

**Engaging With Early Childhood Educators' Encounters With Race:  
An Exploration of the Discursive, Material and Affective Dimensions of Whiteness  
and Processes of Racialization**

by

Lara di Tomasso

B.A., McGill University, 2003

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the School of Child and Youth Care

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University of Victoria

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**Supervisory Committee**

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## **Abstract**

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There is a lack of critical Canadian scholarship addressing questions of racialization in early childhood education, and yet questions of identity and diversity are at the center of education with young children. Substantive engagement with issues surrounding processes of racialization in early childhood education is often stunted by assertions of childhood innocence, discourses that normalize whiteness, or responses entrenched in multicultural discourse. Using early childhood educators' engagements with racialization and whiteness as starting points, this research employs feminist poststructural, postcolonial and sociomaterial theories to reveal and engage with how whiteness and processes of racialization are negotiated in politically, socially, geographically and temporally located spaces. An exploration of the forces of discourse, affect and materiality in shaping and silencing race opens up new spaces for challenging whiteness and processes of racialization in early childhood education and beyond.

Keywords: early childhood education, racialization, whiteness, multiculturalism, Canada

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## Acknowledgements

A special thank you to Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, my supervisor, for the opportunity to work with the data explored in this thesis, and for encouraging me to engage with new ideas. And to Sandrina de Finney, for offering rich feedback throughout the writing process – I greatly appreciate your knowledge and insights.

I would like to express my gratitude to the faculty and staff in the School of Child of Youth Care at UVic for your support these last few years. Particularly Marie Hoskins for keeping your door open for wonderful, impromptu conversations, Jennifer White for your valued listening and support, and Jessica Ball for always generously sharing your time to answer my questions. And to Sandra Curran, for patiently guiding me through the thesis process.

This might not have gotten written if it weren't for the hospitality of the faculty, staff and students of the International Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics in Lund, Sweden. Thank you for giving me a home away from home in your "Tute", and a community with whom to celebrate the small victories. Batch 17 – may you all go on to do wonderful things!

To my parents –thank you for creating a loving home where we could always say what we thought during our long conversations around the dinner table. To my brothers Daniel and Andrew, for reminding me not to take myself too seriously. And a heartfelt thank you to my friend Carol for all of the chats that added perspective and clarity.

To Nicholas – you bring balance and joy to my life. Thank you for believing in me throughout this journey. But mostly, thank you for making me laugh each and every day.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my nonni, Anna Maria Saudelli and Alceo Tontini.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

A palpable ambivalence towards the “Other” has existed in Canada since the land that this country was founded on was violently wrested from Aboriginal peoples by European colonizers. Like other former European colonies turned white settler societies, the Canadian nation-state has a long-standing, complex, and contentious relationship with concepts such as culture, race, and ethnicity. Debates around citizenship and cultural belonging are currently taking place in every domain of Canadian society. This preoccupation with delineating who “we” and “they” are was brought into hyper relief after September 11, 2001. How this current generation of policy makers, human service providers, educators, children and families live within these complexities will set the stage for many years to come.

### ***Research in Context***

Since the 1930s, social scientists have pursued research on children’s understandings of race (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996). The conclusions drawn from cognitive development literature concerning children’s negotiations of race and racism as well as discourses of multiculturalism have informed dominant beliefs, pedagogies and practices in early childhood education for many years. However, increasingly, early childhood studies scholars are challenging many of these long-held, developmentally informed beliefs about children and early childhood education.

The assertion that the field of early childhood education provides a rich site for exploring how concepts of race, whiteness and racialization are currently negotiated and constituted within the Canadian context may seem contentious to scholars outside of

early childhood studies. However, this is precisely the assertion that underlies this thesis. The widely unchallenged perception that children are “incomplete” renders them targets of interventions aimed at re-formation (Castañeda, 2002). Given that it is largely through practices and policies in early childhood education that these interventions are staged, this field offers rich possibilities for inquiry. This research is inspired by the work of Castañeda (2002) who writes, “the study of the child is important not only with respect to children, and their experience of the world, but also with regard to the making of worlds more generally” (p. 1). This thesis will explore how early childhood educators encounter, conceptualize, and engage with race in their work with young children. Using rich data generated from conversations held between early childhood educators in British Columbia, Canada, this study will interrogate what these conceptualizations reveal about whiteness and ongoing processes of racialization in Canada.

It is relevant to the discussion undertaken in this thesis to contextualize this research socio-geographically. What now constitutes the majority of British Columbia’s territory rests on unceded First Nations land. The research project workshops that generated the data used in this thesis, and the early childhood practice settings of participating educators, are located on land belonging to the K’ómoks, Qualicum, Snuneymuxw, Quw’utsun, Esquimalt, Songhees, Saanich, Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, Kwikwetlem and Semiahmoo First Nations (British Columbia Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), 2012). Over 200 distinct First Nations (BCAFN, 2012), speaking 32 different languages (First Peoples’ Heritage, Language and Culture Council, 2012), are indigenous to what is now considered British Columbia.

British Columbia is a settler society, dependent on sustained immigration and a large temporary foreign workforce. Almost 30% of people currently living in British Columbia were born outside of Canada, with 44,176 individuals having moved to the province from 170 different countries in 2010 (Welcome BC, 2010). Issues of diversity and difference are thus extremely relevant to contemporary early learning settings in B.C. The British Columbia Early Learning Framework, which was developed “to support adults to create rich early learning experiences and environments that reflect the latest knowledge on how best to support young children’s early learning and development” (Government of British Columbia, 2008, p. 3) understandably addresses diversity. The framework states that adults need to create environments where, for example, children can “begin to recognize discrimination and inequity and respond appropriately” (Government of British Columbia, 2008, p. 33). The research project that generated the data used in this thesis aimed to support educators in exploring the complexities involved in creating the types of learning environments that the B.C. Early Learning Framework describes.

I will now locate my research methodologically. While positivist forms of research are premised on the belief that the knower is separate and distinct from what is known, and that objective knowledge can be “discovered”, research informed by postfoundational theories is concerned with ontological and epistemological questions. I will be working within a particular theoretical framework grounded in feminist poststructuralist, postcolonial and materialist theories. Drawing from Lather’s (1991) work, Janzen (2008) states, “postmodernism calls into question the possibility of the researcher as an objective knower, of the researcher’s ability to discover one truth, and

the assumption that knowledge can be extracted from one particular context and accepted universally” (p. 288). I am cognizant that what I seek to know is contingent upon what I believe is knowable, as well as how I conceptualize the contexts in which knowledge (and knowing) are produced. Lavery (2003) emphasizes that once the connections between epistemology, ontology and methodology are examined, the notion of researcher as unbiased “Other” in the process of inquiry is revealed as a myth. Aside from working from within particular methodological and theoretical locations, I am also writing from a particular social location, which necessarily impacts what I see and do not see in the data. I will attempt to account for my social location in more detail in chapter four. I am not engaging in this academic exercise as someone located outside of the conditions that I seek to analyze, but recognize that I am embroiled in the interlocking discourses and systems that produce race, whiteness, processes of racialization, and racism(s). Furthermore, it is important to state that the utilization of critical theoretical paradigms in no way frees me from the constraints of language and discourse, but rather immerses me in a specific set of discourses, which only allows for partial knowings.

In articulating my approach to research, I am drawn to Irwin and de Cosson’s (2004) explanation of research as “the enhancement of meaning revealed through ongoing interpretations of complex relationships that are continually created, recreated, and transformed over time” (p. 31). Several facets of this quote are central to my conceptualization of research. First, meaning making and knowledge construction are posited as relational. As I explore throughout the theoretical framework elaborated in chapter two, the taken for granted notion of the self is problematized when we begin to witness the ways in which “self” needs “Other” to exist. Second, this quote acknowledges

the fluidity of contexts in which knowledge and meaning are made, thus recalling the importance of accounting for context when engaging in interpretation and analysis. Lastly, in defining research as an enhancement of meaning, I was free to move away from the idea that research somehow allows for the “discovery” of knowledge. I hope that this research succeeds in making visible some of the multiple ways in which race is being enacted, conceptualized and negotiated within the data set. I am also committed to emphasizing how the local links with the global, the micro with the macro, through an analysis of this data. These linkages will be elaborated upon in pursuant chapters.

### ***Race***

Before moving forward, it is important that I situate my decision to use the term race throughout this thesis. Davis and Mac Naughton (2009a) assert that the word “race” is highly emotive and contested, in no small part due to the atrocities that have been committed through the creation of racial hierarchies. In their work examining race in early childhood settings, Mac Naughton and colleagues (2009) follow a tradition of placing the word “race” inside quotations in order identify it as a social and political construct. I have elected not to place the term race in quotations for reasons that will be explained here.

Throughout this thesis, I employ the term racialization to describe the social, political, economic and colonial processes involved in mediating how race is constructed and perceived through systems of power. The term racialization will be explored in more detail in chapter two. I employ the term race, without quotation marks, to leave room in my analysis for a consideration of the material and affective aspects of how race is embodied. Saldanha (2006), drawing from the work of Deleuze, claims that phenotype is

very important to what he calls the “event” of race, which needs to be “conceived as a chain of contingency, in which the connections between its constituent components are not given, but are made viscous through local attractions” (p. 18).

An exploration of the materiality of race permits a further theoretical layering, which is important for the analysis undertaken in this thesis. The materialist problematization of discursive understandings of race shifts the inquiry from how race can be known, to how bodies do race (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo & Rowan, 2011). Materialist ontological approaches to questions of race do not reject feminist poststructuralist and constructionist theories, but rather draw from them, amongst others, to understand how racialized subject formations come about within material processes (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2011). For the purposes of this thesis, I will consider the biological and geographical material specificities that produce race. Working with sociomaterialist theories in their exploration of events of race in early childhood, Pacini-Ketchabaw and colleagues (2011) propose that by inquiring into what race can be, instead of what race is, educators can “work towards making race work differently” (p. 23).

### ***Introduction to Research***

I had the privilege of working with data from an action research project led by Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, which was implemented in British Columbia, Canada, between 2005 and 2011. While the research methods employed throughout this project are explained more thoroughly in chapter four, I will briefly situate this data, and how I came to use it in my thesis work before articulating the guiding questions behind my inquiry.

One of the key elements of the broader action research project involved holding workshops with early childhood educators. These workshops were opportunities for educators to come together, and engage with diverse theoretical perspectives in order to interrogate practice in their field. Between 2006 and 2011, the conversations that took place during these workshops were videotaped, thereby generating several hundred hours of video data. As a Master's student in the School of Child of Youth Care at the University of Victoria, I had the opportunity to work as a research assistant on the project. I collaborated with Dr. Pacini-Ketchabaw in developing a coding model based on broad themes, which emerged from the educators' conversations. My responsibility thereafter was to watch and listen closely to these conversations, and code them according to an emergent schema using HyperResearch software.

### ***Research Questions***

Three broad questions underlie the research and analysis undertaken throughout this thesis. As previously mentioned, the data that I engage with features early childhood educators' discussions about their work with young children. Although educators occasionally brought in video, photo or written documentation of children's interactions and narratives, I will not be using the narratives or work of young children in this thesis. What the data permits me to explore is how educators interpret children's understandings of race and identity, and what this suggests about whiteness, processes of racialization, as well as the ways in which children, childhood(s) and educators are produced more broadly. Informed by postfoundational theories, and working within the possibilities that my data open up, the following research questions were formulated:

- How do early childhood educators in the data set conceptualize whiteness, race, racialization, and racism(s), and where might these conceptualizations be rooted?
- How are educators reading young children's articulations and performances of race and racism(s), and how are children, childhood(s), and educators being produced in the process?
- How are educators responding to children's articulations and performances of race and racism(s)?

### ***Overview of Thesis***

A significant portion of this thesis will focus on articulating a layered and flexible grounding for a rich qualitative analysis of educators' narratives. The decision to foreground my analysis in multiple contextual layers is an ethical one. By contemplating the subject as fluid, unstable, nomadic (Braidotti, 2006) and emergent through relations of power, engagement with the forces constitutive of subjecthood is vital.

In chapter two, my theoretical framework is elaborated. I employ feminist poststructural, sociomaterialist, and postcolonial theories to link childhood and early childhood education with discourses of whiteness, processes of racialization, multiculturalism, neocolonialism and neoliberalism. Pursuant to this, chapter three consists of a two-part literature review that focuses on both dominant cognitive-developmental understandings of young children and race, as well as reconceptualizations of race and racialization in early childhood. Chapter four lays out my approach to inquiry, explicating the methods and methodology used in the research and analysis phases. My engagement with educators' reported encounters with race appear in chapter five. I will conclude in chapter six by discussing my findings, addressing the limitations of this study, and formulating implications for research and practice.

Before proceeding, it is important to clarify that this thesis is not an evaluation of educators' handling of issues of diversity in the classroom. Nor is it an attempt to dictate "the right way" to do anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice in ECE. This thesis seeks to reveal the relations of power that constitute race with and for educators and young children so that different possibilities of seeing and engaging with issues of race may be opened up.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework**

This chapter will elaborate the theoretical grounding of my analysis. Several theoretical lenses underpin the various facets of this research project, from the framing of my topic, to which aspects of the data are taken up, and the analysis itself. As previously mentioned in chapter one, I have elected to draw from feminist poststructural, sociomaterial and postcolonial scholarship for the purposes of engaging with the data explored in this thesis. Providing complete overviews of feminist poststructuralism, sociomaterialism and postcolonial theory are well beyond the purview of this Master's thesis, and arguably constitute an impossible project. Hence in what follows, I explicate how elements of each of these theoretical orientations address broad concepts such as discourse and power, subjectivity and identity, whiteness, racialization and racism(s), childhood, and the Canadian nation-state. In regards to the Canadian context, I look at how the discourses and forces of multiculturalism, neocolonialism, and neoliberalism are critical to nation building projects. While these broad concepts will serve as useful analytical reference points, I am acutely aware that they cannot be neatly separated out from one another. They are perpetually embroiled in dynamic, co-constitutive and interdependent processes. However, approaching theory as it relates to these central sites of inquiry, albeit somewhat messy, will draw epistemological links between perspectives and hopefully allow for rich readings of the data.

### ***Discourse and Power***

I begin with a discussion of discourse and power, as poststructural understandings of these terms underlie the other key concepts examined in this chapter. I will not be

providing a summary of the discourse and power analytics of Michel Foucault, but rather pulling salient descriptions of power and discourse from various sources. Mac Naughton, Davis and Smith (2009a) describe discourse as “the frameworks we use to make sense of the world intellectually, politically, emotionally, physically, implicitly, and explicitly. They are manifest in how we structure institutions and social life” (p. 33). Davies (2004), drawing from the work of Butler, asserts that discourse is also a system of signification through which objects and subjects are articulated. Discourse is seen as productive, and inextricably related to power. Malson (1998) writes, “Discourses regulate and discipline by constituting fields of knowledge, instituting truths, constituting subjectivities in particular ways, positioning people within discourses and subjecting them to normalizing judgments” (p. 29).

Poststructuralist scholars are concerned with revealing the ways in which discourses are always at work shaping subjects, structures and systems (Davies, 2004). In addition to interrogating what discourses “do”, poststructuralists also contemplate how discourses work to privilege or silence certain ways of knowing (Campbell, Mac Naughton, Page, & Rolfe, 2004). Discourse shapes the contours of what can be known and what is permissible at any given moment within specific contexts (Mac Naughton & Davis, 2009). As Davies (2000) writes, “[c]orrect membership of the social order entails being able to read situations correctly such that what is obvious to everyone else is also obvious to you” (p. 22). In this way, people take up discourses in their performances of identity, and are both constituted by and constitutive of discourse.

Cannella and Viruru (2004), following Foucault, highlight that power and knowledge come together in discourse. Foucault argued that power is like electricity in

the sense that it runs through everything, and is only perceptible in those places where it encounters resistance (Skott-Myhre, 2008). The role of dominant discourses in shaping subjectivities means that power is reinforced from below, in the identity performances fuelled by people's desire to be, as Davies (2000) phrases it: "unpassremarkable" (p.23). Power in poststructural theory is thus thought of as relational and scattered.

Poststructuralist theorizations of power also convey a certain type of hope. Foucault posited that wherever there is power, there is resistance. Drawing from Butler, Davies (2000) explains that within poststructuralism, power is a pre-condition for a radical kind of agency. Butler (1997) also maintained that agency eclipses the power that enables it, arguing that, "[a]gency is the assumption of a purpose unintended by power, one that could not have been derived logically or historically [and] that operates in relation of contingency and reversal to the power that makes it" (as cited in Honan, Knobel, Baker, & Davies, 2000). With that said, dominant discourses and relations of power are also elusive in their invisibility - meaning that unless you look for them, you would not know that they were at work. This is further complicated by the ways in which humans perpetuate systems of power by taking up dominant discourses (Cannella & Viruru, 2004), thereby becoming heavily invested in the identities that discourse affords them.

It is important for the research undertaken here to include a postcolonial critique of Foucault's analytic of power, which is pertinent to a postcolonial reading of the data put forth in this thesis. Following the work of Spivak, Cannella and Viruru (2004) emphasize that Foucault does not adequately account for the power inherent to colonial processes. Through the imposition of language, culture and other overtly violent

technologies of oppression, colonization effectively decimates, erases, and then reconfigures cultural identities and meaning making structures. Thus the notion that one can go outside of colonial structures of power and resist, or recover one's language and voice, is illusory (Spivak, 1996, 1999). Furthermore, citing the work of Mbembe, Thobani (2007) stresses the acknowledgement of "necropolitics" as inherent to colonizing systems, which is the power to dictate who lives and dies – a genocidal power much more violent and absolute than discursive power.

Some feminist materialist scholars have asserted that different conceptualizations of power are needed in this current era of hyper capitalism and increasing globalization (Braidotti 2006, 2009; Grosz, 2002). Haraway insists that contemporary relations of power have extended beyond Foucault's notion of bio-power, and that we have already entered the age of "the informatics of domination" (as cited in Braidotti, 2006). Drawing from the work of Bryld and Lykke, Braidotti (2006) addresses the complexities brought to bear by the advent of contemporary bio-power (not to be confused with Foucault's notion of bio-power), which means the ways in which technology and science immerse bodies (human and non-human) in newly configured social relations of power. One example that brings the fractured, Orwellian nature of contemporary power into relief is the experimental practice of putting computer chips on young children's bodies while they attend early childhood programs (Democracy Now!, September 9, 2010). We can also reflect here on the increasing medicalization of populations, especially children, in the name of regulating bodies through pharmaceutical intervention (Rose, 2003).

Attentiveness to power is integral to engaging with processes of racialization and discourses of whiteness in any setting. How do early childhood educators conceptualize

power in their work with young children? How are children understood to be negotiating power in the early childhood education setting? And how are children and educators taking up and resisting dominant discourses, and both reinforcing and challenging power relations?

### ***Subjects and Identities***

Through a humanist lens, identity is either predetermined (stemming from an inner-self or essence), or results from choice and diligent efforts towards self-actualization (Davies, 2004). While poststructuralism considers that relations of power work through discourse to make limited and contingent subject positions available, dominant, humanist conceptions of the “self” maintain that identities are the result of individuals’ own unique productions (Davies, 2000). Scholars working from postfoundational perspectives are concerned with how subjecthood is mediated, taken up and contested (Ahmed, 2004; Braidotti, 2006; Davies, 2000, 2004; Hall, 1990). This section addresses poststructural conceptualizations of identity, but will also touch upon sociomaterialist responses to the critiqued absence of the material from poststructuralist notions of subjecthood,

According to poststructuralism, subjects both constitute and are constituted by dominant discourses. Davies (2000) writes that the narratives and discourses that constitute us as subjects, and that we in turn constitute, shape processes of subjectification (Davies, 2000). Gendered, racialized and/or sexualized processes of subjectification give rise to what are commonly understood as our identities. While identity is conceived of as unbound and contingent in poststructuralism, humanist discourse constructs subjects within a hierarchical system of binaries that positions

subjects as either normal/abnormal, male/female, homosexual/heterosexual, and so on. Rutherford (1990a) explains that one element of the binary forms the privileged centre through its material and discursive workings, and the other sits on the margin. The notion of binaries, as well as the unitary, bound, coherent “self” are challenged through poststructural theory (Hall, 1990; Lee & Lutz, 2005). The inevitability of binary thinking is also challenged through a postcolonial analysis, which reveals the ways in which colonial processes forced and entrenched binary thought within colonized societies, many of which nurtured much more complex, flexible and elaborate conceptualizations of the world (Lugones, 2007).

Given that people take up various discourses, depending on the context in which they find themselves, they are able to inhabit multiple, porous and sometimes conflicting subjectivities (Hall, 1990). However Davies (2000, 2004) has written extensively on children’s deftness at recognizing binaries, and passionately defending their delineations. Deviations from the gender binary for example provoke what Davies (2004) refers to as category maintenance, or border work, around the edges of acceptable subjecthood. Children will tease one another, or engage in practices that send clear messages to the deviant that they have gotten “it” wrong (Davies, 2004). Thus for poststructural theorists, the child is conceived of as capable, and forever negotiating, policing and experimenting with identity. But category maintenance also serves the important purpose of creating the “I” (Davies, 2004; Rutherford, 1990a). By abjecting or “Othering” those who do not fit within the binary centre, the self is created and reaffirmed.

