

“Tough Parts, Connections, Interruptions, and Courage”:  
Conversations with Beginning Early Childhood Educators

by

Anastasia Butcher  
BCYC, University of Victoria, 2011

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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in the School of Child and Youth Care

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## **Abstract**

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This thesis focuses on beginning early childhood educators and their stories, contributing to an area in the literature that has not been researched extensively. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) philosophical concepts of assemblage and a rhizome underpin the methodological and theoretical threads in this study, which explores the following research questions: What are the possibilities of conversations when beginning early childhood educators get together? What conditions are needed for beginning educators to stay excited and engaged in their work?

With intention to move beyond an individualistic approach of considering educators as “subjects” telling their individual stories, this study focuses on transcripts, stories, audio recordings, images, materials, the researcher's memories and stories, related texts, and concepts as vital parts of the assemblage, directing attention to what emerges through connections between the elements. To explore the research questions, four 90-minute group conversation sessions were conducted with four early childhood educators who had been working in the field between one and two years. Collage was used as part of group conversation sessions, to pay attention to what unfolded through engaging with materials and one another.

Bringing together elements of rhizomatic and narrative approaches in the data analysis highlights the importance of listening deeply, attending to one another, and developing trust to engage in genuine conversations from the heart to form caring relations, as well as directing attention to the complexities and tensions of educators' practice. The results of the study also

point in the direction of switching focus from an individualistic, fast-paced professional development approach to meaningful collective opportunities for professional learning, attending to the concept of time as relational. The study suggests creating a network of educators to continue genuine conversations and nurture connections that will help educators to stay excited and engaged in their work.

**Keywords:** Beginning early childhood educators, assemblage, rhizomatic, narrative, collage

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review**

In this chapter, I discuss the rationale for the study, which includes my own journey of coming to this topic and my ontological and epistemological stance. Next, I provide an overview of the thesis and a review of the literature focusing on the areas that relate to my topic. This chapter concludes with the research questions that guided my study.

### **Bringing Myself into the Process**

It is important for me to situate myself in this process as a settler immigrant, an early childhood educator, an instructor, and a graduate student. My roots are in the northwestern part of Russia, the territory known as Arkhangelskaya Oblastj (Region), also referred to as Pomorye (which means “on the sea”). I have been a visitor on the traditional territories of Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ peoples, situated on what is now known as Victoria, British Columbia, since 1999. In 2002–2003, I studied in the Early Childhood Care and Education Program (now known as Early Learning and Care Program) at Camosun College. As an early childhood educator in the field since 2003, I have developed many connections with educators in the local community. I am aware of and care about their challenges and inspirations, and I bring my passion into my work with them.

In 2013, I started teaching in the same program where I had been a student. In my role as an instructor in the Early Learning and Care Program at Camosun College, I work with both first- and second-year students and visit them at their practicum placements. My connections in the early years field are growing, with many graduates of our program now working in the community.

My experiences as an early childhood educator and an instructor inspired me to stay focused on the early years as an area for further exploration during my graduate studies. I

became interested in the topic of beginning early childhood educators in 2013, when I was conducting a literature review for one of my graduate courses on the topic of burnout and resilience in the early childhood education field.

It was evident from the literature that early childhood educators who are new to the field experience higher levels of stress and burnout (Manlove & Guzell, 1997; Nicholson & Reifel, 2011; Sidelinger, 2004). Literature also showed that opportunities for connections and networks of support foster resilience (Black & Halliwell, 2000; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Kilgallon, Maloney, Lock, & Cowan, 2008; Sumsion, 2002, 2003, 2004). The topics of burnout and resilience were on my mind when I visited students at practicum centres. The following experience influenced my decision to engage in conversations with beginning early childhood educators for my research study:

*As I was driving away from the early childhood centre after visiting a student, I thought about the words of one of the educators who had approached me at the centre. She had recently graduated from the program where I was teaching, and I was excited to see her in the field. She told me how much she missed the connections that the Camosun College Early Learning and Care Program provided. She shared that she wanted to feel more connected with other educators in the broader early years community, both to share her thoughts and ideas and to hear about educators' inspirations and challenges.*

*This educator was not the only one who communicated this wish to me. As a practicum instructor, I visit students in the field and see our graduates now working there. I hear about their desire to have opportunities to connect with others to share their successes, challenges, and discoveries. But it was this particular conversation that sparked my curiosity. I started thinking*

*about the possibilities of having conversations as a way of looking deeper into the nuances of beginning early childhood educators' practice.*

Connections and relationships are the cornerstone of our field, and as I am writing my thesis, I am deeply immersed in my own experiences of being an educator, an instructor, and a student, and in the experiences of the educators who participated in the research, our connections through their school experiences, and memories of their studies, all of this creating a vibrant web of connections and relationships. Inspired by Elliot (2007), I want my work to be not just about educators, but for educators, with intention to continue our dialogue after the study is finished.

### **Ontological and Epistemological Stance**

I discuss my theoretical framework in more detail in chapter 2, but it is important for me to establish my ontological and epistemological stance early in my writing, because it influences and shapes my theoretical framework. Ontology, a theory of being, influences my views of what is considered as knowledge, and in turn it helps me decide what I am looking for in my research. Epistemology, a theory of knowledge, influences my beliefs about how a world can be known and how knowledge can be generated.

My ontological and epistemological stance is inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) perspective, with ontology and epistemology being interconnected as part of an assemblage, and with the researcher being immersed in the world (Cumming, 2015). Livesey (2010) describes an assemblage as "complex constellations of objects, bodies, expressions, qualities, and territories, that come together for varying periods of time to ideally create new ways of functioning" (p. 18). Using a Deleuzian perspective of thinking about "life and the world as a complex set of assemblages" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2009, p. xxi), I approach the research process in the way that Cumming (2015) describes as "entangling researchers, participants and data in assemblages of

understandings of reality (*ontologies*), ideas about what knowledge is and how it is produced (*epistemologies*), and methodological approaches” (p. 72, emphasis in original).

With intention to move beyond an individualistic approach with the focus on educators as “subjects” telling their individual stories, I conceptualize educators’ stories as compositions, combinations of various elements, borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of assemblages. In this process, I am not concerned with exploring what educators’ individual experiences and stories are. Inspired by Davies and Gannon’s (2012) collective biography work, which was influenced by Deleuze, I do not attach the stories and quotes to individual participants as an attempt to deconstruct “the concept of *a subject* whose stories might reveal *a life*” (Davies & Gannon, 2012, p. 357, emphasis in original). Instead, I work with the whole composition, the whole collective assemblage of group conversations, stories, notes, transcripts, compositions, images of those compositions, audio recordings, work with materials, memories, related texts, and concepts that I bring in. My intention is to bring attention to the possible roles that materials, images, and memories play in this process. In chapter 2, I further explore my conceptualization of materials and images as part of an assemblage. This thesis is my entanglement with the stories, images, concepts, and texts. As I am writing it, it keeps shifting, and I feel the fluid quality of the process. This is a snapshot of what is important to me right now, in this moment. I intentionally bring my current interests and passion into this process.

### **Research Context**

It is important to provide the context of education and certification requirements in British Columbia, Canada, because they reflect this study’s participants’ process. Education levels of early childhood educators in British Columbia vary. To be qualified as a certified early childhood educator (ECE), educators must complete “a basic early childhood education training

program” (ECE Registry, n.d., “Training Requirements,” para. 1). Depending on the training program, educators can graduate with a one-year certificate, a two-year diploma, or a bachelor degree. According to Doan (2014), “bachelor degrees in early childhood education are relatively new in British Columbia, and most early childhood educators graduate with a certificate or diploma” (p. 3).

In addition to completing the program, educators also need to complete 500 hours of work experience under the supervision of a Canadian-certified early childhood educator (ECE Registry, n.d.) to be certified as an early childhood educator. The certificate is renewed every five years. Within each five-year period, educators need 400 hours of work experience and 40 hours of professional development to get their certificates renewed (ECE Registry, n.d.).

### **Overview of Thesis**

This thesis consists of four chapters. In this chapter, I have started with my own journey of coming to the topic of my research and my ontological and epistemological stance. I have also described the context of early childhood educators’ education and certification requirements in British Columbia. At the end of this chapter, I provide an overview of the current literature in the following areas: issues that new early childhood educators face, and values and directions of the research in the field of education. Chapter 2 outlines my theoretical framework and methodology, focusing on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) ideas of assemblage and rhizomatic thinking that underpin the methodological and theoretical threads in my study. This chapter also focuses on the research process, explaining my sampling, recruitment, data collection, and data analysis methods, as well as the issues of validity and reliability and the limitations of the study. Chapter 3 presents the findings. I conclude in chapter 4 with the contributions of this study to the existing literature, the implications of the findings, as well as the possibilities for future research.

Next I review the literature as it relates to several areas important to explore for my study.

## **Literature Review**

I focus on the following areas in my review of the literature: issues that new early childhood educators face, values and directions of the research in the field of education. I start with exploring the issues that beginning educators face.

### **Issues Beginning Educators Face**

Research in the area of exploring the experiences of beginning early childhood educators is not extensive (Doan, 2014; Mahmood, 2013a). However, I found several studies that focused specifically on beginning educators (Doan, 2014; Giovacco-Johnson, 2005; Mahmood, 2013a, 2013b; Nicholson & Reifel, 2011; Noble, Goddard, & O'Brien, 2003; Recchia & Beck, 2014).

I also found it helpful to read literature that focused on the issues that educators in general experience (Black & Halliwell, 2000; Cumming, 2015; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Kilgallon et al., 2008; Manlove & Guzell, 1997; Noble & Macfarlane, 2005; Sidelinger, 2004; Sumsion, 2002, 2003, 2004) because some of the findings from these studies point out issues and challenges that beginning educators face.

Research literature emphasizes the importance of the first years of working in the field, stating that “conditions experienced at this time can . . . influence the decision on whether or not to continue in the teaching profession” (Noble & Macfarlane, 2005, p. 53). Beginning educators are more likely to leave the field, compared to educators who have been working in the field for many years (Manlove & Guzell, 1997; Sidelinger, 2004). These findings are consistent with the Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia’s (2012) concern that half of educators leave the field after the first five years.

There is evidence in the literature that early childhood educators who are new to the field experience higher rates of stress and burnout (Mahmood, 2103a; Manlove & Guzell, 1997; Nicholson & Reifel, 2011; Noble et al., 2003; Noble & Macfarlane, 2005; Sidelinger, 2004). According to Noble and Macfarlane (2005), early childhood teachers' level of burnout increases at the beginning of their second year of working in the field. Beginning educators describe their first years in the field as a time of "physical exhaustion" (Mahmood, 2013a, p. 161). In Giovacco-Johnson's (2005) study, educators communicated feeling tired and getting sick a lot as they started working, and that contributed to being overwhelmed and not having energy for both work and personal life. An educator in Giovacco-Johnson's study remarked, "It's such a giving profession that it's hard to remember where work ends and your life starts" (p. 103). Emotional exhaustion is also associated with the intention to leave the field and actually leaving it (Manlove & Guzell, 1997).

The following metaphors were used by beginning educators in several studies to describe their experiences: "reality shock"; "being thrown in at the deep end"; "sink or swim" (Mahmood, 2103a; Nicholson & Reifel, 2011). Educators in Nicholson and Reifel's (2011) study used the metaphors of being "thrown to the wolves"; "just tossed in"; "thrown in the classroom" (p. 10).

Rolfe (2005) and Sidelinger (2004) found that the major stress factors for early childhood educators are poor communication and authoritarian style of management, inadequate support and supervision of new staff, expectations that new staff start their full duties from the first day at work, lack of time and support given to professional development and staff discussions, and challenging behaviours of children in their care.

Several studies (Doan, 2014; Giovacco-Johnson, 2005; Mahmood, 2013a, 2013b; Recchia & Beck, 2014) highlight educators' difficulty in transitioning from the classroom setting

to the work place. Some challenges include increased responsibility, decreased support, “inconsistency” (Mahmood, 2013b, p. 78), and “incongruity between their reality as new teachers and the expectations that they had developed through their pre-service teaching experiences” (Mahmood, 2013a, p. 165). Doan’s (2014) findings show that although educators who had been working in the field for five years or less considered their work to be “deeply satisfying” (p. ii), they also felt “unprepared and overwhelmed for the work as an early childhood educator” (p. 170). Beginning early childhood educators shared that when they were students, they did not have full responsibility, and now “the responsibility was on them” (Mahmood, 2013a, p. 162).

The literature points to the difficulty of understanding (Mahmood, 2013a) and negotiating complexity in educators’ practice (Cumming, 2015). Educators wish they had had more “real” (Recchia & Beck, 2014, p. 219) experiences in their practica as students to prepare them for various challenges, such as communicating with parents, attending staff meetings, and being involved in various aspects of caring for infants and toddlers (Mahmood, 2013a).

Educators in Mahmood’s (2013a) study reported that during their practica, they did not have opportunities to participate in all aspects of the program. This contributed to their difficulties with approaching challenging issues, such as parent-teacher communication and relationships, due to the “inconsistency between their teacher education programs and the real world of teaching, specifically as it related to parent-teacher relationships” (Mahmood, 2013b, p. 78). Educators pointed out that when they were in the program, the focus was on developing partnerships with families, but when they started working in the field, they realized that they were “unfamiliar with the kinds of problems that they encountered” (Mahmood, 2013b, p. 78).

Mahmood (2013a) found that, as they started working in the field, educators found it hard to encounter “a whole range of issues in isolation” (p. 163). Educators missed the supportive environment of the college, and felt like they could no longer bring their questions back to the college like they had when they did their practica to get their questions answered and “sort things out” (Mahmood, 2013a, p. 163). Working as a team with other educators was also highlighted as a challenge that beginning educators experienced. Although they valued collaboration with a team, educators also admitted that those relationships presented challenges (Giovacco-Johnson, 2015), especially when the beginning educators’ philosophies and ideas were different from other educators working at the centres (Mahmood, 2013a). Beginning educators also felt tensions trying to understand “workplace culture, the unwritten rules, norms and practices” (Mahmood, 2013a, p. 162), and high staff attrition caused difficulties with “social and emotional adjustment”(Mahmood, 2013a, p. 161).

