleep” where “there’s a people bed that they sleep in.” She added, “They wanna go to sleep. I’ll let them. I’m gonna get all the trains so they can go to sleep over there. That’s gonna be a big sleepover!” Eventually, Emily climbed into the middle of the spiral/“circle,” lying down on the ground and looking directly at the trains, as if making eye-contact with their imagined characters: “This is the goodnight story, then I’m gonna
say goodnight.” Emily closed her eyes, said goodnight to the trains, and told her dad she, too, was sleeping.

Ultimately, using her resistance and subversion, Emily powerfully pierced through the layers of control and expectations imposed on her in this play, transforming the encounter by imposing herself on it. This was Emily “facing the world, even confronting it, in what is an active and passionate striving in the face of challenges and dilemmas” (Stetsenko, 2017). John attempted to insert his agenda in the train play to show Emily how train tracks are supposed to connect – a pedagogically inspired practice through which Emily would have learned about circles, connections, and the appropriate use of materials. This seemed congruent with the teachers’ desire to see Emily use materials in increasingly “appropriate” manners. However, rather than allow John to use the train tracks to change her and her plans – to teach her about how to make circles and how to use train tracks – Emily changed the nature of the encounter. John was ultimately forced to submit to Emily’s desires and engage in “sleep” play with the trains.

John’s “Mmm” and “OK” reminded me of the moment during the “pipe down” scenario (“Reappropriation”) when Kate recognized Emily’s agenda with the book. This was the turning point in the encounter, when John realized that Emily’s power and resistance, not his own agenda, would define the play scene. In my analysis of both scenarios – “pipe down” and train tracks – the adult recognizes and acknowledges Emily’s agency. This is a subtle yet significant difference from a model in which adults empower children by supporting their voice or grant children agency by following their lead. In this analysis, Emily was always and already powerful, regardless of the adult-
view of her in the moment. In powerful fashion, Emily was continuously engaged in the shaping of the future – a phenomenon which is recognized, not granted, by adults.

As the train play wound down, it was time to leave the apartment for the day. The train track’s denouement would also be defined by Emily’s transformative dissent. As they prepared to wrap up the play and leave the apartment, John told Emily: “You need to put these trains away, remember?” Emily, as always, was persistent in her resistance:

Emily: No!

John: You said you were gonna put the trains away when you got them. OK, let’s – put the trains away.

Emily: No!

John: Yes –

Emily: No!

John ultimately relented, offering what he thought was a reasonable compromise: “Push it [the loose toy pieces] to the side so it’s not in the middle, and the trains that are not on the track please put away, OK?” Emily, not surprisingly, responded with a tart, “No!”

This back-and-forth stalemate continued until Kate joined and offered a similar compromise:

Let’s see, what can we leave out? Let’s just put the trains that are out, in the bucket. Here, we’ll put these ones away, and then we’ll leave this to play with after school. Is that good?

Emily, ever-consistent, quickly responded, “No!” At this point, Kate began to clean up and attempted to entice Emily to get on board with her agenda. Emily instead walked to the other side of the dining room to a large cardboard box that she and her sister had been using in their play. Emily used the box to subvert her parents’ agenda:
Emily: I’m gonna sit in there.

Kate: Oh wait, we’re not gonna play with this yet, you gotta put the trains in the container or on the track.

Emily: No!

Kate: OK, put them on the track then, and then you’ll get the box. Want some help?

John and Kate, while trying to offer a reasonable compromise to bridge the distance between their agenda and Emily’s, were both insisting that Emily move the trains that were on the floor – in their estimation, these trains are part of the mess while the trains on the track are part of the play. Emily saw it differently: the trains were on the floor deliberately, they were sleeping there as part of her play scheme. Kate attempted to move the trains from the floor and onto the tracks:

Emily: No! They’re sleeping.

Kate: Let’s lay them down…

Emily: No! It’s not OK!

Kate: Well, we’re either going to put them on the track or we’re going to put them in this tray (the bin they are stored in). Track, tray? Which one? ‘Cause daddy said we’re gonna clean up, so, we’re gonna do that.

Emily: I’m gonna put all them in my box

(She dumps the trains in the cardboard box she had wanted to sit in)
They’re going in the box. This is gonna be all the trains in, and

I’m gonna sit in there too.

Emily continued to subvert John and Kate’s agenda right through the end of the scene. Emily resisted her parents’ expectations to clean up the toys, and then rejected their efforts at compromising. When Kate gave Emily a choice between two options (place the trains on their tracks, or on the tray where they are stored), Emily subverted her parents’ agenda and forced a third choice, to dump them into the cardboard box, which she did.

I describe Emily’s resistance as a “stance” because, as evident in this encounter, she did not simply or narrowly resist particular aspects of adult-control. Rather, she seems poised to reject and resist the paradigm in which adults are expected to dictate her actions. This paradigm ignores her agenda and is blind to her reality – she did not want to connect the tracks, the trains lying down were part of her play – and so she resisted it wholesale. Emily mattered; she agentively shifted the situation from one in which trains were to be cleaned up into one in which train play continued in the cardboard box. She pierced through the structure imposed on her by adults, reclaiming her power and agency and creating a new future – one which her parents had not expected nor desired.

In this encounter Emily created change in “modest ways” through “mundane events” and on “local scales.” Rather than be changed by the imperial forces seeking to control her, she effectively changed the world she encountered by inserting her agency and voice with strength and confidence. Albeit modestly and locally, Emily invented a new future, one distinct from the future that John intended to bring about when he sat down and asked her, “Do you need some help with your train tracks?” John’s statements throughout the encounter indicate the future he sought: one in which he and Emily use
the train tracks to create a complete circle, on which trains run, and after which the trains are cleaned up and put away before Emily leaves for school. This was how trains are “supposed to” be used. The deviations from John’s agenda forced by Emily’s agenda show that she was involved in a creative process which generated movement and new formations in the landscape of her world. She met the world and she created a different future.

“We’re gonna play peekaboo.” This section brings together excerpts from two creative encounters which revolve around Emily’s generation of a sustained game of “peekaboo” in the school bathroom. I connect these encounters to display how Emily’s “own ideas” bring forth and display her capacity to “know what she wants and when she wants it.” I argue that these encounters show how Emily’s resistance and subversion of Tanya’s agenda of control and regulation ultimately yielded Emily’s invention of a new future.

The Little Ones’ bathroom was outside of the classroom, immediately adjacent to the classroom door. Posted in and around the bathroom were four identical signs: “This bathroom is for children’s use only. Adults please use the bathroom on the 5th floor.” As examined within my argument here, this sign is a tool of age-based segregation and therefore accompanied by the notion that children – the children whom this bathroom is designed for – will require control and regulation as adults supervise children in the appropriate “use” of the facilities. The toilets were each in individual stalls, which have had their doors taken off to increase adult supervision, again reminiscent of Cannella’s panopticon within early childhood settings.
The changing table used in the bathroom was manufactured by Community Playthings, a model referred to as number G248 with a 6” pan. The product website describes the model as having “child-proof lockable doors” and notes that

Following National Health and Safety Performance Standards (part 5.133), straps are not offered. Best practice recommends that the caregiver does not rely on straps but always has a hand on the child.

The company also sells a similar model “with steps,” which allows a child to climb up on their own into the changing pan. The model used by the Little Ones – without steps – required that the teacher physically lift the child up and place them in the pan.

In the first iteration of peekaboo, the design of the changing table forced Tanya to stay focused on Yuval, whose diaper she was changing. Tanya brought Emily and Sarah into the bathroom as well, with the expectation that they wait patiently at her side until it was their turn to be changed. Emily, however, had ideas of her own. She scurried in and out of the cabinet doors at the base of the table while Sarah idled nearby, visually tracking her movements. When Tanya noticed what Emily was doing, she told her that “it’s not safe” to play like that; Emily retorted with a soft whine. Tanya responded, “I know. It is very hard – but right now… I want you to…” Tanya trailed off as she focused on Yuval, which granted Emily a reprieve from supervision. Emily continued to move in and out of the cabinet. Tanya, oscillating between children, looked down at Emily again and stated, “Emily – look at Tanya – be careful!” Emily pointedly ignored Tanya’s instructions, so Tanya re-emphasized her point:

I’m trying to keep you safe – Emily – listen – I’m asking you to move – look at me – it’s going to take longer – it’s going to take longer – you’re doing things today Emily you don’t do, you know? You’re doing things today usually you don’t do. I want you to wait for Tanya, please go wait in the hallway.
Tanya attempted to sustain her control over Emily by having her stand just outside the bathroom, presumably to remove the potential for Emily to play in the cabinet below the changing table. Emily disagreed and maintained her stance of dissent:

Emily: No, I’m going to the classroom.
Tanya: No, nobody’s there in the classroom, you’re going to wait for me here (in the hallway).

