

Unsettling encounters with ‘natural’ places in early childhood education

by

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B.Sc. Hons., Trent University, 1994

M.Sc., Simon Fraser University, 1997

M.B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1999

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

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## **SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE**

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Dr. Pamela Moss, Outside Member  
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## ABSTRACT

### Supervisory Committee

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Drawing on everyday encounters from a three year collaborative research project with young children and early childhood educators in British Columbia, Canada, the manuscripts contained in this dissertation craft and put to work practices of witnessing and a methodology of refiguring presences as modes of creating interruptions in settler colonial place relations. This work critically engages with the question of what attention to Indigenous presences, to ongoing colonialisms, and to human/more-than-human entanglements, in everyday pedagogical encounters might do towards enacting anti-colonial early childhood pedagogies. My particular interest is in the anti-colonial possibilities of (re)storying the ‘natural’ places that I inhabit with children and educators.

In the first manuscript, enacting figurations of witnessing, I map the complexities of my role as a pedagoga, early childhood educator, and researcher; situating myself as an embodied and implicated presence within the research and pedagogical practices from which this dissertation is assembled. In the second manuscript, I articulate refiguring presences as an anti-

colonial methodological orientation for attending to the intricacies of everyday place encounters in early childhood settings. In the third manuscript, I experiment with refiguring presences through a series of interruptive stories that attend to Indigenous relationalities, human-non-human entanglements and the settler colonial tensions that come together in the making of a mountain forest that I regularly visit with children and educators. In the fourth manuscript, I experiment with refiguring presences to pay attention to everyday encounters with a community garden. I experiment with orientations that bring attention to messy historical relations and that attend to the vitalities of specific plant and animal worlds. I discuss the interruptive effects of this noticing in generating politicized dialogues with this place, where more-than-human socialities (Tsing, 2013) disrupt and subvert colonial impositions of control, belonging and order.

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Finally, I remain always in humble gratitude to my family, who have given and given up so much towards my still-ongoing learning journeys.

## **DEDICATION**

For Aiya and Leila

## SUMMARY

### **Kwasuka sukela**

*Kwasuka sukela*<sup>1</sup> ...I begin this dissertation, which is focused on possibilities for anti-colonial childhood place pedagogies with a partial telling of my own place learning stories from my childhood and youth. These stories bring into view, but do not necessarily explain, some of the connections between my contradictory becomings and my embodied understandings of place and place stories.

I was born and spent the first 18 years of my life in Swaziland, popularly described as “the mountain kingdom” for its expansive mountain landscapes, a “postcolonial” nation of approximately one million people in Southern Africa. My brother, mother and I lived in government-subsidized apartment housing in the capital city of Mbabane alongside a busy street. I attended preschool, kindergarten and my primary schooling at a nearby public school. As I attempt to recollect pedagogies that connected to place learning from my early years of schooling, my most recurrent memories are of required learning of place-as-nation and place-as-created by a Christian God. I particularly recall this learning as enacted through song. In a daily school assembly, our uniformly-covered bodies rose in line formation, to sing the Swazi national anthem, which while sung in my first language *Siswati*, reminded us of thankfulness to the Lord God for creating our mountains and rivers. We also stood daily to sing the Anglican hymn, *All Things Bright and Beautiful*. The chorus and tune remain embedded in me still; with both nostalgic familiarity and a discomfort that comes with its dissonant reverberations. This hymn tells of creatures, rivers, flowers, wind, and the sun as the Lord God’s creations. Looking back, I don’t think I ever questioned the disconnection of the lyrics of this song from my realities –

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<sup>1</sup> This is how the telling of a story or folktale to children is traditionally begun in my language, *Siswati*; while often translated as ‘once upon a time’ a closer translation is, ‘this is how this story begins’...

*fruits growing in a garden, tall trees in the greenwood, playing in meadows* – all held no resonant connection and meaning to my everyday world. Nonetheless this song was considered a necessary daily part of my early childhood education.

Alongside my formal schooling, I spent most weekends and all of my school holidays, right through the end of high school, when I left for university in Canada, at the rural farms of my now passed on grandparents. While I was not always happy at my mother's insistence that we spend time here when we were not in school, I now look back on this time as the most meaningful aspects of my place learning. Unlike my English schooling, here I spoke *siSwati* freely; though I did not learn the *Yeyeza* dialect spoken by my *Ndwandwe* family. Here I learned place stories that told of my Indigenous clans' (*Ndwandwe* and *Mavuso*) past and present place belongings. I learnt the significance of specific Indigenous places, such as the sacred mountain caves where my ancestors, including my father, are buried according to traditional customs.

While many of my relations are Christians, most did not discard their incommensurable traditional beliefs. From them, I also learned creation stories, which spoke of a different God than the Lord God of the hymns and national anthem I sang in school: stories of the creator *Mvelinchanti*, who alongside the *madloti* (ancestors), was often called upon in times of hardship and thanked for well-being through specific practices. While my increasing affinity for the sciences in my schooling at times created feelings of estrangement from these Indigenous stories and practices, at the same time, they helped me to feel a sense of rooted belonging somewhere.

My childhood place-learning in these special rural places was far from an idyllic or romantic nature experience. While I remember the pleasure of hours spent outside far away from adults, I also remember the stomach-tightening combination of fear (of encountering snakes, wild dogs, and other unknowns) and excitement that came with being tasked to walk through the

fields to bring the cow herders their meals, just as I also remember the enormous amount of daily work needed to sustain and responsibly nurture land and animals, sometimes without success.

My high school years also brought yet more different perspectives of place. I already had a sense of place belongings as intensely contested and political from stories of my *Ndwandwe* clan's assimilation into nationhood through war and colonialism, and from traumatic experiences while visiting relatives in apartheid South Africa as a young child. However, it was during my high school years that I critically encountered politicized understandings of place. Thanks to a targeted scholarship program, I spent 7 years in boarding school at a private international school. This mountain-top school had been founded on a principal of anti-racism in resistance to neighbouring South Africa's segregated schooling policies. Many exiled or imprisoned South African political activists sent their children to this school, and together with a diverse student body and activist teachers, this created a critical place of learning that while providing a predominantly Euro-Western education, was foundational to my anti-racist and anti-colonial ethic. I remember every June 16, hiking up one of the mountains surrounding the school, where we would noisily dance, chant, and sing freedom songs to commemorate the Soweto youth uprising and remember those that were still imprisoned by the South African regime. I recall these times as some of the few moments in school where my materialized voice and presence felt spontaneous and undisciplined, yet still shaped by and connected to the rhythms enacted by this place and the bodies assembled within it. These are just a few of the place learnings - place stories, place belongings, place becomings, and place estrangements that have travelled with and stayed with me. These place learnings have contributed to my critical perspectives as I continue to experiment with possibilities for politicized and ethical encounters with 'natural' places in early childhood education.

## Overview

The four manuscripts that comprise this dissertation emerged from an inquiry into everyday place encounters from research conducted over a period of three years at group child care centres located in suburban cities in British Columbia, Canada on the traditional unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples – the Musqueam, Squamish, Stó:lō, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations (Squamish Nation, 2008; Tsleil-Waututh Nation, 2013; Musqueam Band, 2011; Stó:lō Nation, 2009). In this work, I grapple with specific encounters to politicize and trouble the Indigenous relationalities, settler colonial relations, and more-than-human formations that were a part of these everyday encounters with gardens and forests, yet, from my perspective, remained absent presences.

More specifically, I bring into view situated settler colonial histories, Indigenous onto-epistemologies and place stories, more-than-human vibrancies, material-discursive entanglements, as well as my own complicated situatedness within the research. I do this in an attempt to unsettle innocent and anthropocentric views of these specific encounters and settler colonial child-nature pedagogies more generally. Mapping partial connections (Haraway, 1992; Mol, 2014) and noticing discordances with these complicated material-discursive multiplicities, I put to work a methodology of refiguring presences. In crafting and enacting this methodology I work with research practices of (re)storying place to seek out possibilities for anti-colonial resonances. Selecting visual, textual and affective traces of specific encounters, I (re)story place through multiple politicized acts of noticing (Tsing, 2011), that include literal and figurative acts of touching past present colonial histories, Indigenous place relations, vibrant more-than-human (such as the forest and garden in manuscripts 3 and 4) materialities, and embodied affectivities.

Briefly stated, “settler colonialism is the specific formation of colonialism in which the colonizer comes to stay, making himself the sovereign, and the arbiter of citizenship, civility, and knowing” (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, p. 73). For over 500 years, settler colonialism has continued to be manifested through ongoing complex, multiple and continually shifting processes of control and erasures of Indigenous people and Indigeneity (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Morgensen, 2011; Wolfe, 2006). As several scholars have noted, early childhood education is not outside of these colonial processes (see for example, Nxumalo, in press; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013; Taylor, 2013). Accordingly, my central intent in this work has been to bring a close critical attention to everyday early childhood place encounters as entangled within ongoing settler colonial relations. I put to work a methodology of refiguring presences (manuscripts 2, 3, and 4) and practices of witnessing (manuscript 1), to attend to the micropolitics of settler colonial formations in everyday place encounters in early childhood education. These are those encounters where connections to colonialism might otherwise go unnoticed. I bring close attention to a multiplicity of material-discursive constituents that come together to enact, sediment or interrupt colonial relations including, but not limited to, place histories and stories, pedagogical practices, human and more-than-human bodies, things, affects and my own situated subjectivities and location within the encounters.

I am interested in what unsettling effects might emerge from encountering nature in ways that go beyond an anthropocentric focus on individual children’s learning ‘about’ nature. Instead, I bring questions that politicize, unsettle, refigure, reconsider and (re)story what is considered present in the pedagogical encounters that I work with. The research question that threads through the manuscripts that comprise this dissertation is: What might attention to Indigenous relational presences, to ongoing colonialisms, and to more-than-human entanglements in

everyday pedagogical encounters with ‘natural’ places in settler colonial British Columbia do towards enacting anti-colonial possibilities in early childhood studies?

In this summary, I situate my research and integrate the four manuscripts that comprise this dissertation. I also engage with some of the tensions that have emerged in my work. I begin by introducing the research setting and human participants. I also situate my complicated role as a researcher, educator and pedagogista - a process I engage with more fully in manuscript 1. I follow this by laying out the ways in which I understand, use and frame certain theoretical concepts and ontologies in this dissertation, including my reasons for bringing certain perspectives together, as well as the tensions therein. I then discuss how ‘meeting’ certain ontological and theoretical perspectives alongside my immersion in the assemblage<sup>2</sup> of data, its materialities, and the unsettling effects of certain encounters, led me towards a methodology of *refiguring presences*. I explain my rationale for the data gathering, analytic and place (re)storying approaches that I followed, as I put this methodology to work. I conclude this summary with a discussion of the contributions and continued grapplings of my work. In particular, I discuss contributory implications for early childhood studies and the ethical potentialities of my work. I also discuss both the contributions and challenges of this work in relation to its anti-colonial aspirations. I close with a brief summary of each of the four manuscripts contained in this dissertation.

### **Research setting**

Since this research project began three years ago, I have worked with twenty-three educators and close to two hundred children in settings such as a preschool, university-based

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<sup>2</sup> I use assemblage to refer to the multiplicities and heterogeneities of the material-discursivities that have come together as ‘data’; data that coalesced from encounters marked by contingency, partiality, and situatedness (Anderson & McFarlane, 2011; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Haraway, 1988; Ong & Collier, 2004).

group child care settings<sup>3</sup>, a licensed family daycare, and a drop-in program. While a formal and detailed gathering of the participants' racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds was not made, the diversity of settings varied. For instance the university-based setting was comprised of predominantly Caucasian children, while the family childcare setting was comprised entirely of racialized children. All of the early childhood educator participants were female and the majority were racialized immigrants of Asian descent (Chinese, East Indian and South Korean). All participants signed consent forms (family consent for the children). Voluntary participant child care settings were recruited via a letter of invitation from contact information provided by the local child care resource and referral unit. Ethics Approval for the research was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Board at the University of Victoria<sup>4</sup>.

My research was situated within a larger action research inquiry, The Investigating Quality (IQ) Project<sup>5</sup>, directed by Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw. With the support of a pedagogista<sup>6</sup> (my role), this project seeks to engage early childhood educators in critically reflective discussions and practices. Important aspects of this project include: engaging educators in discussions to bring forward multiple perspectives on practice, provoking disruptions in normative views, interrupting taken for granted assumptions about practice, and encouraging experimentations with practices inspired by these provocations (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2010; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot & Sanchez, 2014). As a part of this project, early childhood educator participants received 50 hours of professional

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<sup>3</sup> I have worked with three group care settings each licensed for 25 children aged 30 months to 5 years old, and an infant-toddler group care setting licensed for 12 children aged 18 to 30 months. These four settings were all located on the campus of a university in the Greater Vancouver area. The majority of children were children of university employees and students.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendices A through F for participant invitation letters and consent forms.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix G for a description of the Investigating Quality Project.

<sup>6</sup> The role of a *pedagogista* takes inspiration from the preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, where the presence of a pedagogical mentor to support, challenge and deepen educators' practices and thinking is an embedded part of early childhood education policy and practice (Rinaldi, 2006).

development for their participation in the project each year. I elaborate on my role in this project further below and in manuscript 1.

#### Researcher-pedagogista-educator

It is challenging to articulate my various roles in this study as a situated participant within the research: researcher, early childhood educator, and pedagogista. An aspect of my work could be described as that of a field worker in that as part of my visits, I spent approximately 5 hours weekly, in each of the child care settings making written, video and photographic observations of everyday moments in each centre. However, I also had a role as a pedagogista, intended to facilitate educators' critically reflective practice and, while doing so, participate in practice as an educator. This meant that while at the centres, I did more than simply observe and record what was happening. I was also actively involved in working alongside educators with children – engaging in planned and unplanned pedagogical provocations and encounters. My role included bringing forward multiple perspectives to educators to facilitate critical approaches and contestations to several areas of pedagogy within each setting. For instance, over the course of the project, some of the areas in which I worked with educators were:

- supporting shifts to inquiry-led pedagogies rather than pre-determined themes (Nxumalo, 2012a, b);
- paying attention to and ethically responding to issues of racialization and children's gender negotiations (Nxumalo, 2012c; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2010, 2012);
- facilitating the integration of tools and processes of pedagogical narration<sup>7</sup> into everyday practice. This included supporting educators in working with pedagogical

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<sup>7</sup> Pedagogical narrations are a way to make children's learning visible (Berger, 2010; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010; Rinaldi, 2006). They can take the form of: anecdotal observations of children, children's works, photographs that illustrate a process in children's learning, audio and video recordings of children engaged in learning, and children's

narration to rethink practices and support in-depth pedagogical inquiries (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot & Sanchez, 2014);

- questioning fixed daily routines and schedules (Nxumalo, Pacini-Ketchabaw, & Rowan, 2011);
- thinking with materiality in children's art encounters and provocations (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot & Sanchez, 2014);
- rethinking images of the child and educator (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2013);
- bringing settler colonialism, the environmental humanities and the posthumanities into conversation to rethink multispecies (child-animal) relations (Pacini-Ketchabaw, di Tomasso, & Nxumalo, 2014);
- centering settler colonialism, Indigenous relationalities and more-than-human socialities in early childhood nature pedagogies (Nxumalo, submitted (a, b), in press, accepted<sup>8</sup>; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, & Rowan, 2014). It is this area; in relation to questions of 'natural places', nature and nature pedagogies, that is the focus of this dissertation.

As the areas I worked in suggest, a central aspect of my role was unsettling and questioning taken-for-granted practices as well as their accompanying familiarities, normativities, and assumptions. The action research project in which I was a researcher-pedagogista-educator was intended to support 'quality' child care in innovative ways by taking inspiration from dynamic, politicized conceptions of quality and by centering critically reflective practices (Pacini-Ketchabaw, et al., 2014). However, this project cannot be interpreted in terms

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voiced ideas. In addition to the children's words and images, educators include their critical reflections and questions and they invite their colleagues, the children, and the children's families to contribute perspectives. (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2014).

<sup>8</sup> The citations referenced as Nxumalo, submitted-a; submitted-b; in press, and accepted correspond to manuscripts 1, 2 3, and 4 in this dissertation, respectively.

of measurable and easily determined outcomes. That is to say, as I discuss in manuscript 1, my role cannot be adequately explained through processes of providing educators with professional development or tools that could then be clearly linked to linear, progressive, and easily plotted change (see also Pacini-Ketchabaw and Nxumalo, 2013).

In manuscript 1, I have written about some of the specificities of my work with educators in supporting practices, as well as the contradictions, challenges and struggles of the researcher-pedagogista-educator relationship in which I was entangled. In that paper, I provide specific examples of encounters from this research project that trouble the notion of my role as an expert enacting measurable transformations or linear changes in educators' practices and thinking (also see more of my examples in Pacini-Ketchabaw and Nxumalo, 2013, 2014). For the purposes of this summary, I will briefly outline the processes I used to bring forward multiple perspectives.

I engaged in ongoing written and verbal dialogue with educators both during and after my pre-arranged weekly visits to the child care centres. These dialogues included documenting pedagogical encounters in the form of pedagogical narrations and raising critical questions on these encounters to educators. Educators also created and shared with me for feedback pedagogical narrations from experiences that I may not have been a part of in the child care centre. Part of this feedback included critical questions that emerged for me, suggestions for extending and deepening their inquiries in practice, and providing educators with related readings and accompanying questions in an effort to invite multiple perspectives. These readings were selected from pertinent work both within and beyond the early childhood field to bring practice into conversation with perspectives such as critical Indigenous, postcolonial, antiracist, queer, poststructural feminist and, posthumanist<sup>9</sup> theories. The readings that I provided to

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<sup>9</sup> I refer to posthumanist theories as a broad category to include new material feminist theories, more-than-human geographies, work from feminist science studies, and immanent philosophy (for example the work of Barad, 2007;

educators directly connected to questions that emerged from the centre visits, and raised political, pedagogical and theoretical issues that I wanted to bring to educators' attention, or that we were already thinking about together.

All of the educators from the different participant childcare centre settings also came together for monthly three-hour learning circles that I facilitated. As with the child care setting visits and discussions, the intent in these large monthly group discussions was again to deepen, complexify and critically engage with pedagogical inquiries. My role in these discussions was to encourage contestations, multiple critical theoretical and pedagogical perspectives and questions on the pedagogical encounters under discussion. Typically we engaged in a detailed collaborative critical reflection of a pedagogical narration from one of the settings, alongside readings that I had selected for the group to read beforehand. I intentionally selected readings for the learning circle discussions that brought forward contextualized perspectives to trouble developmental 'readings' of early childhood pedagogies. Euro-Western developmental psychology theories remain foundational to early childhood education practice, and an important aspect of my work was to seek ways to critically encounter, in collaboration with educators, the depoliticized and decontextualized understandings of practice that a predominantly developmental discourse brings (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2010, 2013; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2014).

The approaches I worked with towards creating interruptions in practice-as-usual, and the effects thereof, were multiple, emergent, and contingent. These approaches were much more messy, and uncertain than they may seem from what I have described thus far. As I discuss further in manuscript 1, my role in supporting and provoking educators towards contesting,

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Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Haraway, 2008; Lorimer 2012). I make references to particular perspectives within this category throughout the dissertation.

politicizing, and disrupting taken for granted understandings of childhood and early childhood practices was filled with “tensions, resonances, transformations, resistances, and complicities” (Haraway, 1988, p. 588). I worked with children alongside educators, while at the same time provoking, challenging, and questioning our practices, as well as our understandings of theory-practice relations – with varying and often unintended effects. I was in a constant state of embodied discomfort – always carrying with me the power relations inherent in my ‘researcher’ and ‘pedagogista’ roles, while simultaneously working to build and sustain trusting relationships that also had openings for critical questions and disruptions.

One consequence of the inherent tensions in my complex relationship with educators has been that the ways in which I have taken up moments in practice (as discussed in manuscript 1) have not necessarily mirrored the interruptive ways that I have taken them up in writing-with the ‘data’ afterwards (manuscripts 2, 3 and 4). For example, in a recent article I wrote about pedagogical encounters with a forest that I regularly visited with children and educators (Nxumalo, in press – manuscript 3 in this dissertation). In this article, the ‘data’ that I worked with were pedagogical narrations written by educators, my field notes and photographic images from these visits to the forest, as well as my own research on the messy colonial socio-material histories of this forest and Indigenous relationalities with the cedar trees in this forest. However, my practices - such as discussions with educators that were generated from and helped to generate this data - are not detailed in this article. In relation to unsettling forest pedagogies, these complexities-in-practice have taken a multitude of formations – with varying effects and unresolved tensions, which I discuss in manuscript 1.

### Entangled and implicated subjectivities

Importantly, as I illustrate in manuscripts 1 and 2, my role did not preclude questioning and critically encountering my own practices and situatedness within the pedagogical encounters; particularly in connection with the settler colonial relations that are the focus of this dissertation. Further to this, while I refer to myself, educators, and children in separate categories, there are no innocent ‘outsider’ relations implied here. My references to children and educators as separate categories, while perhaps facilitating the clarity of my descriptions of this work, also risk stabilizing some of the very colonizing relations and binaries that this work seeks to unsettle – centering the human all-knowing adult as separate from and above children. It is very important to me that I avoid re-enacting colonizing practices with educators and children that “teach that knowers are manipulators who have no reciprocal responsibilities to the things they manipulate” (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 88). It is my hope that my emphasis throughout this dissertation on the active participation of more-than-human worlds troubles the dichotomies of adult/child and researcher/participant, and gestures instead towards liminality and potential becomings<sup>10</sup> (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In other words, rather than transcending the messiness, I am inextricably entangled in these relations.

Foregrounding my own implicated situatedness within the encounters also necessitates a telling of the particularities of my positioning within colonialism as an Indigenous African and within settler colonialism as a black, female body - a racialized immigrant settler in Canada. As I discuss further in this dissertation (see manuscript 2), categories such as this belie the complexities of the connections between settler colonialism, gender and racialization, as well as how they come to matter in my everyday becomings. Within these complexities are structural and everyday violences, complicities, resistances, fluidities, estrangements, and relationalities.

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<sup>10</sup> Thank you to Dr. Hans Skott-Myhre for challenging me to complicate these dichotomies.

Drawing from critical Indigenous scholar Jodi Byrd (2011), Tuck, Guess, and Sultan (2014) point to some of the complexities of such categorizations - pointing out how the word ‘arrivants’, to refer to people who have come to the Americas through pastpresent histories of slavery and global imperialism,

... is a recognition of the ways in which arrivants both resist and participate as settlers in the historical project of settler colonialism. The word “arrivants” helps to highlight the complicity of all arrivants (including Black people) in Indigenous erasure and dispossession.... But “arrivants” may also conceal the unique positioning of Blackness in settler colonialism and the complicity of white people and nonwhite people (including Native people) in antiblackness (p. 4).

Within the always present, shifting racialized formations within which myself, children and educators are differentially and contingently located, my focus in this dissertation has been on grappling with possibilities for resistance to settler colonial relations.

### **Situating ontological and epistemological terrains**

The focus of the writing that comprises this dissertation emerged from my attempts to disrupt all-too-easy romanticized and decontextualized connections between children and nature as part of outdoor (forest) pedagogies (see Taylor, 2013 for a comprehensive treatise on the problematics and histories of this coupling between childhood and nature). An integral part of this disruption for me was to find ways to question, within the specifically situated settler colonial contexts of my work with children and educators, conceptions of “nature” as ‘pure’ and separated from the human. In other words, I wanted to find ways to foreground non-anthropocentric, intimate, inextricable and lively entanglements in place relations (Haraway,

2008; Martin, 2007; Watts, 2013). As I have already indicated, in manuscripts 1 and 2, I grapple with how my own situated practices of witnessing and a research methodology of *refiguring presences* attempted to work towards these disruptions. In manuscripts 3 and 4, working with data from selected child-educator place encounters, I engage with the potential of these disruptions for anti-colonial place relations, particularly with regards to the potentialities of attending to place encounters in ways that foreground Indigenous and more-than-human relations. Here I want to lay out the ways I have taken up and connected specific theoretical/onto-epistemological threads in relation to this focus on refiguring ‘natural’ place encounters in early childhood studies within the context of settler colonialism in what is now British Columbia, Canada. I discuss how these theoretical and onto-epistemological formations are carried through in the four manuscripts that comprise this dissertation by:

- situating my understandings of place, storied place, and place stories.
- working with Indigenous onto-epistemologies and posthumanist theories.

*Place, storied place, and place stories*

I would like to begin by stating that I engage with the concept of ‘place’ in several different ways in this dissertation. First and foremost, I engage with place as intrinsically storied, where “stories and meanings are not just layered over a pre-existing landscape...stories emerge from and impact upon the way in which places come to be” (van Doreen & Rose, 2012, p. 2). In this regard, I engage with place as storied to discuss specific Indigenous place relations. For example in manuscript 4, X'muzk'i'um is foregrounded as a storied place of knowledge, life, belonging, spirit, pedagogy, and ceremony for Musqueam peoples (Larry Grant; Musqueam elder, 2012). I engage place to discuss Indigenous cosmologies and relationalities with more-than-human others. I also describe specifically located places that I encounter with children and

educators – a mountain forest and a community garden. I also bring forward an understanding of place as a geopolitical location in relation to colonialism.

I also want to emphasize that while the focus of the manuscripts in this dissertation is on what are typically considered to belong to the realm of ‘nature’ pedagogies (gardens and forests, for example), I do not consider place to exclude urban or in-door environments and I work from an understanding of the “urban as storied Indigenous land” (Tuck, McKenzie, & McCoy, 2014, p. 8). In this regard, the urban and suburban childcare settings where I worked - including the buildings, the land, the pedagogical materials we worked with (such as paper and paint), the flows of water through pipes, all the human and more-than-human bodies in these places - are intimately entangled with settler colonial relations.

I make no claim to a complete telling through the stories contained in this work but, instead, as Tsing (2005) eloquently describes, I attempt to enact an intentional and critical seeking out of “odd connections rather than seamless generalizations, inclusive tables or comparative grids” (p. xi). In centering multiple place stories, I draw inspiration from recent work that has highlighted the importance of centering storied and more-than-human relationalities in understandings of place in settler colonial contexts. In these understandings, more-than-human bodies, specific stories, ontologies, histories, as well as humans are *all* lively and entangled participants in the shaping of place (Calderon, 2014; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Somerville, 2006; Tuck & McKenzie, 2014; Tuck, McKenzie, & McCoy, 2014). However, this active participation occurs within inequitable relations that create certain obscurances and erasures, such as colonial imaginaries that story place as a mute site awaiting settler inscription and property-making (Byrd, 2011; Cameron, 2011; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

These perspectives on place and place relationalities are particularly pertinent to my work as they suggest looking beyond innocent perspectives focused on children's place experiences and instead orienting towards explicitly politicized enactments of and dialogues with place. These dialogues with place critically encounter settler colonialism's ongoing erasures and foreground more-than-human worlds (Simpson, 2011). Importantly, politicizing place also necessitates creating interferences in colonial and neocolonial discourses that figure "humans outside of nature and thus implicitly posit that we are free to control our own destiny within a broader 'natural' world that is devoid of meaning, values, and ethics" (Rose et al., 2012, p. 3). In manuscripts 3 and 4, I take up this call to politicization through stories that bring contestations of place into view and that attend to nature and culture as inseparable (Haraway, 2008; see manuscripts 3 and 4 on forest and garden encounters respectively). I am particularly interested in asking how particular places (the places where my research is situated) might be known and experienced differently through stories that highlight marginalized Indigenous stories of place and attend to the vibrant more-than-human relationalities of place.

While stories that unsettle colonial relations with place are suggested here as an opening to different and unsettling relations to place, this research orientation is not immune to recent critiques of place-based pedagogies and methodologies. These critiques suggest that this work can act to re-inscribe settler connections to Indigenous land and situate non-Indigenous educators as the transmitters of Indigenous knowledges (Calderon, 2014; Korteweg & Russell, 2012; Tuck & McKenzie, 2014; Tuck, McKenzie, & McCoy, 2014). Smith (2013) asks important questions that interrupt the benignity of place stories: "Are there some stories that don't belong in research, stories we should not tell? Which ones? Why?" (para. 4). While staying with these tensions and the limitations of place stories, I nonetheless see them as holding potential to trouble taken-for

granted settler colonial relations and encounters in early childhood settings. I return later to the methodological implications of place stories.

