Literacies in the More-Than-Human World:
A Thesis Through Autobiographic and Post-Qualitative Inquiries

by

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B.A., Simon Fraser University, 2006
B.Ed., The University of British Columbia, 2011

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We acknowledge and respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and X̱ʷsepsəm/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

This thesis is composed of two related studies. First, I reflect on the past decade as an educator and graduate student to highlight the joy that accompanied my shifting understanding of literacy. Through an autobiographical narrative inquiry, I use selections from blog entries and graduate coursework to reflect on my "moments of turning". I begin with a logocentric understanding of literacy as a white settler in two Indigenous communities, but over time embrace a multimodal, embodied, emergent, place-based, and more-than-human conception of literacies within a context of the climate and nature emergency. In a second, post-qualitative inquiry I explore *what kinds of literacy practices do learners in an elementary outdoor program engage in, and how are they shaped by the more-than-human world?* I situate my research within the context of a socially and ecologically precarious world, from a posthuman theoretical perspective in conversation with Indigenous literacies, to build an argument for an embodied, sensory, multimodal, emergent, relational, and more-than-human conception of literacy. The study focuses on the experiences and literacy practices of fifteen elementary aged children in a multi-grade, forest school program in southern British Columbia, Canada. Using photographs and field notes, this study interrogates logocentric literacies and employs *literacy as event*, a process-based concept with meaning-making and sense-making occurring relationally, often in surprising ways that defy prior predictions, and therefore contain multiple possibilities. Meaning and sense-making interact to create powerful literacy experiences that transcend language. With these two studies, I argue that more-than-human literacies bring joy and open possibilities in a precarious world.

Keywords: literacy; literacy as event; more-than-human; nature-based education; outdoor education; forest school; post-qualitative inquiry; autobiographical narrative inquiry

Preface

A version of Chapter 2 has been published as: Waliszewska, A. (2025). Joy amid ruin: More than-human literacies for survival. *Language & Literacy, 27*(3), 175–193. https://doi.org/10.20360/langandlit29761

The study in Chapter 2 was approved by the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) review at the University of Victoria (Ethics Protocol Number 25-0099) under the project title: *Joy amid ruin: More than-human literacies for survival*.

A version of Chapter 3 is currently undergoing editorial revisions for the upcoming Critical Forest Studies Special Issue of the *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/australian-journal-of-environmental-education

The study in Chapter 3 was approved by the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) review at the University of Victoria (Ethics Protocol Number 24-0033) under the original project title: *Meaning-making practices in the more-than-human world: A case study with elementary aged learners in an outdoor learning community*.

All sections of this thesis were researched, analyzed, and written by the author, Aleksandra Krystyna Waliszewska.

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Meaning-making or "[c]ommunicative practices for forming and making sense of the world through intentional and sustained encounters with human and more-than-human entities and for opening spaces for new becomings." (Lenters & McDermott, 2019a, p. 4)

Logocentric

Word-based literacies (reading, writing, speaking and listening).

More-Than-Human

Within posthumanism, more-than-human refers to all entities, animate and inanimate, beyond humans including place, animals, plants, objects, etc, and considers them imbued with a complex sense of agency (Lenters & McDermott, 2019b).

Posthumanism

Posthumanist theories are diverse and stem from numerous philosophers and social theorists, but in general they focus on the complex and shifting relationships between the human and the more-than-human world. They also question the concept of agency as human only, while posthumanist literacy theorists question literacy as human only (Lenters & McDermott, 2019a).

Dedication

"We are of the Earth,
To Her we do return.
The future is inside us,
It's not somewhere else,
It's not somewhere else,
It's not somewhere else."
(Radiohead, 2016)

In November 2022, a spark was ignited within my body in response to questions raised by Abigail Hackett about what kinds of literacies might enable children to thrive in an increasingly precarious present and future (Hackett, 2022a, p. 143). At the time, I was in my first year of a graduate program in Language and Literacies and did not anticipate my worlds colliding and expanding in the way that they did. It was a question that I did not realize I had been asking myself in various ways for years – even before becoming a practicing teacher. This question brought up ethical concerns, power dynamics, and philosophical considerations about how we as humans navigate our place in the more-than-human world. To me, that's what education is all about. I knew I had to walk this path and this thesis offers the two main paths I took and how I ended up walking them.

All this to say that I dedicate my work to those who choose to walk the less travelled paths in research and beyond. This includes Dr. Hackett, though I have yet to meet her; my supervisor and committee member, Dr. Lyndze Harvey and Dr. Ruthanne Tobin, respectively; my reluctant mentor from years past (reluctant since he would not identify with the term "mentor"), Dr. John Bogardus; and the countless researchers, educators, artists, musicians, and

writers from whom I continually draw inspiration, courage, and wisdom. To list them would be an impossible act.

I also wish to offer my gratitude to my most beloved human and more-than-human kin. You know who you are and I love you.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The paths ahead

I invite you to walk down two paths with me in this thesis. They are interconnected paths. Chapter 2 is the first path that offers an autobiographical narrative inquiry. This path is an autobiographical take on literature reviews, filtered through my experiences as a graduate student and woven with reflections on my years of teaching practice. It outlines how my understanding of literacy has changed since enrolling in this graduate program from a logocentric approach to more-than-human literacies.

