Reimagining Climate Relations with Feminist Earth-Based Spirituality through Common Worlds Ethnography with Young Children

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education

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Abstract

Children are set to inherit a socially and ecologically damaged world. This thesis responds to this urgent concern by reimagining pedagogical and curriculum practices with educators and young children. Derived from pedagogical research at a childcare centre in London, Ontario, this thesis proposes engagement with common worlds frameworks and feminist earth-based spirituality as possible interventions to the dominant discourses of our times: capitalism, neoliberalism, settler colonialism, and anthropocentrism. A collection of scholarly book chapters and journal articles, this work advocates for situated and responsive pedagogical engagements that refute singular ontological epistemologies and speculate hopeful possibilities for more livable futures. In each chapter I engage with postqualitative research methodologies, such as common worlds ethnography, to experiment with what might be possible when pedagogical and curricular practices create space for multiple and varied conceptualizations of truth.

**Keywords:** early childhood, feminist earth-based spirituality, ecological devastation, common worlds, curriculum
Summary for Lay Audience

Children are set to inherit a socially and ecologically damaged world. This thesis responds to this urgent concern by reimagining pedagogical and curriculum practices with educators and young children. Derived from pedagogical research at a childcare centre in London, Ontario, this thesis proposes engagement with common worlds frameworks and feminist earth-based spirituality as possible interventions to the dominant discourses of our times: capitalism, neoliberalism, settler colonialism, and anthropocentrism. A collection of scholarly book chapters and journal articles, this work advocates for situated and responsive pedagogical engagements that refute singular ontological and epistemologies and speculate hopeful possibilities for more livable futures. In each chapter I engage with postqualitative research methodologies, such as common worlds ethnography, to experiment with what might be possible when pedagogical and curricular practices create space for multiple and varied conceptualizations of truth.
Co-Authorship Statements

Chapter 2, “More-than-Human Kinship Relations Within Indigenous Children’s Books,” was co-authored with Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw. We contributed equally to this book chapter (50% each), including conceptualization, writing, and publication.

Citation:


Chapter 4, “Working with Childhoods and Energies: Critical Reflections on Specifying and Locating the Intangible,” was co-authored with Climate Action Network researchers Dr. Peter Kraftl and Arooj Khan. I was the lead author of this paper. I assumed responsibility for 60% of the article, including conceptualization, writing, and publication.

Citation:


Chapter 5, “Doing Pedagogical Conversations (with Spirituality and Fat) as a Pedagogist in Early Childhood Education,” was co-authored with Dr. Nicole Land. We contributed equally to this article (50% each), including conceptualization, writing, and publication. The data in this article was derived from my doctoral research.

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Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1. Responding Pedagogically to Ecological Devastation with Feminist Earth-Based Spirituality

This chapter orients the thesis toward a deep concern for the current climate crisis and offers research questions that challenge the dominance of scientific rationality, specifically child development, through multiplicitous ontological perspectives, such as immanent earth-based feminist spirituality. The chapter traces the violences enacted through commonplace early childhood education and outlines the theoretical perspectives that will anchor the subsequent chapters.


This chapter enacts a critical reading of Indigenous children’s books in early childhood education to examine how Indigenous onto-epistemologies are often filtered through Western viewpoints in early childhood spaces. The chapter challenges appropriative engagement with Indigenous stories that perpetuate colonial and anthropocentric logics that position humans above the natural world. It engages with Indigenous scholarship to offer hopeful curricular propositions for complex and meaningful engagement with Indigenous cosmologies in early childhood education.

Chapter 3. Posthuman Possibilities for the Early Childhood Educator

This chapter offers feminist posthuman theory as one possible way to activate earth-based feminist spiritualities in early childhood education practices. Through two stories from pedagogist research, the chapter outlines how researchers and educators grappled with, through a common worlds framework and earth-based feminist spirituality, the anthropocentric and developmental logics that govern early childhood spaces and how these theoretical engagements might help the early childhood education field to understand the child, educators, and researchers as part of the complex, relational
assemblages that are always in the process of composing and recomposing relations within more-than-human worlds.

Chapter 4. Working with Childhoods and Energies: Critical Reflections on Specifying and Locating the Intangible

This chapter engages a common worlds framework and collaboratory methodologies to mess up tangible and intact definitions of energy. Weaving stories of place and energy from two research sites from the Climate Action Childhood Network project, the chapter challenges how energy is commonly taken up in environmental education to offer possibilities for pedagogical engagements that promote multiple, situated understandings of a concept, energy, that is primarily understood through very rigid scientific methods. The chapter proposes curricular practices that respond to the unequal lives of 21st-century children and youth.

Chapter 5. Doing Pedagogical Conversations (with Spirituality and Fat) as a Pedagogist in Early Childhood Education

Beginning from the assumption that education is never neutral, this chapter enacts Isabelle Stengers’ (2018a) method of relaying to highlight the necessity of pedagogical discussion in early childhood education curriculum making. In this chapter, a moment from research in which children encounter a magic tree is considered from perspectives of child development, earth-based spirituality, and fats to demonstrate how theoretical orientation matters in early childhood education and proposes that the work of pedagogists carries an obligation to engage in curriculum making that not only responds to life in the 21st century but is response-able (Haraway, 2016) to consequences that follow our pedagogical choices.

Chapter 6. Curriculum and the World Imagined Otherwise

This chapter revisits the research questions and the theoretical concepts of ecologies of practice and reclaiming proposed in the introduction with each of the chapters and makes
connections and propositions toward situated responses to ecological devastation within early childhood education curriculum making.
Chapter 1. Responding Pedagogically to Ecological Devastation with Feminist Earth-Based Spirituality

Acknowledging that we live in barbaric times and that ecological devastation is vast and irrevocable may seem like a place to throw up one’s hands and wait for the inevitable dystopian future to descend upon us. The perpetual state of capitalism may seem insurmountable, but Stengers (2015) challenges us to join the resistors who have inherited a history of struggles against capitalism and to engage in hopeful experiments “that try to make possible a future that isn’t barbaric, now” (p. 23). Thinking through climate crisis with only Scientific\(^1\) rationality fosters passive impotence in the ability to respond to the ecocatastrophe. However, what if instead of despairing at the repercussions of our actions, each of us asks instead, “What might I do differently, what other modes of thinking can I think with?” In my research, I think with Stengers’ (2012) modes of reclaiming as an imaginative way to engage with climate concerns.

My research responds to the growing recognition that current global ecological challenges are of concern to future generations (Government of Canada, 2013; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014; UNICEF, 2007, 2015) and to the call for research that engages with these climate challenges beyond universalistic solution-based models (A. Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015). Acknowledging that the current climate crisis is a result of human-over-nature hierarchal practices of exploitation of the natural world and extraction of its resources (Crutzen, 2002; Steffen et al., 2007), researchers interested in responding to climate change with children (Nxumalo, 2018; A. Taylor, 2017a; A. Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015; Z. Todd, 2017) agree that responses to climate change need to consider the entangled worlds of humans and the more-than-human. These researchers acknowledge the need to think about the climate crisis in ways that transcend the anthropocentric leanings that have contributed to this

\(^1\) Following Subramaniam and Willey’s (2017) thinking with Sandra Harding’s (1991) distinction between Science and science, I capitalize science in instances in which I wish to draw attention to knowledge that is recognized by Euro-Western institutions as “official knowledge.”
ecocatastrophe. For instance, several scholars have turned toward spiritual understandings as possibilities to rethink perspectives on climate change issues (Alexander et al., 2011; Nunn et al., 2016; Woiwode, 2012) in ways that take seriously the many non-Western worldviews that emphasize spiritual aspects of human-nature relationships as key to shifting climate futures (Holst, 1997; Mies & Shiva, 2014; Rountree, 2005; B. Taylor, 2001).

My thesis is presented in an integrated article format. I include two book chapters and two academic articles that, in various ways, respond to the research problem outlined above. In this introductory chapter, I outline my research questions, theoretical perspectives, and methodologies employed to respond by creating curriculum with educators and children that respond to the conditions of life in the 21st century. Asserting that the logics that have contributed to this crisis are the same logics of dominant discourses that construct educational processes within the Scientific gaze, I introduce the chapters included in this thesis to propose educational practices that challenge the logics of neoliberalism, capitalism, anthropocentrism, and colonialism within the everyday happenings in early childhood.

Research Questions

My research considers what is possible when centring immanent ontologies, particularly feminist spiritual knowledges, in early childhood education. My research questions are:

1. What might be possible for early childhood education when we centre immanent, multiplicitous ontological possibilities?

2. How do dominant canons of Euro-Western Scientific rationality subjugate feminist earth-based spiritual knowledges in early childhood education?

3. How might researchers and educators co-create curriculum to disrupt the valourization of the Scientific method and singular conceptualizations of the world to offer new possibilities for thinking about the world?
(4) How might ethical pedagogical disruptions that engage with subjugated feminist spiritual knowledges challenge rational discourses of neoliberalism, colonialism, anthropocentrism, and capitalism in early childhood education?

Immanent ontological possibilities are ways of knowing and being in the world that refuse singular constructions of knowledge that propose one Truth. These possibilities posit that knowledge is created in relation with others (human and more-than-human); therefore, they are always in the process of being made and remade, and they are multiple because they respond to complex, situated human and more-than-human assemblages. Building on Haraway’s (1998) refusal of the God-trick and Skott-Myhre’s (2018) definition of immanent spirituality, I propose immanent curriculum making as a continuous practice of becoming and belonging in the world that is not tied to, or rigidly aligned with, particular constructs of a discipline. This understanding of how knowledge is formed is inextricable from the ontological perspective that multiple truths, worlds, and ways of being in the world exist simultaneously and not in hierarchal structures.

Throughout the chapters, I trace how dominant canons of Euro-Western Scientific rationality are intertwined with and directly shape the tenets of developmental psychology that govern much of early childhood education. I suggest that these singular ways of understanding and categorizing the world make otherwise ways of knowing and being in the world, specifically the imaginability of feminist earth-based spiritual knowledges, impossible. Thinking and acting with logics outside of anthropocentrism by proposing engagement with the world in ways that betray Scientific rationalism, I experiment with curriculum-making practices that enact creative pedagogical responses to the climate crisis. This experimentatation promotes multiple ways of knowing and being in the world aimed at creating ethical disruptions to the dominant discourses of our times by challenging understandings of the world that are defined by singular perspectives and that subjugate people whose knowings of the world do not align with the dominant singular perspective. Each of the chapters responds to some or all of the research questions.
The second chapter, “More-than-Human Kinship Relations Within Indigenous Children’s Books,” enacts a critical reading of Indigenous children’s books in early childhood education to examine how Indigenous onto-epistemologies are often filtered through Western viewpoints in early childhood spaces. My coauthor and I contend that this type of appropriative engagement with Indigenous stories perpetuates colonial and anthropocentric logics that continue to position the human above the natural world. We engage with Indigenous scholarship to offer hopeful curricular propositions for complex and meaningful engagement with Indigenous cosmologies. By refusing the mythologization of Indigenous knowledges and instead creating pedagogical practices that position the Indigenous worldviews we encounter in the stories as truths that are plausible while remaining incommensurable with Scientific categorizations, this chapter responds to research questions one and three. By insisting that Indigenous children’s books be shared with children as truth, we propose pedagogical practices that uphold myriad ontological possibilities for curriculum making.

The third chapter, “Posthuman Possibilities for the Early Childhood Educator,” introduces feminist posthuman theory as one possible way to activate earth-based feminist spiritualities in early childhood education practices. I share two stories from research that show how researchers and educators grappled with, through a common worlds framework and earth-based feminist spirituality, with how we might shift our engagements with children from ways that uphold images of the developmental child (Burman, 2001, 2017; Woodhood, 1999) and child-centred logics (Spyrou, 2018) to instead understand the child and ourselves as part of complex, relational assemblages (Tsing, 2015) that are always in the process of composing and recomposing relations within more-than-human worlds. This chapter responds to all of the research questions, as it proposes an immanent, relational posthuman subject seeking multiplicitous ontological possibilities in early childhood education. Through engagement with a common worlds framework and earth-based feminist spirituality, educators and I experiment with curricular possibilities that make possible ethical pedagogical practices that challenge the limiting and marginalizing logics of developmental psychology.
“Working with Childhoods and Energies: Critical Reflections on Specifying and Locating the Intangible,” Chapter 4, engages a common worlds framework and collaboratory methodologies to mess up tangible and intact definitions of energy. This engagement with energy and the enacting of collaboratory thinking addresses all of the outlined research questions. My coauthors and I ground our paper in our shared pedagogical interests but also explore our divergent conditions, such as place and the age of the participants, to offer possibilities for pedagogical engagements that promote multiple, situated understandings of a concept, energy, that is primarily understood through very rigid Scientific methods. Our aim is to create curricular practices that respond to the unequal lives of 21st-century children and youth. The energies offered within the chapter’s vignettes challenge singular perspectives of knowing the world, which have been demonstrated to “other”, by refusing to settle on one right way of being and knowing the world. Instead, they create opportunities for various onto-epistemologies in curriculum.

Acknowledging that education is never neutral, Chapter 5, “Doing Pedagogical Conversations (with Spirituality and Fat) as a Pedagogist in Early Childhood Education,” enacts Stengers’ (2018a) method of relaying to highlight the necessity of pedagogical discussion in early childhood education curriculum making. Passing a moment from my research back and forth, I and my coauthor, another pedagogist, demonstrate that the work of a pedagogist can never be done in isolation. Relaying an idea creates possibilities for ontological multiplicity and relational knowledge construction. Analysis of the moment from various theoretical perspectives, including feminist spirituality, demonstrates how theoretical orientation matters in early childhood education and that, as pedagogists, we have an obligation to engage in curriculum making that not only responds to life in the 21st century but is response-able (Haraway, 2016) to consequences that follow our pedagogical choices. This chapter responds to the research questions by disrupting taken-for-granted everyday practices in early childhood education that perpetuate dominant discourses without accountability; it also creates ethical pedagogical
practices that actively situate the doings of early childhood education within purposeful and particular theoretical logics.

In the dissertation’s concluding chapter, I revisit the research questions and the chapters to make connections and propositions toward situated responses to ecological devastation within early childhood education curriculum making.

Earth-Based Feminist Spirituality

The collected articles and chapters in this thesis propose educational practices that disrupt singular conceptualizations of the world and create space for multiple ways of being in and knowing the world to exist simultaneously. Although there is no singular definition of feminist spirituality, I am inspired by Kathleen Skott-Myhre’s (2017) writings of immanent feminist spirituality as rooted in collectivist and minoritarian knowledges. Throughout the various engagements with spirituality, I refuse to collapse these knowings into more recognizable early childhood language. This unwillingness to manipulate feminist spirituality to make it more digestible within established frameworks of rational Science works to offer pedagogical propositions for doing education outside of dominant structures. Science has created onto-epistemological standpoints that cajole curriculum practices into modes of providing children, through implicit or explicit means, True Knowledge. Mastery of this knowledge is demonstrated when children are able to reproduce facts and apply them to a variety of situations. This conceptualization of knowledge perpetuates logics of mastery, where knowledge is verifiable and reproducible. Teaching practices are commonly linked with assessment practices in which educators implement systems to test whether children have obtained and can produce specific knowledges.

Thinking with Starhawk (2004), I stay with the tension of purposely bringing spirituality to academic spaces as a way of putting dominant modern discourses at risk. This is a political move on my part: I want to make visible that ‘since the time of the Witch persecutions, the knowledge that derives from the worldview of an animate,
interconnected, dynamic universe is considered suspect—either outright evil or simple woo-woo” (Starhawk, 2004, p. 26). Spiritual knowledges are unintelligible to Scientific Truth, and by framing my research within such unintelligibility, I hope to radically expand the fixed categories of what is possible and impossible. These politics refuse to forget the systemic erasure of Indigenous peoples’ and women’s ways of knowing and being in the world. Thinking with earth-based feminist spirituality, according to Stengers (2005), allows one to craft techniques or arts that refuse to simplify complex matters into quantifiable nodes of psychology and psychosociology and forces us to let go of the comfort of recognizable Scientific categorizations, demanding us to be accountable to the ideas we put forth in the world.

Although most of the chapters in this thesis think with feminist spiritualities, I intentionally resist naming immanent feminist spirituality as the only possible rethinking of dominant Scientific discourses of climate relations, and I acknowledge the varied Indigenous onto-epistemologies of relationality with the more-than-human world as crucial steps towards responding to the climate crisis and reestablishing livable worlds (Z. Todd, 2017). This is why I open this thesis by thinking about how Indigenous ontologies have been taken up through colonial discourses in some early childhood settings. As a white settler living and working on the colonized lands that have been renamed Canada, I take seriously the dangers of appropriating Indigenous onto-epistemologies, knowing that my ability to understand them will always be limited (Mitchell, 2018). So although my research focuses on feminist earth-based spirituality, I hope that by positioning spiritual knowing as a valid way of engaging with the more-than-human world, I will crack open neoliberal subjectivities that privilege specific scientific ways of understanding climate change and create spaces for thinking seriously about spiritual cosmologies.

Through my engagement with earth-based spirituality, my research also aims to make visible (and challenge) how the establishment of “patriarchal culture with its hierarchal, militaristic, mechanistic, industrialist forms” (Spretnak, 1990, p. 5) was and is still used to conceptualize human/more-than-human and male/female binaries as necessary.
Positioning this patriarchal culture as central privileges a positivistic onto-epistemology that assumes the existence of an external, measurable, and objective Truth (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011) and demands the exclusion of other forms of knowledge, including Indigenous and non-Western worldviews that may bring into question the construction of this Truth (Stengers, 2018a). Fundamental to the disruption of this exclusionary way of understanding the world is an ethico-historical trace of the eradication of spiritual knowings as a legitimate worldview.

My research seeks to unpack how these masculinist epistemologies are closely linked to the establishment of early childhood institutions because these institutions are sites of subjectification that support the creation of rational neoliberal beings. Drawing on the work of Erica Burman (2017) and others who have critiqued the allegiance to developmental psychology in early childhood education, I argue that spirituality has been made irrational in early childhood education through the prominence of developmental psychology. I propose that in taking earth-based spirituality seriously in early childhood education, without labelling it as disordered or as children’s imagination, we might begin to challenge the nature/culture divide that has contributed to this ecocatastrophe.

Environmental education scholars have critiqued the current modes of engaging in climate issues with children, arguing that they are rooted in neoliberal anthropocentric logics. Ignoring the complexities of 21st-century environmental precarity, these logics uphold ideals of romanticized developmental images of childhood innocence and nature (Sheldon, 2016; A. Taylor, 2013), promote individualism through environmental stewardship (A. Taylor, 2017a; Haro Woods et al., 2018), and endorse technical, solution-based responses to the climate crisis (Marker, 2006; Rowan, 2017; A. Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015). These responses enact a reproductive futurism that only makes possible “future destruction or present stasis” (Sheldon, 2016, p. 28). My research proposes that spiritual knowings of the more-than-human world can shape pedagogies of climate change that disrupt humancentric techno-fix narratives that reinforce human exceptionalism and neoliberal ideals.
On Subjectivity and Feminist Spirituality

The notion of subjectification is critical in my research. Dahlberg and Moss (2005) define subjectification as “the shaping of a certain kind of subject who will govern herself or himself, replacing the need for coercive force” (p. 20). The ideal Euro-Western Scientific subject is “rational, knowing, stable, unified, self-governing, and freed of obligation—also, by implication, adult, male and white” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 2). Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2013) name the places in which children are educated and cared for as institutions for subjectification, highlighting these spaces as sites of potential reproduction and disruption of capitalistic, neoliberal discourses. Significant research has examined the insidious nature of developmental psychology in producing neoliberal subjects through early childhood institutions (Bloch, Swadener, & Cannella, 2014; Burman, 2017; Dahlberg, 2016; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg et al., 2013; K. Evans, 2015; Janmohamed, 2010; Lenz Taguchi, 2010; MacNaughton, 2003; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2008; Walkerdine, 1990; Woodhead, 1999). Normalizing techniques such as classification, assessment, evaluation, and exclusion/inclusion are integral in the construction of the Scientific child subject (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). Burman (2001) problematizes constructions of the Scientific child as apolitical and gender neutral—a construction that makes female, nonbinary, and racialized bodies Others. This othering makes subjectivities of nonmale, nonwhite people impossible by labelling them as primitive and irrational. Thinking with Braidotti (2013, 2017, 2019, 2022), I extend this notion beyond the child to the human in general. Singular constructions of the human based on Scientific Truth pathologizes and others feminized, racialized, and disabled bodies.

Through the various stories and analyses I share in this thesis, I disrupt the androcentric prejudices embedded within the paradigms of Science and social science (Mies & Shiva, 2014) to make space for reimagining climate responses in novel and innovative ways. I then make nonrational subjectivities visible, specifically through considerations of spirituality. In addition to complexifying Scientific understanding of the more-than-human world, I propose feminist earth-based spirituality as a particularly relevant mode
of thinking and invite witches into early childhood education, noting the recent recognition of witches as ecological and feminist activists in both popular media and academic research (Guadagnino, 2018; Sollee, 2017; Stengers, 2017).

On Developmental Psychology and Feminist Earth-Based Spirituality

Wicca and neopaganism, the most commonly referred to feminist earth-based spiritualities (Jensen & Thompson, 2008), emphasize relations to the natural world that acknowledge the spiritual powers of the more-than-human as comprising an interrelated network of spiritual forces that constitute our world (Skelton, 1990). Earth-based spirituality acknowledges the interconnectedness of the human and the more-than-human and subverts human exceptionalism (Starhawk, 2004). Psychological research labels these spiritual beliefs as superstitions or beliefs in the paranormal. Paranormal beliefs are defined as “belief in witchcraft, extraordinary life forms, precognition” (Watt et al., 2007) because they assign psychological attributes to nonhumans such as rocks, weather, and water (Lindemann & Aarnio, 2007) and see humans as connected to the universe in a holistic way (Willard & Norenzayan, 2017). Following Stengers (2005), in my research, I think with earth-based spirituality “to create techniques [for] … ‘depsychologisation’” (p. 195) within pedagogical and curriculum practices.

When referring to children (and adults), psychological interpretations categorize onto-epistemologies associated with feminist earth-based spirituality as imagination, immaturity, or limitations in cognitive processing (Lindeman & Aarnio, 2007; Mathijesn, 2010; Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013). For example, Zittoun and Cerchia (2013) examine children’s magical thinking using Piaget’s theory of cognitive development and attribute magical thinking to not-yet-developed cognitive capabilities. Also drawing on Piaget, Lindeman and Aarnio (2007) attribute children’s belief in the paranormal to confusion between symbolic and magical thinking. While paranormal beliefs in children are considered traits of the less-developed mind (Bonovitz, 2012; Lindemann & Aarnio,
2007; Wain & Spinella, 2007), paranormal beliefs in adulthood are considered signs of ignorance, irrationality, or pathology.

Studying the concept of imagination is not new to developmental psychology (Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013), and several developmental psychologists label imagination as a rupture in thinking or relating to reality (Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013). Developmental psychology’s reliance on Piaget’s stage theory positions this rupture as a prerequisite element of developing the prosocial rational mind. Therefore, children’s engagement with paranormal beliefs can be thought of as a definite precursor for development. For example, research on children with imaginary companions has indicated the usefulness of these relations for developing prosocial behaviours such as emotional regulation and positive peer relationships (M. Taylor et al., 1993). Yet, this type of magical thinking is discouraged as a child moves toward adulthood. The distinction between what thinking is “appropriate” for children versus adults is grounded in a linear, progressive narrative of development that positions the child as always in the process of becoming a rational adult. Thus, the concern of developmentalists is not the child per se, but the adult the child will inevitably become (Sheldon, 2016). According to Walkerdine (1998), the dominant conceptualization in developmental psychology of childhood as a distinct period in which children grow out of directly results from the prevalence of Piaget’s stage theory of development in early childhood education.

Despite developmental psychology’s construction of imagination and magical thought as tools toward rationality, constructs of child appropriateness dictate how acceptable child imaginings are defined. Putman (1993) notes that some dissociative thinking, that is, thinking that is not associated with that which is logical or reasonable, is normative for preschool children. However, nonnormative expressions, such as entering a trance-like state or speaking in “spooky” voices, indicate psychological disturbance. Studying adult reception to children’s artwork, McClure (2011) notes that while drawings that align with happy constructs of innocent childhoods (e.g., naturescapes and happy families) are celebrated, artworks that disrupt these romanticized images are considered deviant, positioning the child as in need of psychological intervention. Constructions of
normative, happy childhoods pathologize children’s understandings of lives and worlds that do not fit within normative paradigms.

Although imaginative and magical thinking is often encouraged in children, children are expected to move away from this thinking as they develop into young adulthood. When children do not progress out of this magical thinking, they are deemed to be at risk of “retreating into a fantastical cocoon that is divorced from the intrapersonal world around [them]” (Bonovitz, 2012, p. 460). As is the case with many other perceived deficits of the mind, failure to engage with imagination and fantasy in developmentally appropriate ways is linked to childhood trauma, such as physical or sexual abuse (Wain & Spinella, 2007), parental substance abuse (Parra, 2019), low academic achievement (Fasce & Picó, 2019), lack of childhood control, often derived from being a younger sibling or having authoritarian parents (Watt et al., 2007), or deficits in parental attachment (Bonovitz, 2012).

The disparagement of paranormal beliefs goes beyond child development theories. Science, in general, positions belief in the paranormal as pathological and harmful. In the US, the National Science Board (as cited in Genovese, 2005) lists the following six harms related to paranormal beliefs:

- A decline in scientific literacy and critical thinking;
- The inability of citizens to make well-informed decisions;
- Monetary losses (psychic hotlines, for example, offer little value for the money spent);
- A diversion of resources that might have been spent on more productive and worthwhile activities (for example, solving society’s serious problems);
- The encouragement of something-for-nothing mentality and the idea that there are easy answers to serious problems, for example, that positive thinking can replace hard work; and
- False hopes and unrealistic expectations. (p. 99)
These harms associated with paranormal thinking uphold the tenets of neoliberalism and capitalism by positioning those who engage in paranormal thinking as needing intervention and protection. Considering paranormal beliefs as “that which cannot be explained scientifically or which calls into question established scientific principles, and which is incompatible with normative perceptions, beliefs and expectations of reality” (Mathijesn, 2010, p. 346) effectively leaves no room for magical or paranormal ways of engaging in the world to be considered valid.