*Indigenous knowledges and posthumanisms: fractures, resonances and potentialities*

An important aspect of how I enact a politicized place methodology is to purposefully bring together different worldviews and theories – particularly, perspectives from Indigenous knowledges and posthumanist theories. This complicated bringing together of theories and worldviews suggests neither a smooth reconciliation nor a making-into the same (Tuck, 2008). It does however signal a commitment towards responsible practices of creating interferences, shifting onto-epistemologies, and making partial connections (Haraway, 1992; Mol, 2014). Importantly, this bringing into conversation does not seek to minimize the incommensurable foundations of posthumanist and Indigenous perspectives. In other words, highlighting resonances between these perspectives does not imply that they both do not enact particular exclusions, not only of each other, but also of many other ways of knowing. As Povinelli (2014) notes, “any arrangement of existents/existence builds its own otherwise” yet these arrangements are not outside the influences of power (such as colonial power effects) and politics that influence the persistence, unity and dominance of certain arrangements (para. 4). For instance, many Indigenous ontologies enact very precise teachings<sup>11</sup> that are firmly rooted in particular places and bring forward different modes of subjectification than posthuman theorizations of human/more-than-human relations (see, for example, Braidotti, 2013).

Despite these incommensurabilities, I wanted to work with both of these often disparate knowledges and perspectives for a number of interconnected reasons. Firstly, a central focus of this dissertation is to center settler colonialism as integral to early childhood pedagogical

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<sup>11</sup> Thank you to Dr. Sandrina de Finney for helping me to articulate this very important point.

engagements with ‘natural’ places within the context of what is now British Columbia in Canada. This focus is of particular pertinence given the recent popularity of ‘nature-based’ place pedagogies in the early years (see Pacini-Ketchabaw (2013) and Taylor (2013) for recent critical perspectives on these pedagogies; also see manuscript 3 in this dissertation). Given my focus then, working with Indigenous perspectives was for me an integral and ethically necessary part of critically engaging with, politicizing, and seeking interruptions to dominant approaches to ‘nature’ pedagogies in early childhood settings within my current location on Coast Salish territories. Indigenous knowledges enabled me to situate particular pedagogical encounters within the colonial pastpresent and to interrupt what I experienced as absent-presences in our human- and Euro- centric pedagogical encounters with nature on stolen land. For instance, in manuscript 3, a paper that focuses on everyday forest encounters at the child care centers where I worked, I set a Stó:lo story of the red cedar alongside our everyday encounters with ancient red cedar tree stumps, and alongside settler colonial logging histories of this particular mountain forest. I presented this living cedar creation story to interrupt erasures of Indigenous histories, ontologies and epistemologies from this particular place and our everyday encounters therein. My intention was also to disrupt dominant understandings of the forest as a ‘wild’, empty, and unscribed space awaiting children’s discoveries. Further to this, when situated within the material-discursive relations of and affectivities enacted by the logged cedar tree stumps, this story brings into view ongoing colonial territorializations (Nxumalo, in press).

Working with these stories, as someone not indigenous to this place, creates many unresolved frictions that I continue to grapple with. For instance, is acknowledging the risks of working with Indigenous knowledges enough within ongoing settler colonialism? What might it mean for settler educators to encounter and tell such stories in places where the absences of

Indigenous children, families and educators are intimately connected with ongoing settler colonialism? Who can tell the stories of this place and the ‘more-than-human’ things in it? Is it possible to conceive of pedagogies of place that trouble ongoing settler colonialisms through histories and stories without appropriating and ‘museumifying’ Indigenous knowledges? How can children and educators respectfully learn from stories without co-opting them towards settler colonial emplacement and visualities (Tuck, McKenzie, & McCoy, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2014)? Who can ‘include’ Indigenous knowledges into settler colonial spaces? Does the very act of ‘inclusion’ reproduce/create marginalization and exclusions? How might ‘inclusion’ happen while avoiding representational, reified, appropriative, essentialist, and tokenizing colonial relationships? What are the tensions and ethical dilemmas of working with written Indigenous stories as opposed to the living knowledges that reside in Indigenous communities as well as the resultant frictions that this alternative also presents<sup>12</sup>? Might my attempts to (re)story educators’ and children’s place relations inadvertently “obscure the fact of Indigenous erasure and resilient, radical relationship to that selfsame land” (Tuck, Guess, & Sultan, 2014, p. 9)? I see my work as neither transcending nor neatly resolving all of these issues and the messy colonial relations in which I, as well as the children and educators, are immersed and implicated. Nonetheless, it is important to pay careful attention to the ethical dilemmas that these questions bring. For instance in manuscript 3, I explain how the sacred Stó:lō Nation cedar creation story is presented neither as analytic ‘data’ nor as a knowable, complete representation. The story enacts relational, more-than-human, interruptive and complicating knowledge-making to our situated encounters with ancient cedar tree stumps. This story interferes with innocent readings of child-educator-forest encounters.

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<sup>12</sup> Thank you to Dr. Sandrina de Finney for pointing me towards this important question.

Living and staying with unresolved divergences and questions, I have attempted to avoid asking a stance that I can ever fully ‘know’ and define these knowledges; as this ‘knowability’ by others can be seen as a colonizing practice (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). I do not view these lived and living knowledges as fully describable, particularly writing within the limits of English and writing from my own situated meaning-making of these stories predominantly from traced audio, video and written text. Resisting a tendency towards analysis and explanation and the potentially inscriptive and colonizing effects thereof, I have presented these particular situated place stories without analysis - as knowledge-making that speaks for itself.

As I explain in manuscript 2, I also worked with Indigenous knowledges as a part of my methodology so as to politicize, question and perhaps shift what typically counts as knowledge both in academic research and in pedagogical practices, where Indigenous ways of knowing and relating to place and the more-than-human relations within it may not be considered as central to ethical ways of knowing and being. In my attempts to interrupt the privileged position of Eurocentric academic theoretical realms, I draw inspiration from critical Indigenous scholars who call for the centering of marginalized or muted perspectives not considered “academic”. For instance, they foreground Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies using methods such as stories, trickster figures, and poetics amongst many other approaches (for example; Cole, 2006; Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010; Elabor-Idemudia, 2002). Alongside calls for the creation of politicized, lived, and embodied approaches to research that unsettle hegemonies of Eurocentric ways of knowing and becoming in academic spaces, there are also several critiques of bringing Indigenous knowledges into academic spaces. For instance, Indigenous scholar Sarah Hunt (2014a, b) notes the tensions of bringing such knowledge into the geographic and epistemological hegemonies of academia where few Indigenous people locate their work.

In addition to working with place-specific Indigenous knowledges, I have also referenced Indigenous knowledges throughout this dissertation in a general sense when highlighting the vibrancy of the more-than-human, and the entanglements of human/more-than-human relations in everyday place encounters. I have referenced Indigenous relationalities with intention as making meaning of, knowing and becoming with place and the more-than-human in ways that disrupt binaries such as such as subject/object and human/non-human (see manuscripts 1, 2 and 3). This is because an intrinsic part of my work is attention to more-than-human vibrancies, in particular to the sociomaterial 'force' of things and events. I attend to collisions of matter and meaning in everyday practice in ways that seek connections that might appear, at first, 'outside of' or unconnected to a particular encounter or even outside of early childhood practice. As I discuss in manuscript 2, referring to Indigenous knowledges in general terms is intended neither to essentialize these knowledges, nor to minimize their specificities, differences, dynamisms and complexities. On the contrary, I also see potentialities in creating openings for resonances and connections between differently located Indigenous knowledges - as I discuss further below.

Before I engage with some of the resonances between differently located Indigenous knowledges, I want to situate my use of these knowledges within my own learnings as an Indigenous (now primarily dispersed in different countries in Southern Africa including what is now Swaziland, South Africa and Zimbabwe) Ndwandwe clan member. My move to draw on Indigenous knowledges in relation to their resonances with posthumanist theories stems from what I see as strong connections with my own learnings from Ndwandwe clan teachings on my relatedness with my ancestors and place relations as inseparable presences in my life, despite my estrangement and displacement from my ancestral home. The praise narratives (*tinanatelo*) of my clan tell of our relationships to specific ancestral places, and tell our interconnected land,

human, and more-than-human creation stories. These narratives also tell our genealogies and histories, including shifting pastpresent place relations. Many Indigenous knowledges are rooted in similar relationalities, where human and more-than-human relationships are situated within the particularities of place (Driskill, Finley, Gilley, & Morgensen, 2011). Indigenous scholar Cajete (2000) captures this relationalities as an understanding “that all entities of nature – plants, animals, stones, trees, mountains, rivers, lakes and a host of other living entities – embod[y] relationships that must be honored” (p. 178).

Many Indigenous peoples in what is now Canada embody relationality such that family is not limited to the human, but encompasses an entire cosmology - ancestors, future generations, spiritual beings, animal and plant life. These knowledges teach entangled and reciprocal relations with the earth (Watts, 2013). For example, in Stó:lō First Nations teachings, “*shxwelí* - spirit or life force” inhabits both human and more-than-human life. *Shxwelí* inhabits their territories as living ancestral spirits in such as in the form of land, plant, and animal life, creating an inseparable mutuality (Stó:lō Nation, 2003, p. 1). These teachings also resonate with many African ontologies, where connectedness with more-than-human others is central to community as “the living, the unborn, the dead, and nature as a whole” (Wangoola, 2000, p. 271). For example, *Ubuntu* and *Ukama*, expressed in the Siswati (Swaziland) and *Shona* (Zimbabwe), refer to understandings of existence human relatedness within society and with the entire universe, all aspects of which are understood as dynamic and as creating effects on the other (Le Grange, 2012a). These dynamic and mutual effects can be described as life forces that place humanity in intrinsically dynamic and ethical ontological relationships with other more-than-human worlds that are active participants in one’s life (Le Grange, 2012a). These forces include the Creator, one’s ancestors, the elders, family, community, and more-than-human others such as

the land and its crops, waters, skies, animals. Together they form active influences and sensed presence in one's everyday life, in constituting the self and indeed in sustaining life. South African scholar Le Grange (2012b) has recently discussed how *ubuntu/ukama* amongst African peoples has been eroded by the multiple ongoing effects of colonialism, neocolonialism, capitalism and enlightenment humanism. In another example, Aboriginal worldviews in what is now Australia centre "relatedness with not just people, but...Ancestral country, and the animals, plants, skies, waterways" (Martin, 2007, p. 20). With this inextricable interdependence and interconnectedness comes a responsibility to live in ethical relationality with more-than-human others, where humans are not figured in hierarchical order in relation to others (Martin, 2007). In these understandings, human life involves an ongoing immersion in different expressions and experiences of reciprocal relatedness. In other words, "knowing your stories of relatedness...living your stories of relatedness" are central ways of being and becoming in the world (Martin, 2008, n.p).

Taken together, this brief discussion illustrates that differently located Indigenous onto-epistemologies, which have existed for millennia, figure ethical relationality with the more-than-human as foundational to becoming with the world – teachings that are of critical importance within the current precarious times of planetary destruction. Consequently, as I read posthumanist theories alongside my work with children and educators, I found that they were not enough to critically and productively encounter more-than-human worlds as entangled participants in place relations. At the same time, I have found that I also need posthumanist theories to help me think-with and through the complexities of my pedagogical and research practices. These perspectives helped me to situate particular multispecies assemblages as active participants within social and political forces, and helped me to critically engage with the ways

in which the material-discursive becomings of the more-than-human world might interrupt anthropocentric relations (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Haraway, 2008; Tsing, 2013). I have also found that together with Indigenous knowledges and situated settler colonial histories, selected understandings and concepts from the posthumanities (including more-than-human geographies, feminist science studies, immanent philosophy, and the environmental humanities) helped me to navigate the multiple connections, complexities and intricacies that have emerged in everyday place encounters in my work with educators and children. These perspectives allowed me to theorize-with the everyday and mundane as a site of micropolitics, with an emphasis on the multiple more-than-human worlds that assembled therein. These multiplicities included epistemologies, ontologies, biologies, political formations, materialities, and discursivities that emerged from our (children's, educators', and mine) embodied encounters with 'natural' places, as detailed in this dissertation.

### **Data assemblages and interruptions**

In this section, I begin by outlining the types of data that I have accumulated over the past three years. I begin with how I encountered data and how I selected data to work with. Together with my focus on anti-colonialism grounded in Indigenous knowledges and more-than-human relationalities, this data was integral in coming to a methodology of refiguring presences. Since I give a detailed description of the crafting of my methodology of refiguring presences in manuscript 2 of this dissertation, in this section I will only briefly introduce this methodology, with a focus on methodological connections between everyday place encounters (data), place stories and more-than-human entanglements.

I have gathered various forms of what I would call 'conventional data' over these past three years. The data that I have worked with in this dissertation include pedagogical narrations

(prepared both separately and in collaboration with participant educators), field notes, photographic images and video from child care setting visits and discussions, and recordings and notes from monthly learning circle discussions with participant educators. However, there are also several affective more-than-human others (things/objects, plants, animals) that have materialized and assembled as ‘data’<sup>13</sup>. These active participants are entangled within theoretical and ontological orientations committed to politicizing everyday place encounters and committed to centering the more-than-human. In particular, these emergent data assemblages were not only the mountain, mountain forest, cedar tree stumps, and the community garden that I have alluded to previously, but also particularities of several entities such as raccoons, deer, rotting tree hollows, soil-earthworms, forest-garden vegetables, a forest trail, garden waste assemblages, and a fence separating the garden from the forest. These more-than-human bodies, and many others, are active participants as data that invited particular place relations for myself, children and educators. This data resonated with me during the encounters, as I wrote pedagogical narrations of these encounters to share with educators and families, as I sat with these narrations-notes-images-videos (the ‘conventional’ data) that remained as traces of the encounters, and as I made connections with multiple theoretical and ontological perspectives.

Grounded in theoretical and ontological commitments to interrupting colonizing and anthropocentric place relations, I wanted to find ways to connect cumulative material-discursive resonances and dissonances in my data with place stories, living knowledges, and settler colonial past-present histories. I wanted to make these connections between data, stories, knowledges and past-present colonial histories in ways that would bring unsettling, non-anthropocentric perspectives to everyday pedagogical encounters. I reiterate here that I do not present Indigenous

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<sup>13</sup> I use single quotation marks here to point to my discomfort with what I sense as a somewhat reductive and disembodied word [data] to describe a vibrant more-than-human world.

place stories and Indigenous knowledges as ‘data’, but instead as constitutive components of my interruptive and micropolitical anti-colonial intentionality. As I elaborate in manuscript 2, where I discuss my specific methods, I wanted to create connections between ‘data’, ‘theory’, ‘past present histories’, and ‘stories’ in ways that gestured towards the situatedness (Haraway, 1988) of my research practices. In particular, I wanted to situate my research practices as intimately entangled with and productive of the politics, materialities, (power) relations, knowledges/meanings and socialities that they engage with, make visible, and enact (Haraway, 1988; Massumi, 2002; Mol, 2002). I wanted to find a way through my writing, to ‘make sense of’, respond-to, and stay-with the troubles (Haraway, 1991) that these encounters brought. Taken together, these desires and the constitutive data led me towards a methodology of refiguring presences. As I explain further in manuscript 2, refiguring presences gestures towards rethinking, politicizing, complicating, and unsettling what is considered present in everyday place encounters in early childhood pedagogies within settler colonialism.

In selecting the everyday moments that I worked with in the articles that comprise this dissertation, I purposefully picked everyday moments with children, educators and, importantly, with more-than-human others that affected me and left me feeling troubled and unsettled; moments where I questioned the seeming innocence and everydayness normalization of the encounters and wondered about their connections to unquestioned, silent and invisible (yet unintended) complicities in settler colonialism. These were also moments where I found myself uncertain how to respond to what was happening, where I wondered about the human and more-than-human active participants in these encounters, and where, looking back, I found that the usual ‘interruptions’ that I used in my work with educators – asking critical questions, sending critical readings, making suggestions for different types of relations - didn’t ‘work’, were met

with resistance, or were taken up in ways that generated further discomfort and uncertainty for me. These are also moments where I struggled with the multiplicities of my role as a researcher, educator and pedagoga, as well as the responses they suggested. I elaborate on some of my attempted interruptions in practice in manuscript 1 where, working with the figuration of witnessing (Haraway, 1997, Hunt, 2014b, Tarpley, 1995), I describe some of my practices with educators and children.

### **Contributions and challenges**

In this section I discuss contributions of this work to early childhood studies. I also elaborate on the contributions and challenges of this work as an anti-colonial response.

#### *Contributions to early childhood studies*

I situate this dissertation as contributing to recent work in early childhood studies that has focused on children's relations with more-than-human worlds towards unsettling taken for granted nature pedagogies within the context of settler colonialism. In particular my work resonates with recent efforts to displace the innocence of childhood and childhood pedagogies, and to engage with the entanglements of material and discursive worlds through Indigenous onto-epistemologies and posthumanist theories. Here I note a few key inspirational examples to illustrate their resonances with my current work. Affrica Taylor (2011; 2013), working in the context of settler colonial Australia, has drawn on more-than-human geographies to question what counts as nature and in so doing disrupts dominant romantic views of the child as belonging in nature. Also in Australia, Margaret Somerville (2013) works with 'thinking through Country' as an Aboriginal onto-epistemology that disrupts nature/culture binaries in young children's place learning. In Aotearoa, New Zealand, Jenny Ritchie (2012) has written on the counter-colonial and ecological possibilities of Indigenous epistemologies in early childhood settings. In

British Columbia, Canada, Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw (2013) has written about the frictions of early childhood forest pedagogies within settler colonialism.

My specific contribution to this growing body of work within early childhood studies is the crafting and enactment of a situated methodological approach that brings into conversation, seeks intersections, and highlights tensions between child-educator place encounters, Indigenous knowledges, place stories and posthumanist theories. This dissertation is a unique contribution to possibilities for apprehending and refiguring what is considered present within the complexities of everyday settler colonial early childhood place encounters.

Importantly, while the intent of this dissertation is not to develop a series of how-tos in relation to nature pedagogies in early childhood, I also believe that it contributes by creating openings for educators to begin difficult conversations and ask different types of questions. Perhaps educators in their particular contexts might ask, what might it mean to attend to their accountabilities to anti-colonial and more-than-human relations? What might it mean to critically consider the contention that accountability is an ethical choice enacted in encountering the world through mutually transformative encounters with more-than-human others, not only through scientific learning and naming (Haraway, 2006)? What alternate understandings might tracing colonization in early childhood places through more-than-human materialities open up – where land/place, plants, animals, and more are active, contingent and situated witnesses? What new stories and relations might emerge from pedagogical place encounters when both the stories and the ‘storytellers’ are not limited to the human? What might it mean to create interruptions by rethinking what stories are always already active presences? What possibilities might emerge for (re)storying young children’s place encounters in ways that disrupt, destabilize, and subvert taken for granted settler colonial/master narratives of ‘knowing’ a place? What might come into

view from apprehending child-educator place encounters as contested sites of asymmetric power relations?

I believe that such questions create possibilities for being on the lookout for more ethical relationalities in early childhood pedagogies. Here an immanent ethics centers responsibility and accountability for multiple relations within which we are entangled and always becoming (Barad, 2012; Deleuze & Guattari, 1991; Martin, 2007). This perspective does not present educators with already determined ‘solutions’ for the messiness in which we (humans and more-than-humans) are all entangled. On the other hand, educators might begin to view ethical place relations as emerging from an entangled immanent immersion within events and encounters, rather than from a transcendental pre-determined position (Deleuze & Guattari, 1991). Here ethics is a ‘doing’ that is enacted through certain pedagogical practices, such as those emerging from situated practices of witnessing (see manuscript 1). Such practices grapple with the tenuous knots that connect encounters to colonialism and are inseparable from making explicit situatedness within settler colonial relations (see manuscripts 1 and 2). Ethics as accountability to multiple relations might be seen as enacted through early childhood practices that open to both anti-colonial and non-anthropocentric perspectives. Witnessing and refiguring presences might be seen as becoming ethical through particular acts – acts that involve deciding which stories-encounters-histories to make visible, questioning whose knowledge counts, and which pastpresent inhabitants of place matter.

*Anti-colonial resonances, possibilities, and challenges*

I view all of the research and pedagogical orientations and questions that this dissertation experiments with and generates as having cumulative anti-colonial resonances. That is to say, (re)storying place encounters through human/more-than-human relations, settler colonial

histories, and Indigenous knowledges enacts a micropolitics of anti-colonial resonances. From my perspective, these anti-colonial resonances emerge from expanding possibilities for challenging and bringing into question situated settler colonial relations and “colonial logic” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012, p. 49) in everyday place encounters; possibilities that may not necessarily be known in advance.

Earlier in this summary, I discussed the limitations of my work in connection with working with written Indigenous knowledges within the context of ongoing settler colonialism. Further to this, I want to emphasize that this work is not intended to enact a “metaphorization of decolonization” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 1). Decolonization requires and is led by Indigenous peoples, knowledges and ontologies (Tuhiwai Smith, 2013; Morgensen, 2014). However, there are no formal human collaborators in the research project that are Indigenous to the particular place in which my work was situated. I also resonate with the perspectives of critical Indigenous scholars who state that decolonization is not possible while violations and restrictions of Indigenous sovereignty remain an ongoing settler colonial formation through dispossession of Indigenous peoples (see for example Byrd, 2011; Simpson, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Such displacements remain in place in the Coast Salish territories where my research was conducted where there are no Indigenous educators and children in the settings in which I worked. While underlining these important limitations, I take seriously the contention that inheriting colonial histories is a task demanding accountable responses from all (Haraway, 2011). The writing that I have undertaken in this dissertation is but one such response towards situating early childhood studies within these pastpresent histories and towards unsettling settler colonial relations in early childhood pedagogies.

## Organization of dissertation

This dissertation is organized into four manuscripts submitted for publication to peer-reviewed sources. Because this dissertation consists of individual stand-alone manuscripts that were structured to be read individually (rather than as part of a grouping of chapters), some of the ideas that I work with are addressed in more than one paper. In manuscript 1 (Nxumalo, submitted-a), I trace the complexities of my role as a pedagogista-educator-researcher, working with figurations of witnessing, to situate this role as an implicated presence within the pedagogical practices from which this dissertation is assembled. In manuscript 2 (Nxumalo, submitted-b), I articulate *refiguring presences* as an anti-colonial methodological orientation for researching the intricacies of everyday place encounters in early childhood settings. In manuscript 3 (Nxumalo, in press), I experiment with refiguring presences through a series of interruptive stories that attend to Indigenous relationalities, human/non-human entanglements and the settler colonial tensions that come together in the making of a mountain forest that I regularly visited with children and educators. In manuscript 4 (Nxumalo, accepted), I experiment with refiguring presences to pay attention to everyday encounters with a community garden. I experiment with orientations that bring attention to messy historical relations, and that attend to the vitality and assemblages of specific plant and animal worlds. I discuss the interruptive effects of this noticing in generating politicized dialogues with this place, where more-than-human relationalities disrupt and subvert colonial impositions of control, belonging and order.

This dissertation is focused on unsettling everyday encounters with ‘natural’ places within the context of my work with children and educators in British Columbia, Canada. The place learnings that opened this dissertation situate my commitment to assembling and creating conversations between disparate and, at times, incommensurate knowledges.

## **MANUSCRIPT 1: Unsettled pedagogical-research encounters: Storying practices of witnessing**

### **Abstract**

This paper proposes the figuration of the modest witness (Haraway, 1997) and accompanying specificities of witnessing (Haraway, 1997, Hunt, 2014, Tarpley, 1995) as a way of storying my role as a researcher, pedagogista and early childhood educator. I propose situated qualities and performative acts of witnessing as resonant with my immersion in the everyday lives of educators and children. My particular orientation is towards attempts at enacting interferences in connections to settler colonial relations and exclusively child-centered orientations in everyday pedagogical encounters. Through a critically descriptive account of small stories, I experiment with embodying witnessing as an implicated, responsive, and messy practice. While I bring no clear resolution of the questions that this work has brought to practice, I offer it as a tentative experimentation in interfering with everyday colonial and anthropocentric occlusions in early childhood pedagogies.

### **Peer-review manuscript submitted for publication:**

Nxumalo, F. (submitted). Unsettled pedagogical-research encounters: Storying practices of witnessing. *Canadian Children*.

## **Preface**

*My work in early childhood studies began with a focus on countering racialization in young children, inspired by my own experiences as a young child spending time in an apartheid South Africa, from experiences with my own children in Canada navigating their racialized subjectivities, and from encounters with racialization in my work as an early childhood educator. I have become most interested in seeking anti-racist possibilities in those moments when racialization emerges in unpredictable everyday moments; where I have not known how to respond in the moment, where I have found that what might be happening might not be noticed and needs closer attention and further consideration. For example, my then-four year old African-Asian daughter drew a self-portrait as a blonde blue-eyed Rapunzel. The affectivities, conversations and encounters that this seemingly mundane event prompted for myself, children, and fellow early childhood educators led me towards thinking through and responding to racialization as material-discursive encounters. This perspective necessitated a consideration of the effects of the assembled human and more-than-bodies in each moment (for discussions of these events, see Nxumalo, 2010, 2011, 2012; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2010; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, & Rowan, 2011).*

*More recently, my work has turned towards a focus on critical considerations of settler colonialism within early childhood pedagogies - influenced by encountering and beginning to grapple with my own complex complicit locations and subjectivities within settler colonialism as a racialized immigrant to Canada, as well as by my encounters with written Indigenous knowledges in the context of Turtle Island (North America), critical Indigenous theory, and work in the environmental humanities and posthumanities. At the same time, my pedagogical work with children and educators has increasingly focused on their interests in engagements with 'natural' outdoor settings.*

*Taken together, these paths have provoked and inspired my efforts to think through and seek possibilities for critically apprehending those colonialisms that, like my previous encounters with racialization, emerge and come to matter within everyday encounters; yet, often remain unnoticed. My current work with educators and children involves experimenting with possibilities for bringing into view and grappling with these encounters in practice.*

## **Introduction**

For the past three years, I have been immersed in the everyday classroom life of early childhood educators and young children in three group childcare settings (each licensed for 25 preschool aged children) located in Greater Vancouver; spending several hours a week during the entire academic year in the centres and three hours a month in group discussions with the educators. As a researcher, I gathered various forms of data such as video, photography, field notes, and audio recordings of everyday life in the centre. As a pedagogista, my role included working with educators to support critically reflective practices. As an early childhood educator, I also worked alongside the educators, providing pedagogical support with children. While I have described these roles separately, they are not mutually exclusive; they are entangled together. This paper aims to engage with the complexities of my entangled roles working alongside young children and early childhood educators.

My work at this group childcare settings built upon a mountain forest on unceded Coast Salish territories in British Columbia (BC) has been part of an ongoing initiative to support communities of early childhood educators in working with multiple perspectives to question, contextualize, and politicize dominant understandings underpinning everyday practices; and to begin to consider what different practices, perspectives, and responses might be provoked. My attempts at bringing multiple and politicized perspectives to practice are situated within a problematic context in early childhood education, where developmentalism is the foundation of training in the profession (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot & Sanchez, 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2013, 2014). As Pacini-Ketchabaw (2008) notes, developmental psychology as a dominant discourse, “has taken the position of ‘natural’ knowledge” (p. 39) in the field, with little critical attention to how it is entangled in colonizing histories and to the

inequitable structuring impacts on children that are outside its normative formations. My role arose out of an impetus to bring into question inequitable enactments of developmentalism and accompanying governing discourses of ‘appropriate practice’, objectivity, and neutrality. This involved historicizing and politicizing particular practices underpinned by developmentalism, such as the all too common, taken-for-granted, and singular focus on the individual child’s progressive learning and meaning-making (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al, 2014).

In crafting what is a necessarily partial account of my work, I select everyday situated stories drawn from my practices. I focus, in particular, on my attempts at making visible and unsettling connections to settler colonialism (Nxumalo, accepted, in press, submitted) in everyday pedagogical encounters. More specifically, in confluence with the childcare centres’ specific location atop a mountain surrounded by a forest, the forest and the more-than-human life within it became one of the central aspects of both children’s and educators’ pedagogical interest and focus. As this emerged as a pedagogical focus, I began to experiment with different possibilities for complexifying our engagements with this mountain forest.