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall has made important contributions to fluid conceptualizations of identity. He emphasized that although cultural identity is not fixed,

it is no less real. “It has its histories – and histories have their real, material, and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us” (Hall, 1990, p. 226). Drawing from Gramsci, Rutherford (1990a) emphasizes that identity needs to be understood not only as a synthesis of current relations and relationalities, but also as entrenched within the history of those same relations. Citing transnational feminist theory, Pacini-Ketchabaw and Bernhard (in press) articulate the importance of bringing considerations of the specificities produced within bound, national spaces to the fore. This exploration of theory has so far illustrated the ways in which identity is contingent upon relations of power in and across both time and space. It is instructive to turn now to what Hall (1990) eludes to in the quote cited above, regarding material effects on identity.

Poststructuralism has been critiqued for its focus on the discursive at the expense of the material. Braidotti (2006) attributes the return of discussions about bodies to the shift in our social imaginary caused by the types of biotechnologies briefly touched on above. She writes, “[m]ethodologically, the return of ‘real body’ in its thick materiality spells the end of the linguistic turn in the sense of the postmodernist over-emphasis on textuality, representation, interpretation and the power of the signifier” (Braidotti, 2006, p. 5). Pertinent to a discussion on the materiality of subjectivity is the notion of corporeality. Drawing from Slocum (2008), Pacini-Ketchabaw and colleagues (2011) explain that corporeality refers to the dynamic ability of bodies to “become” in relation to human and non-human others. For sociomaterialists then, the body is not simply a static, peripheral canvas on which language writes power, but an active agent in determining how subjectivities are formed and transform.

Another previously neglected aspect of the materiality of human “being” is affect, or emotion. Ahmed (2004) points out that emotion has long been subordinated to reason, and as such, the body and the feminine have both been marginalized. She argues, “... it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others” (p. 10). Ahmed’s work addresses the instrumentality of emotion in identity formation, as well the dependence of the creation of the “I” on the “Other”. Her work also allows for a critical exploration of how subjects become invested in particular constructs, such as the nation, through affect.

What subjectivities become accessible when we conceive of the subject as discursively, materially and affectively constituted? Braidotti (2006) proposes conceptualizing subjectivity as nomadic, with connections spanning beyond traditional concepts of self-other into interconnection with non-human or “earth” others (Braidotti, 2009). The complex shift that Braidotti (2006) calls for is best elaborated in her own words:

... we need to enact a vision of the subject that encompasses changes in the deep structures. The point here is not just mere deconstruction, but the relocation of identities on new grounds that account for multiple belongings, i.e. non-unitary vision of a subject. ... The sociological variables (gender, class, race and ethnicity, age, health) need to be supplemented by a theory of the subject that calls into question the inner fibres of the self. These include the desire, the ability and the courage to sustain multiple belongings in a context which celebrates and rewards Sameness and one-way thinking. (p. 69)

Braidotti (2006, 2009), affirming Ahmed's (2004) thesis, asserts that affect exists in the deep structures of the subject, and as such, the kind of subjective shift she proposes is expected to elicit feelings of pain, anxiety, and nostalgia. This is relevant to an understanding of the affective dimension of work that seeks to challenge processes of racialization and decenter whiteness, which will be explored in more detail in chapter six.

I also wish to consider Castañeda's (2002) description of figurations in order to further broaden the range of analytical lenses employed in readings of the data. Drawing from Haraway (1997, 2004), Castañeda's (2002) usage of figurations involves a consideration of concurrent material and semiotic practices, which bring figures into being through the double force of constitution and circulation. Castañeda (2002) argues that these figures are capable of generating other bodies and worlds. By exploring "the constellation of practices, materialities, and knowledges through which a particular figuration occurs" (p. 8), and by identifying how that figuration works to shore up wider cultural claims, Castañeda (2002) interrogates how figurations of the child are manipulated to establish identity hierarchies which lurk behind assumed "facts" of the natural human body" (p. 9). As such, figurations seem to partially respond to the material, spatial and temporal situatedness of identities, as explored above. On the usefulness of thinking through figurations, Braidotti (2006) writes, "[i]t marks certain territorial or geopolitical coordinates, but it also points out one's sense of genealogy or of historical inscription" (p. 90). The concept of figurations holds the potential to destabilize the certainty of the subject, and elucidates notions of nomadic subjectivity.

My analysis is situated within feminist poststructuralist, sociomaterialist and postcolonial theories in order to arrive at rich critical understandings of the complexities

of race, processes of racialization and discourses of whiteness. These concepts necessitate layered and flexible theoretical understandings. I draw inspiration from Parr (2005), who considers the use of theory as one strategy among many in working to challenge and reconfigure dominant relations by exploring the possibilities that emerge through new readings. The theoretical vantage points through which I work both permit and obstruct certain readings of the data from view, but I hope that working within all of them will permit a nuanced and dynamic analysis. Certainly all of these perspectives share postfoundational orientations, some of which hold particular relevance to this thesis - namely, a recognition of the interconnectivity of language, knowledge and power (Davies, 2000, 2004), a commitment to challenging taken for granted claims to “Truth” (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Burman, 2008a, 2008b), and a conceptualization of identities as fluid, contingent and contradictory (Braidotti, 2006; Hall, 1990; Saldanha, 2006).

What might these theoretical lenses permit me to read in the data about the varied ways in which children and educators are “figured” through discourse, affect and material effects? How might divergent conceptualizations of identity formation support early childhood educators in alternative engagements with children’s experiments and performances of identity, as well as their own? As previously mentioned, I am using broad thematic concepts centered on race and identity in early childhood education as entry points into various theoretical paradigms. Now that some of the theoretical touchstones have been laid out, I explore the category of childhood itself, and why engaging with data generated in conversations with early childhood educators is important.

### *Childhood(s)*

Childhood, as a separate category of human experience, has not been defined in the same way across cultures and contexts over time. Skott-Myhre (2008) argues that the “child” is intentionally rendered a radically separate subject. A problematization of the construct of childhood is critical to the content of this thesis, which seeks to engage with many of the assumptions governing adult responses to children’s questions, performances and explorations of race. In this section, I therefore attempt to address several questions: What might the reasons be for “Othering” the child as a separate subject? And who stands to gain from conceptualizing the child as “Other”?

The concept of childhood is a recent construction, with roots in the universalization of education (Lesko, 1996). Early pedagogical systems, like their descendants, implemented linear development models that permitted the intensification of evaluation and surveillance according to age-related norms (Lesko, 1996). Education from its inception thus served, and serves, as a site for the enforcement of normalized developmental discourse. One of the results of the broad application of linear development models in modern liberal societies is the centrality of psychological testing to the maintenance of social order (Burman, 2008a). Citing the work of Fendler (2001), Pacini-Ketchabaw (2011) links Deleuze’s concept of societies of control with the frequent and continuous monitoring and testing of children in Canada, starting in early learning environments.

Child as “Other” has been conjured differently within the western imaginary over time, however the authority to define childhood and what is best for children is determined through relations of power, which consistently serve nation-building projects.

As Burman (2008b) points out, “Indeed, the widespread slogan that ‘children are our future’ highlights the links between individual children, notions of social progress and national welfare ...” (p.1). Further, the concept of the “inner-child” has become the solution for the disillusioned adult (Burman 2008a; 2008b). But which children have claims to childhood in the ways that it is discursively constructed through the dominant discourses circulating in western educational settings? Burman (2008b) points out that the traits of childhood commonly circulated in the west, such as carefree irresponsibility and innocence, do not neatly translate across culture, geography and class. Many of these assumed to be universal traits emerged out of developmental theory. Citing Burman (2008a), Pacini-Ketchabaw (2011) summarizes that as a framework to think about young people, developmental psychology “has contributed to the Western understanding of the human condition – one that privileges the Anglo-US, white, middle-class, masculine subjectivity of modernity” (p. 26). Developmental psychology’s claim to have mapped out universal, predictable and fixed stages of child development has also inhibited the recognition of the complexities of children’s lives. Davies (2000) states that, “[p]ositioning children as objects of a developmental/categorizing psychological inquiry can lead to a failure to theorize the contexts they inhabit – and it can lead to individualistic interpretations of socially structured phenomena” (p. 155).

Scholars have critiqued the colonization of childhood by science and projects devoted to nation building (Burman, 2008a, 2008b, Castañeda, 2002), and have called for a postcolonial reading of childhood (Cannella & Viruru, 2004). Citing the work of Wallace (1994), Castañeda (2002) elaborates how the idea of the child as incomplete subject made colonial apparatuses based on the infantilization of colonized people

conceivable. In the Canadian context, Aboriginal peoples continue to live with the after-shocks of the brutal residential school system: a horrific convergence of technologies of domination, which included the colonization of knowledge, language, worldviews, culture, *and* childhoods. It is clear then that childhood is a location of multiple and competing socio-politico-economic investments (Burman, 2008b; Castañeda, 2002; Cannella & Viruru, 2004), and as such, provides a complex site of analysis. It will be important to remain attuned to the ways in which the child and childhood are conceptualized, and what this might reveal about ongoing colonialism in the data set.

### ***Whiteness, Racialization and Racism(s)***

Numerous scholars have called for more effective critical tools with which to challenge processes of racialization and racism (Jiwani, 2006; Lee & Lutz, 2005; Razack, Smith, & Thobani, 2010). This thesis adopts the premise that young children's life spaces are political, and that processes of racialization and racism(s) are being encountered and mediated by young children and educators all the time. The primary curiosity informing this section of my theoretical framework pertains to how discourses of whiteness and processes of racialization might be identified and challenged.

The term racialization signifies a problematization of the humanist, biological concept of race as natural and fixed. Drawing from the work of Miles (1997), de Finney (2010) describes racialization as the process through which the dominant group categorizes the "Other" based on perceived physical and sociocultural attributes, and then positions racialized "Others" as different and inferior. This works to create a relational hierarchy between racialized groups with dominant whiteness as the invisible center (Lee & Lutz, 2005). Racialization therefore describes a process whereby race is constituted

through relations of power, and is executed in relation to dominant whiteness. The term racialization also accounts for the role of colonization in shaping notions of race (Mirchandani & Chan, 2002). Once we consider race in this way, it is not identifiable simply through biology, but emerges as the complex and shifting result of matrices of power and oppression, which work to privilege whiteness.

In direct opposition to multicultural discourses proclaiming the promise of post-racist societies, postcolonial scholars situate racism as alive and well in liberal-democratic countries. Moreover, these scholars emphasize the importance of de-individualizing racism, and moving towards the recognition of racism as discursively constructed, embedded within systems, and utilized intentionally in ongoing processes of nation building. Stoler (1997) insists, “[r]acism is not an effect but a tactic in the internal fission of society into binary opposition, a means of creating ‘biologized’ internal enemies, against whom society must defend itself” (as cited in Smith , 2003).

Certain events, such as the attack on New York in 2001, have had radical effects on processes of racialization in North America and elsewhere. While a complete examination of the relationship between national security discourse and processes of racialization is beyond the scope of this discussion, it is important to mention that racialized bodies in Canada are increasingly criminalized through their association with notions of the “enemy” or “terrorist” other (Smolash, 2007).

At times, racism operates overtly. Jiwani (2009b) has highlighted the hate crimes (death threats, assaults, and attacks on physical property) that occurred in Canada in the months following the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 against anyone who looked Middle Eastern, Arab, and/or Muslim. However, racism is also present within the normalized

omissions of the every day. To expand on this assertion, I turn to Armstrong (Armstrong & Ng, 2005) who stated:

What is appalling to me is that nobody thinks it is racism when a native person stands up and speaks his or her language and no one understands a single word. Who decided that my language isn't valuable? Who decided that my language has no place here, on this land, when for thousands of years our people and every other First Nation in this country took care of these lands? (p. 33)

Thus what gets counted as racism in the first place is defined through relations of power. It is crucial to remain aware that processes of racialization are also enabled through what is not said – the silences that circulate within micro and macro encounters. These silences are one of the ways in which racialized “Others”, including Aboriginal peoples, get forced into the peripheries of the national imaginary (Smolash, 2009) by virtue of their being discursively constructed as outside the “us” of what counts as Canadian.

Racist discourses are so widely disseminated that they are even internalized by those affected by racism (Lee & Lutz, 2005). As with other forms of oppression, racism's insidious transformations are enabled by processes of globalization. One such example is Citizenship and Immigration Canada's intention to replace permanent residents, who are accorded rights and the possibility of citizenship, with a massive temporary foreign worker program (Canadian Council for Refugees, n.d.). As Ng (Armstrong & Ng, 2005) insists, we must look for racism in its diverse implications and ask what it actually *does*.

I now examine how “us” and “them” are constructed in the Canadian context. Within white settler societies like Canada, dominant notions of citizenship are rooted in

hegemonic whiteness (Pacini-Ketchabaw, White, & Armstrong de Almeida, 2006). The term white settler society is used throughout this research to intentionally situate discussions of race in Canada within a colonial project that is still in process (Razack, 2011). Explorations of whiteness in Canada cannot be extricated from the plethora of historical and contemporary technologies that first established and now maintain the Canadian nation state, such as (neo)colonialism, neoliberalism and multiculturalism. These dominative technologies will be examined in more detail in the subsequent section. For the purposes of analysis, whiteness will be separated out here artificially, but hopefully not carelessly. Citing the work of Frankenberg and Mani (1996) and Narayan and Harding (2000), de Finney (2010) asserts that,

... whiteness must be understood as a socially endemic cultural system that is ideologically, materially, and historically based. It is at once fluid and adaptive, yet insidious and resilient; its ideologies are reproduced through dominant formations such as political systems, the media, social policy and services, educational institutions, and urban geographies ... (p. 476)

The power of whiteness thus lies in its fluidity and “invisibility”. By remaining unnamed, white can form the invisible backdrop against which racialized others are constituted (Jiwani, 2009a). Citing the work of Ien Ang (2003), Davis, Mac Naughton, and Smith (2009) emphasize that it is critical to recall that white dominance was carefully architected and violently enforced over 500 years of global historical events.

Within the context of the Canadian white settler state, Thobani (2007) writes that official discourses that delineate the boundaries of national belonging create three distinct groups: Canadian, immigrant, and Indian. While immigrants and ethnic minorities fall

under the rubric of Canada's multicultural policy, Aboriginals are not officially considered ethno-cultural minorities, and are instead governed by the Indian Act of 1876, which designates them wards of the state (de Finney, 2010). These three officially-recognized groups are organized hierarchically such that,

[r]acial difference, as a system of hierarchy within the Canadian socio-legal system, constitutes the national, the Indian, and the immigrant as different kinds of *legal* beings. In the process, it also constitutes them as different kinds of *human* beings at a symbolic level, ascribing to them different characteristics and values as intrinsic aspects of their (quasi) humanity. (Thobani, 2007, p. 28)

Once again, we see that processes of racialization are symbiotically related to dominant discourses of whiteness, and that racism and racial hierarchies are built into the very mechanisms of the state.

Whiteness, in its powerful invisibility, claims a culture-less, race-less subjecthood. The primacy of whiteness discourse is evidenced by the synonymy with which dominant narratives of national belonging are predicated on whiteness (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2006). It is important to emphasize that notions of white shift and change over time, and across contexts, such that identities that did not historically pass for white in Canada (e.g. Italian) now do. However, in relation to this last point, it is critical to highlight that the extreme negation of Aboriginal histories and identities through ongoing colonial processes has bestowed a fixity and definitiveness to Aboriginal subjectivities and cultures (Salem, 2009). Salem (2009) draws upon what Bergland (2000) refers to as the "ghosting" of Indians. As a means of mitigating guilt in the name of preserving some semblance of character (Bergland, 2000 as cited in Salem, 2009), the

denial of colonial-settler genocide as the foundation of Canadian nationhood has been successfully perpetuated across space and time. This persistent denial is the condition for the believability of the nation-state's mythologies.

I will now consider how affect might be implicated in creating the "Other", and how emotions are mobilized in white settler societies such as Canada. Ahmed's (2004) work is helpful here, as it postulates emotions as important investments in social norms. In her complex and relevant study of the workings of hate, she argues that hate does not in fact reside inside the subject, but rather, circulates economically. In a description of hate narratives, Ahmed (2004) writes, "Such narratives work by generating a subject that is endangered by imagined others whose proximity not only threatens to take something away ... but to take the place of the subject" (p. 43). Ahmed asserts that histories of association are carried on the body, which render some bodies more hate-able or hateful than others. Hate thus represents a negative attachment to the other, who the subject of hate then wishes to expel (Ahmed, 2004).

It is important to consider how processes of racialization, and dominant whiteness, are gendered and sexualized in particular ways within specific contexts. As I alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, none of the concepts explored here can be neatly parceled out from one another. Lugones (2007) historicizes gender and heterosexuality to gain an "understanding of the mechanisms by which heterosexuality, capitalism, and racial classification are impossible to understand apart from each other" (p. 187). Drawing from the work of Quijano, Lugones (2007) explains that "the coloniality of power" (p. 189) has given rise to what she calls the colonial / gender system. She asserts that because classification is the most enduring effect of colonial

domination, contemporary gendered and sexualized socio-geo-cultural identities are necessarily positioned around the axis of colonialism (Lugones, 2007).

This exploration of the discursive, affective and material forces shaping notions of whiteness and processes of racialization, as well as consideration of the interrelated forces constitutive of subjectivities, provide rich ground for an analysis of the ways in which race emerges in early learning contexts, and how educators respond to these encounters. Some of the questions that have emerged as a result of this exploration of theory include: How are white educators encountering and negotiating their own whiteness in practice? How might discourses of whiteness and processes of racialization be circulating, engaged with and resisted in early childhood spaces? And how do educators read children's encounters with the material, affective and discursive "event" (Saldanha, 2006) of race?

### ***The Canadian Nation State: Multiculturalism, Neocolonialism and Neoliberalism***

As explored above, Canadian subjecthood is not equally available to all people inhabiting the same spatial and temporal location (Thobani, 2007). This section will examine some of the important, interdependent forces at work to maintain dominant whiteness and produce race hierarchies in Canada.

#### *Multiculturalism*

One of the most substantial obstacles to critically engaging with whiteness and racialization in Canada is multicultural discourse. Multiculturalism became official policy in Canada under Prime Minister Trudeau in 1971. This policy was introduced in part to manage collective anxieties over the rapid change in immigrant source countries (Abu-

Laban, 1998). For example, in 1991 only 25% of immigrants to Canada were from Europe, as compared to the 90% of European origin thirty years earlier (Abu-Laban, 1998). While official multicultural policy does not govern legal constructions of Aboriginality in Canada, it constitutes an important part of Canada's national imaginary, which in turn impacts the ways in which immigrants, Canadian-born racialized people, and Aboriginals are "Other(ed)". Multicultural discourse constitutes the primary lens through which early childhood educators and other human service professionals are trained to understand and respond to issues of diversity in their work, and needs to be challenged.

I turn now to a critical unpacking of the term "national imaginary". Braidotti (2006) credits the work of Bhabha and Said in demonstrating that dominant concepts of the "nation" are primarily a product of imagination. The term "imaginary" will therefore be used throughout this section to refer to commonly held beliefs about what Canada is, and what being Canadian is taken to mean. The following quote by Canada's current Citizenship and Immigration Minister, Jason Kenney, offers a potent example of just such an imagined national identity. In a speech in 2009 he stated, "One of the unique things about Canada ... is that we probably have the strongest pro-immigration consensus in our political system of any comparable country. ... At the same time we have this tradition ... of embracing diversity, grounded in our historic, I would say British liberal imperial, tradition of pluralism..." (Kenney, 2009). There are numerous elements in this quote that require analysis, but suffice it to say that under Kenney and the federal Conservative government currently in power, the criminalization, detention and deportation of migrants has intensified, while multiple barriers to immigration have been erected through the

introduction of new bills and changes in policy (No One is Illegal: Coast Salish Territories – Vancouver, 2009). Policies such as these are justified in part through harkening to the national imaginary that Kenney elaborates in his speech. This type of discursive “double-speak” creates complex spaces that require complex responses.

Central to multicultural discourse are narratives of multicultural tolerance, which are inherently contradictory. While they tend to be post-racial in the sense that they proclaim that liberal democratic societies have entered an era of colorblindness, they fail to account for blatant symptoms of persistent, systemic racism. I will now examine various analyses put forth by critics of multiculturalism with the aim of interrogating what discourses of multiculturalism *do*. Bannerji (2000) asserts that multicultural language actually contributes to processes of racialization in its reliance upon the positing of various multicultures against an imagined core culture. Political and corporate systems use multicultural discourse strategically to reify people into institutionally recognizable communities, who then become the targets of policies and campaigns designed to win their loyalty (Bannerji, 2000). Razack (1998) explains that the cumulative effect of multicultural reification is the conflation of race and culture, which works to push racialized others to the margins of acceptable Canadian subjecthood. Furthermore, Kamboureli (2000) articulates the notion of multicultural fatigue, which he describes as having resulted from dominant society’s belief that all that could have been done to promote substantive equality has been achieved, and thus discussions of racism and injustice are anachronistic.

Multicultural discourse is also gendered, both in the way that it impacts racialized women in Canada, and in the way that it produces racialized, gendered, and sexualized

subjects more broadly. For example, Thobani (2011) points out that the politics of multiculturalism in Canada, which demands that artificially concretized groups produce representatives and spokespeople, has greatly strengthened patriarchy in immigrant communities. This serves the double purpose of marginalizing racialized women, and reinforcing dominant society's qualification of racialized communities as inherently patriarchal. Racialized women are also fetishized and sexualized as exotic "Others" within multicultural spaces. Lugones (2007) provides a history of the fetishization of colonized women, which has led to contemporary gendered and sexualized figurations of "Othered" women. Ahmed (2004) comments on multiculturalism's fetishization of racialized women when she writes that within multicultural nations, the mixed race woman "'appears' as a fetish object ... In other words, the nation remains the agent of reproduction: she is the offspring of the multicultural love for difference" (p. 137).