Chapter 3 is the second path that offers a post-qualitative inquiry of an outdoor learning community of multiage learners and the adults who support them. Through this inquiry, I ask: *What kinds of literacy practices do learners in an elementary outdoor program engage in, and how are they shaped by the more-than-human world?* I situate my research within the context of a socially and ecologically precarious world, from a posthuman theoretical perspective in conversation with Indigenous literacies, to build an argument for an embodied, sensory, multimodal, emergent, relational, and more-than-human conception of literacy. I deepen my understanding of more-than-human literacies through photographs and experiences from the forest community of human and more-than-human kin. With these two studies, I argue that more-than-human literacies bring joy and open possibilities in a precarious world.

1.2 Positionality

Many lands and beings, both human and more-than-human, have shaped who I am and have thus gifted me with a multilayered positionality. I am an uninvited settler on lək̓ʷəŋən unceded lands and I am continually learning how to be a good visitor here. Over the years I have

been a settler on kʷikʷəƛ̓əm (Kwikwetlem), q̓icə̓y̓ (Katzie), qiqéyt (Qayqayt), Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Musqueam lands throughout what is commonly known as British Columbia. I have also been an invited guest on Gwich'in and Nuxalk lands; however, this invitation was situated within a complex and problematic web of colonial relationships stemming from historic legacies and present-day iterations of the education system (Smith, 2012, Chapter 3).

I arrived from a faraway land as an immigrant at the age of eleven, uprooted from my human and more-than-human relations (as I describe in more depth in the second chapter below). My life traversed across ecological, economic, political, and social systems when it jumped from a post-Cold War era Poland to capitalist, neoliberal Canada in the 1990s. Just a plane ride away, but an entirely othering experience. My relative power and privilege that stem from my whiteness have thus been tempered by my lived experience of emigrating from a less culturally and economically powerful nation to Canada. My long and unpronounceable name still foreshadows my otherness to unsuspecting, confused English speakers. Thus, my lived experiences as an immigrant cis-woman have carved out access points for me to be able to question some commonly taken for granted ideas about language, culture, race, gender, class, and education.

Years after immigrating, as a white, university educated, and financially secure, settler and educator, I would be dangerously amiss if I did not confront and emphasize that I wield relative power and derive significant privilege from my race and class. I live and own land on Lək̓ʷəŋən Peoples' traditional *unceded* territory under the stewardship of the Songhees, Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt, and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples. These experiences along with my life-long relationship with the education system nested within modernity/coloniality (Machado de Oliveira, 2021) place me on a colonial timeline continuum that my family and I have benefited

from. I am entangled in a complex mess of historical and present day modern/colonial relations that form the cultural foundation of the existential climate and nature emergency (CNE). I believe, though, that human and more-than-human dignity, justice, and survival are predicated on collective dignity, justice, and true sustainability. To me, this collective is composed of all human communities and the more-than-human world. We are all inextricably connected in this age of planetary precarity (Machado de Oliveira, 2021), and I am devoted to exploring learning communities that may offer a glimpse of a way forward toward a just, sustainable future while also acknowledging that it is a messy, ideologically-imbued, and power-laden path (Hackett & Rautio; 2019; Fitzpatrick & May, 2022). This is my "path with heart" (Chambers, 2004, p. 1) and it is shaped by all of my experiences in this historical moment, the roles I play, the relationships I cultivate, and that have in turn cultivated me, and the body that contains me (Williams, 2022).

Chapter 2: Literacies for Survival

> "I think we write and research to figure something out; it might be something small, and it might be something big. Novelists do it, documentary filmmakers do it, and poets and playwrights do it. So do journal and diary writers, who never intend to go public with their work." (Chambers, 2004, p. 10)

As a teacher, I am always trying to figure something out. Sometimes it's something small like *what happens to dozens of perfectly sharpened pencils by winter break*? They seem to completely disappear from all known existence each school year. Sometimes it's something big like *how to help children enjoy reading after a few consecutive years of repeating the same levels of a scripted reading program*? After a decade of collecting questions, I felt the need to pause and dedicate time to address these wonderings. Since I spent a few years working as a learning support teacher, a lot of my questions were about literacy, or how I understood literacy at the time.

When I began my graduate degree in July 2022 in Language and Literacies, I thought I would figure out why scripted reading programs were ineffective. I already knew that they were not culturally relevant to Indigenous students, and many other students, and I already felt that they were doing harm. I had seen it firsthand during my years teaching in an Indigenous community in British Columbia. With positivist zeal, I wanted to learn about best practices for early readers as if there was one single, secret formula waiting to be uncovered. I knew what did not work well, but I wanted to learn new strategies that would promote reading success. I also had questions about what developmentally appropriate skills really meant. I grew up in Poland and learned how to read and write well past the expected age in Canada, but in accordance with local grade level expectations. This made me wonder: if it was regarded as perfectly on time in Poland in the 80's, why is it seen as "behind" here and now? I remember learning to read at age

seven in grade 1. I remember starting to write at age eight in grade 2 with other eight-year-olds. To my knowledge, no one had an Individualized Education Plan, and I think I became a rather competent reader and writer in two languages within a few short years. So why do we fret about very young kids reading and writing as soon as possible? Why the pressure, the worries, and the urgency? Over the course of my graduate work, I stumbled upon partial answers to these questions in unexpected, yet deeply satisfying ways. These answers told a story of human anthropocentrism, colonialism, and logocentrism. Along the way I learned a thing or two about print-based literacies, but more importantly my understanding of literacy bloomed into a beautifully multi-faceted, inclusive, and complex concept.