It is evident from the literature that relationships, opportunities for ongoing learning, networks of support, mentoring, continued connections with their programs and instructors after graduation, and opportunities for connections with other educators buffer against stress and burnout and foster resilience (Black & Halliwell, 2000; Doan, 2014; Giovacco-Johnson 2015; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Kilgallon et al., 2008; Sumsion, 2002, 2003, 2004). Participants in Giovacco-Johnson’s (2015) study described their involvement in the research project as “a form of support” (p. 112) because it encouraged them to stay connected and reflect on their practice. In Sumsion’s (2003) study, the participant’s “sense of connectedness to the wider community” (p. 151) contributed to her resilience.

The following factors are also highlighted in the studies I reviewed as fostering educators’ sense of resilience: “collegial friendships, empathy, trust, and team spirit” (Sumsion,

2004, p. 285) of working together with co-workers, as well as collegial relationships with the broader community and “recognition of their professional expertise by their employer, parents, the early childhood field and the broader community” (Sumsion, 2004, p. 285); time management, the ability to self-reflect, and having professional autonomy, flexibility, self-efficacy, and a sense of achievement (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Kilgallon et al., 2008). It is evident from the literature that it is important to consider broader systemic factors when considering resilience, such as recognition in the society and pay that meets financial needs (Kilgallon et al. 2008; Rolfe, 2005).

In summary, the literature suggests the following: The experiences of beginning educators is an area that has not been researched or explored extensively. However, there is strong evidence of the importance of the first years in the field. Educators beginning to work in the field experience higher rates of stress and burnout. The literature suggests that educators find the transition to the work setting from the classroom challenging, especially with increased responsibility and decreased support. Networks of support, connections, and opportunities for ongoing learning contribute to educators’ resilience.

### **Research in the Field of Education: Values and Directions**

I explored the research literature to find out how research in the field of early childhood was done in the past, and what values guided researchers. It was evident from the literature that historically, the intent of the majority of the research in the field of education was “either to control or constrain the production of certain outcomes . . . or to improve the learning” (Phelan, 2011, p. 208). This approach is strongly influenced by a dominant discourse of standardization of practice, or what Dahlberg and Moss (2005) refer to as “uniformity and normalization of thought and practice” (p. vi). This discourse is informed by developmental psychology, with a strong

emphasis on “objectivity, universality, certainty and mastery, through scientific knowledge” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. vii). From this perspective, educators are viewed as “static and knowable” (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kocher, Sanchez, & Chan, 2009, p. 88) and participation in research programs is seen as a professional development opportunity, and change and outcomes are focused on as something external that take place under certain conditions (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2013).

A growing body of research in the field of early childhood resists the dominant discourse and welcomes “complexity, diversity and otherness” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, vii). Researchers working with postfoundational perspectives (e.g., Cumming, 2015; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Hodgins, 2014; Kummen, 2014; MacNaughton, 2005; Nxumalo, 2014; Olsson, 2009; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2009; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2013; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010; Thompson, 2015) emphasize the importance of looking for new creative approaches of working with educators, seeing research in terms of possibilities, and opening up to multiple trajectories (Duncan & Conner, 2013; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2013).

Researchers working with postfoundational perspectives consider data as assemblages to “generate readings of the possibilities produced” (Cumming, 2015, p. 71), noticing that “the collective capacity of an assemblage exceeds what any one part could achieve alone” (p. 61). According to Thompson (2015), these assemblages include “a multitude of concepts including but not limited to, researchers, events, participants, places, theoretical frameworks, materials, texts, analyses and endings that invite more thought” (p. 93 of pdf); Hodgins (2014) and Kummen (2014) identify images, video clips, collages, conversations, and explorations of the intra-actions that occur within human and more-than-human entanglements in these data assemblages.

I was drawn to and inspired by several researchers working with educators in British Columbia (Hodgins, 2014; Kummen, 2014; Nxumalo, 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind, Kocher, Wapenaar, & Kim, 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot, & Sanchez, 2015; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010; Thompson, 2015). Their approaches resonated with me and inspired me to think about creative possibilities of working with educators. Researchers working with educators in British Columbia have explored the complexity of practice, uncertainties, tensions and the unknown, discomforts and knots by using pedagogical narrations to deeply and critically engage with their questions, working collaboratively with educators and children (Hodgins, 2014; Kummen, 2014, Nxumalo, 2014, Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010; Thompson, 2015).

One example of this work is the Investigating Quality (IQ) Project (Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010). The intention of this ongoing project is to build capacity in and bring innovation to the field (Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010, p. 130) by creating “opportunities for early childhood educators to network and critically reflect on their own practices through the use of pedagogical documentation and learning stories” (Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010, p. 129).

The researchers working with educators in British Columbia engaged in the process of making space “for the complexity, the questioning, the tensions, and the unknown in practice” (Hodgins, 2014, p. 109) to “complicate conversations” (p. iii) and “make visible and disrupt the hegemonic images of children and childhood” (Kummen, 2014, p. iii). What resonated with me in these researchers’ work was the desire to bring care and thoughtfulness, reflection, and thinking back to the practice. They emphasized that there are no easy answers, that our field and practice are complex, and that creative, reflective approaches are needed. Thompson (2015) writes about how her process encouraged her and educators “to reconsider some careless,

habitual, thoughtless practices” (p. 225 of pdf). This kind of creative research generates possibilities so that the habitual does not become a norm, so that care goes back to the heart of our profession. I became inspired by the power of these approaches to working with educators, and wanted to incorporate them in my research.

In addition to the methods described earlier, Black and Halliwell (2000), and Sumsion (2002, 2004) used the following methods with educators: metaphor analysis, line drawings, storytelling, story writing, and conversations. Their results showed that these methods were useful for the participants to get a better understanding of their experiences and to tell their stories. In Black and Halliwell’s study, the participants found using conversations, drawing, metaphors, and story writing helpful “to imagine new possibilities for managing complex teaching situations” (p. 113). These methods reflected the complexity of the profession and encouraged deep reflection and discussions. The participants in this study reported feeling less isolated, and confident, and inspired to take risks and view their practice creatively.

Sumsion’s (2004) study using line drawings as one of the methods encouraged complicating “conceptions of what sustains early childhood teachers” and creating “new opportunities by disrupting traditional, or dominant, cultural scripts and discourses” (p. 287). In regards to using metaphor analysis, she found the sharing of the metaphors was “particularly important” (2002, p. 883). Sumsion (2002) writes:

Collegial conversations about one’s experiences, interpretations of those experiences and expectations as an early childhood educator and how these might be represented metaphorically may generate insights into one’s own and others’ perspectives and actions. (p. 883)

After reviewing the literature, two main points stood out for me. Although there is strong evidence of the importance of the first years in the field, research in the area of exploring the experiences of beginning educators has not been done extensively (Doan, 2014; Mahmood, 2013a). The literature suggests exploring new educators' experiences from various angles and with different methodologies to examine their experiences in more depth (Mahmood, 2013a). To contribute to the literature on beginning educators' experiences, and to explore in more depth some of the issues brought up by the studies mentioned above, I wanted to experiment with using creative approaches of working with educators to look deeply into the nuances of their practice.

### **Research Questions**

This study has been guided by the following research questions:

- What are the possibilities of conversations when beginning early childhood educators get together?
- What conditions are needed for beginning educators to stay excited about and engaged in their work?

In the next chapter, I discuss my theoretical framework and methodology, focusing on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) ideas of assemblage and rhizomatic thinking that underpin the methodological and theoretical threads in my study. Chapter 2 also focuses on the research process, explaining my recruitment and data collection methods, exploring the issues of validity and reliability, and identifying the study's limitations.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

This chapter outlines my theoretical framework and methodology, as well as the research process, including recruitment and data collection methods, and concludes with a discussion of validity and reliability and the limitations of the study. I engage with two theoretical concepts that underpin the methodological and theoretical threads in my study. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) philosophical concept of assemblage helps me conceptualize educators' experiences, materials, and images. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) idea of a rhizome assists me in connecting the concepts to form the theoretical framework that grounds my thesis. These conceptualizations not only form my theoretical framework, they also inform my methodology.

### **Theoretical Framework: Stories, Materials, and Images as Assemblage**

As discussed in chapter 1, my theoretical framework is influenced by Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) perspective. Colebrook (2002) explains that for Deleuze, "the human subject is the effect of one particular series of experiential connections" (p. 81). From a Deleuzian perspective, the experience "is not confined to human experience, which means that there is a multiplicity of *worlds*" (Colebrook, 2002, p. 81, emphasis in original). Focusing on experiential connections with objects, materials, bodies, and sensations helps me understand the concept of assemblage. Livesey (2010) describes an assemblage as "complex constellations of objects, bodies, expressions, qualities, and territories, that come together for varying periods of time to ideally create new ways of functioning" (p. 18). As Dahlberg and Moss (2009) have written, Deleuze and Guattari think about "life and the world as a complex set of assemblages that continuously connect, bifurcate, combine and transform: life from the perspective of emergence and potentiality" (p. xxi).

In chapter 1, I conceptualized educators' stories, emphasizing that my intention is not to represent educators' individual experiences and stories, but to consider educators and their stories as parts of assemblages, along with other elements, such as transcripts, memories, audio, materials, compositions, texts, concepts, and images. I am fully entangled in this process as well. Cumming (2015), who explored complexity as assemblages in her work with educators, states that this reconceptualization allows "a shift in focus beyond simply identifying elements . . . and their connections, to looking at what is produced through the connections" (p. 52).

I conceptualize materials and compositions created with them not as passive objects that represent educators' experiences. The *Material Encounters* exhibit created by researchers in British Columbia to provoke different ways of thinking about early childhood (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2014) asks the following question: How is it to think with materials? Drawn to the ideas of the researchers involved with the *Material Encounters* exhibit, I conceptualize materials, as they do, as "joint participants in our interactions with them" (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2014, p. 1) and pay close attention to their "the fluxes, movements, and rhythms" (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2014, p. 36) and their power to "evoke memories, narrate stories, invite actions, and communicate meanings," as well as to "move us both physically and emotionally" (p. 1). I am curious about how working with materials might elicit deeper thinking about the nuances of practice.

In this thesis, I include several photographs of the compositions created by the study participants and me at the studio. Just as I do not intend for the materials and compositions to represent experiences, my intention in including images is to use them, not as representations of educators' experiences, but as parts of our process of inquiring into educators' experiences as parts of assemblages. I want the reader to join me and the educators in the process of inquiry, and

I hope that the images will spark new connections, conversations, stories, and thoughts. Inspired by Kind (2013), who conceptualizes photography as “a process of collaborating and moving *with* the world, an in-between space, rather than a view from either the outside or inside” (p. 429, emphasis in original), my intention for my work is to pay close attention to the collective creative process of working together.

In this section of the chapter, I used the concept of assemblage to conceptualize what I consider as data in my research. In the next section, I explain why stories are important to me, and I use some of the principles of a rhizome to explain how I bring narrative and rhizomatic elements together for the analysis.

### **Data Analysis: Bringing Narrative and Rhizomatic Approaches Together**

#### **Storytelling**

Stories are a powerful force in our lives. They bring us together, enlighten, bring warmth and comfort, make us forget or bring back memories, heal, encourage, inspire. Since childhood, I have been drawn to stories, both written and oral. When I started working in early childhood education, it felt natural and comfortable to connect with my coworkers through sharing stories. We educators are a lively bunch, with many stories to share about the joys and difficulties of our work. This is how we build relationships. We retell stories many times, remembering the details and the connections that we made with families, children, and each other.

I am drawn to researchers who used storytelling in their work with children and adults in the fields of early years and education. Paley (1986, 1990, 1992) is a kindergarten teacher and researcher who weaves her thoughts and curiosities about children’s play throughout her vibrant, descriptive stories of what is happening for the children in her classroom. When I read her books, I can sense the vibrant, lively energy of many possibilities. I think it is because the author brings

herself, her curiosities, and her questions into this process. Her thoughts and theories are contagious, inviting the reader to continue wondering and reflecting.

Elliot (2007) shares stories of caregivers working with infants and toddlers, recognizing through the process of working with the narratives how her “own narrative became an essential part of the story” (p. 64). By sharing her thoughts and her own stories, she adds depth to and highlights the complexity of the caregivers’ work. Thompson (2015) crafted her dissertation as “a storied research endeavor” (p. 92 of pdf) focusing on stories of multi-age care and positioning stories “as multiplicities” (p. 95 of pdf) to encourage many possibilities and to disrupt binaries and the notion of a single story.

Telling stories is in the heart of our work with young children. For my data analysis, I am imagining a vibrant web of entangled storytelling paths, consisting of my stories, educators’ stories, our memories, and the stories that materials and images shared with us. I imagine these paths rhizomatically, thinking again of the power of the story to connect in unexpected ways and change directions. There is an element of surprise and excitement in storytelling, and I invite the reader to join in this process. There are so many stories that need to be told.

What follows below is my attempt to experiment with bringing rhizomatic elements to storytelling for my data analysis.

### **Rhizomatic Thinking**

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use a metaphor of the rhizome to describe “dynamic, flexible and ‘lateral’ logic that encompasses change, complexity and heterogeneity” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 120). For the purpose of my data analysis, I focus on the following principles of the rhizome: connection, heterogeneity, and multiplicity.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain that principle of connection means that “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be” (p. 7). Having “multiple entryways” (Sermijn, Devlieger, & Loots, 2008, p. 637) is an important characteristic of a rhizome: It does not matter which side one enters from, because “as soon as one is in, one is connected” (Sermijn et al., 2008, p. 637). Adkins (2015) explains that this principle means experimenting with different possibilities of connections “not predicated on hierarchy” (p. 24). The principle of heterogeneity further explains that these various connections need to be diverse (Adkins, 2015), with many trajectories.