I move now to a critical unpacking of the tolerance language central to multiculturalism as an important part of preparing for the analysis undertaken in this thesis. A thorough examination has been conducted elsewhere (di Tomasso, 2012), therefore I will only provide a brief summary of these ideas here. Tolerance works in several ways to further marginalize those marked as "Other" through the processes already explored. Namely: 1) tolerance and decency are subsumed into the national identity and become understood as distinguishing values of the nation and its subjects (Anderson & Taylor, 2005); 2) this positions "Othered" cultures and individuals as lacking these values, and even incapable of possessing them (Brown, 2006); and 3) tolerance can only be exercised by those who have the power to define (un)desirability (Brown, 2006). Apart from working to define the non-Canadian "Other", the cooptation

of benevolence into notions of “Canadian-ness” exalts the national subject, which plays the important role of bonding the subject to the state and nation (Thobani, 2007).

Given the many critiques leveled against multiculturalism, it is not surprising that numerous scholars call for the problematization of multicultural discourse (Anderson & Taylor, 2005; Bannerji, 2000; Brown, 2006; de Finney, 2010; Grosz, 2002; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2006; Vandembroeck, 2010). The anti-bias curriculum developed by Derman-Sparks in 1989, which has had an undeniably important impact on conceptualizations of socially just practice in the field of early childhood education, was heavily informed by multicultural discourse. How might discourses of multiculturalism be utilized to manage diversity and mask whiteness and racialization in early childhood education? What might the employment of multicultural discourses with young children be doing to construct race, identity and difference in particular ways? Based on the theoretical grounding described above, what other lenses and methods might educators be able to use in conceptualizing anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice?

### *(Neo)colonialism*

A discussion of race and identity within the bounded space of what is considered Canada would be incomplete without outlining the centrality of ongoing colonialist practices in sustaining dominant whiteness, and the nation state itself (Razack, 2011). Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European colonial powers ravenously stole territory around the world at the average rate of 210 000 km<sup>2</sup> per year (Cannella & Viruru, 2004). What is now considered Canada is the direct product of British and French colonization of Aboriginal lands and peoples. The Canadian nation-state’s genocidal past and ethnocidal present do not presently feature in dominant conceptualizations of Canadian nationhood.

Razack and colleagues (2010) emphasize that it is crucial to remain attentive to the gendered dimensions of colonization. European patriarchy stripped Aboriginal women of matrilineal land holdings, and the Indian Act was intentionally designed to target children and women for loss of status (Thobani, 2007). Furthermore, Aboriginal women's bodies were sexualized, in part through early colonial policies that limited European women's migration to the colonies, thereby establishing a system of concubinage (Cannella & Viruru, 2004). Smith (2003) explains that because of the inherent threat that female bodies pose to the project of genocide, Native women in particular have been targeted by colonial practices. A horrific example of this in the Canadian context was the forced sterilization of Aboriginal women up until as recently as the 1970s.

Gayatri Spivak (1999) characterizes neocolonialism by its perpetuation through economic, rather than territorial, imperialism. However, continued processes of colonization are also necessarily shored up through regimes of knowledge and claims to truth, like for example the taken for granted assumptions regarding "good" parenting and "quality" education. Canella and Viruru (2004) explicate that the concept of literacy, for example, has contributed to "the larger projects of colonizing minds, intellects, and emotions, creating desires to think like and be like the Empire" (p. 41). Education, including early childhood education, thus sustains ongoing colonial processes, which positions educational settings as central to decolonizing projects. Current neocolonial practices in Canada include the normalizing of white cultural knowledge and education models, aggressive incursions into the lives of Aboriginal families, and the apprehension of their children in alarming numbers. For example, Aboriginals constitute only 7% of the

total population of British Columbia, but Aboriginal children account for 54% of children in government care (Galley, 2010).

It is instructive at this juncture to consider the relationship between colonization and whiteness. Anderson and Taylor's (2005) articulation of white settler society anxiety in Australia can be compared to Canada's relationship to its colonial past. They write, "Indigenous dispossession is both the foundational act that secured white sovereignty and the residual effect that continues to disturb it" (Anderson & Taylor, 2005, pp. 464-465). It might be useful here to link Anderson and Taylor's (2005) notion of white settler society anxiety to Ahmed's (2004) description of hate as rooted in a deep-seated fear of loss. The fear of having something taken away is particularly salient for those who have the collective memory (no matter how repressed) of having taken something.

The violence perpetrated by interlocking processes of colonization, racialization and whiteness discourses is obscured through discourses of multiculturalism. Within multicultural discourse, the national subject in white settler societies considers him/herself a benevolent host (Anderson & Taylor, 2005), which Sharma (2004) likens to notions of the "white man's burden". The narrative of the white subject benevolently sharing what is rightfully his, Ahmed writes, "involves a rewriting of history, in which the labour of others (migrants, slaves) is concealed in a fantasy that it is the white subject who 'built this land'" (2004, p. 43). Living in a society built upon, and sustained through, oppression has an inevitable effect on the dominant group. As Cesaire (1972) notes, "Colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by the contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it; that the colonizer ... tends objectively to transform himself into an animal" (as cited in

Smith, 2003, p. 81). Additionally, Thobani (2007) makes the important point that non-Aboriginal, racialized migrants in Canada are rendered complicit in neocolonial processes through discourses of citizenship, which mobilize them in defense of the white settler nation as a precondition of their acceptance into it. Indeed, as Ahmed (2004) remarks, the new condition of the multicultural state is that in order to be loved, migrants must love the nation.

In light of the exploration undertaken thus far, several critical questions linking this discussion back to ECE have taken shape. How might ongoing colonial processes be at work in ECE spaces? What are some of the taken for granted assumptions that mask and protect ongoing colonial processes? How can educators and children work to disrupt colonial practices and decolonize early learning spaces?

### *Neoliberalism*

Neoliberalism, as it is explored here, refers to a set of policies, practices and attitudes that have emerged in this era of hyper capitalism (Braidotti, 2006), and which serve to strengthen ongoing colonial projects. I turn here to Skott-Myhre's (2008) elucidation of capitalism as a useful introduction to this section. He writes,

Capitalism must create conditions in which need, desire, and production are confused with one another. ... Both groups must believe that they cannot create the world outside the belief systems, values, and systems of control that make up the current capitalist system. They must confuse their own material desires, through which they create their life, with the produced needs of capitalist-driven consumption. They must come to believe that their efforts and creativity are inadequate to the demands of their life. Furthermore, they must come to believe that

it is through the benefits of the current system that they stand any chance in succeeding in life. (p. 157)

Going beyond Skott-Myhre's (2008) description of the workings of capitalism, Quijano articulates a global, Eurocentred capitalism that is situated on the axes of both modernity and colonialism (Lugones, 2007). He explains the workings of modernity as, "the fusing of the experiences of colonialism and coloniality with the necessities of capitalism, creating a specific universe of intersubjective relations of domination under a Eurocentered hegemony" (Quijano, 2000 as cited in Lugones, 2007 p. 191). Using the work of Quijano, Lugones (2007) highlights the important link between racialization and global capitalism. She emphasizes that by engaging with the coloniality of power, conceptual room can be made for thinking about global capitalism as contingent upon colonialist classifications of the world's population into racialized groups. This type of postcolonial analysis foregrounds an attentiveness to the effects of colonialism and modernity in enmeshing race, gender, sexuality, class, and labour in distinctive ways.

The increasing privatization of social services, the rush to exploit the world's natural resources at any cost, and the devaluing of education, children and families are all characteristic of this neoliberal, neocolonialist era. Neoliberalism permeates the very ways in which we attribute value (or not) to everything, including human beings. As Abu-Laban and Gabriel (2008) succinctly state, "...there is increasing emphasis on the economic or potential economic contributions of individuals as the sum worth of a person" (p. 52). They go on to state that within a neoliberal paradigm, even diversity is commodified as citizens are reduced to customers (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2008). Writing about the barriers that neoliberal technologies erect to social change through the

commodification of diversity, Braidotti (2006) writes, "... the proliferation of local differences for the sake of marketability is one of the features of the global economy; globalization functions through the incorporation of otherness" (p. 55). This reductive, profit-driven logic collapses identities in on themselves, and depoliticizes inequality, thereby nullifying critical approaches to social injustice. In Braidotti's words (2006), technologies such as neoliberalism shore up a system that "promotes feminism without women, racism without races, natural laws without nature, reproduction without sex, sexuality without genders, multiculturalism without ending racism, economic growth without development, and cash flow without money" (p. 58).

Neoliberalism constitutes and is constitutive of discourses of racialization and whiteness in several important ways. Because neoliberalism conceives of the humanist, individual as a separate, agentic unit, success (wealth) is the natural result of hard work, and failure (poverty) is a product of personal shortcomings (di Tomasso, 2012). Capitalist markets are held up in neoliberal discourse as self-regulating, meritocratic, quasi-democratic systems, which completely erases modern capitalism's rootedness in colonization, slavery and the exploitation of the world's most disenfranchised (Cannella & Viruru, 2004). The meritocratic myth, fueled by the doctrine of neoliberalism, masks the racialized nature of poverty in Canada, and the concentration of wealth amongst white elites. Roberts and Mahtani (2010) point out that neoliberal policies such as cuts to essential social services disproportionately impact the racialized populations who are overrepresented amongst service users. And then these same policies work to ensure that "racial identity and racism is subsumed under the auspices of meritocracy" (Roberts and Mahtani, 2010, p. 253). It is thus important to remain attentive to the ways in which

neoliberalism produces racialized bodies, and then intervenes in the ways that race functions across space and time.

Neoliberalism has particular impacts on women and children, as well as female-dominated professions such as early childhood education. Socioeconomically vulnerable families, who in Canada are disproportionately Aboriginal, racialized and/or headed by single mothers, are subjected to increased surveillance and regulation as they access social services. Additionally, within the neoliberal model, professions that are not considered to “produce” anything are devalued. As Cannella and Viruru (2004) remind us, “... feminist scholars have illustrated that a characteristic of much of the work that women have historically been allowed or encouraged to do lacks any type of “finished product”” (p. 24). Social services such as education and healthcare are increasingly constructed through neoliberal discourse as drains on the system, with the unfortunate result of service providers being pressured to measure the worth of their work in dollar amounts. In the female-dominated domain of early childhood education, the undervaluation of this work is evidenced by British Columbia’s lack of a universal childcare policy and the ridiculously low salaries suffered by early childhood educators. In regards to this thesis, I am curious about how neoliberal discourse constitutes children and educators in particular ways. Additionally, how might the neoliberalization of diversity and education impact the ways in which race is conceptualized and engaged with in early learning settings?

The intention of this chapter was to use feminist poststructural, sociomaterial and postcolonial theories to engage in a critical discussion of the interrelated concepts and forces that mediate whiteness and processes of racialization in Canada. This type of

discussion, by its very nature, is incomplete. Language and theory can only go so far in interrogating the interdependent and insidious workings of power through which multiculturalism, neocolonialism, and neoliberalism figure childhoods and identities in ever-changing ways. This chapter served to reveal the complex ways in which power, and the particular technologies utilized to maintain dominance in national spaces, necessarily impact the ways in which race, whiteness and processes of racialization emerge in early learning settings.

The following chapter will provide a review of what scholars studying race in early childhood have concluded. Due to the theoretical chasm separating cognitive-developmental discourses on race and racialization in early childhood and the work being done by reconceptualist scholars in early childhood studies, the literature review will be presented in two sections.

### **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

In this chapter, I conduct a two-part literature review of scholarship concerned with issues of race and racialization in early childhood, and in early learning environments. As with much of the literature on childhood and learning, scholarship concerned with young children's understandings of race, and how to engage with children around issues of race, has been informed predominantly by developmental psychology. However, an important shift has occurred towards postfoundational ideas in the field of early childhood studies. This shift, sometimes referred to as the reconceptualist movement, draws from poststructural, feminist and postcolonial, among other postfoundational theories (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010b).

Questions regarding if, how, and when children begin to understand race and act on racial prejudices have formed the basis of intense study for many years (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996). Because the thrust of my research and analysis will draw from reconceptualist scholarship that can be said to have responded to dominant, developmental theorizations of childhood and race, it is crucial to first explore what developmentalist scholars have written on the topic. It is for this reason that I have elected to conduct a two-part literature review. While a complete review of the developmental literature is beyond the scope of this thesis, what follows is a summary of what developmental theorists have concluded from their research with young children around issues of race and identity.

### *Cognitive-Developmental Discourses on Racialization*

In very simple terms, developmental psychology asserts, among other things, that how and what children learn depends largely on their developmental age (Cannella, 1997). It is unsurprising then that developmental theorists assert that children's conceptualizations of race take shape according to their cognitive capacities at fixed points throughout childhood. Some of the earliest research conducted in this area sought to investigate if, when and how children identified phenotypical markers of race (Davis, & Mac Naughton, 2009a). Clarke and Clarke's finding in the 1930s that self-consciousness around racial identification takes place between three and four years old has been investigated over and over again using similar techniques (Mac Naughton & Davis, 2009) and continues to hold ground within developmental literature. The amount of literature on children and race written from a developmental perspective is vast, and the conclusions discussed below are varied. Three broad themes emerged in my review of the developmental literature that I will discuss in depth. I have organized subsequent paragraphs according to these themes: definitions of race and racism, theorizations of young children's understanding(s) of race and identity, and theorizations of children's expressions of racial bias. I will conclude this portion of the literature review by contemplating what implications these conclusions hold for the education of young children.

#### *Defining Race*

While there are some scant allusions in the developmental literature to race as constituted through relations of power, emphasis rests on the centrality of cognitive developmental processes in forming understandings of race in childhood (Aboud, 2008;

Doyle & Aboud, 1995; Hirschfeld, 2008; Katz, 2003; McKown, 2004; Patcher, Szalacha, Bernstein, & Coll, 2010; Quintana, 2008; Quintana & McKown, 2008).

Quintana (1998) states that the social category of race is one of the first things that children learn. He defines race in biological terms as "... a group of persons with shared genetic, biological, and physical features" (p. 28). What is notable is the way in which many of these scholars presuppose race as a fixed, biological and social category (Aboud, 2008; Doyle & Aboud, 1995; McKown, 2004; Patcher et al., 2010; Quintana, 2008; Quintana & McKown, 2008) to the extent that race is neither explicitly defined in the literature, nor is it seriously contested as the basis of perceived racial attitudes in children. Racism is defined in parallel terms. Patcher and colleagues (2010) define racism as, "...negative beliefs, attitudes, actions, or behaviors that are based on phenotypic characteristics or ethnic affiliations" (p. 61). Based on the research of Clark and colleagues (1999), McKown (2004) breaks racism down into cognitive, affective and behavioral components, which then manifest as stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination respectively. The salient assumptions embedded within the definitions of race and racism put forth in this literature are: a) that race is static, and based on phenotypic markers, and b) racism originates and resides within individual beliefs and attitudes regarding phenotype and ethnicity.

### *Theorizing Young Children's Understanding of Race and Identity*

Many of the existing studies on children's understandings of race are grounded in cognitive-development theory (Aboud, 2008; Doyle & Aboud, 1995; Hirschfeld, 2001, 2008; Katz, 2003; Patcher et al., 2010; Quintana, 1998, 2008). The literature in this field has two broad foci: racial recognition and racial bias. Some of the main questions posed

by developmentalist scholars in the reviewed literature are: when do children begin to recognize racial difference, what are the origins of children's awareness of racial difference, what are the stages of developmental understanding of racial difference, when do children develop racially prejudiced behavior, and at what ages does racial prejudice peak and wane? Cognitive development theory (CDT) draws from Piagetian stage-based ideas (Mac Naughton & Davis, 2009) and Kohlberg's 1969 application of Piaget's theory to social development (Aboud, 2008). The underlying premise adopted by CDT researchers is that (very much like developmental psychologists) children possess an innate need to better understand their surroundings by classifying and sorting (Mac Naughton & Davis, 2009). Prior to the 1980s, it was thought that children only developed an awareness of race and gender at around three to four years old (Proshansky, 1966 as cited in Katz & Kofkin, 1997). However, Katz and Kofkin's (1997) longitudinal study of two hundred children in the United States between the ages of six months and six years regarding racial recognition and bias concluded that infants as young as six months of age have pre-verbal concepts of both gender and race.

As children move out of infancy into early childhood, they are believed by developmentalists to move from pre-verbal concepts to a basic understanding of race. McKown (2004) summarizes the dominant perspective in the CDT literature regarding young children when he writes, "As early as preschool, children begin to understand what race is (Aboud, 1988, 2001; Hirschfeld, 1996), to develop an ethnic identity (Aboud, 1988; Quintana, 1998), and endorse racial attitudes (Aboud, 1988; Doyle & Aboud, 1995; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996, 2001)" (p. 598). Developmental research into children and race has debunked the unsubstantiated, longstanding belief that children are "pre-racial"

and therefore colorblind (Hirschfeld, 2008). However, children's perceived awareness of race is considered by developmentalists to be a universal, natural, bi-product of cognitive maturation and is thus assumed to be a-political.

There is notable disagreement in the cognitive developmental literature regarding the age at which children begin to possess an understanding of race and the ability to articulate or act on racial bias. Hirschfeld (2001, 2008) asserts that children not only recognize race, but also begin interpreting behaviors using adults' race stereotypes by age three. He attributes this to a biologically built-in "special-purpose competency", which he believes children develop at around three years old and utilize to create a "folk" or "naïve" theory of biology. According to Hirschfeld (2001), children with the ability to recognize and categorize aggregates would have had an adaptive advantage historically, and thus he assumes racial bias to be a built-in biological skill that has been passed down through the millennia. Alternatively, Quintana (1998, 2008) proposes that children develop racial and ethnic perspective-taking abilities across four fixed stages. These stages dictate what and when children can know about ethnicity and race. In this model, young children between ages three and six operate at what he refers to as "level 0", which is characterized by physical (superficial) and egocentric understandings of racial difference.

While there is broad agreement in this body of literature that infants and young children can recognize racial differences, they are also largely assumed to be incapable of grasping the complexity of race and racism. Quintana (1998) writes, "A young child is further handicapped in understanding such a complex construct [as race] by immature levels of cognitive development as well as limited opportunities for personal and social

exposure to ethnicity and race” (p. 27). Thus children’s concepts of race and racism are perceived as limited by their cognitive immaturity and lack of lived experience.

*Theorizing Children’s Expressions of Racial Bias*

Research with young children around issues of race has revealed that race features prominently in their day to day lives, and a significant percentage of children report encounters with racial discrimination by middle childhood (McKown, 2004; Patcher et al., 2010). Numerous developmental researchers assert that young children begin exhibiting racial attitudes in preschool (Katz & Kofkin, 1997; McKown, 2004; Quintana 1998, 2008), at around the same time that their understanding of race is said to develop. In fact, a multitude of instruments have been created to measure racism and discrimination in the lives of children, which Patcher and colleagues (2010) list as: Perceptions of Racism in Children and Youth scale, the Perceived Racism Scale-Child (PRS-C), the Everyday Discrimination Scale, and the Schedule of Racist Events (SRE) among others.

Although young children are said to be cognizant of race, and are documented in studies as articulating or enacting racial biases (e.g. Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996; Mac Naughton, Davis & Smith, 2009a, 2009b), developmentalist scholars maintain that young children do not act on “genuine” racist beliefs until the age of eight, because up until this time, their notions of race are unstable and immature (Mac Naughton & Davis, 2009). Along this line, McKown (2004) reiterates that there is no evidence that preschool children have any awareness of racism, per se. However, coincidentally, racial attitudes observed in preschool aged children by developmental researchers were largely pro-white and somewhat anti-minority (Quintana, 1998). Additionally, several developmentalist

scholars have claimed that children's racial attitudes in the preschool years seem to take shape independently of their parents (Hirschfeld, 2001, 2008; Katz, 1976 as cited in Quintana, 1998).

The finding that young children seem to develop pro-white attitudes, irrespective of their parents' beliefs, was hypothesized differently by scholars in the field ranging from theories about children parroting bias to biological explanations. Hirschfeld (2001, 2008), drawing from Piaget and Vygotsky, disagrees with the construction of young children as receptacles of their environments' biases and prejudices. Using an evolutionary biological lens he states that, "...xenophobia and other correlate cognitive effects, like stereotyping, prejudice, and group biases, are interpreted as adaptations against predation by other humans" (Hirschfeld, 2001, p. 112). Quintana (1998) hypothesized that children's pro-white attitudes are actually unrelated to social behavior, and instead may reflect "intrinsic attitudes toward light and dark colors" (p. 34).

One of the principal conclusions drawn in the CDT research is that expressions of racism in childhood reduce with age due to the acquisition of more sophisticated cognitive abilities. Aboud (2008) affirms that changes in prejudice follow an aged-based step-wise trajectory, whereby, "[i]n-group and out-group bias peaks by four to five years, and declines after age seven when biological maturation allows children to think about multiple aspects of a person" (p. 58). Therefore, the underlying assumption is that children are not cognitively advanced enough to be tolerant (Levy et al., 2004 as cited in Mac Naughton & Davis, 2009; Quintana, 1998). However, the assertion that children simply "grow out of" racism has been challenged by other CDT scholars who instead attribute the apparent dwindling of racist attitudes in middle childhood to how children's

increased cognitive capacities allow them to conform with anti-racist norms in the presence of adults (Monteiro, Franca, & Rodrigues, 2009). In studying the occurrence of intergroup bias in a sample of white children, Monteiro and colleagues (2009) concluded that, “White children’s expressions of intergroup bias toward stigmatized groups become polymorphic in middle childhood, by showing ... a selective use of concurrent norms according to context demands” (p. 37).