Despite reconceptualist critiques of developmental psychology as privileging Western colonial discourses (Burman, 2019; Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Nxumalo, 2015; Nxumalo, 2016; Woodhead, 1999), it remains the dominant discourse in early childhood education (O’Loughlin, 2014). Within early childhood literature, children’s imagination and spirituality appear frequently; however, developmental psychology co-opts imagination and spirituality as tools to ensure the child progresses toward becoming a rational human subject. A fundamental gap in the literature on childhood spirituality is that it considers spirituality from an exclusively developmental humanistic perspective. Humanistic perspectives position children’s spirituality as related to well-being, morality, and promotion of resilience (Haight, 1998; Holder et al., 2010; Sifers et al., 2012) and fail to acknowledge or take seriously how children’s spirituality is always in relation to the more-than-human world.

Because of the canonical nature of developmental psychology in early childhood education, little space is provided in contemporary early childhood education curricula to seriously explore children’s spiritual knowledges. In following the reconceptualist early childhood education movement, I aim to challenge the modernist privileging of rational scientific thought over worldviews that engage the “nonrational.” For example, in “Doing Pedagogical Conversations (with Spirituality and Fat) as Pedagogists in Early Childhood Education” (Chapter 5), I offer children’s magical knowings of a tree as valid, spiritual ways of being in relation to the more-than-human world.
A critical factor in the establishment of early childhood spaces as reproductive sites of dominant discourses is the construction of a professional (developmentalist) early childhood educator (Urban, 2008). Neoliberal ideologies of school readiness construct the role of the early childhood educator as one of facilitating a transition into rational life (Brown, 2015). Constructions of the good educator involve inoculating children against disordered thinking by promoting Scientific thinking (Genovese, 2005). These constructs preclude educators from bringing their own spiritual beliefs to the teaching environment. In fact, it makes it a risky endeavour. The promotion of Scientific literacy—the knowledge of Scientific theories, the understanding of Scientific reasoning, and trust in Science and its values—is promoted in early childhood teacher education as a way to eradicate superstitious or unwarranted beliefs (Fasce & Picó, 2019). Bjartveit and Panayotidis (2017) explored early childhood educators’ feelings around discussing paranormal topics with young children and found that educators were uncomfortable with these risky conversations and conformed to ideals that shield and protect children from the “unexplainable,” denying both children and educators the space to explore their understandings of these spiritual concepts. In the chapter “Posthuman Possibilities for the Early Childhood Educator,” I offer two stories in which educators and I experimented with doing early childhood education outside the confines of developmental psychology and propose that such engagement creates spaces for educators to think alongside children in meaningful ways that enact multifaceted educator subjectivities that transcend the role of reproducers of knowledge.

On Ecologies of Practice and Affirmative Ethics

As mentioned, my proposed research draws theoretically on the work of feminist philosopher Isabelle Stengers. Stengers (2005) advocates for a different way of doing science that refuses singular paradigms of what constitutes good science and instead works within an ecology of practice—“the demand that no practice be defined as ‘like any other’” (p. 184). An ecology of practice is not a prescriptive method for doing but rather a tool that allows us to think through what is happening in situational ways. Because an ecology of practice is a tool, it is never neutral; the user of the tool always
makes decisions on how to use it and therefore becomes responsible for what is accomplished through its use (Stengers, 2005). I propose that Stengers’ concept of ecologies of practice is intimately related to Braidotti’s (2019, 2022) proposal for affirmative ethical practices. Affirmative ethics, according to Braidotti (2022), are relational practices that bridge critique and creation and require the formation of interdisciplinary alliances to care for divergent ideas. Similarly, ecologies of practice propose reconfigurations of how knowledge is formed within the academy that challenge hypotheses derived within Scientific boundaries (Stengers, 2018a). By offering ways of knowing a phenomenon outside of Scientific onto-epistemologies, each of the chapters in this thesis proposes curriculum making that embodies affirmative ethical practices within ecologies of practices. In “More-than-Human Kinship Relations within Indigenous Children’s Books” (Chapter 2), I, with my co-author Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, propose a refusal of the fictionalization of Indigenous knowledges in early childhood reading practices by carefully reading Indigenous scholarship alongside Indigenous children’s books to consider how we might engage with Indigenous children’s books in ways that do not privilege Scientific understandings of relation with the more-than-human. In “Posthuman Possibilities for the Early Childhood Educator” (Chapter 3), educators and I carefully consider the knowledges and disciplinary perspectives we need to engage to be able to think and do early childhood education otherwise. In “Working with Childhoods and Energies: Critical Reflections on Specifying and Locating the Intangible” (Chapter 4), my coauthors and I experiment with bringing together divergent disciplinary perspectives to think about energies in childhood. We refuse to amalgamate these knowings of energies, and we propose that the specifics of time and place matter to fluid constructions of a slippery concept. In “Doing Pedagogical Conversations (with Spirituality and Fat) as a Pedagogist in Early Childhood Education” (Chapter 5), I propose, again with others, multiple ways of knowing. By examining a moment from research from multiple perspectives, my coauthor and I make possible many configurations of pedagogical practice. We also propose that to do pedagogy in ways that make multiplicity possible, we must enact collective pedagogical practices that rely on, and are indebted to, the thinking of others.
Ecologies of practice and affirmative ethical practices demand that we betray theory and think outside of doctrines of verifiability and falsification. Betraying theory disrupts a priori Scientific practices in which one does not learn from a phenomenon but rather knows the phenomenon and determines questions and methods that uphold casual relations to it (Nathan & Stengers, 2018). Within ecologies of practice researchers craft refrains instead of creating doctrine. Refrains engage with messy partial truths to create democratic practices that are open to the ongoing disruptions of taken-for-granted ways of thinking the world (Stengers, 2008a). Refrains do not rest on operational definitions but create possibilities to examine the consequences that arise from acts of defining. Ecologies of practice ask us to continuously question what is possible in the name of the definitions we construct. To think with ecologies of practice, we must ask speculative questions that disassemble and remake the academic milieu to move beyond critique and deconstruction (Stengers, 2008a). Ecologies of practice insist that we think how our subjectivities become abstractions that blind us to other possible ways of knowing and that we commit to reimagining our ways of knowing the world by being hospitable to subjectivities that force us to think and feel (Stengers, 2008a).

Ecologies of practice and affirmative ethical practices allow us to think outside dominant discourses of Scientific rationalism when crafting refrains that engage with climate issues and our relations to the more-than-human world. Ecologies of practice transcend allegiance to specific disciplines or positionalities; in ecologies of practice, one is neither hyper nor post, only situated by the consequences of one’s thought (Stengers, 2011). Stengers (2017) does not deny the implications of human devastation on the more-than-human world, as this devastation is undoubtedly undeniable, but insists that human exceptionalism will only reproduce the same capitalistic modes of responding that have contributed to the devastation. For example, in the chapter “Working With Childhoods and Energies: Critical Reflections on Specifying and Locating the Intangible,” my coauthors and I connect commonplace curriculum practices about energy to sustainability discourses that draw on commoditized understandings of energy. In the current ecological era we find ourselves in, we must no longer only consider how to protect nature from
human-imposed damage, but also consider “a nature capable of threatening our modes of thinking and living for good” (Stengers, 2015, p. 20).

Reclaiming, which Stengers (2015) borrows from neopagan contemporary witch activists, is experimenting “with the possibilities of manners of living and cooperating that have been destroyed in the name of progress” (p. 12). Reclaiming is not an idyllic return to glorified pasts but rather a way of reconnecting with that from which we have been separated through discourses of objective Scientific Truth. Building on Starhawk’s (1982) assertion that the smell of burning witches still lingers in the nostrils of their contemporaries, Stengers (2017) does not attempt to convince her readers that spells and sorcery are real Truths. Her point instead is to interrogate why these knowings are “relegated to the dustbin of culturally situated beliefs” (Nocek, 2018, p. 101).

By reclaiming feminist earth-based spirituality, I shift from thinking about the natural world as abstract and instead centre the necessity for acknowledging intimate knowings of the more-than-human world, ways of awakening “subtle senses that let us perceive energies and spirits that go beyond the physical world” (Starhawk, 2004, p. 55). Centring earth-based spirituality forces us to find alternative ways to attend to natural entities (Schutten & Rogers, 2011), and by holding possible space for these spiritual knowings to be real, modes of reclaiming offer opportunities to acknowledge intimate relations with the more-than-human world.

Reclaiming, Stengers (2008a) notes, is a healing adventure, one that reappropriates and struggles, and in this, one can reclaim “an ecology that gives the situations we confront the power to have us thinking feeling, imagining, and not theorizing” (Stengers, 2008a, p. 57). Acts of reclaiming then necessitate shifts from modes of responding to climate-related issues with Scientific or technical fixes. Through various examinations of spiritual engagements with the more-than-human, the chapters in this thesis propose immanent ontological frameworks that create possibilities for responses to the climate crisis that disrupt anthropocentric notions of the human as separate and above the natural world by reclaiming ways of knowing the world that have been fictionalized in the name of
Science. I position more-than-human engagement with climate issues not only within the scope of Scientific rationality but in relation to spiritual knowings of the world.

Methodology

My research methodology is postqualitative. Postqualitative methodologies foreground how we can move research away from its normalizing, colonizing, universalistic origins and instead think with those we “study” to offer insights into how we might think of our worlds as layered rather than hierarchal. Postqualitative methodologies challenge the construction of the researcher as clinical, unbiased, and removed from the contexts they study and insist that researchers acknowledge that they are inseparable from the research context and that their onto-epistemologies dictate the intricacies of the entire research project, from design to dissemination (C.A. Taylor, 2017). In this thesis I engage common worlds ethnographies to enact pedagogical practices that make possible curriculum that promotes multiple and nuanced ways of being in relation to the world.

Common Worlds Ethnography

Throughout the chapters I engage with common worlds ethnography in multiple ways. The concept of common worlds “refers to a fundamentally expanded understanding of the social, requiring the reconvening of all of the constituents of our worlds, including non-human life forms, forces and entities” (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Kummen, 2016, p. 432). Common worlds ethnography is a nuanced way of engaging in multispecies research to challenge anthropocentric tendencies that reinforce categorizations of the human as above or separate from other world constituents. It focuses on the entangled, reciprocal relations between humans and the more-than-human world (Dowling, Lloyd, & Suchet-Pearson, 2016). Pulling apart the hierarchies foundational to the current anthropocentric epoch means resisting dominant research’s aims of knowing and proving. Common worlds ethnography offers spaces for more-than-human relations to emerge but always acknowledges that our more-than-human companions are never fully knowable (A. Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015).
Working with common worlds ethnographies allowed me to challenge onto-
epistemological orientations that argue for one specific Truth that has resulted in a violent
episticide that eradicates other ways of knowing and being in the world. I employed a
nonrepresentational research style “to enliven rather than report, to render rather than
represent, to resonate rather than validate, to rupture and re-imagine rather than to
faithfully describe, to generate possibilities of encounter rather than construct
representative ideal types” (Vannini, 2015, p. 15). Considering the complexities of
children’s relations with the world drags more-than-human subjectivities from the
margins of anthropological and educational research (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010).
Centring children’s implication in the current ecological crisis challenges romanticized
images of the child as innocent in idyllic nature spaces (Sheldon, 2016; A. Taylor, 2013)
and accentuates the always-implicated relations children have with the more-than-human.
When imagining children’s relations with nature from nonanthropocentric standpoints
through common worlds ethnographies, we must also reconceptualize how we conceive
educators’ relations to children and curriculum making. As demonstrated in Chapter 3,
“Posthuman Possibilities for the Early Childhood Educator,” enacting posthuman
subjectivities by engaging with a common worlds framework requires a dramatic shift
from the technocratic, developmentally focused practices that many early childhood
educators have been trained in.

Within common worlds ethnography I employed methods of critical reading and
collaboratory (outlined below).

Critical reading involves diffractive reading practices. Diffractive reading practices refuse
hierarchal methodologies that pit texts and theories against one another. Instead,
resources are read through one another to generate creative and unexpected outcomes
(Geerts & van der Tuin, 2021). Critical reading extends diffractive reading practices
through analysis of how the texts encountered work to maintain or disrupt dominant
discourses.
Collaboratory methods “bring together collaboration and experimentation, drawing on feminist, new materialist and common worlds approaches to witnessing how childhoods are constituted through more-than-human processes” (Montpetit et al., 2021, p. 3). Within the Climate Action Childhood Network project (see https://climateactionchildhood.net/) each research site, or collaboratory, was grounded in a topic related to climate change. However, how these topics were taken up in each site was quite different, dependent on the place, politics, and interests of participants. The example provided in Chapter 4, “Working With Childhoods and Energies: Critical Reflections on Specifying and Locating the Intangible,” illustrates how two sites engaged with the concept of energy quite differently but were “tied together by their conceptual framing and by similar methods” (Montpetit et al., 2021, p. 3).

The stories I share from my research were collected through my work as a pedagogist at London Bridge Springbank Child Care Centre in London, Ontario. The role of the pedagogist is specific to Ontario and British Columbia, Canada. Pedagogists work alongside educators and children to “envision pedagogical connections and projects to provoke educational processes that, through interdisciplinary and provocative questions, ideas, theories, materials, relationships . . . deepen and complexify strong, situated pedagogical work in early childhood contexts” (Land et al., 2002, p. 2). Educators and families were recruited through the larger, SSHRC-funded project Climate Action Network (CAN): Exploring Climate Change Pedagogies with Children (see “Research Ethics” below). I worked with a group of six educators, the childcare director, and approximately 30 children for a year and a half. My research entailed weekly visits and observations with educators and children, as well as regular meetings with educators and the director. The weekly engagements with educators and children involved being present in the classroom, in the outdoor space, and, most significantly, on regular walks to a nearby cemetery. Woodland Cemetery is a long-established community gathering place that is home to a variety of animals (deer, groundhogs, squirrels, and turkeys, among many others) that graze and weave in and out around the tombstones. Each week before leaving for the cemetery, the educators and I discussed the cemetery with the children.
and revisited our ideas and wonderings from our previous visits. How long we remained at the cemetery varied due to weather conditions and other happenings of the centre, but we usually stayed there for about two hours. To get to the cemetery we had to cross a busy road and walk for approximately ten minutes. We discussed what was happening at the cemetery with children while we were there and also on our walks back to the centre and during lunchtime, which took place when we got back. I also met most weeks with the educators while the children slept in the afternoon. These meetings were opportunities to think about what was emerging in the cemetery, supported by engaging with traces of documentation and making pedagogical decisions on what to do next with the children and the cemetery. For example, we discussed how there seemed to be a reckless engagement with the space, in which we were struggling to stay connected to the events and significant moments from the previous week, and we chose to remain in one specific grassy space of the cemetery for over a year of visits. As we enacted the processes of pedagogical documentation, we complexified our thinking through sharing readings, podcasts, journal entries, and discussion. The educators and I came to our meetings with notes and questions about resources as well as what was emerging during our time in the cemetery. Educators sometimes visited the cemetery when I was not there, and they shared traces of documentation (photos, videos, notes) with me via Western’s OWL platform. The educators could also access various resources on this platform.

To activate a common worlds ethnographic methodology with educators and children, we used pedagogical documentation as a method of data collection and analysis. As part of pedagogical documentation, we employed observation / arts of noticing, recorded field notes and conversations, and revisited data. These postqualitative readings of the data involve speculative re(configuring) with data that refuses concrete, solution-based finalities. These methods, outlined below, allowed educators and me to think with multiplicity and possibility and to challenge Scientific research practices that offer models for the “best” way to think about pedagogical practices for thinking with children.

**Pedagogical documentation.** Pedagogical documentation is the process by which the educators and I documented our thinking and experiences, using a variety of mediums to
enter into critical dialogue and engage each other in pedagogical thought to make visible our pedagogical choices (Berger, 2015; Hodgins, 2019b). Pedagogical documentation is not synonymous with modernist child observation, which assumes an undeniable Truth that can be captured through objective Scientific measures (Dahlberg et al., 2013). Rather, postfoundational conceptualizations of pedagogical documentation encompass many different perspectives and trouble modernist ideas of objective and value-free knowledge that have been dogmatic in early childhood education research (Moss & Dahlberg, 2008). Because pedagogical documentation emerged in classrooms as a research practice that did not rely on predetermined developmental frameworks (Dahlberg et al., 2013), it invites opportunities to decentre the child in observation and makes possible the consideration of situated child/more-than-human assemblages. In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, the examples I share from my research were derived from the process of pedagogical documentation.

We also engaged with documentation in ways that challenged rigid, template-based standards that encourage the production of quantity over quality (Elfström Pettersson, 2017) to experiment with documentation as a political tool. Because I argue that engaging in ecologies of practice necessitates thinking in malleable ways, a template-based, reproductive documentation style was not suitable for my research. To invite children and their families into our documenting practices, we created a documentation wall that lived in the main hallway of the childcare centre. Drawing on Berger (2010, 2015), Dahlberg et al. (2013), Hodgins (2019b), and Lenz Taguchi (2010), our documentation processes were multiple and responded to the specific pedagogical concerns we had at given times. These processes allowed multiple knowledges to emerge simultaneously.

Acknowledging that pedagogical documentation is never neutral and is always situational, we activated methods of observation / arts of noticing and revisiting to think about our engagements with children and the cemetery and to hold each other accountable to the pedagogical actions we took, which were always political and ethical decisions (Hodgins, 2019b; also see the example of place in Chapter 4). By acknowledging that pedagogical documentation always has pedagogical consequences, in
this research I aimed to resist linearity and conclusion, using pedagogical documentation to analyze moments and make subsequent pedagogical choices that held us responsible for the ideas and actions we put forth into the world.

Thinking pedagogical documentation diffractively resists harmonizing theories of child/more-than-human assemblages (Hodgins, 2015) or making meaning from a singular perspective. Diffraction troubles the “dogmatic, rote application” (Hodgins et al., 2017, p. 195) of documentation that aims to capture the “authentic” voice of children and sustain the role of the educator as one who is capable of knowing children. Diffractive thinking involves “an iterative re(configuring) of patterns of differentiating-entangling” (Barad, 2014, p. 168) and perverts the logics of representationalism that offer simplistic, bounded representations of Reality (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016). Educators and I embraced diffraction when analyzing pedagogical documentation by revisiting (see below) documentation from our visit with our curiosities and wonderings, and by putting the traces of documentation into conversation with readings from various disciplines. By engaging with pedagogical documentation diffractively, educators and I refused to simplify the complexities of child/more-than-human assemblages with concrete conclusions and instead asked questions that activated ethical tensions (Hodgins, 2015) within our entanglements with children and the more-than-human.

**Observation/noticing.** I use the term *observation* postqualitatively and, following Tsing (2015), conceptualize it as *arts of noticing*. Arts of noticing resist positivistic Scientific methods that privilege the objective, removed researcher. A positivistic approach to observation has long been prominent in developmental psychology (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2008) and has maintained nature/culture divides while constructing the researcher as the knower, one who can make sense of the worlds of the Other (Holt, 2004). Reconceptualizing observation as arts of noticing shifts thinking about the researcher as an outsider to acknowledge instead that the researcher is always entangled in multispecies assemblages that are never fully knowable. As Tsing (2015) explains, “assemblages allow us to think about communal effects without assuming them. . . .” Thinking through assemblages urges us to ask: How do gatherings sometimes become
‘happenings’, that is, greater than the sum of their parts?” (p. 23). Engaging in arts of noticing in my research embraced incommensurability to resist the “God-trick” that positions the gaze of the researcher outside the body seeing everything from nowhere (Haraway, 1998). Arts of noticing demand that researchers be capable of situating to what one knows, and actively linking it to questions that one brings in and ways of working that respond to it—implies being indebted to the existence of others who ask different questions, importing them into the situation differently, relating to the situation in a way that resists appropriation in the name of any kind of abstract ideal. (Stengers, 2018a, p. 45)

By engaging in observation as arts of noticing, I can draw attention to ignored assemblages, the partial, messy stories that threaten neoliberal constructs of progress (Tsing, 2015). In my research, we activated arts of noticing by intentionally centring educators’ and my voice in our conversations and documentation. For example, as described in Chapter 2, “Posthuman Possibilities for the Early Childhood Educator,” educators and I purposely engaged with Starhawk’s (2004) nine ways of observing to create possibilities for us to observe the more-than-human assemblages of the cemetery. Engaging with Starhawk’s first observation provocation, “I wonder …” (p. 67), educators and I set intentions to notice our own curiosities on a particular walk to the cemetery to activate ways of observing beyond the objective Scientific gaze. We experimented with various techniques of noticing. Sometimes we carried cameras, and adults took photos and videos that we felt were important to think through pedagogically. Other times children directed adults to take photos of what they found interesting, or children were given the cameras to take photos. A few times, we experimented with taking fewer photos. For example, one time the educators and I decided we each would only take one photo while at the cemetery. We did this because we wanted to challenge ourselves to bring intentionality to our photos. Occasionally, we purposely brought no cameras on our visits to the cemetery because we wanted to notice how the children and we engaged differently with the cemetery when cameras were not present. These photo-taking
experiments helped us think about photography as complex and implicated with colonial (Kind, 2013) and Scientific voyeurism and classification. Our conversations about, and our experimentation with, photography helped us resist conceiving of photography as neutral and objective, and helped us to imagine possibilities for observing with children beyond representation of the individual child. We also enacted arts of noticing through conversation, field notes, and journalling.

Revisiting. Methods of revisiting resist the future-oriented and extractive logics of progress. Such logics position experiences as something to learn from, to propel us toward states of becoming more rational. Revisiting responds to Donna Haraway’s (2008, 2016) call to *stay with the trouble* and Isabelle Stengers’ (2018a) advocacy for practicing *slow science*. Staying with the trouble requires us to be fully present in our intertwined, always-becoming multispecies entanglements and to incessantly interrogate the ethical implications and accountabilities of our relations with the more-than-human world (Haraway, 2008). Slow science asks us to rid ourselves of searching for the correct answer and instead insists on a process of hesitation and scrutiny (Stengers, 2018a). Slow science resists framing research with questions that are amenable to solution-based answers and alternatively posits questions that are disputable and unanswerable to judgments about what counts as valid research (Stengers, 2018a). Each chapter revisits ideas, places, or documentation to thicken (Debaise & Stengers, 2021) and complexify how we understand the everyday happenings in early childhood education.

In Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of this dissertation, revisiting is essential in the (re)construction of pedagogical documentation and subsequently pedagogical decision making. In these chapters I demonstrate how educators and I revisited both physically (by returning to the cemetery weekly) and intellectually (by revisiting field notes, photographs, audio/video recording and our OWL communication) in our weekly adult meetings to return to ideas and moments from our weekly walks to complexify and bring multiple ways of knowing to how we were doing curriculum with young children. But first, in Chapter 2, my coauthor and I revisited Indigenous children’s books multiple times, thinking with the
work of Indigenous scholars to take seriously how we might honour Indigenous knowledges as we offered these texts to children.

Research Ethics

My research was part of Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw’s larger SSHRC-funded project *Climate Action Network (CAN): Exploring Climate Change Pedagogies with Children*. This multisite international study attunes to and experiments with the relations of researchers, educators, children, animals, trees, weather, food, and energies in local contexts as possible ways of responding to the climate crisis. My research received research ethics board approval through the larger project, and my specific research upholds all aspects of this approval, including informed consent, confidentiality, and data collection and storage.

This chapter, coauthored with Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, was previously published as follows:


It has been reformatted and slightly revised for inclusion as a chapter in this dissertation.

Our understandings of the world are often viewed as mythic by “modern” society, while our stories are considered to be an alternative mode of understanding and interpretation rather than “real” events. Colonization is not solely an attack on peoples and lands; rather, this attack is accomplished in part through purposeful and ignorant misrepresentations of Indigenous cosmologies. (Watts, 2013, p. 22)

Indigenous cosmologies are often translated through Western onto-epistemologies and presented as alternatives to them, as Mohawk and Anishinaabe scholar Vanessa Watts (2013) makes clear in the quote that introduces this chapter. This is certainly the case when Indigenous children’s books depicting more-than-human beings (such as plants, animals, water, sky) are introduced in early childhood education classrooms. While these books live within classrooms’ book corners as alternative stories to the abundant number of animal books, they are often presented to children through the lenses of Western onto-epistemologies. That is, when books are interpreted using Euro-Western perspectives, humans are in control of the earth, including its more-than-human, inhuman, and nonhuman inhabitants (Watts, 2013); other-than-humans are rarely depicted as active participants in shaping the world. Such positioning and treatment of Indigenous
children’s books undoubtedly frame Indigenous cosmologies within deficit discourses of coloniality (Nxumalo, 2019a). As a minor act of unsettling colonial relations, in this chapter we turn toward the work of Indigenous scholars and writers to attend to the notion of more-than-human relations and kinship in Indigenous cosmologies within the context of children’s picture books.

Our intention as early childhood pedagogists is to foster early childhood pedagogies that respond to more-than-human kinship as reciprocal relationality at a time of ecological crisis. We heartily accept the invitation of Métis scholar Zoe Todd (2017) when she uttered, “I hope that I can encourage settler Canadians to understand that tending to the reciprocal relationality we hold with . . . more-than-human beings is integral to supporting the ‘narrow conditions of existence’ in this place” (p. 107). Todd is specifically urging us to be drawn to relationality “in the aftermath” of ecological destruction and colonization (p. 103). To do so, we turn to picture books, specifically Indigenous books written for young children. Picture books authored by Indigenous writers across Turtle Island take us to the depth of the onto-epistemologies that Todd insists settlers acknowledge.

Without turning too much attention to the plight of us settlers, we feel obliged to acknowledge the difficult task we engage with in this chapter. We feel the urgency of attending to the important scholarship on Indigenous onto-epistemologies by Indigenous scholars; however, we are aware of the dangers of appropriation and misrepresentation that lie ahead in this piece. These are not our stories, and our ability to understand them is limited (Mitchell, 2018). But in our privileged position as researchers in Western early childhood education institutions, we have a responsibility “to move into and out of” our comfortable Western onto-epistemologies (Mitchell, p. 3). Responding with our deepest respect to Zoe Todd’s (2016a) acknowledgement of the Euro-Western academy’s long tradition of using Indigenous ways of thinking without crediting them as such, we are led here by Indigenous scholars who continue to teach us, both through their scholarship and their daily activism. As a settler of Italian, Croatian, and African descent who grew up in Argentina under military coups, Veronica continues to search for spaces within early
childhood education to unsettle the violent acts always already embedded within pedagogy. Meagan, a white settler of Irish, French, and English descent, looks for ways to disrupt the pernicious effects of the colonial Canadian education system in which she was and continues to be educated and in which she works. Both of us are privileged to live and work in the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee, and the Leni-Lunaape peoples, in what is currently known as Ontario, Canada.