During this exchange, Sarah moved into one of the two toilet stalls and poked her head out, glancing enticingly at Emily. Having firmly rejected Tanya’s admonitions, Emily moved into the stall with Sarah, where they conspired together. In short order, they were playing peekaboo, as they would hide in neighboring stalls and then pop their heads out, finding each other to smile and laugh. Tanya was increasingly frustrated as she lost control of her charges in the bathroom:

Emily – that’s not – what Sarah is doing – Sarah is NOT doing the right thing. Uh-uh-uh (shaking her head “no”) – Emily come out from there (the stall), please – you two cannot – you are having a very hard time listening today Emily. Look at Tanya – it’s not good it’s not good – please listen to my words because all I’m trying to do is keep you safe.

Emily’s resistance and subversion – concurrent with Tanya’s repeated attempts at control\(^6\) – created a scenario in which she pierced through Tanya’s agenda. Emily found liberation in peekaboo; the nascent game was a brazen display of hard-earned independence and freedom.

\(^6\) It is important to insert a reminder here that the agency being analyzed is intimately involved with the imperialism explored in the previous chapter. Emily’s agency in the peekaboo game is positioned alongside (co-terminus), and against (en-countering), Tanya’s extension of control into her life. The agency expressed in this data revolves around how Emily engages with Tanya’s presence in her life. I use the data to argue that Emily’s engagement is one of opposition and resistance to this presence, and through that resistance her agency is expressed. I do not claim that this is the only path to agency nor is it the only way that Emily engages with Tanya. The claim I make is that oppositional agency, as described, was present throughout Emily’s life.
I observed a second iteration of the game in an encounter that seemed to continue the same dialogue of control-and-resistance around bathroom use. In the classroom one afternoon, Tanya called out for Emily, Yuval, and Sarah: “Let’s go get changed.”

Yasmin, who had been reading a book to Emily, told her, “Alright Emily, go to the bathroom now. Tanya’s waiting for you.” Immediately upon entering the bathroom, Emily articulated her own ideas for how the future should unfold, piercing through adult-expectations and taking control:

Emily: OK Yuval, be in there, ok? (Motioning him towards the stall)

We're gonna play peekaboo - let's say, “Peekaboo”!

(She hides in a bathroom stall and then pops out)

PEEKABOO!!! Peekaboo! Peekaboo! Peekaboo!

Tanya: OK - Sarah and Yuval - I say this - Emily - Emily and Yuval - I say this every day - roof is - I - bathroom is not the place to play this - it’s not safe - it’s not very safe.

Emily: (Popping her head out of the stall to find Yuval) Peekaboo!

Peekaboo! Hey, you be in there. (She motions to the other stall.)

At this point, Tanya seemed resigned to the fact that she was being forced to cede control of the bathroom to Emily. Tanya turned to me and explained how the same scenario had unfolded the previous day: “Emily slipped yesterday in the bathroom, running in the water.” Curious about Emily’s perspective on this incident, I asked her:

Noah: What happened Emily?

Emily: I was playing, and I slipped.
Noah: Where was it?
Emily: Right here (the precise spot she is now standing).
Noah: How did you slip - what happened?
Emily: I was playing peekaboo with Yuval and then I just slipped.
Noah: You were playing peekaboo with Yuval and then you just slipped.
Emily: Yes.
Noah: And then when you came back in today, the first thing you wanted to do, was play peekaboo.
Emily: Yea.
Noah: And then Tanya told you that you should not play peekaboo because it is not safe.
Emily: I know.
Tanya: - in the bathroom

In this iteration of peekaboo, Emily continued to assert her vision of the future despite having slipped yesterday in the same context. For Tanya, slipping in the water was a safety hazard which highlighted why she forbade the game to begin with; for Emily, it was a simple nuisance to be brushed aside. Emily was determined to repeat the game and relished in the freedom which she achieved through her dissent.

Tanya repeatedly attempted to maintain control in the bathroom by reminding Emily of expectations and rules; she expected the bathroom to be a place where children listen to teachers and wait their turn to have their diaper changed. Tanya’s needs and preferences in this scenario required a docile Emily. However, *that future never arrived.*
It was instead shifted and informed by Emily’s vision of the future, which she created through her active struggle against the expectations imposed on her. Emily shirked not only Tanya’s verbal commands but also the printed sign that refers to “children’s use” of the bathroom, as she clearly “used” the bathroom stalls in an un-anticipated manner, as well as the changing table, which was designed for diaper storage in the cabinets and certainly not for children hiding. Emily repeatedly resisted, subverted, and pierced through the many attempts to regulate and control her use of the bathroom, through a process in which she ultimately took her future rather than await its automatic and expected arrival.

“MOMMY!” At home one morning, Emily asserted and enacted her vision of the future through repeated resistance, in similar fashion to the train tracks and peekaboo encounters. I present this creative encounter to display how Emily’s small, mundane actions generated meaningful revision of the future as-it-is-being-made. On this morning, Emily’s grandmother had slept over the night before, and was having breakfast with John and Emily in the kitchen. The adult-agenda for the morning was to have Kate work with Susan in the dining room while dad and grandma ate breakfast with Emily. Emily’s agency dis-allowed the arrival of that future and replaced it with the future she sought. Emily initiated the creative encounter when she gazed around the kitchen and realized that her mother was not there:

Emily: MOMMY!
Kate: Yea!
John: What do you need?
Emily: Where mommy?
John: She’s getting Susan some breakfast...

Emily: Can I see?

John: Can you see?

Emily: Yea.

John: Why don’t you hang with us?

Emily: I wanna see - I wanna see her.

John: Who?

Emily: Susan and mommy.

John: Well they'll come back in here.

Emily: I wanna see her.

John: OK. You don’t wanna hang with us? (Emily walks out of the kitchen) Bye!

Grandma: What about your breakfast? Your sausage?

With her opening declaration – “MOMMY!” – Emily established the future that she was determined to work towards. John attempted to convince her to “hang with us,” reassuring her that Kate would “come back” to the kitchen. Emily, though, was insistent on being with Kate immediately and left the kitchen to pursue this goal. Emily found Kate seated next to Susan in the dining room:

Emily: Mommy can you come back in?

Kate: What?

Emily: Mom can you come back in? In here?

At the dining room table, Susan was using a toy called Fashion Plates (crayons are rubbed over different plastic templates, making different outfits for a “fashion
model” pictured below the template). Emily realized that Kate was not going to “come back in” to the kitchen, and so set herself towards participating in the Fashion Plates game:

Emily: MOMMY I wanna sit up here ‘cause I wanna see...Susan I WANTNA SEE!

John and Grandma stayed in the kitchen, and Emily now climbed onto Kate’s lap. She continued to generate a new future as she pursued her own agenda:

Emily: I want you to open the case! (Containing the templates.)
Kate: Sure.
Emily: Mommy - I wanna play with those -
Kate: Let’s try this!
Emily: What is this one? I wanna play with those.
Kate: (Narrating, as the drawing comes into focus) Jean, skirt, and boots, long pants - What one do you want, Emily?
Emily: I want - that one -

Kate worked with Emily to select a template and crayon, and together they made a Fashion Plate drawing:

Kate: We made it!
Emily: Can I see?
Kate: Look what we made!
Emily: Can I do it again? Can I do it again? Mom - mom - can we color this?
Kate: Yea.
John and Grandma then exited the kitchen to find Emily, Susan, and Kate all engaged with Fashion Plates at the dining room table. Emily did, indeed, create the future she envisioned. As they looked around at the activity, Emily proclaimed loudly, “Mom I wanna do it again!” Susan guided her through the final steps in the activity:

Susan: Now you [Emily] have to do the patterns - skirt patterns - or you can have the pants.
John: You’ve been working hard!
Emily: Yea mommy, can you, can you do it again?
Kate: Yea wanna pick it out?
Susan: OK do you want me to - can I open them?
Emily: Yea.

The whole family was now gathered around the dining room table; Emily had pushed back against the expectations that were initially present and took reality as she re-invented the future. The scene continued, with Emily on Kate’s lap for the duration, as Grandma commented to Kate:

Grandma: Of course Emily would wanna, do the grown-up thing.
Kate: I know (giggles).
Grandma: Well it says, I think, “6 or 7 and up”
Kate: Or 2-year-olds, too. (Half jokingly, with a smile)
Grandma: Yea right! (Laughing)

Grandma’s comment highlighted that not only had Emily rejected John’s vision of the future – in which Emily finish her breakfast in the kitchen with Grandma – but she had also rejected the age-grading of the toy. One distribution website stated that Fashion
Plates are for “6 and up,” and another read “5 and up.” Grandma’s comment was benign in intent yet betrayed how ubiquitous adult-expectations around Emily are. The mundane act of participating in her sister’s activity – a requisite condition to engage with Kate that morning – was itself a subversive act against age-based segregation.