Several quotes added clarity to my understanding of the third principle of the rhizome: multiplicity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). According to Colman (2005), thinking in terms of the rhizome reveals “the multiple ways that you might approach any thought, activity, or concept” (p. 233). Thompson (2015) borrows from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to explain that multiplicity means that “there is no One to which it is possible to return” (p. 65 of pdf), challenging us to open up and rethink “taken-for-granted understandings” (p. 83 of pdf). The principle of multiplicity encourages us to disrupt binary thinking and consider what else might be possible (Thompson, 2015).

In this thesis, I bring rhizomatic principles of connection, heterogeneity, and multiplicity to narratives to help view stories in nonlinear directions and to pursue paths “as they emerge in the research” (Thompson, 2015, p. 98 of pdf).

### **Bringing Narrative and Rhizomatic Together**

I am inspired by researchers who have utilized a rhizomatic approach in their work with stories (Loots, Coppens, & Sermijn, 2013; Sermijn et al., 2008). Sermijn et al. (2008) emphasize that it is impossible to see participants’ stories as “a linear and complete whole” (p. 634) because

they are “no more than a fleeting glimpse of the multitude of possible stories” (p. 641). A rhizomatic approach with multiple entryways implies that there is neither a right way nor a right question with which to explore the participants’ stories (Sermijn et al., 2008).

I am aware that it is impossible to represent someone’s experience. Presenting a story from a distance as the truth of the other (Sermijn et. al., 2008) “cannot secure validity” (St. Pierre, 2008, p. 321) because I do not stand outside of these stories. St. Pierre (2013) reminds the reader that “being in every sense is entangled, connected, indefinite, and impersonal” (p. 226). A rhizomatic approach proposes viewing stories from a different perspective, as “neither completely coherent nor completely linearly structured around one plot” and considering their many “contradictory and discontinuous” elements (Sermijn et al., 2008, p. 634). I was curious about how participants’ stories might trigger my own stories and feelings, and the ways their narratives might connect with mine. I kept a journal, writing down my thoughts, feelings, stories, and memories that came up for me as we participated in the process together.

As I read the transcripts, listen to the audio, and look at the images, I notice those moments when something in the data attracts my attention. MacLure (2010) describes these moments as data beginning “to glow” (p. 282) when a certain data fragment all of a sudden “starts to glimmer, gathering our attention” and “connections start to fire up” (MacLure, 2010, p. 282). I pay attention to those moments when text, images, and audio were communicating in their own way, opening my mind to making connections to my own experiences, memories, conversations, readings. I notice the “sensations resonating in the body as well as the brain” (MacLure, 2010, p. 282).

Using a rhizomatic narrative approach, I look at the stories as “overlapping, multifocal and shifting with time” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 122). I notice connections between the stories,

discourses that they bring to life, and connections to the texts from outside and to me (MacNaughton, 2005). Lenz Taguchi (2012) draws on Deleuze, emphasizing that “we can never reflect upon something on our own. To reflect always means to interconnect with something” (p. 272). I am intrigued by what Gough (2004) calls “accidents of experience” (p.35), that is, how the coincidence of what I am interested in and focused on at the same time as doing analysis might influence the rhizomatic paths.

My intention is to “seek surprises” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 119) in how I could find unlikely connections among diverse stories when I was ready to look “within and beyond a text” (Alvermann, 2001, as cited in MacNaughton, 2005, p. 123). I am curious about the possibilities of bringing in ideas from beyond my data, “to touch them with each other” (N. Land, personal communication, February 2, 2015) to influence my thinking and become aware of what MacLure (2013) refers to as the “entangled relation of data-and-research” and the “capacity for wonder that resides and relates in data” (p. 228) as “new connections spark” (MacLure, 2013, p. 229). In chapter 3, I bring several texts and concepts in, placing them in the middle of my transcripts to see how connecting them might prompt me to ask new questions (MacNaughton, 2005).

As Sermijn et al. (2008) suggest, it is important for me to explain to the reader that I am focusing on just a few paths in my thesis, and that these paths are “merely a needle in a haystack” (p. 645). My thesis, as Sermijn et al. suggest, is “but one of the many possible presentations (or entrances)” (p. 646). I agree with Sermijn et al. (2008) that the application of rhizomatic thinking needs to be considered as a “thought experiment and not as a closed methodological or theoretical version” (p. 638). To me, the purpose of using this approach is not to find the answer, but to explore and find out what collective learning might come out of participating in this study.

In the next section of this chapter, I focus on the research process, explaining participant recruitment, informed consent, confidentiality, ethical considerations, incentives and participants' description. Then I explain my data collection methods, including group conversations and collage.

## **The Research Process**

### **Participant Recruitment**

After receiving an approval from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board, I was ready to start participant recruitment. Participants needed to be early childhood educators with a two-year diploma education and a valid certificate to practice, who had been working in the field anywhere between one and two years. To recruit participants for this study, an email was sent out by Child Care Resource and Referral Centre (CCRR) on their listserv with an invitation to participate in the research. The email included the following information: description of the study, details about participants' involvement, and the amount of time that was required from them. I chose CCRR for sending out an email because I knew that their listserv was large; therefore, it would be possible to reach many educators in Victoria, BC, the site of the research.

When the initial recruitment efforts resulted in only one participant, I broadened my recruitment strategies. An additional email with an invitation to participate was sent out by the team leader of the Early Learning and Care Program at Camosun College via the listserv of mentors and to two cohorts of graduates of the Early Learning and Care Program, who graduated in 2013 and 2014. These additional recruitment efforts resulted in three more potential participants. Educators who were interested in participating contacted me by email or by phone to discuss suitability and ask any questions that they might have about the study.

## **Informed Consent**

I followed up with potential participants via email, screening them for suitability. I arranged a meeting with two of the four participants, at a time and location convenient for them, to discuss the details of the study, answer their questions, and go over the consent form. I left the consent form with them for a week to make a decision whether they wanted to participate and sign the consent form. Two participants were not able to meet with me due to their limited availability. I communicated with them via phone and email, discussing the details of the study and explaining the consent form. I emailed the consent form to them and encouraged them to ask me any questions that they might have.

The consent form included information about data collection methods (group conversation sessions and collage). It explicitly stated that participation was voluntary, without any pressure to consent or consequences for not participating (S. de Finney, personal communication, March 16, 2015), and that the participants would be able to withdraw from the study at any time. I obtained and documented ongoing consent by asking participants to initial the signed consent form during subsequent sessions.

## **Confidentiality**

As an early childhood educator, I was aware how small our Victoria early years community is. To protect participants' confidentiality, I asked each person to choose a pseudonym that could be used in my thesis. Although I changed all information that could make participants identifiable, I explicitly stated in the consent form that due to the nature of group conversations, I could not guarantee full confidentiality. I addressed these limitations with participants by including information about confidentiality in the consent form (i.e., stating that all information shared during sessions must remain confidential). Participants were also given

the opportunity to review all transcripts for accuracy and to withdraw any of their responses if they felt they could make them identifiable.

### **Ethical Considerations**

As an instructor, I was mindful that some of participants could be mentoring Early Learning and Care practicum students from Camosun College. I realized that due to my work as an instructor in the Early Learning and Care Program at Camosun College, supervising practicum students and working with both mentors and students might create potential for a dual-role relationship with some mentors. As a safeguard to prevent such a dual-role relationship, I did not supervise students who had mentors participating in the study during the September 2015 to June 2016 school year. I required participants to have a two-year diploma to prevent the possibility of having any power imbalance with them as students in the future if they were to enroll in second-year diploma courses at the college where I work.

### **Incentives**

Early childhood educators in British Columbia are required to complete 40 hours of professional development during five years in order to renew their certificate to practice. Participants received certificates of participation in professional development issued by CRR that documented their hours of participation in the study. I understood that due to the time of our sessions, some participants came to sessions right after work, without having time to eat. To ensure participants' nourishment, I provided snacks and tea to them. As a way of saying thank you to participants, I gave each of them a small gift in our last session. If participants were to withdraw before the completion of the study, they would still be given a small gift of appreciation, and a certificate of professional development hours would be issued, documenting the total hours of participating in the project.

## **Participants' Description**

All four educators identified as female. Violet, Margaret, and Phyliss were members of the same class and graduated in the same year. Rachael graduated from a different program. Rachael and Violet worked in the same program; therefore, their working experiences were similar. Phyliss, Rachael, and Violet worked with preschool-aged children in large child care centres. Margaret worked in a toddler centre. All four educators worked as part of a team with other educators.

In the next section of this chapter, I outline data collection methods, which included group conversations and collage.

## **Data Collection Methods**

My intention for this study was to explore the possibilities of conversations with beginning early childhood educators, as well as conditions needed for them to stay excited and engaged in their work. I wanted my data collection methods to be congruent with my intention. I chose group conversations and collage as data collection methods.

## **Group Conversations**

I conducted four conversation sessions with the four participants. Each session was approximately 60 to 90 minutes in duration. The sessions, which occurred every two weeks, were audio-recorded and transcribed.

In the process of thinking about the beginning framework for the group conversations, the values and principles of appreciative inquiry drew my attention. I was drawn to this approach because it was congruent with my ECE philosophy of working with children, with a focus on strengths and paying attention to stories and the process of inquiry.

Appreciative inquiry is strength-based, with an emphasis on respecting and honouring participants' strengths and their narratives and the belief that people are creative and full of resources (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012). As a researcher, I valued, honoured, and respected my participants as capable contributors to the process. My intention was to bring a group of people together to encourage a process of creativity and collective capacity (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012) in which to explore their experiences as new educators.

Appreciative inquiry's narrative approach emphasizes the importance of storytelling for building connections. As an educator, I know that storytelling is an important method of sharing values, beliefs, and information in our field. As Elliot (2007) has written, "telling stories is a natural and daily activity" (p. 55) of educators. This is how they connect and make meaning with children, families, and one another. I hoped that by starting with sharing stories of their passion and excitement, educators would build trust and connect with one another.

I used the initial discovery stage of appreciative inquiry (Cockell, 2014) to provide the beginning framework for the group conversations. Cooperrider and Whitney (n.d.) state that the goal of the discovery stage is to "discover and disclose positive capacity" (p. 7). To build rapport with participants, I sent them an email with a description of the topics that we would be exploring in our first session. During our first session, I asked participants to share a story of the experience of working in the field of early childhood when they had felt most alive, excited, and engaged. Examples of the questions that I used in our first session include the following:

- Recall a time when you felt most alive, most engaged, or most excited.
- What are the things you value deeply about yourself and your work in the field?
- What helps you pull through challenging times?

- If you had three wishes for your work in the field, what would they be? (adapted from Cockell, 2014).

While my intention was to focus on strengths, successes, and dreams of participants, I was also prepared to explore places of tension, challenges, and feelings of sadness, anger, or frustration that my participants expressed. As Atkinson and Elliot (2013) have written, educators are often “faced with questions and situations that are ambiguous, fraught with layers of emotions, and difficult to resolve” (p. 128). They encourage exploration of these emotions by sharing narratives and questions (Atkinson & Elliot, 2013). I made sure that I was fully present in the process. I honoured, respected, and provided space for acknowledging the participants’ “feelings, fears and concerns” (Atkinson & Elliot, 2013, p. 128) and the uncertainties of practice (Atkinson & Elliot, 2013).

Ritchie, Crow, Rau, and Duhn (2013) wonder what might happen to the conversation in the research process “if there was interviewer–interviewee reciprocity?” (p. 97). I had attended a workshop on appreciative inquiry in which I had had an opportunity to participate in a reciprocal interview, where another participant interviewed me and then I interviewed her. This experience was inspiring for me, because I felt connected and heard by the other person. In our first session, I asked my study participants to interview one another, dividing into groups of two and sharing their stories. After they were finished, they shared the story of the person whom they interviewed with the whole group. I also shared my story with participants. As a way to move forward in the process, I asked participants “What is it that comes out for you when you listen to each other’s stories?”

My intention for using questions from the discovery stage (Cockell, 2014) was to build connections and a sense of trust and relationship with educators and to have a base from which to

move forward in our explorations. To ensure that I allowed space for openness in this process, I decided to leave the rest of the sessions open, being attuned to the themes and ideas that emerged for my participants and waiting for the openings that emerged from my questions and ideas to engage in deeper inquiry (E. Elliot, personal communication, February 25, 2015).

We did not use materials in our first session. However, collage materials were available to educators in the second, third and fourth sessions. In the next section I explore the collage method that was used in sessions 2, 3, and 4 as part of our conversations.

### **Collage**

Our sessions took place in the Provocation Studio at the Child Care Resource and Referral Centre (CCRR) in Victoria, BC. This studio was designed by two early childhood educators with the intention to inspire and provoke thoughts in the early childhood community. The studio has a wide variety of open-ended materials for creative expression, such as clay, rocks, shells, driftwood, and fabric. I chose this location because I wanted to provide opportunities for educators to engage with the materials in the studio as part of our group conversations.

According to Norris (2008), “collage is an arts-based research approach to meaning-making through the juxtaposition of a variety of pictures, artifacts, natural objects, words, phrases, textiles, sounds, and stories” (p. 95). Its purpose is “to create metaphoric evocative texts through which readers, audiences, and patrons create their own meanings on a given research topic” (Norris, 2008, p. 95). I asked participants “not to think, edit, or censor but to collect everything that intuitively spoke to them” (Norris, 2008, p. 95). According to Norris, (2008), participants’ intuitive choices “are part of the evocative meaning-making structure” (p. 96),

meant “to communicate on a metaphoric, rather than a transactional, information-giving level” (p. 97).