I narrate the complexities of my role through a series of visual and textual stories - situated accounts that attempt to move away from a simplistic self-positioning as leader of changes in educators on a linear path towards critically reflective pedagogies. Instead, I highlight my work as filled with more questions than answers for both the educators and myself. For me, this work has been filled with failures and unresolved questions, as well as hopeful potentialities. In this paper, I enact practices of storying specific illustrative encounters that left me questioning my own implicatedness and responses; yet also left me hopeful that our emergent mutual uncertainties, resistances, and interruptions of settler colonialism’s invisibility had created

fissures - openings towards hopeful possibilities, albeit without the closure of final and fixed resolutions.

I position my work with educators not as an attempt to systematically analyze my role, but rather to “redescribe something so that it becomes thicker than it first seems” (Haraway & Goodeve, 2000, p. 108). I emphasize description, rather than definitive interpretations, as a gesture towards a political ontology that seeks to notice the multiplicities present in and enacted through different everyday practices (Mol, 2002; Tsing, 2011). This is resonant with what Viveiros de Castro, Pederson and Holbraad (2014) describe as “a technology of description...designed in the optimistic (non-skeptical) hope of making the otherwise visible” (para 5). To help me do this, alongside performative stories and images from my research-practice, I place intentions, effects, and theoretical aspects of figurations of the modest witness (Haraway, 1997) and witnessing (Haraway, 1997, Hunt, 2014, Tarpley, 1995) that resonate with my work. Working with the contention that practices of figuration do not simply reflect reality, but “‘turn’ what they figure” (Timeto, 2011, p. 161), my descriptive accounts resonate with the contradictions, leakages, resistances, and hopeful potentialities that emerged in practice. I do not enact figurations to ‘tidy up’ and cleanse my practices and the tensions there-in. On the contrary, I work with the contention that a “figuration is no protection from disorder” as it works within and produces places of doubt, a lack of clarity, and confusion (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 281).

In taking this story-telling approach, I also draw inspiration from scholars in the environmental humanities who argue for the importance of stories that are resonant with the damaged worlds we currently live<sup>14</sup> in, that entangle us in small details, and that take up creative

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<sup>14</sup> There are numerous ongoing debates surrounding the epoch of the Anthropocene, and the accompanying evidence that suggests that we are inhabiting a planet increasingly (and in many cases irreversibly) damaged by human actions. Amidst these debates, there is a growing body of work in the Indigenous and environmental humanities that has highlighted the necessity for current and future generations to learn to live in less destructive and more ethical

approaches towards noticing our entangled relations in a world where humans are not the only actors (Haraway, 2014; Tsing, 2014; van Dooren, 2014). As Deborah Bird Rose (2014) says, “the stories we need now are not the big heroic ones, but rather smaller stories that help us rethink our big questions in richer veins” (para 7). In this regard, I attend to everyday encounters that enmesh educators, children, and myself in tenuous relationalities with certain places within a settler colonial context.

In what follows, I provide an introduction to the concept of figuration, the figure of the modest witness, and its animation by acts of witnessing. In the remainder of the article, I situate my role within resonant qualities of witnessing - highlighting stories that attend to some of the questions, tensions, struggles and hopeful possibilities that have emerged in my work.

### **Why qualities of figuration and practices of witnessing?**

I take my understanding of figuration from Donna Haraway (1988, 1997, 2004) who has brought us revolutionary figures like the modest witness, cyborg, Female Man, and oncomouse. An important aspect of putting figurations into motion is that it does not seek to reveal a singular, unmediated truth, but is located within politically oriented contingencies, contestations, and contradictions. Figuration then seems particularly attuned to entering into the inescapable messiness of my work with children and educators, in particular in making visible everyday settler colonial relations.

The concept and practice of figuration, in centering more-than-human subjectivities and in its performativity (Haraway, 1997), is also useful for enacting a storying of my work in ways that interrupt a linear human-centered account, while at the same time highlighting my own complicit situatedness in what I describe. As a form of situated knowledge making, figuration precludes an

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ways with more-than-human life (Cole, 2006; Haraway, 2008; Lorimer, 2012; Rose & van Dooren, 2011; Tuck & McKenzie, 2014).

innocent location (Haraway, 1988, 1997) as I describe my role through specific encounters. Figuration also helps me to make meaning of my work with children and educators in ways that shift away familiar modes of explanation and interpretation. Haraway (2004) terms this normative way of knowing as modes of “‘normal’ rhetorics of systematic critical analysis...[that]...repeat and sustain our entrapment in the stories of established disorders” (p. 47). The specific figuration that I experiment with is to inhabit my role through the figure of the modest witness. I do this by describing this role as particular performativities and interferences of modest witnessing, namely mapping contested worlds, enacting performative images, attuning to place specificities, living with the aporias and fissures of immanent practices, and becoming-with more than human worldings. These ways of inhabiting my role through witnessing are not discrete categories; they overlap, intersect with, and are propagative of each other. For instance, I experimented with images in my practice as a way to enact multiple interferences such as to create an attunement to place specificities, and to bring attention to more-than-human relationalities.

Briefly stated, the modest witness is a figure that interrupts knowledges as fact-making determined through neutral, disembodied perspectives from nowhere (Haraway, 1997). Rather than claiming to see from nowhere, figures such as the modest witness perform and orient towards ways of seeing that are marked by contradiction, multiplicity, and contingency (Haraway, 1988, p. 585). Through the figure of the modest witness, Haraway (1997) transforms witnessing into an active act of “seeing; attesting; standing publicly accountable for, and [becoming]...vulnerable to, one’s visions and representations” (p. 267). Accordingly, I find the figure of the modest witness useful as an epistemological and ontological perspective from which to foreground a telling, or witnessing, of my role working alongside with children and

educators, whereby I do not sit outside of that which I narrate, where I am not the sole narrator of these stories, and where many contradictory, unsettling and unresolved questions are thrown up.

This understanding of witnessing as firmly situating my own embodied presence, perspectives and practices as non-innocent also resonates with Indigenous scholar Sarah Hunt's (2014) crafting of a practice of *Kwagiulth* witnessing. She situates witnessing within the context of settler colonial violence as that which makes visible what might be otherwise disregarded or marginalized, but with a responsibility to the power relations inherent in acting as a witness and an understanding of witnessing as much more than passively hearing, observing or seeing. She describes *Kwagiulth* witnessing as enacting contextualized and embodied relational knowledge making that is "inherently bound up in relations based on responsibility" (p. 39).

I also see resonances, in both Haraway's (1997) and Hunt's (2014) accounts of witnessing, with the African-American tradition of testifying; a gathering to bear witness to difficulties and injustices that might otherwise go unnoticed by the dominant society, that is at the same time a relational affirmation with the gathered witnesses' hope in the face of injustices (Tarpley, 1995). I see resonances here with my work in bringing focused attention to settler colonial relations as an embedded witness, while at the same time seeking out hopeful and affirmative possibilities. As Tarpley (1995) further explains, testifying, in these understandings, means to

to *bear witness*, to bring forth, to claim and proclaim oneself as an intrinsic part of the world. The act of testifying or giving testimony has deep roots in African American history, reaching back to slavery (and before), to the places our ancestors created ... where they opened themselves up to one another, showed their scars, spoke of their day-to-day life... Testifying... has also performed the function of providing a means by which the slave could make herself visible, in a society which had rendered her invisible; by which she

could explore the sound of her own voice when she had been rendered silent. (Tarpley, 1995, pp. 2-3, emphasis added)

Bringing together<sup>15</sup> these multiple understandings of testifying and witnessing, I experiment with the inventive and active concept of *witnessing* as a situated, messy, implicated, active and entangled ‘seeing’, where the ‘witnessed’ and the ‘witnesses’ are not limited to human story-tellers; and, where the self-invisibility and innocence of witnesses is not possible (Chilisa, 2011; Haraway, 1997; Hunt, 2014; Tarpley, 1995). In the remainder of the paper, I put the possibilities enacted by the modest witness and witnessing to work as a way to situate and story my practices with children and educators.

### **Mapping contested worlds**

Acts of figuration such as witnessing are creative ways of mapping relations of knowledge, practice, and place in ways that counter monolithic views of the world and engage with power relations (Haraway, 1997). Figurations enact simultaneously material and semiotic interferences. As Ahmed (2014), puts it: “If figures mean; they matter. If figures matter; they mean... When figures are exercised, they move; and we are moved by them” (p. 17). Following these understandings of witnessing as figuration (Haraway, 1997), I story an illustrative example of my work with children and educators as enacting material, literal and metaphorical mappings of contested territories, and the contradictions thrown up by these encounters.

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<sup>15</sup> Bringing together Haraway’s modest witness (1997), Hunt’s (2014) methodology of *Kwagiulth* witnessing, and the African American tradition of testifying (for example, Tarpley, 1995) is not without frictions and my intent is not to erase their incommensurabilities. These concepts are not intended to ‘speak’ in the same way to the same people. For instance they have emerged from different specificities: from a need to affirm humanity and spirituality in the face of the dehumanizing violence of slavery in North America (Tarpley, 1995); as a methodology to witness stories of settler colonial violence against Indigenous peoples in British Columbia (Hunt, 2014); and, as a feminist posthumanist resistance to claims to impartial unlocated objectivity (typically enacted by white males) in Euro-Western scientific research practices (Haraway, 1997). Nonetheless, I see potential in bringing them together as practices that position witnessing as relational, responsive, hopeful and implicated practices; within which I can locate my own practices. I am also committed to finding ways in my citation and knowledge making practices to unsettle Eurocentrism in the academy.

*Thinking with Water*

In one childcare centre, we have been working on an inquiry with children on thinking with water for several months. Educators have been experimenting with possibilities for encountering water with children in ways that engage with water's liveliness and that move away from 'ways of seeing' water solely as a resource. For instance, I share with educators the idea of thinking of our work with children as "re-storying waters", drawing inspiration from Vancouver poet Rita Wong (2011) who challenges us to think with water in ways beyond objectification and commodification, and suggests instead to think-with water in ways that are creatively inspired, and focus on ethics and multiple relationalities. The children have also become interested in encounters with 'watery places' during walks around the childcare centre and in the nearby surrounding forest. I share with educators a local waterways map that I have come across and ask educators if they think it might be of interest for children to experiment with creatively mapping 'watery places'. Below are excerpts from our email correspondence intermingled with pedagogical encounters at the centre:

*[Educator]: I think it will be interesting to draw a water map of [the childcare setting and the campus]. I wonder what children know about water, where it is, and how they are connected...I think this exploration will give our children opportunity to reflect on their image of water and relate to their everyday lives at [the childcare centre]. It will also give educators a chance to see where our children are with their relationship with water.*

*[Fikile]: I think 'mapping watery relations to place' has really interesting possibilities – Cecilia Chen (2010, 2013) has interesting ideas in there that we could think with further. I*

*resonate with her idea of creating shifts away from mapping as simply a neutral representational practice and instead seek a “generative approach to mapping, [where] we may shift topographic practices away from efforts to claim territory and to fix water as abstract resource, and towards collectively authored place-making practices that will help us to thoughtfully negotiate our relations with each other and with the environment” (2010, np). She suggests seeking multiple, creative ways to map our messy “relations to watery places”; ways that generate multiple understandings of place, such as mapping practices that incorporate changes over time (e.g. seasonal)/history, multiple names, multiple stories, multiple senses (including sound), multiple performative interpretations of place, and maps from different human and more-than-human perspectives.*

*The educator decides to begin by inviting children to collaboratively draw a map of water-spaces in and around the childcare centre. Drawings of “a puddle on the grass” ... “water bottles” ... “ice in the fridge, and “Water all the way to the forest” emerge... Children are also invited to draw while they are outside. “It’s the puddles we jump in” ... “our blood is water...”. “It’s the clouds, maybe” are some of the meanings that emerge as children, paper, colored markers, water, educators, sky, and many other more-than-human things come together in these moments.*



**Figure 1. Mapping watery relations assemblage**

Revisiting these encounters, some questions and thoughts emerge for me, which I share with educators:

*[Fikile] What other possibilities for mapping water and water-relations in this place might emerge? I thought children's drawing of their bodies as watery was wonderful to witness as an articulation of our inextricable relationalities/entanglements with water. Are you planning to invite children to map water around the campus, such as in the forest? I wonder if it might be interesting for children not only to 'place' where water is, but to begin to 'story' these maps as well? For example, I'm wondering about invitations for children to create 'water stories' of their water relations in this place. Here are some more*

*ideas from Cecilia Chen's (2013) work that might be interesting for us to think-with in connection with these and future practices of mapping:*

- *Encouraging “experimental mapping processes that generate “collective authorship [and] multiple interpretations” (p. 292)*
- *Generating an evolving community of maps – multiple inter-related maps and multiple maps of the same ‘watery place’ to produce multiple perspectives*
- *Mapping what we can't necessarily see (such as the children's ‘watery’ self-portraits)*
- *Disrupting “colonial cartographic practices” (p. 290) by considering the exclusions and inclusions generated by each map.*

The children and educators continue drawing maps, both individually and collaboratively. After several weeks, the inquiry dissipates as children's and educators' interests shift away from water and mapping. Despite this dissipation, the tensions brought by interrupting our understandings of children's mapping, as neatly defined representational learning, remain. Witnessing interruptive questions and perspectives alongside maps invites messiness to our practices. This messiness is not easily resolved and resists containment by the ending of our mapping experimentations.

### **Actuating performative images**

There is an element of performativity to witnessing (Haraway, 1997; Hunt, 2014; Tarpley, 1995). Practices of witnessing perform worldings that interrupt what is considered important and “present in everyday life” (Hunt, 2014, p. 6). Haraway (2000) alludes to the performative effects of figures as an “implosion of sign and substance, a literalness of metaphor, the materiality of trope, [and] the tropic quality of materiality” (n.p). There are innumerable ways that practices of witnessing could be enacted through such performativities. In my work with educators and children, I have worked extensively not only with textual or verbal modes of performativity, but

also visually through performative imagery. In this section, I want to story an illustrative example of the ways that I have used images as performative modes of witnessing in my work with educators. First, I want to speak further to my understandings and meanings of performativity in this context.

Rather than a passive reflection of reality, my intention with imagery was to diffract (Barad, 2003) everyday pedagogical encounters elsewhere; that is to say, to consider what else might be happening, might be noticed, and might be important to think-with further. Typically, images are used to document pedagogical encounters with a primary focus on representations of what individual children are doing and learning (Rinaldi, 2006). This is not to disregard the importance of making children's learning visible; considering children's relational meaning making remained an important part of my work. My focus, however, was also to seek out 'otherwise' ways for making meaning of what might be happening and present in everyday encounters beyond the singular focus on the child. Enacting witnessing through performative images was a subtle way for me to bring different kinds of questions and perspectives to our pedagogical encounters.

I wanted to follow everyday encounters across both a discursive and "materialized narrative field" (Haraway, 1997, p. 22), with a particular focus on how these encounters could be seen as mattering within material-discursive settler colonial relations and more-than human entanglements. In this way, I experimented with the performative possibilities of images that might actively enact displacements of anthropocentric and colonial representations (Haraway, 1997).

I wondered, what might emerge from using images with purposeful intent to bring attentiveness not only to what children and educators were doing, but also to interactions and

connections between colonial past/present histories, people, place, and more-than-human others? What interruptions might emerge from encountering images as *bearing witness* to that which might elude textual or verbal representation? In bringing these questions and intents to my practice with children and educators, I worked extensively with pedagogical narration<sup>16</sup> as a tool for collaboratively documenting and revisiting pedagogical encounters. Visual photographic images were an essential part of these pedagogical documentation processes, and an integral part of my approach for bringing critical questions to educators. In this regard, I worked with both images taken by educators and myself, as well as intentionally selected found images that were used to create particular juxtapositions and provoke attention to particular dissonances.

While I worked with visual images extensively, this is not to suggest that I believe that images can ever escape their implication in “colonialism’s representational encounter” (Landau, 2002, p. 142). For example, visualities of British Columbia’s expansive forest landscapes can participate in reinscribing colonial imaginaries and Indigenous erasures. Visual practices, including photography, continue to enact ways of knowing and representing ‘natural’ places as static and separate from the human culture. However, these visual practices can also act to unsettle, contest and refigure these imaginaries (Braun, 2002; Taylor, 2013).

### *Damaged landscapes*

As an invitation for children and educators to come to ‘know forests’ in multiple and creative ways, I set out paint and brushes on a drop cloth on the floor and I tape a large piece of paper on the wall, where I project images of paintings depicting damaged land and water by Coast Salish artist Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (*Burying another face of racism on First Nations soil*, 1997 and *Usufruct*, 1995). I wanted to highlight not only what the children were doing as

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<sup>16</sup> See Pacini-Ketchabaw (2010) and Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot, & Sanchez (2014) for further discussions of critical collaborative practices of pedagogical narration.

they engaged the forest through painting, but also to bring complexity to our understandings and relations to forests in this place. Below are images and my perspectives from a pedagogical narration I shared with educators.



*“The political discourse of my work is involved in environmentalism, globalization, global warming, dealing with capitalism; to analyze where First Nations people are within this planet”  
(Yuxweluptun, n.d.)*

**Figure 2. Forest painting encounters**

*The shadows on the screen seem to create another way for the painting and the children to become entangled...Some children experiment with moving their bodies to create different shadows on the painting...I wonder what meanings might be made of these*

*entanglements with the 'stories' told by the painting? Multiple meanings emerge as the children paint. Chinese New Year emerges...as "dragons", "lions" and "fireworks" become a part of the forest as children paint... Discussions of "A bear coming to eat me up" emerge... I wonder what meanings can be made of these frictional connections? Yuxweluptun's work provides critical perspectives to relating-to the forest. For instance, he brings attention to environmental destruction and contested territories. He also engages with Indigenous perspectives of land such as its inherent vibrancies, cosmologies, histories, socialities and materialities, rather than as a "mute" landscape or romantic wilderness. What might it mean for us to begin to encounter the forest in some of these ways with children? I also wonder what different, perhaps unfamiliar, ways of relating to the forest the children are already learning about and engaging with in this encounter? For instance some children notice that the forest has "eyes", and some children began to paint faces in the trees; perhaps echoing the vitalities in Yuxweluptun's painting? I wonder what other possibilities might emerge for shifting the familiarity of "nature" or the "forest" to the unfamiliar? What other possibilities might emerge for multiple imaginaries and encounters, for multiple ways for us to 'see' and relate to the forest?*

Discussions of this pedagogical narration with educators bring multiple contradictory perspectives, interpretations, and questions. My own embodied uncertainties emerge as I return to setting out the painting provocation each day and as the multiplicities of children-educators-paint-paper-forest images and more assemble together and move apart in different ways each time. In addition to Yuxweluptun's images, we experiment with painting-with different 'interruptive' forest imagery that the children respond to, such as images of clear-cut British

Columbia forests. Each painting encounter brings different ‘flights’, movements, and intensities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) for the human and more than human bodies assembled together; at times in ways that trouble me as they seem disconnected from the performative provocations of colonized and damaged landscapes posed by *Yuxweluptun*’s images and clear-cut forests. These emergent multiplicities-in-practice, together with contradictory perspectives of the painting encounters in discussions with educators, make me question my intentionalities and leave me uncertain of the interruptive effects of these painting encounters. I witness these encounters as illustrations of how I enacted practices of witnessing through performative imagery and struggled with my own practice. These encounters, in which I am entangled, also bear witness to my work as an “experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible” (Derrida, 1992, p. 41). I worked within a place and a sense of impossibility – impossibility of pre-determined and measurable outcomes, impossibility of transcending and resolving colonial relations. At the same time, amidst this impossibility, openings for possibility emerged – such as the possibilities of relating to the forest differently, and possibilities enacted by the active presences of damaged British Columbia forests and waterways imagery in the room.

### **Attuning to place specificities**

An important aspect of witnessing is attention to historical and place specificity and geopolitical situatedness (Haraway, 1997; Hunt, 2014; Tarpley, 1995). In this regard, I think-with the forest as a companion witness; a “meaning-making figure” (Haraway, 2008, p. 5) that orients and situates my story-telling within settler colonial relations on unceded Coast Salish territories.

The forest has become a regular part of our pedagogical encounters. I share with educators an article written by Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw<sup>17</sup> (2013) on the frictions of early childhood forest pedagogies in settler colonial British Columbia. While I do not share this work, at the time, I have also been writing on and thinking-with the tensions of forest pedagogies in connection with settler colonial histories of the mountain on which the childcare centre is located (Nxumalo, in press; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2013; 2014).

*I refer to Pacini-Ketchabaw's (2013) article in discussions with educators and the challenges it brings in asking: What might it mean to engage in forest pedagogies that entangle ethics and politics, as well as the vibrancies and materialities of the forest? How might we begin to engage in the challenging dialogues that are needed in connection with the frictions between early childhood forest pedagogies and settler colonialism? As part of these discussions, I wonder if the map at the beginning of the forest mountain trail, that we often stop at with children, might be interesting to think-with in relation to what other ways we might come to know this forest? For example, I wonder how we might make meaning of the forest in ways that acknowledge this place as First Nations territory? How might we inquire into pastpresent inhabitants of this place (the forest, and the mountain land on which the childcare centres stand)? What might it look like to begin to consider the tensions, entanglements, accountabilities and response-abilities (Haraway, 2008) that Indigenous and settler colonial knowledges of place might bring to our work with young children? How can we pay respectful attention to our entanglement in colonized worlds? How have we come to understand place? Why is place important or not important in thinking about early childhood pedagogies?*

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<sup>17</sup> Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw is the director of the action research project in which my work was situated and participated in several of our monthly learning circle discussions.

These questions bring tensions to our dialogues as we think-with place, British Columbia forests, and forest pedagogies as contested and political. At the same time, our discussions bring new curiosities towards the forest itself, even as the difficult questions that I pose remain unanswered, and perhaps impossible to answer by both educators and myself. Contested forests as witnesses interrupt our everyday encounters. The forests as contested material-discursive issues of concern comes to matter in our pedagogies; spilling over children's learning (Latour, 2004), even as we remain unsure about how to respond to the ethical dilemmas these contestations bring to the situated colonial worldings we inhabit in this particular place. A tentative and hopeful response emerges; educators in one of the child care centres begin to actively seek out connections with the local Indigenous community. I story one such connection next.

### **Living immanent practices: aporias and fissures**

*Educators at the child care centre have arranged for a Coast Salish singing and drumming encounter. The group begins by telling us their Nation and Clan name. They teach us (myself, educators, and children) songs; translating the words for us each time. We sing a welcome song and a song traditionally sung to let the bears know that people are in the forest. We also hear a story of the drums that are a vibrant part of this gathering, and listen to how animal hide and cedar wood have come together in the making of the drums. Sounds, touch, visualities, and human and more-than-human bodies come together towards enacting joyful embodied connections in this encounter. At the same time, I feel a lingering knotted unease and discomfort as the words 'visitors' and 'welcoming visitors' emerge and linger in the space and as questions about hunting and killing animals emerge. Not*

*knowing how to respond, and not wanting to interrupt what I witness as important beginning connections, I remain in complicit silence.*

In a pedagogical narration, subsequent to this encounter, I share my critical reflections with educators:

*How might we think with the importance of the specificities and localities of place, culture, knowledges in encounters with Coast Salish peoples and cultures with children? The children seemed very interested in animals; singing the bear song, and hearing the stories of using different animal parts used to make musical instruments invited children's curiosities. How might children and educators continue to build on and deepen the dialogues and relations began through this encounter with living Indigenous knowledges? For example, [name omitted] suggested it might be possible for an Elder to come regularly to share stories from this territory with children. How might children and educators continue to encounter multiple 'stories', 'storied songs', and 'histories' of this place in meaningful and respectful ways that might make previously hidden 'worlds' possible and visible? How might we navigate the tensions that emerge from discussions with children? For instance, when children's theories/questions intersect with dominant societal discourses and troubling imaginaries about Indigenous peoples and ways of being, what is our ethical responsibility?*

From this encounter, several planned and unplanned pedagogical encounters emerge. We visit with an Elder from the Stó:lō Nation, one of the nations' territories on which the childcare stands, and the children engage in conversations about water's liveliness and movements. We visit a local archaeology museum that becomes a favourite place for the children to return to - they draw pictures and create stories of the masks and artifacts in the room. I witness these

encounters as important beginnings – creating fissures in our established and routinized everyday pedagogies and the erasures they often unknowingly enact. I also witness them as another illustration of the impossibility of my work in that within these hopeful possibilities, my role remains on unstable terrain - where tensions, risks and doubts remain. Tensions emerge in our consumption of Indigenous cultures. Risks remain ever-present in these encounters, such as in reinforcing neoliberal colonialisms through a politics of cultural recognition (Coulthard, 2007; Povinelli, 2002). Doubts and uncertainties remain as I continue to experiment with ways to stay with the tensions that these encounters bring, while deepening our engagements with living Indigenous cultures and knowledges within settler colonial relations.

### **Becoming-with more-than-human worldings**

Human subjectivities are inseparable from their more-than-human relations and responsibilities, as differently situated Indigenous knowledges have taught for millennia (Le Grange, 2012; Martin, 2007; Tuck, 2014). This understanding is of central importance to my work with children and educators, where I have been experimenting with different ways to make visible that our enmeshment with the more-than-human has ethical and political implications.

#### *Witnessing cross-species socialities*

Our location amidst a forest inhabited by many plant and animal species including black bears, moss, mushrooms, English Ivy, deer, raccoons and coyotes has offered a rich place at which to encounter and think with what Donna Haraway (2003) terms non-innocent “co-habitation, and embodied cross-species sociality” (p. 4) within the specificities of particular more-than-human worlds.

For instance, by attention to everyday encounters between children and a group of raccoons that regularly come to the childcare centre playgrounds, and the mutual child-animal

curiosities that have emerged, we have begun to consider the ethical potentialities of paying attention to the nuanced ways in which more-than-human species story particular places in-relation with humans (van Dooren & Rose, 2012). We have begun to challenge ourselves to look beyond issues of safety, to take seriously the effects of our and children's responses to these Indigenous animals' presences in this place, and to create invitations for children to productively relate to raccoons - both real and imaginary - in multiple ways. As a part of this work, I share and discuss with educators scholarly literature from the environmental humanities that offers us questions and perspectives to think with in relation to everyday multispecies relations in early childhood pedagogies. We engage in ongoing dialogues of questioning what an ethics of living-with, responding-to, and relating-to might mean for the plant and animal species we encounter with children, particularly those such as raccoons that are not easy to live-with. These raccoon pedagogies have collided materially and discursively with deadly measures to control the raccoon population, entangling us, and my work in inequitable arrangements of living and dying well (Haraway, 2012) that have brought as yet unresolved ethical questions.



“it is amid the [everyday] practices of ‘living with’ that accountability, caring for and responsibility come to matter... This way of thinking about ethics [is] partial, particular and rooted in bodies and relations” (Ginn, 2013, p. 2)

**Figure 3. Raccoon-child drawing assemblage**

*Staying with contradiction*

In my work, I have also been experimenting with articulations of everyday practice that question the ease with which anthropocentric and child-centred ways of seeing are enacted. I have experimented with ways to make visible what erasures might be caused by these ways of seeing, and in so doing have attempted to create movements towards other possibilities. A key tool in this regard has been to enact interruptive practices of pedagogical narration. These practices have sought to refigure what becomes witnessed as mattering presences in children’s and educators’ forest encounters. These practices have also sought to unsettle recurring descriptors of everyday forest encounters in relation to innocent, anthropocentric and colonizing

understandings; such as belonging, ownership, discovery, learning about, and free exploration of an untouched natural environment (see also Nxumalo, in press).

For instance, I have witnessed the forest trail we walk along everyday as human-made. I have noticed with children - through drawing, photography, and knotting and tying ivy leaves - how invasive English ivy abounds in the forest and chokes the trees. Ivy literally and figuratively entangles not only us humans, but also the plant and animal life in this forest (see Figure 4). I have wondered what might be interrupted by thinking with the ways that this colonizing ivy catches onto us (Nxumalo, submitted). As illustrated in Figure 4, I have paid attention to mundane presences in the forest that unsettle separations and categorizations of the social and 'natural' and that question ways of seeing the forest as untouched (Taylor, 2013; Tsing, 2013). I have witnessed, with children and educators, the contradictions of a persistence of plant and animal life amidst abandoned waste in waterways in the forest; together we have begun to wonder what interruptive ways of encountering waste might look like beyond neoliberal technologies of waste management (Hird, 2014). Even as I attempt to focus on the specificities of more-than-human worldings and relations in my work, I continue to struggle with how I might continually enact "learning to learn without the tools of human exceptionalism" (Haraway, 2014, n.p) as foundational to early childhood pedagogies.