Because we have written extensively elsewhere about the turns toward posthumanisms, in this chapter we take seriously Zoe Todd’s (2016a) provocation not to think with “mega-categories” (p. 6), such as posthumanism in symbolic ontological turns when referring to relations with more-than-human beings such as rivers, mountains, animals, and plants. Indigenous ways of thinking in which humans are derived from the earth, including the idea of more-than-human relationality, extend beyond much of Euro-Western posthuman scholarship (Watts, 2013). Whereas Euro-Western scholars often label this relationality as the posthuman turn, Indigenous peoples have always known these relations are vital to the world’s continuation, and that these “reciprocal responsibilities to more-than-human beings within landscapes [have] been heavily violated by settler-colonial economic and political exigencies” (Z. Todd, 2017, p. 105). Watts (2013) concedes that scholars who engage with a variety of posthuman discourses acknowledge that more-than-human others act, but she refuses to leave open to interpretation the perception that dominates some posthumanist scholarship regarding the agency of more-than-human beings. From an Anishinaabe perspective, Watts contends, the river does think and perceive; it is not simply that Indigenous peoples see the river from a different vantage point. Feminist geographer Juanita Sundberg (2014) makes a similar assertion when she says that posthuman discourses perpetuate colonial understandings of the world by situating the nature/culture divide as a universal truth rather than a production of a specific colonial way of thinking. Thus, we feel it necessary to continually wrestle with our own engagement with posthuman notions of the nature/culture divide. At Todd’s suggestion, we engage with the complex legal/ethical/political realities that would need to be
addressed if these ontological turns were acknowledged to be a reworking and appropriation of Indigenous knowledges (Z. Todd, 2016a).

We turn to texts for children as one form of response (albeit not enough of a response) that might provoke children to extend their worlds of kinship relations and even to recompose existing colonial relations with more-than-human beings. With these texts, we wonder “what might be possible”—inspired by the introduction to their special issue of the English Journal where Eve Tuck and Karyn Recollet (2016) shift focus from what Native feminist texts are to “what Native feminist texts make possible” (p. 18, italics in original). We do not treat the children’s stories as myths. Dwayne Donald, a Papaschase Cree scholar and educator, names myths as “idealized versions of history that are simplified and made coherent” (Donald, 2009, p. 3). In fact, we think with these picture books as means to disrupt two enduring colonial myths told by Euro-Western educators that have been critical to the ongoing settler colonial project (King, 2003): the myths of *terra nullius* and *the disappearing Indian*. These myths have been used as tools to support the Euro-Western vision of valiant explorers encountering vast, empty lands and “developing” those lands into economic resources (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003) and to justify the construction, through legal discourses such as the one-drop rule (Tuck & Wang, 2012) and genocidal legislation such as the Indian Act (Ladner, 2014), of Indigenous peoples as vestiges of the distant past (TallBear, 2013).

For us, it is important to consider most seriously what myths do and how they construct discourses of indigeneity and of Canadian exceptionalism in which Canada is presented as a peaceful colonizer that justly engages with Indigenous peoples (Ladner, 2014). We suggest that mythologizing historical atrocities as well as Indigenous relations with the more-than-human functions as an insidious technology of ongoing settler colonialism. These myths are especially dangerous in their contribution to constructing Indigenous students and families as “at-risk peoples” who are “on the verge of extinction, culturally and economically bereft, engaged or soon-to-be engaged in self-destructive behaviours which can interrupt their school careers and seamless absorption into the economy” (Tuck & Yang, 2013, p. 22). When thinking with children’s picture books written by
Indigenous authors, we take Watts (2013) seriously when she tells us that stories like the ones we engage with in this chapter are not myths but are things that actually happened and continue to happen. Our refusal to treat these stories as myths is an act of resistance against Western practices that seek to use Indigenous stories and knowledges to advance colonial environmental stewardship discourses by positioning humans as the owners, and therefore, sole caretakers of the “natural” world.

In this chapter, we think with three children’s books: *Wild Berries*, written and illustrated by Cree-Métis author Julie Flett (2013), *Sometimes I Feel Like a Fox*, authored by Métis author-illustrator Danielle Daniel (2015), and *Sweetest Kulu*, written by Inuit throat singer Celina Kalluk and illustrated by Alexandria Neonakis (2018). We are grateful to Julie Fleet, Danielle Daniel, Celina Kalluk, and Alexandria Neonakis for sharing their beautiful stories and images with us, and we take to heart our responsibility as settlers to engage with these books in ways that challenge the colonial mythification of Indigenous knowledges. We hope our engagement with these picture books does not imply that we privilege text over oral traditions but rather that we see them as a practice within oral traditions and an entry point for considering how Indigenous stories are taken up in current early childhood practices. The three texts we have chosen represent the diverse Indigenous knowledges and worldviews on Turtle Island, a choice we intend as a purposeful resistance to colonial discourses of pan-Aboriginalism (Simpson, 2008).

Following a brief description of these three stories, we think with Indigenous scholars’ and activists’ published work to unsettle Euro-Western interpretations of children’s literature. Thus, we begin by briefly outlining these interpretations.

**Western Perspectives on Children’s Literature**

Children’s books are staples in early childhood education classrooms. They are often portrayed as purely for children’s literacy (read developmental) gain, and culturally diverse literature is highly encouraged as a way to address difference and diversity in curriculum. For instance, Adam and Harper (2016) wrote that “by selecting children’s books that are representative of diversity, pathways are open for children to discuss and
consider important issues such as diverse perspectives, intercultural awareness, and breaking down stereotypes and misconceptions” (p. 1). Although this conceptualization of “diverse” literature for children might spring from good intentions, we view it as belonging to deficit discourses (which we challenge) because it fails to recognize the part played by picture books in shaping colonial narratives. In other words, “diverse” literature is introduced in early childhood education to highlight the liberal racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity project that privileges discourses of sensitivity, tolerance, and acceptance of difference (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007). The problem is that such a configuration maintains problematic assumptions, such as the existence of nation states as colonial projects. Books written for children are not innocent texts;

[they] have the potential to articulate varying understandings of Canadian identity, offering a double form of representation in the liminal spaces between words and images. They may promote a cohesive and exclusionary view of national identity that can marginalize or exclude diverse immigrant and Aboriginal perspectives or serve as a counter-articulation to such notions of a homogenous sense of nation. (Johnston et al., 2007, p. 75)

Attending to the noninnocence of children’s picture books not only offers the possibility to unpack colonial messages but also allows us to interrogate how these books are presented to children. In particular, we are interested in unsettling the onto-epistemologies from which Indigenous picture books are commonly read in early childhood classrooms. While we concur that books that story, for instance, Indigenous worldviews need to be included in early childhood classrooms, we are concerned about how these books are often presented to children. We want to question the reading of Indigenous texts through Euro-Western paradigms. When educators do not challenge children to read these books through the Indigenous onto-epistemologies that underpin them, they are enacting colonial deficit narratives that erase Indigenous knowledges and ways of being. For example, in our pedagogical work, we have witnessed the exposing of
allegiance to Euro-Western discourses of rational science (Battiste, 2008) when Indigenous texts depicting the more-than-human are read to young children.

Sharla Peltier, a Chippewa scholar from Rama First Nation and a member of the Loon clan, writes that Indigenous epistemologies see “the big picture” and centre heart-mind connections, whereas Western epistemologies ground knowledge in objectivity, scientific fact, and rational thinking (Peltier, 2017). Indigenous scholar Michael Marker (2006), who works in Coast Salish territory, sees the education system’s privileging of Western scientific notions of the environment as upholding ongoing myths of Indigenous peoples as relics of the past. Marker posits that representations of Indigenous practices as historical, as rudimentary, and as being rescued by today’s technological advances contribute to the ongoing invalidation of Indigenous ways of knowing and being with the natural world. In early childhood education in particular, Salazar Pérez and Cahill (2016) remind us of the dangers of privileging scientific engagements with land over Indigenous relations with land. In the rest of this chapter, we offer readings of picture books that seek to respect Indigenous onto-epistemologies and to challenge dichotomous Western scientific rationalities. We read the three children’s books through the stories that Indigenous writers have put out into the world for us to learn with.
In *Wild Berries*, Julie Flett (2013; Figure 2.1) narrates in Cree and English how Clarence learns to pick berries in the woods with his grandmother. The story begins with Grandma carrying Clarence on her back and singing to him while collecting *pikaci-minisa* (wild berries).
Spending long days on the land (Figure 2.2), Clarence and his grandma fill their buckets and bellies, eating plump blueberries until their lips turn purple. Various animals who share the woods with Clarence and his grandmother are beautifully woven into the story. Ants crawl, spiders spin webs (Figure 2.3), and a fox sneaks by. Before leaving the forest, Clarence learns to offer a handful of berries on a leaf for the birds and other animals who make the forest their home. Clarence and his grandmother also thank the forest prior to taking the buckets of berries.
Wild Berries reminds us of the reciprocal relations that Potawatomi biologist Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) teaches us about. Kimmerer writes and speaks poetically about the richness of understanding plants’ generosity from Indigenous perspectives rather than viewing plants from singular Western scientific knowledge. Orienting ourselves “to the generous embrace of the living world” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 7), Kimmerer (2013) says as she tells the Skywoman creation story, invites us to live with plants, accept their gifts “with open hands” and “use them honorably” (p. 8). “Can we all understand the Skywoman story not as an artifact of the past but as instructions for the future?” she asks (p. 9). Inspired by her question, we are moved to hear Flett’s (2013) story beyond that of a child picking berries with his grandmother. Both Kimmerer’s articulation of the Skywoman creation story and Flett’s of Clarence and his grandmother’s relations with the land instruct us to learn from plants, to see plants as wise teachers that offer guidance. As Kimmerer (2013) teaches, “plants know how to make food and medicine from light and water, and then they give it away” (p. 10).

We’d like to stay a little longer with Kimmerer and retell her story of being raised by strawberries to make her point about learning with plants resonate louder. Describing her relations to her past and the land she grew up with, Kimmerer writes that “it was the wild strawberries, beneath dewy leaves on an almost-summer morning, who gave me my sense of the world, my place in it” (p. 22). She fondly recounts the many moments in which strawberries taught her about gratitude, generosity, and kindness. Every time she encounters a strawberry patch she wonders “how to respond to their generosity” (p. 23):
Strawberries first shaped my view of a world full of gifts simply scattered at our feet. A gift comes to you through no action of our own, free, having moved toward you without you beckoning. It is not a reward; you cannot earn it, or call it to you, or even deserve it. And yet it appears. Your only role is to be open-eyed and present. Gifts exist in a realm of humility and mystery—as with random acts of kindness, we do not know their source. (Kimmerer, 2013, pp. 23–24)

Kimmerer’s stories remind us that Indigenous knowledges’ integrity originates in their relations with other beings. Thus Wild Berries offers young children a way of being in and knowing the world that cannot be reduced to a myth or a diverse perspective. Neither can it be read from Euro-Western perspectives on plants and foods as nonbeings we can take and consume as we wish. As Watts (2013) and Kimmerer (2013) poignantly remind us, we are derived from the earth. The berries Clarence and his grandmother carefully pick, thank, and offer to animals are their teachers and kin.

As settler educators, we take up the call to not filter Indigenous stories such as Wild Berries through white Judeo-Christian thought. We want instead to profoundly challenge ourselves to think with this picture book as offering modes of being and knowing. Yet, because we resist postmodern academic appropriation of Indigenous knowledges (Haig-Brown, 2010), we also want to rethink our role in introducing these modes by positioning our engagement with these Indigenous picture books as an opportunity to learn from Indigenous voices alongside children. As early childhood pedagogists, we are invited to create the conditions for pedagogies that decentre Euro-Western perspectives by building relations. Not yet fully understanding what this means, we do it by inviting local Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers to introduce children to stories like Wild Berries before including these books in the book corner. We also attempt to offer children such books as ways to engage in what Kimmerer (2013) calls “re-story-action” (p. 9)—listening to the stories the land offers us before acting—instead of restoration when we plant a garden or visit nearby forests without thinking deeply about our
complicated relationships with these places (see Climate Action Childhood Network, http://www.climateactionchildhood.net/).

More-than-Human Kinship

Watts (2013) offers similar refrains, reminding us that lack of communication with more-than-human others threatens not only the natural world but the Indigenous identity: “Non-human beings are active members of society,” she wrote. “Not only are they active, they also directly influence how humans organize themselves into that society” (Watts, 2013, p. 23). The notion of kin, in particular, needs to be situated within Indigenous knowledges rather than as a new engagement within Euro-Western scholarship. Zoe Todd (2017), in her writing on fossil fuels, describes more-than-humans as kin and consequently teacher. Thinking with more-than-human kinship challenges anthropocentric discourses of human consumption of more-than-human others. Being bounded to more-than-human beings through kinship, Todd says, entails taking seriously our responsibilities towards them, particularly “within landscapes that [have] been heavily violated by settler-colonial economic and political exigencies” (p. 105). Responding to the lives of more-than-human kin also requires addressing them as more-than-human political citizens who are deeply entangled in decolonial resistance (Z. Todd, 2017). Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate anthropologist Kim TallBear reminds us that kinship also rests on more-than-human relations rather than merely on colonial biological ones (TallBear, 2017).

The words of Zoe Todd, Kim TallBear, and Vanessa Watts resonate for us as we encounter Sometimes I Feel Like a Fox and Sweetest Kulu. In the first of these two books, Métis author/illustrator Danielle Daniel uses simple language and beautiful imagery to offer various examples of Anishinaabe totem animals. The story repeats an “I feel like” refrain to describe the attributes of a bear, deer, beaver, butterfly, moose, owl, rabbit, turtle, wolf, porcupine, raven, and fox. The bear, a protector, is strong and confident, the deer sensitive and kind, the beaver efficient, the butterfly free and vulnerable. The owl flies discreetly across a dark sky, while the moose travels both awkwardly and gracefully
and the rabbit quickly leaps into new adventures. Turtles are quiet, but wolves howl into the moonlight. Porcupines are curious, ravens mysterious, and foxes sly and sharp. Daniel uses an author’s note to explain the importance of animal totems to the Anishinaabe peoples, explaining that they are also guides. She tells the reader “totem animals remind us that all living organisms are a part of the same cycle of life” (Daniel, 2015, p. 28).

*Sweetest Kulu* (Figure 2.4) is written by Inuit throat singer Celina Kalluk and illustrated by Alexandria Neonakis. In this lyrical bedtime poem, a mother speaks to her *kulu*, an Inuktitut term of endearment (Kalluk & Neonakis, 2018).

![Sweetest Kulu cover image](Kalluk & Neonakis, 2018)

Through beautiful prose and illustration, a mother tells her child of the gifts they have received from the land and their animal relations. The smiling sun brought warmth and light, while the wind greeted the child when they were born. Reminding the child to always listen closely, the wind learned the child’s name and invited the world to meet them. Snow Bunting and Hare brought gifts of seeds and roots, for confidence and love.
Fox came with a message to rise early in the morning and always help those in need. Arctic Char gifted tenderness and Seal creativity. Narwhal and Beluga saw the child as a natural gift to the world and shared spontaneity and perseverance. The child’s heritage was shared by Muskox, who also offered empowerment. Caribou promised the child that the stars would always guide them. Polar Bear offered gentleness and a reminder to treat animals with respect (Figure 2.5). The Land gave the child their foundation, something to balance them. The story ends with the mother gifting sweet dreams to her child and reminding them that the world sings a beautiful song of them.

Figure 2.5: Polar bears teach to treat animals with respect and gentleness (Kalluk & Neonakis, 2018, pp. 23–24).

These stories of kinship cannot be read as tales of anthropomorphized animals offering thinly veiled moral lessons for children (see A. Taylor, 2013, for a critique). Neither can they be read from Western perspectives on animal rights. Billy-Ray Belcourt (2015) challenges these perspectives as maintaining colonial structures. We cannot rethink speciesism or reimagine human-animal relations, Belcourt insists, without dismantling the neoliberal colonial subjectivities that position animals as a settler colonial resource. To think about kinship through Indigenous knowings of human-animal relations demands acknowledgment that the Euro-Western configuration of human-animal relations has only been made possible because of the erasure of Indigenous bodies and knowledges. Following Belcourt’s (2015) contention that we cannot reimagine human-animal relations without interrogating the entanglement of modernist animal discourses and the creation and maintenance of the settler colonial state, we present these picture books to children,
not only as a means to offer children alternative ways of knowing animal-human assemblages, but also as sites of potential disruption of colonial discourses in early childhood education.

Kinship, within these stories, insists on reciprocity, ways of situating care relations in ways that privilege neither the more-than-human nor the human but instead appreciate the sympoetic nature of the world. The challenge for early childhood education is to situate children in a complex web of relationships with all their kin. Potawatomi scholar and activist Kyle Whyte (2018) reminds us that Anishinaabe intellectual traditions focus on interdependence and responsibility. Because nonhumans have “their own agency, spirituality, knowledge, and intelligence” (p. 130), human caretaking of nonhumans does not position humans as superior but as a part of reciprocal relations that maintain the world. Both Sometimes I Feel Like a Fox and Sweetest Kulu offer examples of the agency of animals and other nonhumans and challenge Euro-Western anthropomorphic constructions of animals common in children’s picture books. When these stories are read as valid ways of knowing the world and not as myths or fictionalized stories, they disrupt colonial narratives and offer ways of relating to the more-than-human world that do not depend on human dominance.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have intended to offer possible ways to engage with children’s picture books that respect and value Indigenous onto-epistemologies. We acknowledge that this engagement is but one small step towards enacting pedagogies that rupture Euro-Western scientific discourses that prevail in early childhood education and that set us on a road, as Laura Hall (2008) says, “toward reclaiming Indigenous economies in the context of colonialism” (p. 155). Yet, we hope we have also made clear that this journey is anything but straight: There is not “a prescriptive element to providing alternative visions to the status quo” (Hall, 2008, p. 155). Thus, we take seriously our responsibility as settler researchers, pedagogists, and educators to engage with Indigenous onto-epistemologies outside the comfortable Euro-Western paradigms we are familiar with.
An abundance of research promotes inclusive representations in children’s picture books as ways to address racism, sexism, and heteronormativity (see Dever et al., 2005; Harrington, 2016; Seidel & Rokne, 2011 for examples), and although we acknowledge the importance of these books in making visible the diversity of families and young children in North America, we specifically avoid folding the inclusion of books written by Indigenous authors into a catch-all inclusion of multicultural discourses in children’s picture books. We acknowledge the importance of including social-justice-informed thinking with young children. Yet, we are aware that violence is enacted against Indigenous peoples when educational initiatives perpetuate neoliberal multicultural discourses. Neoliberal multiculturalism, under the guises of belonging and citizenship, creates specific citizens who are able to overcome their difference from the norm and flourish in a multicultural nation state (Mitchell, 2003). Multicultural resilience discourses ignore historical and ongoing legal structures that promote at-risk narratives of Indigenous peoples (de Leeuw et al., 2010) while simultaneously positioning multicultural settler colonial states, like Canada, as offering all the benefits one needs to “overcome” their being “at risk.” Listening to Tuck and Yang (2012), we position neoliberal multiculturalism as an act of settler colonialism that seeks to assimilate Indigenous peoples’ experiences of the world into homogenous narratives of oppression. Situating Indigenous relations with settler colonialism as simply a subcategory of antiracist narratives obscures the genocidal specificities that have been directed at Indigenous peoples. Token inclusion of the three picture books we have thought with in this chapter in multicultural early childhood book corners continues to conceal the erasure of Indigenous peoples by offering digestible, child-friendly acknowledgments of indigeneity that do little, if anything, to challenge the continued oppression Indigenous peoples face in settler colonial states.

By calling out and resisting this erasure in this chapter, we engaged in reading children’s picture books in tandem with Indigenous scholarship. This purposeful challenge to the privileging of scientific discourse in education highlights the spaces of incommensurability between Indigenous and Western onto-epistemologies. We hope that
we have demonstrated how Indigenous knowledges are made invisible in commonplace practices in early childhood education, and how the mythification of Indigenous knowledges purposely ignores the fact that “Indigenous knowledge systems predate, expand, update, and complicate the curricula found in most public schools” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 22). Alongside Østmo and Law (2018), we contend that “powerful ‘modern’ epistemological, normative, and ontological understandings of [nonhuman entities such as] land and water” (p. 350), which are in the process of displacing alternative understandings, have not only ignored and displaced Indigenous ways of conceptualizing the world but have also rendered them “unintelligible and unimaginable as possibly appropriate descriptions of reality” (Østmo & Law, 2018, p. 350). We acknowledge the multitude of ways in which Indigenous onto-epistemologies are rendered invisible in settler colonial states, and we know our efforts at resisting them in this chapter are imperfect. Nevertheless, we hope that by showcasing the rich Indigenous worldviews offered in these three children’s picture books we may enter into conversations that acknowledge Indigenous onto-epistemologies as valid ways of knowing the world, which must not be absorbed by or positioned as less than Western scientific knowledges.
Chapter 3. Posthuman Possibilities for the Early Childhood Educator

This chapter was previously published as follows:
It has been reformatted and revised for inclusion as a chapter in this dissertation.

I entered my doctoral research disillusioned with many of the reproductive practices in early childhood education. I was tired of the saying that had been drilled into my head for most of my educational training—don’t reinvent the wheel. I felt frustrated. In my heart, I knew that early childhood education had the potential to be a site for radical social change, but even when engaging in “best” early childhood practices I felt I was actually maintaining the status quo. At the same time, like many others, I felt acutely the effects of our time: social injustice and climate change seemed to increase even as early childhood engaged in interventions to respond to them. In the early days of my doctoral program, I was introduced to posthumanism through the Common Worlds Research Collective (http://commonworlds.net/). Through my involvement in the Collective I started to challenge the human-centric, rational, capitalist logics that shaped the neoliberal educational landscape in early childhood. I came to recognize that discourses of neoliberalism do not create spaces to engage with the complexities of 21st-century life, and in fact, reproduce the logics that led to the problems in the first place. I was beginning to notice how, in addition to not doing much to reimagine how we engage with the world, many early childhood education spaces promote subjectivities that narrowly define who the ideal child is and, in turn, position early childhood educators as responsible for ensuring that children develop into ideal human subjects.
In this chapter, I think with posthumanism as a possible way to intervene in the anthropocentric and developmental logics that govern early childhood spaces. Initially, I briefly introduce posthuman theory and discuss why posthumanism has the potential to radically reconfigure the human subject, specifically the early childhood educator subject. I offer two very different conceptual engagements with posthuman theory that were important in my research with early childhood educators: earth-based spiritualities and common worlds. I then revisit two moments from my research where, alongside educators, I experimented with attuning to more-than-human relations in the spaces we engaged through foregrounding posthuman and earth-based feminist spiritual relations with the world. In these moments, the educators and I bumped up against the tensions and difficulties of shifting from the human/child-centred logics prevalent in early childhood education and experimented with how we might embody posthuman subjectivities.

Posthuman Theory

Posthumanism responds to the conditions of the geological period of the Anthropocene, in which human involvement in the natural world has resulted in ecological devastation (Crutzen, 2002; Steffen et al., 2007). It does so by challenging the nature/culture divide that both positions the human as separate from and above other-than-human constitutes of our world and obscures human accountability in ecological devastation (Braidotti, 2013, 2017, 2019). To think about ways in which we might begin to pull apart the logics that have shaped the Anthropocene, we cannot ignore patriarchal, racist, and colonial power relations (Braidotti, 2019). Posthuman subjectivities enact affirmative ethics to challenge the dominance of these power relations. Braidotti (2013, 2019) asserts that to enact posthuman subjectivities requires a shift, from thinking about anthropos, which focuses only on bios—exclusively human life—to thinking about zoe, which includes human life and “the life of animals and other nonhuman entities” (Braidotti, 2017, p. 26). Posthumanism does not do away with the human. Instead, it proposes relational ontologies that respond to the violence that has been done in the name of universalized human subjectivity (Braidotti, 2013, 2017, 2019) by thickening the contexts of what matters in the world.
Posthuman subjectivity is multiple and fluid and moves through complex relational webs of being: assemblages (Tsing, 2012, 2015). By destabilizing the universal subject through human/more-than-human relationality, it becomes “impossible to speak in one unified voice about any category, including women” (Braidotti, 2017, p. 24). Despite misguided criticisms as possibly negating marginalized people’s lived experiences, posthumanism has the capacity to radically restructure the onto-epistemological stance that one group of humans is superior to another (Braidotti, 2017, 2019). Posthumanism allows us to work towards subjectivities that reflect the complexities of the 21st century and to create affirmative ethical responses that help us to be worthy of our times in ways in which we acknowledge that anthropocentric historical and political contexts are the building blocks of current oppression and ecological crisis (Braidotti, 2019).

Posthuman subjectivities are not static conceptualizations of who the human is. Rather, they are emergent, complex human/nonhuman assemblages that create possibilities to be in the world in responsive ways. To attend to complex, collaborative more-than-human assemblages requires a specific type of attunement in which we must pay attention to how humans and nonhumans come together in ways that are more than simply the sum of their parts—parts which are never fully knowable and therefore contain multitudes of possibilities (Tsing, 2015). Acknowledging that nothing or no one is ever fully knowable makes impossible the categorization of traits that make up a universal human subject. Thinking with more-than-human assemblages refuses understandings of the world that promote individual and human-centric extractive relations with the more-than-human world and instead engages with partial, messy, shifting, entangled relations (Tsing, 2015) to stay with the trouble of our worlds (Haraway, 2008, 2016).

To stay with the trouble means dwelling in the uncomfortable tensions of human/more-than-human relations rather than searching for quick, universal solutions to the complex realities of our times. Posthumanism refuses the nature/culture divide that separates the world into distinct categories of humans (rational and thinking) and nature (wild, unthinking) and instead focuses on more-than-human assemblages that acknowledge the ecological, political, and human/more-than-human constituents of any particular
happening. Therefore, in posthumanist thinking, there is a shift, from ascribing agency only to human beings to noticing the agency of all more-than-human others.

Posthumanism and the Early Childhood Subject

In childhood studies, research has been done that challenges the construction of the child subject through humancentric dominant discourses such as developmentalism with its histories of racism, sexism, colonialism, and ableism (Burman, 2017; Hancock et al., 2021; Nxumalo, 2018; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2015). Because the early childhood educator is intricately related to the child, specifically through practices that center the child in early childhood education, the educator too is constructed through these discourses. Therefore, within developmental discourse, the early childhood educator is constructed as one who ensures the child develops into an “appropriate” adult human.

