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Exploring the situated social being of children with profound and multiple learning difficulties across educational contexts: a study of belonging

Ben Simmons

Introduction

The extent to which all children can meaningfully participate in mainstream education is highly contested. Despite renewed calls for inclusive education by United Nations agencies which view inclusion as a human right and 'essential for peace, tolerance, [and] human fulfilment' (UNESCO 2015: 7), there is on-going resistance to the idea that inclusive education necessarily entails a mainstream education. Mary Warnock - a champion of 'integration' in the 1970s (DES 1978) – has more recently suggested that some children find it 'impossible' (2010: 33) to participate in mainstream schools, and that inclusion is better understood in terms of children 'being involved in a common enterprise of learning, rather than being necessarily under the same roof' (p.32). Imray and Colley (2017) support this view in relation to children with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). They suggest that the profound learning impairments of these children preclude them from benefiting from mainstream pedagogy and curricular and instead require tailored approaches better suited to the developmental needs of children with PMLD.

In England it is estimated that out of approximately 9,000 children with PMLD, 82% attend special school, 15% attend mainstream primary school and 3% attend mainstream secondary school (Salt 2010). Lyons and Arthur-Kelly (2014: 446) suggest that segregated provision for children with PMLD is an international trend and that 'if they [children with PMLD] have access to any school education, are educated in "special" schools or classes by "special" educators'. Given the limited mainstream opportunities for children with profound and

multiple learning difficulties, it is perhaps not surprising that there is very little research literature that describes how they engage in non-specialist environments. Instead of describing mainstream practice, researchers have typically focused on mainstream parents and mainstream practitioner attitudes towards the inclusion of learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Researchers have reported that the more profound a child's learning impairment, the less desirable his or her inclusion is perceived to be. Practitioners felt that they lacked appropriate training, resources and support to successfully include children with PMLD (Alquraini 2012; Coutsocostas and Alborz 2010) whereas parental attitudes towards including children with PMLD appeared to be influenced by their lack of knowledge and experience of children with PMLD (de Boer and Munde 2015).

The relatively few studies that have compared and contrasted how children with PMLD engage in special schools and mainstream schools have reported favourable findings for those engaged in the mainstream. For example, Foreman et al. (2004) compared levels of alertness between children with PMLD in a mainstream class and children with PMLD in a special school class. They reported that children in the mainstream class demonstrated a longer time in desired behaviour states (i.e. they were more aware, active and alert) compared to their special school counterparts. These findings resonate with my own doctoral research (Simmons and Watson 2014, 2015) which examined how a child with PMLD participated in a mainstream school and special school. Through participatory and longitudinal observation methods my research described how the participant was more active, happy, communicatively engaged and displayed higher forms of intersubjective awareness in his mainstream school compared to his special school (particularly around mainstream peers).

In this chapter I contribute to the inclusion debate in two ways. First, I report key findings from a three-year research project (2014-2017) which examined how special schools and mainstream schools provided alternative social interaction opportunities for children with PMLD. Second, I develop a theory of 'belonging' to help illuminate the meaning of social engagement in the context of the reported research. Belonging is a new concept to the PMLD field and to date there have been no published inclusive education studies that employ the term in relation to children with PMLD.

In the following section I highlight how research in the PMLD field has traditionally been interventionist in nature and framed children with PMLD monadically or dyadically. I then

draw on phenomenological literature to develop an account of belonging that draws on a more pluralistic (group based and culturally-situated) interpretation of interaction. The monadic, dyadic and pluralistic accounts form a socio-ontological lens through which I interpret the nature of social interactions described in my research. What emerges from this is a complex picture that suggests that belonging is not simply about residing in a physical space, but can emerge across mainstream and special schools in qualitatively different ways. Implications of this are discussed in the conclusion.