*What do these images from our encounters enact/do/unsettle in relating to the forest and to the idea of nature as something 'out there'; separate, pure and non-human (Haraway, 2008)? What stories, knowledges and histories of natural worlds do we privilege? What do we silence?*

**Figure 4. Noticing and responding to entangled human/more-than-human worldings**

Recently, I have been contemplating how geontology, understood as an approach to understanding governance enacted through biogeographical obligations (Povinelli, 2014), might be useful in thinking with the encounters described above in relation to the geomaterialities of settler colonialism. For instance, I am interested in what it might mean to witness this forest as a part of the “lifeblood” of settler colonialism (Yusoff, 2014). What is unsettled by thinking human subjectivities in geologic terms (Yusoff, 2014), connecting ancient forest logging, air, breath, and blood – what does this mean for these forest encounters? Put another way, if, as Povinelli (2014) suggests, “biography and geography are in a relation of extimacy (extimité) [where]....there is not biography (life-descriptions) on the one side and geography (nonlife-descriptions) on the other” (para. 9), what Indigenous biogeographical obligations to this

particular place are presences, and what extinguishments do our ways of knowing this place perform and reinforce (Nxumalo, in press; Povinelli, 2014)? Perhaps centering the forest as literally entangled in our subjectivities might help me to more explicitly center the contradictions, categorizations and erasures, as well as the ethical potentialities enacted by particular pedagogical practices.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have attempted to put witnessing to work as a figuration for attending to and describing the everyday practices that my work with children and educators has entailed within the particular context of three group childcare settings located amidst a mountain forest on Coast Salish territories. I have crafted and enacted witnessing as a situated orientation towards my work and its critical encounters with settler colonial relations in the everyday. I have paid attention to specific events and encounters - describing my work through acts of witnessing as interconnected practices of literal and metaphorical mappings of contested worlds, actuating performative images, attuning to place specificities, making visible the aporias and cracks within immanent practices, and seeking possibilities for ethical relationalities with more-than-human worlds (Haraway, 1997; Hunt, 2014; Tarpley, 1995). In describing my role through its interruptive use of performative imagery, my intent has been to create movements away from fixed interpretations and the colonizing violence of static representations (Said, 2001). Instead, I have emphasized multiple unexpected 'ways of seeing', movement, and performativity, such as in my juxtaposition of the images with questions for practice.

I have attempted to illustrate, through everyday 'small' textual and visual stories, how my work inhabits possibility within impossibility (Derrida, 1992) through the unresolved questions, contradictions, and tensions that have emerged and resided alongside hopeful interruptions,

imaginaries, possibilities and relations. I see my role as a pedagogista as making an important contribution towards situating early childhood education firmly within the political in the interrelated contexts of settler colonialism and anthropogenically vulnerable places. As Rose (2004) says, “we cannot help knowing that we are here through dispossession and death” (p.6). This place of non-innocence brings with it responsibilities for paying attention to the ethical knots that entangle practice, often in unpredictable ways.

While I have been working closely with the childcare centres that I describe in the paper for three years, I see this work as only a beginning, as ongoing tentative experimentations in “learning how to be worldly, how to respond, [and] how to practice respect” (Haraway, 2008, p. 281-282) amidst uncertainty and complexity. Some of the uncertainties and complexities of my role that I have embodied in this descriptive account include the inescapable messiness of emergent practices. As a responsible witness, I attempt to respond (albeit imperfectly) to what emerges in the midst of these messy practices, despite the impossibility of knowing precisely what my questions, responses (and silences) enact and hold in place.

As I continue this work, I hope to focus on collaborating with educators and local Indigenous community members towards possibilities for sustained and meaningful relations that centre, honour and learn-with this place (and the more-than-human-life in it) as Indigenous territory while enacting interferences to settler colonial relations to this place. I realize that such collaborations do not promise a smooth resolution either and do not erase the risks of appropriation and reification of Indigenous knowledges. Nonetheless, as a modest witness, I remain simultaneously troubled, worried, and hopeful (Haraway, 1997) about what these possibilities might produce.

## **MANUSCRIPT 2: Towards ‘refiguring presences’ as an anti-colonial orientation to research in early childhood studies**

### **Abstract**

In this paper, I craft a methodological orientation for attending to the intricacies of everyday place encounters in early childhood settings with particular attention to both settler colonialism and more-than-human entanglements. Drawing from my work with children and educators in childcare settings located in what is now British Columbia, Canada, I use *refiguring presences* to describe my particular attention to unsettling everyday place relations in early childhood pedagogies within the context of settler colonialism. I situate refiguring presences in everyday material-discursive impacts in an effort to open up the potentialities and boundaries of political engagement in early childhood studies. I discuss how refiguring presences, as a methodology, has informed my work, and what I see as its most important elements. These elements include attending to colonialisms in everyday encounters, foregrounding more-than-human relationalities, (dis)entangling researcher subjectivities; and restorying contested places.

**Keywords:** anticolonial methodology; more-than-human; place stories; material-discursive; early childhood studies

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*For this suburban child care centre, encounters with a nearby mountain forest have become part of everyday pedagogies for children and educators. As part of a pedagogical narration<sup>18</sup> an educator reflects on these forest encounters and the dialogues that have emerged with children:*

*“So as the children comfortably continue to explore their forest environment, many questions intrigue me as I wonder more about how we can use the forest as a third learning environment. How can we use what we do inside our classroom and continually bring it out to the forest? What kind of questions will the children have? I also wonder about how to tackle some of the children’s questions about who made the forest. And more recently, when we are discussing the First Nations’ heritage and culture, what do we discuss? There are some topics that come up in our discussions that make me feel uneasy such as the ethics of hunting and killing the animals. My eyes have been opened wide to a place that offers so much learning and exploring. There are so many different avenues that this can take us and wherever we go with it, it will always take us back to nature and to the forest”.*

## **Introduction**

I have been working closely with educators and children in early childhood settings in what is now British Columbia, Canada for several years as a practitioner, researcher and pedagogical mentor. In this work, I have paid close attention to what might be happening, particularly in relation to those everyday encounters that connect with colonialisms, such as those narrated in the opening excerpt. This article is my attempt at articulating how I have come

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<sup>18</sup> Pedagogical narrations are a way to make children’s learning visible and include educator’s critical reflections and questions (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot, & Sanchez, 2014; Rinaldi, 2006).

to a methodology of *refiguring presences*, as a way to grapple with, respond to, as well as work through the doubts, complicated frictions, discomforts, knots and silences that these moments have thrown up for me in both research and practice. Centering my own implicated location and subjectivities, I develop a methodology of refiguring presences as an attempt at creating stutters in the everyday innocence of these moments. For instance, the opening story raised many questions for me when situated within ongoing settler colonial violence. I wondered what possibilities there might be to interrupt anthropocentric imaginaries of the forest as a separate site of exploration and learning for children? What perspectives might bring into view the material-discursive ‘liveliness’ and political socialities of our forest encounters? How might discussions of traditional Indigenous cultures as a source of unease and of the forest as ‘belonging’ to children be made visible as entangled within settler colonial relations? What ways of knowing might interrupt static figurations of Indigenous cultures, erasures of complex Indigenous relationalities with more-than human others, and the assimilation of these relationalities within a normative ethics of hunting and killing?

As I began to write about, and seek ways to ‘make sense’ of and respond to, these everyday encounters I found a number of methodological and ontological orientations invaluable towards my inquiries. For instance, affective ethnography helped me to pay close attention to the intensities, embodied affectivities and material-discursive textualities of the everyday (Stewart, 2007, 2008). Critical Indigenous methodologies helped me to situate these everyday encounters alongside complicities with the epistemic and ontological erasures of settler colonialism (Byrd, 2011; Chilisa, 2012; Tuhiwai Smith, 2013). Both Indigenous relational and materialist ontologies helped me to foreground more-than-human others (such as the forest) as active participants in multiple inextricably entangled relations with humans (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 1988; Deleuze &

Guattari, 1987; Le Grange, 2012; Martin, 2007; Tuck, 2014). Restorying, land education, and place-based methodologies helped me to consider place as intrinsically storied and to find ways to foreground Indigenous place stories (Cameron, 2011; Somerville, 2006; Tuck, McKenzie, & McCoy, 2014). These place-situated methodologies challenged me to seek possibilities for refiguring, politicizing, and materializing place stories.

These understandings have been, and continue to be, invaluable in informing my work and I bring them aspects of them together in this paper in conceptualizing a methodology of refiguring presences. However, I have found that, *individually*, these approaches have not been sufficient in attuning to the multiple politics, complexities and contingencies of unsettling moments that have emerged in my practice such as those narrated in the opening. Some of these multiplicities are my inextricable situatedness in these moments as well as the theories, things, situated settler colonial histories, Indigenous knowledges, and more-than-human relationalities that animate these moments yet often remain seemingly absent or silent.

This paper is an attempt to bring together these multiplicities as an emergent methodology of refiguring presences. I generate and craft refiguring presences as a research methodology that draws from several methodologies and ontologies in ways that enable me to make visible and create interruptions in everyday early childhood encounters that connect to colonialisms. I gather and assemble ways of noticing (Tsing, 2011) that act towards situating refiguring presences as a methodology that might make a difference to those spectres of coloniality in everyday encounters that are not necessarily easily pinned down and might otherwise remain unnoticed.

I position this paper alongside post qualitative research (Lather, 2013; St. Pierre, 2011) that has argued that predominantly discursive and human-centric understandings of difference are inadequate for attending to the material-discursive (Barad, 1998; 2007) intensities, contingencies

and contradictions that mark everyday life (for examples see Haraway, 2008; Lather, 2013; Law, 2004; MacLure, 2011; Tsing, 2013). Taking inspiration from this invitation to attend to the complexities of both nature-culture and material-discursive entanglements, I experiment with research configurations that I see as holding potential to help me generate responsive and responsible (Haraway, 1997) ways of inquiry into everyday encounters in early childhood settings. To focus on the more-than-human, I want to bring Indigenous relational ontologies and posthuman material feminisms into conversation. I do this as an attempt to craft a research orientation that is interested in the generative possibilities of “holding incompatible things together” (Haraway, 1985, p. 65). These possibilities centre on further opening research in early childhood studies to considerations of not only the ethics of more-than-human relationalities, but also to a politics that actively resists colonizing epistemological and ontological formations. While none of the ideas that I bring together here are unprecedented in early childhood research, it is in their coalescence that I see new potentialities emerging for anti-colonial orientations in early childhood studies.

In what follows, I outline in detail how I conceptualize refiguring presences as a methodological orientation, by developing and articulating integral components of this methodology. I also discuss the implications of this methodology for the messy ‘doings’ of research; that is, implications for the ways that I think-with data (such as the opening story) accumulated from the specific encounters that I foreground in my research. I begin by considering the importance of confronting colonialisms in refiguring presences. I discuss how such colonialisms emerge in ordinary life events in early childhood settings, what I call ‘everyday encounters’. Next, I attend to another element of refiguring presences, namely foregrounding the more-than-human. I follow this by discussing how shifting subjectivities are

intricately entangled within practices of refiguring presences. Finally, I consider the implications of engaging with place stories in a methodology of refiguring presences.

### **Confronting everyday colonialisms**

An intrinsic part of locating my work is situating it within a settler colonial place. My work is situated within unceded Coast Salish territories now known as British Columbia, Canada. Colonialism is an ongoing presence articulated through a myriad of racialized exclusions, practices and policies including those normalized through education practices and masked by multicultural recognition (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; de Finney, 2010; Thobani, 2007). These colonial legacies continue to have impacts on everyday life in multiple often taken for granted ways in the banalities of everyday early childhood pedagogies. In previous work, I have engaged with the complexities, contradictions and capriciousness through which racialization emerges and is effected on and implicated through child, educator and more-than-human bodies in everyday encounters (Nxumalo, 2012). I have inquired into how certain racialized child and educator bodies emerge as ‘out of place’ (Ahmed, 2010) in everyday encounters and the ways in which bodies might also escape these limits. I have articulated how an ‘otherwise’ politics of orientation (Ahmed, 2006) might displace the fixities created by tolerance, acceptance and recognition of difference. I have also considered how situated human/more-than-human becomings can create openings to ways of knowing and affinities that include the affective, the unforeseen and unexpected (Nxumalo, 2012).

More recently, I have extended this previous work to consider possibilities for researching colonial forces in everyday encounters. I have engaged with some of the ways in which the “temporality of empire” (Byrd & Rothberg, 2011, p. 5) emerges as an ongoing material-discursive presence in specific pedagogical “nature” encounters in early childhood settings

(Nxumalo, accepted, in press; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2014). A central understanding that shapes my approach to the everyday moments I pay attention to in my work with children and educators is that colonialisms do much of their work through erasures, displacements, and exclusions that become normalized in everyday encounters. Early childhood education is a field permeated by everydayness and seemingly mundane material specificities and normalities – the everyday ‘banalities’ (Horton & Kraftl, 2006; Rautio, 2013) children and educators engage in such as engaging with outdoor places and spaces, eating practices, encounters with plants and animal life, and everyday play with objects and materials. My entry point is that these situated everyday practices are one site at which to apprehend colonially ordered relations. Intrinsic to this response is both foregrounding embedded colonial perspectives in everyday pedagogical encounters and possibilities for anti-colonial ways of seeing.

My focus on the everyday resonates with Povinelli’s (2012a) supposition that differences are governed in the taken for granted and unquestioned intimate little routines that mark everyday life. There are many others who have argued that the seemingly ‘normal’, banal or ordinary is a site of complex political relations and potentials for micropolitical action and resistance (see for example: Ahmed, 2004; Berlant, 2008; Blaise, 2013; Stewart, 2007, 2008, 2011, 2012). Taken together, these scholars’ work suggests attunement to the material-discursive political forces within which the situated intricacies, contradictions and seeming banalities of everyday encounters are composed as both enduring and emergent effects.

Refiguring presences can be thought of, then, as a helpful concept to disrupt the erasures and silences (Simpson, 2013) that mark the ordering of everyday life in childcare settings by colonial formations. I use the term *concept* to intentionally position refiguring presences as both a way of knowing, and methodological acts of reorienting towards specific worlds – as a research

and knowledge-making practice that reshapes everyday events and encounters in an attempt to pull apart their ordering effects (Ahmed, 2014; Deleuze & Guattari, 1994,1987; Haraway, 1994, 2008). Haraway (1994) eloquently names such practices of knowledge-making as simultaneous processes of “description, narration, intervention, inhabiting, conversing, exchanging and building” (p. 62). In this way, I take up research as always in excess of any fact-making intents; the very modes of research, their materialities, and assumptions already create particular effects and stand for specific world-making arrangements (Barad, 2007). I take up refiguring presences as a methodology that is not simply about gathering and then reporting on findings from my work with educators and children, but rather as a form of anti-colonial interruption in itself.

For example, in my research, I have put refiguring presences to work to place settler colonialism at the center of everyday early childhood pedagogical encounters with a local forest and its interrelated stories and animated materialities, including tree stumps, a forest trail, and tree hollows (Nxumalo, in press). I have also written about refiguring presences in a community garden by experimenting with restorying a community garden through noticing forest/garden boundaries, garden-object assemblages, and child-worm encounters (Nxumalo, accepted). In practice, I have attempted to interrupt the settler norms of ownership of the land and “the banality of settler-colonial forgetting” (Badger, 2013, para 4) that are illustrated in the opening story. For example, in situating the forest as Indigenous land, I have shared with educators knowledges of this place (the entirety of our location in what is now Greater Vancouver) as unceded Coast Salish territories. Many other difficult questions emerge from the opening story that might be made visible through an orientation of refiguring presences that focuses on everyday coloniality. For instance, what contradictions and ambivalences emerge in each specific event or encounter that might create new ways of seeing? In the opening story what new

or different perspectives and affects emerge from considering the words ‘comfort’ and ‘unease’ in frictional connection with forest encounters, settler colonialism and Indigenous cultures?

Taken together, my interest has been in making visible and attending to how colonialisms come to matter in everyday encounters often in taken-for-granted “physicalities, fabricated habitudes, habituated visions...[and] habituated materialities” (Povinelli, 2012b, p. 374). As these examples illustrate, my recent work has centred on possibilities for interrupting these everyday material-discursive colonial relations in both research and practice.

In crafting refiguring presences as an approach to research that interrupts settler colonialism, I have drawn inspiration from Leanne Simpson’s (2011) call for *presencing* as anti-colonial acts that resist the erasures of Indigenous presences from settler colonial places, and politicize engagements with place. I use the concept *refiguring* to emphasize re-animating, re-thinking and relating differently to absent presences, and resisting the normative practices and taken for granted understandings therein (Nxumalo, in press). Drawing from Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies is a risky, tension-filled move. As Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy (2014) remind me,

mindfulness of non-Indigenous desires to access assumed Indigenous knowledge also needs to extend to a mindfulness of non-Indigenous desires to adopt or use such knowledge...This is difficult terrain in working both with Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners: to acknowledge and include Indigenous knowledge and perspectives but in non-determined ways that do not stereotype Indigenous knowledge or identities (pp. 10-11).

While staying with the tension that these risks bring, I see potential for anti-colonial resonances in working with refiguring presences in ways that call into question what counts as knowledge in academic research. I also intentionally work with refiguring presences to center

settler colonialism as integral to early childhood pedagogical engagements with place within the context of Canada.

### **Refiguring more-than-human presences**

An important aspect of refiguring presences is shifting attention from the child as the subject of research and practice to children's entanglements within multiple human and more-than-human relations (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Taylor, 2013). As the opening story illustrates, child centred pedagogies create occlusions and silences – such as in creating the forest as a silent 'learning environment' subject to children's actions and imaginaries. By seeking shifts away from anthropocentrism, refiguring presences is an approach to research that pays close attention to matter – the 'things' and 'places' that actively participate in our everyday encounters. In making this shift, I take inspiration from Indigenous knowledges, which are rooted in more-than-human reciprocal relationalities that are situated in place (Le Grange, 2009, 2012; Martin, 2007). For many Indigenous knowledges, the more-than-human is an active, vital force that is entangled in complex non-hierarchical relationalities with the human (for example see; Dei, 2002; Martin, 2007; Sundberg, 2014). Here, humans and non-humans are active and relational participants in world making, rather than passive or inactive objects of human knowledge (Four Arrows, Jacobs, & Ryan, 2010; Le Grange, 2009, 2012; Tuck, 2014).

It is important for me to emphasize here that while I use the term Indigenous to refer broadly to North American, Australian and African contexts, and more specifically in relation to my location on Coast Salish territories, this is not intended to imply that there are not important irreducible and place-specific differences both *within* and *across* these vastly diverse locations. Indigenous knowledges are multiple, complex and dynamic (Driskill, Finley, Gilley &

Morgensen, 2011). It is important that I explicate my intents in the risky move to reference Indigenous knowledge in framing more-than-human active presences.

Refiguring presences is a political orientation to research that intentionally seeks to unsettle Eurocentrism (Battiste, Bell, Findlay, Findlay & Youngblood Henderson, 2005). As Ahmed (2010) notes, “orientations matter. Those who are ‘out of place’ have to secure a place that is not already given” (p. 254). Refiguring presences, then, engages with Indigenous relationalities to counter (neo)colonial erasures in connection with knowledge production in the academy. I also work with Indigenous relationalities to make visible possibilities for more ethical relationships with the more-than-human presences I encounter with children and educators. Drawing on Indigenous knowledges to orient research practices towards the mutual constitution and entanglements of the human and more-than-human does not disappear relations that are marked by inequity and tensions that connect with settler colonialism. Indigenous knowledges provide an entry into inquiring into and making visible power asymmetries by locating my research within the context of a settler colonial location. That is to say, refiguring presences pays attention to the “*unequal* organization of social life” (Povinelli, 2012a, p. 77; emphasis added). These knowledges make possible important questions that create interruptions to the opening story. Some of the questions that emerged for me were: What might specific Indigenous stories teach us about the specific, vibrant and relational participation of the forest in the making of this particular place on Coast Salish territories? How might we come to encounter the forest not as a mute benign or empty space, but as a vibrant, active, social, space in which we are all entangled? For instance, in discussions with educators I wondered how we might contest taken for granted assumptions that figure the forest as simply a learning environment for children. I also wondered what we might notice differently if we considered pedagogies of *learning-with* the forest and

moved away from *learning-about* the forest (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013). I wondered what does the forest know of us? What happens when we think of the forest as a storied witness to all past-present histories? How might we think with the ‘things’ that the children encounter in the forest as not simply awaiting children’s discoveries, but as participants that are always already in relation with other humans and non-humans? What other ways of relating to the forest and the ‘more-than-human’ things in it might be possible? How can we pay attention to our entanglement within colonized places?

Indigenous relational ontologies, while not reducible to the same, share an affinity with Eurowestern material feminist conceptualizations of the mutually co-constitutive entanglements of human and non-human worlds (Jackson, 2013; Tuck, 2014). These materialist perspectives also highlight more-than-human relational becomings and disrupt taken-for-granted anthropocentric ways of ‘knowing’ and relating. For instance, recent materialist research practices interrupt the primacy of human-centred discursive representation and challenge an inanimate view of non-human worlds (Barad, 2007; Jackson, 2013; Saldanha, 2006; Sundberg, 2014; Whatmore, 2006). In these methodologies, attention to the materiality of encounters foregrounds the active force, relational and dis-connective effects, as well as the gestural expressions of human and more-than-human bodies (Bennett, 2004; Saldanha, 2006). Both the human and non-human are seen as active co-constitutive participants, and the human is “no less a subject of ongoing cofabrication than any other socio-material assemblage” (Whatmore, 2006, p. 603).

Taking inspiration from this focus on materiality and more-than-human relationalities, I ask questions such as, what emerges from paying attention to the ‘materializing effects’ created by the ways in which boundaries are drawn between the human/more-than-human and between

nature/culture (Barad, 2011)? What ethical relationalities between children and more-than-human life might an ethics of “responsive attentiveness” (Bird, 2004, p. 5) to material-discursive and nature-culture entanglements bring into view? For instance, in my research and practice, I use performative image assemblages to bring a critical focus to the materialities of colonial relations, more-than-human presences, and human/more-than-human entanglements; and interruption to nature as pure, innocent, and separate from culture (see Nxumalo, accepted, in press).

The images in Figure 1, assembled from encounters at the child care setting narrated in the opening story, are an illustrative example of this critical focus. I took these images during our (myself, children and educators) encounters with invasive and colonizing English ivy in the forest, a human-made storm drain encountered in the forest, urban raccoons that regularly visit the child care centre playground, and a human-made mountain-bike trail in the forest. These images bring multiple modes of attention to nature/culture entanglements. They also bring attention to vibrant more-than-human socialities and materialities. These encounters also point to the non-innocence of human/more-than-human entanglements. Importantly the differences, both within each image and between different images, engage an “art of noticing” (Tsing, 2011, p. 6) that highlights tensions and contradictions in these situated pedagogical encounters. What do these encounters unsettle in relating to the forest and to the idea of ‘nature’ as ‘pure’, ‘something out there’ and ‘non-human’? English ivy is knotted around trees and on the ‘forest’ floor – it catches onto us and trips us up as we walk and run through the area. What might thinking-with the invasive ivy, such as how it materially and metaphorically entangles us and the forest, in colonial pastpresent histories do? What might acts of pulling ivy and working with pulled ivy and ivy leaves with children enact and interrupt? How might encounters with urban raccoons

unsettle the banalities of multispecies relations in this place where human settlement continues to encroach on the forest?



**Figure 1. Image assemblage**

As these images illustrate, refiguring presences are non-innocent research practices that are materially and discursively consequential; they unsettle what is seen to matter, a practice Haraway (1994) refers to as “materialized refiguration” (p. 62). In this regard, refiguring presences is particularly curious about *presences* and *absences* (Law, 2004; Simpson, 2011) in everyday early childhood pedagogical place encounters. This orientation towards research

engages with the potentialities of material-discursive stories situated within particular encounters between children, educators and their more-than-human worlds as a politicized ‘bringing’ together of particular “forms of presence and absence” (Law, 2004, p. 85). Resisting a focus on simply representing reality, this is a political orientation that is concerned with what forms of reality are made visible, and including what and who participates in making that reality (Blaser, 2014). In the preceding image assemblage, what is made present that might otherwise be rendered invisible or absent? How might non-innocent critical textual and visual descriptions (Tsing, 2013) of material-discursive place stories, encounters, relations and more-than-human vibrancies unsettle the colonizing boundaries between what is rendered attached/detached, mute/voiced, present/absent, vibrant/inert? What human/more-than-human relationalities are always already there (Simpson, 2011)? Importantly, *refiguring presences* is not simply about making present that which is absent – for example, Indigenous relationalities are always ‘already there’ despite the erasures manifested through colonial worldings (Simpson, 2011; Spivak, 1990).

My troubling of the binary between presence and absence is important and intentional. There is a danger that *refiguring presences* might reproduce colonial representational practices, such as in creating an idealized ‘looking back’ to a reified authentic Indigenous identity -- another form of erasure through silencing contemporary Indigenous presences and current lived colonial realities (Byrd, 2011; Fawaz, 2012). This politicized attention to human and more-than-human presences and absences foregrounds complexity, uncertainty, contingency and partiality as central to the ways in which becoming-with the world is envisaged, including the ways in which my researcher subjectivities come to matter in anti-colonial knowledge-making practices.

### **(Dis)entangling researcher subjectivities**

One way that I take up the challenge of articulating a location that is resolutely accountable to the more-than-human is to intentionally shift focus away from my individual humanistic subjectivity (Haraway, 2006; Le Grange 2012a, b). To enact this, as I have discussed throughout the paper, I experiment with refiguring presences as a methodology that attends to human/more-than-human relational entanglements; the vibrant force and material-discursive socialities – of ‘things’, ‘plants’ and ‘animals (Bennett, 2010; Four Arrows, Jacobs, & Ryan, 2010; Tsing, 2013). Important questions emerge from this shift to the more-than-human. For instance, how might I engage with research in ways that resist a disembodied neutral positioning, while also complicating my situatedness; marked contingently by alterity, relationality and complicity in the everyday encounters that I bring into view? How might refiguring presences as ways of relating to complex material-discursive and more-than-human worlds also point to my own implicated location?

Here I want to point to what might seem to be in tension with the focus on more-than-human that I have assembled in this paper. Refiguring presences by foregrounding the more-than-human does not erase the effects of human bodies (including their embodied and material differences) and their differential situatedness in a place - human difference matters (Ahmed, 2010). My embodied presence and the partial perspectives provided by my shifting subjectivities are always already entangled within the everyday encounters I describe (Nxumalo, 2012). As Haraway (1988) notes, my location remains a “view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity” (p. 589). While remaining aware of the danger of slippage towards the centering of

myself that I wish to avoid, I think it is important to illustrate what I mean here by briefly narrating a necessarily partial view of my location-in-the-making.

Refiguring presences as a centering of relationality is an intentional resistance to orienting myself simply in relation to fixed locations - black female, Indigenous Ndwandwe clan member, Swazi, Canadian, African immigrant, settler...amongst many others. When understood within geopolitical and historical specificities, these locations can be an important place from which to critically encounter systemic oppressions and everyday marginalizations (Mohanty, 2003). However, some of these categories emerge and re-emerge through ongoing racialized and colonial formations to become material-discursive processes of governing difference. Haraway (1997) foregrounds the complexity of a situated and partial location:

Location is not the listing of adjectives or assigning of labels such as race, sex and class.

Location is not the concrete abstract of decontextualization. Location is the always partial, always finite, always fraught play of foreground and background, text and context, that constitutes critical inquiry. Above all location is not self-evident or transparent. Location is also partial in the sense of being for some worlds and not others. (p. 37)

Within the limits of this paper, I can only begin to untangle the complexities of my locations and their multiple accompanying histories. Here, following Haraway's advice to engage in a "fraught play of foreground and background", I want to briefly foreground how colonial forces have always been a part of my existence, albeit in different and at times incommensurate contexts. My clan, known as the Ndwandwe, was once its own Indigenous kingdom in territories now known as South Africa and Swaziland, but due to territorial wars exacerbated by the arrival of British and Dutch settlers, the Ndwandwe were decimated and scattered throughout what is now Southern Africa; some took refuge under the Swazi kingdom,

the country of my birth (the histories and genealogies of my clan are told through praise poems – passed down orally). The country where my ancestors came to be after this period of upheaval had its borders decided by the British and Dutch settler governments; creating the land-locked country that they named Swaziland – many of my relations also became part of the country now known as South Africa<sup>19</sup>. While official British colonial rule ended just before my birth, my entire education was in English, in schools modelled from the British educational system. Underpinning my immigration to Canada without my family at eighteen years old was an unquestioned neoliberal desire towards the ‘better life’ that an overseas education was expected to bring.