The definition of what it is to be human in early childhood is insidiously grounded in the assumption that the human subject is masculine, white, heterosexual, and able-bodied (Braidotti, 2013, 2017, 2019; Burman, 2001, 2017; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). This narrow conceptualization of whom the human is and is supposed to be requires that early childhood educators enact subjectivities that reproduce both neoliberal and developmental logics. Developmental logics predetermine who and what a person should be at given maturational periods of their lives, and are supported by neoliberal goals of reaching these developmental milestones in the smoothest, quickest ways. This “efficient” push towards limited conceptualizations of the human are made possible by both refusing and ignoring the complexities of the world and our relations within it. Because posthuman feminisms radically reconfigure subjectivity and shift away from the definable, unified human subject to subjects that are always in a state of becoming in negotiation with human and more-than-human presences (Braidotti, 2019), they open possibilities for early childhood educator subjectivities that challenge the status quo by creating space to acknowledge and center the relations between educators and the larger more-than-human world.
So far, I have offered a very general description of my understanding of posthuman theory, but, as with many broad theoretical perspectives, posthuman theory is taken up in various ways. My purpose in this chapter is not to offer a comprehensive telling of what posthuman feminism is but to think specifically about how the early childhood educator subject is constructed within posthuman feminism. Next, I outline common worlds frameworks and earth-based spirituality, the specific conceptual frameworks that ground and shape my research. I then share stories from my research as a pedagogist\(^2\) on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Attawandaron peoples in what is colonially known as London, Ontario, Canada. This research was part of a larger SSHRC-funded research project led by Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, *Climate Action Network: Exploring Climate Change Pedagogies with Children* (http://www.climateactionchildhood.net/).

**Posthumanist Theory and Common Worlds Framework in Early Childhood**

For the educators in my doctoral research and for me, a common worlds framework provided a theoretical perspective that allowed us to think about questions that could not be answered by the developmental perspectives offered by predetermined curricula, so that we might enact curricular practices to respond to the specificities of our time and also our own interests and curiosities. Common worlds frameworks are a way to think otherwise about human/more-than-human relationality in early childhood education. Common worlds frameworks and pedagogies enact a posthuman stance by acknowledging 21st-century children’s and educators’ complex and multilayered lives (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Khattar, & Montpetit, 2019; A. Taylor, 2013, 2017a). These frameworks and pedagogical practices require a “reconvening of all of the constituents of our worlds, including non-human life forms, forces and entities” (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Kummen, 2016, p. 432) to subvert the humancentric logics that shape the individualist and capitalist thinking so prevalent in the neoliberal education system. Because common

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\(^2\) A role in Ontario and British Columbia, Canada. Pedagogists work alongside educators and children to “envision pedagogical connections and projects to provoke educational processes that, through interdisciplinary and provocative questions, ideas, theories, materials, relationships . . . deepen and complexify strong, situated pedagogical work in early childhood contexts” (Land et al., 2020c, p. 2).
worlds frameworks and pedagogies are localized and situated, thinking with them requires and enables educators to experiment with doing early childhood education outside the rigid boundaries of predetermined curriculum (Jobb et al., 2019).

Like the broader theory of posthumanism, common worlds frameworks are not universal, and many early childhood scholars have engaged with them in a variety of ways to challenge anthropocentric (Nxumalo, 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2015; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor, & Blaise, 2016; A. Taylor, 2017a), colonial (Nelson, 2019; Nxumalo, 2015, 2016, 2019a, 2019b; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013; A. Taylor, 2019; A. Taylor et al., 2016) and developmental (Hodgins, 2019a; Jobb et al., 2019; Land et al., 2020a; A. Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2018) doings of early childhood. However, because both posthuman and common worlds theories challenge Euro-Western ontologies that center the rational man and the singular construction of the universalized male subject (Braidotti, 2017; Hodgins, 2019b), when put to work in early childhood education, they both make possible the construction of a feminist posthuman.

Although common worlds frameworks are often misconstrued as discourses about idealized child-nature relations (A. Taylor, 2011, 2013), both common worlds frameworks and posthumanisms in general pay attention to the multiple more-than-human relations, such as with other species and with place, which is the focus of the research I briefly outline in this chapter, as well as to the agency of materials (Kind & Argent, 2019; Kind et al., 2018; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Boucher, 2019; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind, & Kocher, 2016) and to the complex relations of technology (Land et al., 2020a, 2020b) in early childhood spaces. These important reconfigurations in which materials, technologies, and other species, are not positioned as either good or bad but as the constituents of the lives of educators and children that offer important points of divergence for whom the early childhood educator can be within early childhood spaces. Within common worlds frameworks, instead of the role of educators as delivering curriculum designed to orient children towards future success, educators become co-researchers and engage in methodological processes not bounded by future-orientated logics of development. These processes enable educators to ask different questions, ones
that are not limited to what defines good or bad practices for early childhood care and curriculum but explore how humans come together with more-than-humans and how educators might enact these relationalities towards more livable futures. Within these common worlds configurations, the educator subject is, like Braidotti’s (2019) posthuman subject, “embodied and embedded, and its relational affectivity produces a shared sense of belonging to, and knowledge of, the common world we are sharing” (p. 47).

Because pedagogical practices within common worlds frameworks respond to the specificities of the time and place of the educators and children, they offer the possibility of enacting posthuman affirmative ethics. Affirmative ethics are “a collective practice of constructing social horizons of hope, in response to the flagrant injustices, the perpetuation of old hierarchies, and new forms of domination” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 156).

Posthumanism and Earth-Based Feminist Spiritualities

Earth-based feminist spirituality is a broad term but is often associated with neopagan beliefs such as Wicca. Feminist scholars acknowledge that many women’s ways of knowing were eradicated in the rise of patriarchy (Starhawk, 1982), capitalism (Federici, 2004, 2018; Skott-Myhre, 2017), and science (Ehrenreich & English, 2010). Many of these ways of knowing, and certainly the ones I focus on in my research, propose a deeply connected, mutually reciprocal relation between the human and the more-than-human. With the literal and figurative murder of the “witches,” knowledges women had about relationality with nature has been destroyed (Mies & Shiva, 2014). Ecofeminists and others who seek to reanimate these knowledges propose reclaiming these purposely erased ways of being in the world as experimental modes of intervening in human-caused ecological disaster. Mies and Shiva (2014), for example, note that the current climate crisis has disproportionate effects on the bodies of women and other marginalized groups. In other words, the climate crisis affects bodies differently, and women and other marginalized groups suffer these effects more materially than others.

Turning more specifically to theorists who engage with the particularities of earth-based feminist spirituality, reclaiming these feminist embodied ways of knowing is a possible
entry point in crafting refrains (Stengers, 2008a) that respond to the “vast disconnection, [the] abyss of ignorance that becomes apparent whenever an issue involving the natural world arises” (Starhawk, 2004, p. 7). Refrains move away from applying dogmatic categorizations of understanding what is happening in the world and engage instead with partial and situated truths to create democratic practices and ask speculative questions that assemble and reassemble subjectivities (Stengers, 2008a). These reassembled subjectivities constitute a radical reconvening of the world in which relationality is a sympoetic process (Haraway, 2017) where human/more-than-human assemblages flow and reflow through each other to create happenings (Tsing, 2015), allowing the theoretical cages that dictate how the world can be understood to be dismantled. These complex understandings of the world do not position spirituality and scientific beliefs as incommensurable. Embodying more-than-human subjectivities through intimate relations with the world allows us to think outside the dogmatic compartmentalizations of what is true and what is not rational (Starhawk, 2004).

Experimenting with Subjectivities in Early Childhood Education

I now share stories from my research that show how I, alongside educators, children, and our more-than-human companions, embodied feminist posthuman subjectivities to experiment with how we might do early childhood education differently. My intention is not to create a binary between good and bad early childhood practices but instead to share insight into what I think posthuman subjectivities might offer to educator/child/more-than-human comings together. I propose that resisting the “good educator” subjectivity as inscribed through humanistic discourses such as capitalism, neoliberalism, and developmentalism allows pedagogical engagements that create otherwise possibilities.

In an early childhood centre, I worked as a pedagogist within the Climate Action Childhood Network. At my specific research site, we wanted to rethink energy relations through posthuman understandings (see Chapter 4: Montpetit, Kraftl, and Khan, 2021), and to do this we needed to embody posthuman subjectivity. At my particular site,
educators, children, and I walked every week to a local cemetery that was rife with more-than-human others: animals, trees, rocks (both natural and unnatural in the form of tombstones), bacteria, decaying bodies, weather, soil, grass, sun, and on and on). In my research, I wanted to think about how we could move past discussions about whether the cemetery was an *appropriate* place for children or what children could learn from the cemetery to think about how the cemetery was a place where we might come to know our relations with the more-than-human world differently. I was curious about what possibilities enacting affirmative more-than-human ethical relations might generate towards enacting climate change pedagogies that do more than reinstate human exceptionalism. Specifically, as posthuman subjects we needed to craft pedagogical practices that resisted positioning ourselves and children at the centre of the more-than-human world. Doing so required acknowledging that we are in relation with the world, not acting upon the natural world, an idea that is often perpetuated in environmental education initiatives with children (Cole & Malone, 2019).

Enacting affirmative ethical subjectivities is how I began to address the frustration I felt about my inability to enact change in early childhood spaces and enabled me to engage in joyful experimentation with the possibility of loosening the stronghold of patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist structures on early childhood education. In practice, experimenting with affirmative ethical responses to children and the more-than-human world created the possibility for educators to be more than passive deliverers of predetermined information that reinforces constructions of a universal human subject. Instead, it enabled educators, through constructing themselves as posthuman subjects, to also envision the child subject differently. To center affirmative ethical practices, educators and I followed not only our own curiosities but our hopes for the world, both human and more-than-human. What guided us in our enactment of affirmative ethical practices was a commitment to address shared concerns in early childhood while taking seriously an understanding that we do not experience these concerns in the same way, or, as Braidotti (2019) so eloquently puts it, “we, posthuman subjects’, [are] in *this*
particular project together, but ‘we are not One and the same’” (p. 153, emphasis in original).

For example, the educators and I shared concerns about the climate crisis and a desire to think with children about climate relations, but we each had different specific concerns. Because we were each embedded in the specific particularities of our individual lives, we each felt the effects of the climate crisis differently. Bringing together these different positionalities allowed us, as posthuman early childhood educator subjects, to come together in ways that did not universalize or simplify our own relations to the more-than-human world but carried the possibilities of new and exciting interconnectivities and relationalities. Educators and I worked at embodying posthuman subjectivities as early childhood educators and researchers. This process was both difficult and generative and offered us small but important possibilities to engage in methodological processes that subvert the violences often done in the name of the universal human.

**Working to Decenter the Child Through Common Worlds Frameworks**

Early on in our relationship, I shared common worlds frameworks with educators as a way to intervene in the anthropocentric logics that have caused the current ecological crisis and are prevalent in many environmental education initiatives. I had been playing with feminist posthuman relationality in my thinking, but I knew that this was the particular ontological way in which I experienced the world and that to actually embody posthuman subjectivities, the educators’ worldviews and lived experiences mattered as well. In other words, we needed a place to start, a way to think with common worlds and posthuman frameworks, and to engage in our work with children as posthuman educator subjects with shared pedagogical commitments. To think together, we read Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor and Blaise’s (2016) chapter “Decentring the Human in Multispecies Ethnography,” in which they offer vignettes about their relations with more-than-human others. Each vignette affords complex insight into more-than-human relations and importantly refuses to position children at the centre of these relations. The thickness of these multispecies encounters outrightly denies readers the ability to translate these
stories into teachable moments for children. The vignettes describe encounters with worms, raccoons, dogs, and dead kangaroos.

At first, the educators were disturbed by the piece, confused and frustrated with why an article about early childhood dwells in the stink of death, urine, and feces instead of in the romanticized child/animal stories they were familiar with. The chapter’s propositions were unfamiliar and quite uncomfortable, precisely because the authors refused to use the tools of human exceptionalism (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor & Blaise, 2016) to configure child relations with the more-than-human, or to anthropomorphize nonhumans to teach children about morality. I share this story, not to criticize the caring and dedicated educators I am grateful to have learned alongside, but to gesture towards how thinking with more-than-human relationality demands a radically different subjectivity than most educators are trained in and familiar with enacting.

As we continued over weeks to read, the educators explored what kinds of questions and practices they might begin to engage in if the child’s development did not have to be the sole focus of our pedagogical practices. Thinking with posthuman and common worlds concepts offered possibilities for us, not only to think about human/more-than-human relations in radically different ways than we were used to in early childhood education, but to wonder how we might be as educators and researchers if we embraced these concepts. This was an exciting proposition for the educators and me to see ourselves beyond dominant constructions of the early childhood educator subject—but a proposition that demanded a radical reconfiguring of the subjectivities that we, and many early childhood educators, are familiar with.

Sparked by the posthuman conceptualizations of children’s relations with other species offered to us by Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor and Blaise, the educators and I began to think about how we could experiment with ways of knowing the cemetery that decentered children, and the human. We were able to broaden and complexify who we were as early childhood educators and researchers. As soon as we began to think with common worlds frameworks, we started to question children’s and our own relations with the more-than-
human world. We wondered how engaging in noninnocent, experimental pedagogical practices might disrupt the humancentric and developmental underpinnings of early childhood education. Positioning children’s relations with nature as innocent or pure obscures children’s implication in activities that contribute to environmental crisis; for example, the overwhelming use of plastics in childhood (Kraftl, 2020; Pacini-Ketchabaw & MacAlpine, 2022) has concrete environmental implications. By refusing to see children as innocent in their relations with the world, we were able to disrupt binary thinking that defines specific acts or people as either good or bad and instead pay attention to the multiple ways in which we and children are in relation with the world (A. Taylor, 2017b). Refusing the simplification of our relations with the world, our complex common worlds engagements with more-than-humans provided us ways to think and do early childhood education differently to subvert the developmental alliances that have historically greatly limited what is possible in early childhood spaces.

**Working with Earth Based Feminist Spirituality**

After having thought with common worlds frameworks with the educators, I slowly introduced earth-based feminist spirituality as a possible way to reconfigure the human/more-than-human relations we embodied in our weekly walks to the cemetery. In our work with the children, by embracing concepts related to how earth-based feminist spirituality challenges universal constructions of the human, we were able to begin to think of ourselves as different educator subjects. This shift allowed us to experiment with ways in which our work with children could matter in ways that went beyond the individual development of the child.

Acknowledging that in the time of the Anthropocene, the ecological crisis is a result of human intervention in and extraction of natural resources, I wanted to find a way to usurp human essentialist logics and conceptualize ways to disrupt the hierarchical structure of humans above all else. Thinking alongside science philosopher Isabelle Stengers and witch and ecofeminist Starhawk, the educators and I began experimenting with how we might reclaim earth-based feminist knowledges as modes to engage in posthuman pedagogical practices. Reclaiming, which Stengers (2015) borrows from neopagan
contemporary witch activists, is to experiment “with the possibilities of manners of living and cooperating that have been destroyed in the name of progress” (p. 12). It is important to note that reclaiming is not rooted in nostalgia for simple, more natural pasts or a return to more “innocent” times, but rather is a way of reconnecting with that which we have been separated from through subjectivities that position the human as rational, with rationality being directly correlated with objective Science and a universal human.

Reclaiming earth-based feminist spirituality, then, is a way to enact posthuman feminist subjectivities as early childhood educators because it allows us to bring knowledges that focus on more-than-human relationality that have been “lost” in the name of masculinist scientific knowledges. Building on Starhawk’s (1982) assertion that the legacies of eradicating women’s spiritual knowledges through infamous witch burnings and the continued oppression and punishment of women who do not go along with what is rational still shape how women move through the world, Stengers (2017) is not arguing for a universal shift to feminist spirituality which would be misaligned with the affirmative ethics at the centre of posthuman theory. Instead, her point is to interrogate why these knowings are “relegated to the dustbin of culturally situated beliefs” (Nocek, 2018, p. 101) and to experiment with how reclaiming these knowledges in our current times might make possible subjectivities that puncture the violence of human exceptionalism. Alongside Stengers’ (2008a) propositions, I wonder what might emerge when engaging with pedagogies of reclaiming with children and educators in early childhood education spaces and how these engagements might work to construct feminist posthuman early childhood educator subjects. My understanding of feminist earth-based spirituality draws on neopagan and ecofeminist understandings of human/more-than-human relations “to liberate women and nature from patriarchal destruction” (Mies & Shiva, 2014, p. 17). I want to strongly reiterate that earth-based feminist engagements are how I go about thinking more-than-human relations and subjectivities, and I am not suggesting a switch to these modes of engagement as a new way to do early childhood

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3 Following Subramaniam and Willey’s (2017) thinking with Sandra Harding’s (1997) distinction between Science and science, I capitalize science in instances in which I wish to draw attention to knowledge that is recognized by Euro-Western institutions as official knowledge.
education. I also acknowledge the deep spiritual relations with more-than-human others of Indigenous Peoples\textsuperscript{4}, and I am grateful for this scholarship and the reminder that the posthuman turn in academia owes a great deal to these onto-epistemologies (Z. Todd, 2016a). Also, as a white settler on colonized lands, I have an obligation to tread carefully and respectfully as I discuss more-than-human spiritualities to resist offering my specific conceptualization of spirituality as privileged.

In addition to our weekly walks with children to the cemetery, the educators and I frequently met to read, discuss what was happening on our walks, and experiment with ways to document our inquiry with the cemetery. We began to read Starhawk’s *The Earth Path: Grounding Your Spirit in the Rhythms of Nature* (2004) as a possible way to begin enacting feminist earth-based spiritual posthuman subjectivities in our pedagogical work. We wondered how, alongside this book, we might begin to notice our engagements with the more-than-human outside the paradigms of child development. We wanted to notice what was happening in the cemetery versus thinking only about what children could learn from it. In her book, Starhawk proposes observation as a mode to attune to more-than-human presences and build relationality with the more-than-human world. The type of observation she proposes is vastly different from the positivistic, objective mode of observation prominent in early childhood education spaces (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2008). In early childhood education, the scientific underpinnings of developmentally focused observation reinforce the nature/culture divide and position the observer, most frequently the educator, as separate from that which she observes, and children and more-than-human others as knowable subjects (Holt, 2004). In these positionings, the educator appropriates what she observes into abstract ideals, reproducing the ideal human subject by determining when what she observes does not fall into the “natural” developmental order. Haraway (1998) refers to this type of observation as the God-trick, a masculinist practice in which the observer sees everything from nowhere. She advocates instead for a more situated approach in which the observer, in the case of my research the early childhood educator, acknowledges material, local, and partial accounts of the world as

what is necessary for interrelated webs of connection to flourish. Starhawk proposes that
to engage with observation in ways that transcend the reproduction of already known
facts about the world, we must let go of stories about what we know to be true and instead
pay attention differently to the more-than-human world. Tsing (2015) offers similar
propositions, which she names arts of noticing. Arts of noticing foreground the
observer’s embodied and embedded relations with more-than-human assemblages to pay
attention to the messy and often ignored stories in traditional observation techniques.
These nuanced ways of noticing construct the early childhood educator subject as
complex and always in fluid relation with the more-than-human world by challenging the
dominant types of observation in early childhood education.

Similar to our beginnings with reading posthuman common world perspectives, this shift
in modes of observation was not easy. We could not just put aside the ways in which we
had been trained and how we practiced observing children. We needed some help. This
brought another tension to our work: How do we think with and be inspired by others but
not reproduce what they have offered? We returned to Starhawk (2004) and found her
nine ways of observing to be a generative guide to how we might experiment with
observation differently. The first way of observing she offers is to start with the
proposition I wonder… Prior to our next weekly walk to the cemetery, the educators and I
chose something we wondered about. Aligning with affirmative ethical practices, we had
a shared interest in paying attention to the more-than-human world differently. We hoped
to recalibrate not only how we see these spaces but how, in noticing how we are always
in deep relation with the more-than-human, we could construct early childhood
posthuman subjectivities by purposely choosing not to focus on the children’s relations
with the cemetery. Guided by our shared interest, we each spent time thinking about what
we were personally curious about and why. Knowing that it would be challenging to
observe differently, we each chose something that did not have to do with the children,
particularly turning our curiosities toward the more-than-human. Some wonderings
included: I wonder if the grass will be dewy? I wonder if we will encounter cicada
exuviae? Prepared with these wonderings, we were able to pay attention to more-than-
human presences in ways that made them integral to our knowings of the place. Our wonderings came from our own curiosities and allowed us to enact posthuman subjectivities that were fluid and responsive to more-than-human presences. We were able to pay attention differently to the cemetery through these wonderings, and as our curiosity invigorated more wonderings we continued to deepen the conceptualizations of our observations. For example, we did find cicada exuviae, which inspired the educator who was wondering about these abandoned shells to spend some time researching the lifespan of the cicada and sharing this information with children and families in the childcare centre. Observing outside the familiar developmental models allowed us to bring ourselves to our pedagogical work. Careful not to recentrize the human through focusing on the self-fulfillment of the educators, I want to propose that through this posthuman engagement, educators were able to enact subjectivities that positioned them as active participants in their relations with children (and the more-than-human) rather than passive facilitators of reproductive curricula.

Conclusion

The shift from humancentric subjectivity to posthuman subjectivity is not easy. Many early childhood educators, myself included, were trained in ways that position developmental psychology as the way to do early childhood education. Developmental psychology offers an ideal, universal human subject, which, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, excludes and pathologizes feminized, racialized, and disabled bodies. This singular theoretical orientation narrowly defines the purpose of early childhood education as preparing children to be successful, functioning adults and consequently positions the primary responsibility of educators as guides to bring children to this idealized state in enjoyable, child-friendly ways (Brown, 2015; Vintimilla, 2014). I want to be careful to position subjectivity not as something one can choose to step into but rather as the shaping of whom one can be in the world. Dahlberg and Moss (2005) define subjectification as “the shaping of a certain kind of subject who will govern herself or himself, replacing the need for coercive force” (p. 20). As discussed above, the human subject is often positioned as “rational, knowing, stable, unified, self-governing, and
freed of obligation—also, by implication, adult, male and white” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 2). Early childhood spaces, the places in which children are educated and cared for, can be considered institutions for subjectification (Dahlberg et al., 2013), meaning that these spaces are sites of potential reproduction and disruption of capitalistic, neoliberal subjectivities for both children and educators.

Early childhood educator posthuman subjectivities create possibilities for doing early childhood education otherwise, but enacting posthuman subjectivities is not prescriptive. It requires experimentation and engagement with theoretical perspectives that are unfamiliar in many early childhood spaces. The stories I shared above tell about the particular experiences educators and I had in engaging in affirmative ethics to enact posthuman subjectivities. However, they are not reproducible, which is a tricky but fundamental aspect of posthuman pedagogical work. Posthuman subjectivities must always be in response to the specificities of the time and place in which they are enacted and are always constructed in relation to the more-than-human world. For me, thinking with earth-based feminist spiritualities allows me to bring erased feminist knowledges to how I conceptualize more-than-human relationalities, but this is just one way that posthuman subjectivity can be explored in early childhood spaces. As demonstrated by the vast common worlds scholarship, posthuman subjectivities provide multiple possible entry points to disrupt anthropocentric logics that uphold patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist power relations that define a universal human subject. Rupturing the ideal human subject through engaging with posthuman subjectivities makes possible an early childhood educator subject who is not bound to taken-for-granted, reproductive developmentalism.
Chapter 4. Working with Childhoods and Energies: Critical Reflections on Specifying and Locating the Intangible

This chapter, coauthored with Peter Kraftl and Arooj Khan, was previously published as follows:


It has been reformatted and slightly revised for inclusion as a chapter in this dissertation.

This paper seeks to critically interrogate how a collaboratory\(^5\) approach could articulate complex relationships between childhoods and energies (what we term *childhoods-energies*). It aims to extend the forms, processes, and practices associated with commonplace understandings of energy, holding divergent childhoods-energies in productive tension. Our analyses are based on the observation that, in many (especially Minority North) contexts, energy is associated with sets of (predominantly neoliberal) discourses and modes of governance that are narrowly instrumental. Energy—especially in the terms of economic and/or environmental debate—is considered to be a resource that powers human endeavour and a force that is subject to the measurement imperatives of commodification. Throughout our research and the examples detailed in this paper, we shift from tightly constrained definitions of energy and instead engage the term *energetic phenomena*, which refers to any and all practices, flows, affects, and material processes that are understood as energy, from kinesthetic energies of bodily movements, to emotional and spiritual energies attached to place. Thus, childhoods-energies can be

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\(^5\) The term *collaboratory* deliberately combines and questions the ideas of collaboration and laboratory to emphasize the coproduction of experimental ways of producing research “data” through engaged practices involving academics, practitioners, and children. Please see the Introduction to the special issue [title] for a more general discussion of collaboratories; the methodology section of this paper provides details and examples of how the collaboratories in our projects were constituted.
conceptualized “in terms of metabolism, embodiment, socialisation and process” (Kraftl, 2020, p. 139). Our refusal to organize energies into concrete categories highlights how categorizations of energies “slip” and move in and out of each other and leaves open reconfiguring understandings of children’s relations with and to energies. This openness to deep consideration of the multitude of relations children have with energy demands that we enter this work, not already knowing how children should come into relation with energy, but acknowledging that these relations are already present. In our paper, then, we cannot offer ways to “teach” children about energy or offer specific ways in which energy should be positioned in environmental education—although other ways of knowing and learning about energy could potentially emerge from an openness to engaging with energetic phenomena.

Our broad contention is that narrowly instrumental conceptualizations of energy are also refracted within the ways in which childhoods-energies are usually understood. Critically, children’s geographers and other childhood scholars have, despite a longstanding engagement with environmental issues, rarely considered energy in either theoretical or empirical terms. In one sense, this is surprising given the absolute centrality of fossil fuels to the constitution of most childhoods. In another—as we outline below—given the intangibility of energy in its manifold guises, this is less surprising, since energy represents a slippery, elusive object of inquiry, unlike other socio-environmental-material processes with which childhood scholars have engaged.

Despite the relative absence of scholarship around childhoods-energies, this paper is nonetheless situated within two small subsets of work. On the one hand, children’s learning about energy forms a fairly small element of larger literatures about environmental education (Chawla & Cushing, 2007; Hursh et al., 2015; de Hoop, 2017; Rousell & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2020; Walker, 2021). Central here has been a focus on children’s transmission of knowledge about energy to other generations, questioning how children can influence (especially) older family members’ energy behaviours (e.g., Merritt et al., 2019). Moreover, the concept of energy literacy has had limited purchase in attempts to understand how knowledge about energy resources and
behaviours may translate into children’s self-reported feelings about their agency in bringing about change (Aguirre-Bielschowsky et al., 2017; DeWaters & Powers, 2011).