The influence of psychological theory in the PMLD field

In my previous work (e.g. Simmons and Watson 2014) I explored the theoretical foundations of the 'PMLD field' and found that much of the literature written about children with PMLD drew conceptual resources from psychology. For example, the construct of 'PMLD' appeared to be predicated on the idea that children with PMLD are developmentally delayed and operate at the so-called pre-verbal stages of development. I referred to this as the *pre-x symptomatology* of PMLD (Simmons, Blackmore and Bayliss 2008) to highlight how children with PMLD were commonly defined in terms of their failure to meet certain developmental milestones, such as cause-effect awareness (they were pre-contingency aware), and joint attention (they were pre-intersubjective). A more extensive examination of the research literature revealed a key focus on developing assessment tools and intervention strategies inspired by behaviourist and cognitive-developmental models of learning (see Simmons and Watson 2014 for a detailed account. A summary is provided below).

Behaviourism is an approach concerned with the scientific study of observable behaviour. Central to behaviourism is the idea of learning as conditioning. Conditioning here is construed as an unconscious or automatic form of learning that underlies the acquisition of behaviour. A wealth of international research has been published exploring the efficacy of behaviourist training programmes to develop functional or adaptive skills in people with PMLD. Training programmes are usually guided by operant conditioning theory, and it is hoped that the presentation of a stimulus each time a discrete behaviour is performed will increase the likelihood of that behaviour reoccurring. Much research has been published documenting strategies for identifying stimuli to act as reinforcers (Tullis et al., 2011), and reinforcers are often used to increase the occurrence of behaviours such as microswitch-pressing (Mechling 2006), the idea being that by learning to press microswitches, people with

PMLD may master a level of control over their environment and eventually learn to signal others (Roche et al. 2015).

An alternative to the behaviourist approach is one that attempts to develop social cognition and symbolic communication in people with PMLD. This cognitivist approach aims to foster the beginnings of social awareness so people with PMLD can begin to engage intentionally with those around them. For example, Intensive Interaction (Nind & Hewett 2001) is an intervention that supports the simulation of interactive sequences described in studies of parent–infant communication (such as contingent responding, imitation, and turn taking). The idea is that infants naturally develop intersubjectivity and communicative intent through pre-verbal, implicit social transactions with parents. By simulating what occurs between parents and infants (but with greater intensity and reflection), practitioners can engage with people with PMLD on a basic level that may lead to social learning.

Reconceptualising the socio-ontological status of children with PMLD: from the monadic and dyadic to the plural

The research traditions described above have provided a monadic or dyadic socio-ontological figuring of children with PMLD (Stewart and Pullen 2014). The behaviourist literature is monadic in nature, meaning that the children are conceptualised individualistically, as being pre-/asocial and under the control of environmental variables. By contrast, the developmental-cognitivist literature is dyadic in nature, meaning that the minimal unit of analysis is the relation between the child with PMLD and a parent or professional. Monadic interventions abstract the child from the social environment (the child is not conceptualised as a social actor but as a passive recipient of sensory input aimed to invoke a behavioural output) whilst dyadic interventions involve a practitioner interacting with a child on a one-to-one basis (i.e. the practitioner is responsive to the social being of the child and aims to share control of the interaction with the child).

What has been overlooked in the PMLD field so far is what I refer to in this chapter as a position of ‘plurality’. When referring to plurality I have two separate but related concepts in mind, which together provide a framework for thinking about the meaning of ‘belonging’. The first concept is a literal or numerical concept of plurality. As described previously, the PMLD field has largely focused on monadic behaviour or dyadic interaction and has ignored

how children with PMLD may participate in or belong to larger collectives, such as groups of friends or local communities. I find Tuomela's (2013) work on group membership insightful here as he suggests that belonging to a collective of individuals can involve qualitatively different kinds of roles and goals. Tuomela's (2013) describes two forms of group membership: the 'I-mode' and the 'we-mode'. The I-mode is individualistic and individuals work together to achieve personal ends. By contrast the we-mode is collectivistic. In the we-mode members of the group act only for the group and do not enact personal motives. They share collective commitments and act "as if they were intentionally functioning as parts of an organism" (p.34) who "think and act only for group centered motives" (p.38). I interpret this as meaning that belonging to a group does not require that each individual performs the same task at the same time, but rather members of the group (at least those operating in the we-mode) have different tasks. Hence, the meaning of belonging is about how individuals cooperate and coordinate their actions to achieve a shared goal.