2.1 Methodology: Autobiographical narrative inquiry

> "I understand now that stories that I think of as silenced, as voices that I cannot hear, might be just waiting for the right time to come forward." (Cardinal, 2015, p. 6)

> "As you remember and record, you pass the story, and the memory, back through the heart, once again." (Chambers, 2004, p. 12)

I was inspired to experiment with autobiographical narrative inquiry (Caine et al., 2013; Courtland, 2020) and life writing (Chambers et al., 2012) to explore my shifting understanding of literacy over the last decade or so. Courtland (2020) embeds multiple reflections spanning several years into one article in an effort to create space for both "head knowledge and heart knowledge" (p. 33) while searching for a new "definition of *literacy*" (p. 27). I lean on the author's courage to offer my own reflections and images collected over the years. I use them to contextualize my learning journey, to reflect more deeply on my teaching, and to arrive at my own sketch of literacies. Caine et al. (2013) stress the importance of "relational engagement" (p.

577) in narrative inquiry through which researchers carefully reflect on who they are over time through selected experiences. In other words, it's an opportunity to think *with* stories and experiences to make sense of things (Courtland, 2020), or to figure something out.

I also lean on life writing to closely examine "individual and collective embodied knowledge" (Chambers et al., 2012, p. xxiii) of lived experience in education. Chambers (2012) explores colonialism in education and argues that literacies are never neutral, especially when skills are decoupled from learners' or texts' contexts. Hurren (2012) reflects on a reluctant career of teaching with written and photo snapshots from the past juxtaposed with her father's life experiences. Cardinal (2015), too, employs life writing by weaving together early childhood memories, dreams, experiences, and stories to understand literacy as ways to make sense of the world. And in these ways, life writing and autobiographical narrative inquiry are close kin: through stories, through relating experiences, and making sense of them (Clandinin, Huber, & Murphy, 2011 as cited in Caine et al., 2013). This methodology offers one path to confront coloniality and systemic racism in academia. Through more accessible storytelling practices, I attempt to address the embedded hierarchy of academic explanations and resist jargon-rich, third person writing practices that reach for objectivity (Harvey, 2024; 2025).

My story is marked by "moments of turning" that enabled me "to see, hear and understand life and being differently" (Schrag, 1986 as cited in Chambers, 2004, p. 10). These moments of turning offered fertile twists and turns that changed my understanding of education, the world around me, and literacy. Like Cardinal (2015), I often wondered "about how my early landscape stories of literacy didn't always line up with the stories of literacy" that circulate most prominently in the education field (p. 3). And I wondered which stories we tend to privilege in education and which stories we silence and why (Cardinal, 2015). Inspired by Courtland's

(2020) use of autobiographical narrative inquiry and her willingness to embrace vulnerability to share her shifting understandings of literacy, I outline key "moments of turning" in my learning journey using selections from past blog entries, graduate coursework written excerpts and images, as well as selected stories as my data. Please note that written selections used as data are *italicized* throughout to distinguish them from other quotes used. I carefully selected each excerpt or story to represent a transformative shift in my experiences with and understandings of literacies. I mulled over these ideas and I kept returning to these stories over the years. Something kept tugging at me until I finally paid attention, until I finally saw things differently. In this way, I now wonder if *I* did the selecting or whether the stories, experiences, and contexts selected *me* (Osgood & Hackett, 2024).

In the next section, I begin with a logocentric understanding of literacy as a white settler teaching in two Indigenous communities, but over time embrace a multimodal, embodied, emergent, place-based, and relational conception of literacies within a context of the climate and nature emergency. This conception learns from and with Indigenous ways of knowing rooted in ecology, relationships, and the land (Battiste, 2010; Cardinal, 2015; Donald, 2019; Grenz, 2024; Machado de Oliveira, 2021). I sketch my shifts in understanding followed by a reflection equipped with the lens of joy as social justice and healing; joy as an embodied experience of "the body, heart, imagination, and mind" (Leggo, 2004, p. 32); and joy amid a precarious present and future through "collaborative survival" (Tsing, 2015, p. 19) in "the knots and pulses of patchiness" (p. 6) of contemporary capitalism. In these ways, joy flows through my learning in complicated and surprising ways rooted in the precarity of the climate and nature emergency. I stumble upon joy amid ruin.

2.2 "Moments of turning"

I live on lək̓ʷəŋən speaking People's traditional *unceded* territories under the collaborative stewardship of the Songhees, Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt, and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples in what is known as southern Vancouver Island. I am an immigrant and a white settler in a long-standing relationship with the education system both as a learner and a teacher, notably and problematically, having worked in two Indigenous communities in the past. In important ways, I am a direct benefactor of a long colonial history instilled in present day colonial relationships and institutions since the education system in general, and literacy in particular, have both been steeped in colonialism (Donald, 2019; Hackett, 2022; Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Smith, 2012; Viruru, 2001). In my practice, I have resisted institutional and curricular constraints and tried to decolonize spaces, stories, pedagogies, and relationships. But the way I have understood resistance and decolonization has changed over time, just as my understanding of literacy has changed. With each moment of turning, my understanding of literacy shifted farther and farther away from just language and deeper into other ways of making meaning. This enabled me to notice the silenced stories (Cardinal, 2015) and learn from their gifts as opportunities to further decolonize education.