On the other hand, a still-smaller body of scholarship has assessed children’s domestic energy consumption. Significantly, this work generally draws on approaches from engineering and computing disciplines and hence positions children rather uniformly and instrumentally as “users” of energy technologies, such as thermostats, solar lamps and digital apps (Beck et al., 2019; Haunstrup Christensen & Rommes, 2019). Drawing again on measurable, commoditized understandings of energy, it has shown that children tend to use less energy in the home than do adults and are often more effective at saving energy (Wallis et al., 2016). Although these two types of scholarship offer important considerations towards sustainability discourses, they (re)produce commonplace or scientific understandings of energy in which energy is able to be concretely measured in its ability to be saved or wasted. We do draw attention, however, to very recent attempts to map children’s experiences of multiple, intersecting resources. Theorizing them as resource “nexuses”—such as water-energy-food—geographers have demonstrated how children articulate connections between different resources in ways that are more finegrained and multifarious than top-down policy approaches to governing “trade-offs” between such resources (e.g., Kraftl et al., 2019; Walker, 2020). Nevertheless, critically, energy remains a fairly elusive, slippery phenomenon in such nexus approaches—often positioned secondarily to water and food given the more obvious ways in which the latter can be visualized, felt, and narrated within (children’s) everyday lives.

The above nexus approaches form one touchstone for this paper, since they begin to demonstrate how childhood scholars might account for more complex, multiple imbrications of childhoods and energies. A final, nascent approach to childhoods-energies—based on the concept of energetic phenomena—offers a second touchstone. In a chapter dedicated to energetic phenomena, and drawing on a range of common worlds, new materialist, and critical race theories, Kraftl (2020) argues for more diverse but “smaller” stories (also see A. Taylor, 2020) about energy. Unlike nexus approaches, his
theorization of energetic phenomena is centred upon energy (or energies), and the energy stories that extend beyond energy-as-“resource.”

If childhoods-energies are conceptualized in the above ways, then a third, broader touchstone for this paper is burgeoning work within childhood studies that takes nonrepresentational, new materialist, and/or common worlds approaches to children’s interactions with and as more-than-human materialities (e.g., Blaise & Hamm, 2020; Nxumalo, 2019a; Rautio, 2013; A. Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2018). As Horton and Kraftl (2018) argue, however, a key preoccupation of that work has been with bounded “things”—like toys or animals—that are identifiable, determinate, and narrate-able.

Energy, however, a little like water, is less graspable. Energy—and its lack—operates through modalities of stillness and activity, dispersal and accumulation. Energy, like water, operates across micro and macro scales, pooling, flowing, often unnoticed, while carrying with it physical and social phenomena (Hadfield-Hill & Zara, 2019; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Clark, 2016). For energy, like water, place is surprisingly pivotal, since it is the actions of both—and humans’ attempts to harness them—that literally shape the physical, social, political-economic, and cultural specificities of places.

Yet, unlike water, energy has a less visceral, visible, material presence: It can be experienced and witnessed through its manifestations, but really only grasped through dedicated technologies (such as smart metres), self-reported or observed bodily experiences (e.g., “I have no energy after lunch”; “the children are full of energy since they didn’t play outside”), or more speculative, metaphorical forms of storying that have yet to be systematically developed by childhood scholars. This paper’s key contribution is to bear witness to some of these forms of storying—based on collaboratory styles of thinking, writing, and doing—to examine, think-with, and juxtapose childhoods-energies in plural ways. To do so, we first provide an overview of the two collaboratories in Canada and the United Kingdom on which this paper is based. We then present a series of extended, overlapping, but also divergent stories about childhoods-energies. These vignettes are interspersed with analytical reflections that draw out the different kinds of
energies that emerged through our collaboratories. The first set of vignettes focuses on place and the second more specifically on childhoods-energies.

Working through energy collaboratories

The stories told in the rest of this paper are based upon two collaboratories (in London, Ontario, Canada and Birmingham, UK), which formed part of the Climate Action Childhood Network. As outlined by Blaise, Kraftl, and Pacini-Ketchabaw (forthcoming), collaboratories bring together collaboration with experimentation, drawing on feminist, new materialist, and common worlds approaches to witnessing how childhoods are constituted through more-than-human processes (A. Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2018). Mirroring to an extent participatory approaches to childhood research, both collaboratories under discussion in this paper brought together academics with adults and children in a range of educational settings, including early childcare centres, a nursery, and a secondary school. Nonacademic partners were involved from the start (including in the research funding application), such that all partners codesigned experimental activities that sought to generate new ways to understand climate action. As well as being tied together by their conceptual framing and by similar methods (such as walking-with/through urban landscapes), the two collaboratories were also connected through their mutual focus on energy. However, as we highlight, the priorities of the two groups, and the specificities of the two locales, meant that energy was interpreted in often divergent ways.

The energy collaboratory in London, Ontario, is based on the traditional lands of the Anishinabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Attawandaron peoples. More than 75% of London residents were born in Canada, speak predominately English, and do not identify as a visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2019). In the London collaboratory, researchers worked as pedagogists with children and educators at Creekhill Childcare

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6 A pedagogist is a role in Ontario and British Columbia, Canada. Pedagogists work alongside educators and children to “envision pedagogical connections and projects to provoke educational processes that, through interdisciplinary and provocative questions, ideas, theories, materials, relationships . . . deepen and complexify strong, situated pedagogical work in early childhood contexts” (Land et al., 2020c, p. 2).
Centre from Fall 2017 until Fall 2019. The mode of engaging was through weekly walks to a local cemetery—Woodland Cemetery—which has a long and cherished history in London. The first body was buried in the cemetery in 1879 (Hord, 2017), and the cemetery is still active today. Despite the common association between cemeteries and death, Woodland Cemetery is a vibrant place where animals mingle among tombstones and mausoleums, mature trees and flora. The educators and children at Creekhill Child Care have been visiting the cemetery for several years and were excited to share their love for it with us. After our introduction to the cemetery, we decided that weekly walks to the cemetery with children would help us think about how we might engage with the complex human and more-than-human presences of this place.

To think with childhoods-energies in ways that transcend humancentric energy-use discourses, we grounded our work in earth-based feminist spiritualities, following witch and ecofeminist Starhawk (2004), and a common worlds theoretical framework to attend to the (re)convening assemblages of human and more-than-human life forms. Specifically, we enacted a methodology of (re)visiting. (Re)visiting happened in two specific ways: we returned to the same space within the cemetery on weekly walks; and, through engagement with various traces of documentation, we (re)visited our initial questions about human and more-than-human entanglements in the cemetery. Thinking with Haraway (2008, 2016) and Stengers (2018a), we conceptualized (re)visiting as an ethical practice to linger with the tensions of our engagement and to resist the allure of “doing” research amenable to solution-based, indisputable depictions of childhood-energies.

Birmingham, in the West Midlands region of the UK, can be described as an energycentric metropolis. It is situated in an area fertile with coalfields with a historic network of canals utilized to transport coal around the country, thus playing a central role in Britain’s industrial revolution. Today, the city has transformed into the Midlands hub of knowledge and enterprise. The area is also a nexus for other related energies—most

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Other than the references to St Paul’s Community Development Trust, all names of childcare/learning centres, educators, and children are pseudonyms.
notably its long and complex history as a key destination for migrants to the UK, some of whom moved to work in the city’s factories. Therefore the city’s past, present, and future are firmly rooted in energy production consumption and other, “embodied” forms of energy.

The Birmingham collaboratory was conducted in partnership with St Paul’s Community Development Trust, which runs a network of nurseries, daycare centres, a primary school, and a secondary school for students excluded from mainstream education. The Trust has worked in Balsall Heath since 1973, providing educational services for this former inner suburb of Birmingham built to service the city’s many industries during the 19th century and now a key area for the British South Asian (specifically Pakistani) community, who comprise 50% of the population.

The Birmingham collaboratory involved working with four groups, drawing on a suite of approaches that were both similar and divergent, depending on children’s ages. We played with energy and art by setting up play stations with a local nursery; we created artistic representations of energy via activities at a local summer play scheme; we analyzed energy use at local, national, and international levels while creating our own renewable energy outlets within the secondary school; we engaged a group of nursery students and their families in intergenerational energy walks. Artistic activities included the manipulation of paints with magnets, sponges, and other media to subject paint to various energies—magnetic, kinesthetic, and gravitational. Fairly “conventional” sessions with the older children—where they learned about renewable energy, for instance—were complemented and disrupted by attempts to think otherwise about energy (through walks around Balsall Heath, visits to local museums, and opportunities for free play and unstructured reflections/conversations about energy). In total, over 12 months, we collaborated with 49 children aged between 3 and 16, plus nursery workers and school teachers.

As the vignettes below demonstrate, the secondary school provided a unique space in which to develop a collaboratory. Working with students, primarily boys, excluded from
mainstream school, the school has greater freedom than many such schools, while—without romanticizing their behaviour—students’ diverse social, emotional, and behavioural differences meant that they each responded to different activities in different ways, with disconnections and connections forming in unexpected. This divergence is reflected in the vignettes, which themselves intentionally tell disjointed stories that cut back and forth across time and place, sometimes extending beyond obviously energy-related concerns. Comparing empires to spiders and questioning notions of absolute imperial power in the past, present, and future while listening to a soundtrack of Akala and Joyner Lucas enabled us to create energy-related knowledges in a local, national, and international context. Thus, what we figure here as forms of creativity enabled within the school have allowed us to pick apart particularly colonial elements of energy in a context (the UK) where climate change curricula have yet to be decolonized. They also offer points of connection with the reflections on settler colonialism introduced in the London, Ontario example.

The vignettes below have been chosen through a process of coproduction. First, and to reiterate the above points about our collaboratory, along with postqualitative approaches (e.g., Mayes, 2019), we resist any neat distinction between “data” and “analysis” since the vignettes themselves involved recursive reflection by a range of collaborators. This is why—despite the connections and divergences between the sites—we present vignettes from each collaboratory separately. Second, however, the authors have been involved in a lengthy process of sharing vignettes between the two case study sites, both through collaborative writing and presentation (including a Climate Action Childhood Network website, exhibition, and colloquium) and through directly comparing points of resonance—such as the significance of colonialism—across our experiences. We start with vignettes about place to ground our work historically and geographically, and then turn more specifically to childhoods-energies.
In the early spring of 2018, we began to visit the cemetery with the preschool and toddler classrooms. Two of the educators, Tala and Maddie, had visited the cemetery with children and on their own several times. Two other educators, Genna and Claire, were newer to the centre and had more recently begun exploring the cemetery with the children. On an initial visit with the preschool children, I observed their familiar routine for visiting the cemetery. To get to the cemetery from the childcare centre, they must cross a busy road mediated by an impossibly quick traffic light. Following centre-established practices, on walks to the cemetery, preschool children were tethered together by a long rope that looped around their waists. As we entered the cemetery, I asked if I could help take the children off the rope and was met with looks of uncertainty from Tala and Claire. They informed me that the children usually stay on the rope when walking through the cemetery.

When I met with Tala and Claire to discuss our noticing about our walk and the cemetery, I was curious about the rope. I asked why the children walked on the rope versus walking independently and was offered familiar and logical explanations of safety and surveillance. I proposed we let the children off the rope once we reached the cemetery and was met with hesitation. Claire was worried about being able to see all the children with the vastness of the space and differing heights of tombstones. I recalled an open, grassy space and wondered if maybe the children could explore this place off the rope. Over the next few days, Tala and Claire discussed with the children that the next time we visited the “deer park” (the child-friendly renamed cemetery), they would go “off rope” and that they were to remain in the grassy space, which was bounded by a circular road. On the day of our planned visit, I arrived at the centre and immediately felt tension and nervous energy from the educators and children. As we prepared to leave, we again reminded the children about going off the rope and the expectations for their behaviour. When we reached the cemetery and the children were let off the rope, the nervous energy from inside the childcare centre switched to exuberant energy as children
began to dart off in all directions, quickly followed by exasperated, somewhat chaotic energy as much of the visit involved adults chasing after children who were crossing onto the concrete boundaries and discouraging children from using sticks to hit small memorial plaques. By the time we left, the educators, children, and I were exhausted and frustrated with the push and pull of freedom and restriction. Our walk back to the centre included tears, tantrums, and exasperated sighs.

After the children were settled around the lunch tables, I moved towards Claire to discuss our encounter with the cemetery. I could tell she was frustrated and possibly even angry that I had suggested that we explore with the children not on ropes. She told me that she was frustrated. I asked why. The children were out of control, she said. I empathetically asked what specifically about their behaviour bothered her, and if the children had behaved in the same way at the centre playground, would she have been equally as frustrated. She explained that she was worried about what people may think of seeing children running around a cemetery. She was worried that people might find it disrespectful for children to be loud and boisterous in a “solemn, reverent” space. Sparked by these generative tensions, we began to think about this place, its multiplicity, and its various value-laden meanings. We considered the political constructions of the place itself and how, as subjectified humans, we are expected to behave there. These wonderings stayed with us for the duration of our pedagogical work together, and the cemetery remained a site of deep pedagogical exploration of place.

As mentioned in the introduction, we want to think about how we might conceptualize energies in ways that refuse anthropocentric logics of how energy can work for humans. Although we thought deeply about energy relations at both our sites, we thought of these relations in very different ways. We know that where we conducted our research mattered, and we feel it necessary to discuss how the specificities of place are inseparable from our reflections about energies.

The places that are the sites for each energy collaboratory are multilayered; to think about cemeteries, museums, suburban and industrial neighbourhoods, childcare centres, and
school classrooms in this way opens myriad conceptual entry points: colonialism, economics, education, ecology, geography, and geology. However, we clarify that we do not intend these different ways of thinking with place to offer more robust or complete conceptualizations of place but seek to think about place in multifarious, expansive ways that may contradict rather than complement each other. We offer this refusal of commensurability, acknowledging that it is an imperfect way to grapple with the complexities of situated entanglements of childhoods and energies, but we hope that we might nonetheless make visible how we independently and collectively grappled with thinking energy together.

Reflecting on the London example, we situate our reflections within place-based research with children, specifically in settler colonial states, which demands a careful attunement to how settler colonial logics circulate in geographical and environmental education (Nxumalo, 2016, 2019a; Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015; Tuck & McKenzie, 2014; Wildcat et al., 2014) as well as the inclusion of explicit decolonial agendas that disrupt the status quo transition of settler colonial land ethics (Calderon, 2014). Specifically related to the vignette above, the cemetery enacts what Nxumalo (2016) asserts is a fundamental aspect of settler colonialism: the remaking of Indigenous land into settler property. The cemetery, in which vast “natural” space is punctured by tombstones marking the burial plots of primarily settler bodies, is a stark representation of settler appropriation of Indigenous land. The worry that Claire voiced about how she and the children might be judged for their behaviour at the cemetery—the confluence of nervous, excited, and apparently inappropriate energies before, during, and after our visit—highlights internalized settler understandings of place. As settler researchers, we must remember colonial logics that have shaped the cemetery and therefore know that when we think about energy relations with this place, we are also thinking about colonial energy relations. Meaning that, because we are on colonized lands, we cannot extract our thinking about energy relations from how we are both implicated in and reproduce colonial ways of knowing this place. Knowing this, and acknowledging the responsibility to think about relations with place differently, we
experimented with ways in which we could conceptualize childhoods-energies outside of dominant ideologies that permeate “energy literacy” and instead engage with multiple energetic phenomena present in the cemetery. These are picked up in the second vignette from London, later in the paper. Meanwhile, we extend our discussion of “appropriate” (or not) behaviours and energies in the Birmingham vignettes.

**Birmingham: Peter and Arooj**

We had spent time in the classroom talking about the different ages in history: the iron age, the coal age, etcetera. As always, the sessions in the classroom were somewhat didactic. The boys seemed to dip in and out—physically and mentally—paying attention and asking questions at times, at other times completely ignoring James (who had been invited to talk about his knowledge of environmental issues in Birmingham). Nonetheless, aspects of what we had discussed—and of Birmingham’s long and famous industrial past—occasionally emerged in fragments of other conversations and happenings.

A couple of weeks later, we visited ThinkTank (a science museum) in Birmingham, located in one of Birmingham’s many former industrial areas. One of the boys mentioned canals, for which Birmingham is fairly famous. He asked if we could get energy from them. We talked a bit about what the canals were for, referring to some of the old factories that once stood (and in a few cases still stand) both near the museum and in the area around the school. There was some recognition that there was lots of energy in Birmingham in the past—the canal boats “moving stuff around” as one boy put it, and lots of energy being burned by factories. However, the conversation stopped almost as abruptly as it started when two of the boys walked off as one of the museum leaders was talking.

Fairly early on in our work with the school, we visited the Lapworth Museum, a museum of geology, at the University of Birmingham. The boys were fascinated by the exhibits showing fossils and the formation of fossil fuels. During one visit, the conversation steered towards the production of oil. Tony, one student, described eloquently how layers
of land form from dead plant and animal remains that eventually turn into oil and gas, which in turn is pumped to the surface. Tony then added, “But when you ruin things for the animals they come back at you, like what Moby Dick did.” One of the other boys noted that if we run out of fossil fuels we would have to wait millions of more years to get more. The fossil display sparked off a conversation about the future of fossil fuels. They commented that the future sources of fossil fuels could be human remains and food waste—specifically chicken bones.

Fast forward to a guided walk around the area near the school, and we are counting chimneys that, for the past two hundred years, like chimneys throughout the city, have been burning coal. The boys then admire the brickwork on the railway bridges that once carried coal-power steam locomotives (the lines are no longer running, although there are ambitious plans to bring back local trains). They stroke the bricks, commenting on their smoothness and colour, stained black by decades of coal and diesel smoke.

Reverting back to our time at the Lapworth Museum, we engaged in a play-initiated discussion that enabled us to time-hop 200 years prior to the heyday of colonialism, which in which Birmingham was deeply implicated in its role as a producer and consumer of energy during the British industrial revolution. Perhaps unexpectedly, the game that attracted the most attention was a large floor puzzle depicting a world map. Jake and Arooj talked about colonialism, sparked by the fact that Jake could easily name all of the Caribbean Islands. The source of this knowledge was his familial and ethnic background.

When the map had been pieced together, Jake stood over it, pointed at Britain, and said, “But I don’t understand, how did this little country take over the whole world?” This led to a range of views about the role of colonialism and the subsequent imperialism that controls the Global South to this day. The conversation then moved from colonialism and historical migration to Birmingham, to the migrant crisis in Europe, and to the energy required to travel to Britain. The students used their fingers to trace an outline of the best and worst routes into Europe, followed by a further discussion regarding why the UK (and Birmingham itself) was such a desirable location. The consensus was that crossing
the sea was too dangerous and a tremendous amount of energy would be required to swim it, despite there being fewer borders to cross.

The conversations about migration and race returned in the guided walk. Arooj found herself conversing with Jake again about the puzzle activity at the Lapworth. He explained how the activity really resonated with him given the racism that he, his family and friends had experienced. “It makes sense... If it’s taken hundreds of years for racism to develop, then it’s going to take hundreds of years to remove it, right? It is tiring.”

Again, we are curious about the multiple energetic phenomena that emerged in this vignette, and that in part were spawned by some more “conventional” educational encounters with energy (in discussions about renewable energy resources, for instance). A key point of connection with (but also divergence from) the Canadian collaboratory is the presence of death, and particularly a kind of awareness and speculation about the possibilities of decay for the production of energy. Indeed, to us, the boys’ discussions of fossil fuels—as they were produced in deep geological time and as they speared forwards into futures millions of years from now—echoed Haraway’s (2016) call for speculative narratives that acknowledge responsibility for land, and for land’s human and nonhuman inhabitants, both past and present. Particularly striking for us were the odd, quirky, playful kinds of care that the boys expressed—not only for microscopic lifeforms that had become oil and coal, but also for how animals (like Moby Dick) might “act back” and whose carcasses (like chickens’) we are throwing away right now but which might become fuel in the distant future. For us, this tying of children’s care for dead animals (compare Nelson, 2020) to the specificities of energy production was a way of exceeding the usual narratives associated with learning about fossil fuels.

A second key point of resonance with (and departure from) the Canadian cemetery is the discussion of colonialism. Canada and the UK were positioned very differently within—but also tied together by—historical processes of colonialism and the forms of racism that ensued, as the boys (many from Black and South Asian backgrounds, who had
themselves experienced racism) pointed out. These colonial processes and forms of racism are constitutive of Birmingham as a place, but also of Birmingham’s place in global political, economic, and cultural forms of exploitation and domination. On one hand, to use a term developed by Meagan at the cemetery, the constant revisiting of the puzzle at the Lapworth emphasized that scientific knowledge about the earth (expressed by the discipline of geology), the designation of epochs, and the exploitation of those knowledges were all made possible by colonial power (Jackson, 2015). On the other hand, albeit rather more implicitly, those forms of power are also expressed in the very physical fabric of Birmingham itself—in the geological and engineering knowledges it took to mine coal, to build and power factories, and to build the city of brick with its canals, chimneys, bridges, railways, and roads (all of which featured heavily in our walks and conversations). Those spaces are also under- and overwritten with other energies: the power struggles in the land grabs that took place during colonialism in a scramble for resources; the atrocious forms of racism (such as slavery and exploitation) that were perpetrated in the search for industrial “progress”; the energies of many generations of migrants who have travelled to Birmingham, including Balsall Heath itself; the constant drain (“it is tiring,” reminds Jake) as global majority people expend energy simply navigating the layering of colonialisms and racisms in city infrastructures that most white inhabitants simply do not see. As at the cemetery, our attunement to the specificities of place—with our collaborators—was one in which we sought to draw attention to what are often hidden histories and presences, which have their legacies in both urban places themselves and the ways that we view and act in them.

Childhoods-Energies—London, Ontario: Meagan

*In mid-spring, the educators, children, and I arrived at the grassy space in the cemetery that we had decided to revisit on our weekly walks. We had decided we wanted to stay with this specific spot. We wanted to think about what it meant for us to be in sustained relations with a specific place. We had been thinking with Starhawk’s (2004) Nine Ways of Observing and were considering her second provocation: to observe how energy*
comes into a system, specifically, how energy might be exchanged between us and the space we were (re)visiting.

When we arrived at the cemetery, the grass was glistening as the morning sun slowly dried the previous night’s dew. Genna, an educator, had been a happy participant in the walks to the cemetery since the inception of the pedagogical project but was unsure about the energetic and spiritual concepts we were discussing. For her, the concepts of spiritual energy threatened the “scientific” knowledge that she had been trained to promote in children’s learning. On this sunny morning, Genna began exploring the grassy space with the children and soon realized that the dew on the grass had soaked through her shoes and socks. Noting the uncomfortable feeling, she decided to remove her shoes and walk barefoot. The children quickly noticed and asked if they too could take off their shoes. Quick discussions were had by the educators, and despite the presence of goose droppings, a decision was made: Children could take off their shoes. As child shoes and adult shoes began to line the border of our grassy space, something shifted. As I had mentioned, we had been revisiting this specific space for several months. Educators worried that, at best, children were bored, and that, at worst, we were denying them developmental opportunities to explore other spaces in the cemetery. As bare feet slid through glossy grass and toddling children experimented with walking on unfamiliar terrain, a renewed vitality circulated through the space.

When I arrived at the centre the next day, Genna excitedly greeted me and told me about some reading material she had found the previous evening. She was affected by her barefoot encounter with the grassy space and wanted to know more about energy and grounding—"contact with the Earth’s surface electrons by walking barefoot outside” (Chevalier et al., 2012, p. 2). Genna had found resources that discussed the health benefits of grounding and was excited to share them with me, other educators, and families through a shared documentation board displayed in the childcare centre. Genna, the children, and a couple of educators continued to take off their shoes when we visited the grassy space.
Thinking about energy is tricky. Even the London energy collaboratory’s commitment to think energy through ecofeminist spiritualities, in which spiritual relations with the more-than-human are considered valid and important (Starhawk, 2004), is disrupted through human-centric health-benefit justifications demonstrated in the above vignette. As researchers and educators, we knew that bare feet on the ground did something—they moved bodies in new ways and created new ways of knowing the cemetery. Children and educators “knew” something about energy relations with the cemetery. But focusing on spiritual energetic phenomena did not easily align with how we had known energy before thinking with Starhawk. Genna’s initial hesitation to think about spiritual energy is not uncommon. Educational allegiance to Science has effectively delegated spiritual and bodily knowings, especially those associated with the feminine, to the metaphorical dustbin of hysteria and superstition (see Skott-Myhre, 2017; Starhawk, 1982). So it is hard to stay with spiritual knowledges, especially in educational spaces that undoubtedly privilege the nexus approach to “resource” knowledges discussed in the introduction to this paper. Refusal of dominant theorizing of energy is risky for educators, whose professional responsibilities are frequently positioned as preparing students for “formal” education (Brown, 2015) and inoculating children against disordered (read nonscientific) thinking (Genovese, 2005). We cannot necessarily step outside our neoliberal, rational subjectivities; instead, we need to find ways that disrupt scientific/spiritual binaries that position these binaries as “if this, then not that” ways of thinking about energy. By focusing our attention on observing and sensing the subtle ways energies flow through the world alongside more recognizable scientific principles of observation, we can begin to reconcile theories of science and spiritualities (Starhawk, 2004). Gemma’s offering of kinetic grounding through barefootedness did not detract from our focus on thinking spiritual energy—consciousness “acts in both overt and subtle ways and . . . energy-flows set the patterns that result in manifestation or form” (Starhawk, 2004, p. 33). Thinking these energies together deepened how we could come to know the multiple, partial ways these energies interweave to tell different kinds of energy stories.
The purpose of bringing together these ways of knowing energy is not to “convert” to beliefs of earth-based feminist spirituality or to advocate for rationalizing barefootedness by categorizing it as kinetic but rather to consider how we might conceptualize childhoods-energies outside of dogmatic scientific discourses so that we begin to make visible the interwoven webs of energy-stories that may encompass both the spiritual and then scientific. Similar to the interplay among kinetic, kinesthetic, bodily, and social energies experienced at the ThinkTank in Birmingham (see below), the convergences and divergences of spiritual and kinetic energies made us pay close attention to the intangible, less bounded forces of energy and the way these energies bump against and affect the ways in which we conceptually and materially experience energy.

**Birmingham: Peter and Arooj**

*During our visits to the ThinkTank (see Birmingham vignette 1), the main purpose was a session facilitated by the museum’s staff, during which the students used LEGO™ to learn about energy. Specifically, the aim of the workshops was to build a wind turbine from LEGO™. As always, the boys engaged with different aspects of the workshops at their own pace. Some wandered around the room as Sophie (the session lead) provided an introduction to different kinds of fossil fuels and different kinds of renewable energy (including wind). Others sat and listened. Others sat with their heads down on the table under their arms. We researchers already knew that some of the students hardly slept at night, spending time gaming online or navigating challenging domestic circumstances. They often slept at school, or subsisted on energy drinks.*

*Our group got on fairly well. Samir, one of the boys, would periodically get up to walk around the room and then come back and work in detail on our turbine. Just as we were finishing our windmill, there was an enormous “WHOOP!” from across the room. Two of the boys fist-bumped as Sophie turned on a large fan (which was so powerful we could feel it from about 10 metres away). It drove the turbine. The boys were ecstatic.*
By this point, we all had finished our turbine and were ready to have a go ourselves. We faced it into the wind, connected some small bulbs—and it worked! Again there were whoops, and Samir (who was very thin) almost seemed to be blown backwards, with a bemused smile on his face.