The second concept I have in mind when referring to plurality suggests that the nature of social interaction (e.g. the meaning and shape of interaction) is culturally situated. Whereas the monadic and dyadic PMLD literatures take a normative view of social interaction (e.g. by suggesting that there are universal or 'human' behavioural patterns that transcend historical, cultural and social conventions), the relative pluralistic account holds that social interaction depends on the broader context of interaction. Phenomenologists such as Heidegger (1962) and Merleau-Ponty (2002) have advanced a view that human beings are born into a social world and that our lived experiences are heavily influenced by historical and public norms. Our experience of the world is anchored in 'shared, public, normalized intelligibility' (Koo 2016: 95). This is what Heidegger (1962) means when he talks about being-in-the-world: we coexist with others to the extent that our shared perception is permeated with cultural significance. However, for both Heidegger (1962) and Merleau-Ponty (2002), these cultural experiences must be understood with reference to our embodiment. Embodiment implies more than simply having a body. It refers to how we live through our body, with how our perception of the world is made meaningful in terms of how we can interact with the world, and how these interactions and meanings are shaped by the cultural norms that we are born into. In lived experience the world is signified in terms of how it affords us opportunities to act, and to act in culturally-specific ways requires us to learn how others act in a given context. Hence, for Merleau-Ponty (2002) to learn how to walk or gesture, dance or use

objects is to learn how others perform these actions, and to learn what a chair, a toy, or spoon is means to learn how it is used by others.

These ideas suggest to me that whilst 'belonging' can be understood in terms of the numerical concept of plurality (i.e. in terms of how individuals in a group interact), we also need to understand belonging with reference to a community's common heritage, meanings, affective valuations, rituals and traditions. Belonging involves *active participation* in culturally-specific ways of engaging with the material environment, and is always relational insofar as it is through participation with others that we acquire culturally-specific ways of understanding and interacting with the material environment. In this chapter I propose that both accounts of plurality (the numerical and the cultural) provide a framework for thinking about the meaning of belonging. I apply this framework to the research findings described below.

Research

The research I describe in this chapter examined how mainstream schools and special schools provide social interaction opportunities for children with PMLD. The data presented is based on my analysis of two children with the pseudonyms of Emma and Harry. Emma was five years old and Harry was eight years old during my data collection phase. Both children attended the same special school in England and were educated in the school's PMLD class. The PMLD class doubled up as a reception class for younger children with special educational needs. For the purposes of this project, Emma and Harry attended an age-equivalent class in a local mainstream school for one day a week (these placements were set up for the project, but continued after the project had ended which indicates their successful nature). Each child was observed once a week in the mainstream school and once a week in a special school for ten weeks (20 observations per child). Emma and Harry participated in the project at different times (Emma in the autumn term, and Harry in the winter). A special school teaching assistant (SSTA) accompanied Emma and Harry on each visit.

The methodology resembled a participatory or ethnographic approach which I have described extensively elsewhere (e.g. Simmons and Watson 2014, 2015; Simmons 2018). Prior to undertaking fieldwork, I engaged in a pre-observation focus groups with school staff and semi-structured interviews with the children's parents. The aim was to explore the children's

interests, abilities and methods of communication by consulting those who knew the children intimately. This led to the development of an initial lens through which to interpret and understand the children's action. Participatory observation was undertaken to develop understandings of the children's behaviours by working with them in context. Participatory observation helped me to develop trust and rapport with members of staff and provided me with opportunities for informal discussion with staff in real time. These informal conversations allowed me to share and discuss my interpretations of Harry and Emma's actions, ask questions and seek out staff members' expertise and wisdom (e.g. to resolve my confusion about the meaning of newly observed or unexpected behaviours).

My data primarily consisted of written fieldnotes or "vignettes" composed during periods of non-participatory observation. Vignettes are rich and prosaic renderings of fieldnotes about social interactions. They have a story-like structure and adhere to chronological flow. Vignettes are restricted to a particular place, time, and actor (or group of actors), and can vary from a few lines of descriptions to several paragraphs. When opportunities for social interaction were observed I would write detailed, descriptive accounts as the interaction unfolded, paying attention to who initiated the interaction and how, the actions of the interactive participants over time and contextual variables such as location and context of the interaction and the objects involved. I thematically analysed the vignettes, the findings of which are presented below.