2.2.1 Logocentric literacy: A starting place, a place of questioning

In my first year as a classroom teacher, I lived in a small, northern, Indigenous community within the Arctic Circle.[1] When I say "small", I mean tiny. I could see the elementary school from my living room window, and it was *literally* a stone's throw away. I

[1] The specific name of this local Indigenous culture as well as the specific place name have been omitted to preserve the confidentiality and anonymity of this small community.

could circle the whole town in less than twenty minutes at a relaxed walking pace. The population fluctuated but generally stayed under 200 people. The same was true of the school population. It fluctuated greatly and included students from kindergarten to grade 9. The first few years of a teaching career tend to be memorable and can be defining. This was especially true of my very first year.

My memories of that year are filled with the desolate, sparkling beauty of expansive landscapes covered in layers of permafrost, snow, and ice. I remember the ever-present quiet of winter that surprised me at first. I initially missed the coastal rainstorms and windstorms I had become accustomed to that helped me sleep at night, but quickly grew to appreciate the quiet nights that stretched out well into the daytime hours. I remember the seasons: at first warm, dusty, muddy, and in all shades of brown; then cold, white, blue, quiet, and encased in ice; finally returning to sunshine, softening to mud again. After the extended quiet of winter, late spring was filled with the cacophony of life when every imaginable species of bird suddenly appeared, one after another, flying overhead in large migrating flocks to match the colourful plant life below, forcing its way up, piercing through the permafrost, in shades of green, purple, and yellow. I remember the land: alive and animated. Carefully tended to and in relationship with the local Indigenous cultural ways. I was a visitor wrapped up in a colonial story I was only beginning to understand.

My memories of that year are also filled with the people I met and my students in particular. One student stands out, because of what I learned from our interactions. Wren[2] was a

[2] Identifying features and student names have been changed to preserve their confidentiality and anonymity. I also use the pronouns they/them/their to further anonymize students.

student who started the year in my colleague's primary, mixed-grade classroom. They struggled from September until winter break, because they had emerging reading and writing skills, and their frustration would frequently translate into refusing to participate in classroom activities, and sometimes even running away and hiding. By winter break the relationship with their teacher became compromised to the degree that Wren was moved into my intermediate, mixed-grade class. I had fewer students, although most of them were Wren's close relatives.

Due to Wren's rocky start to the school year, moving them to my class offered a fresh start. I was tasked with simply making them feel comfortable and welcome in my classroom. Academics were secondary to their emotional well-being. While I always believed that developing a strong relationship with students was key to meaningful learning, this was a stretch even for me. At the time, it felt antithetical to the profession of teaching to let a student essentially hang out and for academic learning to be an afterthought. I also knew that we had few other options left so I put my discomfort aside and participated in the experiment. Wren settled in and became part of the class fairly quickly. And since the rest of my students were independent readers, I spent our daily quiet reading time reading aloud to Wren on the cozy school couch. They loved it. I didn't ask them to try to read, I didn't use sight word cards, nor did I assess their reading level. I simply let the student choose a book to read and I read it out to them. I distinctly recall how much they loved the *Mercy* books by Kate DiCamillo. Wren loved the hilarious, whimsical stories, and before I knew it, they were recognizing and pointing out words on the page. I wrote the following on my teaching blog at the time:

> *Working with a struggling, reluctant reader in grade (…) to the point that s/he asks to read and is happy to try makes me happy every time. It doesn't get old!* (Waliszewska, 2013).

Over the six months in my classroom, Wren did not reach grade level. On paper, they were at least two grade levels "behind". But I saw how crucial those months were for them. They could breathe again. They were allowed to once again enjoy early print literacy experiences and to begin to learn at their own pace and in their own way. They were not reminded of how far behind they were in relation to their peers on a daily basis, and they were not constantly pressured to "catch up". They participated in classroom activities and did not run away. They regained the desire to learn, and they *did* learn despite not reaching grade level.

I later realized that the approach I was given permission for and even encouraged to take was to lead with relationship building, joy, and to allow for learning to unfold at a comfortable pace for this particular child. This stands in opposition to teaching more and "harder" which often happens with children who are perceived to be struggling. Under the influence of "gap discourse" (McCarty, 2015, p. 70 in Avineri et al., 2015), educators frequently experience a lot of pressure to urgently address learning "delays" and to differentiate learning such that each child can access the curriculum, but what literacy stories are silenced when we act on that pressure and urgency at the expense of joy? What stories are reinforced? And how are these stories shaped by problematic assumptions of human mastery, print literacy, and "the universalized, all encompassing, line of child development" (Hackett, 2022b, p. 8)? I thought about Wren a lot after leaving the North and especially each time I met a learner who did not follow the rigid path along reading and writing expectations as laid out in the curriculum. I still imagine us chuckling at the silly misadventures of Mercy the pig on Deckawoo Drive.