Emily took the reality that was given to her – eating breakfast with John and Grandma – and pushed back against it by inserting “her own ideas.” She displayed her persistence in her active struggle to achieve her vision of how the future ought to be. The modest act of leaving the kitchen in pursuit of her mother created the future – a future that her parents and grandmother did not anticipate. At a local level, Emily generated an un-anticipated future by inserting her agenda.

Summary

Emily was engaged in a generative encounter with the world as she asserted “her own ideas” through her power and her plans for the future. Common in each of these creative encounters was Emily’s capacity to invent a new future by transcending the status quo in a modest, local, mundane manner. I argue that throughout all of her many small actions, Emily was continuously “inventing the future within the present” (Stetsenko, 2017, p. 245). This is evidenced in the set of creative encounters reviewed here, as Emily resisted and reappropriated adult-agendas, ultimately generating a novel future through her active striving. Emily’s agency encountered adult imperialism, and this entanglement created new landscapes: John capitulated and played trains Emily’s
way; Tanya ceded control of the bathroom to Emily’s peekaboo game; the morning for Emily’s entire family was transformed by her desire to be with Kate. These were not frivolous or small moments; *even powerless people are powerful*. I argue that these displays of agency and power are instantiations of how individuals and the world they meet come to co-author the future. In this fashion, Emily met the world and generated the future.

**Summary of Chapter VI**

I have established from the data that Emily meaningfully and persistently asserted her agency through her tripartite acts of resistance, reappropriation, and generation. Emily’s transformative dissent agentively generated novel futures. I presented data in this chapter to locate Emily’s power in her ongoing stance of opposition towards adult-expectations. Emily’s capacity to overcome and confront her reality provided hard-earned freedom and *matter*-ing. The data I used in this argument come from mundane, modest, local areas of Emily’s life, such as saying “no,” walking away from the rug, throwing a ball, knocking down a block tower, raking in the sandbox, playing trains, and asking for her mother. These are not isolated examples of agency but rather show the fullness of Emily’s always-agentive presence as she encountered the world. Emily’s ongoing encounters displayed her struggle to be seen, to be understood, and to matter in the world-as-it-is-being-made.
Chapter VII

IMPLICATIONS

Agency cannot be taken for granted…. Agency and the capacity to be a social actor *have to develop* (and be developed) within a solidaristic community and with the help of cultural mediations and tools of its social practices. (Stetsenko, 2017, p. 248)

Overview

Emily shifted my relationship with children and childhood; I offer this shift as the reflexive implications of this study. I felt this shift not only in my relationship with Emily but also with my own two children (now turning 2 and 5 years old) and with the students in the nursery school where I work as director. In a display of the power and agency Emily carries with her every day, the simple act of watching her and interacting with her for a period of time pushed me towards a different understanding of children and myself: Emily changed my stance as a researcher, a parent, and a nursery school director. In this chapter I offer the ways that Emily changed my relationship with children and childhood as the implications that this study can contribute to other adults in their interactions with
other children. I describe how my learnings from my time with Emily can be explored, understood, critiqued, and carried further by other adults in encounters with other children.

These implications are only arrived at through the lens of the local and particular moments which I spent with Emily while getting a glimpse into her world. I offer situated implications, grounded in the unique cultural and historical context which allowed Emily’s transformation of my practice. What I am able to offer here springs forth not from anything to do with generalized childhood but, rather, Emily’s particular childhood in the here and now of this particular time and place. I do not attempt to offer a positivist set of truths or indefeasible beliefs about children. What I share are my contestable and interpretable theories of how my exploration of Emily’s encounter with her world can yield insight into relationships between other adults and other children – beyond me and beyond Emily.

The idiographic nature of my study allowed me to study Emily’s life with depth and clarity afforded by the situation of close interactions and lengthy time spent together. My commitment has been to learn from a particular child about meaningful aspects of her life as she encounters the world. When I speak of “other adults” and “other children” in this chapter I mean that while my research is local and particular, the local is never separate from the general. Emily is not ahistorical and my research is not acontextual. The implications offered here – the ways Emily moved and educated me – are both particular to the time and place of the research and also salient to how our contemporary adult society interacts with both the construct of childhood and individual children.
These implications can thus be understood as the refraction of Emily’s encounter with the world through me. I am the non-neutral lens through which they must be considered, an imperfect yet sympathetic and deeply interested observer. I offer this chapter knowing that it will itself be again refracted through the reader, in the readers own role as a researcher, a parent, or an early childhood educator – and yet again through the children the reader encounters. The reader is the conduit through which these implications will be felt and made sense of in other local, situated, particular contexts – with other adults and other children. The dialogic validity of this chapter rests on the situativity of knowledge, on epistemological praxis. This chapter is my quest to understand, interpret, and translate Emily’s encounters so they might be considered by other adults in their relationships with other children.

The implications of this study are built around the notion in TAS that agency expressed through the individual is a social “achievement” which is constituted by individuals and groups as they

…defy the preestablished categories and deconstruct the taken-for-granted rules and modes of operating while making the familiar seem strange – and not as some kind of intellectual exercise, but as a means to open up possibilities for new social arrangements and ways of life [emphasis added]. (Stetsenko, 2017, p. 247)

In this sense, individual agency means nothing less than social impact, a disruptive, innovative mattering in the flow of social norms. It is through this lens that the implications of this chapter are offered, as part of my continued commitment to critically deconstruct taken-for-granted canons about children, early childhood, child development, and the practices of adults as they relate to young children. The model for these implications – Stetsenko’s “new social arrangements” – was achieved by Emily as she encountered her world. Her agency and transformative dissent defied the taken-for-
granted rules and achieved – *as a social expression of agency* – a shift in my relationship with her and my understanding of childhood. Viewed as such, the implications offered here are indeed not “some kind of intellectual exercise” and instead represent, in a literal sense, the “new social arrangements and ways of life” arrived at through playing close and intimate attention to Emily’s life.

I will outline new social arrangements between adults and children, based off Emily’s mattering and disruption of taken-for-granted rules. I will first present contrasting visions of a hypothetical axis of relationships between adults and children and will then locate that axis in my own relationship with children. I will use that as a pivot from which to offer implications for other adults and other children.

**Re-Orienting the Axis of Relationships**

Considering the data analysis in Chapters V and VI, I suggest a productive and critical re-orientation of the axis, or pole, of relationships among adults and children – a new social arrangement. This re-orientation points towards a profound shift in the manner that adults perceive and construct children, away from adult imperialism in which children are seen as an object to “contain and control” (Wartofsky, 1983, p. 200). This re-orientation is born out of a recognition of Emily’s resistance, reappropriation, and generation – her transformative dissent – and a desire to seek out the fullness of rights accorded to each human.
Throughout my time spent with Emily, questioning the relationship between adult imperialism and child agency, Emily’s powerful presence suggested the possibility of two contrasting axis on which adult-child relationships might be placed: vertical and horizontal. These axis are inherently overly-generalized as heuristic devices yet offer a productive framework through which to understand how this relationship can be re-imagined and opened up to new social possibilities.

Consider a vertical axis in which adults are at the top, looking down at children and employing strategies to raise them up into adulthood. This vertical axis embodies the controlling power of imperialism, with adults perpetually peering disapprovingly down at childhood, coaxing them to climb the ladder of development in order to qualify for the rights, respect, and trust of a full member of society – of an adult. Children in this vertical axis are left to gaze ever-upwards, awaiting imperial commands and grappling with the ontological notion that they are not-yet-full and not-yet-fully-recognized. Children here are positioned at the bottom; they are a subjugated class and this subjugation is rendered ubiquitous, oft-invisible, and supposedly-benign by the many cultural myths about children and parenting embedded in this construction.¹ Children are captively immobile: there is no amount of expressed power, no degree of displayed indignation, no level of verbal clarity that will convince or persuade adults to allow children to join them at the top. Effort is frivolous, for only the gradual accrual of biological time, meted out over the course of childhood, will ever allow children to join adults as full members of society at

¹ Here again I refer to the “invented” childhood reviewed in Chapters I and II, itself a social construction bringing with it certain biases of class and privilege. This “construction” refers to the cultural context of the research and not to any generalized notions of childhood.
the top of the axis. Adult imperialism constructs this vertical axis through the extension of age-based segregation, infantilization, and regulation into the lives of children.