Findings

Monadic data

A theme unique to special school data was 'monadic: indirect interaction' and refers to staff manipulating the physical environment (usually a multi-sensory environment) in order to encourage particular behavioural and/or emotional responses from Emma. Whilst it may be argued that many teachers modify classrooms to create ambience (e.g. decorating classrooms according to a season's festivals such as Halloween), in the special school indirect interaction refers to a specific way of engaging with Emma. Indirect interactions occurred in a small room adjacent to the classroom. If Emma was drowsy staff would play lively music and project images on the wall of people dancing. By contrast, soothing nature sounds (e.g. recordings of sea waves lapping on a beach accompanied by images of the sea) were used to relax children.

In addition to altering mood and levels of arousal, staff used the sensory room to help identify stimuli that could be used as positive behavioural reinforcers during switch work. During these interactions staff did not engage directly with Emma (there were no face-to-face engagement). Instead, members of staff moved out of sight (e.g. behind Emma) and deliberately remained quiet and still. Staff would turn lights on and off, project images on the wall, play sound effects, or place a tray in front of Emma with a collection of flashing and moving electronic toys. Sometimes the toys were attached to switches that staff would press before recording Emma's responses (e.g. turning her head to locate the source of the sound, reaching out to touch an object, or expressing approval through smiling and laughter).

Dyadic data

Dyadic interactions consisted of one-to-one interactions face-to-face interactions. These took place in both the mainstream school and special school. In the special school Harry and Emma experienced almost no peer interaction outside of occasional greetings. By contrast, interactions between staff and Harry/Emma were typically dyadic in nature and functional or normative, meaning that the interactions were planned for, aimed to foster Harry's/Emma's emerging social awareness and communication skills, and took place within the context of a time-tabled activity. For example, almost on a daily basis both Harry and Emma were encouraged to express a preference for an object, person or event (e.g. smiling to express 'like' or turning away from the object to express 'dislike'). They were asked to make a choice between two objects (e.g. two different flavoured lip balms) through prolonged looking or anticipatory behaviours (e.g. looking at a preferred lip balm with an open mouth). Staff encouraged Harry/Emma to ask for 'more' through looking and verbalising. If the children did not respond to choices offered by staff then a range of prompts would be issued including verbal prompts (the question would be reiterated, reworded, and/or spoken in more dramatic tone), gestural and visual prompts (such as pointing at or showing an object or a Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) symbol), followed by a physical prompt:

> It's time for children to have their teeth brushed. The teacher plays the song that signals the beginning of the brushing routine. Harry is looking sleepy today and doesn't stir. The TA sits in front of him and wiggles his arms ('Wakey, wakey Harry! It's time to brush your teeth!'). He stirs a little but then goes back to sleep. The TA

asks Harry to open his mouth but he doesn't. He is slumped in his wheelchair and his chin rests on chest. The TA raises his head and rests it on the headrest. He opens his eyes and shows him the toothbrush ('C'mon mate, you know what to do! Wakey wakey!). The TA finally touches Harry's lips with the toothbrush and Harry licks and sucks the brush. His eyes open slightly though he doesn't appear to focus on the brush but does become more alert and focused before opening his mouth wide for the toothbrush.

Dyadic interactions also involved staff providing personal care and comfort to Harry and Emma such as massaging aching limbs, feeding, toileting, and administering medication. However, whilst the medications were deemed imperative to sustain bodily functioning and reduce discomfort, they also made the participants heavily drowsy. Staff would attempt to negate the effects of the medication by singing to them or talking to them using dramatic intonation, 'shake-to-wake' (e.g. rubbing and shaking limbs) as well as other forms of physical encouragement such as massaging hands and feet. Staff held Emma's arms and sang to her in order to stop her from her rubbing her nose and pulling her hair.