I used collage as a research method to deliberately incorporate “non-dominant modes of knowing and knowledge systems” (Vaughan, 2005, p. 32) in my research. According to Vaughan (2005), collage “values multiple distinctive understandings” (p. 32). The process of gathering materials “from *different* worlds into a single composition” (Vaughan, 2005, p. 32, emphasis in original) calls attention to “the irreducible *heterogeneity* of the postmodern condition” (Vaughan, 2005, p. 32, emphasis in original).

Collage materials were available to educators in the second, third and fourth sessions. The participants and I created compositions using various materials, including clay, shells, corks, rocks, driftwood, and fabric. I also had paper, glue, scissors, a variety of magazines, and markers for us to use.

In the second session, I arranged materials on a low table in the middle of the studio (see Figure 1). At the end of session 2, educators provided me with feedback. They preferred materials arranged on the floor around the table so that they could have space to work on. In the third session, Violet arrived early and helped me arrange materials on the floor around the table (see Figure 2). In the fourth session, educators wanted to create a vision board, inspired by Margaret’s idea (see Figure 3).



**Figure 1: Session 2.**



**Figure 2: Session 3.**



**Figure 3: Session 4.**

My intention in using a collage method was to help us think with the materials, have conversations through materials, and notice “side stories and centered stories” (E. Elliot, personal communication, April 30, 2015). Le Guin (2001) says this about the work we do with our hands:

Nothing we do is better than the work of handmind. When mind uses itself without the hands it runs the circle and may go too fast. The hand that shapes the mind into clay or the written word slows thought to the gait of things and lets it be subject to accident and time. (p. 175)

I wondered how it would be to use materials as part of our conversations, to, as Acland (2012) says, “rest in the story and feel the parts that are comfortable . . . to poke the story and listen to the parts that giggle . . . to wrestle with the story and see which parts wrestle back” (para. 3). I also was curious about what might emerge when we asked “the linear, logical part of ourselves to still while the playful wonderer wanders about doing her prodding work” (Acland, 2012. para. 8).

As I wrote previously, the compositions we created are part of the entanglements of data, participants, and myself. I participated in the process of making compositions with the participants, and I also shared my stories with them. My intention was to partner images and text, but it was not to provide an accurate correspondence of what the educators said at the time of working with the materials. I layered images and texts in unexpected ways to see what might happen, what emotion I might experience when I looked through the images as I read the data, and it provided me with clarity regarding how I wanted to position them. As I was reading the data and looking through the images, I waited to find the one(s) that stood out for me in terms of communicating an emotion.

My intention was not to treat the collage materials arranged by the educators as representations of their experiences. Instead, I was curious about the role of the materials in our conversations, the affect of the materials and the images. I wanted to read our compositions “as an assemblage of elements in itself, as well as for what was produced as the collage was connected-up with other elements as part of a data assemblage” (Cumming, 2015, p. 72).

Kummen (2014) writes about the power of collage to unexpectedly invite a conversation about a topic (p. 157), “to disturb” (p. 158), startle, and disrupt the agenda. Kummen writes that she “could feel the disturbance of the collage as it reverberated in our thinking, feelings, and

being” (p. 161) as it joined other texts and narratives. In my own research, I wanted to experiment with connecting images of collage materials arranged by educators, transcripts of our conversations, audio recordings, concepts, and memories in various ways, paying attention to “visceral prompts—moments of intensity in which capacities for change (*affect*) seemed to be made more or less possible” (Cumming, 2015, p. 72, emphasis in original).

### **The Issues of Validity and Reliability**

Kvale (1995) problematizes the issue of validity due to its emphasis on “a firm boundary line between truth and nontruth” (p. 21). According to Kvale (1995), “a strong emphasis on validity in research may foster an emphasis on testing and verification of knowledge rather than on exploration and creative generation of new knowledge” (p. 36). Kvale states that “to validate is to question” (p. 28) and encourages researchers to understand validity “as craftsmanship, as communication and action” (p. 36). Newbury and Hoskins (2008) emphasize the importance of engaging in a conversation about research “*while* it is in progress rather than only after it has been finalized” (p. 238, emphasis in original).

I did not intend to produce a generalizable study. Instead, my goal was to share with and learn from others (Newbury & Hoskins, 2008) and to write about my process “as it unfold[ed]” (Newbury & Hoskins, 2008, p. 238). I made sure that my voice was not the only one being heard by persistently and actively engaging with research literature and my participants (S. de Finney, personal communication, March 16, 2015). I shared transcripts of participants’ stories with them to invite their comments. I consistently asked, “What else could it be?” (S. de Finney, personal communication, March 16, 2015), consulting with my research committee and going back to the research literature. Using rhizomatic narrative data analysis helped me engage with related texts, ideas, and concepts to deepen my inquiry.

## **Limitations of the Study**

I am aware of the following limitations of my study. The sample included four participants; using participant observations at their workplace fell outside the scope of this study. The sample was homogeneous in terms of cultural backgrounds and gender (all four participants identified as white and female). Working with a diverse group of educators would have provided more depth and insights.

Although I decided to name our sessions group conversations, I am aware that Berg and Lune (2012) point to the fact that all forms of interviewing “are not truly natural conversations” (p. 175) due to the power of the facilitator to “control the assembly, alter the pace of discussions, change the direction of comments, interrupt or stop conversations, and so forth” (p. 175). I am aware of my position as both an insider and an outsider. According to Kirby, Greaves, and Reid (2006), “the more familiarity the researcher has with the issue the better potential understanding of it she or he will have” (p. 37). As an educator, I knew the excitement, issues, and possibilities present in our field, and could relate to what the participants were discussing. However, as a facilitator, I was aware of “the power asymmetry within an interview situation” (Kvale, 2006, p. 496). I am aware of the power that I had as a researcher, choosing the stories that I decided to include in the data analysis and following paths that resonated with me. I am also aware that, although I used a rhizomatic approach to data analysis, “whatever shape it takes, it is still data analysis” (S. de Finney, personal communication, March 16, 2015), with a power imbalance between me and the participants.

Kirby et al. (2006) have written that “researchers who are passionate about their area of interests can offer interesting and insightful knowledge and go on to inspire others to investigate the issue further” (p. 37). To counteract the power imbalance, I hoped to develop collaborative

relationships with the participants by actively involving them in the process and by being engaged in it myself, encouraging reciprocity between myself and the participants by sharing my own thoughts, stories, and ideas with them (Van den Hoonaard, 2012).

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 2 has described my theoretical framework and methodology, including my approach to data analysis, which was influenced by Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) philosophical concepts of assemblage and a rhizome. I also outlined my research process, explaining my recruitment and data collection methods, which consisted of group conversations and collage. The chapter concluded with a discussion of validity and reliability and the limitations of the study.

In the next chapter, I discuss my findings. My exploration flows rhizomatically as I connect various elements of data (images of the collage materials arranged by educators, transcripts of our conversations, audio recordings of conversations, memories, related texts and concepts that I bring in to spark additional questions, and my notes) in different ways to create new connections and raise new questions.

## Chapter 3: Findings

This chapter follows rhizomatic flow. I decided to use two additional fonts to make my process of engaging with the data visible. In addition to using regular Times New Roman font, I also use Arial font for sharing my own memories and stories and Times New Roman italic font for sharing our conversations during the sessions. Just like the educators are new to working in the early years field, I am also new to doing research and trying to find my way. I am immersed in this process as a new researcher, entangled with our conversations, materials, stories, feelings, memories, concepts, related texts, and images in an assemblage. The chapter is guided by my research questions:

- What are the possibilities of conversations when beginning early childhood educators get together?
- What conditions are needed for beginning educators to stay excited and engaged in their work?

I draw on Adkins (2015), who explains Deleuze and Guattari's intention of "writing a rhizome that connects to the outside," wanting "not so much readers as fellow creators" (p. 32).

As Massumi (1987) explains,

when you buy a record there are always cuts that leave you cold. You skip them.

You don't approach a record as a closed book that you have to take or leave.

Other cuts you may listen to over and over again. They follow you. You find yourself humming them under your breath as you go about your daily business.

(p. xiii)

Making connections rhizomatically means that there is no beginning and no end, and the reader is welcome to start on any path anywhere in the chapter, skip sections, and follow the

paths in their own way. Massumi (1987) asks: “What new thoughts does it make it possible to think? What new emotions does it make it possible to feel?” (p. xv). My intention is to invite the reader to notice how the images, stories, and reflections might spark their own memories, sensations, and stories as they follow the paths, making new connections.

This chapter is a narrative of our conversations, which connected us, and the possibilities that emerged as we connected in conversations. The word *conversation* has Latin origins, consisting of the prefix *con*—which means “together”—and the root noun *versatio*, meaning “turning” (Vocabulary Lesson Plans, n.d.). In this narrative, I explore our process of turning together to connect. I start with the fragment of our sessions that caught my attention right away:

*When I was in the program, I was so connected, but now this connection is lost. It would be nice if we were more connected, united. If we were more connected, we could use our voice more.*

I am curious about this fragment, because all four educators worked as part of a team, and none of them worked by themselves. In fact, they emphasized that they did not want to work alone, that being part of a team was important to them. I wondered how it was for educators to connect, what was missing for them in their current working environment compared to being in the college program.

I explored the concept of connections further. According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), some definitions of connection include “causal or logical relation or sequence, contextual relation or association, and a relation of personal intimacy.” Thinking about connections as relations, I bring in the concept of caring relations (Held, 2006). Held (2006) says this about caring relations: they need to be “reciprocal” (p. 42), characterized by trust (p. 42), and they “ought to be cultivated” (p. 42).

As I continued to read and listen, the concept of not just connecting but bonding stood out: *Shared experience kind of bonds everyone together.*

The Oxford Living English Dictionary (2017) defines a bond as “a force or feeling that unites people; a shared emotion or interest.” Thinking about connections as caring relations based on trust and paying attention to the energy that bonds us is in the heart of this narrative.

### **Coming Together: Listening Deeply and Attending in Conversations**



**Figure 4: The contrast of light and dark.**

The contrast of light and dark in the photo in Figure 1 brings back memories of the rhythm and energy flow in our conversations. We started our meetings in October, the air still filled with memories of summer, its warmth and lightness. Educators came straight from work,

and we took time to eat and connect while sitting in the area in front of the studio before going in. We spent our first two sessions in the studio without turning the lights on. There was a lot of laughter and light-hearted conversations, with vibrant energy filling our space together.



**Figure 5: Dancing figure wrapped in fabric.**

A body (see Figure 2) with fabric carefully wrapped around it and tucked in, bursting with colour, adding a splash of energy:

*And then she did something amazing! And she is phenomenal! She went outside with four kids, she did it! In the pouring rain! In the pouring rain! Yes, we are going outside today! (everyone talking at the same time) ... So, phenomenal that you took them out! You saw what they needed, you know what they needed, right?*

*You explored it, and you rocked it! You rocked it! I did not have to be there to see that you rocked it!* (laughter in the group)

*Yeah, it's been a struggle to do that.*

*To stand up for yourself!*

*Yes! Yes!*

*To hold your own!*

*Be the change!*

(everyone talking at the same time and laughing)

I noticed the sensation, the energy changing, when all of a sudden everyone started talking at the same time and laughing. It was a joyful moment, with collective energy bursting, spilling, and surrounding the group as a whole. Swept up in this collective joyful energy, I shared my story with the educators:

I remember one day when I was working in the field, and everything was flowing. We had 16 children that day, that was our full program, and if you came in from outside, it might seem like a chaos. It was loud, busy, noisy, and the energy was exhilarating! My coworker and I, we had this in-sync flow that day, well, not only on that day, but that day especially, so we looked at each other one time in the morning, and she had this big grin on her face, and she said to me, "Isn't it wonderful?" I said, "Yes, it is wonderful!" The children were so engaged in different areas, we appreciated so much happening around us—the energy, creative thinking, the ideas—and I was thinking, what was the key? And I think

the key was that we really understood each other. And it was a process, I would say. It did not happen overnight kind of thing, but it takes time. You build connections, relationships, and from there it's like, "Oh! (laughter) You have my back; I have your back; we are in sync."

This collective joy united and lifted our spirits. We felt the energy and the sensation when we came together in a conversation with one another and with the materials that we worked with.

Silence, laughter, arranging, slowing down, kneading, folding, rolling, rearranging, sticking, moving, wrapping, balancing, cutting, talking at the same time, noticing, sharing memories and stories...

I noticed as I worked with materials that they encouraged me to slow down and pay attention to the collective "emotional, bodied, tactile, sensory, *felt* experience" (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind, & Kocher, 2017, p. 31, emphasis in original). I slowed down and paid attention, listening deeply.

Bright tissue paper suspended on the wall, suddenly, as if by magic, fluttering down to the floor, making us jump and laugh. I notice how our conversation responds to the interruption, encouraging us to pause and think: Where were we? Through this interruption and a pause, a new story emerges, turning us in a different direction unexpectedly.

I paid attention to "active and participatory" (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017, p. 2) materials, setting things in motion, inciting questions, producing ideas and generating insights (p. 2). I felt materials turning together with us in our conversations, and making us turn to one another and share stories, associations, and memories.

*This person looks excited!*

*It reminds me of a demon!*

*It's actually reminding of me of somebody dancing. . . . It could be actually me dancing!*

*One little girl took dance lessons this summer, and she showed me her dance moves. That actually looks like one of the moves! (laughter)*

*These two look like they are dancing too—more poised. . . .*

As we kneaded, squeezed, and rolled clay, we folded “experiences, feelings, memories, histories” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017, p. 63) into our conversations. Each of us brought our own experiences, values, beliefs, and memories into this process, and our conversations had layers of folded-in collective experiences. Sometimes these experiences, values, and beliefs were like whispers that were not heard right away—to hear them, we needed to listen deeply. We needed to collectively notice and hear one another, attending to one another. Materials invited and welcomed silence and reflection. There was no pressure to produce. We directed our attention to the process in a very open way, and I could sense the connections wrapping us in a warm embrace, letting us be, trusting one another without judgment as we attended to one another, listening deeply.