Yet, Emily’s powerful presence and demand for her voice to be heard – her insistence that she matters – suggests a deconstruction of this verticality and an exploration of how this relationship can be understood instead as horizontal. This imagined horizontal axis is an egalitarian landscape in which adults and children look across at each other in acknowledgement of their mutual humanity, rights, and agency. These reciprocal rights and respect are already-earned and never-absent. Within this horizontal axis, agency and power are always-acknowledged in the collaborative striving towards a mutually-sought-after-future. Appreciation replaces subjugation. Children – and their behavior, presence, and idiosyncrasies – are recognized here as “indigenous to the culture of childhood” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 162) and thus understood as “‘native’ practices” (Cahan et al., 1994). Children and adults have much to learn from each other in this horizontal model, engaged in continual acts of co-creation as they meet and learn from each other and build their futures forward together. Re-orienting from a vertical to a horizontal axis disrupts strategies of control and establishes instead relationships of trust.

**Locating Vertical and Horizontal Relationships**

Having described the contrast between vertical and horizontal relationships as I understand them as a result of my time with Emily, I will locate examples of these relationships to contextualize and ground them; I will then explicate four core elements
within these horizontal relationships. My time spent with Emily disrupted my place on the vertical axis and shifted me towards a horizontal axis in my relationships with children – in my research, at school, and in my family. I was open to this shift because I was not there as a teacher, a parent, or a school director – in short, I was not there as an adult-authority seeking to control Emily. I was there, literally, on the floor with Emily and “trying on” her perspective of the world. I went where she went, I played what she played, I empathized when she was frustrated and felt she was wronged. My agenda was to learn her agenda. Her native practices were not immaturities; they were my teachings. I embraced her indigenous culture and tried to learn it instead of shape it. The research afforded me an opportunity to look at Emily instead of raise her.

While writing Chapters V and VI, I was struck by two descriptions of children offered by parents I met in my role as nursery school director. I meet with each new family over the summer to learn about their child and family; in this setting I typically ask the parents to describe their child. One set of parents described their child as “compliant…easy to manipulate from activity to activity…a rule follower,” while the other said their child was “crazy…wild…willful…asserts her independence.” These descriptions of children align with a vertical axis: our relationship to children in this axis is ubiquitously shaped by how amenable to control they are. The child’s docility or resistance comes to define our image of them. With a horizontal axis in mind, however, the child’s agitation is felt differently.

Another parent shared with me that she often gets into pitched battles with her 3-year-old daughter about the need to wear a shirt during dinner time. I asked why she was adamant this requirement, and it came out that the parent had been shamed by her
mother-in-law for allowing her daughter to “run wild” through the apartment – she had “lost control,” a cardinal sin in a vertical adult-child relationship. Insisting on a shirt at dinner became her way of clamping down, enforcing rules, and re-claiming control. After reflecting on this, however, the parent commented, “You know what though? Sometimes it’s just that you feel like you need control and you need this to happen.” As adults, we are often stuck in this vertical relationship with children. We use control (or loss of it) as the determining factor in what we say to children, what we ask of them, and how we describe them.

I watched one afternoon in our school foyer as Dylan, a 4-year-old girl, was picked up by Annette, her caregiver. As they sat on a bench outside of class, Dylan’s eyes filled with tears. I sat next to Dylan and asked her and Annette what was going on. Annette answered, “Dylan doesn’t want to go to ballet class.” I asked Dylan, and she confirmed. Annette continued, “She has soccer and gymnastics on other days, and she likes both of those, but I think she is too athletic for ballet class. She needs to move more.” I asked if Dylan had told her parents that she does not like ballet, to which both Dylan and Annette said yes, she had told them.

Sitting next to Dylan, I encouraged her to tell her parents again tonight, louder, that she does not like ballet and that she does not want to go anymore; I added that she should tell them it is making her cry after school. In a horizontal relationship, adults can believe children’s statements about their lives to be authentic and intentional expressions of their sought-after future. Walking by, a classroom teacher saw Dylan crying and also came over. She offered Dylan a light-hearted, brief pep talk: “Oh Dylan! You don’t like ballet? C’mon you know it will be so much fun! You had a great time in the gym running
around today, I’m sure you’ll enjoy ballet too.” While prior to my time with Emily I may have offered a similarly chipper statement, I now see it as problematic in that it swipes aside Dylan’s role as an agent of her own life. The teacher’s enthusiasm was intended not to appreciate Dylan’s stance of opposition but rather to entice her into participating in the confined spaces prepared for her by adults. In a vertical axis, adults coax children into following orders and complying with expectations; in a horizontal axis, children’s protests agentively inform the landscape of the relationship.

**Elements of Horizontal Relationships**

The set of implications offered here is a vision of the distant horizon, a model of what the world-could-be in a sought-after-future. While I do not naively believe that this future is easily approachable, I outline certain elements of horizontal relationships here with a firm belief that without a vision of the horizon we are enslaved to our current conditions. These implications reflect my committed stance to strive towards a more socially equitable future. I describe four elements through which adults can strive towards and construct a horizontal relationship with children: *symmetry, shedding, listening,* and *ceding*. These are designed around the belief that

Education is not about transmitting and acquiring knowledge for the sake of knowing, but a project of *providing conditions and tools for persons to become agentive actors and co-creators* [emphasis added] of society, culture, and history. (Stetsenko, 2017, p. 249)
My intention is for these elements to contribute to the “conditions and tools” available for adults to recognize and support children’s status as agentive actors in their ongoing co-creations.

**Symmetry.** Symmetry between humans defines the horizontal relationship and necessarily acts as a cornerstone upon which other elements are built. Symmetry here implies that all members of a relationship are imbued with already-earned mutual respect and agency. This situates the adult as a fellow co-citizen of the child, embedded within human society on equal terms. Within a symmetrical relationship there is reciprocity of respect and admiration for the mere presence of another human.

I should be clear that I do *not* mean that symmetry requires an abolishment of the concept of biological age or the ways in which individuals differ from each other, including age-based distinctions. Adults may bring with them experience, wisdom, and physical capabilities typically absent in young children. The presence of these traits in adults should not be denied but rather situated within a respectful relationship which acknowledges the elements that the child brings with her, perhaps including traits such as creativity, energy, whimsy, novelty, and spontaneity. Symmetry in this sense does not mean essentializing people into equal entities or mirror-images but rather that each person in the relationship can recognize and value the traits which the other brings with them into the relationship.

**Shedding.** Shedding assumptions about children based on developmentally appropriate practices and developmental psychology is a necessary component of a
horizontal relationship. Shedding developmental assumptions acknowledges that they are themselves social constructions which graft general qualities onto specific children. Shedding requires adults to recognize the child they are in relationship with and ask: What can this child, in front of me, do, say, and create? How are developmental assumptions obscuring my capacity to recognize the traits which she brings to this relationship? By shedding these assumptions, adults can slowly build a local, modest understanding of the child they are in a relationship with based off their experiences within that relationship – just as they might do with another adult. Shedding therefore allows the child to be human-ized and real-ized within the relationship, at an idiographic level, rather than be modelled after the mythical, homogenized child of developmentally appropriate practices.

This does not mean that all knowledge, or ideas, about children – as humans – should be discarded. Rather, it centralizes the local, particular understanding of the person and relationship and also contextualizes that person – and relationship – within the broader fabric of culture and history. In this fashion, within a horizontal relationship, the content knowledge-base of developmental psychology does not dominate the construction of the child but continues to exist, albeit critically, alongside social science fields turned towards childhood such as history, cross-cultural anthropology, cultural psychology, sociology, and curricular studies. Added to these fields are current early childhood scholars who critique and reconceptualize mainstream developmental psychology. This broad, multi-disciplinary approach de-centers developmental assumptions and embraces a local, nuanced understanding of each particular child-in-relationship amidst broad cultural and historical forces.
**Listening.** Listening means not only hearing the child but genuinely embracing her thoughts, actions, and expressions as authentic assertions on the world. This requires humility and curiosity on the part of the adult, qualities adults might place in their relationship with peers but not often with children. Humility here refers to the adult’s capacity to slow down and carefully curb their presence out of deference to the child and the belief that she may have more to say, think, or do, or simply may not have invited an adult-interloper into a particular moment. Humility means withdrawing from the presumed largeness of our adult-presence out of recognition that the child – though constructed as powerless – in fact needs space for her power as well. Curiosity then positions the adult as interested in the power which the child brings, genuinely inclined to find value in her ideas and actions. Listening means the adult might wonder: How is this child changing me? How is this child pushing back against her world? How can I engage with her audacity and dissent in a respectful fashion? This shifts away from a desire to control and towards an appetite to recognize and appreciate. Humility and curiosity situate the adult within the horizontal relationship as prepared to recognize the child’s agency as she meets the world.

Listening necessarily means limiting the adult-talk that often dominates conversations with children, such as asking a child a question and near-immediately following it up with multiple versions of the same question. Listening often means, at a literal level, not-talking. Adults in a horizontal relationship are certainly engaged, dialogic partners, but curtail their talking in order to allow more space for the child’s voice to be heard. This is not out of deference to any particular insight or inspirational
idea the child may have (which may indeed be the case) but rather out of the mutual respect present in egalitarian relationships. Children, as humans, deserve to be listened to.