Dyadic interactions that took place in the mainstream school typically involved Emma or Harry engaging with the SSTA. Whilst some interactions resembled those described above (e.g. care-based activities such as feeding, or trying to develop communication skills), a central theme that emerged during analysis of the dyadic mainstream data was 'narrated bodily appropriation'. Narrated bodily appropriation refers to a particular style of dyadic physical interaction whereby the SSTA would move or control Harry or Emma's body (or, more specifically, body parts such as limbs) in accordance with the normative contextual demands of the situation. For example, the SSTA raised Harry's hands in response to a teacher's question (e.g. 'Who would like to play outside?') or hold onto Emma's hands and perform the actions of a nursery rhyme with her. During numeracy the SSTA would count using Emma's fingers and raise her arm in the air with fingers outstretched with the correct answer, whilst in literacy the SSTA would play an audiobook for Emma whilst holding Emma's finger to point to the words and pictures on the physical page. This physical control of Emma and Harry's bodies (or the shaping of their behaviours) was also observed during care-based. For example, if the SSTA felt that Emma had spent too long in her wheelchair she would sit on the floor with her and allow Emma to lean back and rest on her. If Emma's 'ticks' appeared to be resulting in harm (e.g. her skin began to redden after too much rubbing) the SSTA would put splints on Emma's arms to prevent her from reaching her nose. These

dyadic forms of interaction were typically narrated, meaning that the interactions were accompanied by a description of what was about to happen and why. The SSTA would also issue verbal instructions (e.g. 'Sit up please'), ask questions ('Did you like the story?') and offer lots of praise (e.g. 'Good looking, Harry!').

Interactions between Emma and the mainstream teaching staff were relatively rare. Interactions included formal greetings ('Good morning, Emma') and attempts at humour ('You need beepers on your wheelchair like a lorry!'). The mainstream staff gave Emma objects (teddy bears, balls) and repeated questions with heightened intonation if Emma did not respond. The teacher typically praised Emma if she saw her working indoors with the SSTA. The teacher also used strategies that she uses to teach the mainstream children (e.g. showing Emma words in a book, spelling out the letters phonically before blending it together).

Plurality data

The category of plurality refers to data which involves Emma/Harry and at least two other participants interacting together (i.e. triadic or group-based interaction). There was relatively little data describing plural interactions in the special school (most of the data was monadic or dyadic in nature). These interactions typically took the form of whole class singing or the teacher instructing the whole class (e.g. explaining that it's time to tidy up). By contrast, one of the defining features of the mainstream school data was its plurality. The special school teaching assistant (SSTA) featured in almost all of the vignettes recorded in the mainstream school, and peers played a significant role too.

Initially large groups (up to twelve children) would 'flock' towards Emma (especially in the playground) and children would interact briefly by greeting Emma and/or the SSTA before running away again. During these moments Emma presented as shy and opted out of engagement (e.g. by pretending to be asleep or turning her head away from the crowds). However, as the project progressed Emma became more comfortable in the presence of others and on her second visit to the mainstream began engaging in what was coded as 'co-presence and group affect'. Emma would be excited even though there was no direct interaction, and simply being beside other children (particularly during carpet time) or directly observing others resulted in Emma's excitement. She would squeal with excitement

when children ran past her, laugh when they were reprimanded by the teacher, and stare intensely at children working or playing near her. Emma would locate the sound of children shouting and being noisy, track children running, and watch children interact with objects (e.g. musical instruments). The SSTA noticed that Emma's ticks would reduce in intensity whilst observing others (e.g. her facial rubbing, hair pulling, and teeth-grinding would slow down or stop briefly). The SSTA also confessed that Emma's growing interest in other children could be distracting and the SSTA found it difficult gaining her attention (e.g. when reading to her or trying to feed her).

Sustained direct engagement between Emma and other children initially emerged through the SSTA who provided explicit guidance to mainstream children and physical support to Emma. The SSTA would move Emma to groups of children who were working or playing and give Emma the same objects that others were using (e.g. musical instruments, jigsaw puzzle pieces). The SSTA celebrated the children's achievements with Emma (e.g. raising Emma's hands and cheering after children completed a puzzle, or by telling children that Emma liked their paintings). Children would be invited to interact with Emma and given interaction strategies to perform ('Tell her your name' 'Tell her what you've done today', 'Can you choose a story for Emma?') and suggestions on how to play (e.g. 'Can you roll the ball to Emma?' 'Emma likes to have her hands held'). The SSTA would provide physical support (e.g. by helping Emma roll a ball back to other children, raising Emma's hand in the air so others could 'high-five' her). Children received praise and verbal encouragement for interacting with Emma and had their questions answered by the SSTA (e.g. 'Why is she in a wheelchair chair?' 'Can she talk?'). Sometimes the SSTA would play games with Emma that attracted the attention of groups of children (such as piling up toys on Emma's lap and celebrating when the pile toppled to the ground, or blowing bubbles in front of Emma and popping those that floated in front of her face whilst shouting 'Pop! Pop! Pop!')