My subjectivities, then, have been and are continually negotiated within the inequities produced by complex colonial, racial and neoliberal relations. As Indigenous scholar Andrea Smith (2014) notes, “settler colonialism does not merely operate by racializing Native peoples, positioning them as racial minorities rather than as colonized nations, but also through domesticating Black struggle within the framework of anti-racist rather than anti-colonial struggle” (para. 7). At the same time, however, I cannot claim an innocent relationship to settler colonialism and ongoing territorial dispossession, as an immigrant to what is now Canada. My multiple belongings to and estrangements from the places I call ‘home’ that I have briefly discussed suggest that the locations that I have named above are much more than what they ‘represent’; they are just some of the rooted yet rootless, material-discursive marks of difference that render my self-invisibility (Haraway, 1997) in my work an impossibility. I also resonate with Haraway’s (1997) figure of the modest witness to describe my immersion in practices of non-innocent, entangled and implicated knowledge-making (see Nxumalo, submitted). This

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<sup>19</sup> See Domson-Lindsay (2008) for a current debate on these contested colonially constructed borders.

immersion necessitates continually being accountable to and vulnerable to the situated and always partial ways in which I encounter and make meaning of the world. In other words, my particular perspectives, histories and experiences always already create a propensity towards particular ways of seeing, noticing and contesting colonialisms.

Further to this, the categories into which I have been structured (Haraway, 1988) and the situated becomings that emerge in particular contexts and encounters are always already present in multiple, complex and often contradictory relationship. My becomings are never singular - they remain firmly rooted-in-particular places and experiences yet are also always in motion in different places and temporalities - at times colliding in ways marked by material and discursive tensions, discomfort, contradiction, ambivalence, as well as relationality and affinity; yet oriented towards resisting racial and colonial formations.

My becomings are also always already entangled with my research and pedagogical practices. At the same time, these marks of difference bring no guarantee of a simplified subaltern positioning (Spivak, 2010). For example, it is important for me to resist conflating and simplifying the specificities and effects of racial and colonial formations of difference, particularly within the context of 'multicultural' settler colonial Canada, where complicity in the "colonial racial-spatial order" (Opondo, 2008, p. 61) of things cannot be evenly assigned to all bodies. I also intentionally resist attempting to translate (Spivak, 2000) those unrepresentable subjectivities that are a part of my becomings because I remain wary of reproducing colonial tropes of the "authentic African" made knowable through (self)representation (Opondo, 2008). As Tuck and Yang (2014) further explain, "there is much value in working to subvert and avert the carrying out of social science research under assumptions of subalternity and authenticity, and to refuse to be a purveyor of voices constructed as such" (p. 226).

Povinelli (2012a) also helps me think through the tensions, complexities and ambivalences of my researcher subjectivities as “immanent modes of obligation” (p. 83) filled with both fixed and emergent ethical responsibilities that complicate identity. She suggests reflexivity is insufficient in its centering of the individual and the personal since “no one is merely the given-form of identity. Every identity is shot through with unnamable networks of deep unspecifiable, unnamable obligation” (p. 83). She suggests that a difficult but necessary task is to figure out how to remain situated in and responsive to our relational obligations while, at the same time, critically engaging with the relations of power that “act to disrupt and contain and redirect these immanent modes of obligation” (p. 83).

As a researcher, I have found that negotiating the complexities that I have just described while maintaining a focus on more-than-human relations is a challenging task. As a beginning, I have attempted to make visible the partial perspectives afforded by my particular locations (Haraway, 1988), by situating myself as an implicated participant within the specific ongoing everyday settler colonial relations that emerge and entangle the everyday encounters in my research. For instance, in the opening story, while I have included only a partial story from one educator (and at the same time risked representing a singular view of the ‘educator’), making meaning of this encounter in a methodology of refiguring necessitated an engagement with the non-innocent affects and silences this story generated in me, my embodied and implicated presence in the forest pedagogies described by the educator, and the tensions, challenges and divergences that emerged from my attempted responses to this encounter.

What I have tried to outline in this brief discussion is that rather than a pre-defined subject position seeking a definitive complete truth, refiguring presences are situated and politicized acts of connecting with what comes into view in a particular encounter. These acts are entangled with

my subjective perspectives through a particular orientation towards interfering in colonizing relations in everyday early childhood pedagogical encounters. In addition to (dis)entangling researcher subjectivities, an important part of situating my research within settler colonialism is to attend to the politics of place. Accordingly, next I situate refiguring presences as practices of restorying place.

### **Refiguring presences as restorying place**

As I pointed out earlier in the paper, my perspective is specifically situated and located in particular *place* encounters within the geopolitical and geohistorical (Mignolo, 2002) specificities of what is now British Columbia, Canada. Refiguring presences is concerned with re-orienting settler relations to specific places (and the more-than-human life therein) in anti-colonial ways. Refiguring presences requires politicized attention to the specificities of the settler colonial places early childhood educators inhabit and encounter with children. Consequently, this methodology generates material-discursive stories of place, where both the stories and the ‘storytellers’ are more-than-human and where mapping (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) marginalized stories and generating different stories requires attending to diverse methods.

I want to emphasize here that place refers not only to territorial physicalities or materialities of place, but also to the specific stories, worldviews, as well as to human and more-than-human relations therein (Calderon, 2014). That is to say, place is conceptualized as a ‘gathering’ of things, human and non-human bodies, and stories that require attention beyond the individual child’s experiences. Place is also seen as enacted through colonial and neocolonial assemblages including knowledges, practices as well as other social forces that come together to enact a politicized conception and ‘doing’ of ‘place’ (Anderson, 2012). This orientation towards “alternative, repressed and contradictory stories of place” (Somerville, 2006, para 9) enacts

critical encounters with settler colonialism. Attending to place stories in this way creates an opening to grappling with the ethical potentialities of plural more-than-human worldings where both the human and more-than-human “shape and are shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces” (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010, p. 545). Refiguring presences, then, is an intentional experimentation with how to notice the material-discursive boundaries and hierarchical orderings that come to matter in encounters with particular settler colonial places. This is an approach to inquiry that escapes a neat description as it is contingent and emergent knowledge-making (Haraway, 1988, 1991, 2006) that attempts to attend to some of the complexities in an intentionally chosen moment of encounter with place.

I use the term *stories* broadly to encompass stories generated from situated place-based historical fragments, written non-Indigenous and Indigenous stories of particular places, visual images, and stories of specific plant and animal species encountered with children. In addition to place stories, refiguring presences generates detailed descriptive accounts of everyday encounters. These descriptive accounts attend to more-than-human relations from critical and politicized perspectives (Haraway, 2008; Stewart, 2007; Tsing, 2005, 2013). For instance, in my work, I have generated ‘critical descriptions’ (Tsing, 2013) of everyday encounters with pedagogical narrations, field notes, and images (Nxumalo, 2012, accepted, in press; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2010, 2013, 2014). These descriptive gatherings are intended to unsettle a simplistic link between theory and ‘real’ world research practices and seek out resonances between them as points of contact (Stewart, 2007).

I see potential for *refiguring presences* as a research methodology that maps (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) place stories and sets them alongside descriptive visual and textual accounts of everyday encounters to see what they produce and unsettle (Nxumalo, accepted; in press). In this

regard, in working with selected everyday moments as ‘data’, a particular method that I have put to work, has been to juxtapose and link these narrated moments with selected interruptive stories and images. For example, the opening story might be set alongside situated stories including situated settler colonial historical fragments and Indigenous stories of the particular lands in which this work is located. This story might also be set alongside more-than-human relationalities such as those in the image assemblages in Figure 1. Stories of child-multispecies encounters, such as the raccoon encounters in Figure 1, that emphasize the mutual entanglement and susceptibilities of children/more-than human life might also enact interruptive effects in the taken-for-granted knowledges and practices in the opening story.

This way of working with ‘data’ and place stories emphasizes what I see as active presences in these encounters: assemblages of situated Indigenous stories; our (including children’s, educators’, mine, the more-than-human’s) embodied embeddedness in settler colonial pastpresent histories; more-than-human worlds, and ethical tensions. Importantly, while I have listed these integral presences separately, inherent to this method is their complex interconnections. In this method, I intentionally resist a conventional ‘analysis’ or interpretation of the data and place stories assemblages. I also intentionally intermingle the data and place stories with theoretical and Indigenous ontological perspectives, creating movement away from a clean separation of data, place stories, Indigenous knowledges and posthumanist theories. Instead, staying with the messiness and complexities enacted by these everyday encounters, I experiment with the anti-colonial interruptive effects of these juxtapositions and frictional connections, and highlight the difficult questions that they bring to situated research and practice.

The inventive and experimental approaches to ‘meeting’ data, theory and knowledge that I have assembled here share affinities with what St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) refer to as “post coding analysis” - research practices that:

...borrow concepts, invent approaches, and create new assemblages that demonstrate a range of analytic practices....Post-coding analysis, then, can be thought as non-technique and non-method that is always in a process of becoming....[it] cannot be neat, tidy, and contained. Furthermore, it cannot be easily explained either during or after analysis. It certainly cannot be replicated because it is emergent and experimental. In addition, its space–time cannot be secured in the traditional linear “process” trajectory of data collection> analysis> representation. (p. 717)

Lastly, I make no claim to have represented all the constituent parts of the encounters and stories that I bring together, but, rather I position my work as an intentional, politicized and selective noticing of encounters as a partial beginning towards interrupting colonialisms and anthropocentrisms in everyday practices. However this is without the promise of a final resolution of the contradictions, frictions and troubles that abound.

### **Towards refiguring presences**

In this paper, I have gathered together concepts, ontologies, methods and research practices to propose refiguring presences as an anti-colonial methodological orientation to early childhood research. I have situated refiguring presences within a settler colonial context by conceiving this as a methodology that unsettles taken for granted ways of seeing and noticing connections to colonialisms. I have suggested that refiguring presences needs to bring attention to the intricacies of everyday moments in ways that have an interruptive intentionality in seeking to make visible the colonial resonances and flows of power that circulate through the everyday. I have also

discussed how refiguring presences is attuned to ordering effects as well as to the ethical potentialities of more-than-human relations. In this understanding, while humans may not necessarily be the central actors, entangled and implicated researcher subjectivities are also active, situated participants in refiguring presences. I also view seeking situated stories of place to be of critical importance in refiguring presences as an anti-colonial orientation to early childhood research; where place is a site of asymmetrical relations that require close attention (Somerville, 2006).

While oriented towards interruptive attention to settler colonialism and its ongoing resonances in everyday life, refiguring presences is also a messy, provisional, and imperfect research practice. That is to say, the elements that I bring together in this paper are not exhaustive in informing a methodology of refiguring presences. While I have discussed what I consider to be important elements of refiguring presences, I want to avoid the suggestion of certainty and fixed borders around this methodology. Following Lather (2013), I consider this methodology as “non-totalizable, sometimes fugitive, also aggregate, innumerable, resisting stasis and capture, hierarchy and totality” (p. 635). Situating everyday (neo)colonialisms in early childhood places as continually emerging, cunningly inventive and entangled with multiple material-discursive assemblages (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo & Rowan, 2014; Povinelli, 2012a) means that there will be other elements that aggregate in refiguring presences that I have not considered here. Refiguring presences requires opening to the emergent, unforeseen and unexpected, while acknowledging the impossibility of mapping all the constituent parts of the place stories or histories that animate a particular encounter. Finally, as I have discussed, refiguring presences is not without important limitations in enacting decolonizing possibilities. To actively enact decolonizing early childhood studies, much more is

required than what I have begun to gather here. Refiguring presences might perhaps be seen then as beginning towards engaging with the situated messiness of anti-colonial early childhood studies.

## **MANUSCRIPT 3: Forest Stories: Restorying Encounters with ‘Natural’ Places in Early Childhood Education**

### **Abstract**

Drawing on visits to a mountain forest, this paper seeks to consider possibilities for disrupting the innocence of child-nature encounters as well as the nature-culture separations that these pedagogical encounters hold in place. By centering colonial histories, more-than-human reciprocities and Indigenous presences in this forest, I consider possibilities for unsettling and complicating representations of nature as a separate site for children’s experiences. I experiment with the notion of *refiguring presences* through a series of interruptive stories that attend to Indigenous relationalities, human-non-human entanglements and the settler colonial tensions that come together in the making of the mountain forest.

### **Peer-review manuscript in press:**

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*We often walk to the forest close by to the child care centre with the children. Each encounter with the forest invites different curiosities – hollowed out tree stumps... shiny green moss clinging to the trees and tree stumps...mushrooms...sticks...looking down to the ocean inlet and across it to snow-capped mountains, salmonberries in the summer, fallen leaves in the fall -these are just some of the ‘things’ that might come together to create particular wonderings and curiosities in encounters with this place. One morning before our walk, the educator tells the children “today we will use our senses to discover the forest” and asks them, “What will we hear? What will we see? What will we touch? What will we discover today?” The children answer: “lions”; “bears”; “tigers”; “trees and clouds”; “flowers, sticks and berries”...*

Recent work in childhood studies has considered the inherent vibrancy of place as part of human and more-than-human relations filled with tensions and contested belongings (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2012; Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Giugni, 2012). This body of work has used posthuman and postcolonial theorizations to foreground the anthropocentric viewpoints that underpin the linking of the innocent child and ‘pure’ nature in early childhood education. Inspired by this work, I seek to unsettle taken for granted familiarities of nature as a site to enhance children’s learning experiences (Taylor, 2013). This is a pertinent area of inquiry, given the current high interest in nature early childhood pedagogies in British Columbia, Canada, where my work is located. Recent calls for children to spend time in nature are marked by several normative assumptions and omissions. For instance, past/present colonial histories, assumptions of nature-culture separation, discourses of childhood innocence, privileging of a ‘scientific’ approach to nature education, and classed and racialized assumptions of what constitutes ‘normal’ childhood experiences of nature remain, for the most part, unquestioned (see Dickinson, 2013; Pacini-

Ketchabaw, 2013; Taylor, 2013 for work that engages critically with some of these gaps in nature education). As the opening story illustrates, unquestioned assumptions of nature education are apparent in easy moves to representations of a static nature in everyday pedagogies and conceptualizations of nature as separate from children and simply awaiting their discoveries.

In this paper, my specific focus is on our (myself, children and educators) everyday encounters with particular things (the forest trail, tree stumps and tree hollows) in a specific socially, materially and historically situated mountain forest. An intrinsic part of situating this place is attending to the ever-present threads of empire (Tsing, 2012). The mountain forest that early childhood educators, children, and I visit lies on unceded Musqueam, Squamish, Stó:lō, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations territories (Squamish Nation, 2008; Tsleil-Waututh Nation, 2013; Musqueam Band, 2011; Stó:lō Nation, 2009). Settler colonial conditions in what is now Canada are ongoing and include material and discursive erasures, as well as dispossessions, displacements and appropriations that shape everyday relations, often in taken for granted ways by the dominant settler society (Barker, 2009). These erasures and displacements include the underpinning of understandings and encounters with nature; where dominant tropes of British Columbia's untouched wild landscapes are intimately entangled with ongoing colonial legacies (Braun, 2002; Oliver, 2010). Settler colonialism is deeply entangled within taken for granted banalities of everyday early childhood nature pedagogies in British Columbia (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013). At the same time, colonialisms are shifting, malleable and articulated differently in different places at different times – often in contradictory and contingent ways (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Kothari & Wilkinson, 2010). Colonialisms have been and continue to be enacted through “greatly varied forms of engagement and encounter, political purposes, local complexities and distinct geographies” (Kothari & Wilkinson, 2010, p. 1398). Colonialism

is implicated in ruptures to Indigenous relationalities with place. Colonial encounters imposed hierarchical humanisms; racializing and dichotomizing the human/non-human, wild nature/civilized culture, and placing the colonized along a linear trajectory to ‘civility’ and ‘humanity’ albeit with contextually contingent intents, effects and affects in differently situated colonial encounters (Anderson, 2007). In this way, colonial authority attempts to bind the colonized within the “limits of their presupposed ontological difference” (Mbembe, 2002, p. 246); figured in hierarchical order to the colonizers.

I inhabit the forest encounters described herein as non-innocent “everyday worldings that matter in many ways beyond their status as representations” (Stewart, 2012, p. 519). I consider how restorying (Cameron, 2011) this particular place and the ‘things’ in it, through material-discursive relations (Barad, 2007) and Indigenous relationalities, might be a productive move towards *refiguring presences* and countering the “continual colonial mapping and erasing of Indigenous presence” (Simpson, 2011, p. 96) in encounters with so-called ‘natural places’. Refiguring presences is inspired by Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Simpson’s (2011) call for *presencing* as anticolonial acts by Indigenous peoples through which reconnections are created with colonized places in multiple ways, including *stories* that presence Indigenous relationships within occupied territories. Refiguring presences through stories seeks to create interruptive effects to normative assumptions of place, and to create openings towards engaging in politicized dialogues with places such as the mountain forest we (the educators and myself) visit with the children. I use the concept *refiguring* to highlight that these are active acts of resistance that are not simply about making present that which is absent – these relationalities are ‘always already’ there despite the erasures manifested through colonial worldings (Spivak, 1990). *Refiguring* gestures towards re-thinking and relating differently to absent presences and the normative

practices and taken for granted understandings therein. These relationalities include a consideration of not only the more-than-human—including matter, relations, meanings and understandings—but also the wider historical geopolitics within which the more-than-human is located and entangled, most notably settler colonialism.

My intent then, is to center refiguring presences as an anticolonial practice aimed at provoking educators' attention towards the 'things', practices, relations, historical and social forces through which nature is enacted (Braun, 2002; Instone, 2004). By attending to colonial erasures, I am interested in relating differently to the question of "whose stories come to matter" (van Dooren & Rose, 2012, p. 3) in the making of this particular forest that we visit with the children. The stories I choose to tell are deliberate interruptions to (the seemingly) innocent stories of early childhood places and nature pedagogies within a settler location. What disparate gatherings might be enacted through material and figurative encounters with this forest and its particularities? What connections might be made with colonial imaginaries (Said, 1978) of other forests in British Columbia? What possibilities might emerge for troubling the "social and spatial, material and discursive" (Instone, 2010a, p. 360) boundaries and borders enacted through nature as benign site for "discovery"? What anticolonial possibilities might emerge from stories that unsettle "dualistic constructions and hierarchical relations with the natural world" (Instone, 1998, p. 457)? What might inhabiting the historical politics of this particular place do (Instone, 2010a, b)? With these questions, as with other questions I ask throughout the paper, I do not necessarily provide answers, but rather pose them as invitations to early childhood educators to engage with an ethics of "responsive attentiveness" (Rose, 2004, p. 5) to everyday encounters and the complexities, relationalities and tensions that they bring into view.

I began this paper by locating my work within British Columbia as a place in which representations of nature are intimately connected with ongoing colonialisms. I then introduced *refiguring presences* as a form of responsive, accountable attention that makes visible and creates interruptions to connections to colonialisms in everyday nature encounters that might otherwise remain unnoticed. I explored how refiguring presences might be useful as relational, situated, and non-innocent storying practices that unsettle taken for granted ways of seeing and provoke different ways of relating to everyday encounters with the forest. For the remainder of the paper, I enact a series of interruptive stories of forest encounters. I put refiguring presences to work through non-innocent tales of ‘walking the forest trail’, ‘lingering at tree stumps’ and ‘touching tree hollows’. I consider how interruptive stories, such as these, that attend to the inherent vibrancies, tensions and contestations of place, might be put to work as an anticolonial practice.

### **Forest Encounters**

*for every one of your questions there is a story hidden in the skin of the forest...*

(Simpson, 2013, p. 132)

The stories I tell of my encounters with the forest with children and educators emerged from my work with three child care centres located atop a mountain and surrounded by a forest. I worked as a pedagogista, supporting educators in their pedagogical practices. The forest encounters took place at different times during the academic year. I have selected particular moments that spoke to me, troubled me, and left me with questions about what remained invisible. I want to note here that I am intimately implicated and entangled in these pedagogical encounters; I situate myself *alongside* the educators as a non-innocent participant in these practices. My primary interest in this paper is in complicating and interrupting these enactments

of nature and children in nature, as well as in what refiguring more-than-human (Whatmore, 2006) and Indigenous presences might provide towards anticolonial pedagogical possibilities in encounters with the forest. In other words, my intent is not to critique educators but to unsettle this mountain forest as simply a place for children's real and imaginary discoveries.

I experiment with “modes of inquiry and analysis that do not diminish the significance of the very stuff of the more-than-human world” (Alaimo, 2010, p. 73), while simultaneously attending to material and discursive neocolonial relations and presences within the geopolitical context of what is now British Columbia. Throughout the paper, I write about the settler colonial histories that are ever-present in the opening story by attending to how they are enacted through the idea of the wild and empty lands and discourses of protecting nature, while simultaneously undergoing erasure by the same imaginaries of a wild and empty forest awaiting discovery and protection (Cattelino, 2011; Willems-Braun, 1997).

Following Haraway (2008), I explore how knowledge-making, through foregrounding more-than-human worlds, might bring into view multiple stories of this particular situated mountain forest; stories that act towards relational and anticolonial nature early childhood pedagogies. I am interested in the anticolonial possibilities of restorying (Cameron, 2011) a particular so-called natural place and the human/more-than-human relations therein. I wish to put restorying place to work through stories of relationalities that create interferences (Haraway, 1992) in images of innocence in children's relations with nature within the specific settler colonial context of British Columbia. I attempt to refigure the multiple presences, tensions and complexities that are always already entangled prior to and within these encounters.

It is important to emphasize here that foregrounding Indigenous presences through stories and histories of place cannot alone dismantle structural and systemic colonial and racial

formations nor “the ‘educated ignorance’ enabled by hegemonic narratives” (Cameron, 2012, p. 190). Drawing inspiration from Indigenous knowledges as a non-Indigenous immigrant settler<sup>20</sup> also brings with it the serious problematics of representation, and appropriation – as disguised “settler moves to innocence” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 1). For instance the printed sources of the stories that I present (rather than consulting directly with First Nations communities) could be read as Western representations and romanticizations of Indigenous oral storytelling cultures. Furthermore, as Carlson (2009) notes, “Indigenous knowledge, as Skagit Coast Salish Elder Vi Hilbert so often and forcefully reminded people, cannot be learned from a book. It can only be learned through long-term face-to-face human interaction” (p. 11). This work does not transcend nor neatly resolve these issues and the messy colonial relations in which I am immersed and implicated. I tell these stories to bring educators’ attention to taken for granted silences and erasures in everyday early childhood pedagogies in settler colonial spaces.

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<sup>20</sup> I would like to make a brief note about my use of the categories “non-Indigenous” “immigrant” and “settler” to situate myself within British Columbia, Canada. I use these descriptions with caution and do not mean to imply an uncomplicated identity that erases the complex “variations, slippages, dispersions, and ambivalences” (Povinelli, 2012, p. 3) that describe some of ways in which my multiple belongings continuously shift and change across time and place. My focus has been to complicate children’s and educators’ everyday pedagogical encounters with a particular mountain forest in ways that decentre the human and foreground the more-than-human. There are numerous complexities in relation to my subjectivity and location in this place that I have not captured here. These complexities include power relations both within and across identity categories, such as those shaped by the ongoing effects of racialized material-discursive subjectivities, transnational colonial histories, complicated cultural and linguistic resonances and estrangements, the limits of racialized immigrants’ inclusion within a settler state despite multicultural rhetorics, and the effects of global neoliberal forces. Importantly, while using the category non-Indigenous to situate myself within ongoing settler colonialism within this particular place (BC, Canada), I resonate with Indigenous more-than-human relational worldviews in their affinities with the teachings of my ancestors from the Ndwandwe peoples, without collapsing these Indigenous worldviews into the same.

### *Walking the forest trail*

The childcare centres are built atop a mountain and are one part of several building developments surrounded by close to 600 hectares of second growth forest that is inhabited by black bears, cougars, deer, coyote, and many other animal and plant species (City of Burnaby, 2013a). The mountain is named for a prominent settler who surveyed the area for colonial settlement and economic pursuits on behalf of the British Empire (Wolfenden, 2000). The ‘untouched’, ‘wild’ and ‘pristine’ nature of this mountain forest is a common narrative used in its description. A brochure I came across on the city’s website reads: “*As you reach the top, pause for a breath and consider how the preservation of this environment ensures that generations to come will enjoy and appreciate our natural heritage*” (City of Burnaby, 2013b, n.p.). Much of the mountain forest has been demarcated as a designated protected conservation park area; administered by the local municipality (City of Burnaby, 2013b).



**Figure 1.1**



**1.2. Encountering the forest trail**

Our walks with the children into the forest are along part of an extensive hiking trail system that has been constructed running through the mountain forest. Encountering this partly paved trail is to walk literally and figuratively amidst tensions. The disruptions enacted challenge the dominant imaginaries of an untouched wilderness and suggest that it might be a site at which to pause, and “lookout for movements beneath the apparent order” (Instone, 2010a, p. 373) to seek out unexpected material and discursive connections. Perhaps we might begin to think of walking as an embodied and affective practice where walking along the trail might be seen as “not a linear journey, but rhizomatic voyaging of hesitant beginnings, doubtful meanders, indistinct side tracks and unlikely alliances” (Instone, 2010a, p. 362).

This forest trail is materially and discursively connected to colonial past and present histories. Many of the hiking trails though the mountain incorporate earlier logging roads (skidroads) that were cut into the forest as part of the extensive commercial logging that began in 1903 and accompanied colonial settlement in the area (City of Burnaby, 1998). With the opening of a lumber mill close to the foot of the mountain, the mountain was quickly cleared of its trees (Crampton, 1980; Heritage Burnaby, 2013). As Borkwood (1980) explains, “any small trees or trees not wanted had simply been felled and left to rot” (p. 13). Steam powered logging engines (also known as donkey engines) were used to haul the logs down the mountain along the logging roads, and over to the mill, where, after processing the lumber was loaded onto the ships and trains located adjacent to the mill (Green, 1947). The lumber processed at the saw mill (at the time one of the largest in the British Empire until it ceased operation thirty years later) was exported to destinations in the British colonies such as Australia, as well as to other export markets such as South America. This lumber was used for many purposes including shingles, railway ties, and spars for sailing ships (Borkwood, 1980; Braches, 2009).



**Figure 2. "A good size log"**

(A good size log, n.d.) [Credit: City of Vancouver Archives <http://vancouver.ca/your-government/city-of-vancouver-archives.aspx> ]

Much of the Douglas fir, western hemlock and western red cedar trees that covered the mountain were removed or destroyed by fires during the logging period (Heritage Burnaby, 2013). The effects of extensive commercial logging resulted in the current second growth trees that have grown and recolonized most areas. The oldest of these trees are about 100 years old, and primarily consist of red alder with some broad leaf maple, vine maple, and balsam poplar trees (City of Burnaby, 2000; Crampton, 1980). Note that while I purposefully name the species of trees that populate this forest prior to and after colonial logging practices to unsettle the timelessness of the forest and to point to the destruction of the red cedar tree, the very naming and classification of the trees according to Eurowestern taxonomies is itself not an innocent practice and is entangled in specific colonial worlding histories and practices that privilege

particular ways of knowing the world while intentionally or unintentionally ignoring others (Collard, 2012; Dickinson, 2013; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013).

Walking through the forest along the partly-human made trail traversing the wooded landscape is a compelling way through which educators might begin to refigure presences in this particular place by unsettling the separation of past-present, constructed-natural, human-non-human, nature-culture. As Haraway (2008) reminds me, critical attention to these entangled relationalities through the embodied act of walking holds ethical world-making potentialities - “actual encounters are what make beings” (p. 67).

What histories, demarcations and boundaries are either enacted, obscured, or perhaps both, by the forest trail and apparent timelessness of the forest when we walk with children? Instone (2010a) provides a helpful shift in this timelessness in reconfiguring walking as a literal and metaphoric journey; providing openings to the affectivities in the “mobile and contested meanings” of a place (p. 362). Thinking of our walks through the trail as encountering a contested place, what stories might educators think with to “destabilize notions of fixed national space and stable identity” and foreground the inherent contestations that pervade this place (Instone, 2010a, p. 360)?