**Ceding.** Ceding territory within an adult-child relationship means recognizing that vertical relationships are fully dominated by adults despite the power and agency which children bring with them. Ceding refers to the capacity of an adult to critically recognize which aspects of the relationship they un-necessarily dominate and turn the control of those areas over to the child, in the same fashion in which imperial powers might return sovereign governance to former subjects. This means granting greater latitude to children in decisions about their life while allowing for their idiosyncratic behaviors to flower instead of adapt.

Ceding territory to children embraces a vision of social justice in which our mutual (and mutually-acknowledged) humanity necessarily requires the inclusion of, and respect for, the variegated voices which make up our societies. Children are present in our culture yet their capacity to matter has been rendered invisible or meaningless. Ceding ground within adult-child relationships does nothing less than *reshape society* to recognize children as an enfranchised class of people, no longer subjugated through segregation, infantilization, and regulation. This shifts the adult from a position in which they change the child through instruction and intervention towards one in which the child *also* changes the world.
Implications for Practice

The re-orientation of the axis of adult-child relationships outlined above, derived through the ways Emily changed me over the course of this research, suggests direct implications for adults engaged in relationships with children, including researchers, teachers, and parents. I will review these direct implications for practice here, knowing that what I can offer is a simple sketch for others to interpret, critique, and expand upon in their own relationships with other children.

Researchers

My ability to approach an authentic understanding of Emily’s world was strengthened by the methodological choices made around field observations and interviews. The morning-til-night design allowed me to explore and connect many salient features in Emily’s life, such as: breakfast, lunch, and dinner, getting ready to leave in the morning and arriving home in the afternoon, walking to and from school, drop off and pick up at school, and playtime at home and at school. I observed each of these features of Emily’s life in a typical month during the nine-month research period, which meant that I observed them each nine or more times. The combination of the nine-month research period and the morning-til-night observations allowed me to gain an intimate access to, and understanding of, the flow of Emily’s mundane life.
I have not come across similar methodologies employed by researchers working with young children. Many of the studies cited in Chapter II do pay close attention to children in various aspects of their life, but focus on particular “topics” in the child’s life such as school, home, playtime, literacy, teachers, etc. By focusing on Emily’s social agency and stretching this focus to include her entire life – not only home or school or the interaction between them – I was able to offer an ethnographic presentation of Emily’s life from a wide angle. This helped me escape a developmental paradigm and allowed me to comprehend how Emily – as a person (not a “developing person”) – might perceive her world as she moved throughout it.

I encourage other early childhood researchers to similarly find inspiration in the daily life studies outlined in the early chapters here and utilize the morning-til-night method in ethnographic, idiographic studies focusing on individual children. While I have applied this method to Emily – and her particular, local cultural-historical context – other research with other children will yield novel insights into how children encounter their world. I hope that my representation of Emily’s agency – her transformative dissent and her social assertions – is joined by variegated representations of the nuanced, complex entanglement between children’s agency and the extension of adult control into their world.

During my time with Emily, I was fortuitously guided by my earlier pilot studies as well as by Moore’s learnings regarding adult-methodologies in research with children (2014). I am compelled to again share Moore’s advice, reviewed at length in Chapter IV, and offer my own methodological learnings that sprung from heeding this advice:

While methodologically I understood knowledge construction in the research process to be a shared endeavor with the children…I was often working from an
interrogative perspective. Therefore, despite having carefully described the methodology in one way, in reality my default dominant position meant that I was still heavily influenced by power-imbalanced adult/child roles. In practice, this meant I inadvertently slipped in and out of a dominant researcher position thereby not consistently respecting, listening to the children’s words or being attentive to their body language throughout the study. (p. 8)

I became aware of the need to quietly listen to the children, rather than controlling the conversation based on my own predetermined priorities. It became evident that when I stopped dictating an adult-dominated line of enquiry and quietly listened, I started to hear the children’s stories…. Regardless of research methodology designed with child-centered participatory intentions, children do not always engage with nor need ‘adult-devised tools’ to create knowledge as data. (p. 9)

Entering the research situation with this advice, I was able to maintain a stance of commitment towards listening to Emily and staying attentive to her presence, in contrast to the “interrogative perspective” and “default dominant position” Moore cautions against.

This stance required an internal vigilance about my own presence, my verbal statements and purposeful silences, my physical positioning, my adherence to or departure from my research agenda, and my perceived allegiances with other adults. I attempted to avoid the paradoxical connotation of an adult-researcher exploring Emily’s life for signs of adult-imperialism by heeding Moore’s advice to stop “controlling the conversation based on my own predetermined priorities” and instead “quietly listen.” As a result, my interviews with Emily were far more casual then formal and occurred less frequently then I would have liked. However, they were rich, authentic expressions of her presence and life because they unfolded according to her volition: they took place at times she desired, focused on topics she brought up, used materials she selected and was comfortable with, and ended when she moved on. I listened instead of interrogated.
I brought this mentality of listening instead of interrogating to the field observations as well and encourage other early childhood researchers to likewise take up this practice. The most productive moments in the field – the ones that led to the bulk of the data used in Chapters V and VI – were “simply” the result of quiet listening. While Chapter II reviewed the recent proliferation of what Moore describes as “adult-devised tools” designed with “child-centered intentions,” these tools – maps, photographs, cameras, videos, drawings, puppets, interview toolkits, picture books, etc. – were not ultimately what allowed me this insight into Emily’s life. It was simply “being there,” being a present partner, relinquishing developmental assumptions and allegiances with adults in their control over children, which granted me what I imagine in Emily’s eyes was a slight amnesty from the imperial role that adults played in her life. By intentionally ignoring my adult-proclivities, I was exonerated from my adult-need to control Emily and instead could “be there” with her. More than any methodological tools, it was this disdain for adult-control that positioned me to truly learn from Emily and present her powerful agency here in a novel manner. The practice of simply being there – being present from morning-til-night – in a young child’s life has the powerful potential to yield novel research findings.

Teachers

I will focus here only on implications for teachers in early childhood settings such as nursery school classrooms (as in, not for older children, which I would consider likely
congruent with, yet outside the scope of, these implications). It must be stated plainly that teachers in these settings face a mountain of opposition to the practices I will outline here. Teachers are roundly expected to produce docile students; this is a problematic paradigm. The research here suggests that this schooled docility both ignores much of what children contribute with their very presence and is itself a human rights infraction. I encourage early childhood teachers to embrace horizontal relationships as a manner through which they can concurrently expand the possibilities present within their classrooms – both social and individual – and also protest the injustice of adult imperialism. While each of the four elements of horizontal relationships outlined above can be put into practice by teachers, I will attempt to outline with more specificity here how this might be accomplished pragmatically. The specific implications highlighted here emerge from my role as a nursery school director throughout the research and writing period and offer more examples, in and of themselves, as to how Emily’s powerful agency shifted my professional practice.

The implications here revolve around shifting teaching practice from strategies of control towards embracing the child’s powerful agency and transformative dissent. To accomplish this, teachers can approach a classroom situation from a flipped perspective: instead of striving for pedagogical strategies which manipulate child-behavior towards adult-expectations (“classroom management”), teachers can interpret children’s behavior as authentic expressions of their agenda or desire. Recognizing behavior as such allows teachers to then shift their own practices in a manner that is supportive instead of restrictive. This means building classroom practices and culture around what children do instead of creating routines that show children what they should do. This is opposed to
many mainstream applications of developmentally appropriate practices and this must be considered and acknowledged when locally applied in teachers’ pedagogical practice.

A classroom teacher I work with presented me with an anecdote from her 2-year-old classroom. In a scene ubiquitous in nursery classrooms, she would gather the children in a circle on the rug to sing a goodbye song at the end of each class and would afterwards welcome in parents and caregivers to pick the children up. Yet, she was frustrated that at each of these circle-times, the children were quite cacophonous and highly energetic. This was directly opposed to her agenda for the circle-time, which was to have the children harmoniously quiet down before the adults entered the room. In considering the children’s transformative dissent, we explored how the children’s behavior might shift her teaching practice, instead of designing a teaching practice which might shift the children’s behavior. Considering this horizontal perspective, we discussed abandoning the idea that children are supposed to be quiet at pickup time (“shedding” assumptions) and abolishing the circle-time as an activity (“ceding” territory). This example shows how teacher-practices oriented around horizontal relationships can be designed to highlight children’s agency instead of constrict their capacity to be heard.