As the project progressed children began to initiate interactions themselves. This began with children choosing to sit in close proximity to Emma (e.g. drinking milk beside her during snack time). Children would greet Emma without prompt and say farewell to her when they moved away. They performed for Emma (e.g. by dancing or singing, pulling silly faces to make her laugh, approach her in fancy dress and act out a scene). In addition to performance, children regularly interacted with Emma using objects such as showing her what they had made (e.g. Lego cars). Children give Emma objects to play with (e.g. balls, hula-hoops) by

placing them in her hand, on her lap, or (if a football) at her feet. Children would also show Emma how objects worked (e.g. spinning tops and whoopie cushions). They invited Emma to play with them (e.g. join her at the water table or at the doll house) or approached Emma when she had objects of interests such as bubble-wrap. During these forms of engagement Emma would become more awake and alert, excited, and typically turn to look at children gathered around her and the objects being shown. She would laugh at their performances and her ticks would sometimes reduce in intensity. If Emma was drowsy the children would still interact with her (e.g. by putting a ball on her lap and shaking her arms to wake her up). The interactions were often physical and intimate in nature. Children would kiss Emma on the cheek or give her a hug, stroke her arms and hair, hold her hands, rub her shoulders and perform care-based actions such as tuck in her poncho and blanket when she was outside in the playground. During these activities Emma would typically smile and vocalise happily and/or engage in prolonged looking

Discussion

In the above text I examined how different environments and communication partners provided Emma and Harry with opportunities for social interaction. My research was based on the preconception that distinct places and groups would present qualitatively different forms of social engagement for children with PMLD. However, what emerged during data analysis was a more nuanced picture whereby the presupposed binaries (e.g. mainstream vs. special, peer vs. adult) proved to be overly-simplistic and reductionist in light of the situated and relational findings of the project. For example, the nature of the interaction between the participants with PMLD and teaching staff from the special school were contingent upon the location of the interaction. In the special school the interactions were similar to those described in the interventionist research literature. These interactions included monadic behavioural approaches to shaping the actions of participants or dyadic cognitive approaches that were normative, functional and attempted to support children's emerging communication skills. By contrast, dyadic interactions in the mainstream school between Emma/Harry and the SSTA took a more physical form whereby the SSTA would take control of - or appropriate – the bodies of Emma/Harry in order to shape their actions in a contextually normative way (e.g. by raising children's hands in response to teacher's questions, or by helping Emma/Harry draw through hand-on-hand support).

Earlier in the chapter I advanced a view of belonging based on two concepts of plurality: a numerical concept which referred to an aggregation of individuals and how they interacted (Tuomela 2013), and a relative cultural concept which referred to the embodiment of a community's meanings and traditions, including the ways in which the material environment is culturally experienced and engaged with (Husserl 1962, Merleau-Ponty 2002). The numerical and cultural concepts of plurality offer a framework for thinking about belonging that help me make sense of the social complexity of the data. Belonging is not a simple either/or concept. Rather, we can belong to different communities and cultures which shape how we engage with others. In the special school the SSTA embodied the 'PMLD culture' insofar as her interactions with Emma and Harry were constrained by the meanings, routines, objects and discourses of the special school. The SSTA used trampolines for Rebound Therapy, sound beams for Music Therapy, multisensory rooms (Snoezelen) for modifying affect, switches for teaching cause-and-effect, and objects of reference for emerging symbolic communication, etc. These materials and meanings cut across the monadic and dyadic interactions between the SSTA and Emma/Harry which aimed to develop functional and symbolically normative interactions. By contrast, in the mainstream school the SSTA was faced with a different cultural and material environment that she appropriated in her interactions with Emma/Harry. She pointed to words in books whilst reading a story, helped Emma/Harry write through hand-on-hand support, held up phonics cards, and put headphones on Emma/Harry so they could listen to audio books.