Simpson (2013) tells a story of colonialism and its entanglements with extraction that highlights these contestations, particularly when placed alongside the preceding story of the mountain forest’s logging history:

*Extraction and assimilation go together. Colonialism and capitalism are based on extracting and assimilating. My land is seen as a resource. My relatives in the plant and animal worlds are seen as resources. My culture and knowledge is a resource. ...The act of extraction removes all of the relationships that give whatever is being extracted meaning.*

...*Colonialism has always extracted the indigenous—extraction of indigenous knowledge, indigenous women, indigenous peoples. (para. 11)*

What does this story do to the act of walking through the forest trail? What might educators learn by following extractive settler colonial logging histories in this forest as a past that is not closed, but remains as an active *presence* in the fabric of the forest, the forest trail and its vibrant materialities (Barad, 2011) and in the *Shxwelí*, “the life force that exists in all things” (Stó:lō Nation Lalems ye Stó:lō Si:ya:m, 2003, p. 5)? Perhaps this might create interferences (Haraway, 1992) in the authority of colonial imaginaries (Said, 1978) that represent this place as unspoilt ‘pure nature’, obscuring its contestations and territorial appropriations. As Korteweg and Russell (2012) suggest, “we cannot skip ahead to some neutralized ahistorical, guilt-free, pain-free, ‘romanticized’ version of environmental education” (p. 8). In the encounter described in the opening to this paper, nature is framed as awaiting human inscription through children’s discoveries rather than in always already present, entangled yet non-innocent and asymmetrical power relations (Taylor, 2013).

Foregrounding entanglements between time and place then might act as a means to interrupt the representational, decontextualized colonial gaze that most nature early childhood pedagogies embed— including conceptions of this land/place as natural territory, discoverable, unoccupied, mute, commodity, and static (Clare, 2011; Ritskes, 2012; Taylor, 2013). These interruptions might also create openings towards inhabiting the multiplicities of place, engaging in politicized dialogues with place – for *refiguring presences*. For educators, this might include experimenting with being in relation with a particular place, and its specificities, through material stories, myth, more-than-human vibrancies, colonial past-present histories, and other disparate connections (Instone, 2010a). In these understandings, as we (the educators and

myself) walk through the mountain forest with children, perhaps we might ‘see’ this place as neither simply physical nor easily categorized, but rather as a place of complex mutual encounters.

*Lingering at tree stumps*

*The children stop to climb atop the old tree stumps and touch the deeply lined crevices. Atop some of the decaying tree stumps, young trees and new shoots have emerged....*



**Figure 3.1**



**Figure 3.2 Encountering an old tree stump**

Red cedar tree stumps might teach us different stories as witnesses (Haraway, 1997) to colonial histories and Indigenous relationalities with the land. Perhaps anticolonial “worlding stories of accountability” and responsibility to this place and its histories might be enacted through these stories (Haraway, 2011, n.p.). Perhaps bringing these stories to nature pedagogies might create movement towards “the hard work of unsettling nature as it is imagined and engaged in settler societies” (Cattelino, 2013, para. 16). While the old growth red cedar trees of this mountain were mostly destroyed by commercial logging (Heritage Burnaby, 2013), the cedar

tree stump is also a site at which to disrupt imaginaries of an empty and untouched landscape prior to the colonial project:

*Traditional use of cedar has changed over roughly the past hundred years. Its prominence in Northwest Coast culture is still very high, but many of its uses have notably diminished. Coupled with an escalating demand for western red-cedar as a timber species, the quantity of cedar available to First Peoples is only a fraction of its former amount. Alienation from their former land base because of factors such as tree farm licenses and the creation of parks and protected areas has further reduced the availability and accessibility of cedar....In ongoing treaty and land rights negotiations between First Nations and federal and provincial governments, the availability of cedar features prominently. (Garibaldi & Turner, 2004, p. 5)*

*There was a real good man who was always helping others. Whatever they needed, he had; when they wanted, he gave them food and clothing. When the Great Spirit [Xá:ls] saw this, he said, "That man has done his work; when he dies and where he is buried, a cedar tree will grow and be useful to the people – the roots for baskets, the bark for clothing, the wood for shelter". (Stó:lō Nation; told by Stó:lō elder Bertha Peters, cited in Stewart, 1995, p. 2<sup>21</sup>)*

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<sup>21</sup> I present the living Stó:lō Nation story of the cedar with respect and acknowledgement to the Coast Salish peoples, and with the resonance that “to tell [these] stories is to have at least one foot on sacred ground” (Frank, 2008, p 692). I present this story not as ‘data’ to be subjected to an analytic interpretation, nor as “folklore with its implication of museum culture” (Frank, 2008, p. 690). Instead, I present it as possibilities for interrupting and complicating dominant approaches to nature pedagogies in early childhood education within a settler colonial setting. I also present this story to create situated interferences (Haraway, 1992) in the encounters with the forest that I describe in the paper, and to create movement towards anticolonial relations with this place.

In a publication in a local tourism website that encourages visitors to “discover” this mountain and its forests and trails, there is one reference to First Nations, referring to past villages along one of the rivers in the area (Tourism Burnaby, 2013). On the city’s heritage site, the city’s history is divided into ‘early’, ‘pioneer’, ‘boom’ and ‘modern’ periods. First Nations are mentioned only in the early period, in a reference to the significant reduction in the population due to disease and smallpox brought by Europeans (Heritage Burnaby, 2013). In other words, First Nations are relegated to the past and to the edges of the forest (Oliver, 2007); this particular shaping of nature ‘discovery’ and ‘heritage conservation’ might be seen as neither a simple nor an innocent act, but as a part of practices that create particular ordering imaginaries as “a process not only of acquisition and dispossession, but also of cultural production and forgetting” (Cattelino, 2013, para. 8).

As we walk through the forest with children and enact representational practices that frame “the ‘natural’ as an entity separate from the ‘cultural’” (Willems-Braun, 1997, p. 7), we as early childhood educators are also implicated in reproducing settler-colonial imaginaries and practices of dispossession and forgetting (Cattelino, 2013). Imaginaries of untouched nature devoid of Indigenous material, social and cultural presences are part of “colonial perceptions [that] have worked to de-humanize the landscape” in British Columbia through erasures of Indigenous presences – their interactions with, relating to, and transformations of the forest landscape in different ways (Oliver, 2007, p. 8). As Oliver (2010) notes, these erasures have become a dominant, normalized way of seeing British Columbia:

*A myriad of popular websites, glossy coffee-table books, and tourist memorabilia reproduce the idea of the Northwest Coast as forever primeval and untouched. ... References to past or present Indigenous inhabitation beyond the water’s edge are*

*relegated to the media's margin...a convoluted history entangled with the agendas of different interest groups has influenced these perceptions. ... Over the last few decades this landscape has been as much a contested background for the forestry lobby and environmental activists as a source of artistic inspiration or recreational playground. Nevertheless if we accept the grand narrative of first contact and European colonialism, the marginality of the landscape and its lack of human agency – in short, its domination by nature not culture – represent the region's most salient plotline. (p. 26)*

What might pausing at the tree stumps to honour this land on unceded Coast Salish territories and Stó:lō stories of this place as witnesses to Indigenous active presences refigure and unsettle for us (children, educators, and myself)? Perhaps this might enact a “politics of situated and respectful interference” (Law & Miele, 2010); *refiguring presences* by unsettling the boundaries and relations between what is present and absent or rendered absent/invisible (Law, 2004). What might it mean for us to pause at the tree stumps not to ‘discover’ nature but to refigure what is already there? What might this do towards creating openings for different and unexpected affectivities, connections, relations and pedagogical responses - reorientations that might unsettle the relegation of Indigenous peoples and relationalities to ‘absence’ - to “the immaterial and spectral past” (Cameron, 2008, p. 388)?

### *Touching tree hollows*

*The tree cavities carved into the trees invite the children's curiosities; some tree hollows are close enough to the ground that the children can peer closely and reach in, touching the depths and edges of the holes. Another hollowed out tree trunk is large enough for the children to step inside its depths. Encounters with these tree hollows enact many ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’ inhabitants for the children - “acorns”; “a bath for*

*dinosaurs and bears*”; “*a rabbit-hole*”; “*bear-prints*”, “*a bear-hole*”, “*a giant’s prints*”, “*a special bird*”...



**Figure 4.1**



**Figure 4.2: Encountering tree hollows**

Educators might wonder what other ways of storying tree hollows in this particular place might emerge by looking beyond their familiarity. It might be possible to bring into view some of the multiple figurative and material relationalities that are enacted when children ‘touch’ tree hollows (Haraway, 2008). For instance, perhaps different histories and stories of this forest and the tree hollows that we touch might emerge – stories that connect to land and place. These tree hollows can be seen as world making; not inert or passive but as lively ‘actants’ (Latour, 2004) that participate in creating particular material and social worlds. These worlds are not “exclusively human achievement[s]” but “are co-fabricated between more-than-human bodies and a lively earth” in which the human is but one aspect (Whatmore, 2006, p. 603).

As Indigenous knowledges teach us, relationality encompasses complex relations to the earth, cosmologies, living and non-living beings and all other matter: “a powerful force beyond the immediate and more physically observable culture, one that directs social action beyond the

perspective of human control in terms of what can be counted, evaluated, and physically grasped” (Dei, 2002 as cited in Ritskes, 2012, p. 38). The complex ecologies of the life inhabited in tree hollows – from the microorganisms that coat the cavities, to fungi, insects, squirrels, birds, bears and many others (Cockle, Martin, & Wesołowski, 2011) – might have much to teach early childhood educators about the interdependencies, contradictions and relations of life and death as co-inhabitants of tree hollows. The more-than-human inhabitants of this forest reciprocally change each other as active participants in the storying of this place (van Dooren & Rose, 2012). Van Dooren and Rose (2012) suggest that “attentiveness to nonhuman storying of places...[has the]...ability to provide new perspectives on the world, and in so doing to draw us into deeper and more demanding accountabilities for nonhuman others” (pp. 1-2).

What histories of the tree hollow as an active participant in this encounter might be told, if we contend that “places are materialized as historical and meaningful, and no place is produced by a singular vision of how it is or might be” (van Dooren & Rose, 2012, p. 2)? In other words tree hollows can be seen as more than benign sites for children’s ‘discoveries’ and imaginaries of nature; tree hollows “inhabit their own richly meaningful and storied worlds” (van Dooren & Rose, 2012, p. 10). Different possibilities might be enacted by refiguring this place as a landscape that is inextricably materially and discursively linked to settler colonial histories and Indigenous relationalities with this place (a place where tree hollows hold the traces of colonial histories). As Instone (2010a) notes:

*territory is always an assemblage made up of many elements, many perspectives, many stories – and at times the lines shift, sprout connections, move in unpredictable ways, edges open out and territories change, possibility blossoms...It is possible to choose to sing other refrains, ones attuned to the multiplicity and multivocality (p. 373).*

What might it mean for educators to look out for the entanglements and vibrancies suggested by tree hollows? What might this enact and bring into view in terms of new possibilities for nature pedagogies? Perhaps educators might wonder about tree hollows and their inhabitants and how they are a part of mutually constitutive “human-plant-place relations, colonial dispossession, and other modes of connection between humans and nonhumans” (Instone, 2010b, p. 96)? For instance, it typically takes over a century for decay holes to begin to form in dying trees and often several centuries for a large tree hollow to form (Cockle, Martin, & Wesolowski, 2011). Touching the old tree hollow, then, is also touching histories and wondering about the human and more-than-human pastpresent histories of this place that have been captured through the shaping of the tree hollows themselves over time.

However, tree hollows are not only interesting because their interdependent inhabitants illustrate how more-than-human worlds entail ‘multispecies knots’ (Haraway, 2011) that are active participants in shaping and storying the forest. Tree hollows also offer possibilities for disrupting “the fixed territory of Cartesian linearity” (Instone, 2010a, p. 374) implied by viewing the forest from an anthropocentric perspective. Trees and tree hollows, in other words, are “too social and too narrated to be truly natural” (Latour, 1993, p. 6). I see this perspective as one possible invitation for early childhood educators to simultaneously grapple with material and discursive relationalities in inhabiting and narrating particular ‘webs’ (Haraway, 2011) that animate the forest. The materiality of the tree hollows that the children touch cannot be thought apart from their signification or narration, and the tensions and connections thereof (Latour, 1993).

What might it mean and do for educators to inhabit tree hollows figuratively through ongoing worldings of colonialism? How might seeing tree hollows as figurative for the rot and

devastation created by settler colonialism unsettle our (myself and educators') pedagogical practices and their unintentional "imagining, representing, and purifying [of] 'natural' landscapes" (Willems-Braun, 1997, p. 11)? As Anishinaabe scholar Lee (2011) describes "over 500 years of colonial attacks have ripped holes in the fabric of our relationships within our places" (para. 2). Thinking with the tree hollow as a figure for the effects of colonialism might also be helpful to consider the complexities of colonialism; that the Indigenous cannot be relegated to an absence. Complex relationships and relationalities abound, persist and continually shift *amidst the rot*. Tree hollows perhaps have much to teach us about living with "ontological, ethical, and ecological knots in multispecies contact zones" (Haraway, 2011, n.p.).

A tree hollow in a different forest in what is now British Columbia also illustrates these ethical knots and colonial entanglements. There is an iconic 700 year old western red cedar tree hollow located in Stanley Park, Vancouver, that was the subject of intense public efforts to save it after it was extensively damaged by windstorms. Stanley Park is an iconic tourist attraction, named after the then Governor General of Canada in 1888, when the park was first opened (Barman, 2006). The Stanley Park tree hollow remains standing today, supported by metal steel beams (CTV news, 2011). The immense public effort to 'save' this tree is interesting in itself in relation to the effort to maintain settler imaginaries of pristine wilderness in park spaces – park spaces created through human acts (Barman, 2006; Kheraj, 2007).



**Figure 5. Touring car in front of Hollow Tree at Stanley Park**

(Stanley Park Photographers, 1915) [Credit: City of Vancouver Archives

<http://vancouver.ca/your-government/city-of-vancouver-archives.aspx> ]

*No park is virginal, nor does it remain so. ...The pastoral settings of parks obscure their fractured histories legitimizing elements of the story that those in control choose to share with visitors...despite the rhetoric, and there is a lot of it, Stanley Park was not pristine. It was not even first growth forest. Much of it had been logged....Trees grow back but there was a greater, ongoing challenge to Stanley Park's virginity. The park was imposed on existing ways of life....It took over two-thirds of a century from the imposition of Stanley Park in 1887, for the last of its families to be removed....The park was imposed on existing ways of life....its creation was a consummately colonial enterprise (Barman, 2006, p. 13)*

Barman (2006) writes about the history, tensions and colonial relations entangled within Stanley Park and the effort to save the old tree hollow. In mentioning this story I highlight

*another* account that can be placed alongside the tree hollows we touch in our walks through the mountain forest. Touching the old tree hollow in Stanley Park, is to touch the colonial histories of the park, which includes the removal of Indigenous peoples who lived there for thousands of years in material, spiritual and ceremonial relationship with the red cedar trees before the last dwellings of the Squamish peoples that inhabited this place were burned down (Barman, 2006).

## **Conclusions**

In this paper, I have attempted to experiment with interruptive situated stories of walking forest trails, lingering at tree stumps and touching tree hollows as anticolonial ways of seeing and relating to a place in early childhood nature encounters. I used the notion of *refiguring presences* through stories that attend to settler colonial tensions and Indigenous relationalities that inhabit this particular place. I have intentionally brought forward stories that create possibilities for ways of relating that unsettle anthropocentric and colonial enactments of nature education and the erasures therein. My intent then has been to experiment with possibilities that unsettle innocent and romantic visions of children's relations with nature (Taylor, 2013) and take seriously the implications of inheriting settler colonial histories (Haraway, 2011) in the particular situated localities where I live and practice. I have attempted to resist a singular master narrative – by posing questions rather than definitive answers alongside the stories, and by attempting to “write theory through stories” in which “things matter not because of how they are represented but because they have qualities, rhythms, forces, relations, and movements” (Stewart, 2011, p. 445).

While restorying places might create possibilities towards more equitable orientations and ethical relationalities, it is important to note that this does not present a resolution to the messiness of ongoing colonialisms. Indigenous peoples' displacements from the places I describe in this paper, remain as unresolved “epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence” (Tuck &

Yang, 2012, p. 5). Here I have just begun to suggest possibilities for early childhood educators to attend closely to “how differences get made, what gets excluded, and how these exclusions matter” (Barad, 2007, p. 30) in everyday encounters with ‘natural’ places. I also have begun to suggest possibilities for experimentation with tracing the multiplicities of place through storied encounters – where place and the ‘things’ that inhabit it are seen as active, contingent and situated witnesses to colonial worldings (Haraway, 2011; Spivak, 1990). As a beginning to anticolonial practices in early childhood education, I suggest that relating to the mountain forest trail, to tree hollows and tree stumps in this particular place through multiple material-discursive stories and histories might trouble views of this particular mountain forest as an uninscribed place and might create openings towards difficult conversations, disruptive understandings, and different unsettled place relations.

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## **MANUSCRIPT 4: Touching place in childhood studies: Situated encounters with a community garden**

### **Abstract**

This paper is inspired by recent provocations to consider what it might mean to inherit colonial histories in these times of wounded places; where seeking possibilities for more ethical relations with more-than-human others remains an important task (Haraway, 2011; Rose, 2004). I seek to open up possibilities for an engagement with childhoods' situatedness within ongoing settler colonial relations by paying attention to everyday encounters with a community garden in an early childhood education setting. I experiment with orientations that bring attention to messy historical and sociomaterial relations, while interrupting all too easy moves to romanticize children's 'nature' encounters. I consider how this close noticing by might generate different stories of this particular place and in so doing, create anti-colonial resonances for environmental education.

### **Keywords**

community gardens, settler colonialism, more-than-human relations, nature/culture divide, early childhood environmental education

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## Introduction

I situate this paper alongside recent work in early childhood studies that has used more-than-human<sup>22</sup> epistemologies and ontologies to consider nature pedagogies in relation to Indigenous knowledges, human/more-than-human relationalities, natureculture entanglements, and anti-colonial possibilities (Duhn, 2012; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013; Ritchie, 2012; Somerville, 2006; Taylor, 2013). Inspired by this work, and its commitment to resisting simplistic and romantic couplings of children and nature, I seek to notice the practices; sociomaterialities; and colonial histories<sup>23</sup> and relations that come together to enact the production of a community garden that I visit with children and early childhood educators in the child care centres where my research<sup>24</sup> is situated. My specific localities in the Greater Vancouver area are unceded Musqueam, Squamish, Stó:lo, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations territories (Squamish Nation, 2008; Tsleil-Waututh Nation, 2013; Musqueam Band, 2011; Stó:lo Nation, 2009).

Putting to work an emergent methodology that I refer to as refiguring presences, (see Nxumalo, in press, submitted), I rethink, refigure, and complicate what is considered present in everyday child-educator community garden encounters by paying particular attention to Indigenous relationalities, colonial displacements, garden histories, socio-

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<sup>22</sup>I use more-than-human to refer broadly to all that exceeds the human, whereby the human and non-human are active co-constitutive participants (Whatmore, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> In its intentional selection of particular sociomaterial histories and their connections with everyday garden encounters and ‘things’, my work shares an affinity with Michel Foucault’s (1980) genealogies as “a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its emptiness throughout the course of history” (p. 117).

<sup>24</sup>I work closely with educators and children as a pedagoga in four early childhood group care centres. My role includes supporting possibilities for creative and transformative pedagogies; and, creating shifts towards contextualized understandings of practices with young children.

material encounters, and more-than-human vibrancies<sup>25</sup> (Pratt, 1992; Massey, 2005; Simpson, 2011). I pay particular attention to the unruly propensities of more-than-human actors (Ginn, 2008), and the possibilities this noticing might bring as knowledge-making (Haraway, 1994) that complicates the boundaries enacted in this place. My intent here is to see what anti-colonial resonances might emerge through these practices of refiguring presences. I view these resonances as having the potential to unsettle everyday taken for granted relations (Nxumalo, submitted).

I begin the paper by discussing how and why I use ‘touch’ to refigure presences in community garden encounters. For the remainder of the paper, I engage in literal and metaphorical practices of refiguring presences in the garden assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) through entangled histories, sociomaterialities, and more-than-human actors. More specifically, I refigure presences in the garden through touching historical children-garden pedagogies, political formations of gardens and, settler colonial worldings of gardens. I then map and experiment with touching and unsettling garden lines and line making; attending closely to the complexities and disruptive potentials of the lively yet messy assemblages of garden things, and child-garden worm encounters. I conclude the paper by revisiting the anti-colonial resonances that might be enacted through this work.

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<sup>25</sup> In this paper, I place multiple perspectives alongside each other with political intent; namely, Indigenous knowledges, ‘biological’ perspectives of plant and worm species; and materialist more-than-human perspectives. This is neither to suggest that these perspectives are the same, nor that there are no important and at times even incommensurate differences between and within them (see Nxumalo, in press). My intents here are multiple and inter-related. Firstly, I want to interrupt Eurowestern theories as the centre of knowledge production in the academy and in early childhood pedagogies. Secondly, foregrounding Indigenous knowledges is an integral part of my methodology which intends to interrupt taken for granted everyday settler colonial place relations. Thirdly, I want to highlight pertinent and productive affinities between Indigenous ontologies and materialisms in interfering with anthropocentrism.

### **Refiguring presences in community garden encounters**

Haraway (2006) inspires close attention to the political and ethical potentialities set in motion through human/more-than-human encounters, asking: “which worldings and which sorts of temporalities and materialities erupt into this touch” (p. 145)? Taking up her invitation to think-with, respond to and become accountable to the worldings enacted through specific encounters, I experiment with refiguring what is considered present in a community garden through research practices that restory (Cameron, 2011) this place. In so doing, I am placed within multiple connecting “temporalities and materialities” (Haraway, 2006, p. 145). I intentionally use ‘*touch*’ in restorying this place to emphasize that the practices of refiguring presences that I enact in this paper are particularly attentive to material and affective relations with the garden assemblage. I affect and am affected (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) by more-than-human relationalities, entanglements with pastpresent histories and, the tensions that are thrown up by encounters with the community garden. In other words, by ‘touching,’ I mean more than my physical presence in the garden with children and educators; I touch through affective modes that allow me to restory place in politically disruptive ways. I touch with particular politicized curiosities as well with openings to my own unsettling.

Refiguring presence is also a creative knowledge-making (Haraway, 1997) process; as I engage with making connections, I also experiment with hopeful, yet risky possibilities for refiguring what is seen as present in this garden and the garden encounters. Through both the relationalities and dissonances that emerge from actual and metaphorical acts of touching, I seek out responsive and responsible interruptions of colonial, anthropocentric and innocent worldings of gardens and gardening practices.

However, touching does not come without dangers: “there is a risk of idealizing the paradigmatic ‘other’ of vision, for instance, as a signifier of embodied unmediated knowing and relating. Thinking with touch does not assure resolution; it opens new questions” (Bellacasa, 2009, p. 299). The hopeful possibilities that I enact point to ways of knowing and relating that elude easy resolution and are always partial. As Haraway (2008) reminds me:

touch ramifies and shapes accountability. Accountability, caring for, being affected, and entering into responsibility are not ethical abstractions; these mundane, prosaic things are the result of having truck with each other. Touch does not make one small; it peppers its partners with attachment sites for world making. Touch, regard, looking back, becoming with—all these make us responsible in unpredictable ways for which worlds take shape...Touch and regard have consequences (p. 36).

Importantly, refiguring presences through generative human/more-than-human cominglings, mutualities and relationalities assumes neither the absence of human difference nor the presence of equal relations between humans. In other words, the sociomaterial asymmetries enacted through presences of settler colonialism, racialization, whiteness, gender and class are never erased from gardens and are an intrinsic part of my own situated, contingent and embodied location as a racialized settler immigrant in colonial gardens and colonial garden histories<sup>26</sup>. In this paper I intentionally attempt to decentre the human by foregrounding human/more-than-human entanglements and more-than-human vibrancies. I do this in ways that engage gardens in both their dampening and transformative effects within ongoing socio-material formations of empire.

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<sup>26</sup>See Nxumalo (submitted) for an in depth discussion of the entanglements of my researcher subjectivities.

I engage touch through art images of gardens, historical imageries of gardening, and specific sociomaterialities of everyday child-educator-garden encounters. I engage touch with images not to represent place but rather to enact a politicized (re)storying of place within a settler colonial context – a non-innocent, entangled, and implicated worlding. Bellacasa (2009) refers to this as “touching vision” where “refusing the distinction between vision and touch troubles the ground of objectivity” (p. 308). What might these practices of refiguring presences do? What interruptions might be created to practice-as-usual? What connections might emerge and enact disruptions to visions of already demarcated, categorized, “settled” and defined colonial place? How might inhabiting multiple and differential place relations as a site for early childhood inquiry open up lines for engaging with complexity? As I discuss in the next section, situating gardens within Eurowestern early childhood pedagogies is one place to begin to encounter these complexities.

### **Cultivating nature’s children – gardening pedagogy histories**

The child care centers where I work are located alongside a second growth forest, a large part of which is a designated protected conservation area and is home to several animal species including deer, raccoons, black bears, and coyotes. The forest has become an important part of the children’s pedagogical experiences (Nxumalo, in press). A community garden that lies at the edge of a part of this forest has also recently become a place of interest for educators and children. The community garden’s stated purpose is to engage in “healthy recreational activity while growing nutritious food, benefiting from the connection to nature, and social interaction”<sup>27</sup>. The space has been divided into

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<sup>27</sup> Community garden reference omitted to maintain anonymity.

garden plots, separated by wooden planks available for rental to members of the local community to grow organic vegetables in numbered assigned plots subject to adherence to the policies and procedures in the gardening agreement.



**Figure 1. Encounters with the community garden**

As with many early childhood nature pedagogies in British Columbia, gardening is not new to these children; each of the centers has a garden area in their outdoor play spaces, where educators and children tend to and grow flowers and vegetables. These practices have a long history in Eurowestern early childhood education. Eighteenth-century Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau inspired generations of romantic nature-based early childhood pedagogies with his beliefs in “‘Nature’ as the child’s best teacher” (Taylor & Giugni, 2012, p. 114). For instance, in 1840 Friedrich Fröebel began gardens specifically designed to prepare kindergarten children “for living in a perfectly ordered civil society” (Taylor, 2013, p. 41). Rudolf Steiner, Maria Montessori, and Loris Malaguzzi are other notable early childhood educational philosophers inspired by Rousseau’s emphasis on connecting children with nature (Taylor & Giugni, 2012). In early twentieth century North American schools, gardens were part of the nature study

movement and were designed to give children opportunities to learn about ‘nature’ through the garden (Frost, 2009). School gardens were also widely introduced as tools to teach desired moral and social attributes such as pride in community, and individual responsibility for public property (Bassett, 1981; Lawson, 2005). They were also used to teach the respectability of labour. Children, under close adult supervision, were trained to work efficiently in the belief that this training could be transferred to factory work (Bassett, 1981; Lawson, 2005). This role of the adult figure in ‘leading’ or shaping children-followers is apparent in the war time propaganda poster depicted in Figure 2. Here children are depicted joining the ‘school garden army’ using the famed children’s tale figure of the pied piper, now remade into America’s nation building and patriarchal Uncle Sam character.



**Figure 2. Follow the Pied Piper**

(Barney, 1919) [Credit: U.S. Department of Agriculture Poster Collection]

These histories remain an active presence in Eurowestern early childhood garden pedagogies; continuing to do the work of maintaining nature/culture divisions; enacting

romantic discourses of a special relationship between children and nature; and structuring childhood (and education) as a preparatory site towards normative adulthood (Taylor, 2013; Williamson, 2002).