This can also be accomplished without ceding certain territory – which teachers are not always in position to do – by paying attention to the reality presented to children by classroom rules. A different teacher I work with shared a scenario in which one child began crying at cleanup-time because he was not ready to be done with his toy. As we discussed how to approach the scenario, we explored how we can both enforce the rule (toys must be cleaned up) while also embracing a horizontal relationship. At circle-time the next day, the teacher engaged the children in a discussion about why the student had
been crying and steered the conversation towards productive strategies to help support him. The children came up with ideas such as give him ice cream, provide him with an alternate toy, give him hugs and kisses, and show him pictures of his parents. These were all strategies which the children knew comforted them in moments of distress and might provide the same relief to the boy who had been crying.

This is a critical departure from a vertical relationship, in which a teacher might be inclined to reiterate to the children the importance of everyone participating in cleanup-time together, that even if you don’t like to do something you still need to do it\(^2\), and that each child must learn to tolerate the rules of the classroom (“socialization”). Instead, the approach the teacher took shows children that their emotions – however expressed – are acknowledged as valid within their classroom culture and deserving of time, energy, and attention. This approach shows how children’s critical or negative reactions to teacher-expectations need not be whitewashed, swept aside, or ignored but can be actively considered as part of meaningful classroom discourse (“symmetrical” respect).

**Parents**

For me, this is the hardest and the most personal. Perhaps due to the profoundly intimate nature of a parent-child relationship, I have found much greater personal comfort and fluency within my own life in the implications for practice for researchers and

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\(^2\) In the jargon of early childhood education, this is referred to as, “You get what you get and you don’t get upset.” My point here is, *you do* get upset and that is not to be side-stepped.
teachers. As a parent, I continue to struggle with how to express my learnings here in my own relationship with my children. I will share here how this research changed my practice as a parent and how it might be considered by other parents curious about horizontal relationships with their children.

Dropping Jonah (Shira and my 5-year-old son) off at school one morning, I noticed as he sat down at a table with scissors and a craft project. He struggled to use the child-safety scissors to cut through the art materials; this stood out to me because at home he uses “adult” scissors, far sharper, to competently cut through tougher materials. Shedding assumptions about child development has thus pushed me towards encouraging my children to use “real” materials instead of infantilized “child” versions. This is of course not a blanket statement evenly applied to all materials but rather requires a nuanced application in varying contexts and with varying materials. For example, Jonah does not use large kitchen knives on his own but does use sharp knives when working with an adult in the kitchen; I’ve likewise worked with both of our children to build an early proficiency with basic tools such as “real” hammers and screwdrivers. As Shira quipped after we moved apartments, Jonah was more helpful than she was in assembling our furniture. This is not because I am “training” them to work with tools in the future but rather because I don’t think they implicitly need child-versions of these materials, which, as seen in the safety-scissor example, only serve to diminish their actual competencies.

At home recently, Jonah received a new t-shirt with lots of sparkles. He was completely enamored with this new shirt and showed it off to everyone he saw. At a standing weekly appointment he has Wednesday afternoons, he told the adult who sees him in that appointment that he was so excited about his new shirt and wanted to show it
to her next week. His babysitter, who was with him at the appointment, mentioned this to me in the evening to pass along how excited he was about the shirt. We thought the pride he took in his shirt was quite cute. The following Wednesday, he emerged from his bedroom in the morning, wearing the sparkly shirt. He greeted me that morning by saying, “I can’t wait to show my sparkly shirt” to the adult that afternoon, and indeed he did. In a vertical relationship, when children make statements they can easily be written off as cute, frivolous, or humorous; in a horizontal relationship these statements are authentic expressions of desire, of a future a child wants to write and create. I am learning to see my children’s statements as powerfully agentive and embrace them as their clearly-stated agenda for the future they intend to create.

With Solomon, Shira and my 2-year-old son, I have felt this shift during our family dinners. He would protest his booster seat – replete with safety-buckle and plastic tray over his lap – by flailing his body and raising his voice, so we swapped it in favor of having him sit at a “normal” adult chair despite his age (he was around 18 months). He eagerly showed us how he could clamber up the chair and eat, standing, from his new perch. What he seemed to enjoy most with this change was the freedom to come and go as he pleased. Whereas in the booster seat he was confined until we let him out (a vertical relationship of control), in the chair he could now hop down whenever he wanted. He could additionally use his body in new ways from his standing perch, showing us with delight how he could “run” in place and do “yoga” by lifting up one leg. In a vertical relationship, children’s bodily movements are available for adult-control and regulation through age-appropriate furniture; in a horizontal relationship, the child’s transformative dissent shows adults how they want their body to be positioned.
In the foyer at my nursery school, I was chatting with a mother, Kathy, after she dropped Andrew, her 3-year-old son, off mid-day at school. Andrew had a standing weekly appointment that took him out of school; while most weeks Kathy brought him back to school afterwards, this week she had scheduled a second appointment afterwards which would prevent him from coming back to school that afternoon. However, Andrew knew that the music teacher had a session in his class that afternoon, and he successfully argued that he should return to school for the music session. This meant Kathy had to re-schedule the second appointment. As she explained all this to me, Kathy grimaced as she mentioned that she relented and re-scheduled the appointment, saying, “I just feel so whipped!” Adults in a vertical relationship are wary to cede control to children and feel defeated when they do. Instead, I offered a horizontal perspective, and mentioned that perhaps instead we could appreciate Andrew’s powerful argument and clear voice. We talked about how he likely appreciated the chance to impact his own schedule and control the flow of his afternoon.

Each of these examples highlights what I have learned about the need to cede territory within the parent-child relationship out of a sense of symmetrical respect and admiration. I find myself now more frequently “giving in” to Jonah and Solomon during disagreements about what they can and cannot do. This is a very uncomfortable position for many parents, given the context described throughout this research within which parents typically ascribe to a relationship of control with their children. “Giving in” as a parent, within a horizontal relationship, is not correlated with a forfeiture of authority or a lack of stamina in responding to children’s defiant behavior but is rather an acute expression of a symmetrical relationship. Just as there are many times throughout the day
in which I (continue to) demand that my children comply with my expectations, I believe there ought to be times during the day when their expectations are the *overriding priority*. These can be mundane yet meaningful moments as children build up a repository of experience with *their voice* defining their lived experience.

Furthermore, I believe it is advantageous to the development of the child’s agency – itself a social accomplishment – when the adult can highlight the way(s) which they were changed by the child. An anecdote was shared with me by our children’s babysitter, Karen, in which she was walking back from the grocery store pushing Solomon in his stroller alongside a fellow babysitter pushing a 2-year-old friend of Solomon’s. Solomon began to wail, protesting that his friend had watermelon from the store but he had not received any. The friend’s babysitter noted Solomon’s protest and shared some of the watermelon with him. This was not the future imagined by the babysitters, who had divergent shopping lists; it was the future demanded by Solomon through the social assertion of his agency.

I am intrigued by how adults can reflect back to children their power in these moments. How often do we hear adults tell young children, “I’m so glad you protested what you saw as un-fair,” or, “Your loud voice is so powerful”? In discussing this concept with a group of parents at my nursery school, we recognized that parents often encourage this practice (of protest and voice) for older, elementary-aged children – to speak up against a teacher if they think they are being treated unfairly, to advocate for a higher grade if they can defend their work, to stand strong if an adult attempts to take advantage of them, etc. Yet, this muscle is largely absent in our relationship with young children. I encourage parents to consider how they can support their young child’s
transformative dissent by giving in, by appreciating their agitation, and by commending them for demanding justice.

**Limitations and Possibilities**

The implications offered here are derived from the idiographic ethnography presented throughout this research and are thus bordered both by limitations and possibilities. In this section, I will consider other childhoods and the questions they can contribute to the analysis and implications offered here. My hope is that this aids the facilitation of similar work undertaken with various children in various cultural locations. As described in Chapters I-III, Emily’s agency and encounters are local and particular, inextricably entangled with her and her proximal culture. Considering agency and imperialism beyond Emily presents both limitations and possibilities. Here I will explore how the lens of agency and imperialism might be usefully taken up for a dialogue in cross-cultural settings.

Emily’s agency is located in cultural context congruent in many ways to “concerted cultivation” (Lareau, 2011). Her agency arises in, and near, the space her mother leaves for negotiation around rules and limits; her stance of opposition is often in direct counterpoint to the firm weekly schedule her teachers and parents (attempt to) hold her to. Both of these (parental support of child-negotiations and controlled-schedules) are cultural threads well-documented by Lareau. It might be considered that the firm control of her schedule sets up Emily for a stance of opposition; likewise, Kate’s allowance for
Emily’s dissent allowed me to perceive it as agentive. Emily’s voice mattered, which is what I saw. In family, school, and cultural settings which vary from a “concerted cultivation,” Emily’s actions might be reconsidered through a different lens.