Drawing on the concept of belonging, I argue that the SSTA belonged to both mainstream school and special school cultures: the materials, routines, and understandings were intelligible to her, and her interactions with Emma/Harry were shaped by the cultural norms of the contexts she was operating in. Furthermore, by engaging in these ways the SSTA was *communalising* Emma/Harry in the different cultures, teaching them how to perform in ways deemed culturally significant (perhaps culturally normal) in relation to the objects to hand, and thus shaping their participation and belonging.

The numerical and culturally relative accounts of plurality also help make sense of the ways in which Emma and Harry belonged to mainstream peer groups. Most of the data that described Emma and Harry interacting with peers in the mainstream school was group based. Following Tuomela (2013), I interpret these interactions in terms of the group operating in the 'we-mode', i.e. children worked together and shared a collective commitment to

achieving the same goal. For example, children performed for Emma and Harry in the playground by dancing, singing, or dressing up and acting out a story. These kinds of performances were highly affective for Emma/Harry and the performers themselves, with lots of smiles and laughter, and provided opportunities for Harry/Emma to experience themselves in the presence of others. However, children also gave Emma and Harry responsibilities during group-based tasks. During the class treasure hunt, Harry was given a chart of treasures to tick off as well as a map and compass. During the class Bear Hunt, Emma was given objects found in the school woods such as grass, twigs and leaves that would be used later in the day to tell the Bear Hunt story. In each of these examples groups of children worked together with and through Emma/Harry. Put differently, Emma and Harry were centres of social gravity whereby other children coordinated their actions to achieve the shared goal of including Emma/Harry by giving them meaningful roles in the context of the activity. These kinds of interactions demonstrate that Emma and Harry belonged to peer groups according to Tuomela's (2013) definition.

Building on this, I suggest that the culturally relative concept of plurality helps provide an account of the ways in which Emma and Harry belonged to friendship groups. Children regularly gave Emma/Harry tokens of affection such as bracelets, daisy chains, and cards. They invited Emma/Harry to play by offering them objects (e.g. laying a ball at Emma' feet) or demonstrating how to use objects (e.g. spinning tops). Following Merleau-Ponty (2002) I argue that the use and exchange of objects in this way can be interpreted as mainstream children inviting Emma and Harry to participate in children's play culture, an affectively-loaded act which drew laughter and excitement from Emma and Harry, suggesting a bond or emotional relation between Emma/Harry and peers who can be considered friends. To me, these moments crystallise the ways in which Emma/Harry experienced belonging in the mainstream.

Conclusion

In this chapter I developed an account of belonging based on two concepts of plurality: a numerical concept (which refers to an aggregation of individuals and how they interact) and a cultural concept (which refers to the embodiment of a community's meanings and traditions, exemplified in how these play out in the material environment). What emerged when applying these concepts to the reported research findings was a dynamic account of

belonging which can contribute to the inclusion debate for children with PMLD. In one of her later publications, Warnock (2010) made an explicit link between belonging and inclusive education by stating that: 'Inclusion is not a matter of where you are geographically, but where you feel like you belong' (p. 34). Whilst Warnock (2010) did not develop a theory of belonging, she did state that some children with special educational needs 'will never feel that they belong in a large mainstream school' (ibid.). My work in this chapter resonates with Warnock's (2010) view that belonging is not *simply* about location, though I have argued that cultural interpretations of the material environment can shape social interactions. Rather than thinking about belonging in binary terms (special vs mainstream), I suggest that it may be more fruitful to understand belonging as something that is enacted or brought into being in qualitatively different ways, and that mainstream schools *and* special schools can be sites that foster the experience of belonging. Whether inclusion is the same as belonging is open to interpretation, but I hope that the pluralistic view of belonging advanced in this chapter provides future researchers with new ways of thinking about inclusion and I call for more research to inform the debate.

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