Cognitive-development theory necessarily presupposes the universality of its conclusions by entrenching children’s understandings of, and attitudes towards, race in predetermined and naturalized ages and stages of development. However, a persistent theme in the CDT research in the United States highlights a significant discrepancy between white children’s conceptions of race and racial prejudice, and that of African-American and Hispanic children. In McKown’s (2004) research with six to ten year olds, he found that African-American children possessed more elaborated concepts of race and racism than their non-African-American peers. Dulin-Keita, Hannon, Fernandez and Cockerham (2011) also found that non-Hispanic black children in the United States were more aware of the concept of race than their peers who identified themselves as belonging to other racial groups. Furthermore, non-Hispanic white children in their study were less adept at defining race, and very few reported having experienced racial discrimination (Dulin-Keita et al., 2011). However, despite apparently possessing firmer understandings of the concept of race and racial discrimination, Dulin-Keita and colleagues’ (2011) research using persona dolls also found that children from racial or ethnic groups other than white were unable to choose dolls that accurately reflected their ethnic identities until age seven. This raises very interesting questions that are not

addressed in the CDT literature, but which are taken up by reconceptualists.

### *Summary*

A preliminary review of the CDT literature pertaining to children and race has unearthed several dominant assumptions that have significant ramifications for how race and diversity are conceptualized and addressed by CDT theorists in the field of early childhood education. Below is a point form summary of these assumptions:

- Race is a fixed, biological and social category (Aboud, 2008; Doyle & Aboud, 1995; McKown, 2004; Patcher et al., 2010; Quintana, 2008; Quintana & McKown, 2008);
- Racism involves negative attitudes and/or behaviors based on ethnic grouping or phenotypic characteristics (Patcher et al., 2010);
- Children begin to understand what race is in preschool (Aboud, 2008; Hirschfeld, 1996 as cited in McKown, 2004) and to exhibit and act on racial attitudes in preschool (Aboud, 2008; Doyle & Aboud, 1995; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996);
- Young children's racial beliefs and attitudes are not "real" until approximately eight years of age (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996);
- Expressions of racism in childhood reduce with age due to the acquisition of more sophisticated cognitive abilities (Aboud, 2008).

Throughout this thesis, I will examine how the assumptions listed above construct children, education and educators in particular ways. I move now to putting forth a brief response to developmental psychology as a means of foregrounding the second portion of the literature review, which addresses postfoundational views on childhood and race.

### ***Response to Developmentalism***

The dominance of developmental psychological theory in early childhood education derives from its assertion that it represents a science, with objective methods of

measurement (Burman, 2008a). European and North American societies are still very much tied to Enlightenment-era humanist notions regarding the primacy of rational thought. Science is accorded “Truth” status, and claims to science are used to explain the universality and infallibility of western psychology (Burman, 2008a). A critical examination of developmental psychology holds particular salience for the research questions put forward in this thesis. Not simply due to the truth status bestowed upon developmental psychology when it comes to matters of childhood and learning, but also for its collusion in processes of colonization and racialization.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Darwin’s work on the origin and evolution of species created an epistemic ordering of things, which produced a concept of development as being temporally contingent (Lesko, 1996). In turn, this led to the theory of “cultural recapitulation”, which centered on the premise that “each individual human’s growth recapitulates the stages of evolution of the race” (Lesko, 1996, pp. 40-41). Consequently, cognitive and social development were posited as parallel to evolutionary development (Burman, 2008a). It is not surprising then that “[t]he colonization of most parts of the non-Western world ... and the emergence of the most commonly accepted discourses about children took place in the same historical period and served similar purposes” (Cannella & Viruru, 2004, p. 4). These historical and ideological links between childhood, colonization and race are integral to any serious discussion on dominant theorizations of children’s understandings of race and racism(s). In fact, Darwin’s conclusions supported claims to white racial superiority, thus justifying colonial processes under the guise of development (Davis & Mac Naughton, 2009) with severe impacts for both colonized populations as well as children.

According to Burman (2008a) the idea of developmental progression was naturalized by introducing the idea of a “mental life” which was measurable through age-graded testing, and by assuming that cognitive and physical development were concurrent. Stage theory, credited to Jean Piaget, emerged in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Mac Naughton & Davis, 2009), and continues to serve as the foundation of developmental theory today. Stage theory featured strongly in the cognitive-developmental literature detailed above. For example, Quintana (1998, 2008) elaborates a four-staged (level 0-4) model of “Ethnic Perspective Taking Ability”, whereby children’s categorizations of racial and ethnic status becomes more “accurate” with age. In Katz and Kofkin’s (1997) longitudinal research, children were assessed for racial recognition at fixed and precise ages (e.g. six months, one year, two years and so on). But what are some of the implications of applying cognitive developmental theory to questions of race and identity in early childhood?

As was displayed in the first portion of this literature review, developmental theory postulates race and racism in particular ways. Race is naturalized, collapsed into a biological fait accompli, while racism is reduced to a function of cognitive immaturity or natural instinct, and thus completely depoliticized. By imagining the social as natural, we render structures of power invisible. And it could be argued that what we consider to be natural or inevitable at the individual level will also be carried over into the social, thereby erecting substantive barriers to systemic change. Brown (2006) writes that the dangerous process of depoliticization “involves construing inequality, subordination, marginalization, and social conflict, which all require political analysis and political

solutions, as personal and individual on the one hand, or as natural, religious or cultural on the other...” (p. 15).

The image of the child constructed through the cognitive developmental literature explored in the previous section is largely one characterized by incompetence. With the exception of Monteiro and colleagues (2009) who state that children learn to negotiate social norms quite young, and Hirschfeld (2008) who asserts that children influence the processes through which we think about race, the literature largely theorized young children as either unaware of race, or cognitively deficient. Burman (2008a) incites us to be mindful about whose “development” is marginalized and privileged through developmental discourses. For example, within the dominant developmental model, where nuanced understandings of race are thought to stem from cognitive capacity, racialized children taking up privileged discourses of whiteness become further marginalized as they are assumed to be displaying identity confusion due to weak or underdeveloped cognitive abilities.

If developmental discourse constructs the child in this way, how are early childhood educators positioned? What types of curricula and pedagogical interventions become sanctioned or prohibited in early learning environments around issues of race when approaching practice through a developmental lens? As I will examine in the upcoming portion of the literature review, reconceptualist scholars in the field of ECE have asserted that developmental theory does not adequately attend to the agency of children in exploring and articulating elements of their identities, nor does it acknowledge the currency of power in shaping attitudes about race - for both children and adults.

### *Review of Reconceptualist Conceptualizations of Racialization*

Research in the field of education has begun to question formerly accepted assumptions about the relationship between power and knowledge, (T)ruth, the unitary self, and complexities of representation (Janzen, 2008). The reconceptualist movement in early childhood education is informed by various postfoundational theories, and thus cannot be concisely summarized or defined (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010b). Some of the theoretical underpinnings of the reconceptualist movement were previously explored in chapter two. While an overview of the reconceptualist movement as a whole is beyond the scope of this thesis, this portion of the literature review will highlight some of the contributions made by reconceptualist scholars to the question of race and identity in early childhood education.

Cannella (2002) describes the term reconceptualization as “multidirectional and multidimensional, resulting in constant critique and new insights from which new transformative actions can emerge” (as cited in Janzen, 2008, pp. 295-296). Through the use of theories like transnational feminism and poststructuralism, reconceptualist scholars have problematized the concept of fixed developmental trajectories and have challenged aforementioned accepted “Truths” about unitary, knowable and stable identities.

Therefore reconceptualist handlings of questions around race and identity in ECE are very different from the conclusions reached through cognitive developmental theory. In fact, one of the first concepts challenged by reconceptualists was the taken for granted coupling of developmental psychology and early childhood education (Cannella, 1997).

The principal intention behind the reconceptualist movement was to use postfoundational theoretically-informed critique to disrupt normalizing ECE discourses,

which are entrenched in dualistic thinking (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007).

Postfoundational scholars in early childhood studies do not seek to do away with developmental theory entirely. Instead, reconceptualist ECE scholars and practitioners are seeking out new lenses with which to critique the taken for granted. Drawing from Foucault, Davies (2004) reminds us that critique is not only about criticizing the way things are, but rather entails searching out the established, taken for granted assumptions underlying accepted practices. In her description of the reconceptualist movement, Pacini-Ketchabaw (2010b) echoes the above statement in writing: “We do not propose moving away from child development in early childhood education, but moving in/with child development and unfolding its historical, political and social underpinnings” (p. 243).

The following sections are organized according to the principal sites of inquiry encountered through a review of the reconceptualist literature surrounding issues of race and identity in early childhood education. First, the ways in which race and identity are (re)conceptualized in the literature will be explored, as well as the image of the child that emerges through these postfoundational readings. Following from that, I will highlight some of the characteristics of reconceptualist research into young children and race, and provide a brief overview of a selection of research exploring young children’s negotiations and performances of race and racism in early childhood settings. Thirdly, I will address the ways in which reconceptualist scholarship offers a politicization of early childhood education, and a re-envisioning of the role of educators. Finally, a summary of this portion of the literature review and a rationale for this thesis research will be provided.

*What is Race?*

Reconceptualist understandings of race differ significantly from developmentalist assertions that race is derived from phenotypic differences. Race within this body of scholarship is generally conceived of as being a fluid socio-politico-historical construction mediated through relations of power (Brown, Souto-Manning, & Tropp Laman, 2010; Campbell et al., 2004; Connolly, 2006; Mac Naughton & Davis, 2009; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Berikoff, 2008; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2010; Skattebol, 2003). Omi and Winant (1994) assert that, “Although the concept of “race” invokes biologically based human characteristics (so called “phenotypes”), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process” (as cited in Davis & Mac Naughton, 2009, p. 4). Recalling the work of Fanon, Cruz (2009) emphasizes the ways in which socially constructed differences demarcate social signifiers thereby systematizing the devaluation of difference.

Through the use of theories like feminist poststructuralism among others, which posit that the subject is both constitutive of, and constituted by power (Davies, 2000), the focus of postfoundational scholars has shifted away from researching if and when children notice or understand race as a biological construct, to opening up space for children to take up and contest racial and other identities. Reconceptualist early childhood education has thus become more concerned with systemic and discursive constructions of children’s racialized identities (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2011). Within reconceptualist pedagogy, attention is paid to “the ways in which racial identities are constantly being produced anew within different and competing discourses” (Lather, 1991).

Davis and Mac Naughton (2009) highlight the importance of language when researching and writing about race and processes of racialization. In their research on race and identity in early childhood settings in Australia, they intentionally employ the term “racing” in order to “capture the complex and active individual and institutional sociocultural and political processes that form young children’s feelings, desires, understandings, and enactments of “race” in their daily lives” (Davis & Mac Naughton, 2009a, p. 2).

There is recognition amongst reconceptualist researchers of the interconnectedness of racialization and whiteness. Taylor (2005a) asserts that the de-racialization of white is highly problematic, and needs to be challenged in all venues, not least of which is the early childhood classroom. As explored in chapter two, by “de-racing” white, we render it invisible, and therefore make it harder to address in its various partnerships with power. As Brown and colleagues (2010) assert, “The power and privilege of Whiteness is woven into the fabric of everyday life in educational settings” (p. 513). Unfortunately, the power of whiteness is often neglected as a useful starting point for diversity training in education and human services. Citing Rosenberg (1997), Taylor (2005a) reminds us that even amidst the absence of racialized people in a space, race and racism can very much be in the room.

The employment of theoretical lenses that permit the deconstruction of language and discourse in early childhood education have given rise to important discussions regarding social justice in the field (Dahlberg et al., 2007). However, it is important to describe another recent shift in the field towards theoretical readings of the sociomaterial in early childhood education research (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2011). Drawing from

Deleuzian theories which foreground the body and the material world, “[m]aterialist ontologies of race focus on how bodies *do* race through emergent material/discursive relations” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2011). The project then becomes one of being receptive to how race emerges in early learning settings (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2011). What is evident in a review of some of the reconceptualist research is that there is a push to seek out and play with new applications of theory in order to create space for alternative understandings of children, race and early childhood education.

### *Rethinking Identity and The Image of the Child*

Mac Naughton and colleagues (2009a) offer a succinct overview of the assumptions underlying reconceptualist explorations of children’s identities. In their overview, identity is conceptualized as actively performed, discursively mediated, and something that is chosen and changeable. To further elaborate on the second point, I turn to the basis of inquiry in Mac Naughton and colleagues’ (2009a) research with young children on the topic of race. In describing the essence of their work they write, “We map how the discursive field of “race” in Australian early childhood spaces is shaped by global discourses of “race,” historical discourses of “race,” and contemporary discourses of “race” that intersect with discourses of gender and class to produce what children believe is “racially” doable, permissible, desirable, and changeable” (Mac Naughton et al., 2009a, p. 36). This obviously diverges significantly from developmental inquiries into childhood and race.

In a review of postmodern research on childhood, Janzen (2008) describes her encounter with the pervasive assertion that young children’s identities are constructions of the contexts in which they live. Skattebol (2003) maintains that all subjects, including

children, are positioned in social space by performing identity as a set of practices. This allows for openness to the changing, fluid and contradictory expressions of identity that children often bring to the classroom. Drawing from Braidotti (2006), Pacini-Ketchabaw and Berikoff (2008) explore how a “nomadic” understanding of the subject can change the way that researchers explore issues of identity and how early childhood educators engage with children. Expanding on the work of Parr (2005) they write, “... transposing the subject out of identity politics leads us to view children’s actions as creative expressions to attempt the deterritorialization of their subjectivity by using their conversations as sites of political struggle” (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Berikoff, 2008, pp. 262-263).

Consideration of nomadic (i.e. fluid, changing, contradictory) identities has significant ramifications for how the image of the young child is constructed, and consequently impacts the nature and types of research conducted with children regarding race and processes of racialization. Skattebol (2003) argues that early childhood practices informed by developmental theory emphasize age-appropriate interventions based around the presumption of childhood innocence. Alternatively, reconceptualist approaches construct children as competent and adept at reading and negotiating relations of power in the taking up of multiple identities. In her review of seventeen ECE journals published in 2006, Janzen (2008) found that research rooted in postmodern theory presented children as important co-constructors of identity and culture. Citing the work of Cannella and Viruru (2004), Janzen (2008) writes, “The child is perceived as socially constructed and embedded within context, recognized as being a social actor, having agency, belonging to a unique culture, and engaged in worthwhile social relationships” (p. 292). Echoing this,

Mac Naughton, Hughes and Smith (2007) reiterate Christensen and James' (2000) argument that, "young children can make valid meanings about the world and their place in it; children's knowledge of the world is different (not inferior) to adults' knowledge; and children's insights and perspectives on the world can improve adults' understandings of children's experiences" (p. 460).

*Where You Sit is Where You Stand*

This section will explore what the reconceptualist lens has permitted early childhood researchers and educators to question about children's engagements with race and processes of racialization. I have drawn out two general observations about the type and content of reconceptualist research into the area of race and racism in early childhood education. First, instead of starting at the tabula rasa theory of childhood, which often leads to the prescription of developmentally-appropriate, multicultural, anti-bias curriculum, many reconceptualist studies were sparked by the enactment of race and racism(s) by children in spaces that were already committed to equity and social justice. It was the recognition that traditional ways of envisioning and managing diversity issues in early learning environments were insufficient that served as the starting point for much of this research. Secondly, the methods and methodology grounded in the reconceptualist movement made use of ordinary moments in early learning settings as sites for analysis rather than relying on staging interviews with children during which a list of questions were asked. Reconceptualist researchers also used multiple methods for revisiting data with children, thereby eliciting children's interpretations and responses. Several researchers emphasized that unless educators are attuned to the diverse and slippery ways in which race surfaces, race would seem to never "come up" at all (Copenhaver-Johnson,

2006; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Bernhard, in press). It is instructive to now turn to some of the research studies reviewed.

*Children Engaging with Race and Racism(s)*

Van Ausdale and Feagin (1996), while not reconceptualist scholars, are often referenced as the first researchers to suggest that young children understand racial difference and skillfully *employ* race day to day. They suggested that young children grasp the complexity of race and the power claimed by whiteness. Reconceptualist scholars maintain that children are constantly involved in processes of meaning making around race (Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006; Husband Jr., 2012; Mac Naughton & Davis, 2009; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Berikoff, 2008; Skattebol, 2003; Taylor, 2005a). Not only do young children possess an awareness of human difference, they also grasp that people enjoy different levels of status and authority depending on which group they seem to belong to (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2010).

Reconceptualist scholars are interested in how children take up and resist colonialist and racializing discourses in their day-to-day lives. They are also concerned with how processes of racialization intersect with discourses of gender, sexuality and class to give rise to a seemingly endless combination of subject positions. For example, Mac Naughton and colleagues (2009b) highlight that when young girls were asked to adopt pseudonyms in their Australia-based research project, 65% of them chose to take up popular icon identities that firmly linked feminine beauty with heterosexuality and whiteness. They argue that proto-feminized culture icons (like Barbie and Disney Princesses) “persistently denied [the girls in the study] the possibility of desirable beauty and pleasurable girlhood by being “ethnically other” or outside of whiteness” (Mac

Naughton et al., 2009b, p. 80).

Atkinson (2009) found that white Anglo-Saxon children in Australia “Other(ed)” Aboriginal children through the use of colonial discourses on Aboriginality. She writes, “Not only do white children position Indigenous people as the exotic, strange, and at times fearful “other,” the objectification of the black “other” with its dualistic desire for white is also expressed by Indigenous children” (Atkinson, 2009, p. 144). Skattebol (2003), also working in Australia, observed a white and Aboriginal child in the research setting combine colonial discourses with what the centre’s Aboriginal educators had purposefully been teaching the children about Aboriginal culture. In her words, “The children presented a character that swings in the trees like Tarzan, is a naked, mute, colonial ‘other’, and yet, this character has the ‘Aunties’ stressed in our program’s focus on families and contemporary practices” (Skattebol, 2003, p. 150). These examples illustrate children’s engagements with race and the varied, subtle ways in which discourses are taken up. Because children are adept at navigating power, they do not necessarily exercise power overtly, which means that educators need to be attuned to these political interactions (Skattebol, 2003). Additionally, research on racism over the past two decades reveals that expressions of racism have become more indirect (Monteiro et al., 2009).

In Copenhaver-Johnson’s (2006) research in kindergarten classes in the United States, white children were reluctant to discuss race, although they were observed actively excluding black children from their play. Using the example of Rosales’ (1999) reading of a Christmas book meant to provoke a conversation on race, Copenhaver-Johnson, Bowman and Johnson (2007) review how all of the children objected to the

possibility of a black Santa, but only the black children named race as proof of impossibility. Copenhaver-Johnson (2006) posits that “White children’s reluctance to discuss race and racism can be considered symptomatic of their socialization into color-blindness, at least in adults’ presence” (p. 14).

In an ethnographic research study with three and four-year-olds in Australia, Taylor (2005a) noted a similar reluctance to name race as the basis of exclusion. As a recently arrived child from the Middle East watched two white children belonging to a high status group within the early childhood centre play in the sand pit, he attempted to join in their play, but was barred from entering. When challenged by the educators to explain why another child had been granted entry, and not the one that wanted to play with them, the white children cited this second child’s stronger English as the reason for inclusion. However, upon further prodding around what the grounds for acceptance really were, one of the white children responded, “But he talks more like us and he is sort of ... um... white-brown” (Taylor, 2005a, p. 12). Taylor notes, “What is particularly interesting in this sandpit incident, however, is ... that they managed to articulate their respective subject positions in the terms of prevailing Australian discourses of core white and marginal non-white cultural belongings” (2005a, p.12).

What practice implications do these cited research examples hold for early childhood education and educators? The following section will explore how reconceptualist scholars in the field of early childhood education envision practice that can complexify race, disturb dominant whiteness and challenge processes of racialization.

### *Politicizing Early Childhood Education*

In the 1980s and 1990s, early childhood education, like other fields, began to develop multicultural and intercultural curriculum (Vandenbroeck, 2010). Much of the diversity curriculum in education is based on Derman-Sparks' (1989) publication of *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children* in the United States. Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006) state that, "The underlying goal of anti-bias education is to foster the development of children and adults who have the persona; strength, critical thinking ability, and activist skills to work with others to build caring, just, diverse communities and societies for all" (p. 5). Based on the work of Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997), Husband (2012) provides a summary of the three steps of anti-bias curriculum implementation: 1) teachers need to evaluate the climate for racial bias, 2) teachers use "teachable moments" to introduce anti-bias concepts that prompt discussions on race, and 3) maintain an ongoing commitment to diversity in all aspects of the teacher's classroom and within the wider school and community (p. 367).

Several reconceptualist scholars have put forward strong critiques of anti-bias, multicultural curriculum in early childhood education (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Bernhard, in press; Skattebol, 2003; Vandenbroeck, 2010). These challenges center on the framing of these pedagogical interventions within discourses of development. Pacini-Ketchabaw and Bernhard (in press) assert that this curriculum focuses predominantly on the individual, which translates into interventions being directed towards specific children's attitudes or behaviors. Furthermore, multiculturalism is often approached in early childhood education through the essentialization and universalization of culture and development (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Bernhard, in press). Vandenbroeck (2010) offers that traditional

anti-bias curriculum reduces complex power relations to the binary of victim/perpetrator, thus “taking up this developmental standpoint in the anti-bias work often serves as an excuse not to take up the ethical and political discussion” (p. 27). Skattebol (2003) echoes this and warns that couching anti-bias curriculum in developmental terms is confusing for educators, as it pulls them between contradictory images of the child.