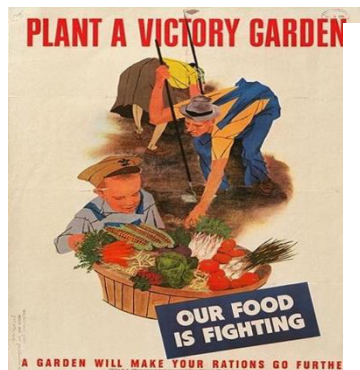
### **Situating community gardens in political formations**

*As children and educators engage in ‘everyday’ gardening practices - planting, tending, weeding, and learning about healthy foods, I am unsettled as I consider the seeming innocence of these practices. I wonder what looking into the entanglements of gardening with empire building and settler colonialism might do? (field notes)*

Community gardens in urban environments have been introduced with different purposes in a multitude of spaces and places, including, but not limited to: providing food to poor urban families; targeting immigrant families to inculcate “civic duty, health and sanitation, and middle-class aesthetic values” (Lawson, 2005, p. 8) to build a sense of community; to beautify city neighbourhoods; to support war efforts materially and discursively; to revitalize depressed neighbourhoods; and, as a source for local business development (Lawson, 2005).

In North America, community gardens flourished during the Great Depression as relief gardens; during World War I as liberty gardens; and during World War II as victory gardens or war gardens (Williamson, 2002). In British Columbia, there were over 1,400 victory gardens in 1943, prompting a headline in the Vancouver News Herald stating that “if all the Victory Gardens in British Columbia were lumped together, they would occupy a space approximately three times the size of Vancouver's great Stanley Park” (Buswell, 1980, para. 11). As illustrated in Figure 3, through government propaganda in Canada, the United States, and Britain, gardening during wartime became permeated with

nationalist idealism and figured as a weapon of war. As Ginn (2012) notes, “the garden, a place where craft, soil and blood mingled, was doubly inscribed not only as a place from which the war might be won, but also as a reason why the war should be won” (p. 297). During this time, these community gardens were also referred to as ‘food gardens for defense’ (Buswell, 1980).



“Food is no less a weapon than tanks, guns, and planes...the duty of every loyal citizen [is] to do everything possible, to accept any sacrifice, so that there shall be plentiful supplies of food for the fighting forces and facilities for delivering them”(Bassett 1981, p.7, as cited in Williamson, 2002, p. 13).

### **Figure 3. Plant a victory garden**

(Unknown, circa 1944) [Credit: Library and Archives Canada/Harry Mayerovitch fonds/c115716]

More recent community garden movements have arisen from the resistance movements generated during the 1960s civil rights and counter-culture eras (French, 2008; Warner, 1987). These community gardens, while typically not conceptualized by the government, require governmental support to provide land for gardening. Other reasons behind the recent rise in community gardens have been a concern with climate change and an accompanying interest in organic gardening (British Columbia Ministry of Community Development & Union of British Columbia Municipalities, 2009). An in-depth discussion of all of the diverse and entangled reasons for the emergence of current community gardens and their many formations are beyond the scope of this paper, and it is not my purpose to minimize the beneficial effects of community gardens. From this

very brief historical overview, my primary purpose is to restory community gardens in ways that disrupt innocence; these are intensely political and ideological places.

The community garden I encounter with children and educators is not outside of these political formations; this organic-only garden, while a place where healthy food might become more accessible, is still located within a locus of socio-material stratification, racialized class privilege and individualized neoliberal relations to food access (see Nxumalo, Pacini-Ketchabaw, and Rowan (2011) for an in depth illustration of connections between neoliberal formations and food/eating practices in early childhood education). These asymmetries are continually “made, marked and re-made” (Ginn, 2013, p. 5), such as through practices of plot rental fees and contracts; garden rules, and individual allotment plots. They are also continually articulated through affective materializations, such as the fence that borders the garden and the accompanying signage marking the garden as patrolled private property. As the following section suggests, the asymmetries of gardens also need to be considered within their presence in settler colonial logics (Casteel, 2003; Longhurst, 2006; Plumwood, 2005).

### **Digging deeper: Community gardens in worldings of settler colonialism**

As I dig into colonial worldings in gardens of North America, I notice an idyllic vision of nature (Casteel, 2007) materialized and enacted in paintings such as the one shown in Figure 4. This painting depicts romanticized visions of a Garden of Eden-like paradise in North America figured as representative of the innocence and normative whiteness of childhood. While this particular painting was an American-commissioned work, many of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century landscape paintings, emerged when artists were commissioned to produce paintings from colonial excursions to the Americas; bringing

back representations of the “discovered” world to Europeans (Clark, Pacini-Ketchabaw & Hodgins, in press). These depictions of idyllic garden-like landscapes stand in stark contrast to the violences enacted during and after these voyages of ‘discovery’ and conquest (Battiste, Bell, Findlay, Findlay & Youngblood Henderson, 2005; Povinelli, 2011; Simpson, 2011).



**Figure 4. "The Voyage of Life: Childhood"**

(Cole, 1842)<sup>28</sup> [Credit: National Gallery of Art, (Open Access), Washington D.C.]

I also unearth colonial imaginaries of *terra nullius* that attempted to erase Indigenous presences and set about ‘improving’ “empty wild” land into property used for ‘productive’ farms and gardens (Ginn, 2008, 2009; Edwards, 2010). As the late ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood (2005) noted, today’s gardens continue to be imbued with settler colonial practices of “domestication and Eurocentric ideals of beauty” (para. 5), imposing order through various flora and fauna. Eurocentric ideals of gardens emerge and are enacted in gardening books, magazines, clubs, and various shows that situate gardens within commodifying practices, privilege particular aesthetics, and “idolise the gardens of the Euro-centre” (Plumwood, 2005, para. 6; also see Highlights

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<sup>28</sup>Thank you to Vanessa Clark for finding this image.

for the Armchair Gardener, 2002). These imaginaries and gardening practices come together to help shape what belongs, lives and grows inside certain gardens, and what becomes classified as a weed or a ‘invasive pest’.

I do not want to suggest an uncomplicated fixed division between ‘alien’ and ‘Indigenous’ species. For instance, my use of the term ‘Indigenous’ carries with it omissions that mask the complexities, nuances, politics and situatedness of Indigeneity—such as specific cosmologies, ceremony, living knowledges and many human and more-than-human relations (de Finney, personal communication, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014). Further to this, within the limits of this paper, I am not discussing in depth the historical contingencies and situated contradictions in how divisions between ‘alien’ and ‘Indigenous’ have been and continue to be viewed and taken up in gardening practices of killing and ‘saving’ certain plant species (Badger, 2009; Braun, 2002; Ginn, 2008; 2009). Some of these include practices of preserving or saving certain places as ‘wild’ nature; forest conservation; neoliberal natures; and ‘native species’ gardening trends, amongst several techniques of contingent and contradictory stratifications of land (Braun, 2002; Ginn, 2009; Langford, 2012; Lorimer, 2012). What I am more interested in here, is beginning to untangle some of the sociomaterial workings of plant, animal and land domestication as active presences in establishing settler colonialism. Also as I discuss later in the paper, I am interested in the slippages, resistances and mutualities that create stutters to colonial ways of seeing and doing garden encounters with young children.

As I continue to dig into settler colonial practices that introduced imported species which have diminished or destroyed Indigenous species (Plumwood, 2005), I find an example that illustrates that domestication relationships are complex; they are not

inherently exploitative and solely human-directed (Haraway, 2008). I find this example in camas<sup>29</sup>, a starchy flowering vegetable that the Coast Salish Peoples domesticated for many generations using multiple and complex practices (Kwiáht, 2014). Some of the multiple human and more-than-human entangled participants in empire building that lead to the decline of both wild camas fields and domesticated camas gardens include: increased potato cultivation which effectively displaced camas, appropriation of lands for settler agriculture, the spread of invasive grasses that accompanied sheep grazing, and colonial restrictions on traditional food cultivation and gathering (Corntassel & Bryce, 2012; Deur & Turner, 2005; Kwiáht, 2014).

The land on which we stand – gardens, plants, organisms, soil and many unseen presences - all “hold the memory of all traces” (Barad, 2011, p. 146) of their intimate entanglements with violent empire building in settler colonial places. As Saquaro (2006) notes, there are many variations of gardens in settler colonial places, but they are all imbued with colonial histories, including displacements of people, plants and animals. To illustrate this, I turn to the story of X'muzk'i'um (Camosun Bog), a place on Musqueam territories, and wonder about both the traces of empire, and the Indigenous relational presences that are alive in this place that has been a part of Musqueam First Nation stories, food, medicine and ceremony for thousands of years (Point, 2012). I pause here and let the following words “speak” for themselves:

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<sup>29</sup> Thank you to Dr. Sandrina de Finney and Vanessa Clark for the Camas example

X'muzk'i'um (Camosun Bog)<sup>30</sup>

*“[X'muzk'i'um Camosun Bog] is also a place that I take my grandchildren. It's a place that has been here for thousands of years. And there are very few people within the city of Vancouver that even know of this place”. (Susan Point, Musqueam artist, 2012)*

*“This was our garden, our people's garden; where they had picked the berries, picked the medicinal plants...we have to save this for our children and our children's children”. (Rose Point, Musqueam elder, 2012)*

*“When the bog shrinks that means people have drained the bog for urbanization, for uses of land, removing what Western culture calls unusable land or unusable space... If it is allowed to shrink anymore that actually erases all of the corroborating evidence of the story of Musqueam...it removes all traces of any of the stories that we are able to tell... We can still tell the story but we won't be able to say this is where it originates” (Larry Grant, Musqueam elder, 2012)*

What memories do places like X'muzk'i'um (Camosun Bog) hold of past *and* present Indigenous relationalities? What might we (myself, educators and children) learn from the story of this place as a Musqueam people's garden for medicine and ceremony; from its near destruction from construction site dumping and intentional draining; from

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<sup>30</sup>To view an image of X'muzk'i'um (Camosun bog), please go to [http://susanpoint.com/files/2012/02/cultural\\_secret.jpg](http://susanpoint.com/files/2012/02/cultural_secret.jpg)

its ongoing partial restoration by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (see Camosun Bog Restoration Group, n.d) and; from ongoing colonial dispossession from this place?

These stories, while necessarily incomplete, hold and enact a “revolutionary force” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 19) that disrupts taken for granted settler understandings of what gardens are and can be. I see this as “knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination” (Haraway, 1991, p. 192). Camas and X'muzk'i'um stories resonate and stay with me as I reconsider the community garden I encounter with children and educators in connection to seen and unseen presences. If we take seriously the idea that “touch is never pure or innocent...[and is] inseparable from the field of differential relations that constitute it” (Barad, 2012, p. 215), how then might touching place in early childhood education be refigured to interrupt the violent banality of disregard for these presences?

### **Unsettling forest/garden lines**

*A fence encloses the community garden we visit with children, separating it from the surrounding forest. The fence seems to struggle to separate the ‘wild’ forest from the ‘domesticated’ garden. The deer we sometimes encounter in the garden feeding on the vegetables also seem out-of place, yet highlight the tenuousness of this separation. The possibility of an encounter with the coyotes and bears that inhabit the forest is another unsettling affective presence. ‘Wild’ vegetables also seem to contest this separation by growing ‘outside of garden row formation’ beyond the boundaries of the forest-garden fence-line. A pile of uprooted weeds sits at the entrance to the garden; while some plots appear neat*

*and carefully tended with rows of vegetables, others are overgrown with weeds.*

(field notes)



**Figure 5. Encountering community garden lines**

The creation of lines around what counts as ‘pure’ nature is intimately entangled with settler colonial past-present histories. As previously discussed, I consider certain acts of domesticating, demarcation, and controlled planting of landscapes as part of the making of colonial projects within imaginaries “of a pristine, purified and timeless precolonial nature” (Instone, 2010 p. 97). What emerges from paying attention to the “materializing effects” created by the ways in which boundaries are drawn between the human/more-than-human and between nature/culture (Barad, 2011, pp. 123-124)? Here I want to touch and be touched by lines such as the fence that struggles to contain the garden and forest boundaries, the lines that separate each garden plot, and the gate to the garden with the sign marking this place as ‘private property’. These lines are enacting colonizing orderings, management and mastery over the cultivated plants and the ‘wild’ forest. As Tuhiwai Smith (1999) notes, “the line is important, because it was used to map territory, to survey land, [and] to establish boundaries” (p. 53). I witness the lines

separating the individual garden plots and separating the forest from the garden as connected with the colonial mapping of territories. I become curious about how certain demarcating lines are made and decided.

Deleuze (2009) suggests that “some lines are segments, or segmented; some lines get caught in a rut, or disappear into “black holes”; some are destructive, sketching death; and some lines are vital and creative” (p. 1). What if we (myself and educators) consider *both* the productive and oppressive forces) of the lines in the relations that come together in the forest-garden assemblage? How do the vibrancies of place restoried through multispecies relations sit alongside the border-lines of the garden? What might we learn by paying attention to not only colonial framing enacted by lines, but also to leaks, cracks and ruptures in these lines? How do these lines escape their intended effects as acts of containment, representation and visibility (Holmes, 2012)? What is set into motion as children notice and touch the vegetables growing in the forest beyond the fence-line (see Figure 6), and as they encounter deer feeding on the vegetables in the garden? These ‘escapes’ of plants and animals between forest and garden line are not without danger, including possible harm to the forest floor. However, before I consider pulling up the ‘wild forest vegetables’, I want to engage with the potentials of the presence of unruly assemblages. Perhaps these moments might be also seen as encounters with the active presences and queer performativities of the more-than-human world (Barad, 2011; Ginn, 2013). Such unexpected encounters might also bring into view potentialities for alternative relations to this place beyond an already known, defined and separate ‘domesticated community garden’ and ‘wild forest’.



**Figure 6. Vegetables growing on the forest floor**

Perhaps common worlds (Latour, 2004; Taylor, 2013) emerge here through such unpredictable assemblages, where the composers of these entangled worlds “are certainly not all human, nor are they evenly empowered or equally interested in the composing” (Ginn, 2013, p. 2). How might touching these messy and continually shifting common worlds of forest/vegetable garden/human/animal co-presences be a place to relate differently to nature as natureculture (Haraway, 2008)? These different relations might include “a dissonance, a provocation to re-think and to walk differently...[and consider]...human-plant-place relations, colonial dispossession, and other modes of connection between humans and nonhumans” (Instone, 2010, p. 96). I pause in this place to consider the possibilities suggested by non-conformity, co-implication; by becoming-with (Haraway, 2011). I wonder about the disruptive potentialities enacted by the forest and the garden vegetables in interrupting and unsettling colonial ordering practices that are embedded in the domesticated garden. Encountering this garden as a place of liminality may create pedagogical openings for destabilizing Eurocentric colonial rootedness (Head & Muir, 2006). Perhaps this unsettles the dualities between non-human nature and human culture; and between the wild and domesticated that have acted to

erase Indigenous presences. These dualisms can be traced back to Enlightenment logic [which] positioned the thinking human subject at the centre of the world” (Potter & Hawkins, 2009, para. 2).

Perhaps as Tsing (2013) suggests, close attention to the vitality and assemblages of plant worlds might be a way to begin to bring into view some of the ways in which more-than-human worlds are made; where humans are not the central participants. She notes that “to even begin to tell these stories offers a reminder of the entangling of multiple scales and trajectories in the making of social landscapes” (p. 36). While both the community garden and the adjacent forest have emerged from human disruptions to the landscape (see Nxumalo, in press on the logging histories of this forest) such as logging, cultivation, weeding, and composting practices; the *active* relations between the multiple plant and animal species that inhabit the forest have created assemblages beyond human control (Tsing, 2013). I witness these interruptions as creating openings towards inhabiting messiness and for generating politicized dialogues with this place. Touching this forest garden, and its lines and boundaries in this way is about much more than exposing children to learning about a pure and separate nature (Taylor, 2013), but a place where early childhood educators and children might begin to “to live the consequences of non-stop curiosity inside mortal, situated, relentlessly relational worlding” (Haraway, 2006, p. 143). In these understandings then, places, such as this forest garden, are neither simply physical nor easily categorized, but places of complex mutual encounter and “ethics then emerges not from a transcendent interpretation of nature, but from our always imperfect and never innocent responses to the specific naturalcultural entanglements through which we come to be in the world” (Weakland, 2012, p. 129).

Apprehending the emergent interactions between the forest and garden highlights the tenuousness of boundaries around what counts as ‘pure’ nature (Ginn, 2009; Haraway, 1997). The garden perhaps then is “never simply the product of settler’s imaginations, but a much more contested material landscape, where trees, [plants, worms] and weeds ‘push back’ to alter the nature of the project” (Ginn, 2009, p. 40). In other words, more-than-human socialities (Tsing 2013) disrupt and subvert colonial impositions of control, belonging and order.

### **Relating to more-than-human assemblages**

*This garden has invited multiple possibilities for engaging with the ‘otherwise’.*

*This particular community garden, its location on the edge of the forest, the shifting ‘disorderly’ assemblages of things in it - have become a site of curiosity for children and educators. These things include chairs, carefully tended plots alongside overgrown untended plots, giant-sized vegetables and flowers, a pile of uprooted weeds, a concrete shed, worms, a makeshift “no stealing’ sign - and more...A tire is picked up and carried along, then put down on a log as it becomes too heavy for the child to carry. (field notes)*



**Figure 7. Garden assemblage**

I intentionally want to refigure these materialities by considering ways of relating that go beyond seeing and responding to these ‘things’ as garbage, clutter, out-of-place, and ugly. The ‘things’ that are in the garden and the different ways they beckon to and affect the children (questions, curiosity and touch/carrying) are suggestive of what Taylor (2013), drawing from Donna Haraway, terms a “queer kin relational ontology” (p. 83) that perhaps disrupts the romanticization of the ‘child in the pristine garden’ in normative garden pedagogies and as seen in the ‘New World’ painting in Figure 4. Perhaps attending and responding to children’s relations with the more-than-human vibrancies of the ‘queer’ things in this place might enact anti-colonial ways of seeing; ways of seeing

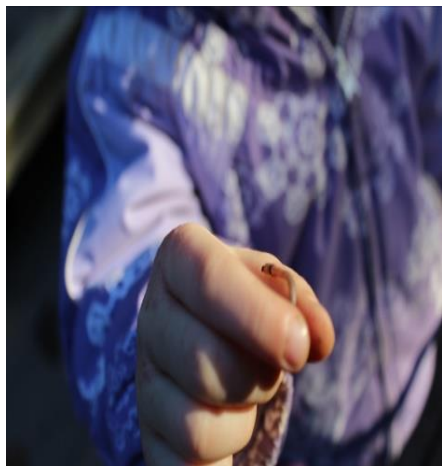
that begin to appreciate the complex liveliness of this garden and its resistances to a simple categorization as an organic-only community garden, or as an enclosed, pure, romantic natural place awaiting children's learning about nature. These messy relations are "characterized by lively processes and impure forms, co-existing in inhabited landscapes" (Lorimer, 2012, p. 595) that elude categorization within the borders of community gardening. Disruptions of purity are important in a settler colonial society where purificationist resonances in delineations of belonging for plants and animals are entangled in complex ways with settler constructions of belonging (Head & Muir, 2006).

In touching this assemblage of images and seeking out other practices/ways of becoming with these seemingly disparate 'things,' my hope is to create interruptive affects. I wonder if attending to these affective resonances might interfere with the technologies and histories of control that permeate gardening practices in this settler colonial place? What new realities and knowledges might be enacted through attention to the human and more-than-human "transformative mutualism" (Tsing, 2012, p. 515) enacted through the garden, the forest, the things in it and the assemblages that come together therein? More-than-human assemblages in this place perhaps point to the instability and leakiness of the boundaries created by anthropomorphic colonizing conceptions of place such as the 'domesticated' garden and the 'wild' forest.

### **Touching garden worms**

*A non-innocent relational ethics (Simpson, 2011; Whatmore, 2006) of caring and protection seems to emerge in children's embodied encounters with the worms that are abundant in the garden's soil. The educator and myself witness relations marked by mutual attentiveness, curiosity, and touch: children name the worms, imagine worm*

families, and are closely attentive to the worms' various actions and movements, including their movements on their hands, which they describe as for example, "tickling me", "looking at me, "thinking" and "giggling"...



-- Worms are not scared of people. That worm is doing a happy dance!  
 -- The worms are tickling me!  
 -- Let's name them! This one is called 'Toothless'!  
 -- I'm going to call this worm 'Smart Cookie.'  
 -- This is the time when Toothless and Shootball are babies, and this is their Dad...they're a family.  
 -- Haha, it tickles.  
 -- Look what worm is doing...he's giggling.  
 -- I think worm is looking for some food

**Figure 8. Touching garden worms**

I see potential in these mundane encounters between children and worms for an ethical becoming-with through mutual *touch*, responsiveness and curiosity rather than a pre-defined 'learning' experience (Haraway, 2008; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2013; Taylor, & Pacini-Ketchabaw, in press). Here ethical caring relations are seen as emerging in the middle of the everyday life through immanent materialized connections (Bellacasa, 2009). That is to say, *seemingly* mundane and unimportant things and places can be a site for caring ethical relations involving "tasks that make living better in interdependence, but which are often considered petty and unimportant, however vital they are for liveable relations" (Bellacasa, 2011, p. 9). I emphasize the word *seemingly* here to emphasize that, as I have attempted to illustrate throughout this paper, the garden is far from a

mundane place. For example, Camas and X'muzk'i'um (Camosun Bog) gardens speak as complex, sacred and pedagogical places in Indigenous ontologies.

Even the playfulness of children's encounters with gardens and garden worms, is a site to consider how touching worms holds consequential possibilities for children to learn how to get along with and care for more-than-human others in these messy inherited histories (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2013). If we take seriously John Law's (2011) contention that "different practices enact different realities" (p. 3), we might ask how 'nature' is enacted by paying attention to the kind of worm that emerges through these embodied practices? Perhaps then we might encourage relations that foreground the worm as responsive; as evoking care, attention and responsibility. Here worms evoke affective responses through the specific mutual sociomaterial compositions they take in these encounters (Bertoni, 2012).

The worms in this encounter emerge through complex human-more-than-human inter-relationships including their movements on children's bodies and through the soil, in relation with children's and educator's words and actions. Through these situated encounters, the assemblages of worms-children and their relations that emerge suggest enactments of worms through mutual interaction between humans and nonhuman species. In paying attention to disruptive presences in these encounters, I want to highlight the political potentiality of the 'ordinary' (Ahmed, 2004; Berlant, 2008; Blaise, 2013, Stewart, 2007; 2011, 2012; Tsing, 2005). Perhaps these ordinary encounters might be seen as holding potential to seek less anthropomorphic ways of relating to this place; as a vibrant assemblage (Bennett, 2010) – rather than a mute site awaiting children's meaning-making.

In this particular situated settler colonial place, the ethical animal-place-body resonances I am tentatively suggesting here are always already partial; relationality does not aim to erase or transcend difference (Haraway, 2011). As Lorimer (2012) states, “the coming into being of humans and non-humans involves immanent processes, not the revelation of universal and transcendent forms” (p. 596). Attention to reciprocal encounters between children and the more than human plant, animal, and objects in this garden, neither erases nor resolves difficult ethical questions such as “what counts as a livable life and a grievable death” (Butler, 2004, p. xv) in the making of the forest-garden and its entanglements with pastpresent colonialisms? In other words, perhaps educators might also begin to consider how touching earthworms in this garden is also to touch colonial histories.

The colonial “temporalities and materialities” (Haraway, 2006, p. 145) that emerge from touching earthworms in this community garden are complex and here I just briefly engage with where they might take us (myself, educators and children). Touching worms takes us to glaciers during a Pleistocene ice age that brought indigenous worms in North America close to extinction; it takes us to colonial ships, which brought most of the earthworm species currently in North America (Smithsonian Environmental Research Centre, 2013):

New earthworms began entering North America as early as the 1600s, with the first European settlers. They crossed over in root balls or the dry ballast of ships. As the British, French, Spanish and Dutch colonized the American continent, they were largely oblivious to another colonization going on under their feet. European earthworms thrived in the upper soils of forests and gardens. Native earthworms,

if there were any, remained deeper underground. In the end Europe's earthworms established an empire....(para.2)

In British Columbia, these introduced worms quickly spread through the land, outpacing the few remaining indigenous earthworms. Known as 'ancient earthworms', these indigenous worms inhabit British Columbia's forest soils (Marshall & Fender, 1998; 2007). While worms' benefits to the earth's ecosystems are well known, recent work also points to the destructive effects of the spread of introduced worms to Canadian forests (Addison, 2009). This story illustrates the contingencies, complexities and contradictions of domestication relationships. As I discussed earlier, more-than-human socialities are active and unruly participants in domestication relationships (Cassidy, 2007; Haraway, 2008; Tsing, 2013). Children's relations with garden worms, the forest, the community garden, as well as the boundaries and porosities therein, become even more complicated, non-innocent and unsettling.

### **Conclusions: Opening to anti-colonial resonances**

In this paper, I have intentionally focused my attention towards knowledge making practices that trouble the enduring innocence of the child-garden/child-in-nature figure. I have attempted to critically engage with the sociomaterialities, tensions and situated histories that emerge from refiguring presences in everyday encounters with a particular community garden. I have made no attempts to 'tidy up' this place and have resisted avoiding the 'mess' that emerges from making visible connections between histories of community gardens, children in gardens, and settler colonialism. Instead, I have experimented with literal and figurative 'touch' as a way to refigure presences by foregrounding colonial territorialities, and multiple place stories. I have also noticed and

become unsettled by everyday encounters with unexpected and unruly performativities of more-than-human assemblages. I see this unsettling as an important part of enacting anti-colonial resonances and possibilities – possibilities that disrupt normative and orderly gardening pedagogies.

While I suggest that educators and children actively seek out the histories, and Indigenous ontologies of the places they inhabit, and consider what an “interspecies garden ethics” (Plumwood, 2005, para 23) might look like in their particular contexts, I also wonder what other effects these moments of unsettling (which cannot necessarily be known in advance) might have for practice with children. I remain hopeful that noticing with children unexpected garden assemblages and more-than-human relations might enact a beginning towards unsettling the “colonial order of things” (Stoler, 2008, p. 193) embedded in the romantic visualities of gardens and gardening in early childhood environmental education.

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## APPENDIX A: Centre Invitation letter



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### INVESTIGATING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENTS

We are happy to inform and invite you to participate in a research initiative entitled *"Investigating Quality Early Childhood Environments"* which is being conducted by Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Dr. Alan Pence and a large group of research assistants. Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Dr. Alan Pence are faculty members at the School of Child and Youth Care in the University of Victoria.

This research is being funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Child Care Policy Branch for the period beginning September 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012.

The purpose of this research project is to situate BC's promotion of quality within the most dynamic discourses currently found internationally regarding quality care. The research will promote the active engagement of key stakeholders, most critically early childhood practitioners (including early childhood educators and family childcare providers) and parents, in discussions and actions that can lead to the formation of sustainable and positive care-giving environments. A participatory action research model will be used to engage early childhood practitioners in BC to reflect on knowledge, experiences, values, and practice to derive richer, contextual meaningful and relevant understandings and practices on 'quality' care that best serve the well-being and optimal development of children from diverse backgrounds and settings in BC. The objectives of this project are:

1. To develop a broader understanding of the current major issues constituting the discourse of quality in early childhood care and education from different perspectives emerging through a literature review.
2. To incorporate the issues derived from the literature review to create a rich, contextual and relevant curriculum for early childhood practitioners, that will best meet the needs of children in British Columbia.
3. To engage in professional support and development with BC early childhood practitioners by addressing the issues of quality care through a professional development model, involving group sessions and the design and execution of a project by practitioners in their practice settings, which will be initiated in the group sessions and carried out in practitioners' settings.

4. To support and collaborate with early childhood practitioners towards designing, executing and evaluating a project in their practice settings.
5. To facilitate focus groups and interview sessions with practitioners towards the evaluation of the professional development model described in points 1 to 4.

Research of this type is important because it will help to advance the development and promotion of rich, contextual, meaningful and relevant understandings and practices related to quality in early childhood settings in BC. This will contribute to new perspectives and knowledge that will best suit and serve children of diverse backgrounds and settings in BC, increasing the benefits of investing in early childhood programs. It will also give you an opportunity to participate in an exciting initiative of professional development.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include:

- a) Participating in group sessions (ten three-hour sessions) in which issues related to quality child care will be discussed, with your permission, researchers will be audio and/or video recording the groups sessions.
- b) Implementing a project of your choice in your practice setting related to the issues discussed during the group sessions. Researchers will offer support and guidance during the design and execution of your project, which will involve visits to your setting, engaging in dialogue on an individual and small group basis in person, via email or phone, as well as providing necessary resources. Field notes will be taken by researchers to record conversations during visits in the settings, with your permission. In addition, researchers will collect the field notes and other documentation (e.g., self reflections, photographs, etc.) that you produce during the process of the professional development model. Any photographs that you take of the children during the research project will require permission from the parents (Researchers will give you a form to use).
- c) Participating in a sharing circle that will take place twice during the *Investigating Quality* sessions (September 2011 to June 2012) where all practitioners will meet to share and discuss their experiences, learning, and projects related to the group sessions.
- d) Participating in ongoing and end of project evaluation, which will include, observations, a focus group discussion, interviews, and a survey. Researchers will audio record focus group sessions and interviews with your permission and we will take field notes during the observations.