*We are so engrossed in this, it is distracting. . . . Does it fit in here? Yes, I just need to put it on the right angle. . . .*

*It took me a while to get into it. . . . When there are no materials, we talk more freely—more free-flowing discussion—but maybe it is not that enriching, maybe*

*we are just trying to fill space. With materials, it gives you something to concentrate on . . . and there are silences. It does not feel weird . . .*

I noticed how slowing down encouraged me to pay attention and notice “rhythms of pause and engagement” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017, p. 32), the flow and the energy of our conversations as we wrapped and stretched fabric, arranged and rearranged the figures, balanced rocks and cut paper. I also noticed how the rhythm of the fall season also influenced our collective energy, becoming part of our assemblage.

I noticed how surprised we all were to come back at the beginning of November after the time change to discover that it was quite dark in there now and we had to turn on the lights. Darkness outside somehow slowed down the energy of our conversation, inviting us to be quieter and more reflective. I also wonder if maybe as our relationships grew, they also influenced the pace of our conversations, turning our attention to reflecting and questioning.

According to Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2017), “practising attunement requires awareness of the in-between, attending to the relations between things” (p. 39). Reflecting on our process of coming together, we showed care to one another by listening deeply and intently to be able to attend to one another. It helped us turn together with one another and the materials. I wonder, what else is needed for conversations to form caring relations? I turn back to the data fragments and the story continues.

## Courage to Engage in Conversations from the Heart

During one session, our conversation somehow turned to what educators wished they had had more of when they were students in the Early Learning and Care Program. I remember how hearing the word *courage* surprised and startled me:

*Courage, to have more courage to talk to educators. How to be respectful and to show them different ways to broaden their education.*

As an instructor, I thought about teaching courage: How do we do it? What is needed? To explore this question further, I turned to Brown (2010), who explains that the original definition of courage “when it first came into the English language—it’s from the Latin word *cor*, meaning heart—and the original definition was to tell the story of who you are with your whole heart” (n.p.). How do we tell the story of who we are, of all the facets that shape us and our stories? I thought about my roles and responsibilities as a graduate student, a mother, an early childhood educator, an instructor, a friend. . . . Participants reflected on this complexity of different roles in our conversation as well.

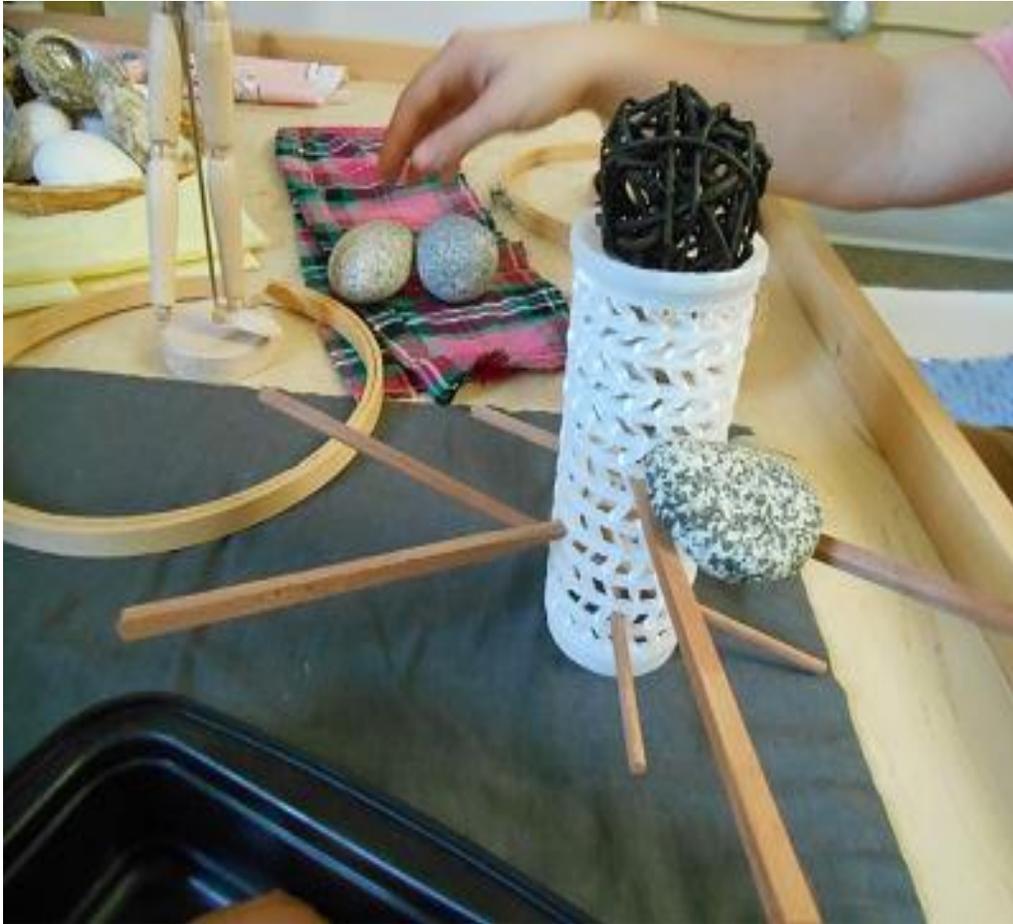
*You are a different person when you walk in that door, because they are counting on you to step up to the task and to be a professional, to be a leader, and to be a mentor and a friend, and all of these different hats, and—but that’s kind of a wonderful part of it. (laughs)*

As Elliot (2007) writes, “Caregiving . . . demands one’s whole being, with each facet contributing to the process” (p. 66). To tell your whole story requires risk, vulnerability, and trust. How do we let ourselves be seen (Brown, 2010)?



**Figure 6: Awkward angles.**

This figure [body in Figure 3] looks really vulnerable. . . . It reminds me of a woman trying to run in a skirt that is tight and uncomfortable. (Enid Elliot, personal communication, June 11, 2017)



**Figure 7: Rock, hand, and circle.**

Delicate and seemingly impossible to balance, the rock (see Figure 4) is suspended, supported by the sticks. Holding my breath, I think, what if it falls? The hand's intention, next step: It is very close to the rocks on the fabric. Is it going to touch them or pick them up, placing them somewhere? Being on the edge of the circle but inside the circle.

*Being straight out of school—those people have been in this field for so long, and we come with all ideas, and we want to change things, and they are like, no, not now, change, what's that, that's scary! Let's just ignore it . . .*

Looking at the image, a strong wave of emotion washed over me and sent me back to 2003, remembering my experiences as a new educator full of hopes and excitement, starting to work in the field. I remembered a feeling of being finally there, but also feeling on the edge, although inside—taking time, learning the ways, noticing, observing, connecting, asking questions. Feelings of tension when I sensed that my ideas were disregarded because I did not have experience yet.

The image somehow pulled tensions and memories out of the depth of memory, urging me to feel them again—heart pounding, head hurting, feeling so afraid and unsure—a new educator attending a meeting with another educator to discuss a situation that I did not agree with. How difficult it was, to face that at the beginning, to articulate what I believed was important.

Being “new” is not an easy process. I reflected on my process as a new researcher, and an image of the ocean and waves came to mind—quiet and peaceful ocean with waves gently rolling to the shore reminded me of the days when I was at peace, content and excited, enjoying the process. On “stormy ocean” days I felt restless and tense, unsure how to proceed and questioning my abilities. I had to learn what to do with the tension, uncertainty, and doubt, learning a lot about myself in the process. But the best days were when I was able to catch a wave in that storm and ride it, enjoying the challenge, finding a surprising connection, and bringing it farther.

*And it's hard to find your place and to establish who you are within that team and what that team means. . . . Especially just being out of the program, and everyone else is like, “Oh, well, you don't know anything!” And you are like, actually I do know things! (laughs)*

*I do know, you just don't know it yet!*

*You have not asked me!*

I continue thinking about being “new” in different situations in my life—as a new instructor, a new mother, a new immigrant, a new educator, a new student, a new researcher. There are many complex emotions attached to being “new”: excitement, joy, uncertainty, optimism, fear, feeling one day that I can do everything and another day that I cannot do a single thing.

As I engaged with the data and started the process of writing as a new researcher, I noticed an interesting parallel between my process of writing and what the educators were talking about regarding their work in the field: I/they don't want to work by myself/themselves. I/they want to be part of a team. I wanted to be connected with others too in my writing, and I invited others into the process.

I craved human contact, sharing ideas and thoughts. My research committee provided ongoing inspiration. Their ideas and suggestions encouraged me to dig deeper and keep going. I am very grateful to them! I experienced such joy from the moments of connecting data with the concepts and ideas in a very unusual way and noticing with surprise how “one meaning expands into another” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 121), challenging my thinking. It was like having a conversation in the company of wise and interesting people, all of them bringing fresh, unexpected perspectives. I found it energizing and rejuvenating to meet with my fellow classmates, go for a walk, and engage in conversations.

I wonder, how do people find their way from being on the edge of the circle? It certainly takes trust: in your own abilities, in people around you, and for them to trust you as well, you need to tell your whole story.

A saying comes to mind: Trust has to be earned. What is the responsibility of the beginning educators in this process? I also think about educators who are not new to working in the field and their vulnerability as well, meeting beginning educators as they come in to their centres.

*Yes, we need to talk . . .*

*And how . . .*

*How do I do that? (laughter in the group)*

*You sit down and talk to them.*

*You have to be brave.*

*And put yourself out there, like you did, and ask coworkers for support, hey, will you back me up on this?*

*I asked . . . and the coworker said, I don't know, it has always been done this way.*

*. . . This is what I hear a lot—this is what it is! There is fear of change, of trying something different.*

Brown (2010) explains that when we want to numb vulnerability, we make the uncertain certain. The more afraid we are, the more vulnerable we are. It-has-always-been-done-this-way responses have vulnerability underneath. I wonder: How can these responses be approached with

kindness, gentleness, and desire to get to know people? Almost simultaneously come across the following two very different texts, and somehow they speak to me. In *The Sacred Tree*, Bopp, Bopp, Brown, and Lane (2004) explain the teachings of the medicine wheel: It “teaches us that courage must be balanced by wisdom, toughness by gentleness of heart” (p. 39). Daly Pizzo (2015) writes about Gwen Morgan, a leader and leadership mentor in the field of early years, and an important quality of a leader: “summon[ing] up courage in a wise way” (p. 83).

Daly Pizzo (2015) reflects on the gift that Morgan has to “raise good ideas gently and wisely, recognizing their disruptive power” (p. 80). She writes about the courage that is needed in our field “to risk disapproval and misunderstandings from others” (p. 81). She describes Gwen Morgan’s process of first simply listening deeply and then gently raising a question or two (p. 81). Morgan understood that “the courage needed could be better sustained in an atmosphere of mutual support and cooperation, and so drew people around her as she and others were developing a good idea” (p. 81). She went through the process together with others so that the ideas were “slowly built, nurtured, cared for, and informed” (p. 81).

Gwen Morgan shared a gift of bringing out “the best of so many individual thoughts” and drawing “concentric circles of supporters around ideas” (Daly Pizzo, 2015, p. 81). I continue thinking about the importance of attending to, paying attention to, and listening deeply, now adding the courage to have “conversations from the heart” (E. Elliot, personal communication, June 29, 2017). The following question emerges: How do we notice, ask, listen deeply, acknowledge, and nurture the gifts that people have so that we can have authentic conversations and tell the stories of who we are with our whole hearts?

Nurturing and caring are important in this process. I turn to Held (2006), who writes about the importance of caring in the process of developing trust for caring relations:

Consider how trust is built, bit by bit, largely by practices of caring. Trust is fragile and can be shattered in a single event; to rebuild it may take long stretches of time and many expressions of care, or the rebuilding may be impossible. (p. 42)

I sensed how our connections were developing, with people caring for one another and trusting one another more and more with each conversation. Listening deeply and attending to one another enabled us to develop a sense of trust to engage in deeper conversations from the heart. Because of the sense of trust, we were able to pull at the threads of tensions in our conversations.

### **“Tough Parts”: Pulling At the Threads of Tensions**

#### **Conversations as Frictions**



**Figure 8: Perspectives.**

Taking perspective and looking at things from various angles (see Figure 5): How does everything look when I crouch down low? When I stand above it? When I look from above, it looks flat, just an overview. Getting lower, I notice details and dimensions.

The energy of the conversations changed and became emotionally charged we talked about differences in philosophy.

*Asking open-ended questions and sharing moments—that can happen when your team is ok.*

*When you have the same perspective.*

*Exactly! If you have a team or a centre that has two very different philosophies, perspectives, you are bumping heads all the time, so it is how you find the balance in-between. It's tricky.*

*We talk a lot about finding others' strengths. What if you can't find strengths?  
How do we talk to somebody when it is hard, when philosophies are so different?*

A memory of our class, and an exercise of the importance of getting down to the children's level to really notice and listen. One person stands on a chair, the other crouches down, and they try to communicate. How is it to experience the distance? When do we feel the distance in our work? What if our perspectives on things are not the same? What if we look at situations from different angles?

Curious about possibilities of connections when there are differences of perspectives, I bring Tsing (2005) in, placing the concept of friction in the middle of the data to see what it will do to it, what sparks might appear. Tsing (2005) describes friction as “the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” (p. 4). Reading Tsing

(2005) helps me reflect on “collaboration with a difference: collaboration with friction at its heart” (p. 246). Tsing invites us to move beyond the idea that for a collaboration to work, the people involved in it need to be “like-minded colleagues” (p. 246). Tsing proposes a different approach to collaboration, stating that “parties who work together may or may not be similar and may or may not have common understandings. . . . The more different they are the more they must reach for barely overlapping understandings of the situation” (p. 247).