Then a few things happened all at once. Back with another group, the fan blew so hard that one of the sails from the windmill became detached and flew across the room (about 20 metres). Meanwhile, on another table, a group discovered kinetic and embodied energy as, upon removing a piece from their turbine, the piece flicked across the table and into a pupil’s mouth, to uproarious laughter (he was okay). During the creation of the wind turbine, the conversation kept drifting in and out of the future of renewable energy with conversations about whether or not it would be possible to take a rocket to space and collect solar energy to power things on Earth, and what a garden would look like if it contained a wind turbine field.

Reflecting on our experiences at the ThinkTank, we are constantly drawn to how—as in the first Birmingham vignette—different kinds of energies are constantly interweaving: the differential levels of bodily energy (depending on levels of sleep the night before and energy drinks consumed), which spawned different forms of “appropriate” engagement (however defined) with the tasks; the (dis)appearance of formal learning about energy sources and technologies, often sudden and unexpected but sometimes (literally) generative of new connections, ideas, and “success” in making turbines; and, the presence of different forms of kinetic and kinesthetic energy. As much as the words we used to describe barefoot walking at the cemetery in London—and the emotional and spiritual registers they afforded—the vignettes afford a bare attempt to witness these different kinds of energy and the emotions associated with them (such as punctuations of uproarious laughter). In particular, the kinetic energy of wind power as air moved across the room, the kinesthetic energy as the boys moved around the room, and the interaction of the two as a rather bemused Samir seemed almost to be blown backwards by a powerful fan were only rendered apparent through particular kinds of material and embodied effects.
Tellingly, both in resonance and in dissonance from the spiritual energies emergent at the cemetery in London, the stuttering, interweaving, multiple forms of energy that (partially) presented themselves to us at the ThinkTank were profoundly effective and affecting. First, and in direct contrast with the London example, as they intersected these manifold energies actually enabled energy “facts,” energy “stories,” and energy “futures” to emerge—albeit perhaps alternative forms of knowledge that brought to mind speculation about extraterrestrial forms of energy harvesting and enabled the students to position and make claims about energy technologies (especially wind power). Thus, it became evident that learning about energy, which has been such a preoccupation of the limited extant studies about childhoods-energies, was embedded in and emerged from a range of other ways of relating to, expressing, interacting with, and feeling (about) energy (Merritt et al., 2019).

Second, however, and extending this last point, we briefly connect this second vignette from Birmingham to the first by continuing to highlight the workings of social forces (if not social energies) as childhoods-energies are articulated. Specifically, alongside Jake’s striking observation that living with racism and the legacies of colonial pasts is tiring, that tiredness is intersectional and multifaceted—constituted as much by the boys’ domestic lives and what we knew to be various forms of socioeconomic disadvantage as well as race. This is not to say that either race or socioeconomic status determined their tiredness (and their lack of sleep), but that these intersecting factors—as well as their gender, age, and, in some cases, emotional and mental health—contributed to the levels of bodily energy they were able to bring to the turbine-building task. Hence, this paper builds on recent developments in theorizing the intersectionality of children’s lives (e.g., Konstantoni & Emejulu, 2017), and particularly those around what social (and educational) institutions deem problem children (Knight, 2019), by focusing on the ways in which different energetic phenomena constitute and are constituted by those intersections (compare Kraftl, 2020).
Conclusions

Putting our divergent encounters with energies and place into conversation with each other allowed us to think further with what we have termed childhoods-energies outside of considerations about how to “teach” or “learn” with children about energy. The enmeshment of energy-stories from the London and Birmingham collaboratories made it impossible to think about energy outside its relation to epistemological constructions of “good” knowledge, the histories and vibrancies of the places where we worked, and the socio-political implications of our lived experiences and those of the educators and children we thought energy alongside. While we have not offered a blueprint of how to do energies research or education with children, we have challenged dominant ways of conceptualizing childhoods-energies by comparing overlapping yet divergent collaboratory approaches to generating energy-stories that are arguably more diverse, place-aware, and careful than those that have been told previously.

Thinking with energy and its slippery intangibilities demanded that we create aggregative processes to understand these energy relations, which in turn have highlighted energy-stories at multiple scales. Central has been a recognition of the intersection of energy—as an elusive, (im)material force that produces bodily, emotional, even spiritual effects—with colonial relations and power and with forms of racial and socioeconomic difference that may well be tied to those colonial histories. We wonder what this type of approach might offer to childhood studies in terms of other elusive objects of study—if, perhaps, it may create conditions where we might stay with more-than-social tensions and troubles writ through intangible environmental-material processes (Haraway, 2016). In a similar vein, and with our sometimes stuttering and partial attempts to compare and speculate about resonances and dissonances between London and Birmingham, we wonder whether childhood scholars might further develop ways to examine forms of (in)commensurability across sites both proximate and distant (see also Land et al., 2020b). Far from a call for “internationally comparative” studies, embracing
incommensurability would be to leave open the question of what emerges when stories of childhoods-energies (and other matters) are shared and presented alongside one another.
Chapter 5. Doing Pedagogical Conversations (with Spirituality and Fat) as Pedagogists in Early Childhood Education

This chapter, coauthored with Nicole Land, was previously published as follows:
It has been reformatted and slightly revised for inclusion as a chapter in this dissertation.

Amid an intensifying push, in the field and postsecondary professional training programs, toward deepening the pedagogical character of early childhood education (ECE) in Canada, early years programs are increasingly creating opportunities for educators to connect with “pedagogists,” “pedagogistas,” or “pedagogical facilitators” to support their everyday practice. Who pedagogists are, what pedagogists do, and how the work of a pedagogist unfolds is a local (Ainsworth, 2016; Atkinson & Biegun, 2017; Kummen & Hodgins, 2019; Nxumalo, 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Hodgins, 2017; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2006; Vintimilla, 2018) and often controversial question. As evidenced by the multiple responsibilities, educational paradigms, and practices that pedagogist roles are justified through in various programs and municipalities (from quality assurance to promoting emergent curriculum through developing locally responsive pedagogies), the actions of a pedagogist are inseparable from the dominant political and ontological climate the pedagogist confronts in education spaces. That is, the work of a pedagogist is entangled with the situated contours of ongoing settler colonialism, neoliberal educational imperatives, environmental precarities, systemic inequities and injustices, and privileged and silenced knowledges of childhood, learning, curriculum, pedagogy, relationality, and land, and with how these forces shape local possibilities for pedagogical collaboration.
Concurrently, the emerging role of a pedagogist in the Canadian context is indebted to the continuing Reggio Emilia education project in Italy (Nxumalo et al., 2018; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015; Vintimilla, 2018). In Reggio Emilia (a place and a paradigm), the value, work, and training of a pedagogista is articulated in response to local politics, inheritances, and precarities. The role of a pedagogist in Canada is, then, also a question of how we might mobilize, in this place, these borrowed, displaced, and extracted practices of what it means to do pedagogical work. This means that pedagogists must answer to the unequal worlds that children, families, communities, and educators inherit while simultaneously crafting and recrafting the practices, relations, and accountabilities that shape the role of a pedagogist as one of creating pedagogies that answer to the situated politics and precarities of this place.

We, Nicole and Meagan, are pedagogists who locate our collaborations with early childhood educators in Ontario and British Columbia at this doubled, entangled responsibility: We work to answer to multiple histories, inheritances, lives, and precarities while constantly putting at risk the practices, knowledges, and relations that we work toward responding to our times with. Our intention in this article is twofold. We want to (1) put into public the imperfect interdisciplinary pedagogical conversations that we have as pedagogists who centre particular concerns, interests, and accountabilities. In the body of the article, we (2) hinge our conversation upon our discomfort with (and desire to reimagine) how developmental perspectives in dominant ECE in Canada shape children’s experiences that inform our respective research: children’s spiritual knowings for Meagan, and for Nicole, children’s relations with fat. Arguing that engagements with spirituality and fat are highly regulated, we propose that different possibilities for attuning to spiritual understandings of the more-than-human world and to childhood obesity become possible when we trace how our situated connections with spirituality and fat layer upon, diverge from, and complexify one another.

In this article we share a moment—a narration from a pedagogical inquiry Meagan is contributing to—that animates one of our many pedagogical conversations. This narration is one example of how we bring the work of our various roles to each other and
is part of a larger SSHRC-funded project in which Meagan engages with educators and children in a childcare centre on a weekly basis. The children and educators from a toddler classroom and a preschool classroom embark on weekly walks to a local cemetery along with Meagan and other researchers who participate in this action research in the role of a pedagogist. Our pedagogical conversations are frequent and varied, but this particular moment is one that we have spent much time thinking with and we offer it here as one example of how we put our work into conversation. We each offer a mainstream developmental reading of the moment, gesture toward a tentative reengagement grounded in postdevelopmental pedagogies, and then weave our thinking with spirituality and fat together to complexify, trouble, and put at risk our propositions. The back and forth nature of our reading of this moment is deliberate and puts into practice Stenger’s (2018) concept of relaying, in which the passing of ideas back and forth does not refute but rather always adds to and complexifies. Putting our work into conversation is, we contend, a necessary practice for our work as pedagogists as we endeavour to answer to the complex education spaces we inherit and recreate with educators and children. Pedagogical conversations pull our theorizing and practices into uneasy, difficult, often contradictory relations that help to make visible some edges, exclusions, and potential futures we enact. To begin, we offer our tentative approach to being pedagogists.

Responding to Situated and Urgent Inheritances as a Pedagogist

It is with caution that we offer our understanding of what it means to be a pedagogist. We want to keep open the question of what responding, as a pedagogist, to the specificities of the Canadian ECE context that we inherit and work within might demand. We have become pedagogical coconspirators for multiple reasons: we share methodological and theoretical commitments to unsettling hegemonic developmental discourses in settler colonial Canada; our projects contribute to wider research-practice collectives (e.g., Early Childhood Pedagogies Collaboratory and Climate Action Childhood Network) where we
are encouraged to constantly think together; we work collaboratively, as part of a larger team, to support community-based pedagogists in a province-wide professional learning initiative in Ontario (the Provincial Centre of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care); and as doctoral students and early career researchers working in Ontario and British Columbia, we have woven our scholarly activities together as we have grown our research programs, such that we have exchanged so many drafts, theories, tensions, and stories that disentangling our work seems impossible. These activities are, for us, entangled: Our pedagogical work across multiple projects and collaborations is always woven with our research, practice, and curriculum making. While we resist offering a singular, universalized way of embodying this role, we do want to make clear that the conversations we share are of a certain mode and meaning. For us, being pedagogists is grounded in a heart-filled trust (an idea we borrow from our colleague Dr. Cristina D. Vintimilla, who reminds us that pedagogists’ labour is always “heart work”) we place in our collaboration. We conceptualize our pedagogist relationship as more than an acknowledgement that our work has put us in relation with each other; we consider it an achievement that always carries the risk of failure (Stengers, 2018a). In our pedagogical relations we ask each other strange questions (Stengers, 2018a)—questions that do not lend themselves to easy answers and often rip open ideas that we have held dear in our research and our work with children and educators. Although our pedagogical conversations are generative, they are rarely easy. They require we have a specific form of trust, one that is based on a feminist ethic in which we refuse to compete with each other as neoliberal academic spaces often ask us to. We offer each other immanent critique (Stengers, 2008b) as we acknowledge that our critical questions become generative parts of our conversational assemblages. We do not perpetuate critique that seeks to break down or falsify the ideas we offer each other.

Echoing our colleagues Nxumalo, Vintimilla, and Nelson (2018), we feel uneasy about “the currency and privilege that . . . the job title that we have each gone by for several years, pedagogista, carr[ies]. . . . Our grapplings stem from what at times feels like an all-too-smooth assimilation as ‘best practice’ of pedagogies and curriculum developed within
very particular understandings in their original context in Italy” (p. 2). Our pedagogy
tenors—Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Dr. B. Denise Hodgins, and Dr. Cristina D.
Vintimilla—have taught us that pedagogical collaborations are pedagogical in their
difficulty. To create possibilities for doing pedagogy beyond neoliberal logics requires
that we notice, and become suspicious, when our practices become habitual,
transferrable, or exceptionalized. Learning from Indigenous scholars who refuse and
reconfigure the Euro-Western foundations of pedagogy and curriculum (L. T. Smith et
al., 2019; Z. Todd, 2016b; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013), we take seriously that
our work as pedagogists is never removed from the violent histories of education projects
in Canada and that thinking about pedagogy as white settlers is never inherently
redemptive, innocent, just, nor equitable (Tuck & Yang, 2012). To reify the role of a
pedagogist in Canada as a universalizable or desirable position for “improving” education
is to once again participate in neoliberal education projects. In our work, we are inspired
by Nxumalo’s (with Vintimilla & Nelson, 2018) contention that

taking seriously the settler colonial and anti-Black foundations of education in
North America means that the work of the pedagogista in supporting early
childhood educators in their pedagogical and curricular encounters needs to
include finding ways to respond to these emplaced violences from a speculative
imaginary that recognizes yet is not defined by erasure, displacement, and
dehumanization (p. 16).

We understand our role as pedagogists as negotiating this layered practice of, as Nxumalo
(with Vintimilla & Nelson, 2018) contends, recognizing but not being defined by the
complex, often violent everyday worlds we must respond to through our pedagogical
work with educators. Our work as pedagogists never rests with critical analysis and also
never ignores the urgent need for critical engagements with contemporary and historical
inequities. Consistent with articulations of pedagogist accountabilities offered by
Atkinson and Biegun (2017), Hodgins (2015), and Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015), we
anchor our practice in the noninnocent, nonredemptive, situated ethical and political
intentions, convictions, and response-abilities (Haraway, 2016) we carry as pedagogists within neoliberal and colonial ECE spaces in Canada.

**Staking (or, Beginning to Notice) Our Pedagogist Intentions and Accountabilities**

There are practices we hold as fundamental to our role as pedagogists in ECE in Canada: fostering ongoing collaborative pedagogical conversations with educators (Atkinson & Biegun, 2017; Hodgins, 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind, & Kocher, 2016); participating in pedagogical collectives that see education as a common, public sphere (Berger, 2015; Hodgins, Atkinson, & Wanamaker, 2017; Vintimilla, 2018); noticing how we are implicated in, shaped by, and accountable to everyday pedagogical relations (Land & Danis, 2016; Moss, 2019; Nxumalo et al., 2018); attending and responding to multiple lives and precarities by understanding education as more than only a human concern (Haro Woods et al., 2018; Nxumalo, 2017; A. Taylor, 2017); deepening the pedagogical character of everyday ECE practices through approaches to documentation and dialogue that emphasize the complexity and politicality of these practices (Hodgins et al., 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015); and crafting tentative, responsive, locally relevant pedagogies with children, educators, and lively worlds (A. Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015; Wapenaar & DeSchutter, 2018; Yazbeck & Danis, 2015). We also attend to our situated, personal answerabilities as pedagogists: What might Meagan (a pedagogist with a particular history, concerns, and relations) need to answer to in pedagogical collaborations? How might Nicole (as a different pedagogist with a different history, concerns, and relations) be implicated differently in pedagogical commons? Our responses to these questions are, of course, mobile and constantly reforming. However, we take seriously that, as specific bodies in specific places in specific entanglements, our work as pedagogists might hold shared orientations but will never be entirely coincident. Our own pedagogist work, though marked by different places and response-abilities, is acutely entangled with each other’s pedagogist work. How, then, might we begin to notice our emplaced answerabilities as pedagogists who are in constant conversation?
As we think with the dominant knowledge politics we inherit in Euro-Western education, where some ways of knowing are hierarchically emphasized (e.g., school readiness, self-regulation, literacy, and numeracy; Salazar Pérez & Cahill, 2016) over others (Indigenous cosmologies, bodied knowledges, more-than-human relations), we feel strongly that as pedagogists we must refute or complexify these taken-for-granted epistemic structures. We see our work as a feminist citational practice (Ahmed, 2013, 2017; Tuck et al., 2015): We are accountable to the knowledges we centre and silence, and to the histories, inheritances, lives, and worldviews that we presence and erase in our pedagogist work. Accordingly, we each locate our scholarship at unique intersections of education and early childhood studies, an interdisciplinary field. Meagan’s pedagogical inquiry research investigates children’s spirituality and Nicole’s work complexifies childhood obesity. These two concerns intersect different academic disciplines (spirituality: religious studies, pagan studies, holistic learning; obesity: physiology, critical obesity studies, critical health education). We approach these concerns with shared theoretical loyalties, including feminist new materialisms (Barad, 2007), feminist science studies (Haraway, 2016; Stengers, 2008a) and common worlds perspectives8 (A. Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2018). Exploring possibilities toward postdevelopmental pedagogies (Blaise, 2014) is a core ethical and political intention for us as we work to respond to the normalizing interpretive clout held by developmental approaches to understanding children’s learning in ECE (Burman, 2017; Dahlberg et al., 2013; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). We are learning that we must activate the theoretical approaches we have in common in very different ways to respond to the specificities of thinking with spiritual knowings and with fat. Our shared unease with how dominant conceptions of spirituality and obesity shape children’s relations with spiritual knowings and fat in particular human-centered and developmental ways (spirituality: Lideman & Aarnio, 2007; Matheijsn, 2010; Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013; obesity: Elliott, 2016; B. Evans, 2010; B.

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8 Scholars and educators who think with a common worlds perspective (please see Common Worlds Research Collective, www.commonworlds.net) work to unsettle Euro-Western anthropocentric and developmental educational inheritances (Nelson et al., 2018; Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017) by responding to how human lives are entangled with, and accountable to, complex relations with more-than-human others amid ongoing settler colonialism and ecological precarities.
Evans & Colls, 2011; Ward, 2016) partially informs what it is we want to answer to as pedagogists.

This article is one thread of our work toward articulating why it matters that we collaborate as pedagogists (and as researchers) within the specific Canadian ECE contexts we work in. Borrowing inspiration from the interdisciplinary ethics enacted by Haraway (2016) and Stengers (2008a; Tola, 2016), wherein generating knowledge is a practice of risk, accountability, and response-ability, we argue that intentionally immersing our work in uneasy dialogue can expand our methods for attuning to children’s relations with spirituality and fat. Our overarching intention is to make visible the uncertain, tense, and generous work of following how we might “do” pedagogist dialogues. Thinking with a story of a “magic tree,” which Meagan experienced and recounted to Nicole, we experiment with how actively entangling our projects might work to expand our possibilities for doing spirituality and fat otherwise. We offer speculative postdevelopmental engagements to share with one another how we activate some of our shared theoretical loyalties differently as we attend to our respective concerns with spirituality and fat. Following this, we place our understandings into conversation to trace how they might, and might not, respond to our accountabilities as pedagogists.

**Doing Spirituality and Fat with Pedagogical Conversations: A Magic Tree Story**

Walking along a busy road on the lands of the Attawandaran, Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Leni-Lunaape peoples in what is currently known as London, Ontario, Canada, a group of young children and adults head to a local cemetery. Educators and children have been visiting this place, which they have named The Deer Park, for a long time. Woodland Cemetery has been operating in London since 1830 (Woodland Cemetery, Mausoleum, and Crematorium, 2018). We share this place with wildlife such as deer, turkeys, geese, squirrels, and robins. The cemetery is vast and has
many areas to explore. For the past month, we have chosen to stay in a grassy area that is home to mature trees and two intriguing drainage grates.

At first we feel uncomfortable remaining in this space—we feel itchy desires in our bodies to move on, to explore. Educators and researchers resist the urge to move on and encourage children to remain in the grassy space and notice what this place offers to us. Many children experiment with dropping leaves and pine cones into the drainage grates, hypothesizing about crocodiles who live there and feed off these offerings of sticks and cones; some children find memorial plaques on stones and tree trunks as adults attentively discuss the meanings of these plaques, pushing through our own uncomfortableness of discussing death with children. We offer explanations such as “someone is buried here” and “this is a place where people can remember people they love once they have died.” A child runs to Meagan as she pauses with a group of children at the drainage grate. “People are buried here,” the child informs the group, as she runs back to explore the plaque.

Alongside an educator, Anne-Marie, some children begin to explore a large beech tree, running their hands against the knotty tree bark, moss, and nut shells. After we return to the centre, Anne-Marie tells Meagan of a child, Leonard⁹, discovering a knot in the tree: Leonard begins to press a large piece of bark into the knot and declares that the tree is magic and the bark is a magic key that provides entry to the tree. The educator recalls the palpable change in the children’s energy as they run and dance and find more magical keyholes in the ground. Anne-Marie describes another shift in the children, a shift from questioning to knowing. The children know that the tree is magic; collective meaning making unfolds with the tree and bark and children and uneasy relations with death. As Meagan and Anne-Marie reflect on this moment, the magic tree feels important, like a consequential relationship we have crafted with this place. The magic tree also raises many questions: Should we “correct” the children and provide scientific explanations for knots in bark? How do conversations about magic connect to the theories on life and

⁹ All children’s names are pseudonyms.
death we make visible within the cemetery? How might we respond to children’s running and dancing with the magic tree? How do we, as researchers and educators, make meaning of the magic tree with children—and how do we collectively unsettle our familiar habits for coming to understand with the magic tree?

Thinking Spirituality and Fat in Conversation (with the Magic Tree)

For us, thinking the magic tree, spirituality, and fat requires that we attend to nuanced and multiple (and still imperfect and partial) understandings of the event. As we work to activate postdevelopmental perspectives in our work as pedagogists, we understand that how we do spirituality and fat is never an intact, paused, idealized practice. To keep our engagements with spirituality and fat lively, relevant, and responsive, we argue that we need to continually drag our understandings into uneasy conversations that complexify or call us to revisit how we make spirituality and fat matter with children. The limits and borders of our postdevelopmental doings are made visible to us in many ways—including, but certainly not limited to, through our pedagogical conversations. In the following conversation, we do not work to build “better” practices for doing spirituality or fat. Participating in pedagogical dialogue together is not a “solution” for addressing the situated boundaries of the places, theories, and lives we make choices to centre and silence in our work. We do unapologetically want to craft pedagogical relations where putting our work into conversation becomes a method for constantly tracing how our work does and does not respond to our everyday relations with children. Importantly, we recognize that the conversations we share in this article are between two female white settler pedagogists with similar ontological inheritances, privileges, and worldviews. We acknowledge, in discussing magic as a way to reconceptualize relations with humans and more-than-humans, the scholarship of many Indigenous authors who have graciously shared Indigenous ways of relating to the more-than-human world (Hall, 2008; Kimmerer, 2013; Simpson, 2008; Z. Todd, 2017; Watts, 2013). As white settlers, we hold an ethical commitment to not co-opt Indigenous onto-epistemologies to further our own scholarship, so while we acknowledge that some parallels may be evident in how we consider spirituality and bodies in relation to the more-than-human world, we do not
name this as decolonizing work. Rather, this is about disrupting inherited Euro-Western approaches as part of a larger, incredibly complicated project of dismantling Euro-Western hegemonies in current early childhood discourses in Canada. We want to show how our approaches to doing spirituality and fat complexify one another, how we engage in pedagogical conversations together, and how our collaborations are partial and contingent but always oriented toward responding to our times.

Meagan: My first shift from developmentalism happens in how I choose to define spirituality in my thinking alongside children. I diverge from developmental theories that situate spiritual development as an intrinsic human capacity, rooted in biology or physiology or defined by stage theories as “change, transformation, growth, or maturation” (Benson et al., 2003, p. 210). Instead, thinking with Skott-Myhre (2018), I conceptualize a specific spirituality rooted in immanence and in collectivist and minoritarian knowledges. I ground this spirituality in ecological practices to challenge the Cartesian divide between the human and nature and the anthropocentric privileging of human intellect and rational thought. I consider this spirituality as not a religious one but one that it more analogous with magic, one that works with the material world and is considered the life force of both humans and the more-than-human (Mies & Shiva, 2014). I broaden my thinking of spirituality through common worlding and new material feminisms, and reconvene the constituents of our worlds to include nonhuman lifeforms, forces, and entities (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Kummen, 2016). By broadening my definitions of children’s spiritual understandings to include the unseen or intangible associated with magical thinking, I also wrest children’s “superstitious” or “paranormal” experiences of the world from developmental classifications of imagination and cognitive deficit (Lindeman & Aarnio, 2007; Mathijesen, 2010; Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013).

The magic tree, in developmental discourses, quickly loses its magic. The magic becomes a trick, a clever mechanism for scaffolding children’s learning about nature and science. Developmentally, magical thinking is defined as “involving attribution of causal effects on real life events by either a thought or action that is physically unconnected to the events” (Bolton et al., 2002, p. 480). Magical thinking positioned this way clearly
delineates what is True or Real as the tangible and physical, that which is able to be objectively measured, and thus the only knowledge deemed legitimate is that which is “rational.” This privileging of verifiable “rational” scientific thought has been instrumental in silencing voices from other thought collectives (Stengers, 2018a), specifically those of women and Indigenous peoples (Skott-Myhre, 2018). Developmentalists see benefit in magical thinking as long as it remains situated in the appropriate stages of sequential child development; the younger the child the more acceptable it is for them to engage in magical thinking, but as the child progresses, magical thinking should give way to logical thinking, or else it becomes problematic (Bolton et al., 2002; Mathijesn, 2010). Reversely, developmentalists also positively associate magical thinking with imagination (Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013), which makes magic developmentally advantageous in positive correlations to cognitive development and academic success (M. Smith & Mathur, 2009).

Nicole: Dominant Euro-Western frameworks for understanding childhood obesity adopt a medicalized and developmental approach. Critical obesity scholars, including Guthman (2013) and Rich (2010), detail how this developmental framing allows for excess body fat to be marked as an unhealthy pathology because of the present and future risks of inhabiting a body that does not meet normative age, race, and gender-based bioscientific markers for health. As Elliott (2016) and Evans and Colls (B. Evans, 2010; B. Evans & Colls, 2011) make visible, these approaches to doing childhood obesity invest in developmental trajectories that decisively assert that fat children become fat adults. This understanding of obesity positions fat as readily quantifiable and knowable, human-centered, and necessitating tracking and intervention, and it roots fat within social discourses that stigmatize and moralize against fat bodies (Beausoleil & Ward, 2010; Rice, 2016; Rich, 2011). Narratives of normative, fit, and healthy childhood development facilitate the creation of fatphobic and fat-mitigating ECE curriculum, which reminds children and educators that it is their personal responsibility to become healthy adults through carefully controlled practices of healthy eating and exercise.
Adopting a developmental childhood obesity lens, the magic tree matters because it draws children outside and into movement. The magic tree is a resource that I might deploy to encourage children to run, jump, and climb as they reach their recommended 180 minutes of daily physical activity. With children, I might hope we can investigate where more magic keyholes are, carrying the magic as a motivator for us to move our bodies across the grassy terrain of the cemetery. I may capture the curiosities the magic tree invites, encouraging children to keep letting the energy the tree shares move their bodies quickly as we run around the space and raise our heart rates into a “healthy” activity range.