In total, we will be asking approximately 50 hours of your time throughout a period of 10 months. Involvement in the research project will result in taking time away from your practice. If you agree to participate in this study, we will issue a certificate of participation for the meetings that take place outside working hours which could be used towards your professional development hours. Please note that this certificate must not be coercive. It is

unethical to provide undue compensation or inducements to research participants. If you would not participate if the compensation was not offered, then you should decline. If you agree to participate in this study, this form of compensation to you must not be coercive.

Your participation in this project will offer you the opportunity to learn, question and investigate the meanings of quality in early childhood care and education. Through your participation in this project you will benefit from professional development with the potential benefit of increasing your knowledge and skill base in the field of early childhood care and education, contributing to the growth of your practice. You will be involved in the processes of deepening and broadening the understanding of quality in early childhood care and education through the examination of various bodies of literature coupled with reflections on knowledge, experiences and practice by practitioners; contributing to new knowledge in the field of early childhood care and education.

If you are interested in participating in this exciting initiative, please send us a response, at your earliest convenience.

If you require more information please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw at (250) 721-6478 or via email at [vpacunik@uvic.ca](mailto:vpacunik@uvic.ca)

Please send your response via mail, fax, or electronically to:

Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw  
School of Child & Youth Care  
University of Victoria  
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Victoria, B.C. Canada V8W 2Y2  
Fax: 250-721-7218  
E-mail: [vpacunik@uvic.ca](mailto:vpacunik@uvic.ca)

## APPENDIX B: Educator Consent Form



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Undergraduate Program  
 On Campus & Distributed Learning  
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 Graduate Program  
 (250) 472-4857

# *Practitioner Consent Form*

## INVESTIGATING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENTS

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled "*Investigating Quality Early Childhood Environments*" which is being conducted by Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Dr. Alan Pence and a group of research assistants. Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw is Assistant Professor at the School of Child and Youth Care in the University of Victoria; and Dr. Alan Pence is Professor at the School of Child and Youth Care in the University of Victoria. If you have any questions you may contact Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw at (250) 721-6478 or via e-mail at [vpacinik@uvic.ca](mailto:vpacinik@uvic.ca) or Dr. Alan Pence at (250) 721-7981 or via e-mail at [apence@uvic.ca](mailto:apence@uvic.ca).

This research is being funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Child Care Policy Branch for the period beginning September 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012.

The purpose of this research project is to situate BC's promotion of quality within the most dynamic discourses currently found internationally regarding quality care. The research will promote the active engagement of key stakeholders -- early childhood practitioners (including early childhood educators working in centre-based child care and family-based childcare providers) and parents-- in discussions and actions that can lead to the formation of sustainable and positive early learning environments. A participatory action research model will be used to engage early childhood practitioners in BC to reflect on knowledge, experiences, values, and practice to derive richer, contextual meaningful and relevant understandings and practices on 'quality' care that best serve the well-being and optimal development and learning of children from diverse backgrounds and settings in BC. The objectives of this project are:

1. To develop a broader understanding of the current major issues constituting the discourse of quality in early childhood care and education from different perspectives emerging through a literature review.
2. To incorporate the issues derived from the literature review to create a rich, contextual and relevant curriculum for early childhood practitioners that will best meet the needs of children in British Columbia.
3. To engage in professional support and development with BC early childhood practitioners by addressing the issues of quality care through a professional development model, involving group sessions and the design and execution of a project by practitioners in their practice settings, which will be initiated in the group sessions and carried out in practitioners' settings.
4. To support and collaborate with early childhood practitioners towards designing, executing and evaluating a project in their practice settings.

5. To facilitate focus groups and interview sessions with practitioners towards the evaluation of the professional development model described in points 1 to 4.

Research of this type is important because it will help to advance the development and promotion of rich, contextual, meaningful and relevant understandings and practices related to quality in early childhood settings in BC. This will contribute to new perspectives and knowledge that will best suit and serve children of diverse backgrounds and settings in BC, increasing the benefits of investing in early childhood programs.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a licensed centre-based or licensed family-based childcare practice. Initially, your setting was contacted and informed about the research project. You (or setting director) contacted us specifying that you would be interested in participating. In addition to you, other practitioners in Vancouver and Victoria are participating in this project. The material provided to you during the group sessions has been previously provided to two groups of practitioners involved in piloting the “Investigating Quality” project since 2006.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include:

- a) Participating in group sessions (ten three-hour sessions) in which issues related to quality child care will be discussed. With your permission, researchers will audio and/or video record the group sessions.
- b) Implementing a project of your choice in your practice setting related to the issues discussed during the group sessions. Researchers will offer support and guidance during the design and execution of your project, which will involve visits to your setting, engaging in dialogue on an individual and small group basis in person, via email or phone, as well as providing necessary resources. Field notes will be taken by researchers to record conversations during visits in the settings, with your permission. In addition, researchers will collect the field notes and other documentation (e.g., self reflections, photographs, etc.) that you produce during the process of the professional development model. Any photographs that you take of the children during the research project will require permission from the parents (Researchers will give you a form to use).
- c) Participating in a sharing circle that will take place once a month during the *Investigating Quality* sessions (September 2011 to June 2012) where all practitioners will meet to share and discuss their experiences, learning, and projects related to the group sessions.
- d) Participating in ongoing and end of project evaluation, which will include, observations, a focus group discussion, interviews, and a survey. Researchers will audio record focus group sessions and interviews with your permission and we will take field notes during the observations.

You may review any of the transcripts produced during the project upon request and add any additional comments or extract comments from the original transcripts.

In total, we will be asking approximately 50 hours of your time throughout a period of 10 months. Involvement in the research project will result in taking time away from your practice. If you agree to participate in this study, we will issue a certificate of participation for the meetings that take place outside working hours which could be used towards your professional development hours. Please note that this certificate must not be coercive. It is unethical to provide undue compensation or inducements to research participants. If you would not participate if the

compensation was not offered, then you should decline. If you agree to participate in this study, this form of compensation to you must not be coercive.

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you. Engaging in discussions related to your practice during staff meetings might detract your team from other issues. An inconvenience for children and for you might be the interruption or intrusion of being recorded while engaged in daily activities. If this occurs, recording will be stopped. A potential inconvenience to you if you choose to be part of the project outside working hours is that time will be taken from other non-work related activities of your life.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. You will be involved in group sessions, which will be more or less the same as pre-service professional training sessions and therefore may be somewhat familiar to you. The sessions are not expected to cause undesired stress or emotional disturbance. By being exposed to the contents and the process of the group sessions you will have the opportunity to reflect on your own experiences, practices and values; a process that can be professionally exciting and fulfilling. However, not all your professional experiences may be good. Reflections on negative experiences may be emotionally disturbing at times. An environment of empathy and understanding through listening, respect and appreciation will be established during reflections. A trained facilitator with experience in the field of early childhood education has been hired to deliver the sessions in collaboration with the researchers. You will be asked to contribute only those experiences that you are comfortable and willing to share.

You are invited to select the days and times that a researcher will visit your setting. This approach will not create any possibility of risk other than the usual risks that you may face in your daily activities within your childcare setting. An information letter will be provided to parents to ensure they are aware of researcher visits to your setting. The project does not involve an evaluation of you or your practice, nor an assessment of children's development and/or learning. As a practitioner you will have the opportunity to engage in a process through which you can receive support and feedback in your practice.

Your participation in this project will offer you the opportunity to learn, question and investigate the meanings of quality in early childhood care and education. Through your participation in this project you will benefit from professional development with the potential benefit of increasing your knowledge and skill base in the field of early childhood care and education, contributing to the growth of your practice. You will be involved in the processes of deepening and broadening the understanding of quality in early childhood care and education through the examination of various bodies of literature coupled with reflections on knowledge, experiences and practice by practitioners; contributing to new knowledge in the field of early childhood care and education. You will receive recognition for your participation in the project. Please see above information regarding a certificate of participation.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without explanation and without consequences. Similarly, your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your employment in any way. If any of the issues discussed during the group sessions and/or the visits to your settings make you feel uncomfortable you may leave or stop the discussion at anytime without consequence. If you withdraw from the study your data will only be used after you sign an authorization form. However, please note that it will be very difficult for us to remove what you have said during the focus group sessions. This is due primarily to the fact that after removing one person's dialogue in a discussion, the entire conversation might not make sense in total. We will minimize your data to

respect your decision to withdraw while ensuring that we can still gain a good understanding of other participant experiences and insights. If you choose to withdraw from the project, the setting will not continue to receive the funding for a substitute practitioner.

To ensure your continued consent of participation in the research project, prior to each session (i.e. group sessions, setting participation by the researcher during implementation, completion of survey, focus group discussions and interviews during evaluation) we will review the consent form with you verbally.

In terms of protecting your anonymity, your name will not be revealed in transcripts, reports, or publications that we produce and any information you provide will remain anonymous. We will change such things as your name, details about you and any kind of information that identifies you. Our research results will not reveal the identity of you or your family. However, participants involved in the group sessions and focus group sessions will be able to recognize you. We will ask that all participants respect the confidentiality of the group by not revealing participant discussions with others outside of the group, including the identity or identifying information of other participants. We cannot guarantee that all group members will keep everything that is said in the group confidential. In addition, it may be possible that participating practitioners will be identified by their own childcare setting community (i.e., colleagues, parents) and potentially by other childcare settings (especially in small communities).

If you would like to have your name used in future publications please sign the additional consent section below.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by means of storing all files and data in a locked filing cabinet and password protected computer files in Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw's office (Room B132 in the Human and Social Development Building) and/or in the research office at L-Hut building, both at the University of Victoria. These are secure locations where data will only be accessible to the researchers involved in the project, who have signed confidentiality agreements. Data will be stored for a maximum period of 5 years. All forms of data will be destroyed by April 1, 2016. Electronic data will be deleted, paper copied will be shredded and audio and video records will be erased or burnt.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: a paper will be prepared with the results of the evaluation and mailed to the participating childcare settings and to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Child Care Policy Branch. Articles, book chapters and PhD theses will also be written.

In addition to being able to contact the researchers at the phone numbers given above, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545).

You are encouraged to ask any clarifying questions with regard to your participation in this research and we will answer your questions to the best of our knowledge and your satisfaction. Your signatures below indicate that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

---

*Name of Participant*

---

*Signature*

---

*Date*

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

\_\_\_\_\_

I agree to have my group sessions, focus sessions and interviews audiotaped and/or videotaped.

I wish to review the transcripts of the focus group sessions and interviews.

Please check here     Yes  No

Your signature below indicates that you give permission to the researchers involved in the “*Investigating Quality Early Childhood Environments*” study, to use your names in future publications and presentations (conferences, institutes, workshops, etc) related to the study. Anticipated publications include articles, book chapters and an Early Childhood Education manual for College Instructors. Publications and presentations will acknowledge the authorship of your contributions.

\_\_\_\_\_

*Name of Participant*

\_\_\_\_\_

*Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_

*Date*

***Authorization to use data upon withdrawal from the project***

Upon my withdrawal from the research project entitled “*Investigating Quality Early Childhood Environments*”, I hereby grant Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Dr. Alan Pence the right and permission to use my data in the following ways:

- In results of the evaluation which will be mailed to participating childcare settings and to the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the Child Care Policy Branch.
- In articles, book chapters, conference presentations and Doctoral Theses.

\_\_\_\_\_

Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

## APPENDIX C: Educator Confidentiality Agreement



University  
of Victoria

### School of Child & Youth Care

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### Investigating Quality Early Childhood Environments

#### *Confidentiality agreement for practitioners*

Researchers at the University of Victoria are committed to the principle that the confidentiality and anonymity of each individual participant must be protected.

All early childhood practitioners involved in this research project must sign the confidentiality agreement.

1. I will keep completely confidential all information arising from the research project concerning individual children and parents to which I gain access, as well as the comments/reflections done by other practitioners in the group sessions.
2. I will keep confidential the names of all participants as well as any information that can identify them.
3. I will not discuss participant involvement in the research project with others outside of the project.

I give my personal pledge that I shall abide by this assurance of confidentiality

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any question about confidentiality issues, please contact:

Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw

Phone: (250) 721-6468

Email: [ypacunik@uvic.ca](mailto:ypacunik@uvic.ca)

## APPENDIX D: Parent/Guardian Information Letter



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### *Letter of information for parents*

#### INVESTIGATING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENTS

We are happy to inform you about a research initiative entitled “*Investigating Quality Early Childhood Environments*” in which the childcare centre your child(ren) attends is participating. The research is directed by Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Dr. Alan Pence and a large group of research assistants. Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw is Associate Professor at the School of Child and Youth Care in the University of Victoria; and Dr. Alan Pence is Professor at the School of Child and Youth Care in the University of Victoria. If you have any questions, you may contact Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw at (250) 721-6478 or [vpacunik@uvic.ca](mailto:vpacunik@uvic.ca).

This research is being funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Child Care Policy Branch for the period beginning September 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012.

The purpose of this research project is to situate BC's promotion of quality within the most dynamic discussions currently found internationally regarding quality care. The research will promote the active engagement of key stakeholders, most critically early childhood practitioners (including early childhood educators and family childcare providers) in discussions and actions that can lead to the formation of sustainable and positive care-giving environments. A participatory action research model will be used to engage early childhood practitioners in BC to reflect upon their knowledge, values, experiences and practice, and to explore the meanings and practices of quality care that will best serve the well being and development of children from diverse backgrounds and settings in British Columbia. The objectives of this project are:

1. To develop a broader understanding of the current major issues constituting the discourse of quality in early childhood care and education from different perspectives emerging through a literature review.
2. To incorporate the issues derived from the literature review to create a rich, contextual and relevant curriculum for early childhood practitioners that will best meet the needs of children in British Columbia.

3. To engage in professional support and development with BC early childhood practitioners by addressing the issues of quality care through a professional development model, involving group sessions and the design and execution of a project by practitioners in their practice settings, which will be initiated in the group sessions and carried out in practitioners' settings.
4. To support and collaborate with early childhood practitioners towards designing, executing and evaluating a project in their practice settings.
5. To facilitate focus groups and interview sessions with practitioners towards the evaluation of the professional development model described in points 1 to 4.

Research of this type is important because it will help to advance the development and promotion of rich, contextual, meaningful and relevant understandings and practices related to quality in early childhood settings in BC. This will contribute to new perspectives and knowledge that will best suit and serve children of diverse backgrounds and settings in BC, increasing the benefits of investing in early childhood programs. We are extremely excited about embarking in this initiative with the childcare setting and look forward to meeting you.

Please note that this research does not involve observations and/or assessments of the children. Rather we will collaborate directly with the practitioners in the settings to offer support in their daily activities. Practitioners will participate in group sessions once a month, and design and implement a project of their own through which they will document their practices, collect children's work and take photographs of key learning experiences. Therefore, we would like to ask your permission to use children's work and photographs/recordings in the research. Please see form attached.

During the research project researchers will be collaborating with practitioners in an exchange of shared experience, dialogue and feedback through the professional development model. Researchers will visit the settings to offer practitioners support during the implementation of their projects. The practitioner in your childcare setting will have a schedule of researcher visits, which will take place during normal setting hours.

Photographs and/or video recordings of your child will only be taken with your permission. Any photographs and/or video recordings taken will not be revealed in transcripts, reports, or publications that we produce unless we have your permission. The confidentiality of the data (photographs, video recordings and children's work) will be protected by means of storing the data in a locked filing cabinet in a secure location as described in the letter of permission. You may receive the photographs taken of your child, upon request. Your child's daily activities in the setting will not be disrupted or negatively impacted during researcher visits and we do not foresee any inconvenience or risk to your child as a result of her or his participation.

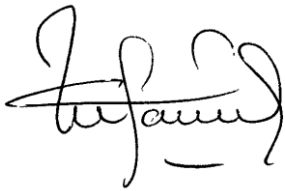
We anticipate that the practitioners' participation will have multiple benefits for the child care setting. By participating in this project your child and family will be exposed to an enhanced environment that will be meaningful and supportive to your child's

educational and developmental experiences. We expect to effectively evaluate the execution of the project in the childcare setting and develop information which will be helpful in advancing a curriculum model which we expect will best serve the well-being and optimal development of children from diverse backgrounds and settings in BC.

If you have any questions/comments please do not hesitate to discuss them with the childcare setting practitioners and/or Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw at (250) 721-6478 or [vpacini@uvic.ca](mailto:vpacini@uvic.ca).

In addition to being able to contact the researcher at the phone number given above, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V. Pacini-Ketchabaw', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw

## APPENDIX E: Parent/Guardian Consent Form



University  
of Victoria

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# Parent/Guardian Consent Form

## INVESTIGATING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENTS

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled “*Investigating Quality Early Childhood Environments*” which is being conducted by Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Dr. Alan Pence and a large group of research assistants. Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw is Associate Professor at the School of Child and Youth Care in the University of Victoria; and Dr. Alan Pence is Professor at the School of Child and Youth Care in the University of Victoria. If you have any questions you may contact Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw at (250) 721-6478 or via e-mail at [vpacunik@uvic.ca](mailto:vpacunik@uvic.ca) or Dr. Alan Pence at (250) 721-7981 or via e-mail at [apence@uvic.ca](mailto:apence@uvic.ca).

This research is being funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Child Care Policy Branch for the period beginning September 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012.

The purpose of this research project is to situate BC's promotion of quality within the most dynamic discussions currently found internationally regarding quality care. The research will promote the active engagement of key stakeholders, most critically early childhood practitioners (including early childhood educators and family childcare providers) in discussions and actions that can lead to the formation of sustainable and positive care-giving environments. A participatory action research model will be used to engage early childhood practitioners in BC to reflect upon their knowledge, values, experiences and practice, and to explore the meanings and practices of quality care that will best serve the well being and development of children from diverse backgrounds and settings in British Columbia. The objectives of this project are:

1. To develop a broader understanding of the current major issues constituting the discourse of quality in early childhood care and education from different perspectives emerging through a literature review.
2. To incorporate the issues derived from the literature review to create a rich, contextual and relevant curriculum for early childhood practitioners that will best meet the needs of children in British Columbia.
3. To engage in professional support and development with BC early childhood practitioners by addressing the issues of quality care through a professional development model, involving group sessions and the design and execution of a project by practitioners in their practice settings, which will be initiated in the group sessions and carried out in practitioners' settings.

4. To support and collaborate with early childhood practitioners towards designing, executing and evaluating a project in their practice settings.
5. To facilitate focus groups and interview sessions with practitioners towards the evaluation of the professional development model described in points 1 to 4.

Research of this type is important because it will help to advance the development and promotion of rich, contextual, meaningful and relevant understandings and practices related to quality in early childhood settings in BC. This will contribute to new perspectives and knowledge that will best suit and serve children of diverse backgrounds and settings in BC, increasing the benefits of investing in early childhood programs.

You are being approached to participate in this research project because the practitioners in your childcare setting have been involved in the project described above. Your participation is required for the evaluation of the professional development model (as described in point 5). Your participation is important because it will help us understand the implications and effects of the professional development model that the practitioners in your childcare setting participated.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include taking part in two focus group discussions, two surveys and two interviews (at the beginning and end of the project). Researchers will audio record the focus group sessions and interviews with your permission. You may review your transcripts from the focus group sessions and interviews upon request and add any additional comments or extract comments from the original transcripts.

The inconvenience to you due to your involvement may mean taking time away from work, family, and/ or other activities. An attempt will be made to schedule the focus group and interview sessions around your work and family schedule.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. It is expected that you may have had both positive and negative experiences regarding childcare and childcare services for your children. Reflections on negative experiences may be emotionally disturbing at times. An environment of empathy and understanding through listening, respect and appreciation will be established during the focus group and interview. An interviewer/facilitator with experience in the field of early childhood education and counselling will facilitate the sessions. You will be asked to contribute only those experiences that you are comfortable and willing to share.

Your participation in this project will offer you the opportunity to engage in discussions surrounding quality of care for your children and the experiences that you have had since the practitioners in the child care centre that your child(ren) attend began their participation in the project. Your experiences and insights will contribute to the development of quality childcare in BC.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without explanation or consequences. Similarly, your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your access to services at the childcare setting. If any of the issues discussed during the sessions make you feel uncomfortable you may leave or stop the discussion at anytime without consequence. If you withdraw from the project your data will only be used after you sign an authorization form. However, please note that it will be very difficult for us to remove what you have said during the focus group sessions. This is due primarily to the fact that after removing one person's dialogue in a discussion, the group conversation may

not make sense. We will however minimize your personal data while ensuring we can still gain a good understanding of other participants' experiences and insights.

To ensure your continued consent to participate in this research, prior to the focus group and interview sessions we will review the consent form verbally.

In terms of protecting your anonymity, your name will not be revealed in transcripts, reports, or publications that we produce and any information you provide will remain anonymous. We will change such things as your name, details about you and any kind of information that identifies you. The research results will not reveal the identity of you or your family. However, participants involved in the focus group sessions will be able to recognize you. We ask that all participants in the focus group respect the confidentiality of the group by not revealing participant information of other participants. We cannot guarantee that all group members will keep everything that is said in the group confidential. In addition, you may be identified by your own childcare setting community (i.e., practitioners, other parents) and potentially by other participating childcare settings (especially in a small community). We will ask the practitioners to keep this information confidential by signing a confidentiality agreement but cannot guarantee complete confidentiality.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by means of storing all files and data in a locked filing cabinet and password protected computer files in Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw's office (Room B132 in the Human and Social Development Building) and/or in the research office at L-Hut building, both at the University of Victoria. These are secure locations where data will only be accessible to the researchers involved in the project, who have signed confidentiality agreements. Data will be stored for a maximum period of 5 years. All forms of data will be destroyed by April 1, 2016. Electronic data will be deleted, paper copied will be shredded and audio and video recordings will be erased or burnt.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: a paper will be prepared with the results of the evaluation and mailed to the participating centres and to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Child Care Policy Branch. Articles, book chapters and Masters and Doctoral Theses will also be written.

In addition to being able to contact the researchers at the phone numbers given above, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545).

You are encouraged to ask any clarifying questions with regard to your participation in this research and we will answer your questions to the best of our knowledge and your satisfaction. Your signatures below indicate that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
----------------------------	------------------	-------------

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
I agree to have my focus groups and  
interviews audiotaped

I wish to review the transcripts of the interviews and  
focus groups

Please check here     Yes  No

***Authorization to use data upon withdrawal from the project***

Upon my withdrawal from the research project entitled "*Investigating Quality Early Childhood Environments*", I hereby grant Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Dr. Alan Pence the right and permission to use my data in the following ways:

- In results of the evaluation which will be mailed to participating childcare settings and to the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the Child Care Policy Branch.
- In articles, book chapters, conference presentations and Doctoral Theses.

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Print Name

---

Signature

---

Date

## **APPENDIX F: Permission to use children’s work, photographs and video/audio recordings**



**University  
of Victoria**

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### **Permission to use children’s work, photographs and video/audio recordings**

#### Investigating Quality Early Childhood Environments

Principal Investigator:

Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Ph.D.

Phone: (250) 721-6478

Email: [vpacini@uvic.ca](mailto:vpacini@uvic.ca)

Your signature below indicates that you give permission to the practitioners and researchers involved in *Investigating Quality Early Childhood Environments* to use your child’s work, take photographs and video recordings of key learning activities in which your child may be involved as a part of the research project. Your child’s work/photographs/video/audio recordings might be used in activities done by practitioners and/or researchers including: articles, book chapters, presentations, face-to-face group discussions, electronic e-mail-based (password protected) group discussions, and PhD thesis written as part of the project. The photographs/video/audio recordings might also be uploaded into an online course website which is password protected and only accessible to early childhood educators enrolled in the Investigating Quality initiative and research team members.

In terms of protecting your child’s anonymity, his/her name will not be revealed in transcripts, reports, or publications that we produce that include the photograph/work of the child and any personal information about the child will remain anonymous. We will change such things as his/her name, details about the child and any kind of information that identify him/her. Our research results will not reveal the identity of your child or your family.

However, participants involved in the childcare centre your child attends/and those who know your child will be able to recognize him/her in the photographs/video recordings. We ask all personnel and parents in the childcare centre to respect the confidentiality of the children by not revealing their identity or other identifying information. We cannot guarantee that all members will keep the identity of your child confidential. In addition, your child may be identified by community members especially in a small community.

The confidentiality of the data will be protected by ensuring that no one other than the researchers will have access to the photographs and video recordings of your child as well as his/her work. The confidentiality of the data (photographs, video recordings, and children's work) will be protected by means of storing the data in a locked filing cabinet and password protected computer files in Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw's office (Room B 132 in the Human and Social Development Building) and/or in the research office at L-Hut building, both at the University of Victoria.

These are secure locations where data will only be accessible to the researchers involved in the project, who have signed confidentiality agreements. Data will be stored for a maximum period of 5 years. All forms of data will be destroyed by April 1, 2013. Electronic data will be deleted, paper copied will be shredded and video recordings will be erased or burnt. A copy of this form will be left with you and a copy will remain with the researchers.

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Name of child care setting

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Name of child/children in care

I agree to have practitioners and researchers participating in Investigating Early Childhood Quality Environments collect my child(ren)'s work, take photographs and/or video/audio recordings of my child during his/her time at the childcare setting.

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Signature

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Date

***Authorization to use data upon withdrawal from the project***

Upon my child's withdrawal from the research project entitled "*Investigating Quality Early Childhood Environments*", I hereby grant Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Dr. Alan Pence the right and permission to use my data in the following ways:

- In results of the evaluation which will be mailed to participating childcare settings and to the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the Child Care Policy Branch.
- In articles, book chapters, conference presentations and Theses.

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Print Name

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Signature

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Date

## **APPENDIX G: Description of the Investigating Quality Project**

The Investigating Quality (IQ) Project is an initiative of the Unit for Early Years Research and Development<sup>1</sup> in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria, British Columbia (BC). Its aim has been to broaden and deepen discussions on quality in the early childhood education field at local, regional, national, and international levels (Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010, 2012).

The project began by identifying where the most innovative work in the field was taking place. It was found that Sweden's Stockholm Project, the Reggio Emilia preschools of northern Italy, and groundbreaking programs in Aotearoa/New Zealand, among other programs, were working in ways that complexify practice. To explore the possibilities of such programs in the context of BC, the Unit hosted a series of forums at the University of Victoria, where guests from around the world were invited to discuss pedagogical innovation, democratic engagement, pedagogical documentation, assessment, participatory development, social justice, and other issues (Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010, 2012). These dialogues invigorated and enriched discussions and stimulated many questions. From these starting points, the professional development portion of the IQ Project was designed.

More than 100 early childhood educators have participated in the project to date. These participants work in a wide variety of settings in urban and rural communities in BC, including Aboriginal, multicultural, college- and university-based, preschool, full-time childcare, infant-toddler, family childcare, nonprofit, and small-scale for-profit settings.

Each educator typically participates for a 10-month period, although many have participated more than once. Together with a facilitator, the educators meet monthly in small groups to

dialogue and share their established and emerging practices. These monthly learning circles are critical in creating a community of practice among the project participants. The facilitator's role is to assist the early childhood educators in discussing early childhood practices and investigating postfoundational ideas through reading materials that pertain to the discussions at hand. Following processes of pedagogical narration, the educators collect moments of practice through journal writing, photography, and video and audio recording in their centres and then share their pedagogical narrations with the group. Together, the educators and researchers reflect critically on each narration and on how we might work with postfoundational theories to extend and complexify practices. Periodic sharing circles bring the educators from the different discussion groups together to interact and discuss the work they have engaged in during the learning circles. A listserv enables the educators and researchers to share ideas and materials of interest between meetings. Members of the research team provide individual support to each educator through visits to early childhood education centres.

**NOTE:** project description text excerpted from pages 217-218 of: Pacini-Ketchabaw, V.,

Nxumalo, F., Kocher, L., Elliot, E., & Sanchez, A. (2014). *Journeys: Reconceptualizing early childhood practices through pedagogical narration*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.