2.2.2 Logocentric literacy: Critical literacy, critical questioning

Before becoming a certified teacher, I was aware that there were many approaches to teaching literacy. I spent almost ten years tutoring students who were learning English, and even then, I noticed that some tutoring agencies employed phonics-based and memorization-based strategies, while others put more emphasis on conversation skills and engaging with authentic literature. As an immigrant and English language learner myself, I knew what worked well for me in the past and I gravitated towards approaches that used authentic literature and cultivated students' critical thinking skills as they became more competent English speakers (and writers and readers). It wasn't until I started working as a certified teacher that I realized how divisive, complicated, political, and often emotional literacy teaching could be - and how susceptible school administrators and some teachers were to glossy marketing from companies promising to quickly address students' needs and challenges based on questionable premises. I soon learned this is especially pervasive in reading instruction.

I started a new job in learning support in late August of 2014. I moved up to the central coast of British Columbia[3] from the Lower Mainland to live in an idyllic cabin nestled in the Great Bear Rainforest, surrounded by meadows, old growth cedars, and mountains upon mountains. It was the second such major move in my teaching career - the first one was up to the quiet and desolate Arctic beauty of the North. I was excited to take on this new role within a small, vibrant town spliced right in the middle: turn left off

[3] The exact location was identified in the original graduate assignment, but I have chosen to anonymize it along with all other locations and the name of the particular Indigenous culture. As such, this selection has been lightly edited throughout.

the highway for settlers and right for the reserve. It shocked me at first - could it be actual apartheid in contemporary British Columbia? Not quite, but it doesn't mean that colonial tensions didn't exist and didn't continue to shape relationships, institutions and daily realities. My position was at an independent First Nations school started years ago by Indigenous community members who were tired of systemic racism their kids faced at the local public school. It was an exciting privilege to be invited to teach there and to be able to learn from and with the Indigenous community. The school building itself was nothing I had ever experienced before. It was a piece of art, ornately carved and painted, and it set the tone for the important work that happened inside. There were cultural electives and regular language classes for all K-12 students. The school strived to be culturally responsive and sustaining in most areas of learning - except for reading.

My new role involved overseeing a pre-existing structure of reading groups using vast amounts of materials acquired through the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC). These were scripted reading programs called Read Well and Reading Mastery with all students up to grade 9 or so were levelled and assigned to a group. After a quick orientation day in my new role, all new teachers and all education assistants were whisked away for a group trip to a nearby larger town to attend a FNESC regional Read Well workshop. I remember those two days well. I remember the FNESC representatives - none of whom were Indigenous, like most teachers in the room - excitedly detailing each aspect of the prescribed reading program. Phrases such as "kids in the red" and "yellow" and "green" were thrown around supplemented with colour coded tables. It was important to implement the program "with fidelity." That meant to follow it exactly as it was laid out - teachers were discouraged from making any changes

or responding to the unique students in front of them. I remember feeling confused and the atmosphere was cult-like - all of us from multiple regional schools crammed into the subterranean Ramada hotel conference room and told to deliver this gospel with utmost accuracy without any regard for students' agency, interests or cultures. No one asked if the program was culturally relevant and I felt too intimidated. Everyone seemed on board, but even then I knew there was no way I could implement these programs with fidelity.

When I returned I began coordinating reading groups. In my learning support role, I took on a group of learners who had been through the same early levels of Read Well at least three times with little results to show for it. They had a tumultuous relationship with reading. Over the school year together, we mostly focused on sight words, authentic texts, and silly, very simple stories I wrote for them. Unlike Read Well's whole group and small group activities which were mandatory, they didn't have to participate if they didn't feel ready. Sometimes I read to them instead. I remember how their faces looked when they realized I would read to them, if needed, and they could join when they were ready to - a mix of relief and disbelief. I was not implementing the program with fidelity. I was trying to teach my students with dignity. Hruby (2020) reviews a few claims that prescribed reading programs often make and they instantly reminded me of Read Well: an overemphasis on phonics, structured and repetitive programming, and the dubious claim that these programs are research-based - the claim that FNESC echoed as well and didn't know how to answer when I asked whether any independent studies existed. They never thought to check before committing to thousands of dollars of expenses on behalf of First Nations schools in British Columbia.

I reflect about this, because it was a formative time in my early career. In many ways, this is why I'm enrolled in this graduate program. During my three years in that role, I worked to debunk some of the assumptions that we were encouraged to ignore and tried to empower educators to do what they knew was best for the particular kids in their reading groups. I advocated for culturally appropriate reading materials and acquired texts better suited for our learners. A lot of our students thought the American flag was the flag of Canada since it appeared so frequently in Read Well materials! Given that we had amazing local Indigenous stories at our disposal, I encouraged the development of local texts - something I hope to revisit and perhaps be able to support in the future. It felt like the biggest irony at the time - how can FNESC, an organization aimed to support Indigenous learners across our province, subscribe to American scripted reading programs and pressure independent First Nations schools to implement them without any regard for local students? It didn't occur to me until my third year there that FNESC was a colonial organization working for colonial interests.[4] Read Well (and the never-ending monitoring of our students using various metrics such as Dibels[5]) was but one manifestation of this. - Literacies Research graduate course, excerpt from Portfolio 1A (Waliszewska, 2022b, pp. 7-9 emphasis added).