“Differences invigorate social mobilizations,” Tsing (2005, p. 245) says. There is great potential for what might emerge out of these encounters, when friction is at the heart of the collaboration. Tsing emphasizes that friction is not “a synonym for resistance” (p. 6). Instead, she writes, “the effects of encounters across difference can be compromising or empowering” (p. 6). Placing the concept of friction in the middle of my data challenged me to shift focus from considering only the same perspectives. The following questions emerged in this process:

- What are the possibilities of working with different perspectives?
- How do we articulate our differences and frictions in conversations and explore them together?
- What is needed for this to happen?

I noticed as we continued with our conversations that we sometimes had different perspectives on things, and we were able to share them with one another. We had a sense of trust and the courage to share these perspectives. We became more genuine with one another as we explored the tensions of engaging in difficult conversations.

### **Having Difficult Conversations**

*What I value about myself is having an ability and courage to have a difficult conversation with kids, and to not being fearful to explain or answer questions. I*

*think I am really good at that. An example: We go on a walk, and there are many deer in our community. As we are walking, there is a dead fawn on the side of the road.*

*Several people in the community came to us before we passed it, saying “there is a dead deer,” and I stopped and looked at the kids and my coworker, and I said, it will be ok, thank you for warning us, but life is life, sometimes there are tricky moments, so we are going to walk past. So I turned around and told the children that there is a dead deer on the side of the road; we are going to walk past it, but we are not going to touch it; if you have any questions, we are going to talk about it after; and if you get scared, just let me know.*

*The kids walked slowly past, and these adults looked at me like I was crazy: How you could subject these children to such a difficult topic, a difficult scene? But for me it was a process of learning—understanding almost—so when we went past, the kids had all those questions about the deer—what happened to the deer, where is its mother, it looked like it was sleeping—and it blossomed into this enriching conversation about what they thought had occurred, and their ideas were very interesting. Maybe it got hit by a car. One child said that maybe it got stuck in a bush and starved to death, and the mother was not around anymore because it did not love the deer, and the police will take the deer to the hospital and give it medicine to make it feel better.*

*And we asked, what would happen if the doctors would not be able to fix it, and they said, that’s ok, we will just eat it for dinner (laughter). And I thought, what if I would be like, oh my gosh, we can’t walk past the deer, we have to*

*cancel our walk. If I went out of my way to prevent them from seeing the deer, they would not have this knowledge. On the way back we saw another deer, it was alive, on the side of the road, and the children were very concerned, saying to the cars, wait, stop, don't kill the deer, you have to be safe to the deer!*

In our conversations, the participants and I listened deeply and thought deeply, not only about relations between us, but also about relations that connect us to the broader world, recognizing that we do not exist outside of the world, but are part of it. Davies (2010) calls this recognition “an awareness of oneself-in-relation” (p. 60).

I want to explore the possibility of placing the awkwardness of encounters in the centre, making it visible. In the middle of the fragment about the dead deer, I place Lorimer's (2014) writing about awkwardness. Lorimer's definition of being awkward as being “difficult and different” (p. 195) makes me think of awkward encounters like the one with the deer. Lorimer states that “as an adjective, awkward describes the unfamiliar, the clumsy and the unskilled (p. 195), conveying “embarrassment, inconvenience and risk” (p. 195). These risky, difficult encounters provide opportunities to crack the door open to the feelings hidden deep inside, to the unspoken.

Every day children and educators face awkward encounters. I think about the importance of engaging in what Pacini-Ketchabaw (2013) calls “complicated conversations” (p. 363), and I wonder: What is needed for us to engage in difficult conversations with one another? I also think about possible barriers to conversations, and I turn my attention to miscommunication and misunderstanding and their influence on conversations.

## Misunderstandings in Conversations: Resisting the Binary



**Figure 9: The three figures.**

I was thinking about the recent Orange Shirt Day at Camosun College as I arranged three figures (see Figure 6). People had gathered at Na'tsa'maht (the Gathering Place) to honour those who had attended residential schools and their families. When one person spoke of her experiences, two people standing behind her placed their hands on her shoulders to provide support. I shared this memory with the participants, and one of them responded:

*This is interesting. When I look at this dynamic, I see the support happening, but I also see the negative. It reminds me of outside sources coming in and pushing down the person in the middle, so it is like older educators pushing down the ideas of the new person.*

*It is a metaphor of how you can control yourself, because there is no point of controlling other people, you can only control yourself, so within that control do you choose to see things in the positive light or the negative light, and then taking that and doing with it what you will.*

This part of the conversation highlighted to me how our personal experiences influence our perceptions, and how that can lead in turn to misunderstanding. It also reminded me of the importance of listening deeply as part of the conversation, as well as having trust to voice different ideas when you view things differently.

As I was arranging the figures, I thought about educators in the field as strong and generous, sharing their gifts, empowering one another, sharing stories from the past, stories of relationships, and gifts of connections. The educator who responded had her own memories and experiences that influenced her perception:

*From what I remember about school, it was a lot of, yay, ECEs, let's all work together as a team, let's all get along, it was us trying to empower each other. However, when you get in the real world, there will be people who will try to bring you down. . . . Let the students know that this is the situation we are in, and it will be tough, and not soft serving it, because when a real situation arises, you have some bases on what to do, you are not going to be shocked. . . . I thought we are all friends, what is happening?*

By engaging in our conversation respectfully and deeply, we shared our experiences, enriching our conversation.

I also think about my courage as a researcher to stay with the uncomfortable, to respond to the frictions in our conversations. This conversation took place during our last session, and I felt comfortable exploring this deeper with the educators

because I could sense the trust. I wondered, looking back at earlier sessions, if there were more opportunities for me to ask deeper questions or to share stories to provoke thoughts. Engaging in conversations helped me to learn about myself as well and notice when I am too cautious to ask a deeper question or to share a comment.

I notice a binary of the old and the new in the conversation, and pull out more instances of this binary resurfacing:

*How we express the importance of this new generation, and to get older generation on our side, but without making them feel like they are doing things wrong, or their ideas don't matter . . . but it is hard.*

Curious about the binary of the old and new generations that emerged from the conversations, I draw on Deleuze and Guattari (1987), MacNaughton (2005), and Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2017) to explore the binary deeper. MacNaughton (2005) explains that “the significance of binary oppositions and their ‘other’ is that the ‘other’ is not equal to the main part of the pair” (p. 83). There is a hierarchy, and “the pairs are always ranked, so one part of the pair always has higher value in the ranking and is privileged over the ‘other’” (p. 83).

Using MacNaughton’s (2005) ideas, I look at the binary of the old and the new and think about the issues of power. Beginning educators position themselves as the ones who have to convince the “older” generation of educators to get on their side, and therefore the “older” generation of educators is perceived of as doing something wrong. However, the “older” generation holds the power, and this binary thinking creates a feeling of resistance and a power struggle. As I think about this, I feel restricted and constrained, and want to free myself and explore what else is possible.

Using the concept of folding in (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017) helps me explore the possibilities of moving away from the binary. Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2017) explain that this concept challenges binary thinking because “there is always a continuation that takes place through folding” (p. 63). I also draw on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) rhizomatic principles of connection and multiplicity. The principle of connection means experimenting with new connections “not predicated on hierarchy” (Adkins, 2015, p. 24). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain that “a multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions” (p. 8). When more perspectives and stories are folded in, the dimensions of multiplicity change, challenging the binary thinking, moving away from the hierarchy, and making me think more deeply and rhizomatically about the dimensions. Rhizomatic thinking implies “growth in more than one direction” offering “more than one possibility in thought” (Thompson, 2015, p. 84 of pdf). I fold other connections into my story to continue the conversation to challenge the binary and to think with multiple possibilities of old and new.

I feel grateful to have had a wise, kind, and caring mentor when I started working in the field. She had been in the early years field for many years, and possessed an amazing gift of connecting with people. From the first moment I met her, I sensed that she genuinely was interested to learn about me, to listen to my stories. What was her secret? How could she connect with very young educators and older ones, coming from different paths of life? Relationships!

She had a motto: network, network, network! She believed passionately in the power of connections and networking! I am grateful to her for taking me to various meetings and gatherings. From her, I learned that it is impossible to do it by yourself in this field, that networks and connections are everything—they will

inspire, energize, and support you. And I also learned how small our early years community really is, with invisible threads connecting people.

So what was my mentor's secret? She met everyone whom she encountered where they were, she put time into getting to know them as people, and she listened to their stories. That is how trust and respect are built—by listening to the stories, by showing interest in people's lives outside of work.

I remember how she asked me at the end of the day “How was your day? How did it go?” Inviting me to share successes and situations that puzzled me. Her invitation to share was there, and it was comforting to know that I could share with her.

And the sense of humour! The laughter, the warm smiles that she gave to the children, families, and educators! There was this eternal optimism and belief in people. She believed in me, and in others, and when I came to work, I looked forward to her warm greeting.

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), “good and bad are only the products of an active and temporary selection, which must be renewed” (p. 10). Thinking with the concepts of the hierarchy, folding in, and rhizomatic principles of connection and multiplicity helps me see multiple possibilities, asking questions to broaden instead of restricting and limiting:

- What conditions are needed to move beyond the binary in conversations?
- What are the responsibilities that each individual has in this process?

As we continued exploring tensions and “tough parts,” the complexity and difficulty of connections emerged.

## **Interruptions in Conversations**

*Being on a team is incredibly important, and the tough parts are not necessarily with the children, but with the people you work with, other adults, other ECEs (laughter in the group). And that there is constant learning happening with those others, but also within yourself, and learning how to trust yourself, to face yourself, and understand what you are good at, and what you are not so good at (laughter in the group). And that there is always (laughs as she talks) constant conflicts and interruptions, whether that is between children, between you and a coworker, or another coworker and another child, or within yourself, there is always something coming up, and you always have to deal with something new every day.*

When I worked in the early years centres, I remember quite often starting conversations that were suddenly interrupted for various reasons. We would pick up conversations with coworkers either on the same day or later in the week, realizing that we had not finished our questioning and wondering. Sometimes we did not have a chance to continue, and then after several weeks I would realize that I only had part of the story. It encouraged me to come back to my coworker and ask: Do you remember we started talking about it last month? And our conversation would continue, not from the beginning, but from the middle, where we left off before, making them richer and more meaningful.

I think about interruptions as a daily part of our work, and I wonder about the possibilities that interruptions offer “continually throughout our practice” (E. Elliot, personal communication, July 6, 2017). I bring in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) attributes of a rhizome as

“always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable” (p. 21) and having “multiple entryways and exits” (p. 21) to think about interruptions of daily work in the early years field. If a rhizome’s connections rupture, “they simply begin again wherever they are” (Adkins, 2015, p. 23). Interruptions provide opportunities to look from the middle, to consider the angles, to reflect. Thinking with Deleuze and Guattari, I imagine the conversations that connect educators in the field as never ending, complex, like “a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25).

*And when you find a moment that is calm, not too crazy, to come together with your fellow educators and talk about whatever is going on, there is bound for something to happen, there is a conflict, and then you are gone . . . or something else happened, someone else is gone. . . . It’s really tricky.*

Educators’ stories highlight the complexity of their daily connections and conversations. Just like an unpredictable rhizome that “does not follow a linear pattern” (Adkins, 2015, p. 23), educators’ connections and conversations are complex, shifting, tricky, and unpredictable. Participants’ responses echo MacNaughton (2005), who wrote about relationships being “notoriously difficult to control and predict” (p. 193). Just like relationships, connections “demand more of the educator than techniques” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 193), and a one-size-fits-all approach does not apply to connections. I wonder what is needed to nurture conversations that connect. I think about our process as a group, and I realize that what we needed to build the sense of trust for those conversations was having time. My narrative turns to the importance of finding time to connect.

## **Finding Time for Conversations**

*I set the goal for myself: how to have that intelligent respectful conversation. But there is no time for that. Hard to find time when you are on the floor.*

*It is difficult to communicate between the teachers on the floor and everyone, so lately it has been a challenge.*

*How to make others trust and respect us. Just trust me! And it takes time, right?*

The participants also point out that time gets taken away by the schedule:

*So what part did not work? And it was next, next, next, what's the schedule, what's happening next, what's supposed to happen, what's this, what's that?*

The educators' responses about a lack of time echo early childhood scholars who have explored the complexity of time and problematized the tyranny of time governance in early childhood (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999/2007; Kummen, 2010; MacNaughton, 2005; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2012; Rose & Whitty, 2010; Wien & Kirby-Smith, 1998). I draw on their work to highlight the tension and the discrepancy that exists between educators' values and beliefs and the rigid schedule that somehow takes away from these values, from what is really important (Rose & Whitty, 2010; Wien & Kirby-Smith, 1998). The puzzling contradiction of educators' reality is that although they crave the time to connect and nourish their spirit and their practice, the schedule and the rigid routine full of steps of what needs to be done takes over, governs, and dominates daily practice to the point where "no one has the time to think consciously about how time undermines what educators value" (Wien & Kirby-Smith, 1998, p. 9).

Our lives are very fast-paced, with multiple responsibilities that prevent us from reflecting. Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (1999/2007) write:

We live in a world that is increasingly time-governed, driven by new technologies and demands for increasing productivity. . . . We demand and expect instant answers and quick fixes. We do not make time for other things, not least reflection, dialogue, critical thinking, working the tensions between theory and practice. (Dahlberg et al., 1999/2007, p. 17)

To look deeper into the concept of time in the early years, I bring in Hoffman (2009), who writes that “the human time . . . is in important ways subjective. But it is also, just as importantly, relational and intersubjective” (p. 119). Rose and Whitty (2010) suggest that creating space for relational time slows down the pace of life (p. 268). They write:

When people are valued more than the clock, more than the scheduled curriculum, our individual and collective desires to understand, be inspired, and be in community are enlivened and affirmed thereby diminishing the standardization of life in daycares and beyond. (Rose & Whitty, 2010, p. 270)

Earlier in the chapter, I explored how materials helped the educators and me to slow down and attend. I think about attending again, now connecting it to relational time. Pacini-Ketchabaw and colleagues (2017) write that “to attend to something means to pause. To linger with, dwell in, take time with” (p. 39). I think about creating conditions to linger and pause, to invite time into this process. What if, instead of worrying about running out of time and being on time, we enjoyed being with time?