Other childhoods in other cultural locations may have less-enforced daily and weekly schedules, meaning children may have both the burden and responsibility of filling their time by initiating activities. Where and how are children powerful and agentive outside of “concerted cultivation,” in contexts with fewer scheduling constraints? Might a less-enforced schedule (such as, away from the constraints of parents getting children to school on time and getting themselves to work on time) shift the way a child’s agency is performed? Likewise, how did Emily’s sister’s schedule impact her own agency – how might birth order, or sibling-status, serve to calibrate a child’s agency?

Similarly, other childhoods may bring children into encounters with an adult culture which seeks group conformity (in contrast to the individualism present in Emily’s broader adult-culture), leaving little or no space for dissent and negotiations. Adults may insist more sharply on particular behaviors, creating less room for visible opposition within the relationship. How might children find their agency in firm relationships with adults? How might children’s agency work outside their visible relationship with their parent(s)? Likewise, how might social conformity in certain settings be used by a child in an agentive manner, in order to achieve a particular agenda of the child’s?

Additionally, Emily encounters an environment saturated with materials “for kids,” which brings about opportunities both for her to reappropriate these materials and also conform to their expected “age-appropriate” use. Other childhoods may present
children with a less-striated material environment, in which far fewer items are curated for a narrow, particular age-band. In these varying cultural locations, how might children agentively encounter a less-age-banded material world? How do age-appropriate materials afford or constrain children’s agency, and how do children agentively encounter different materials in different environments?

The research and implications presented here also brings up further questions in regard to mechanisms for control. While my focus in this research was Emily’s encounters with adult-agendas, there are other mechanisms of control in children’s lives. How did Emily’s proximal peers – her fellow two-year-olds – serve to either afford or constrain her agency? What role did her sister, and her sister’s peers, play? In the classroom setting, there exist not only “individual” agendas (such as Emily departing from the music session with David or initiating peekaboo) but also “group” agendas. What are the goals of Emily’s group, and how does her agency join with others? In my research, Emily’s agenda typically coincided with the peer-group agenda, or at least rarely conflicted; how is children’s agency impacted when it conflicts with the peer-group agenda?

This set of contexts and questions offer potential future pathways of ethnographic research while highlighting the cultural limitations of the present research. These questions outline pathways to explore the power and agency of children across various cultures and locations.
Summary

In this concluding chapter I have offered reflexive implications for how Emily shifted me and my relationship with children. I used the ways that Emily changed me to conceptualize and contrast vertical and horizontal adult-child relationships and described new social arrangements that are implicated in a horizontal relationship. I offered four elements of horizontal relationships – symmetry, shedding, listening, and ceding – which adults can adopt to explore the conditions and tools through which children’s agency might be more fully recognized at a local, and societal, level. I then used these elements to frame implications for practice for early childhood researchers, early childhood teachers, and parents of young children. I have argued that a child’s transformative dissent is the social assertion of her agency and that children, as humans, deserve to be appreciated and celebrated instead of subjugated and ignored. I believe that children’s social agency has the power to combat adult imperialism and chart a future that children will not only inherit but create. My hope is that this can be explored in variegated contexts with children who define their own particular use of agency to change and create their world as they meet it.
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Appendix A
First Pilot Study - Findings

Isaac’s (research participant) speech-partners (teacher, parent, and peer) displayed distinct patterns of speech towards him. The distinction between teacher and parent was instantiated in three ways: Isaac’s father engages in roughly twice the frequency of both requests and negotiations as did his teachers (Distinction 1); this was corroborated in Isaac’s father’s interview when he stated that for the past two years he has been “just negotiating and having all the patience in the world,” which grew out of his understanding that “at any given moment, whatever it is, that’s the ideal” for Isaac. Abraham (Isaac’s dad) engages Isaac with information about the world, information about himself, and with humor, while Isaac’s teachers only rarely, if at all, engaged in this type of talk (Distinction 2). Isaac’s teachers engage in speech about Isaac’s smarts, while his parents do not (Distinction 3). Abraham stated in his interview that he purposefully refrains from telling Isaac how smart he is, whereas Isaac’s teachers ascertained that he is the smartest child in the class based on his vocabulary and reading skills. See Table 1 for examples of distinctions 2 and 3.

Table 1. Emblematic adult utterances to Isaac…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speech examples taken from field notes of the pilot study</th>
<th>…with information about the world. (Distinction 2)</th>
<th>…with information about the speaker. (Distinction 2)</th>
<th>…with humor. (Distinction 2)</th>
<th>…about Isaac’s smarts. (Distinction 3)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“See, they’re holding lacrosse sticks, it’s like hockey.” - Dad</td>
<td>“I ran under some scaffolding and hid, just like this.” - Dad</td>
<td>“What’s going on with booger-town over here?” - Dad</td>
<td>“Isaac, you’re so smart.” - Teacher</td>
<td></td>
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Appendix B
Second Pilot Study - Timeline/Map
Appendix C
Introductory Letter to Eligible School Families

Dear Kate and John,

I am in the middle of a five-year doctoral program at Teachers College, Columbia University, in early childhood education. My research explores the process of a child starting school for the very first time, at and around the age of three. I am interested in how the child becomes a student at this age, what impact this has on other areas of the child’s life, and what impact the child has on those same elements. This is a one-year study working with one individual three year-old [sic] child as s/he begins school for the first time. The study would begin this May (2017) and conclude the following February (2018), with the child’s first day of school occurring in the middle (September 2017).

During this time, I hope to do three field observations of the child each month, with each field observation being four hours long and occurring wherever the child typically is at that time (home, school, playdate, etc). These would be scheduled so that each month, the three observations would cover different chunks of the day – one starting when the child wakes up and going until 12:00pm, another from noon until 4:00pm, and the third from 4:00pm until the child goes to sleep. Each field observation will be audio recorded (a handheld recorder, smaller than a cell phone) and transcribed by me. I also hope to do a series of one-hour interviews, a handful each with the child’s teacher(s), parent(s), and caregiver(s)/babysitter(s). This will all then be analyzed in my doctoral thesis.

My goal in this research is to explore and understand the child’s world, and his/her interaction with it, during the process of becoming a student. I will be paying attention to the child’s ways of expression (i.e., language, art, facial expression, etc) and how he/she shifts the world around them (i.e., by asserting him/herself, saying “no”, coming up with an idea, being different than expected, etc). The hope is that this will contribute to the field of early childhood by offering insight into how parents, teachers, and caregivers can engage in meaningful, supportive ways with the child during this process.

In addition to my research at Teachers College, I am a happy (and tired!) dad to a three year-old and a three month old. Professionally, I am serving in my fourth year as the nursery school director ---. Before this role, I was an associate and then head teacher in a three year-old classroom at --- for five years – I know three year-olds very well! Prior to Teachers College, I received my master’s degree in early childhood education from Fordham University, and bachelor’s degrees in American history from Columbia University and Jewish history from the Jewish Theological Seminary.

I know that I am a stranger making a big ask of your family. I am happy to provide references – families who I have done similar studies with before – if that would
help make you more comfortable. The research project has been approved by the Internal Review Board (IRB) at Teachers College, a process which ensures that ethical considerations and the participants’ rights are safeguarded at all times. Pseudonyms would be used in the write up and identifying information would be withheld.

Should you be interested in having your child participate, our next step would be to meet in person where I could answer questions and review this in more depth. I would then ask you to consent via an IRB consent form, which I would then also do with your child’s caregiver and eventually teachers.

I am available for any questions at -- or --.

With appreciation,

Noah Hichenberg
### The Walsh Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susan Older sister, 2nd grade</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda Babysitter</td>
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### Rainbow House

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<th>Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little Ones Classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tanya Teacher, primary caregiver</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michelle Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yasmin Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Classmate, in primary group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuval Classmate, in primary group</td>
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Appendix E

Layout of Emily’s apartment
Appendix F

Layout of Emily’s classroom
### Appendix H

#### Data List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRANSCRIPTS</th>
<th>MATERIAL LISTS</th>
<th>DOCUMENTS FROM SCHOOL</th>
<th>AGE GRADING DOCUMENTS</th>
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<th>AGE GRADING DOCUMENTS</th>
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<td>Parents orientation handouts - separation, classroom activities</td>
<td>Little Ones year calendar</td>
<td>Melissa and Doug’s Age Grading document</td>
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<td>Parent handouts from top of cubbies</td>
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Appendix I

Field Observations

My schedule varied according to multiple factors: the first session began at 7:30am because Kate was at the gym that morning and did not want me to begin with Emily without her there; I found I did not have the stamina as a researcher to surpass four hours, so I started a few sessions a half hour late so I could catch the ending moments of Emily’s day, around 6:45pm; after a few morning sessions I decided to move the time back a few minutes because I felt I had the “early morning” data I needed and I was straining to arrive at that early hour; mid-day observations were often interrupted by Emily’s nap, which took an hour or longer. Due to all of these factors, while observations were scheduled for a four-hour period they ultimately averaged three hours in reality.