It is therefore important, reconceptualists argue, to recognize children as cognizant of power, and the early childhood education setting as political. Taylor (2005a) argues that early childhood offers “a critical point of intervention, for it is within the culturally diverse social context of the early childhood centre that the child’s emergent sense of national identity and belonging begins to take shape” (p. 7). Politicizing early childhood spaces is no easy task, and pushes in this direction are only beginning to take shape in the Canadian context.

### *Complexifying the Role of Educator*

The above review has important implications for the role of early childhood educators. Dominant multicultural discourses of color-blindness make it difficult and uncomfortable for educators to address race in their classrooms with young children. Some educators may even be fearful of engaging with children around issues of race (Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006). Davis and Mac Naughton (2009) elucidate the complexity of working from a post-modern, anti-racist perspective when they write, “... antiracist educators must walk a fine line: they must confront local social relationships with their specific contexts and histories; but they must also acknowledge that those local relationships are inseparable from international histories and contexts.” (p. 5)

For educators trained in normalized developmental discourses, substantively

engaging with issues of race in the early childhood classroom represents a massive shift in perspective and approach. As Vandembroeck (2010) argues, “It is not the duty of educationalists to define educational norms or outcomes anymore, but rather to look at who defines them, how the dialogue is constructed, who it serves and what power relations occur in this debate ...” (p. 31). While a thorough review of the pedagogical methods that reconceptualist scholars employ in their work to disturb processes of racialization is beyond the scope of this review, I will provide a brief overview of some of the practices that were mentioned throughout the literature.

Mac Naughton and colleagues (2009a) emphasize that it is important for children to be integral to the process of “de-racing” early childhood education. They suggest that educators need to direct teaching efforts to locating and contesting whiteness, consider children’s words as political, and find early childhood texts that support children towards recognizing how whiteness operates in their lives (Davis, Mac Naughton & Smith, 2009a). Cruz (2009) adds that for a space to be anti-racist, it must also be decolonizing. This means attending to how colonial discourses shape how children take up concepts of race, citizenship and belonging. Pacini-Ketchabaw and Berikoff (2008) also encourage educators to involve children in transforming spaces for social justice. They write, “Children’s involvement plays an integral part in developing sites of political struggles. By engaging in and listening to children’s opinions expressed within their use of multiple languages, we can participate in the politics that children are enacting in their becomings” (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Berikoff, 2008, p. 263).

It is important to highlight some of the work being done in the Canadian context by Pacini-Ketchabaw and Nxumalo (2010, in press) from a sociomaterial perspective. It

differs from feminist poststructuralism in important ways. It brings the materiality of the body into full view and thus creates the possibility for attentiveness to more diverse ways of reading race, racism and racialization in the early childhood context. As explored above, these readings stem from questions such as “what does race do”? This lens extends beyond the social (i.e. interactions between children, educators and the wider community) into the materiality that ensconces children and educators in dynamic and always changing specificities. In their words, “... we are provoked to engage in a pedagogy that is always trying to understand what racialization, gender, and sexuality are capable of, discovering their potentialities, sensing them “hiding around” us, finding out how we can make them produce alternative assemblages” (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2010, p. 143). Drawing from Grosz, Pacini-Ketchabaw and Nxumalo (2010) describe a pedagogy informed by sociomaterial theory as one in which educators are not trying to decipher the meaning of children’s dialogues or behavior, but are rather trying to find the traces of connections that children are making with other things all the time.

### *Summary*

A selective review of the reconceptualist literature has revealed the varied, dynamic and creative theories and methodologies employed by scholars interested in issues of race and identity in early childhood education. The central ideas that I have drawn out of this selection of the literature are: 1) sites of early childhood education provide rich and complex opportunities for investigating race and identity, 2) the discursive, affective and material “event” of race (Saldanha, 2006) surfaces and plays out in early learning settings, 3) challenging processes of racialization in early childhood education requires the ability to critically engage with discourses of whiteness, and 4)

dominant anti-bias multicultural curriculum is insufficient for challenging discourses of whiteness and racialization.

The value of early childhood education as a site for exploring issues of race, and the lack of locally grounded alternatives to multicultural curriculum, serve as important starting points for my rationale to study the ways in which educators conceptualize race, whiteness and processes of racialization, and respond to the emergence of race in their work with young children. Furthermore, the selective review of the reconceptualist literature revealed a significant lack of Canadian-generated scholarship on the topic of race and identity in early childhood. With the exception of Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Rowan, and Bernhard's research in British Columbia and Ontario, there is a paucity of critical scholarship on this topic in Canada. Much of the reconceptualist scholarship addressing questions of race in early childhood education has originated in Australia. And while scholars have explored how dominant notions of Aboriginality are constituted and mediated in early learning settings in the Australian context (Atkinson, 2009; Mac Naughton et al., 2009; Skattebol, 2003), no such work has emerged out of the Canadian context in this regard. It is my hope that this thesis research can make a contribution to emerging Canadian scholarship concerning race and identity in early childhood studies.

The next chapter will provide an overview of my approach to inquiry, which includes a more thorough description of the research methods of the project out of which the data used in this thesis emerged. I will also outline the methodological framework guiding my analysis, and reiterate my analytical reference points and research questions.

## **Chapter 4: Approach to Inquiry**

In this chapter, I offer a more detailed description of the action research project conducted with early childhood educators, whose conversations form the data set used in this thesis. I would like to reiterate that this data was generated from early childhood educator workshops, which constituted only one component of a much larger research project. This will be further explained in subsequent sections. This chapter will provide a general overview of the methods employed in the project, the coding structure used to organize the data, and the data set used in this thesis work. I also locate myself in this chapter as a researcher engaging with data generated through a project that I did not collaborate on. Finally, I outline my analytical framework and restate my research questions as a means of foregrounding my analysis.

### ***The Research Project***

I am working with data that was generated as part of a long-term action research project that ran with early childhood educators in British Columbia, Canada for a period of five years. The project was developed to engage educators in rethinking their conceptualization of early childhood and envisioning changes in practice and pedagogy. Canada has been criticized for its weak commitment to supporting the care and education of young children, and does not make the list of top ten OECD countries when it comes to early learning programs (UNICEF, 2008 as cited in Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010). The mandate of this action research project was thus to engage early childhood educators in critical discussions about current practice in childcare and early learning settings.

Through the use of postfoundational, reconceptualist early childhood education literature, the project sought to generate new notions of early learning and care through an action research model. Because the guiding intention of the project was to open up new ways of envisioning practice, close and collaborative work with early childhood educators in the field was prioritized. Dick, Stringer and Huxham (2009) state that “[f]rom the beginning, action research was to be about action and research: both practice and theory” (p. 6). Action research involves a praxis spiral, which circles from theoretically informed critical reflection, to practice, and back to more reflection (Dick et al., 2009). This means that explicit engagements with theory are integral to action research models (Dick, et al., 2009). The action research project described here utilized postfoundational theories throughout the workshops with early childhood educators, thus supporting new conceptualizations of children, the role of educators and the field of early childhood education.

The project addressed four sectors: academia, the training sector, government, and front line workers. A key component of the project was gathering early childhood educators from various regions of the province approximately once a month to participate in professional development workshops. Facilitators used postfoundational theories to provoke collaborative discussions that deconstructed and then reconstructed understandings of early childhood practices with educators (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2010). In regards to working through these theories, the main goals of the workshops were to develop and deliver ongoing professional development to early childhood educators, support their incorporation of new knowledge into everyday practices, and create opportunities for educators to provide each other with critical

feedback.

### *Methods*

Participation in the workshops was voluntary. The criterion laid out by the project stated that all participants had to be early childhood educators currently working in an early childhood setting within the province, who were willing to engage in a process of critical reflection on their practice, and who had five or more years experience working with young children. Facilitators who possessed extensive experience in the field of early childhood education, and whose practices were informed by reconceptualist theories, moderated the workshops. Meetings were face-to-face, however an online list-serve was also set up as an additional forum for sharing ideas and accessing resources.

Occasionally, larger gatherings were organized to allow for the exchange of ideas across workshop groups. Members of the research team also visited participants' workplaces as often as they could to allow for one-on-one learning. Workshops were based around a two-phased curriculum, with the second phase stemming directly from the interests and needs expressed by participants in phase one. Educators were provided with various readings before each meeting, which were used as theoretical reference points during discussions of practice.

Since its inception, the project has worked with over one hundred early childhood educators in four locations across British Columbia. I will only be working with video data generated in two of these locations. It is important to note that the number of participants varied from one workshop to the next, depending on people's availability. Some workshops were small, with only four or so participants, and some were much larger, with up to twenty or more educators in attendance. Participants also varied from

year to year, with some people remaining assiduous over several years, and others taking part only several times in a year, or attending a full year and not returning the next. The vast majority of participants were women ranging in age from early to late adulthood. Only one man participated in the project. It is also worth noting that English was the primary language for most educators in the workshops, and the majority of educators self-identified as white. Self-location was not formally practiced in the sessions, and thus an accurate description of participants' racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds is not possible beyond the information that participants divulged through conversation.

This project represents a time of profound change in the field of early childhood education in British Columbia. While the project itself has ended, it has resulted in a train-the-trainer program, which is in the process of creating a team of facilitators, who will work to support change in their communities towards more innovative early learning and care practices. The intention is to work at the community level for the next four years across the entire province.

### ***Pedagogical Narration***

It is important to briefly touch upon pedagogical narration, or documentation, which was used by the educators participating in the workshops as a tool through which to share and reflect on moments of practice. Pedagogical documentation, as it came to be used throughout the project, was introduced to educators as a means of capturing the everyday moments in their work with young children (Dahlberg, et al., 2007). These moments were then used as sites to disrupt and challenge dominant assumptions and practices through critical reflection. Educators were encouraged to document everyday moments through photos, videos, or children's work. They were also asked in many

instances to write small narrations of what they had observed and documented in practice. Narrations either accompanied a piece of documentation, like for example a photo or video, or stood alone. Narrations sometimes consisted of the wonderings that prompted or emerged from the documentation process, or summarized a particular moment in practice that caught educators' attention or that troubled them. In some instances, narrations included a preliminary analysis or reading of events that had been captured through documentation. These narrations and pieces of documentation were then brought to the group, where they were linked with postfoundational theories and discussed extensively.

Lenz Taguchi (2009) writes, "I would describe pedagogical documentation as something that is *alive* and from which we can produce a multiplicity of differentiated knowledge from a specific event" (as cited in Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, in press, p.1). As an outside observer of the workshops, it was fascinating to witness how many different readings emerged from the process of collectively engaging with narrations. The fact that educators offered honest renderings of vulnerable practice moments to the group, and engaged in challenging one another's perspectives, is a testament to the collaborative and safe environment that emerged throughout the duration of the project. For this reason, amongst others, I attempt to tread as respectfully as possible amidst these rich conversations.

It is important to note that I am not working with the educators' documentation or narrations themselves, nor am I using any of the original work produced by children throughout the project. In some cases, I use transcribed excerpts that refer explicitly to a particular piece of documentation or narration. In other instances, where it is important to provide a contextual layer, I offer a brief description of the pedagogical documentation or

narration out of which the transcribed conversation stems.

### ***Ethics***

This research project was evaluated and approved by the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board. Participants in the project signed an ethics form citing that they understood that the data generated from the project could be used in thesis work.

### ***Coding***

As a research assistant on this project, I collaborated with Dr. Pacini-Ketchabaw on developing a list of codes and worked on coding the workshop video data. Due to the limitations of the software, which did not allow for hierarchical coding, the codes themselves were broad. For example, under the code named "racialization", anything to do with "Othering" processes, race, whiteness, multiculturalism, diversity, culture, ethnicity, notions of citizenship, racism, Aboriginality, and migration were coded. A single excerpt was often coded under multiple headings. The coding structure was emergent, meaning that it took shape through conversations with Dr. Pacini-Ketchabaw as we worked our way through the data. We ended up utilizing forty-one broadly conceptualized thematic codes to create a searchable video archive.

Throughout the coding process, I attempted to remain vigilant about recognizing silences, omissions and resistance to engaging with race. As a result, it was sometimes what was "not said" that formed the substance of the excerpt. It was also important to resist the temptation to code only blatant, overt, or surprising moments of conversation. I heeded the caution of Fine, Weis, Weseen and Wong (2003) who write that as researchers "(we) tend to be drawn to – in fact, to *code for* – the exotic, the bizarre, the violent" (p.

186). As discussed throughout my exploration of theory in chapter two, it is in the everyday, taken for granted practices that whiteness and racialization must be sought out and challenged.

### ***Data Set***

This research project generated a voluminous amount of text, video and other forms of data. I worked solely with select video excerpts that were coded under the term “racialization”. Out of the 204 hours of video data that I watched, 3948 coded excerpts were archived. I worked with 132 clips for the purpose of this thesis, ranging from half a minute to almost an hour each, in which issues of racialization emerged (as broadly defined above). Excerpts selected for analysis in this thesis were transcribed, and the textual renderings of these conversations serve as the basis for the analysis conducted in chapter five.

I wanted to remain open to the readings of affect and/or materiality in my data set, and so one transcribed excerpt also includes general observations about what seemed to be happening to the speaker’s hands and body simultaneously to what was being articulated verbally. In this excerpt, non-verbal cues, such as facial movements, body language, and glances towards the camera were noted in the transcript in order to attend to the multiple ways in which race emerged and was taken up in that moment.

### ***Researcher in Context***

I have not been trained as an early childhood educator. Thus the process of watching video of these workshops, and conducting research in the field of early childhood studies, has been an intensive learning process. I approached the analysis of

this data cautiously, out of respect for the educators who boldly brought their wonderings and tensions to the table for discussion. I am also cognizant that as an outside observer, a voyeur of these complex conversations, it was ethically imperative that I remain attentive to the inherent power of invisibility. The desire to avoid slipping into an all-seeing, all-knowing, expert researcher subjecthood involved grounding my analysis in feminist poststructural and postcolonial theories, among others. I expressly use theory that de-individualizes research participants by contextualizing their conversations within relations of power configured through situated cartographies (Braidotti, 2006). The aim is not to judge and evaluate a specific educator's performance on negotiating the complexities of race. Instead, the data are conceptualized as doorways into an examination of the ways in which power, processes of racialization, and whiteness are emerging, playing themselves out, and transforming in space and time. However, even as I write this, I fully recognize that the type of analysis conducted in this thesis is not, and could never be, fully democratic, tidy, or polite. Emergences of race, processes of racialization, and whiteness are complex and messy (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, in press), and I wonder if any critical engagement with these concepts is capable of generating a comfortable reading.

It is still important, however, to articulate my own location as part of a broader acknowledgement that my reading of the data is partial and subjective. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) remind us that behind any methodology “stands the personal biography of the researcher, who speaks from a particular class, gender, racial, cultural and ethnic community perspective” (p. 29). I come to this work as a white, heterosexual woman of European origin. I was born in Canada, and grew up with minimal knowledge of whose

land I lived on, and no awareness that the genocide of Aboriginal peoples was the precondition of my privilege. My first language is English, and I have full citizenship status in Canada. My interest in this topic stems in part from the moments in my own work with racialized migrant children and families when I realized that I was replicating and reinforcing that which I sought to challenge through anti-oppressive practice. I have no illusions of being neutral, objective, or operating from “above” or “outside of” the dominant processes that I critique in this thesis. I am aware that my location accounts for what I look for, what I see, and what falls outside of purview.

### ***Analytical Framework***

As previously outlined, feminist poststructuralist, materialist feminist and postcolonial theory will be used in fluid combinations in order to stretch and thicken an analysis of the data. My investigation was propelled by a curiosity about how educators reflect on, and engage with, issues of race, identity, whiteness and processes of racialization as it emerges in practice. However, my wonderings also extend to questioning how an examination of early childhood educators’ engagements with race may illuminate and contribute to processes of racialization and the dominance of whiteness. As Anderson and Taylor (2005) point out, contestations over belonging and exclusion are played out at the local level, for example the workshops that took place as part of this project, as well as the global. They write, “the politics and fantasies that inhere within nation building are simultaneously and reciprocally global/national/local” (Anderson & Taylor, 2005, p. 463).

My inquiry therefore utilizes theoretical perspectives that allow me to consider the local, national and global dimensions of race, racialization, whiteness and racisms(s)

through the ways in which they manifest in the conversations of early childhood educators. Castañeda (2002) emphasizes, “Not only it is important to describe the distinct global processes that are implicated in colonial and postcolonial histories, but it is also necessary to consider the potentially multiple kinds of transnational processes that can be at work in one location” (p. 6). How does one then envision an analytical framework that can respond to the complex workings of power in this historical moment? Castañeda (2002) uses the concept of the “local-global” for envisaging the constructed materialities through which subjects are figured, and how these figurations then circulate across borders and time. Anderson and Taylor (2005) employ the term “nested geographies” to reflect that no location is ever *just* local, but rather is always in process, over time, co-constitutive of and constituted by the global. Working within these fluid conceptualizations of space permits “glocalized” responses, which may be local, but capable of confronting global power matrices (Anderson & Taylor, 2005).

It is not my goal to use each theoretical perspective separately in order to arrive at distinct readings of events pulled from the data. Nor will I attempt to blend all theoretical perspectives together in every instance. In what follows, I will outline the various layers of analysis, the foci of analysis, the analytical tools utilized to complexify and contextualize the data, and the analytical reference points around which theory and data meet in my research.

### *Layers of Analysis*

Analysis occurred across multiple layers. The data used in this inquiry was pulled from the workshops, where educators were engaging in a process of critical reflection, replete with theoretical referencing, feedback, epistemological and ontological

questioning. Thus, in some cases, the analysis in this thesis constitutes a reading of conversations that went on to produce very different analyses within the context of the workshops. My reason for mentioning this is to emphasize that the data was alive before I lifted moments out, transcribed them, and rendered them static. It is impossible to capture the analyses produced within the two to four hour workshops, and for reasons of feasibility, the excerpts with which I work are brief.

Within the workshops, the educators themselves were engaging with and applying postfoundational theories in practice. Thus some of the data engaged with in this thesis reveals this immersion in reconceptualist theories, as well as the complexities that emerged through the adoption of this perspective. It is important to note that there was often a facilitator/researcher present, and despite the open and collaborative environment fostered throughout the workshops, relations of power were always present. For example, participants would sometimes defer to the facilitator or researcher on a particular issue, even though the latter resisted being positioned as “experts”. This is one of the unavoidable effects of any research project, but warrants mention. Furthermore, as postfoundational discourses were contemplated in the focus groups, the struggle to take up these discourses while still holding onto humanist notions of childhood and race was sometimes visible.

The second layer of analysis began with the coding of the workshops. While watching the video data in HyperResearch, I was able to attach analytical notes to coded excerpts. When I returned back to the data to pull out excerpts for transcription, I revisited these analytical notes and used them as springboards during the final analytical layering. The next stage consisted of narrowing down clips where racialization had been

engaged with into two groups: high potential and potential for use, which I then watched several more times to get an idea of how to go about selecting excerpts for transcription. The final analytical layer is elaborated in chapter five, and is based primarily on transcribed text. After revisiting the data several times, I developed two analytical foci, which are explained below.

### *Foci of Analysis*

After spending time reviewing the data, it became clear that race, racialization and whiteness were constructed and circulated differently in various workshop contexts. I have identified two distinct ways in which issues surrounding race emerged in conversations, and these forms of appearance serve as the foci of my analysis. First, race appeared explicitly, that is, in dialogue between educators. Instances where issues of race, whiteness, or multiculturalism were articulated in discussions were coded and subsequently analyzed. However, race, whiteness and processes of racialization also emerged in the silences as well as the patterns of what was said, or not, and by whom. Therefore the two foci of my analysis of the data are: 1) dialogue, 2) absence / patterns of emergence. Working with the various ways in which race is both spoken and silenced requires a number of complementary strategies, which will be described in the following section.

### *Analytical Tools*

The theoretical lenses framing my analysis afford me several tools, or strategies, for engaging with the shifting complexity of race as it emerged within the local-global context of the workshops. First, while I do not ascribe to a strict form of discourse

analysis, I employ this method generally, in combination with other strategies. I borrow from Fairclough's (1995) definition of discourse analysis as "a method and a theory 'for studying language in its relation to power and ideology'" (as cited in Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2006, p. 100). The relevance of seeking out dominant discourses throughout this analysis is to facilitate the exploration of what lies beneath the taken-for-granted ways in which educators, children, race and worlds are languaged into existence. As mentioned in chapter two, I employ an expanded view of discourse in this thesis, which also includes the reading of affect and materiality, in order to allow for conceptual room to map the connections between the concepts with which I work.

I will also be using the notion of cartographies (Braidotti, 2006) to locate power, race, racialization, and racism(s) as they play out within particular spatio-temporal contexts. Braidotti (2006) describes cartographic methods as those that take into account the politics of location, and which are thus capable of mapping out the contradictory, diffuse and non-linear workings of power characteristic of our globalized era. She writes,

'we' are in *this* together. What *this* refers to is the cartography as a cluster of interconnected problems that touches the structure of subjectivity and the very possibility of the future as a sustainable option. 'We' are in *this* together, in fact, enlarges the sense of collectively-bound subjectivity to non-human agents, from our genetic neighbors the animals, to the earth as a biosphere as a whole. (p. 136)

The non-human agents that I consider alongside educators and children in my expanded analysis of the interrelatedness of problems are the nation-state, neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and multiculturalism.