## Relational Time for Professional Learning Connections

With the concept of time on my mind, I pull out more tensions that the participants talked about in our conversations:

*People always say you play all day. . . . Actually it is extremely emotionally and physically exhausting . . . and you have to have people who help you get inspired. It becomes stagnant without professional development days.*

*How do we stay inspired or inspire others, if we are the only ones doing professional development?*

*It is frustrating, that we only need 40 hours for five years . . .*

*That's the issue with so little hours. It does not give you opportunities to freshen up your practice. If you are not that kind of person who seeks these opportunities for learning, when you need to be forced to do it, then this small number of hours in five years won't make any difference.*

*How do you find professional development opportunities that you are interested in, [are] affordable and in your area?*

*It is like this mysterious gathering . . .*

*Finding resources faster . . . there was a nature one this weekend. Totally missed out on that!*

*You hear through the grapevine . . .*

This message is very clear and strong: Educators need more professional development opportunities. However, I also hear the frustrated energy that seeps through. I sense educators' desire to find opportunities for continuing learning to nurture their practice and their spirit, and their frustration about their inability to transfer their individual passion and their new learning to their centres is palpable.

To think deeper about the concept of professional development, I draw on MacNaughton (2005), who highlighted similar tensions in her writing. She challenged the discourse of professional development as a quick fix, an illusion of being able to provide educators with proper strategies and techniques that they could quickly implement and apply in their practice. It brings me back to the discourse of individualism and the idea that individual educators could quickly learn and quickly apply their learning, because we live in a fast-paced world, with no time for reflection. I think more about time as individual and separate and time as relational, now applying it to the idea of professional development opportunities.

MacNaughton (2005) calls the one-off in-service workshop “the one-shot injection” and considers it to be “the least effective way to excite learning and change in teachers” (p. 196). An individualistic approach to professional development is very strong in our field, with multiple individual workshops offered by different agencies. Such opportunities for professional development taken in isolation are considered quick fixes, and cannot nurture educators' connections. Participants clearly articulated their frustration with this approach and their inability to transfer their passion quickly, saying that it was impossible without connections and without considering time as relational. An individualistic approach to professional development does not make a difference to educators. So, what is needed to nurture and value time for relations? The importance of connection emerges again:

*It's all about these connections. If you are able to go to professional development as a team . . . you are also moving together as a professional team. So it's not only those two people who go to a conference and want to share all the knowledge, it's everyone saying "Hey, remember that?"*

*You have a shared memory.*

*You are all excited as a team, inspired as a team. It's contagious!*

I remember going to the conference in Vancouver with the whole team of educators. Our board of directors sent us to the conference, and all expenses were paid for: ferry, meals, and conference registration fees. I smile remembering our time together, our shared memories that we treasure and the sense of community that this trip helped foster.

Thinking with MacNaughton (2005), I wonder, though, if going to a conference as a team, although it offers opportunities to connect, is in a way also a quick fix, because it does not nurture slow-paced relational time? MacNaughton emphasizes the importance of shifting away from "individual responsibility . . . to collective responsibility for critiquing and developing this knowledge" (p. 200). She compares educators' desires for intellectually stimulating and interesting conversations to seeds that are wilting under the "quick fix" (p. 194) model of professional development, sitting "in a landscape starved of time, opportunities for reflection, dialogue and collaboration" (p. 196). I think about other possibilities to nurture conversations that connect.

## **Continuing Conversations to Stay Engaged and Excited**

What emerged at the end of our last session showed that I was not the only one who was thinking about possibilities for continuing conversations. The participating educators did not want to end our process. They wanted to continue engaging in genuine conversations to stay engaged and connected.

*I think that is the key to discovering solutions to some of our questions, is getting together and continuing to talk, because we all bring different experiences, and you might say, you know, this worked for me.*

We listened deeply, attending to one another's joys and uncertainties. We developed a sense of trust to pull at the threads of tensions. We engaged in genuine conversations to form caring relations. From our process of reflecting, sharing, and questioning, an idea emerged: What if we created our own group, a network of educators, to feel inspired and connected? What if this was an opportunity for professional learning that could connect us and sustain our desire for intellectually stimulating conversations?

The idea of creating networks of educators was previously described in the literature (MacNaughton, 2005; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010). In the context of British Columbia, the Investigating Quality Project (Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010) is an inspiring example of collaborative work with educators that offers possibilities for networking and "a space for professional revitalization of educators by engaging in reflection and critical analysis and challenging each other to think differently about early childhood education issues" (Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010, p. 134). As an educator, I participated in the Community Early Learning and Child Care Facilitators phase of this project several years ago, and I appreciated the format of attending monthly learning circles where we engaged in sharing and critically

reflecting on documentation. I also appreciated the site visits of our pedagogical facilitator, who encouraged us to think deeper and challenge our practice, and the opportunity to engage in discussions online with other educators.

In regards to beginning educators specifically, a recent study conducted by Doan (2014) proposes “the Doan model of best practice for the induction of beginning early childhood educators” (p.172). This model is based on the term “communities of practice” (Wenger, 1998), defined as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2011, p. 1). Doan (2014) applies this term to the early childhood education workplace as being “responsible for the induction of early childhood educators” (p. 166).

Our idea of creating a network of educators was similar in intention, but slightly different in its focus. We wanted to involve the broader early years community, not limiting it to workplace. We imagined a group of educators coming together from a variety of workplaces, including beginning educators and educators with years of experience. We wanted to create a group “in which diversity flourishes, ruptures, reshoots” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 203) to enrich our conversations and challenge us to embrace uncertainty.

MacNaughton (2005), who has worked with several “communities of learners” (p. 200)—she also calls them “critically knowing early childhood communities” (p. 211)—emphasizes the importance of learning together because it can “lessen the challenges of change by ensuring that you have support, encouragement and inspiration as you plunge into new ways of thinking and acting” (p. 200). MacNaughton (2005) also advocates for the importance of creating a community that is local and relevant to the needs and desires of particular groups of people, ensuring their active involvement in the process of organizing it from the beginning.

This is what was important to us: we wanted to invite other educators to join our group. A small group of educators interested in connecting informally and regularly, we would meet once a month in various locations. It was important for us to have opportunities to meet outdoors, so we considered the following: going for a hike or a walk, meeting at the beach or in the park. Once a month seemed a good time frame, with meetings of about one or two hours in duration. We also wanted our meetings to be used as hours of professional development. I am happy to tell the reader that this is not the end of the narrative, only the beginning. This idea was well received in the community, and our group is vibrant, thriving, and growing. But that is another story, and I hope to share it someday.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter followed rhizomatic flow, connecting data fragments with my memories and related texts and concepts as an assemblage. Placing concepts, texts, and memories in the middle of the story, I noticed how they expanded and complexified the narrative of our conversations, with new, unexpected questions and thoughts emerging in this process. The concepts of caring relations (Held, 2006) and folding in (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017) highlighted the importance of slowing down, listening deeply, and attending to one another in order to turn together to connect in conversations. Reflecting on what it means to have the courage to engage in genuine conversations from the heart turned the story to the importance of building trust, nurturing, and caring for one another.

In this process, it became evident that conversations are not always easy. They could be difficult, complicated, awkward, complex, or interrupted, and quite often there is a risk of being misunderstood. The concepts of friction (Tsing, 2005), hierarchy (MacNaughton, 2005), folding in and attending (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017), rhizomatic principles of connection and

multiplicity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and thinking about time as relational (Hoffman, 2009) expanded the narrative, adding layers of complexity and questions and provoking thoughts.

In the next chapter, I look back at the research process, and discuss the contributions of this study to the existing research literature, its implications, and future research directions.

## Chapter 4: Contributions, Implications, and Future Directions

*Where thought might go is not mine alone to control or to will, but more like an act of listening to where thought might take me—might take us, since thought is by no means a solitary or singular activity.* (Davies, 2010, p. 61)

In this chapter, I look back at the research process that unfolded and revisit the original questions that I set out to explore. Seeing ontology and epistemology as part of an assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) with the researcher being immersed and entangled in the process shaped my theoretical framework and methodology. I was not concerned about the participants' individual stories. Instead, I paid attention to the whole assemblage of their stories, my stories and memories, materials, images, and related texts and concepts, noticing what emerged through connections of various elements of the assemblage.

Drawing on the philosophical concept of a rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), I approached data analysis in a rhizomatic way to notice how various parts of data influenced one another and to provoke myself and the reader to ask more questions. My intended audience was the early childhood community, and I wanted these entanglements to be entry points into new conversations and dialogue. The following research questions guided my study:

- What are the possibilities of conversations when beginning early childhood educators get together?
- What conditions are needed for beginning educators to stay excited and engaged in their work?

## Overview of Findings

Similar to Thompson's (2015) experience, I found that while I was exploring particular questions, "instead of a single answer, more questions rhizomatically erupted" (p. 232 of pdf). The following reflections and questions emerged in this process, provoking further connections and dialogue with the early childhood community.

As we started our conversations, the educators communicated their strong preference to work as part of a team. Nobody from our group worked by themselves. However, it was interesting to hear about their desire to be more connected in order to be more united. Curious to explore what was missing for them in regards to their connections, I paid attention to the energy of our conversations that bonded us in caring relations based on trust. Working with the materials helped us slow down, attend to one another, and listen deeply. We noticed how we folded our experiences, values, and beliefs into our conversations. Our stories highlighted the complexity of educators' roles and responsibilities and their desire to have more courage to engage in genuine conversations from the heart. Bringing in the concept of caring relations (Held, 2006) helped me further reflect on what was needed in this process: Courage is not possible without having trust, nurturing, and caring. The following question emerged, and I invite the reader to continue exploring it deeper:

- How do we notice, ask, listen deeply, acknowledge, and nurture the gifts that people have so that we can have authentic conversations and have the courage to tell the stories of who we are with our whole hearts?

As a group, we developed a sense of trust by listening deeply and attending to one another. With this trust, we were able to engage in difficult conversations that caused tensions.

Bringing in the concept of friction (Tsing, 2005) encouraged me to reflect on collaborating when not sharing the same perspectives. The following questions surfaced for further exploration:

- What are the possibilities of working with different perspectives?
- How do we articulate our differences and frictions in conversations and explore them together?

Together we reflected on the importance of difficult, complicated conversations with one another and with children, thinking about ourselves not as separate, but as part of the world and its relations. I continue to wonder:

- What is needed for us to engage in difficult conversations with one another?

Conversations are not easy. We discovered they are layered with tensions. As I listened to the educators, I noticed how strongly established the binary of the old and the new is in the field. Thinking with the hierarchy of binary thinking (MacNaughton, 2005), the concept of folding in (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017), and the rhizomatic principles of connections and multiplicity encouraged me to think beyond the binary to discover other possibilities. I continue thinking about the following questions:

- What conditions are needed to move beyond the binary in conversations?
- What are the responsibilities that each individual has in this process?

We shared stories of interruptions in conversations. All of us could relate to having unfinished stories with coworkers due to being interrupted by various tasks. The educators' wish to have more time for ongoing professional learning, their frustration about having so few hours of professional development as a requirement, and also their frustration about their inability to transfer their individual learning into their workplace were palpable. The importance of shifting

focus from individualistic professional development to ongoing learning opportunities that would allow us to stay engaged and excited, with a view of time as relational, emerged from our conversations. At the end of our last session, we decided to continue our dialogue by creating a network of early childhood educators who would meet regularly and have meaningful, genuine conversations from the heart by listening deeply and attending to one another.

### **Contributions of the Study to Existing Research Literature**

This study contributes to the existing literature on the topic of beginning early childhood educators, an area that has not been researched extensively (Doan, 2014; Mahmood, 2013a). The findings of this research reinforce what has been previously explored in the literature regarding the importance of connections, ongoing learning opportunities, and networking for early childhood educators (Black & Halliwell, 2000; Doan, 2014; Giovacco-Johnson, 2015; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Kilgallon et al., 2008; Sumsion, 2002, 2003, 2004). Using Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concepts of assemblage and rhizomatic thinking, this study contributes to the growing body of research literature that utilizes these concepts in the early childhood field (e.g., Cumming, 2015; MacNaughton, 2005; Olsson, 2009; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2012; Thompson, 2015). The findings provide insights into nuances of beginning educators' practice, such as the complexity of their daily connections, conversations, and roles, as well as tensions and difficult parts of their practice.

The study highlights the complexity of many roles and responsibilities, as well as the complexity of conversations and connections in beginning early childhood educators' practice. The issue of the complexity of educators' practice has been acknowledged in the literature (e.g., Cumming, 2015; Elliot, 2007; Hodgins, 2014; Mahmood 2013a). Working with the concept of assemblage, Cumming (2015) "made visible elements of complexity of early childhood practice,

and some of the ways that these elements of complexity worked together to produce change” (p. 147). This study’s findings add to existing research literature, focusing specifically on the complexity of beginning educators’ practice. Similar to Cumming (2015), this research focuses on what is produced through connections among the elements of the assemblage, shifting focus away from viewing educators as subjects telling individual stories, and highlighting the depth and nuances of beginning educators’ practice.

Placing concepts, texts, and memories in the middle of data fragments and paying attention to what happened when various elements of the assemblage connected encouraged me to look at the data from different angles and to consider other possibilities of thinking about tensions and difficulties in practice, such as the issue of time. The findings of this study add to the existing literature on the topic of time in early childhood (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999/2007; Kummen, 2010; MacNaughton, 2005; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2012; Rose & Whitty, 2010; Wien & Kirby-Smith, 1998) with specific focus on considering time as relational and its importance in the context of ongoing professional learning.