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<thead>
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<td>Morning</td>
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<td>September</td>
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<td>December</td>
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<td>8:25am-11:30am</td>
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Appendix J
Emily’s Interviews

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<td>Emily Interview 3</td>
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<td>Café near school</td>
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<td>Emily Interview 4</td>
<td>Friday, September 15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Lego in living room</td>
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<td>Emily Interview 5</td>
<td>Thursday, September 28</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Emily Interview 6</td>
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<td>Emily Interview 7</td>
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<td>Emily Interview 8</td>
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<td>Emily Interview 9</td>
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<td>Emily Interview 11</td>
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Appendix K
Adult Interviews and questions

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<td>Teacher Interview - Yasmin</td>
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<td>4:00-5:00pm</td>
<td>Diner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Interview - Tanya</td>
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<td>Diner</td>
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<td>Parent interview 3</td>
<td>Wednesday, February 28</td>
<td>8:00-9:00pm</td>
<td>Apartment</td>
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</table>

**Parent interview #1 questions:**

PARENTING:

Describe your childhood and your memories of your parents’ “parenting”

Describe your role as parents.

What is your relationship like with your children?

What informs your parenting – Each other? Peers?

What has been similar, and what has been different, as Emily has grown in comparison to Susan?

What has been surprising as a parent, for both/either children?

SCHOOL:

Tell me about the beginning of school for Emily.

How did you decide Rainbow House?

How was home-school communication established?

What is expected of you during this time?
How would you define a successful transition into school for Emily?

Where does Emily have power and agency at home?

**Parent interview #2 questions:**

**CATCHING UP ABOUT SCHOOL:**
Review some particulars about Rainbow House.

Is Emily making any new friends at school?

In September, when Kate would leave Little Ones, Emily was saying, "stay a long time with me today, don’t leave.” What is she saying/doing now as you leave in the morning?

She is “playing school” more now – Lego interviews with me, and spontaneous play with mom. Can you describe any of this to me?

**ROLE OF PARENTS:**
You mentioned last interview, “We’ve definitely learned stuff from our kids’ teachers”. What, if anything, have you learned from Emily’s teachers?

You also both mentioned other sources of learning, such as observing parents and reading about parents. Has this occurred over the past couple months?

Can you think back and make a list of any books or blogs that you’ve looked at/skimmed in the past couple years?

Last time I asked you, “What is your role as a parent?” You offered a few answers. Let’s review those answers and I’d love to either hear more about them, or hear examples of how these have played out in recent weeks.

**EMILY AND THE WORLD:**
Emily is exploring her role in the world – including family and school. This leads to what I described last time as a “messy encounter” between Emily and the world, where she does not meet adult expectations. Where has this
occurred recently – where Eloise and the adults around her clash over what is expected of Emily?

What, if anything, are relatively new tasks that Emily is doing by herself?

**Parent interview #3 questions:**

Catching up on some particulars about the data.

**MATERIAL CULTURE:**

How did you select toys at home – in particular, the five Montessori-style stackers in bedroom? They match the ones at school.

What toys are hand me downs?

How do you distinguish what is for Emily and Susan, and what is just for Susan or just for Emily?


How do you decide what books to keep in the apartment for Emily?

Can you share a blueprint of your apartment? And can you tell me about the layout of Emily’s room?

**ADULT CONTROL:**

When do you trust Emily, and when do you not trust her?

Tell me about age-based expectations in your house, and how they relate to food, furniture, and toys.

**SOCIAL FACTORS:**

What can you share with me about your family’s socioeconomic status?

What can you share with me about your religious views?

**Group teacher interview questions:**

How do you prepare for the beginning of the school year?
What shaped your teaching style?

How are you planning for the upcoming days and weeks with Emily, and the rest of the class?

What marks a successful beginning of school for you? Unsuccessful?

Has anything unexpected happened in the beginning of this school year? Anything hard or different?

Tell me about Emily:
What did you know about her before her first day?
What have you learned about her since the first day?

**Individual teacher interview questions (modified accordingly for each teacher):**

Tell me about you:

About your early life

About what brought you into early childhood

About what brought you specifically to Rainbow House

About what influences your general teaching practice

About how you learn what is expected of you as a professional at Rainbow House in particular

Tell me about Emily:

What do you know about her?

What have you learned about her, and how?

What is your relationship like with her?

Where is there power in your relationship with her?

What friends have you noticed of hers?
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<th>Schedule</th>
<th>1 Interviews</th>
<th>2 Milestones</th>
<th>3 People</th>
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<td>2.1 Paci</td>
<td>3.2 Sister</td>
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<td>1.3 LEGO</td>
<td>2.2 Stroller/walking</td>
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<td>2.3 Diaper/potty</td>
<td>3.4 Peers</td>
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<td>2.4 Development/body/stages</td>
<td>3.5 Extended family</td>
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<td>2.5 Learning/skills</td>
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<td>Language</td>
<td>3.7 Babysitter</td>
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<td>3.8 4.3 = Turns/Collab/Mine/Noticing</td>
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<th>6 Methods</th>
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<td>6.1 Consent/book</td>
<td>7.1 Backpack and lunchbox</td>
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# Appendix M

## Inductive Codes

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<th>Signs</th>
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<td>8.2 Adult</td>
<td>8.3 (talking about age)</td>
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<td>Regulation of time</td>
<td>Material rules</td>
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<td>11.3 Quizzing</td>
<td>11.4 Doubting</td>
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<td>11.5 Doing tasks for her</td>
<td>11.6 Gap in understanding</td>
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*Inductive Codes*
## Creative Encounters

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<td>7-Jun</td>
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<td>14-Jun</td>
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<td>14-Jul</td>
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<td>Museum</td>
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<td>Fashion Plates</td>
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<td>11-Aug</td>
<td>Catch</td>
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<td>John</td>
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<td>Train tracks</td>
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<td>Kate, Susan</td>
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<tr>
<td>28-Sep</td>
<td>Stroller fight, toy stroller</td>
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<td>Kate, Susan</td>
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<tr>
<td>4-Oct</td>
<td>Peach</td>
<td>Living room</td>
<td>Kate</td>
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<tr>
<td>4-Oct</td>
<td>Staying home</td>
<td>Little Kids</td>
<td>Tanya</td>
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<tr>
<td>19-Oct</td>
<td>Red bears</td>
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<td>19-Oct</td>
<td>Clean up</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-Oct</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-Nov</td>
<td>Hide and Seek</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-Oct</td>
<td>Lunch, peekaboo</td>
<td>Little Kids</td>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>21-Nov</td>
<td>Board games</td>
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<td>14-Dec</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Little Kids</td>
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<tr>
<td>21-Dec</td>
<td>Free play, clean up</td>
<td>Little Kids</td>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>24-Jan</td>
<td>Clothing choice</td>
<td>Bedroom</td>
<td>Kate, Michelle, Yasmin</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-Feb</td>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>Little Kids</td>
<td>Tanya</td>
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<td>7-Feb</td>
<td>Free play</td>
<td>Little Kids</td>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td>20</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix O

Sampling of manufacturer age-statements on art materials in Emily’s apartment:

Colored pencils  “an essential creative tool for kids”

Crayons “designed specifically for the grip and control of toddler hands”

Markers “add[s] a new dimension to kids’ artwork”

Paintbrushes “encourage children to experiment with colours”
(https://www.discountschoolsupply.com)

Glitter “ignite your child’s imagination”
(https://www.michaels.com/creatology-silver-glitter-tube/M10267533.html)

Coffee filters “make crafts with your kiddos to keep them entertained”

Glue “generations of school children have grown up with”
(http://www.elmers.com/product/detail/E308)
### Toys at Little Ones:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toy</th>
<th>Age-grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zippers Buttons Bows by Moria Butterfield</td>
<td>“2-4 years”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hexie Snaps by Popular Playthings</td>
<td>“For ages 2+”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alphabet Outloud Talking Puzzle by Small World Toys</td>
<td>“2-5 years”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My First Matching Game by Ravensburger</td>
<td>“2-3yrs”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC Alphabet Building Blocks by Sarah Buel Dowling</td>
<td>“For ages 2+”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circular Floor Puzzle Vehicle by Melissa and Doug</td>
<td>“Ages 2 and up”</td>
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</table>

### Toys at Apartment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toy</th>
<th>Age-grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mini Window Blocks by Guidecraft</td>
<td>“Ages 2+”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa’s Christmas Set by LEGO DUPLO</td>
<td>“2-5” years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stethoscope and Thermometer by BatTat</td>
<td>“3+” years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Unit Blocks by Melissa and Doug</td>
<td>“3-8 years”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean Up Set by Melissa and Doug</td>
<td>“3-6 years”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>