[4] FNESC is a complex entity involved in complex, colonial relationships. It is entangled in a long legacy and present-day iterations of colonialism, and as such, is not free of its impacts on education. My statement above is based on my lived experience as a teacher witnessing how FNESC supported, and often failed to support, Indigenous learners. This is a possible area to explore in future research as limited research exists about FNESC and how the organization supports Indigenous learners in schools.

[5] DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) is a standardized assessment of reading skills primarily focusing on decoding as opposed to comprehension. More can be learned on their website: https://dibels.uoregon.edu

My experiences teaching up North combined with my early literacy experiences as a child informed my time in the Great Bear Rainforest. My own unique early literacy experiences underpinned a general gut feeling that questioned fixed grade level expectations. Teaching up North made me question what stories of literacy are assumed to be superior and which ones are silenced. Finally, my time working as a learning support teacher and resisting a scripted reading program made me aware of complex, capitalist, colonial structures in place and how they mingle with literacy programs in nuanced ways. While I was attuned to the importance of relationships with individual students, their cultures and their sense of agency, it took those years to notice the institutional racism embedded in colonial structures put in place to ostensibly support Indigenous schools and learners, but in practice holding them to culturally inappropriate expectations using standardized programs, and gathering disproportionate mountains of data in the process. All in the name of literacy defined in narrow ways and measured by testing instruments such as Dibels.

And yet throughout those years, I was still firmly rooted in logocentric literacies: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. I understood those skills in relation to helping students develop critical thinking and culturally sustaining practices (Kelly & Djonko-Moore, 2021), but I had not yet begun to question language as the only path to literacy or meaning-making. I had noticed the socially constructed sense of urgency around print literacies at the expense of speaking and listening, but I had not yet begun to question "what is lost when language is gained" (Viruru, 2001, p. 31)?

2.2.3 Multimodality: The first moment of turning

When I began my graduate work in language and literacy, I hoped to deepen my understanding of what effective and research-based teaching strategies for early readers look

like, inspired by my years working as a teacher and resisting a scripted, American reading program introduced to First Nations schools across BC. At the time, my understanding of literacy was limited to reading/writing/speaking/listening, and to a smaller degree, viewing/representing, as reflected in the BC Curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016). Instead, my understanding of literacy widened and reading became but one star in its constellation.

My first expansion of the concept of literacy occurred in the Writing and Representing course in my first semester of my master's program. I learned about the importance of creating diverse opportunities for responding to and representing ideas beyond the written word. Also known as multimodality, it's the idea that meaning can be represented using "socially and culturally given resource[s]" (Kress, 2014, p. 60) or modes, including visual, kinesthetic, linguistic, spatial, and auditory. My colleague and I were inspired by these ideas and dove deeper into meaning-making through dance, music, and visual arts (see Figure 2.1). This was the first time that I considered all modes of expression under the umbrella of "literacy," and began to think of literacy as many kinds of meaning-making practices, as multimodal. My colleague went on to complete her master's project on affect-based and embodied literacies (van Ierland, 2024), and I decided to explore meaning-making in a nature-based, multi-grade program for my thesis (Waliszewska, 2023b). For both of us, literacy rippled into *literacies*.

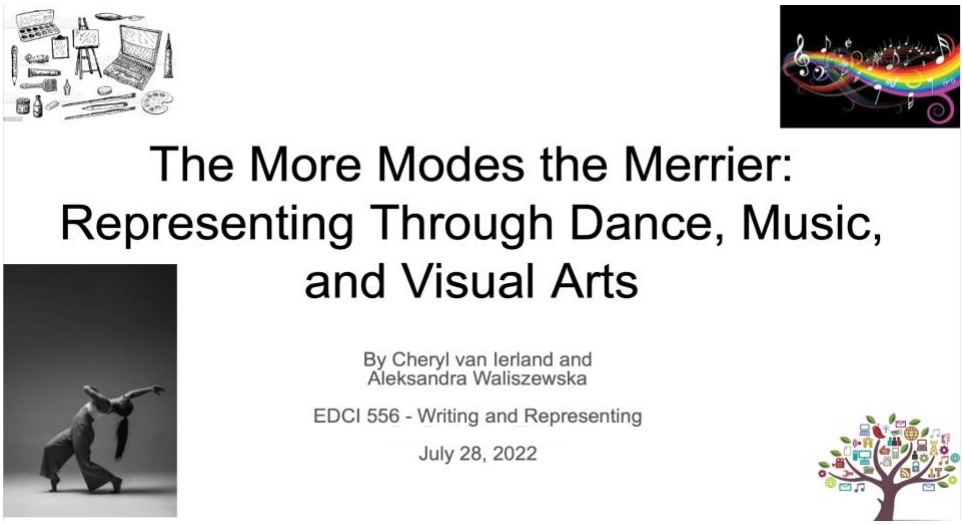

Figure 2.1 The More Modes the Merrier (Title page from a final assignment completed with a colleague for EDCI 556 - Writing and Representing, July 2022. Used with permission from Cheryl van Ierland.)