Another strategic tool for interrogating how race emerges in the data set is the

concept of figurations. This concept is quite complex, and there is much that has been written and critiqued about this topic that I do not take up in my research. For the purposes of this thesis, I follow the notion of figurations elaborated by Castañeda (2002), who developed this concept by drawing from the work of Haraway. In this thesis, the concept of figurations is utilized to foster attentiveness to how children, educators and race are figured through simultaneous semiotic and material practices. This concept opens up the possibility to explore the means through which figures such as the child and educator are generated, and the racialized bodies and worlds that these figures inhere (Castañeda, 2002). Figurations, like cartographies, allow for attentiveness to the specificities of the spatio-temporally situated moment as well its relationship to the global. Thinking through figurations also permits a way of conceptualizing the geo-cultural identities (Lugones, 2007) formed through the matrix of neocolonial, neoliberal and modern state power.

I also pay particular attention to materiality throughout the analytical process. Because I have the privilege of working with video data, I am a witness to how bodies come together in specific moments and contexts, and thus what the “event” of race (Saldanha, 2006) may be doing in the room. The focus group setting, the layout of the space, facial expressions, body language, sighs, tones of voice, and glances towards the camera: all of these have a role in determining how race is being constructed and felt in and on the body. As Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo (in press) write,

Race is what *emerges* when bodies come together with other bodies, with tables in the classroom, with the smells of food children bring to the centres, the posters that are hung on the walls, and so on. The language that children use also *charges*

certain elements as they come together in particular moments. The memories of colonization that are carried around by bodies might also charge the situation, as do the memories of previous conversations with friends or families. Race always emerges and works differently in different encounters, and different possibilities come into view. (p. 8)

Affect is also considered in my analysis, as many educators made reference in the data to emotion when reacting to, and engaging with, race. Using the work of Ahmed (2004), I analyze how emotion is articulated, and what this might be telling us about the educators' negotiations of race.

#### *Analytical Reference Points*

The key concepts explored in chapter two will serve as windows between my theoretical framework and the data. When held up against the theoretical lenses framing this analysis, the exploration of each concept elicited particular questions, which in turn created the guiding questions informing my analysis. These questions are summarized below.

##### *a) Discourse and Power*

- How do early childhood educators conceptualize power in their work with young children?
- How are young children understood to be negotiating power in the early childhood education setting?
- How are children and educators taking up and resisting dominant discourses, and reinforcing / challenging power relations?

*b) Subjects and Identities*

- How might various theoretical conceptualizations of identity formation support early childhood educators in alternative engagements with children's experiments and performances of identity, as well as their own?
- What might these theoretical lenses permit me to read in the data about the varied ways in which children are "figured" with and by educators?

*c) Childhood(s)*

- How are children and childhood conceptualized, or "Othered" in the data? And in what ways is this being taken up, and/or challenged?
- What does the practice of "Othering" the child in the data set reveal about ongoing processes of colonization?

*d) Whiteness and Racialization*

- How are discourses of whiteness and processes of racialization circulating, being encountered and challenged in early childhood spaces?
- How are white educators encountering and negotiating their own whiteness in practice?
- How are educators reading children's encounters with the material, affective and discursive "event" (Saldanha, 2006) of race? And how is race as a gendered, classed and sexualized construct being constituted and read by educators?

*e) The Canadian Nation State: Multiculturalism, Neocolonialism and Neoliberalism*

- How might discourses of multiculturalism be utilized to manage diversity and mask whiteness and racialization in early childhood settings?
- What might the employment of multicultural discourses with young children be doing to construct race, identity and difference in particular ways?
- What other lenses and methods might educators be able to use in conceptualizing anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice?
- How might ongoing colonial processes be at work in ECE spaces?
- What are some of the taken for granted assumptions that mask and protect ongoing colonial processes?

- How can educators and children work to disrupt colonial practices and decolonize early learning spaces?
- How might neoliberal discourse be working to constitute educators and children in particular ways?
- How might the neoliberalization of diversity and education impact the ways in which race is conceptualized and engaged with in early learning settings?

### ***Summary and Research Questions***

Using analytical tools like cartography, figuration, and discourse analysis, I engage with the data as exemplars of local-global processes. By holding the questions that arose through an exploration of theory close as analytical reference points, I am better positioned to respond to the three overarching research questions outlined at the beginning of this thesis:

- How do early childhood educators in the data set conceptualize whiteness, race, racialization, and racism(s), and where are these conceptualizations rooted?
- How are educators reading young children's articulations and performances of race and racism(s), and how are children, childhood(s), and educators being produced in the process?
- How are educators responding to children's articulations and performances of race and racism(s)?

## **Chapter 5: Engaging With Early Childhood Educators' Encounters With Race**

In this chapter, I will present an analysis of transcribed excerpts pulled from the workshops. First, I use select excerpts from the data to explore moments when educators took up and struggled with notions of race, whiteness, and racialization. Second, I look at several instances where educators articulate interpretations of children's negotiations of race, and I engage with educators' responses to children's enactments of race and processes of racialization in early learning settings. If the educator in the excerpt self-identified her/himself racially within the data set, I include this information in the transcribed excerpt or in the analysis. I borrow from Davis and Mac Naughton (2009a) in the explanation of my use of the terms black and white as an acknowledgement of "the politics that generate these colors as "race" – terms that connect identities to historical and social constructions of whiteness and blackness in "race" classificatory systems over time" (p. 4). Before delving into an analysis of the selected data, I first wish to highlight my observation of several patterns in the data.

### ***Emergent Patterns***

While numerous conversations about race, identity and diversity took place in the workshops, only two educators in the video data analyzed chose to explicitly revisit questions pertaining to race with children and to document this process. As described in chapter four, participants in the research project documented ordinary moments in their work with young children through photo, video, art work, and narrations, which were then brought into the workshops for discussion with other educators. Whereas encounters with race were documented several times in the form of narrative summaries of

educators' questions, feelings, and responses to these encounters, only two pieces of pedagogical documentation set out to capture educators' intentional engagement around issues of race, whiteness and processes of racialization with children. The relatively few pieces documenting explicit engagements with race is significant given that educators were involved in the practice of documentation over the course of the project, and topics like gender and play, for example, featured prominently in their pedagogical explorations.

I also observed a similarity between the two instances in which educators chose to explicitly revisit racialization and whiteness with children. The two pieces of documentation that sought to capture overt engagements with young children around these issues were created by educators with their own children, i.e. their family members. I read this as more than just a coincidence. Questions and tensions around race, racism, and identity were brought to the focus groups for discussion with other educators, but I perceived a reticence on the part of educators to explicitly revisit issues of race with children, or to document this exploratory process relative to other areas of curiosity or tension. What might this reveal about the perceived "riskiness" of addressing race, especially with young children? As de Finney asks, what might this also imply about the ways in which race, like sexuality, is considered a private "family" issue, whereas gender is public (S. de Finney, personal communication, April 30, 2012)?

It was not unusual, during conversations about the emergence of race in practice, for educators to question how, and when, to explain race and racism to young children. The articulated pressure to explain complexities to children was experienced tenuously alongside a commitment to support children's questioning. How might developmental, neoliberal and multicultural discourses be constructing notions of best practice, which

early childhood professionals are expected to learn, master, and employ with children? How might dominant understandings of the image of the educator as expert knower constrain educators' responses to young children's explorations of racialization and whiteness? Sometimes the tensions brought to bear by these discourses surfaced through questions such as, "how do we even begin to explain to children about these things?" This tension was also noticeable amidst the uncertainty regarding the appropriate place and time to address issues like colonization and racism with young children. One educator suggested in one of the workshops that race had not "come up" in her class before. This parallels a broader pattern in the data set that conceived of race as something that was introduced into the classroom, not something that was always/already being performed, negotiated, contested, and constituted. The notion that race does not come up is an interesting assertion, and one that may be linked back with the assumed "risk" of engaging with race in practice. These two patterns will be explored in more detail in subsequent sections.

Lastly, it is important to address what I perceived to be an absence of critical discussion of Aboriginality and colonialism in the context of educators' conversations about children's engagements with race and identity. While colonization and Aboriginality were touched upon in the focus groups, namely when a particular reading or the facilitator provoked discussion, educators were less likely to mention Aboriginality or colonization when discussing the ways in which race, racism and identity were encountered in practice. None of the educators in the data set identified themselves as Aboriginal, or as working in Aboriginal Head Start (a culturally-based early childhood program for Aboriginal children in Canada). This may partially account for the absence

of a consideration of Aboriginal identity. However, this speaks once again to the idea that like race, discussions of Aboriginal identity and colonialism are only relevant when they are introduced, or “come up”. In this way, the discourses that maintain whiteness as the invisible, normalized backdrop of “Otherness” (Jiwani, 2006) persist and the ongoing colonial processes that “ghost” Aboriginal peoples and marginalize Indigenous ways of being continue unchallenged.

### ***Grappling with Whiteness***

Citing the work of John Gabriel, Jiwani (2006) describes the power of whiteness as “whitewash”, which relies on a set of discursive techniques including exnomination, naturalization, and normalization. Processes of racialization, and the powers that construct race as knowable, rely on these whitewashing techniques (Jiwani, 2006). With this in mind, I wish to foreground my analysis with an examination of how whiteness was taken up in some of the workshop groups as a means of challenging its position as the “normalized, invisible, hegemonic, unmarked, absent center” (Lee & Lutz, 2005, p. 19).

Before embarking on this portion of the analysis, it would be instructive to reiterate the context out of which the data emerged. The workshops that constituted a key part of the research project introduced participating educators to postfoundational literature, which prompted interesting and dynamic discussions. Approximately once a month, anywhere from four to upwards of fifteen educators met for several hours to discuss theory, practice, and their pedagogical documentations. A facilitator and the researcher were present during the workshops. For many self-identified white educators, participation in the project marked the first time that they had been encouraged to examine their social locations, their identities, and the “invisible knapsack” of white

privilege (McIntosh, 1988). The first excerpt in this section involves an educator struggling with the notion of white dominance. Other educators in the learning circle then engage with her question.

*Excerpt 1*

**Educator 1 (white):** ... one of the things I always thought is why can't we celebrate the individual? You know, each child is different, and each color is different, and those sorts of things. Um, and you know, gay pride, so black pride. Um, but then the flip side of that is how can we actually go "white pride"? Like, you say white pride and we go, "Whoa, wait a minute". We can't do it. So you know, how do you make a whole –

**Educator 2 (white):** It's redundant.

**Researcher:** Mmm hmm.

**Educator 1:** It's redundant?

**Educator 2:** I – I would argue to say white pride would be redundant.

**Educator 1:** Possibly that's one way of looking at it. But the thought of everybody going, "Ya, so I'm white, I'm great" is – is, I don't –

**Educators 3 (white):** Doesn't society already do that?

**Educator 1:** Ya.

**Educator 3:** Just in general?

**Educator 1:** Ya.

There are several discourses at work in Educator 1's text. First I would like to engage with the question, "why can't we just celebrate the individual?" Two discursively

produced notions of the individual can be elicited from this question. First is the humanist focus on the primacy of the coherent, unique, individual, which is defined separately from community, culture, nation, gender, class, race and so on. Second, and related to the first, is the liberal notion of the autonomous, agentic subject whose identity is the product of his/her unhindered, intentional self-actualization (Davies, 2004). The positing of the individual in these ways depoliticizes and obscures the complex and interrelated processes constitutive of subjecthood. It divorces the subject from the histories and symbols attached to how phenotype is read across contexts. Additionally, as I explored in chapter two, this liberal notion of the individual subject is central to the neoliberal paradigm, which measures success and failure against meritocratic myths of equal opportunity. In regard to the current Canadian context, where the value of a person is increasingly measured according to how much they can contribute economically (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2008), certain individuals are certainly not celebrated.

I now turn to the statement, “You know, each child is different, and each color is different”, which also recalls the liberal humanist figuring of identity as knowable and static. There is a multicultural construction of difference forwarded in this excerpt as well. Multicultural discourse is at work suggesting that difference should be celebrated. But what does the celebration of difference do? It presupposes all races, cultures, and sexual orientations, among other social locations, to be operating on a level playing field. Multicultural discourse implies “a neutral, unmediated pluralism among equal, coherent cultural wholes” (de Finney, 2010, p. 473). So we see that at the same time as multicultural discourse claims to account for difference, it maintains that we are really all the same. The celebration of difference, as opposed to the critical engagement with the

forces that define difference, constitutes an important tool in multiculturalism's goal of managing anxieties about diversity (Abu-Laban, 1998). Dominant white society's "celebration" of difference both denies interlocking, historical systems of oppression at the same time that it claims moral righteousness through this act. The statement that "each color is different" may also represent an instance where race has effectively been culturalized through discourses of multiculturalism (Razack, 2001). The culturalization of race leads to racialized bodies being assumed to carry cultural values antithetical to those of the nation in and on them. Furthermore, as was explored in chapter two, whiteness hierarchically organizes cultural and racial identities and accords them with different value (Davis, 2009). Whiteness in Canada is associated with what it means to be Canadian.

I now turn to an analysis of the ways in which whiteness is articulated and challenged in this excerpt. Although educator 1 explicitly names white in her wonderings, whiteness, with all of its viscous attractions (Saldanha, 2006) is invisibilized through the equation of white and black pride. Educators 2 and 3 bring whiteness into relief when they say, "I would argue to say white pride would be redundant" and "Doesn't society already do that [exalt whiteness]?" The invisibilization of whiteness in this excerpt reflects a learned process. McIntosh (1988) asserts, "I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege" (p. 125). She observes that when confronting one's own whiteness, it is easier to acknowledge disadvantage without accounting for one's own privilege, or what she prefers to refer to as negative (unearned) advantage (McIntosh, 1988). This is why it is preferred practice in white-settler societies to mediate difference through celebrations rather than a critical accounting of privilege.

It is important to state that whiteness is not elusive to everyone. This excerpt reveals how whiteness is most intentionally and effectively hidden from the view of those who benefit from it. People who do not pass as white, who experience being brought into relief against normalized whiteness, have a clearer understanding of what whiteness is, and the work that it does (Braidotti, 2006). What are some of the bi-products of the effective invisibilization of whiteness, and how do they feature in this excerpt?

This excerpt captures the confusion that elusive whiteness and narratives of colorblindness engender. When whiteness is not attended to, race is collapsed into individualized notions of difference and discourses of sameness. The collapsing of race into individualized subjecthoods while asserting that “we are all the same” assures that narratives of colorblindness gain currency. And of course, power is involved in this process: race can only be constructed as inconsequential by those for whom it is of no consequence. Braidotti (2006) writes, “The source of the representational power of white is the propensity to be everything and nothing, whereas black, of course, is always marked off as *a* color. The effect of this structured invisibility and of the process of naturalization of whiteness is that it masks itself off into a ‘colourless multicolourness’” (p. 74). Multicultural training into colorblindness assures that the difference between white and black pride is obscured in this excerpt. By erasing color, colorblindness detaches notions of white and black pride from their histories, in which colonization, slavery and the subjugation of non-white people the world over engendered liberatory struggles for freedom, self-determination and cultural survival.

Excerpt 1 illustrates what critics of multicultural discourse (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Bernhard, in press; Thobani, 2011; Vandebroek, 2010) have asserted regarding its

impotency in challenging dominant whiteness and racializing discourses. What is the alternative? Part of the task involves recognizing white as racialized, but not in the same way that forces and systems of power minoritize non-white “Others”. Saldanha (2006) cautions against what he refers to as strategic universalism, or collapsing equality into sameness, which involves “brushing aside the “minor differences” between bodies to make space for accepting alterity within a common humanity” (p. 14). Because whiteness is so difficult to call out means that there is an urgent imperative to do so in white-settler states like Canada. Davis (2009) writes,

White discourses working to simultaneously silence connections and discussions of “race” and culture while relying on the identification of white as the marker of inclusion/exclusion makes mapping the workings of white discourses problematic and challenging. It is in exploring these tensions and contradictions within this paradox with white individuals, however, where some of the possibilities for disrupting and deconstructing white discourses exist. (p. 119)

Educator 2 and Educator 3’s challenge to whiteness in this excerpt illuminated the work that discourses of individualism and multiculturalism were doing in that moment. However, the discursive disruptions introduced by Educators 2 and 3 did not overcome the relations of power in this conversation. In fact, it was interesting to observe the ways in which educators were often able to take up two competing and contradictory discourses simultaneously throughout the data. As Davis (2009) notes, “This meeting of white was (and is) never complete, as white discursive practices are always in operation and working to draw white individuals and communities back into dominant constructions of identity that rely on universalizing and normalizing white” (p. 125). This

is a reminder that the conversations that took place in the workshops constitute only the beginning of what it would mean to challenge whiteness in BC, and more broadly. Let us now turn to the second excerpt, which will allow for a deeper exploration of material and affective encounters with whiteness.

When I first watched the video of excerpt two, I was struck by how the educator's body was involved not just in performing the content of what she was saying, but also how it was being impacted by her encounter with whiteness. I was interested in the meaning of her words, and also what her body was doing while she spoke. In order to attempt to bring the body into my analysis, I have included my observational notes in the transcript below.

*Excerpt 2*

**Educator** (white): For myself when I read those articles, it – it makes – it did make – or some of them - it made me take a look at how (.) I was thinking.

*[The educator's face appears to blush. While she speaks, she holds her upper left arm tightly with her right hand, and holds her throat with her other hand. As she talks, she looks down at the table. When she finishes the sentence with the word "thinking", she turns her head to her right to look at the facilitator. She takes her hand away from her chest, and places it on her opposite arm. Her arms are now crossed firmly across her body, with both hands holding opposite upper arms.]*

**Facilitator:** Mmm hmm.

**Educator:** And um [2] I don't know if I came to a real conclusion [*she sits back in her chair and uncrosses her arms*] about it. I think I'm in a process because it brought up; it stirred up a bunch of things inside me, um, to do with uh white

privilege [*she uses both her hands and moves them in small circles on top of the table, making a stirring motion*] - to do with the otherness thing. Because it (.) um - just because of the multiculturalism - we don't have a whole lot in Chesterly<sup>1</sup> [*she frowns slightly and she looks around the table nodding*]. Um, but in our centre - but recently a little boy joined us who's um [1] who is um (.) who's uh (.) well, he's got a lot of color in him [*she lifts her hands up, palms raised, in a gesture of defeat*]. And - and there's - it made me start thinking about how we think about him [2] to be honest with you. That - it - it brought something out with me. And I had just been with someone - [*she moves both her arms to the left of her on the table, and leans her whole upper body left, as if to indicate that this has happened previously, somewhere else, in a different context*] - I couldn't believe it [*opens eyes widely*], that's very prejudiced and was talking. And I - and so all this article and everything that was being said [*her hands hover over the table and move back and forth*] was making me [*tilts her head back abruptly, widens her eyes, and turns her palms up to the ceiling*] really take a look at how we all think. [*She puts her hands down on the table, arms stretched in front of her*]. And, you know, what we're looking at. And then - should I go on?

**Facilitator** [off camera]: [seems to confirm without speaking that educator should go on]

**Educator**: Just about, because I have ... [grandchildren] who are part Vietnamese<sup>2</sup>... So I - it makes me think about how ... we view them. And it - and themselves, right? [*Places right hand on her chest*] So it was making me

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<sup>1</sup> This is not an actual town in British Columbia, Canada.

<sup>2</sup> Changed for purposes of anonymization.

think a lot about those things (1) and that how – how – I don't know how to put this really into words because ... my newest little [grandchild] has quite round eyes. ... At Thanksgiving, my cousins and that, his wife is Korean<sup>3</sup>, and she was thrilled that this – my little [grandchild] had quite round eyes and she's Viet - part Vietnamese. And I thought, "Well that's weird". But then I realized that it's to do with the whiteness. [*She makes a sweeping gesture with her right hand away from her body and extends her arm completely in front of her.*]

Facilitator: Ya.

Educator: The otherness. [*She makes the same the same movement with her right hand and arm.*]

Facilitator: Ya.

Educator: And – and that article made me really start ... thinking. Now how do I put it into practice? I'm not sure. What – what am I going to think - what? But it did bring it to the forefront of what I was thinking.

Saldanha (2006) asserts that language, far from being the sole author of the world, acts as a mediator between consciousness and the body. He urges, "Bodies need to be appreciated as productive in their own right, just like words or money or architecture" (Saldanha, 2006, p. 12). I will use discourse (text) and materiality (body) in this portion of analysis as doorways into theoretical readings of what encounters with whiteness can produce. It is important to emphasize that my reading of the "event" of race (Saldanha, 2006) in this clip is not being presented as a single truth about what was happening in that moment. Rather, I seek to racialize white subjectivity (Braidotti, 2006) through the

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<sup>3</sup> Changed for purposes of anonymization.

employment of poststructural and sociomaterial lenses. I am cognizant that there are obvious limitations involved in translating what I observe as the “material” into text. Attentiveness to materiality and discourse is also mediated and constrained by my (dis)embodied subjecthood as voyeur, transcriptionist, interpreter, analyst, researcher. What I observe in this excerpt, and how I engage with what is said, is necessarily filtered through my subjectivities and can only offer a partial reading open to contestation, but hopefully one that complexifies what might have been happening in the moment. I should also mention that there is another educator in this clip, who is necessarily implicated in what emerges in the moment even though she does not speak. I elected not to include the second educator in the transcript and analysis, as I wanted to focus on what both text and body were doing simultaneously.