Meagan: Feminist new materialisms and common worlds allow me to think beyond the allegiance to rational thought offered by developmental psychology to break from the binaries that Western ontologies use to separate mind/body, nature/culture, spirituality/rationalism. This thinking involves a recognition that being in the world allows us to have knowledge always produced and reproduced by engaging with the material world (C. A. Taylor & Ivinson, 2013). Children’s bodies intra-act (Barad, 2007) with tree bodies and in this intra-active assemblage tree/children/educators/spaces/magic become agentic, not in ways in which one element causes or precedes the other but as multiple and emerging in consistently different ways as they intermingle (Barad, 2007). To see beyond the singular and universal developmental understandings of the magic tree moment, I must slow down and pay close attention (Starhawk, 2004; Tsing, 2015) to how the tree, children, adults, and other more-than-human actors mutually shape this particular assemblage. I ask “What do trees do?” “What do children do?” and, most importantly, “What do trees and children do?” This act of slowing down itself resists progressive neoliberal logics that are deeply embedded in early childhood practices, logics that push educators to move children through sequential stage theories toward becoming a rational adult who participates in society in acceptable and preferred ways (Burman, 2017; Swadener, 2010).

Thinking postdevelopmentally, I think with magic. And I name magic deliberately knowing it is a word that disrupts scientific rationality (Starhawk, 1982). I choose to
define magic, not as fictional imaginings, but as relations with natural materials that foster new ways of relating to natural entities (Schutten & Rogers, 2011). By taking seriously children’s spiritual connections to this magic tree, the child/tree intra-action becomes a place of meaning making, one that challenges the individual agency of children and instead calls attention to the collective construction of meaning (Lenz Taguchi, 2010) and forefronts more-than-human assemblages (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor, & Blaise, 2016; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Khattar, & Montpetit, 2019). Thinking with (Rautio, 2017) magic foregrounds the historical, cultural, and political governance of spirituality, and by taking magic seriously I begin to see the multiple stories that take place simultaneously in this intra-action as a site for possible disruption of neoliberal developmental discourses of individualism and anthropocentrism. Here, stories of androcentric erasure of spiritual feminist knowledges (Skott-Myhre, 2018; Starhawk, 1982) grapple with and speak with taxonomic classifications of dendrology to challenge the taken-for-granted ways that developmental psychology silences some and makes others the norm.

Nicole: My understanding of obesity responds to dominant childhood obesity discourses by foregrounding children’s relationships with fat(s) as an ongoing activity, rather than a biological axiom governed by developmental logic. This call to “do” fat(s) is grounded in postdevelopmental approaches to ECE, such as those articulated by scholars including Blaise (2013, 2014), Lenz Taguchi (2011), and Rautio and Jokinen (Rautio, 2013; Rautio & Jokinen, 2015). Rather than foregrounding prearticulated developmental curriculum frameworks, these scholars attend to how lively and situated relationships, responsibilities, politics, and tensions animate our learning encounters (Nxumalo, 2017). I am interested in doing pedagogy as a reciprocal, ongoing, complex process (Iorio et al., 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind, & Kocher, 2016). I argue that a postdevelopmental understanding of childhood obesity might take seriously how we do obesity with children—that is, how we craft, respond to, and silence different relationships with fat in everyday moments. This understanding situates fat as an ethical, political, and pedagogical activity where educators, children, place, and fat cells are in constant
conversation with dominant discourses of childhood obesity, and where we need to be accountable to the relations with fat that we enact and silence with children.

With the magic tree, a postdevelopmental ethic of doing childhood obesity refuses any easy translation of preset physical activity promotion activities into this moment and instead attunes to how the questions, connections, and pedagogies we make possible shape how children might craft different situated relationships with fat. If I try to harness the energy the tree makes with children toward meeting a physical activity requirement, how can I be accountable to the moving, relationships, and connections that I prohibit? What happens if I understand moments of children running their fingers along the bark of the tree while their subcutaneous fat cushions their finger bones as moments of exploring this cemetery place with fat? When childhood obesity rhetoric constantly shouts morbidity and mortality statistics, what kinds of relationships with fat might we make with a place already storied with nuanced narratives of living and dying? How can I be accountable to the fats that I make possible here, in this place, with this magic tree, with children?

Meagan: Going back to my understanding of spirituality, one that I couple with magic, I think about how Dahlberg and Moss (2005) name meaning making as an inherently political act. I can link the silencing of magic back to modernist aims of making the Other into the same (Skott-Myhre, 2018; Starhawk, 1982) and through this I can think about whose voices have been silenced in the erasure of collective spirituality, specifically Indigenous and women’s voices. But the question I am grappling with is, what does centring magic actually make possible in early childhood education practices? What other possible ways of knowing might also be validated by taking magic seriously? I want to be clear: I am not advocating that everyone should believe in magic (Stengers, 2018a) or begin to incorporate immanent feminist spirituality in their pedagogical practice. What I am concerned with is how dominant ideas of science and rationality define certain ways of knowing as dispensable (Stengers, 2018a). I wonder how I can let magic flourish and resist urges to use magic as a technology to reproduce dominant neoliberal ideologies that are so taken for granted in the discourses of quality ECE (Dahlberg et al., 2013). By
thinking with magic, I wonder how I might continue to make meaning of pedagogical practices in ways that attend to the lives of the children and educators I collaborate with?

Nicole: I think that this tension of using versus sitting with magic is really timely—I hear echoes of postdevelopmental scholars, like Peter Moss (2016), who make visible how instrumental pedagogies—here, pedagogies that use magic—shape childhoods in line with neoliberal ideas of citizenship and success. This feels to me like a type of meaning making that plays a match game with magic, trying to find where magic slots into preset curriculum and then taking those as the “valuable” pieces of magic. I think that’s a really relevant critique, but what I think is really interesting when we put our work into conversation is how our practices of meaning making with magic are rooted in our existing relationships with magic—and how those relationships are entangled with our research and pedagogical intentions. I think that there’s something in your work where you carry an intention to notice magic, that your work with spirituality means that you work hard to attune with magic. I do not know if my commitment to thinking fat outside developmental logic already “knows” magic, and I think that matters. It reminds me of Haraway’s (2016) idea about “passing patterns back and forth, giving and receiving, patterning, holding the unasked-for pattern in one’s hands, response-ability” (p. 12). I can almost think of the idea of noticing how our understandings of magic matter with fats as an unasked-for pattern that I have to stick with. I would not have thought about how I make fat differently with our practices of making magic meaningful, but different responses with magic definitely enact different relationships with fat: relationships with fat that co-opt magic to technical ends, relationships with fats that push into tree trunks, relationships with fat that sit quietly shivering on a chilly morning. I think these all matter. They all have different consequences and, importantly, they matter with magic, which kind of tugs at the importance of putting our different concerns into conversations for me.

Meagan: I do actively attune to magic, but your discussion of fat and magic has me thinking of magic in ways that I have not thought about before, which is really important. It is important because even though our pedagogical and research focuses are different,
we have an obligation to put them into uneasy conversations. This is at the heart of why we wanted to write this paper. When we first started thinking about writing this paper, one of the biggest challenges was finding a way to connect magic and fat. As we have continued to think about this uneasy alliance and engaged in discussion, I have become less concerned with making concrete connections and more interested in the way these transdisciplinary conversations matter. Modernism and neoliberalism, and most definitely settler colonialism, have established a singular way of knowing (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Tuck, 2013). I hope that this type of transdisciplinary conversation might be a move toward disrupting positivist Western ways of knowing that have been so predominant in ECE. When we weave together different knowledges we highlight how layered our stories and our worlds are. Drawing attention to these layers is important and politically significant because it manifests a way to engage in fluid multiplicity in our pedagogies. By nesting stories or knowledge, I believe we have the potential to hear and centre voices that have been previously marginalized through desire for consensus and universality.

Nicole: This reminds me of a provocation offered by Hamilton, Subramaniam, and Willey (2017), who speak about the politics of scientific ways of knowing and how these contribute to perpetuating settler colonial ways of knowing the world. Hamilton et al. contend that “science is constitutive of colonialism. Science is more than simply an instrumental extension of colonial power. Science and colonization are co-emergent, co-constituted, and co-produced; one cannot understand science without colonialism or colonialism without science” (p. 613). This makes me think about what our ways of meaning making in ECE are constitutive of, as they speak back to traditional knowledge politics: Why does it matter that we think about magic as a conversational, transdisciplinary doing that is rooted in both of our intentions for research? How does putting magic and fat and spirituality into conversation unsettle epistemic divides and help us to weave together different knowledges to build differently responsive words and pedagogies? I think that this, to me, shares an ethic that feels really timely: this idea that we need to constantly put our divergent ideas and focuses into conversation in order to
create uneasy alliances or conversations, while also refusing to reconcile or merge these concerns.

Meagan: This brings me to an uncomfortable question: What are the limitations or the questions our work as pedagogists can’t answer? We have talked about how postdevelopmental theorizing challenges some taken-for-granted neoliberal and colonial assumptions, and I hope by offering these divergent ways of thinking about moments with children, educators, and the more-than-human we are leaving room for other ways of knowing to enter into dialogue with pedagogical practices. But I am hesitant to conclude that they will. We discussed in the beginning of this paper the specificities of the Canadian context we work in, and although I think our relations with magic and fat might open up different conversations that may respond to some of the specificities, there are very real, tangible aspects of the lives of Indigenous and other historically and continually marginalized Canadians that this work does not answer. For me this acknowledgement is very important. Pretending that the work we do can answer all the questions or fix the ills of society through pedagogy (let alone the lives of humans and more-than-humans in this place) feels like a slip back into offering master narratives.

**Pedagogical Conversations and Connections**

We approach this conclusion with a specific uneasiness and borrow from Pignarre and Stengers (2011) a resistance to conclude. Like Pignarre and Stengers, we have not answered nor attempted to answer any of the burning questions that surround how and why pedagogists might practice in certain ways. Instead we have offered our imperfect method as we try to avoid comfortable alliances and resist any imperative to make developmentalism and spirituality and obesity work together to create universalized understandings of children and childhood. Our decision to write this article was born of months of pedagogical conversations, consuming and generative for both of us, but was also haunted by simultaneous desires to make visible our shared thinking and to hold close something that has become very dear to us. We have purposefully avoided defining what a pedagogist is in a transferrable or technical sense and instead have activated what
pedagogical conversations generate and ask of us in our pedagogist roles. Our unease with the possibility of our example being taken up in reproducible ways is multiplicitous. First, we need to be explicit that in our advocacy for situated, localized ways of doing pedagogy, we do not adopt a relativistic, anything goes stance. We make decisions and specifically think beyond developmental psychology, knowing that no decision is ever innocent and that what we choose to do and not do matters to the futures we contribute to (Stengers, 2018a). We also worry that our desire to make visible how we think and work together may be interpreted as call for others to engage in pedagogical work in precisely the way we do. This is resolutely not our intention. With this paper we hope to create spaces to enact and invite varied and situated pedagogies that respond to local contexts, where pedagogies of fats and pedagogies of magic may be taken seriously. Instead of ending with a summation of this heart work we offer an invitation to think with this article beyond reflexivity and critique and instead with an “ecology of partial connections” (Stengers, 2018a, p. 127) that requires a way of learning from others that acknowledges that we are transformed by others and indebted to one other. We believe that the value of our—and any—pedagogical work is in its responsiveness to the local worlds it labours to answer to. We also take seriously that our thinking and conversing sometimes fails to answer to some of the questions that we know to be central to the contexts in which we live and work. To “do” pedagogical conversations, then, requires that we trace who we are in dialogue with, and that we care for the pedagogical relations that trouble and expand how our ongoing conversations answer to situated lives, precarities, and inheritances.  

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10 This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
Chapter 6. Curriculum and the World Imagined Otherwise

In this final chapter I revisit my research questions with each of the chapters in the thesis, discuss the specificities of how I enacted the pedagogist role in my research, and conclude with implications of my research for early childhood education and for ecological devastation. In revisiting my research questions, I propose that early childhood education is a site of subject and world making, and that the research questions I propose ask postqualitative questions that require curriculum-making processes that acknowledge and address issues of subject and world making. Returning to the theoretical perspectives of ecologies of practice and affirmative ethics offered in the introduction, I deepen this engagement with a more complex discussion of how I worked with the concepts of betrayal and reclaiming in each chapter, and I position these concepts as integral to enacting otherwise pedagogical and curriculum-making practices. Betrayal and reclaiming are two theoretical concepts that I briefly introduced in my introduction. These specific tools allow me to respond to my research questions outlined below. My research is postqualitative, which requires that I ask questions that do not propose universal, implementable curriculum practices but instead create possibilities for situated curriculum making that responds to the specific contexts in which the curriculum is being enacted. As tools, betrayal and reclaiming allowed me to notice and attend to how dominant discourses flow through early childhood education and to experiment with novel curriculum responses alongside educators and young children.

The articles and book chapters that compose this thesis offer imperfect examples of pedagogical engagements that attempt to disrupt dominant and pervasive ways of doing early childhood education in response to the conditions of our times. Each chapter is grounded in moves to destabilize dominant discourses such as capitalism, neoliberalism, and settler colonialism by enacting small but intentional pedagogical engagements in early childhood. Although each chapter does this in divergent ways, underpinning them all are hopeful pedagogical choices that challenge the onto-epistemologies that follow the modernist logics that shape our society. Each chapter, in its own way, responds to
questions of what might be possible if early childhood education practices were to take seriously multiple ways of knowing and being in the world. Each of the speculative research questions that frame the chapters outlined below aims to create possibilities for multiple, divergent pedagogical practices. Given that that all educational and pedagogical practices create specific subjects, ones that either disrupt or uphold the dominant discourses of our times, my research questions propose a subject that challenges the modernist conceptualization of the self-governing subject who is also, “by implication, adult, male, and white” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 20).

Revisiting the Research Questions

As noted, each of the chapters included in this thesis responds to research questions that are deeply concerned with the types of worlds children live in and inherit, and each chapter proposes types of subjectivities that might make possible worlds that subvert the dominant, singular, anthropocentric subjectivities that compose most of the current Western world. My research questions asked:

1. What might be possible for early childhood education when we centre immanent, multiplicitous ontological possibilities?

2. How do dominant canons of Euro-Western Scientific rationality subjugate feminist earth-based spiritual knowledges in early childhood education?

3. How might researchers and educators co-create curriculum to disrupt the valourization of the Scientific method and singular conceptualizations of the world to offer new possibilities for thinking about climate change?

4. How might ethical pedagogical disruptions that engage with subjugated feminist spiritual knowledges challenge rational discourses of neoliberalism, colonialism, anthropocentrism, and capitalism in early childhood education?

Indigenous onto-epistemologies are reduced in early childhood spaces, and offered hopeful propositions for complex, meaningful engagement with Indigenous cosmologies. This chapter explored ontologies other than dominant Western ones through a careful consideration of how, as educators and researchers, we take up Indigenous knowledges alongside children. It examined how Indigenous children’s books are frequently absorbed into neoliberal conceptualizations of multiculturalism. “More-than-Human Kinship Relations Within Indigenous Children’s Books” challenged responses to colonialism that address surface-level engagement with Indigenous cosmologies that occurs when Indigenous materials are included in early childhood spaces without critical consideration of the why and how of its inclusion. In the chapter, we proposed that simply including Indigenous children’s books in early childhood classrooms is insufficient to address the historical and ongoing colonial structures in North America, and that the ways in which “diverse” children’s books are often presented to young children maintain myths and logics that perpetuate colonial violence. From a developmental (Scientific) ontological perspective, if there can only be one truth, then the Indigenous knowledges in the storybooks analyzed cannot be “true” if and when they contradict Scientific knowledge; therefore, they must be mythologized or created as fables that promote romanticized relations in which humans are the caretakers of the natural world. In the chapter, thinking closely with Indigenous scholars such as Vanessa Watts and Zoe Todd to acknowledge the ways in which Indigenous knowledges are rendered as invisible or unimaginable within the settler colonial state, we proposed ways of thickening engagement in the early childhood classroom so that multiple truths (both Indigenous and Western) are valid and reasonable at the same time. In this chapter, my co-author Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and I explored the relation between myth and Indigenous knowledges in educational processes. We took up myths in two ways. First, we discussed how Indigenous knowledges and relations are mythologized in “modern” society. These mythifications work to answer calls for “inclusion”—and are surface-level responses to calls for decolonizing and reconciling educational accountabilities while maintaining allegiance to
rational conceptualizations of Truth\textsuperscript{11}—by offering Indigenous knowledges as allegories promoting innocent, idyllic relations with more-than-human others. We also discussed the colonial myths that privilege and make digestible these types of engagement with Indigenous cosmologies, specifically the myths of terra nullius and the disappearing Indian, which position Indigenous people as historic rather than of the present and allow settlers to evade responsibility in the ongoing construction of a colonial society that continues to marginalize Indigenous peoples. This chapter responded to research questions one and three. By proposing that in early childhood education a refusal to flatten Indigenous cosmologies and relations with more-than-human others into fictionalized accounts that promote humanocentrism, we created space for early childhood institutions to be sites of subject and world making that make possible worlds in which multiple onto-epistemologies may flourish simultaneously.

The subsequent three chapters, supported by research data from the SSHRC-funded Climate Action Network (see climateactionchildhood.net), activated earth-based feminist spiritual knowledges to explore how we might experiment with pedagogical and curriculum responses outside of the logics of human exceptionalism to intervene in prevalent concerns of our times, including ecological devastation. Most of the stories offered in these chapters came from my research at the Spiral Energy site in London, Ontario. The term spiral energy foregrounds thinking about energy with immanent earth-based feminist spirituality, and the name is derived from Starhawk’s (1999) discussion of energy:

\begin{quote}
The primary principle of magic is connection. The universe is a fluid, ever-changing energy pattern, not a collection of fixed and separated things. What affects one thing affects, in some way, all things: All is interwoven into the continuous fabric of being. Its warp and weft are energy, which is the essence of magic. (p. 155)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{11} Following Subramaniam and Willey’s (2017) thinking with Sandra Harding’s (1997) distinction between Truth and truth, Science and science, I capitalize truth and science in instances in which I wish to draw attention to knowledge that is recognized by Euro-Western institutions as official knowledge.
At the Spiral Energy site, educators and children from Creekhill Childcare Centre\textsuperscript{12} and I (and sometimes other researchers from the Climate Action Network project) went for weekly walks to a local cemetery. Woodland Cemetery is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Attawandaron peoples.

Woodland Cemetery was established in 1879 (Hord, 2017) and is still an active cemetery today. It is a unique place within the community, vibrant with more-than-humans others such as deer, birds, insects, trees, wind, grass, creeks, and rocks (both natural and human-made in the form of tombstones), and one would be as likely to see community members enjoying a walk as to see people visiting the gravesites of loved ones. Although the cemetery was the primary site of our curriculum making with children, educators and I also met frequently to compose and revisit pedagogical documentation, to deepen our understandings of the pedagogical significance of what was happening on our walks through conversation and shared reading, and to make pedagogical decisions about what we would do next on our walks.

The third chapter, “Posthuman Possibilities for the Early Childhood Educator,” introduced feminist posthuman theory as one possible way to activate earth-based feminist spiritualities in early childhood education practices. It offered two stories from my research depicting how educators, other pedagogists, and I, through a common worlds ethnography, grappled with ways in which we could shift how we engage with children from ways that uphold images of the developmental child (Burman, 2001, 2017; Woodhood, 1999) and child-centred logics (Spyrou, 2018) to instead understand the child and ourselves as always in the process of composing and recomposing our relations with more-than-human others as part of complex, relational assemblages (Tsing, 2015).

Notably, this chapter identified tensions and difficulties in creating conditions for ways of knowing and being in the world that are not grounded in singular, universalized understandings of the world and who the human is within that singular world. Pushing back against the trappings of developmental training and the reinforcement of that training in our subsequent years in the field, we wondered and experimented with what

\textsuperscript{12} All names of childcare/learning centres, educators, and children are pseudonyms.
we might need to bring to our work with children to think about our engagements with place and the more-than-human world otherwise. We engaged with resources both within and outside childhood studies to expose ourselves to possibilities for curriculum making alongside children that was not barrelling forward toward predetermined Scientific outcomes. This chapter highlighted how, through developmental and humancentric logics, both children and early childhood educators are created as subjects that uphold singular, rational onto-epistemologies that thin worlds (Debaise & Stengers, 2021) rather than create space for complex relational engagement. Through an experimentation of enacting pedagogical and curricular practices and centring both common worlds frameworks and earth-based spirituality, educators, children, and I responded to all of the research questions and proposed subjects and worlds that transcend human- and child-centred logics. Following Starhawk (2004), we engaged with feminist earth-based spiritual ways of observing, to disrupt the valourization of Scientific knowledges. Knowing that we can never step out of the subjectivities of rationalism, settler colonialism, and capitalism, we created space through this experiment for other onto-epistemologies to exist alongside dominant constructions of the world and early childhood education. In the chapter, I traced how dominant canons of Euro-Western Science have rendered feminist earth-based spirituality as nonsensical, and I proposed a reclaiming of these knowledges as an ethical move to agitate the discourses of rationalism, settler colonialism, capitalism, and humancentrism which are central to the project of creating a singular universal subject.

In the fourth chapter, “Working with Childhoods and Energies: Critical Reflections on Specifying and Locating the Intangible,” my co-authors Peter Kraftl and Arooj Khan and I described how we engaged collaboratory methodologies to mess up tangible and intact definitions of energy. We began with the assertion that energy is a concept commonly understood through Scientific and economic perspectives. By choosing a concept that is so predominantly understood through these lenses, we responded to research question three, putting this Scientific categorization into question by working with “energies,” an idea that draws on the concept of energetic phenomena, in which energies are understood
through small, situated stories rather than broad scientific categorizations (Montpetit et al., 2021). While it might not be novel in research to explore multiple possibilities of a concept, what we worked at in the article was a description that moves beyond pitting different conceptualizations against each other until we find the “correct” one, instead making onto-epistemological propositions for the multiple conceptualizations of energies to be valid at the same time. Focusing on small, situated energy stories from two research sites, one in London, Ontario, Canada, and the other in Birmingham, UK, my co-authors and I were able to show how energies are always entangled and constructed in relation to the specificities, and dominant discourses, of a time and place. By thinking about how energy is conceptualized in two different places, working with two different age groups of children, we were able to carefully trace how dominant discourses such as colonialism and racism, similar and also divergent at each site, manifest in the everyday occurrences of the world and shape how we construct all concepts, even ones that are considered straightforward, such as energy. In the London, Ontario site, weekly visits to a local cemetery—a place that it not commonly associated with children and childhood—we were able to think about the logics of settler colonialism as they relate to how we conceptualize place and to foreground that any engagement in Canadian places cannot be subtracted from either the settler colonial logics that have shaped this place or the educational practices that take place within it. By thinking carefully about place in terms of what is “appropriate” for children, we were able to trace how specific dominant discourses structure seemingly innocuous decisions about early childhood education according to the prevailing logics of settler colonialism, capitalism, and developmentalism. The purposeful choice to continue to visit the cemetery despite discomfort was a small but meaningful ethical disruption of the taken-for-granted ways of doing early childhood education. In this chapter, I also offered a story in which an educator, Genna, by paying attention to the cemetery in ways that disrupted developmental modes of observation, was provoked to research barefootedness as a way of thinking differently about how we understand and engage with energy. This particular moment has interesting pedagogical significance. The educator knew that something was occurring energetically when she and the children removed their shoes which could be
understood through earth-based feminist spirituality, but she supported this knowing by seeking out Scientific justification of the phenomenon. This is quite important as we think about subjectivities as being something that we cannot step outside of. In other words, we cannot subtract ourselves from the dominant subjectivities that shape our worlds, but we can—for example, by thinking feminist earth-based spirituality alongside accepted Scientific definition—generate multiplicitous ontological possibilities and challenge dominant Scientific classifications of energy as Truth. This multiplicity was complexified at the Birmingham site by situating energy stories as relational and always being made and remade in response to the lived experiences of those who are creating energy’s meaning. At this site, researchers and youth were able to co-create curriculum that challenged singular Scientific definitions.

Finally, in the fifth chapter, “Doing Pedagogical Conversations (with Spirituality and Fat) as a Pedagogist in Early Childhood Education,” my co-author Nicole Land and I enacted Stengers’ method of relaying to highlight the necessity of pedagogical discussion in pedagogical work. We proposed that pedagogical intervention is necessary if we want to make possible ways of being in the world outside the dominant logics of developmentalism and its entangled discourses of capitalism, settler colonialism, and neoliberalism. The affirmative ethical practice of relaying allowed us to respond to research question one by challenging singular interpretations of everyday happenings with children. Nicole and I passed a moment from my research with educators and children in the cemetery back and forth, and in doing so we demonstrated how relaying enacts risky pedagogical actions that betray the logics of singular understanding. By putting our analyses into conversation by passing back and forth an idea to generate multiple and new perspectives, we offered onto-epistemological possibilities for knowledges to form and reform within affirmative relational practices. That is, we offered ideas to each other, not to disprove the other’s perspective nor even to refute developmental psychology as a truth, but to engage with each concept to complexify our understandings and create an analysis that was multiple. Again, this relaying was not a refusal of other perspectives, and although we both certainly problematized the violences
of developmental psychology, as I have done in other chapters, it is impossible to deny developmental psychology as a truth. Our aim then was not to create fat or spirituality pedagogies that others can pick up and apply, but rather to propose modes of engaging in pedagogical work that betray the singular objectives that frequently govern the field. We refused conclusions and were explicit that we were not offering the way to do pedagogical work; rather, we put our ideas in relation to each other, and to the dominance of developmental psychology, to create hopeful, speculative possibilities for how we might reimagine our and children’s relations to the world. We traced how much of the meaning that is made through observation in early childhood education is bounded by the logics of developmental psychology. We challenged this reality by offering two alternative interpretations of an observed moment between children and a tree. We situated pedagogical work as needing to respond to the complex and “dominant knowledge politics we inherit in Euro-Western education, where some ways of knowing are hierarchically emphasized . . . over others” (Land & Montpetit, 2018, p. 84). This assertion, like the examples that follow in this chapter, responded to all of the research questions as we proposed multiple perspectives, including feminist earth-based spiritualities, to mess up singular Scientific interpretations of the worlds of children and create space for ethical pedagogical and curricular practices through which early childhood education can create subjectivities and worlds that go beyond the limiting and oppressive logics of settler colonialism, capitalism, and neoliberalism.