2.2.4 Research as a third space: The second moment of turning

During my third graduate course that fall, we learned about literacies research using a newly released anthology, *Unsettling Literacies* (Lee et al., 2022). The book explores a wide variety of topics using predominantly qualitative and post-qualitative methodologies from diverse theoretical perspectives. During the course, I experienced two meaningful moments of turning. We read a chapter by Hawley and Potter (2022) that argues for engaging children as co-researchers and explores the creation of a Third Space in the research process through a case study (see Figure 2.2 below). In this space, the authors propose that identities can be undone, redone, and become-other in potentially generative and emancipatory ways. They draw on the work of several scholars to apply this concept to education (Bhabha, 1994; Gutiérrez, 2008; Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996, as cited in Hawley & Potter, 2022). They also explore the complex process of negotiating identities of teacher and researcher in a second case study and apply Ingold's notion of dwelling in research where learning/researching/doing are inseparable from

one another and from their context rather than knowledge being constructed and represented in the head of an entity separated from the world. Hawley and Potter (2022) see research as an embodied, affectual process rather than a purely intellectual one. This was the first time that I encountered participatory and emancipatory methodologies in literacies research - an exciting connection to my undergraduate degree in Sociology and Anthropology years ago. It was also the first time I came across post-qualitative approaches and embodied literacies. Literacies research became political, complex, and sensory. I reflect on the power of the embodied *doing* of teaching and learning in an excerpt from a weekly course reflection below:

> *The **practices** of teaching and learning are much more powerful than the curriculum itself. When many aspects of the curriculum are long forgotten, the **practices** stay with adults long into the future and discipline them as citizens and workers.* - Literacies Research graduate course, excerpt from a Weekly Reflection (Waliszewska, 2022a, emphasis added).

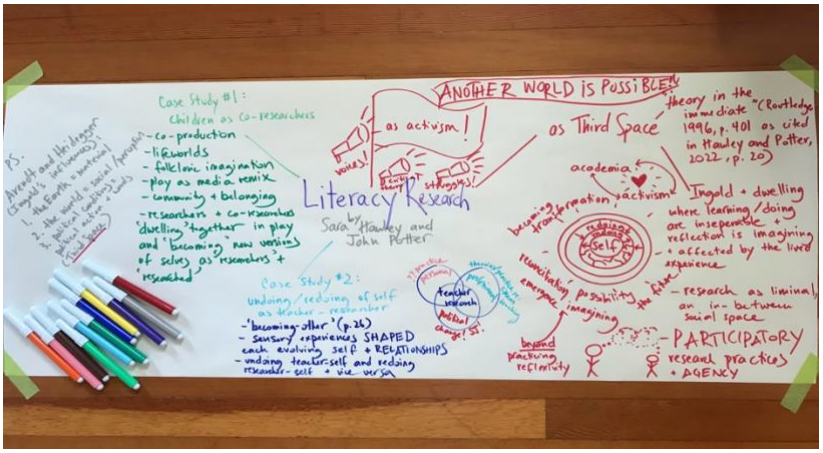

Figure 2.2 Literacy Research as a Third Space (A visual response to a chapter read for EDCI 546 - Literacies Research, September 2022.)

2.2.5 More-than-human literacies: The third moment of turning

Another moment of turning in the literacies research course happened near the end. It was, and still remains, a transformational shift in my understanding of literacies. We read a chapter by Hackett (2022a) in which the author asks: "*What ways of being in the world might enable children to thrive in the future, and what role might literacies play in enacting, valuing or making available these ways of being?*" (p. 131). Hackett (2022a) uses a posthuman lens to explore young children's literacies as emergent, provisional, embodied, and entangled, and questions human mastery and exceptionalism in a world beyond the human species, a more-than-human world. At first read, I had a strong, embodied experience. My body sparked with multiple questions, connections, and ideas. Issues I was passionate about, but had never found a place for in academia, found a home in this analysis: the climate crisis; meaning-making contributions of other species; the emergent, unprescribed, and uncertain aspects of teaching and learning; and seeing the social world as a complex system. Moreover, Hackett (2022a) highlights the link between literacy and mastery in colonial projects; an argument I later encountered in Smith's (2012) work, but at the time was new to me. I remember *feeling* its significance beyond its logical veracity and being flooded with memories of working in learning support with Indigenous learners. I also realized that Hackett's (2022a) argument is in part supported by a book I had read 17 years prior in which Abram (1996) argues for the deep connection between human cultures and languages and the natural environments in which they incubate. It was strange, because for a reason unclear to me, I still had a vivid memory of finding this book at my university bookstore. I had almost forgotten about it, until the memory hit me all at once and I pulled *The Spell of the Sensuous* off my bookshelf. It was an unexpected connection to my past that seemed to be simmering away until I was ready to receive its gifts.

By the end of the course, I wove four strands together: literacies for survival in a precarious world, embodied literacies, critical literacies for interrogating power relations, and post-qualitative research as one way to imagine other worlds. I summarize these themes below in a final assignment:

> *Literacies for **survival** depend on a view of literacy as embodied and in conversation with both the human and the more-than-human world. Without this crucial element of **embodiment**, literacies would be socially decontextualized, too abstract, and lack urgency. Without a direct interrogation of **power** relations, literacies for survival would be intended for some, but not all human and more-than-human members of our planet. These three themes, then, are mutually compatible and necessary ingredients if the goal of literacy research is empowerment as opposed to mastery for the labour market. Lastly, I think of **post qualitative** research as the "how" of literacy, if the goal is empowerment and survival of all species, our own included. We can't use the same methods that uphold the existing power structures and shy away from questioning their assumed legitimacy. We need methods that allow us the flexibility to question everything, imagine another world, take it seriously but with flexibility, and understand that all social phenomena emerge collaboratively and unpredictably, but still require thoughtful deliberation and intentional action if we are to survive.* - Literacies Research graduate course, excerpt from Portfolio 1B assignment (Waliszewska, 2022c, p. 10, emphasis added).