Before delving into the analysis, it must be noted that pursuant references to whiteness are made with the recognition that white is not a homogeneous, uniform category of identity. Davis (2009) points out that it is problematic to erase the diversity that exists in white communities. In the same way that the term whiteness does not capture the plethora of cultures and identities experienced by people whose bodies are read as white, people do not experience being white in uniform ways across contexts. Part of the power of whiteness lies in its fluidity and flexibility, which allows it to appropriate and colonize (S. de Finney, personal communication, April 30, 2012).

What I found so interesting about this clip is the way in which the body conveys an ongoing process. The body performs the statement, “I don’t think I came to a real conclusion”. Pacini-Ketchabaw and colleagues (2011) succinctly summarize sociomaterial notions of becoming-subject when they write, “Bodies and their actions,

perceptions, and affects interact with things, spaces, and discursive elements in the emergence of subjectivity as an embodied and embedded assemblage of multiple belongings - made, remade, and potentially transformed in heterogeneous relational connections to create and recreate a subject-in-process” (p. 23). Excerpt 2 reveals a white educator’s first encounter with whiteness – a coming into her body in a way that revealed the subject-in-process engaging with the viscosity of race, and its sticky connections. It is not an encounter with white that is thus occurring in excerpt 2, but rather a confrontation with whiteness. While phenotypical markers of race are not inconsequential for the becoming subject, they do not hold primacy either. As Saldanha (2006) writes, “Whiteness ... is about the sticky connections between property, privilege and a paler skin” (p. 18). This quote elucidates how a sociomaterial consideration of these sticky associations connects bodies with histories and space: whiteness with colonialism and neoliberalism. An embodied confrontation with whiteness is where the white body meets these histories and matrices of power.

Iterating on this last point Saldanha (2006) writes, “The embodiment of race therefore encompasses certain ethical stances and political choices. It informs what one can do, what one should do, in certain spaces and situations” (p. 11). We see how the embodiment of race in excerpt 2 provokes a consideration of ethical and political complexities. This educator’s confrontation with whiteness encourages her to take stock of prejudice in a conversation, re-consider what it might mean for her grandchildren to grow up in Canada “part-Vietnamese”: “it makes me think how ... we view them ... and [how they view] themselves, right?” The embodiment of whiteness also prompts the very

ethical and political question, “Now how do I put it [a recognition of the power of whiteness] into practice?”

We see in excerpt 2 that at the same time that the educator begins to meet the histories and forces that uphold systemic racism, she individualizes racism when she refers to the person who she had spoken with who was “very prejudiced”. Backhouse emphasizes, “The roots of racialization run far deeper than individualized, intentional activities. Racism resonates through institutions, intellectual theory, popular culture, and law” (as cited in Thobani, 2007, p. 52). In reflecting on this quote, it is instructive to recall the ways in which colonization violently displaced Indigenous peoples, knowledges, cultures and languages in Canada with the express intention of installing white understandings of growth, science, and development as the preferred ways of engaging with the world (Cannella, 1997). It would be useful at this juncture to construct a cartography of the discursive-spatio-temporal location out of which this excerpt emerged in an attempt to consider what encountering whiteness might mean in this context.

In British Columbia, where much of the province’s territory rests on unceded First Nations land, the geographical backdrop of the learning circle conversations serves as an intractable reminder of the histories attached to space and race. Anderson and Taylor (2005) explain that whiteness in settler-societies such as Australia, and as I argue here, Canada, holds an anxious central position as the originary theft that created the nation is never too far from the surface. Excerpt 2 also emerged out of a socio-temporal context in Canada marked by the intensification in the circulation of contradictory discourses regarding immigration. At the same time that racialized migrants are increasingly

criminalized, deported and detained by the state, and permanent residents are being replaced by a burgeoning temporary migrant workers program, the nation positions white Canadians as benevolent hosts to immigrant others (di Tomasso, 2012). This is espoused as proof of the supposed advanced nature of multicultural, liberal, democratic societies. This spatio-temporal context constructs and masks whiteness in particular ways, and therefore necessitates locally-rooted responses.

What is particularly interesting in excerpt 2 is also the silencing of race when the educator begins to talk about one of the children in her centre. She seems to search for a way to describe racial identity without mentioning ethnicity, culture or phenotype. She finishes by saying, “well, he’s got a lot of color in him”. Writing about the place of silence in discourse, Foucault (1978) states,

Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies” (as cited in Davies, 2004, p. 74)

What is what the educator declines to say *doing* in this excerpt? This erasure of race is significant. The statement that someone has a lot of color implies that white is colorless. One reading is that in the midst of the workshop itself, where postcolonial and poststructural discourses were being privileged, and the educator was sitting amongst white and racialized colleagues, there was the potential to lose status by “improperly” articulating race. This is one of the perceived “risks” of naming race for white

individuals, and also speaks to the dominance of whiteness in Canada, which confers the power to choose when and if to inhabit one's whiteness and engage with race at all.

Reading the “event” of race through a sociomaterialist lens allows for a consideration of “how different physical forces come together ... with discursive, systemic forces to *make race matter* in each encounter with difference” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2011, p. 23). The body is extremely relevant not only in its performance of becoming-subject (explained above), but also in the way that it seems to be moving to keep the subject bound throughout the encounter with whiteness. Arms wrapped tightly around itself, the body here seems to be protecting its interiority from the sudden sticky attractions visiting it through the embodiment of whiteness. The body in this excerpt could be read in a variety of ways, but it does convey a sense of discomfort. Touching the throat and chest, and then the release of tension in the throwing up of hands at the end of the excerpt, speak to a sense of unease. It would be useful here to bring in what Ahmed (2004), drawing from Butler's (1993) notion of materialization, refers to as “intensification”. While I am not confusing discomfort with pain, it is useful to read the body in this encounter with whiteness as responding to “the intensification of pain sensations” (Ahmed, 2004, p.24). If we think of discomfort as the close relative of pain, we can imagine them working in similar ways in and on the body. Ahmed (2004) elaborates, “Pain involves the violation or transgression of the border between inside and outside, and it is through this transgression that I feel the border in the first place” (p. 27). Arms wrapped around the body seems to convey an awareness of the border between inside and outside, and a desire to guard this border against the sticky associations of whiteness.

Mac Naughton (2009) notes that there is a growing body of research, which suggests that discomfort may be necessary to shifting attitudes and prompting white people to action. In a piece that holds particular relevance to unmasking and challenging whiteness, Braidotti (2009) remarks on the pain inherent to change. She writes, “Changes that affect one’s sense of identity are especially delicate. Given that identifications constitute an inner scaffolding that supports one’s sense of identity, shifting our imaginary identifications is not as simple as casting away a used garment” (Braidotti, 2009, p. 55). She outlines her notion of affirmative ethics as resting on the belief that negative affects (such as shame or discomfort) can be transformed through transcending passivity. What might this mean for naming and engaging with whiteness in the field of early childhood education and beyond?

Braidotti (2006) suggests that if we are to face our contemporary cartography of interconnected problems together, we must expand our appreciation of our collectively bound subjectivities (p. 136). For example, a problematization of the humanist self as independent of the “Other” would need to be addressed. This work would also need to be directed at white people. Davis (2009) counsels that tensions around race must be explored with white individuals in order to support the emergence of possibilities for interrupting whiteness. This seems to be, in part, what both excerpts in this section represent. The naming of, and grappling with, whiteness was tenuous and uncomfortable in both scenarios, however it created small avenues into expanded explorations of whiteness, race, and anti-oppressive practice spaces.

While critical engagements with whiteness are undoubtedly necessary for envisioning ethical responses to injustice, the analysis undertaken so far brings some

tensions to the fore and prompts important questions about how this might be put into practice. For example, at what point do critical engagements with whiteness need to give rise to critically informed actions against matrices of power in order for substantive change to become a possibility? Who gets to decide what these concrete challenges to power look like? Who is recruited into the project of challenging whiteness across contexts, at various levels, and what are the politics and ethics of these decisions? How do educators, and people, equip themselves to respond to resistance to change? These, and other critical questions will be revisited in chapter six. The analysis will now turn towards the ways in which educators interpreted children's enactments of race in practice, and their responses to these moments.

### ***Encounters with Race in Early Childhood Education***

The conversation transcribed in excerpt 3 followed two previous workshop discussions in the data set concerning four-year-old boys in one of the educator's centres. A young white child had started calling his black friend "chocolate" and referring to himself as "vanilla". Educator 1 had been discussing how to address this with her peers in the focus groups over several months. At the time that this conversation was recorded, several parents of other children in the centre (not the two boys involved in this interaction) had asked the educator to intervene, citing their discomfort with the fact that race was being brought up in this way by the boys. This excerpt is presented as an example of the complex ways in which race and processes of racialization emerge in early learning settings. My analysis does not focus on the children, but on how the educators in this excerpt take up the question of children's negotiations of race and racialization, and what this reflects about their conceptualizations. Finally, I will examine

how these conceptualizations are structured through dominant discourses concerning race in early childhood, and what type of figuration of the child emerges.

*Excerpt 3*

**Educator 1:** I – I mean I don't consider myself to have any racial issues that I'm aware of. But even saying that like I – am I – am I saying something now that's being -

**Educator 2:** Ya.

**Educator 1:** So its one of those topics that is so um - it (.) its (.) so shaded all the time that (.) people don't talk about it. It – it can be a very cold topic to discuss because it's got so much negative –

**Educator 2:** There's more (.) ya –

**Educator 3:** It can be loaded.

**Educator 1:** It *can* be very loaded. So this piece in my mind when the boys first started, was very light. It was - they were just looking at it, they were –

**Educator 2:** Having fun and –

**Educator 1:** They were having fun. And then the minute that the parents started coming forward, that's when I thought, ok something else is happening here. But then when I look at it, I'm thinking ok, is something else happening here because of the parents? What the parents are bringing in and what their background is? Or is it – and then I have to be that (.) that (.) –

**Educator 2:** How you respond to them.

**Educator 1:** Ya. And what they're saying to their children about color and race and the topic of skin. Does it somehow come and negatively come and impact

what I'm trying to provide, which is a safe environment that they can talk about those things? So [laughing] its – its this complicated web that got kind of crazy from this one little innocent comment.

**Educator 2:** And in the children's eyes, that's what it was, or is. Purely innocent.

**Educator 1:** That's what I'm thinking.

**Educators 2:** Yes.

**Educator 1:** Yes.

**Educator 2:** But then ... the adults come in with their baggage and then it becomes something more.

**Researcher:** Why do we assume that it's innocence? What is innocent? Is there anything that is innocent? They live in the same world that we do.

**Educator 1:** They do. But do they have the knowledge? Do they have the knowledge that we have about what's happening in the world?

The beginning of excerpt 3 bears striking parallels to the broader patterns in the data, which I explicate earlier in this chapter, particularly in regards to the notion that overtly discussing race carries certain risks. Without being named explicitly, the topic of race is referred to in excerpt 3 as “loaded”, “cold”, and “shaded”. When Educator 1 refers to “what the parents are bringing in”, race is constructed as something that is introduced into the early childhood setting, which necessarily implies that it was not there before. Adults here are constructed as importers of race into the early learning environment and children's lives. But I also wonder about bodies. Are there certain bodies that could be constructed as “importers” of race? And what happens to bodies in white spaces that are seen to “import” race?

There seem to be two dominant discourses at work in this excerpt. The first is a developmental discourse, which surfaces explicitly at the end of the transcript, when the educator suggests that because young children do not possess the same knowledge as adults, they are innocent of engaging with race. The second discourse is one of childhood innocence, and is predicated upon assertions regarding child development. A select review of the developmental literature revealed the belief that children cannot grasp the complexity of constructs such as race and racism due to immature levels of cognitive development (see Quintana, 1998). Cannella & Viruru (2004) argue that discourses that construct childhood are similar to Said's analysis of orientalism. They write, "Those who are younger have been constructed through a similar lens, labeled "exotic" in their innocence, weakness, immaturity, lack of responsibility and cuteness" (Cannella & Viruru, 2004, p. 110).

As explored in chapter three, reconceptualist scholars have called for a politicization of early learning spaces through the adoption of the view that what children say and do is political. As reconceptualist scholars have demonstrated in their research on the topic of race, young children are extremely adept at recognizing and negotiating relations of power. Skattebol's (2003) assertion that children will often not exercise power overtly is echoed by Copenhaver-Johnson's (2006) observation that children in her study rarely spoke of race explicitly. Not only then are young children aware of the ways in which power dictates what can and cannot be said, and by whom, but they are also aware that the human differences they observe are not granted equal authority (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2010). What is excluded when children's explorations of race are dismissed as innocent play?

I now want to pay particular attention to the figuration of the child as “innocent” and what this figuration is capable of producing. Educator 1 states, “it’s this complicated web that got kind of crazy from this one little innocent comment”, and Educator 2 agrees. What type of child is elicited in this statement, and how is the silhouette of this child-figure transposed across contexts and discourses to conjure educators, education, and the world in particular ways? Castañeda (2002) argues that the notion of the child “as a potentiality rather than an actuality” (p. 1) leads to generalized figurations of children. Using Castañeda’s (2002) inquiry into how figurations of the child can be used to make wider cultural assertions, I am interested in what claims are made through the presupposition of the innocence of children in excerpt 3.

Braidotti (2006) explains that figurations are the articulation of one’s location in time and space, as a historically inscribed being that marks out particular geopolitical coordinates. If we were to look on a map, what would be the coordinates of this excerpt? First, the exaltation of the universal, innocent child is a western practice, which excludes many global childhoods. This relates to Burman’s (2008b) question about which children have access to the “right” kinds of childhoods to qualify as children. It also suggests that childhood can be spoiled, or tainted in such a way as to render it ineligible for membership into this developmental category. Davis and colleagues (2009) address the impact of this discourse in early learning settings when they write, “Discourses of childhood racial innocence and color-blindness can bring concern that talking about racism is harmful to young children” (p. 62). Which children are privileged, or not, by discourses that silence conversations about race and racism in early learning environments? If children have been observed as capable navigators of complex and

powerful discourses, is it a coincidence that it was the white child in this interaction that initiated a conversation exploring race, or that he used a common cultural metaphor for racial difference? It is impossible to know, but O’Loughlin (2001) relevantly summarizes that, “... some writers would suggest that, at least for Caucasians, the development of a white racial identity may depend as much on defining the Other that they are not, as on defining some essential characteristics of whiteness with which to identify” (as cited in Mac Naughton, Davis and Smith, 2009, p. 39). Might the white child have been engaging in an exercise of abjection of the “Other” as means of affirming selfhood (Davies, 2004; Rutherford, 1990a)?

Without ever being able to know what the intentions and experiences were of the two young boys mentioned in excerpt 3, the figuration of the innocent child is symbiotically related to the figuration of the early childhood educator as protector and guardian of unspoiled childhood innocence. This features in the excerpt, when Educator 1 asks if parents’ concerns about the way in which race is emerging in the space “negatively come and impact what I’m trying to provide, which is a safe environment that they can talk about those things”. Educator 1’s statement that parents come in with “baggage” which compromises the safety of the environment has important effects for how parents are also figured in this dialogue. First, the parent is positioned as a threat to the educator’s expertness through the introduction of uncritical anxieties into the space (S. de Finney, April 30, 2012, personal communication), which compromises the safety that the educator, as professional, is charged with maintaining. Secondly, the suggestion that parents introduce their baggage regarding race to children and into early learning settings positions racialized parents particularly as inherently more threatening. As

developmental scholars Katz and Kofkin (1997) found, white parents do not talk about race to their children as early or as frequently as black parents. Race and processes of racialization are irrelevant for those who are not forced to confront its oppressive practices everyday. Finally, it should be noted that race once again emerges here as risky business, where engaging with it directly is considered unsafe. In the next section, I follow the thread of educator as protector.

### *Engaging With Race in Practice*

In the following excerpts, an educator reflects back on an event that took place in her centre the previous year. A group of white three-year-old girls who had been playing princesses excluded a black classmate from their play. When the educator encouraged them to allow the girl to join, one of the girls emphatically refused, stating that there was no such thing as brown princesses. The below texts consist of the educator describing her reaction and responses to this event.

#### *Excerpt 4*

**Educator 1:** But then that brings up for me ... [the] princess story. I am really protective of that little girl. For me, I don't want her to be the subject of a big, intense conversation about why she's different. I, you know, I've got that ferocity ... of protection for anyone that is [inaudible] that special needs kid, or whatever. I get that really ferocious –

**Educator 2:** Mother bear.

**Educator 1:** Mother bear! Absolutely.

**Educators 2:** Oh ya. [Laughing]

**Educator 1:** Absolutely. So I – I wanted to protect that little girl. I don't want anybody to be making her uncomfortable with herself.

**Educator 2:** Mmm hmm.

**Educator 1:** So, I'd love to talk about it. But I'm afraid to, because I don't know ... if I can protect her, or how I would protect her.

The following excerpt was pulled from a later learning circle. It features the same educator expanding on her response to the racialized princess event.

*Excerpt 5*

**Educator 1:** And so I'm busy thinking what I can do to help broaden that view in my preschool. And it's so minimal. You know, we've got the brown dolls, we've got the brown – as many brown story books as you can – you know, with people, characters from different colors in the storybooks and so forth. I felt useless. I felt like I ... couldn't reflect this little girl ... visually back to the rest of the [class] – and to herself very effectively.

I begin by expanding my analysis of what ascriptions to notions of childhood innocence *do* to inform educators' responses to the emergence of race in early childhood settings. I first want to examine how the discourse of childhood innocence constitutes both children and educators in particular ways. These constructions set off a chain of signification (Castañeda, 2002) whereby dominant relations of power are reproduced across space and time. The question becomes: what does constructing children as innocent do in early learning spaces, and how are these processes entrenched in specific sociomaterial pasts and presents?

From a postcolonial lens, the figuration of the child as innocent can be paralleled to the colonizer's figuration of the colonial other as natural, unspoiled primitive.<sup>4</sup>

Lugones (2007) emphasizes that colonization was not simply a contained process, but rather colonization authored a conceptualization of humanity in which:

... the world's population was differentiated in two groups: superior and inferior, rational and traditional, primitive and civilized, traditional and modern. *Primitive* referred to a prior time in the history of the species, in terms of evolutionary time. ... Thus from within this mythical starting point, other human inhabitants of the planet came to be mythically conceived not as dominated through conquest ... but as an anterior stage in the history of the species, in this unidirectional path. (p. 192)

As explored in chapter two, postcolonial, early childhood studies scholars have addressed the ways in which child and native have been represented as symbols of our individual and racial pasts respectively (Castañeda, 2002; Cannella & Viruru, 2004). Castañeda (2002) elaborates on the work executed by discourses of innocence when she writes, “... the child's inner capacities have been constituted as the “natural” ground on which the social institutions, such as education, work to ensure – and enforce – normative development” (p. 43). Because discussions about race, racialization, colonization, oppression, and social justice within a paradigm of childhood innocence are considered risks and threats to the natural and unspoiled state of childhood, the response to the emergence of race then becomes one of wanting to protect the child against such unsafe conversations. But what are the politics of protecting and saving? And how might

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to emphasize that the colonial “Other” was also figured as dangerous savage and non-human (S. de Finney, personal communication, April 30, 2012).

discourses of childhood innocence and protection be colluding with ongoing, systematic colonialist processes?

While the above questions cannot be answered in any concrete form, I will engage in a postcolonial analysis of figurations of princesshood. I am interested in exploring how blackness and whiteness in this excerpt are both gendered and sexualized through the figure of the white princess. The statement “there are no brown princesses” constructs princesshood as antithetical to blackness. It is important to understand the princess figure as defined through gendered and sexualized narratives of purity and chastity. Lugones (2007) describes how colonialism served to attach notions of feminine sexual purity to white, English, middle class women. She explains that colonization figured the colonial woman as eroticized, sexualized, impure “Other” at the same time as it justified white males’ access to colonial women as objects. Citing McClintock (1995), Lugones (2007) describes how colonization itself was an eroticized project. The figuration of the pure, white princess described in excerpt 4 is attached to complex histories of oppressive constitutions of femininity that are brought into the early learning space through this encounter. This is not to say that the child making this statement understands these histories, but the child has read and understands the transposition of the white princess figure across time and space through encounters with white, proto-feminized pop-culture icons like Barbie. This child would also conceivably perceive the difference between Disney portrayals of white princesses like Cinderella, who exude notions of purity, and Pocahontas, who is defined through her sexualized encounter with the white colonizer. What messages are communicated when we do not confront these figurations, and the worlds that they inhere (Castañeda, 2002), with children?

An exploration of affect is also relevant to an analysis of excerpt 4. In her analysis of the important ways in which emotions function as investments in social norms, Ahmed (2004) argues that power and politics are very often about who gets to claim that they are acting out of love. She cites Spelman (1997) who writes, “Compassion, like caring, may also reinforce the very patterns of economic and political subordination responsible for such suffering” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 22). This connects with Brown’s (2006) deconstruction of the power relations bound up with claims to benevolence. Although the “mother-bear” instincts cited in excerpt 4 may differ from concepts like compassion and care, these affective engagements with children are charged with dominant narratives, defined through relations of power, regarding appropriate ways to relate to the innocent child. Skott-Myhre (2008) eloquently explicates the complex, insidious workings of power when he writes, “... it is in arranging and making meaning from daily living that power is engendered... How each of us attempts to enforce our vision of the world constructs the confrontations that comprise the centre and periphery of what is true. Through a multiplicity of such confrontations, hegemonic truths are formed” (p. 143).