In chapter 1, I referred to several researchers working with educators in British Columbia (Hodgins, 2014; Kummen, 2014; Nxumalo, 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010; Thompson, 2015). These researchers emphasize the importance of using creative approaches in research to reflect the complexity in the field of early childhood. By sharing my process of experimenting with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concepts in this study, I hope to engage in a dialogue with others about creative research methods in the field of early childhood.

I now turn to the implications of this study’s findings, first for the early childhood community and then for government policy.

## **Implications for the Early Childhood Community**

Many questions that emerged in the process of this research study are directed to the broader early childhood community, including early childhood educators and postsecondary educational programs working with early childhood students. The results of the study show that beginning educators need support from the broader community to stay engaged and excited. These findings are consistent with existing research literature (Cumming, 2015; Doan, 2014). For example, Cumming (2015) advocates paying “ongoing attention to how educators are being supported in the complexity of their practice” (p. 157). Although the importance of the first years in the field has been discussed in the literature (Noble & Macfarlane, 2005), Doan (2014) describes the support for beginning early childhood educators in British Columbia as “haphazard” (p. 172). As I thought about the implications of these findings further, the following questions emerged, which I invite the reader to explore, focusing specifically on the need for the early childhood community to support beginning educators:

- How can an early childhood community nurture and support beginning educators?
- Who do you see as part of this community?
- What does an early childhood community need to nurture and support recent graduates?
- What are the responsibilities that each individual (beginning educators as well as more experienced educators) has in this process?

Engaging in a continuing conversation about these questions will ensure a collaborative, meaningful approach to supporting beginning educators.

In this research, educators’ stories brought to life the energy and complexity of their work in the field filled with ongoing interruptions, conflicts, and new experiences. Kummen (2014)

wrote the following about implications of her research for college instructors working with students: “We, as teachers of early childhood educators, need to create learning spaces that explore what it means to teach, live, and practice in an unstable, unpredictable, always emerging world” (p. 192). The results of this study could inform parts of the postsecondary programs’ curriculum design for working with early childhood students, with the aim of building students’ awareness of the reality of working in the field, sharing real-life experiences, and involving the students in many opportunities for collaboration, problem solving, and conflict resolution.

The results of the study show that the most important skills needed for beginning educators are ones in effective communication, collaboration, critical reflective thinking, and problem solving. By building a sense of community and directing attention to being together with students in the classroom, modelling these skills in everyday encounters will help prepare educators for the realities of working in the field. Educators in this study emphasized that they do not want to work in isolation; rather, they would like to work as part of a team. The skills of working together with others need to be fostered when the students are in their postsecondary programs.

I agree with Doan (2014), who suggested incorporating the idea of communities of practice into the curriculum, providing the students with many opportunities to work collaboratively during their time in the program. College instructors could also support the broader community of educators by facilitating regular meetings of educators who are interested in various topics. Building connections in the community among experienced educators and educators who are new to the field will foster a sense of belonging and opportunities for deeper listening and reflecting.

## **Implications for Government Policy**

The findings of this study emphasize the importance of considering beginning educators' practice in the broader context of government policy. We cannot move forward with the suggestions to engage in ongoing learning opportunities without government policy change. Unfortunately, there is "a lack of funding and a lack of government policy supporting the work of early childhood educators" (Doan, 2014, p. 170). Early childhood educators need to be recognized and valued by the broader society, with the importance of their work being reflected in wages that meet their financial needs.

In regards to professional learning, the only required professional development in the context of British Columbia is 40 hours within five years of work. As Doan (2014) wrote, "it is assumed that early childhood educators will access professional development with their own money and on their own time, typically on weekends and evenings, and this is usually the case" (p. 167). As the participants of this study emphasized, they do not find the requirement of 40 hours over five years to fulfill their needs because it does not give them opportunities to engage deeply with one another. If time is to be considered as relational, there needs to be a shift in policy and recognition that ongoing learning opportunities are valuable to educators, and that educators need to be supported financially and given time to engage in these opportunities.

## **Future Research Directions**

Many possibilities for future research emerged from this study's findings. Studies focusing on the group dynamics at large centres might highlight the issues that teams face when working together. Educators in this study reflected on their team work with others, highlighting the importance of communication, working through conflicts, and discussing challenges with colleagues. These topics were the most challenging for the educators in this study, and further

exploration of the work of teams of educators would be beneficial, including consideration of the following questions:

- What are the stories of teams' connections, successes, and challenges?
- How do teams overcome challenges and move forward? What is needed?

One of the most important wishes that educators who participated in this study had for their work was having more opportunities for professional learning that nurture connections. Research done with groups of educators who are connected with others and who meet regularly to discuss various topics would offer more insights into these processes.

The educators who participated in this study were not in positions of team leaders, managers, or supervisors. According to Bella and Bloom (2003, as cited in Doan, 2014), “the early childhood education field is one where there is a high turn-over of staff, and early childhood educators are elevated to positions of leadership when they may not be prepared” (p. 7). Further research is needed to explore the experiences of beginning educators who assumed leadership responsibilities early in their career, including their challenges, successes, and needs.

Conducting a longitudinal study focusing on the experiences of beginning educators over several years would provide valuable insights and a broader picture of their practice in the field. Further studies done with educators working in the field for five or more years highlighting their experiences would also be beneficial. As Doan (2014) wrote, “more could be done to ensure that early childhood education programs have the means necessary to support the most valuable asset in this setting, the beginning early childhood educators” (p. 170). Exploring what it means for the community to have the means to support beginning educators would offer additional insights on this topic. Further exploration of multiple factors that influence and shape beginning educators' practice, such as their work environment, education, community connections, government

policies, and regulations would highlight the importance of bringing attention to the complex layers of early childhood practice.

Although my research questions were not focused on the educators' experiences as students, their memories and stories of being students in early childhood postsecondary programs interconnected and resurfaced, and while the participants reflected on what was needed for them in their work in the field, they also talked about their wishes for the early childhood programs. Exploring the experiences of recent graduates of early childhood postsecondary programs, with a specific focus on their needs and wishes, would be a valuable contribution to curriculum planning.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The findings of this study highlight the complexity and the tensions of beginning educators' practice. Engaging in conversations with beginning early childhood educators created possibilities for developing a sense of belonging, trust, and connections when we directed our attention to listening deeply and attending to one another. Only then we were able to engage in genuine conversations from the heart to form caring relations with one another. For beginning educators to stay excited and engaged in their work, it is important to switch focus from an individualistic professional development approach to creating meaningful collective opportunities for professional learning and attending to the concept of time as relational. Creating a network of educators to continue authentic conversations and nurture their connections would help educators to stay excited about and engaged in their work.

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## Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in a Research Study



**University  
of Victoria**

### **Invitation to Participate in a Research Study**

Dear Early Childhood Educator,

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled Exploring Experiences of Early Childhood Educators Who Are New to the Field. My name is Anastasia Butcher. I am a graduate student in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria, and I am interested in the experiences of early childhood educators who are new to the field.

I am contacting you because you may be an early childhood educator with a two year diploma training and a valid certificate to practise, working in the field anywhere between one and two years. Sharing your experiences and insights relative to being a beginning early childhood educator will provide a valuable perspective on your inspirations, challenges and wishes and will greatly enhance this research study.

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research study, your participation will include attending four group conversation sessions that will take place in the Provocation Studio at the Child Care Resource and Referral Centre (CCRR) on Wednesdays beginning October 2015: October 7, October 21, November 4 and November 18. The sessions will start at 5 pm. Each group conversation session will be approximately 60-90 minutes long.

All sessions will be audio-recorded. There will be four-eight educators participating in this study. The Provocation Studio has a wide variety of open-ended materials for creative expression, such as clay, rocks, shells, driftwood, mirrors, yarn, glass gems and fabric. During sessions, you will have opportunities to engage with the materials in the studio as part of group conversations. Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. Light supper, tea and coffee will be provided to you during the sessions. Your participation will be acknowledged with a professional development certificate issued by the Child Care Resource and Referral Centre for the hours spent, as well as a small token of appreciation.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please indicate your interest by responding to this email within the next two weeks: [abutcher@uvic.ca](mailto:abutcher@uvic.ca).

If you have any questions about this research, you may also contact my research supervisor Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw at [vpacunik@uvic.ca](mailto:vpacunik@uvic.ca) or my research committee member Dr. Enid Elliot at [eelliot@uvic.ca](mailto:eelliot@uvic.ca).

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or ask any questions you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

Anastasia Butcher

## Appendix B: Participant Consent Form



**University  
of Victoria**

## Participant Consent Form

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You are invited to participate in a study entitled Exploring Experiences of Early Childhood Educators Who Are New to the Field that is being conducted by Anastasia Butcher.

Anastasia Butcher is a graduate student in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by email: [abutcher@uvic.ca](mailto:abutcher@uvic.ca)

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a MA degree in Child and Youth Care. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Dr. Enid Elliot. You may contact them at [vpacinek@uvic.ca](mailto:vpacinek@uvic.ca) or [eelliot@uvic.ca](mailto:eelliot@uvic.ca).

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this research study is to explore experiences of early childhood educators who have been in the field for a period of time between one and two years. I will explore the following research questions: What are the experiences of educators who are new to the field? What possibilities of looking deeper into nuances of their experiences could using collage as part of group conversations offer?

### **Importance of this Research**

Research of this type is important because there has been limited research carried out on the topic of exploring new educators' experiences, as well as using creative approaches in data collection methods. I hope that this study will provide new insights into experiences, inspirations, challenges and needs of early childhood educators who are new to the field that will be important for the field of early childhood. The results of the study could potentially inform parts of college curriculum design for training early childhood students, building awareness of what could be added to the curriculum, based on the findings.

### **Participants Selection**

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an early childhood educator with a two year diploma training and a valid certificate to practise, working in the field anywhere between one and two years. Your experiences and insights relative to being a beginning early childhood educator will be valuable to this study.

### **What is Involved**

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include attending four group conversation sessions that will take place in the Provocation Studio at the Child Care

Resource and Referral Centre (CCRR) on Wednesdays beginning October 2015: October 7, October 21, November 4 and November 18. This studio was designed by two early childhood educators with the intention to inspire and provoke thoughts in the early childhood community. The studio has a wide variety of open-ended materials for creative expression, such as clay, rocks, shells, driftwood, mirrors, yarn, glass gems and fabric. Each group conversation session will be approximately 60-90 minutes long. The sessions will start at 5 pm. With your permission, all sessions will be audio-recorded and transcribed. There will be four-eight educators participating in this study.

A collage method will be used as part of group conversation sessions to explore themes and look deeper into nuances of your experiences. During sessions, you will have opportunities to engage with the materials in the studio as part of group conversations to create compositions. I hope to include photographs of the compositions in my thesis.

### **Inconvenience**

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including coming to sessions right after work, without having time to eat. To ensure your nourishment, I will provide light supper, coffee and tea to you.

### **Risks**

Due to the personal experiences that you will share during sessions, it is possible that it might bring out some level of emotional discomfort or stress when you discuss difficult situations. I hope that being in a collegial atmosphere of support that will be created during sessions will alleviate stress and discomfort.

To prevent or to deal with emotional discomfort the following steps will be taken: I will provide questions that we will discuss during the first session to you in advance. If you become upset during the session, I will offer you a break and a chance to stop the session. I will also offer to debrief with you or to call someone who could assist you, and will stay with you until the person comes.

### **Benefits**

It is evident from the research literature that networking and connecting with others buffer against burnout in the field of early childhood and foster resilience. My hope for this study is that a network of connections among you and other participants develops during the study and may continue to exist after the study is finished.

My hope for this study is to experiment with and to invite others to think about creative approaches in research with educators. By using collage method as part of group conversations, I hope that the study will uncover new insights and nuances of new educators' experiences, their inspirations, challenges and wishes.

The results of the study could potentially inform parts of college curriculum design for training early childhood students, building awareness of what could be added to the curriculum, based on the findings.

### **Compensation**

Your participation will be acknowledged with a professional development certificate for the hours spent, as well as a small token of appreciation. If you would not participate if the compensation was not offered, then you should not consider participating in this study.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be used only when linked to group conversation sessions data in a summarized form with no identifying information.

If you choose to withdraw before the completion of the study, you will still be acknowledged with a small token of appreciation, as well as a professional development certificate for the hours of participating in the project.

### **Researcher's Relationship with Participants**

Some of participants might be mentoring Early Learning and Care practicum students from Camosun College. Due to my work as an instructor in the Early Learning and Care Program at Camosun College, supervising practicum students and working with both mentors and students might create potential for a dual -role relationship with some mentors. As a safeguard to prevent dual-role, I will not supervise students who will have mentors participating in the study during September 2015–June 2016 school year.

### **Ongoing Consent**

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will ask you to initial the signed consent form on subsequent sessions.

### **Confidentiality**

Your confidentiality will be protected by changing all identifying information and features, and by identifying you through a pseudonym. You will be given the opportunity to review all transcripts for accuracy, and to withdraw any of your responses if they could make you identifiable. Due to the nature of group conversations, I cannot fully guarantee confidentiality. To protect all participants' confidentiality, all information that will be shared during group conversation sessions must remain confidential.

The confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing all data, including audio files, photographs, transcripts and field notes as password protected computer files on my computer. Field notes will be scanned in as password protected computer files, and the paper copy will be shredded.

### **Dissemination of Results**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: thesis, presentations, publications, internet (Thesis will be posted on UVic Space) and directly to participants involved by a report.

### **Disposal of Data**

All data will be kept for five years. After five years, all computer files will be erased.

### **Future Use of Data**

The data from this research study might be used in future for educational purposes, in presentations, and publications. I am asking your permission to contact you again in the future, when full information could be provided about future purposes.

I consent to be contacted in the event my data is requested for future purposes: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please initial)

**Contacts**

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Anastasia Butcher, Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Dr. Enid Elliot. Please refer to their contact information at the beginning of this consent form.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Name of Participant*                      \_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*    \_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***