**Researching as a Pedagogist**

My engagement in each of the chapters is in response to a deep care for early childhood education in Canada, and Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are derived from my enactment of the role of the pedagogist, a role in Ontario and British Columbia, Canada. Pedagogists work alongside educators and children to “envision pedagogical connections and projects to provoke educational processes that, through interdisciplinary and provocative questions, ideas, theories, materials, relationships . . . deepen and complexify strong, situated pedagogical work in early childhood contexts” (Land et al., 2002, p. 2). Who I am as a pedagogist, and the histories and inheritances I bring to this role, matter. Acknowledging
that all educational and curricular practices are means of subject making (S. Todd, 2010), the processes in which we are made and make our selves, which are shaped by social and political forces (Dahlberg & Moss, 2004), means that there are no neutral practices in education, and that all curriculum making enacts forms of ontological violence (S. Todd, 2010). As pedagogists, then, we must imagine the worlds in which we wish to live to help us understand whom the subject of those worlds might be. This shift from making subjects grounded in modernist logics of capitalism, neoliberalism, and settler colonialism demands specific intentionality. Pedagogical commitments ground pedagogical work in questions of the world that respond to specific discourses we wish to challenge. They make possible affirmative ethical practices (Braidotti, 2019, 2022) that do more than critique the current dominant discourses and that help to create new pedagogical practices that experiment, not only with doing education differently but also with creating worlds that foster multiplicitous ontological possibilities. Positioning the role of the pedagogist as not neutral, and as always in response to the contexts in which it is enacted (Land et al., 2020c; Land & Montpetit, 2018, Nxumalo et al., 2018), holds me accountable for the pedagogical choices I make. It demands that I carefully craft pedagogical commitments that ground my work. Although the commitments that guide my pedagogical work are similar to those of my colleagues, specifically the ones with whom I have collaborated in the chapters included in this thesis, we come to those commitments in our own ways. Pedagogically and personally, I am deeply disturbed by the current ecological crisis, and alongside others (Crutzen, 2002; Steffen, Crutzen, & McNeill, 2007; Nxumalo, 2018; Taylor A., 2017; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015; Z. Todd, 2017) I believe that the logics of capitalism, neoliberalism, colonialism, and anthropocentrism are the direct cause of the precarious conditions of the natural world. I propose, again in the company of others (Alexander et al., 2011; Holst, 1997, Mies & Shiva, 2014; Nunn et al., 2016; Rountree, 2005; Taylor, 2001; Woiwode, 2012), that shifting focus from anthropocentric interactions with the world to relational spiritual assemblages might be one possible intervention in the continuing devastation of the natural world. Concretely I am inspired by immanent feminist earth-based spiritual knowledges that propose subjectivities that disrupt the logics of anthropocentrism (and its
entanglement with settler colonialism, neoliberalism, and capitalism), but my engagement with these spiritualities is twofold. First, by engaging with a worldview that sits so far outside the dominant logics of Science, I hope to create possibilities for curriculum making that resist appropriation into implementable universal practices. Second, pedagogically I am committed to creating possibilities to enact immanent ontological multiplicity, because this is the only way in which spiritual knowledges can be considered legitimate in spaces typically defined by Science, thereby shifting the perception of earth-based feminist spirituality as knowing instead of believing (Stengers, 2018a).

Each of the chapters of this thesis responds in some way to modes of engaging with educational practices that promote a singular engagement with the world and thus make it impossible to take earth-based spiritual knowings of the world seriously. The research questions that ground my thesis are postqualitative. Postqualitative research addresses the humancentric nature of much qualitative research by pushing back on research methods that seek to understand only how humans compose and are affected by the world (St. Pierre, 2019) in order to broaden understandings of knowledge formation to include the relational assemblages (Tsing, 2015) of the human and more-than-human world. Therefore, the postqualitative questions I pose cannot be answered within status quo pedagogical and curricular practices. Attending to the research questions outlined above necessitated me creating conditions to enact early childhood practices and curriculum outside the dominance of Science and, more specifically, developmental psychology. To propose curriculum work that does not thin (Debaise & Stengers, 2021) ontological possibilities into reproducible, implementable pedagogical practices required me to experiment with theoretical practices such as ecologies of practice, affirmative ethics, betraying, reclaiming, and revisiting. As demonstrated in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, earth-based feminist spirituality is a way of knowing the world that allowed me to enact these theoretical perspectives.

Feminist earth-based spiritual ways of being in and knowing the world are often cast aside as fantastical “woohoo” (Starkhawk, 1982) that is divorced from reality (see the
introduction for a detailed conversation on the myriad ways this depiction is reproduced in early childhood education). For me, the eradication of feminist ways of knowing and being in the world and the continual categorization of the woman as hysterical, irrational, and incapable of controlling one’s emotions are particularly salient sites for thinking about the oppression of specific bodies through the construction of universal subjects. Although I chose to think with the particular perspective of eradicated feminist spiritual knowledges, the making irrational of particular bodies is not limited to women’s experiences. In Chapter 2, my co-author and I examined how Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world are too often mythologized and classified as fictional and outside the realm of reality (Watts, 2013). Other research extends this phenomenon to racialized people (Teo, 2022; Walcott, 2021) and people with mental illness (Liegghio, 2013). Basically, anyone who does not embody the white, masculinist, rational ways of knowing and being in the world is either demonized or infantilized.

One of what I believe to be the major issues with traditional educational practices that “respond” to societal inequities is that they do it with the same logics that created the inequities themselves, which is why I proposed research questions that necessitated experimenting with nontraditional early childhood education practices. An example that grounds my research is that of educational initiatives that respond to the climate crisis with the same anthropocentric logics that created it (Nxumalo, 2018; A. Taylor, 2017a; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015; Z. Todd, 2017). The familiar refrain “children are the future” is helpful here for me to challenge educational projects rooted in the dominant logics of the Euro-Western world. The idea that children somehow have innate capacity to undo the damage that has been done to both the natural and the socio-political world creates what Rebekah Sheldon (2016) names as reproductive futurism: “a two-sided salvation narrative: someday the future will be redeemed of the mess our present actions fortell; until then, we must keep the messy future from coming up by replicating the present through our children” (p. 35). What a burden to place on children: the responsibility to create a better, more livable world, without the tools to think and act differently than in the ways that created the devastation in the first place. The challenge,
however, is to create possibilities for multiplicity that do not slip into relativism or offer redemptive practices that erase the legacies of injustice and violence that have brought us to where we are today.

**Pedagogical Commitments Towards Ecologies of Practice and Affirmative Ethics**

To create possibilities for pedagogical and curriculum practices that allow us to experiment with speculative and hopeful possibilities for multiplicitous subjectivities and worlds, we need to be grounded in pedagogical commitments. To craft pedagogical commitments we must take an inventory of the times in which we live, pay attention to the discourses that circulate and create the specific subjectivities we hope to intervene in, and then pose questions and create interventions that challenge the logics and practices that make the world as it is now. I hope I move beyond despair about an ecologically devastated and ontologically violent world within the chapters I have included in this thesis. Therefore am pedagogically committed to enacting modes of doing early childhood education that create possibilities for ontological multiplicity outside the paradigms of rational Science. To do so, I constructed different kinds of research questions, ones that not only seek novel answers but also refuse singular Scientific logics, offering instead complex and tension-filled relations with the world (Stengers, 2018a). To ask these types of questions, I enacted dispositions and engaged thinking tools and actions that resist consensus and conclusion. My hope is to show that there is the possibility for early childhood education to be a site that produces and reproduces subjectivities and worlds in which we might respond to the complexities of our times. I again revisit each of the chapters to highlight how my specific pedagogical commitments were brought to life through ecologies of practice, affirmative ethical practices, and acts of betrayal and reclaiming in each of my research engagements.

In the introductory chapter, I introduced ecologies of practice and affirmative ethical practices as tools I engage with throughout the thesis to challenge dominant discourses that govern early childhood education and also society. I employed ecologies of practice
as a thinking tool throughout the chapters to think through what was happening in my research in situated ways that are never neutral. Ecologies of practice can never be neutral because they always are enacted through the contexts of the people using them (Stengers, 2005). One of the ways in which I use ecologies of practice to enact affirmative ethical practices of constructing pedagogical commitments is the practice of betraying. Stengers (2018b) describes betraying as a situated, on the ground refusal of a priori practices that aim to know a phenomenon rather than to learn alongside it. Acts of betraying allow us to note our relationality to phenomena but act in ways not determined by it (Nathan & Stengers, 2018). This important distinction is crucial in early childhood education, and it challenges the predetermination of who the child should be that is fundamental to developmental psychology and the construction of “best practices.”

However, to be able to betray the logics that create singular perspectives through educational constructions such as best practices, we need to be able to trace and unravel the dominant discourses, such as settler colonialism, capitalism, and neoliberalism, that underpin Euro-Western education. To imagine an otherwise world, we need a reason to do so. Leaning on Rosi Braidotti’s (2017, 2019, 2022) call for affirmative ethical practices that amalgamate critique and creation, each of the chapters in this thesis offers a critique of the dominant discourses that govern the particular ways of doing early childhood education. The critiques I offer are particular; they are not the critique that is prominent in Scientific and academic circles in which a theory is challenged to prove another theory as true (Stengers, 2018a). I see these critiques as a call to think, to notice, and to be aware of how the dominant discourses we often passively accept have real consequences, which are felt unequally. Paying attention to how dominant discourses have shaped and continue to shape our worlds and who we are able to be within them reminds us that the “past was not inevitable” (Shotwell, 2016, p. 17) and therefore offers hopeful speculation that the future is not inevitable either.

Betraying then is more than a tracing and refusal of the dogmas of particular disciplines; it is also a betrayal of the rigid methods and structures that have governed the creation of Truth within academia (Stengers, 2018a). This betrayal is not unrelated to what happens
“on the ground” in early childhood education, as what is established as Truth, norms, or best practice in sites of early childhood education both reflects and proposes societal practices that shape and govern who particular individuals are. Therefore, I have enacted theoretical betrayal in each of the chapters to create possibilities for pedagogies beyond the logics of capitalism, neoliberalism, and colonialism. This betrayal requires that we pay attention and respond to the “complex, often violent everyday worlds” (Land & Montpetit, 2018, p. 83) we encounter with educators and children in our work as pedagogists. For example, in Chapter 2, “More-than-Human Kinship Relations Within Indigenous Children’s Books,” tracing how taken-for-granted educational practices uphold and reinforce logics of colonialism holds me accountable to what is created when I engage in familiar practices such as reading with small children. In this chapter, my co-author and I betrayed the prevalent positioning of children’s literacy as a precursor to later cognitive development, and instead, we considered how the modes in which educators engage with children’s literature have the potential to both disrupt and recreate settler colonial logics. By betraying these taken-for-granted logics through a diffractive reading of the storybooks alongside Indigenous scholarship, we created possibilities for responding to the research questions—possibilities that would not be possible if we did not pay attention to and betray how settler colonialism flourishes in everyday practices, such as reading, in early childhood education. In Chapter 3, “Posthuman Possibilities for the Early Childhood Educator,” I outlined how the dominant construction of the developmental subject within early childhood education perpetuates racism, classism, and ablism—and offers a reason and a site for me to betray these logics to make possibilities for subject and world making that transcend stifling universal perspectives and hold me accountable to experimenting with pedagogical and curriculum practices beyond developmental practices. In Chapter 4, “Working with Childhoods and Energies: Critical Reflections on Specifying and Locating the Intangible,” my co-authors and I began from a shared research aim to create climate pedagogies that respond to the current ecological crisis. We examined the concept of energy from multiple perspectives but first noted the technocratic, economically driven definitions of energy that are commonplace. This was necessary for us to establish why we wanted to play with energy as a sticky, never-intact
concept. By establishing how energy is frequently taken up within educational practices, my co-authors and I were able to demonstrate how taking up energy from various perspectives betrays commonplace understandings of the concept that produce specific ways of being in the world, and we were then motivated to engage with energy otherwise. In Chapter 5, “Doing Pedagogical Conversations (with Spirituality and Fat) as a Pedagogist in Early Childhood Education,” my co-author and I outlined the limitations of solely developmental analyses of moments in educational practice and betrayed developmental psychology, not only by offering multiple theoretical perspectives, but by refusing to pit these perspectives against one another until we reached a consensus on the “best” way to understand the situation. This double betrayal, of both developmental logics as well as Scientific modes of understanding the world through consensus, helped us to create provocative conditions for making cracks within narrow developmental educational practices to respond to the questions posed in this thesis.

As noted, I conceptualize betrayal as an integral component of enacting affirmative ethical practices, but I want to return to Braidotti’s (2017, 2019, 2022) insistence that these practices cannot stop at critique. I therefore propose reclaiming, a notion Stengers (2015) borrows from contemporary neopagan witch activists as a theoretical companion to betrayal in the work of enacting ecologies of practice and affirmative ethics. Reclaiming does not suggest a return, with reverence, to idealized pasts, but rather noticing and experimenting with knowledges and ways of being in the world “that have been destroyed in the name of progress” (Stengers, 2015, p. 12). Reclaiming is an act that can only be done when one notices how the logics of particular discourses render other, specific knowledges unintelligible; reclaiming proposes onto-epistemological possibilities that position these marginalized knowledges as valid. In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I reclaim immanent earth-based feminist knowledges in everyday practices with early childhood educators and children. I am indebted to the neopagan witches, such as Starhawk, who have offered this term as a way to think specifically about women’s ways of knowing and engaging in the world that have been made fantastical through the dominance of masculinist logics of rational Science. However, I think reclaiming can be
extended to many ways of being in the world that have been pushed to the periphery by dominant discourses. When I engage in acts of reclaiming, like Stengers, I am not proposing earth-based spirituality as the Truth but rather as one possible way of knowing and being in the world, one that makes possible myriad onto-epistemologies. In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I reclaim earth-based feminist spiritualities, but demonstrate that there are multiple ways in which to do this. In “Posthuman Possibilities for the Early Childhood Educator,” educators and I experimented with what it might do to think with Starhawk; in “Working with Childhoods and Energies: Critical Reflections on Specifying and Locating the Intangible” educators, children, and I experimented with spiritual energetic connections to the more-than-human world; and in “Doing Pedagogical Conversations (With Spirituality and Fat) as a Pedagogist in Early Childhood Education” I proposed that earth-based spirituality, specifically magic, might be a valid and generative way to engage with the more-than-human world. In regard to the second chapter, “More-than-Human Kinship Relations Within Indigenous Children’s Books,” I do know that as a settler I cannot reclaim Indigenous knowledges, nor do I propose that I should, but I hope that my co-author and I have nudged other settler educators to think carefully about how they engage with Indigenous knowledges in early childhood spaces, so that these knowledges have space to be reclaimed by Indigenous peoples.

Implications of This Research

This section outlines two distinct but related implications of the research on which this thesis is based. First, I discuss implications for early childhood education curriculum that proposes situated, coconstructed pedagogical practices. Second, I discuss how this type of early childhood education curriculum, and specifically nonanthropocentric engagements with the more-than-human world, makes possible pedagogical responses to the current climate crisis.

Implications for Early Childhood Education Curriculum

Throughout the chapters of this thesis I have been grounded in a pedagogical commitment to create more livable worlds. I propose that enacting posthuman
subjectivities demands pedagogical processes that make possible coconstructed, situated curriculum making versus implementable, universal curricula. Situated, coconstructed curriculum making activates ongoing pedagogical decision making and allows educators and children to work together to construct multiple knowledges that are always recomposing. Such curriculum making is active; it is a process that creates and puts something into the world, unlike the familiar education understanding of a curriculum (read curriculum guides) that is implementable. Who the subject is not created outside of the dominant discourses of our time. As noted in the introduction, the image of the child—and consequently the image of the educator—is intimately related to how Western society is structured. The individualism that is so pervasive in educational settings is a clear antecedent of neoliberal and capitalist rationality. Child-centredness, manifested in practices in which materials and spaces are offered to children for them to “explore,” perpetuates settler colonial logics of the conquering explorer finding something that was not there before while simultaneously denying the complexity of human/more-than-human relations. Thus, who we want to be and who we want children to be needs to be carefully considered. As people who do the work of education, we can never claim that what we do with children is neutral. We cannot abdicate from the processes of subject formation; we are always creating a subject. We might think, especially in early childhood education, where developmental psychology is so prevalent that the field often seems atheoretical, that we are outside of subject making, but all of the things we do as educators are promoting specific subjectivities. We have, then, an ethical obligation to interrogate what kind of person and what kind of world our pedagogical practices are constructing, and to enact curriculum making that offers possibilities for otherwise subjects and worlds.

Implications for Ecological Devastation

The chapters in this thesis have also responded to the current ecological devastation that marks this epoch of the Anthropocene, a period in which the damage from human extraction and misuse of the planet threatens the continuation of the planet as we now know it. As climate concerns enter into mainstream politics and popular culture, there is
an intensifying push to develop educational initiatives that position children as interveners in the ongoing damage to the world. By sticking with the logics of human exceptionalism, we doom children to reproductive futurism (Sheldon, 2016) in which we hope and expect children to “save the world” while only providing them with the same tools and logics that have been used to destroy it. If where we are now is the result of the logics of human exceptionalism—the positioning of the human as separate and above the material world (Crutzen, 2002; Steffen et al., 2007)—we must experiment with ways of responding to the world that enact different logics. My aim with this research has been to trouble popular and government-mandated environmental educational tactics, such as the familiar refrain “reduce, reuse, and recycle” (Jobb et al., 2019), that reinstate humans at the centre of the world, and instead offer educational possibilities for creating a posthuman subject who acknowledges the complex more-than-human assemblages that make up the world.

Conclusion

This thesis in its entirety is a pedagogical proposal for curriculum making, grounded in pedagogical commitments and practices beyond the logics of Scientific rationalism, to respond to a socio-politically troubled and ecologically devasted world. My intention is that the stories from my research offer hopeful and speculative examples of how pedagogists and early childhood educators might resist the urge to turn away from what might seem like the insurmountable dominance of discourses such as settler colonialism, neoliberalism, and capitalism to “try to make possible a future that isn’t barbaric, now” (Stengers, 2015, p. 23). The pedagogical proposals I make are firmly grounded in my belief that meaningful change cannot be enacted through singular, universal modes of doing education. Rather, curriculum must be localized and responsive to the contexts of the places in which it emerges, to the lived experiences of children and educators, and to the concerns of 21st-century life.
Bibliography


(Eds.), *Reconceptualizing early childhood care and education—A reader: Critical questions, new imaginaries and social activism* (pp. 1–16). Peter Lang.


 https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/handle/1828/5772


http://www.criticalethnicstudiesjournal.org/citation-practices/

UNICEF. (2007). *Climate change and children.*


https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/3372SD_children_FINAL.pdf


https://www.unicef.org/publications/index_86337.html


Appendix: Research Ethics

Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board
NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw
Department & Institution: Education/Faculty of Education, Western University

NMREB File Number: 109337
Study Title: Climate Action Network: Exploring climate change pedagogies with children
NMREB Initial Approval Date: September 06, 2017
NMREB Expiry Date: September 06, 2018

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Name</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Version Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western University Protocol</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment Items</td>
<td>Appendix A - Information Session</td>
<td>2017/05/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment Items</td>
<td>Appendix B - Email reminder to be sent to Educators</td>
<td>2017/05/07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment Items</td>
<td>Appendix C - Families - Invite to Info Session</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment Items</td>
<td>Appendix D - Verbal reminder to families provided by Educators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assent</td>
<td>Appendix E - Children Assent</td>
<td>2017/05/08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Appendix F - Confidentiality Agreement</td>
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<td>Educators</td>
<td>2017/09/04</td>
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<td>Caregiver Letter of Information &amp; Consent</td>
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<td>2017/09/05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instruments</td>
<td>Protocol to use with educators in monthly evening meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instruments</td>
<td>Steps to conduct pedagogical documentation, including ethical considerations.</td>
<td>2017/05/08</td>
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The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000094.

Ethics Officer, on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair or delegated board member

E.O.: Erika Basile _ Grace Kelly _ Katelynn Harris _ Nicola Murphy _ Karen Gepaul _ Patricia Sargeant _ Kelly Patterson _

Western University, Research, Support Services Bldg., 8th Fl., 5150 London, ON, Canada N6G 1C9 1.519.888.3036 1.519.888.3460 www.uwo.ca/research/ethics
Dear Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw,

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board has reviewed this application. This study, including all currently approved documents, has been re-approved until the expiry date noted above.

REB members involved in the research project do not participate in the review, discussion or decision.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 000/00041.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Daniel Wyszynski, Research Ethics Coordinator, on behalf of Prof. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).
Curriculum Vitae

Education
Ph.D. Candidate: Curriculum Studies  September 2016 – Present
Western University, Faculty of Education, London, Ontario
  • Supervisor: Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw

Master of Education and Digital Technology  December 2012
University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Oshawa, Ontario

Bachelor of Education  June 2009
University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Oshawa, Ontario

Bachelor of Arts – Honours - Psychology  June 2008
York University, Toronto, Ontario

Diploma – Honours – Early Childhood Education  June 2005

Publications

Peer-Reviewed


Non-Peer Reviewed

Non-Academic Publications


Related Experience

**Editorial Assistant**  
*Journal of Childhood Studies*  
August 2018 – June 2022

- Coordinate submission, review, and editorial decision processes for regular and special issues
- Technical support for authors, reviewers, and editors
- Publish issues online
- Maintain social media

**Regional Coordinator**  
*Provincial Centre of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care*  
London Region  
August 2018 – March 2019

- Co-coordinate 30+ pedagogists, including facilitation and participation in weekly large group and bi-weekly small group discussions
- Support in the development of pedagogical plans
- Support individual pedagogists situational contexts
- Community Engagement

**Research Assistant/Pedagogist**  
*Western University, London Ontario*  
November 2017-August 2019

- For Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw
- SSHRC funded Research Project: Climate Action Network: Exploring climate change pedagogies with children
- Work with children and early childhood educators to craft new and innovative pedagogical practices

**Instructor/Graduate Teaching Appointment**  
*B.Ed Program, Western University, London, Ontario*  
September 2018 – April 2019  
September 2017 – April 2018

- EDUC 5461 Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Learning in Early Childhood II

**Research Assistant**  
May 2018 – August 2018  
Secretariat for the Centres of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care, London, ON

- Participate in Centre network meetings
- Data collection and triangulation
  - Created a survey using Qualtrics
  - Draft emails and memos
  - Coordinate translation services

**Research Assistant**  
July 2017 – September 2017
Western University, London, Ontario
For Dr. Erica Neeganagwedgin
- Assist in the collection of primary and secondary sources to support the *Practicing the Good Life (Pimatisiwin) for Indigenous Youth in The Ontario Public School System Through the Gift of Elders*

Research Assistant September 2016 – May 2017
Western University, London, Ontario
- For Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw
- Developed and implemented workshops and guided learning groups for local childcare providers
- Maintained and developed websites to promote research and communities of learning

Marker November 2016 – Present
Western University, B.Ed Program, London, Ontario
- EDUC 5461 Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Learning in Early Childhood II

Early Childhood Education Program Coordinator 2013 – 2016
Sprott Shaw College, Kelowna, British Columbia
- Oversaw ten campuses ECE departments throughout the province of BC, taking into consideration the specific needs of the various communities
- Support instructors in the delivery of standardization curriculum
- Facilitate monthly ECE TEAM meetings for all Sprott Shaw ECE instructors, creating agendas based on current needs and hosting instructors via WEB-X online platform.
- Curriculum development
  - Update curriculum to reflect emerging ECE ideologies
  - Maintain standardization curriculum updates (update textbook changes, correct minor errors)
- Attend annual provincial articulation meeting
- Participate in Entry-to-Practice partnership working towards developing an Entry-to-Practice document for the province of British Columbia

**Academic Conference Presentations**
Canadian Society for the Study of Education Annual Conference
*London, Ontario (conference cancelled)*
Paper Presentation
*Risking Rationality – Early Childhood Educators Experiences with Bringing Feminist Spiritual Knowledges into Early Childhood Education Pedagogical Practice*

Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education International Conference
*November 4, 2019
Las Cruces, New Mexico*
Paper Presentation with Dr. Nicole Land
*Mobilizing citational practices as feminist curriculum-making in early childhood education*
American Education Research Association Annual Meeting 2019  
Toronto, Ontario

- Paper Presentation with Sarah Black  
  Care and conviviality: Reconfiguring everyday place encounters in early childhood education  
  April 5, 2019
- Structured Poster Presentation with Dr. Nicole Land  
  Complexifying entanglements with natural and developmental sciences in children’s everyday encounters with ecologies – Poster Session Children’s Common Worlds in Times of Climate Change and ‘Post Truths.’  
  April 5, 2019
- Paper Presentation  
  Pedagogies of reclaiming: Thinking with children and magic as a response to ecological crisis  
  April 8, 2019

Critical Ethnic Association Fourth International Conference  
June 24, 2018  
Vancouver, BC.

Panel Presentation: Thinking with Transdisciplinary Feminisms in Education: Towards Collective Possibilities for Responding to Environmental Precarity  
Paper presented with Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw - Regenerating 'energies' in anti-ecological times through dialogues with critical race feminisms, Indigenous feminisms and critical environmental humanities feminisms

Childhood and Materiality - VIII Conference on Childhood Studies  
May 9, 2018  
University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Paper presentation with Dr. Nicole Land  
Conversing with/in spiritual knowings, fat cells, and children's bodied materialities

Robert Macmillan Graduate Research Symposium 2018  
April 6, 2018  
Western University, London ON


Other Scholarly Activities


Guest Editor – Special Issue - Ecological Challenges with/in Contemporary Childhoods  
Journal of Childhood Studies – Published 2022

Guest Lecturer – Ryerson University - Ryerson University – CLD 213: History and Philosophy of Early Childhood Education (Dr. Susan Jagger) - Reconfiguring Early Childhood Education: Common Worlding Pedagogies – March 12, 2020/November 5, 2020(remote)

Colloquium Coordinator – “Responding to Ecological Challenges with/in Contemporary Childhoods” – University of Western, Faculty of Education, London, Ontario, January 31-February 2, 2020

Co-Facilitator – “Pedagogies Reading Group” – September 2018 – September 2019

Reviewer – Journal of Pedagogy – August 2019
**Steering Committee** - Robert Macmillan Graduate Research Symposium 2018 – April 6, 2018

**Critical Friend Reviewer** - "Journal of Childhood Studies" September 2017 - November 2017

**Event Coordinator** – “Childhood and Climate Change in Settler Colonial Spaces Symposium,”
University of Western, Faculty of Education, London, ON, October 2, 2017

**Steering Committee** - Robert Macmillan Graduate Research Symposium 2017 – April 7, 2017