Because children have so effectively been constructed as incomplete beings (Castañeda, 2002) – as empty receptacles for (particular) adult knowledge - education and educators are positioned as stewards of the normalized developmental process. In excerpt 4, the educator’s statement that she does not want a black child in her centre to be “the subject of a big, intense conversation about why she’s different” is worthy of unpacking. It presupposes that this young girl is not conscious of the gendered, racialized, colonialist processes always/already at work to ascribe meaning to phenotype within a predominantly white early childhood space. It also ignores the white child’s taking up of

dominant gendered and racialized discourses that work to firmly position feminine beauty within whiteness and heterosexuality (Mac Naughton, 2009). By not engaging with the white child's boundary work around "acceptable" princesshood, the boundaries are implicitly condoned and reified.

Excerpt 4 also conveys the assumption that children are not actively engaged in negotiating identity in very political ways. Taylor (2005b) comments powerfully on children's role in shaping identities when she writes, "... not all the children's performances of self and other are open – to the contrary, they can be very rigid, exclusionary, and strictly focused on boundary maintenance. Whatever way they perform themselves, I regard all children as theorists of the self, for in their own ways, they are all investigating ways of doing themselves ..." (p. 5). How might the young girls' refuting the possibility of a brown princess have been linked to theorizations of selfhood, whiteness, and acceptable femininity? How might discourses of protection have been challenged had the children in this event been conceptualized as theorists of the self?

We also see in excerpt 4 how responses to processes of racialization in early childhood settings are shored up by dominant developmental discourses, which construct the young child as cognitively incapable of grasping the complexities of identity and power, and therefore innocent of creating exclusions around race. However, Davies (2004) and others point out that young children work hard to maintain binary categories.

Writing on gender she states:

The practices of category-maintenance work might be interpreted as a rational, cerebral, linguistic strategy. Yet if one looks at the examples, there is a lot of emotion and movement of bodies going on that involves more than the rational

maintenance of the gender order. The structure of the gender order, the formation of the 'I' with its particular boundaries, the maintenance of the binary form of discourse, are all going on simultaneously and through the same practices. (p. 62)

In Davies' description of category-maintenance work in childhood, children might be understood as acting on affective investments in identities (Ahmed, 2004; Braidotti, 2006).

Through a sociomaterial lens, the event of race emerges in relationship to a plethora of situated social and material elements, one of which is phenotype. As Smolash (2009) describes, "Racialization shapes how human bodies are perceived, and, to echo Foucault, inscribes meaning on the human body, marks the body with a particular value. The identities of those who enter into a racialized discourse are reconstituted by these inscriptions" (p. 747). The color of our skin is a permanent feature of how our bodies are read in different contexts across our lifespan. How might the notion of protection in this context become a quest to protect the young girl from the materiality of her own body? In her work exploring critical race theory with student teachers, Pennington (2007) writes that, "... saving can be viewed as saving the children from their own lives, lives we perceived as missing essential qualities, qualities that we felt we could make up. ... Feagin and Vera (1995) explain the idea of 'White rituals' that we go through in our daily lives; these go unnoticed by Whites but not people of color" (p. 99). Might it be a "white ritual" to ground pedagogical responses to instances of racial exclusion in discourses of protection? This is one reading. It might also be that the dominant ways in which educators are taught to engage with difference, namely through multicultural, anti-bias

curriculum, invisibilizes relations of power by reducing children's encounters with race to the victim/perpetrator binary (Vandenbroeck, 2010).

I now turn to excerpt 5, where the educator states, "I'd love to talk about it [racialization]. But I'm afraid to, because I don't know ... if I can protect her, or how I would protect her". This excerpt implies that naming difference would a) necessarily be focused on the black child, and b) that naming race, and rendering processes of racialization visible, would harm the child. Reconceptualist scholars assert that precisely the opposite is true. Research has shown that directly and critically engaging with young children around the political and historical dimensions of racism changed how race was understood, and led to a reduction in the performance of inter-group bias (Davis & Mac Naughton, 2009b, p. 96). This previous research demonstrates that the response to racial exclusion in early childhood settings need not be in the form of a singular intervention directed at the excluded child, but would ideally be an ongoing pedagogical process.

In excerpt 5, the educator also verbalizes her frustration with the limitations of multicultural responses to processes of racialization. She articulates the recognition that despite incorporating "brown dolls", and storybooks "with brown characters" into her practice setting, she felt "useless" in her bid to create an inclusive environment. Canadian multiculturalism has been criticized extensively in various disciplines, and through different theoretical lenses, for its exaltation of symbolic difference, the reification of Other(ed) identities into hardened groups, the culturalization of race, and the racialization of non-white Others. In the field of education, critics of multicultural pedagogy have leveled that it does little to work towards challenging oppression. Some of these critiques were explored in detail in chapter 2.

It is possible to hypothesize that the educator's frustration in excerpt 5 stems from the realization that the response she might have been taught to use in the management of classroom diversity proved insufficient. Castañeda (2002) writes the race is, "evacuated of its meaning by positioning color as the medium of difference" (p. 102). An approach to diversity centered on difference is not in itself 'wrong', but it works to keep dominant norms in place (Razack (2001) by invisibilizing power in the ways that have been explored in chapter two.

When operating through a colorblind multicultural discourse that passively engages with difference and positions race as risky, the urge in practice may become to steer conversations away from race, to tell children that they are all the same, or to put different colored dolls out in the centre in a bid to get children to be inclusive. In contrast to this, Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, (2010) urge educators to ask different kinds of questions about the emergence of race in ECE. They posit, "The question to ask ... moves us away from pondering how we can make children understand concepts of inclusion and sameness, and towards understanding the forces and intensities that come together in the encounters: How can the forces and intensities that came together in these particular moments be rearranged to create new movements and new arrangements?" (p. 145). I interpret this as a provocation to get involved with the viscosity of race, talk about issues surrounding race with children, challenge processes of racialization that maintain dominant whiteness, and follow children's wonderings and enactments. These propositions are complex, and encounter numerous obstacles when transferred into practice. In chapter 6, I explore some of the complexities inherent to shifting thinking and practice regarding the event of race (Saldanha, 2006) in early childhood education.

### *Summary*

In this chapter, I engaged with early childhood educators' conceptualizations of whiteness and processes of racialization, as well as their responses to encounters with race in practice. Figurations of the developmental and innocent child were problematized through a critical analysis of how these figures maintain whiteness and reinforce ongoing colonialist processes. This chapter highlights the necessity of being able to develop complex responses to emergences of race in practice, which involves moving beyond the application of multicultural pedagogical responses. So where does this leave us?

Grosz (2002) asserts, "Rethinking multiculturalism and anti-racism, conceptualizing them in terms that facilitate social, political and economic change, entails the creation of more thoroughly radical concepts, concepts with a less invested, and with perhaps a wider range than that afforded by the regime of recognition" (p. 463). What types of radical concepts are being envisioned, and how effective can they be in challenging matrices of power? I wonder about the potential of Braidotti's (2009) notion of the ethical relation, which characterizes the ethical good as that which favors complexity by allowing for non-unitary subjecthood, promoting enlarged understandings of the interconnection between self and other, and by empowering becomings instead of reifying identities. Might centering the ethical relation be a viable starting point for disturbing whiteness and processes of racialization with young children? In the next and final chapter of this thesis, I utilize a discussion of my findings to lead me back to these questions.

## Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, I begin with a reiteration of my research questions, and continue with a discussion of my findings. I will then revisit some of the critical questions that arose through the analysis in chapter five regarding the possibility and complexity of conceptualizing anti-racist, socially just pedagogical practices. I end the chapter by articulating the limitations and implications of my research.

This thesis used vignettes of conversations generated within an early childhood education research project to explore how educators read and respond to the emergence of race in their work with young children. A necessary facet of this exploration was a consideration of the ways in which educators conceptualize race, whiteness, and racialization, and the rootedness of these understandings in dominant discourses currently in circulation in British Columbia, Canada. The three questions guiding my analysis were:

- How do early childhood educators in the data set conceptualize whiteness, race, racialization, and racism(s), and where are these conceptualizations rooted?
- How are educators reading young children's articulations and performances of race and racism(s), and how are children, childhood(s) and educators being produced in the process?
- How are educators responding to children's articulations and performances of race and racism(s)?

### *Summary of Findings*

In what follows, I provide a summary of the links that I have drawn between the “local” of ECE settings, and the “global” histories and relations of power instrumental in sustaining cycles of oppression. I have separated my findings out under distinct headings,

yet once again, I will reiterate that this orderly categorization is artificial as all of these concepts are interrelated and co-constitutive of one another.

### *Whiteness*

I decided to foreground excerpts featuring white educators' explorations of whiteness and emergent processes of racialization in chapter five as an acknowledgement that processes of racialization in Canada are contingent upon the construction of white as normal and neutral. The excerpts in the "Grappling with Whiteness" section of my analysis revealed unfamiliarity with theories of whiteness, the historical imbrications of processes of racialization and whiteness, as well as an uncertainty and/or anxiety regarding vocabulary used to describe race. This is not in itself surprising given the effective invisibilization of whiteness. My exploration of whiteness also revealed the important ways in which multicultural discourse works to obscure and reinforce dominant whiteness. This will be explored in more depth later on.

The excerpts that featured overt discussions of whiteness also provided interesting opportunities for an exploration of the immediate effects of critically engaging with whiteness. My findings in this regard correspond to the work of scholars who have supported the study of whiteness with educators (e.g. Davis, 2009; Pennington, 2007), which qualifies this process as tenuous and uncomfortable, but necessary. As Mac Naughton (2009) points out, discomfort has the potential to lead to change. However, this exploration also highlighted the importance of making challenges to whiteness an ongoing pedagogical process. Using a sociomaterial lens to observe how the body was implicated in the educator's critical reflection on whiteness permitted an exploration of affective and embodied investments (Ahmed, 2004) in whiteness. This has significance

for preparing for the potential unproductive effects of racializing white bodies (Braidotti, 2006), such as denial, resistance, anger, guilt, and shame.

### *Race is Introduced*

The notion that early learning spaces were somehow exempt from dominant processes of racialization came up several times in the data. The idea that race did not “come up” was made visible in the ways in which educators seemed more comfortable with discussions around gender, or steered the learning circle conversations away from race if it was introduced by the facilitator or researcher. The image of the innocent child was instrumental in sustaining the belief that processes of racialization were inert or absent from early learning spaces unless otherwise “introduced” by an adult. The implication in excerpt 3 was that the children’s conversation was not really about race, as children’s conversations are innocent and therefore apolitical. Parents, with baggage, were seen to be politicizing the conversation and putting the safety of the educational space at risk. This positioned the children as innocent “Others” and the educator as the guardian of safe, developmentally-appropriate space. This dynamic was also revealed in excerpt 4 regarding the firm boundary maintenance work around white princesshood.

The idea that processes of racialization are not at work in a space unless they are explicitly named has several important implications. The first is that it absolves educators from critically engaging with issues around race, whiteness and racialization with young children. Secondly, it means that in spaces where discourses of normalized whiteness prevail, processes of racialization remain invisible and the discourses always/already at work to, for example, “ghost” Aboriginals, go unchallenged.

As I noted in chapter five, Aboriginal identity, culture and colonization did not

feature prominently in conversations regarding race and racialization in the workshops. The ways in which dominant whiteness and ongoing colonial processes “Other” Aboriginal peoples and marginalize Indigenous ways of being in early learning spaces were not taken up with the same depth and frequency as conversations about racialized immigrants for example. The absence of Aboriginality from conversations on race and identity in the data reflects the broader lack of critical analysis of colonial history and ongoing colonialism in the workshops. This can be said to be reflective of Canada’s efforts to disappear its colonial past and colonialist present. As the analysis elucidated in chapter five, globalized colonialism and Canadian processes of ongoing colonization impact how young children and educators are racialized, gendered and sexualized.

### *Race is Risky*

The notion that openly talking about race with young children carries certain risks was prominent in the data set. In excerpt 3, the topic of race was described as “shaded” and “loaded”. My analysis revealed that this sense of risk is inextricably bound with discourses that work to keep whiteness invisible, such as ascriptions to childhood innocence and commitments to multicultural notions like colorblindness and sameness. An analysis of the data revealed that for people who enjoy the negative advantages of being white, the risk inherent to talking about race might originate in two places. First is the fear of exposing whiteness through conversations about race, which could result in a subsequent loss of status. Second, dominant constructions of the innocent child and educator as developmental steward constitute race, and critical discussions about race, as unsafe, inappropriate and disruptive to young children.

The construction of race as risky surfaced differently through several of the excerpts. However in excerpt 4, we are able to observe how the risks assumed to be inherent to race, compounded with discourses of childhood innocence, culminated in a desire to “protect” a child who was being “victimized” through racially exclusionary practices. By mapping out a cartography of interconnected historical and political factors, a figuration of the child, tied to Canada’s colonial past, was described. I looked at how both the child and educator inhaled in this figuration, which allowed for a contextual politicization of the early childhood space. As Davis and colleagues (2009) write, “...educators need to consider that what children say in the daily life of an early childhood space is political. For educators this means becoming familiar with the political texts of “race” and “race” struggles for social justice relevant in their region, country, city, town, and/or community” (pp. 61-62). Cartography and figuration thus serve as useful tools in the ongoing and interrelated projects of re-politicizing and decolonizing early learning spaces.

### *Multiculturalism Maintains Normalized Whiteness*

The data clearly revealed the insufficiency of responses informed by multicultural discourse to the emergence of race in early childhood settings. Excerpt 5 demonstrates that without critical responses to processes of racialization in practice, substantively inclusive learning spaces remain elusive. In all of the excerpts, multicultural discourse was identified as doing important work to silence race through notions of colorblindness, sameness, and the celebration (through the reification) of difference, thus sustaining the centering of whiteness. In chapter two, I explored how multicultural policy was intended from its inception to manage and contain cultural difference (Abu-Laban, 1998). But it is

important to be attentive to the ways in which discourses of multiculturalism actually contribute to racism in Canada. In a recent speech, Thobani (2011) stated, “Multiculturalism is the dominant discourse now through which all of us ... are forced to articulate our politics ... it has just silenced an anti-racist discourse, an anti-racist politics in this country, which has now become defined as an extreme kind of politics”. What would a move away from multicultural “solutions” to diversity in practice entail? Do anti-racist discourse and anti-racist pedagogies carry us far enough away from matrices of power to allow for substantive change? And where would this lead not only early childhood educators, but social workers, child and youth care workers, and other human service professionals? I will attempt to engage with some of these questions in a pursuant section on implications.

### *Holding Theoretical Contradictions*

The data used in this study were collected as part of a project that aimed at introducing early childhood educators to postfoundational lenses for a critical rethinking of early childhood and early childhood education practices. An analysis of the data revealed that educators often spoke through contradictory discourses, sometimes simultaneously. The child might, in one single narrative, be constructed as agentic, competent learner and the next as an innocent, incomplete being in need of protection. This is not unique to the data set, but is in line with poststructural theories of discursively formed, fluid and contradictory subjecthood (Hall, 1990). This simultaneous engagement with competing humanist and postmodern discourses is noteworthy because it reminds us that shifts in perspective are messy. As Davis (2009) cautions in regards to challenging whiteness, the work is never done - it is an ongoing process.

### ***Implications***

This research falls in line with reconceptualist scholarship, which endorses familiarity with a range of different theoretical lenses. Campbell and colleagues (2004) argue that, “using multiple theoretical perspectives to analyze teaching and learning can generate and drive critical reflection on equity praxis more effectively than using a single perspective that presents a single truth about teaching and learning moments” (p.55). It is important to reiterate that this study does not advocate for a complete doing away with developmental lenses. However, this thesis does illustrate the risks inherent to figuring children through developmental discourse, and highlights the importance of expanding theorizations of the child, the educator, and education through the use of postfoundational theories.

An examination of reconceptualist literature in the field of early childhood studies, as well as a postfoundational theoretical analysis of the data, has elucidated several potential starting points for envisioning what Pacini-Ketchabaw (2010) refers to as a pedagogy for social justice. The importance of politicizing the early childhood classroom (Mac Naughton, 2009), the complexification of identity, the problematization of the role of education, and the foregrounding of an expanded, relational and affirmative ethics (Braidotti, 2006, 2009) have all been considered in this study as alternatives to humanist, multicultural approaches to disturbing processes of racialization. My analysis elucidated that creating these disturbances necessarily involves challenging dominant assumptions regarding the fixity of race. Critically engaging with whiteness, and bringing it into relief so as to challenge processes that racialize the “Other” is central to this task. As de Finney (2010) aptly states, “[h]erein lies the paradox of whiteness, that living

under it does not bestow an inherent critical understanding of its hegemony” (p. 480).

This research also illustrated that educators might benefit from more opportunities to cultivate theoretical flexibility so that they are better able to engage with encounters with race and racism in their work, and avoid colluding with processes of racialization. I am not suggesting that educators are supposed to have all the answers, but rather that they be supported in expanding their conceptualizations of race so that they can participate in non-oppressive explorations of race and identity with children. Lee and Lutz (2005) refer to this shift as "cognitive decolonization". But moving beyond this, practices, knowledges, relationships, materials and spaces need also be decolonized. So what comes next? What are the possibilities and limitations of critically reflecting on whiteness, ongoing colonialism, and matrices of power?

I want to briefly touch upon some of the questions that anti-racist and social justice perspectives illicit, which have implications for the crafting of pedagogical responses. As this thesis has explicated, the systems of power at work to make the status quo seem inevitable are ingrained in the very ways in which people see themselves, and thus we are heavily invested in perpetuating them. Because unexamined whiteness is so central to ongoing injustice, much of the work needs to occur at this level. However, the burden of educating white people, or making them realize that they need to be re-educated, should not fall on marginalized communities (Walia, 2012). This dynamic only serves to reinforce privilege. Similarly, resources should not be diverted away from other social justice projects so that whiteness can be challenged.

Walia (2012) states that in Canada, Indigenous self-determination is increasingly being perceived as intertwined with other social struggles. She writes about the

importance of understanding decolonization as a process. In a call to action, Walia (2012) writes, “Non-natives must be able to position ourselves as active and integral participants in a decolonization movement for political liberation, social transformation, renewed cultural kinships and the development of an economic system that serves rather than threatens our collective life on this planet” (par. 1).

In terms of education, which is designed to advance and maintain structures of power, how and where might this decolonizing shift begin? In the context of my findings, both the institutions that educate educators, as well as early childhood educators themselves, would need to support the expansion of critical awareness in order for this shift to occur. I would suggest that curriculum needs to move away from multicultural, cross-cultural competency training towards a more activist oriented approach that interweaves critical discussions of diversity with all course content. Social justice and diversity courses in education and the human “sciences” have too often been taught as “add-ons” to core curriculum.

Additionally, change may be provoked in educational institutions by inviting activists and other non-academics to become part of interdisciplinary conversations about pedagogy and curriculum development. I use the term interdisciplinary here to describe discussions that span educational disciplines as well as the borders between academia, families, pedagogues, community workers, educators, and activists. What pedagogical models might emerge from such conversations? What new and dynamic conceptualizations could take shape to support early childhood educators in their encounters with racialization, whiteness and injustice? Lastly, I see the potential for Canadian research that documents efforts to disturb whiteness within university and

college programs. This would allow for the sharing of knowledge and strategies for how to engage students in challenging whiteness.

### *Limitations*

My hope for this thesis was that it would make a humble contribution to Canadian scholarship on the topic of racialization in early childhood studies. One of the limitations of this study is the inevitable outcome of thinking through particular discourses. The theories that I employ throughout this thesis necessarily exclude certain readings of the data. Additionally, in my use of sociomaterial theory, I relied heavily on secondary scholarship, like the work of Castañeda (2002). A more in depth exploration of the sociomateriality of race would involve a reading of Deleuze, Butler and Haraway, among others. The findings from this research were not intended to be generalizable across contexts, as race was intentionally conceptualized in my analysis as a context-specific and contingent event. However, I appreciate the desire for clear and concise recommendations on best practice. This research cannot, and does not, provide a solution but hopefully raises questions that provoke thinking around these issues.

I think that there is a lot more work to be done in this area, particularly in Canada. This topic, in all its complexities, would benefit from multidisciplinary research approaches and methodologies. Continued exploration into this topic has the potential to bring scholars from political science, women's studies, media studies and communications, social work, science studies, psychology and history together. Holding whiteness at the center of academic inquiry is also important, particularly as it relates to the silencing of Aboriginal identities, cultures and histories in non-Aboriginal spaces in Canada.

### *Final Words*

I feel very fortunate to have had access to a body of data generated through an action research project. The conversations used in my data set sprung from rich learning contexts, where educators bravely challenged themselves and each other to re-examine the substance of their work. Voluntarily immersing themselves in uncertainty by complexifying their thinking about things like children, race, gender, and education is highly commendable.

I set out to explore the ways in which educators encounter notions of race in their work with young children, and how their responses to the emergence of race in practice relate to whiteness and ongoing processes of racialization in Canada. I sincerely hope that I was able to present an analysis that locates discussions about race and diversity in ECE within the cartographic dimensions of British Columbia, Canada in a way that is relevant to educators and scholars asking some of same questions as myself.

A critical, ethical engagement with diversity issues in ECE as well as in child and youth care, social work and other human services in Canada is crucial. As the current politico-economic climate leads to the increased devaluation of our work, and the children with whom we work, the imperative to live ethically with one another extends well beyond the walls of our practice settings. The importance of this task is summarized in the words of Heble (2002) when he writes, "... it is apparent that in an era of widespread inequality, privation, and injustice, when subjugated knowledges struggle for legitimacy only to be met with various forms of institutional disparagement and intolerance, pedagogy can carry an impressive ethical [and] public force" (p. 156). I

believe that as communities of practice, we are approaching a critical juncture regarding the future nature of our work. We need to begin preparing our responses today.

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