Over the following months that stretched into the current year, I continued to build on my understanding of more-than-human literacies and frequently returned to Hackett's question. It guided my other readings and provided a focus. I continued to explore these ideas in assignments that argued for more-than-human literacies composed of multiple modes of meaning that are

emergent, embodied, sensory and place-based (Waliszewska, 2023a & c), and completed a research proposal that further built upon and expanded on these initial ideas (Waliszewska, 2023b). Similar to Courtland's (2020) experience in a graduate program, this was a significant departure from just a few months prior of understanding literacy as the exchange of ideas through largely linguistic endeavours. And there was no going back for me.

2.2.6 Indigenous literacies: The final moment of turning

The final moment of turning arrived after I read *Hospicing Modernity* (Machado de Oliveira, 2021) and was accepted into the Climate Education Fellowship Program. The year-long fellowship was composed of ten members of Faculty of Education staff, students, and faculty to engage in collaborative inquiry through a *Facing Human Wrongs* non-credit course and climate education projects. Over several months, these experiences allowed me to engage more deeply with the ways in which logocentric literacy plays a significant part in the processes of "wording the world" (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 21), or colonizing "our relationship with language itself" (p. 22), by describing the limits of what is possible and obstructing other possibilities from view (Donald, 2019). Employing a "pedagogy of order words" (MacLure, 2016, in Hackett, 2022b, p. 43) to label and describe the more-than-human world builds separation between humans and nature, and establishes hierarchy based on human exceptionalism (Abram, 1996). In this way, literacies that *word* the world enact epistemic violence through an over-reliance on language for conceptual, meaning-focused purposes that uphold the logic of

modernity/coloniality[6] at the expense of embodied, metabolic literacies as well as Indigenous ways of knowing (Machado de Oliveira, 2021).

This reminded me to revisit Indigenous thinkers and worldviews rather than depend solely on posthumanist thought. I became aware of a longstanding pattern in Western philosophy of appropriating Indigenous thought (Graeber & Wengrow, 2023), and I felt I needed to take a critical look at the sources I was relying on. It's important to me to contribute to decolonizing education and literacy research. In practice, part of that means actively seeking out and giving recognition to Indigenous scholars as well as other diverse voices that tend to be hidden in academia behind well-known, frequently published names (hooks, 1994; Mussell, 2025; Waliszewska, 2024a). Any visioning of other ways of being, of other literacies, necessitates authentic engagement with local Indigenous peoples and wider Indigenous scholarship who have largely done much of this work already (Donald, 2019; Grenz, 2024; Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Thomas et al., 2020).

2.3 Literacies for survival

> "What if the texts, education, and forms of organization we revere have carried and spread the disease, but also contain latent parts of the medicine that can heal it?" (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. xxv)

> *"1. What ways of being in the world might enable children to thrive in "pockets of more-than-human livability?" (Tsing, 2015)*
> *2. And what role might literacies play in enacting, valuing or making available, these ways of being?"* (Hackett, 2022, p. 143; italics in original)

[6] Machado de Oliveira (2021) and Stein et al. (2023) use the term modernity/coloniality to emphasize the connections between promises of modernity (including prosperity, certainty, universal knowledge systems, etc) and its violent costs rooted in colonialism (violence against all beings, human and beyond). In sum, there is "no modernity without coloniality," (Stein et al., 2023, p. 988).

> "At the end of the day we must ask ourselves, are we preparing our children for their future or for our past?" (Johnson, 2015, as cited in Donald, 2019, p. 113)

At present, I am informed by a tapestry of posthuman *and* Indigenous thinkers that help me to understand literacy as:

- fraught with political contradictions and inequities (Hackett, 2022b),
- implicated in colonial projects (Donald, 2019; Hackett, 2022; Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Smith, 2012, Chapter 3; Viruru, 2001),
- questioning human exceptionalism and mind/body dualism (Hackett, 2022b),
- emergent rather than striving for predefined mastery (Hackett, 2022b; Lenters et al., 2022),
- multimodal meaning-making (Hackett 2022b; Kress, 1997; Lenters et al., 2022),
- embodied, sensory, affect-based, living, and metabolic (Abram, 1996; Cardinal, 2015; Courtland, 2020; Kuzmičová et al., 2022; Lenters & McDermott, 2019; Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Mills & Dooley, 2019; Rowsell & Pahl, 2020; van Ierland, 2024),
- place and land-based (Battiste, 2010; Cardinal, 2015; Donald, 2019; 2021; Grenz, 2024; Häggström & Schmidt, 2020; Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Marom & Rattray, 2022; Mills et al., 2014; Mills et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2020),
- deeply relational and entangled with the more-than-human world (Abram, 1996; Common Worlds Research Collective, 2020; Donald, 2021; Grenz, 2024; Hackett, 2022b; Hackett & Somerville, 2017; Machado de Oliveira, 2021),
- and a site of joy steeped in social justice and healing (Ferlazzo, 2023; Vlach et al., 2023).

This is not an intellectual exercise to me, but a matter of survival. I reflected on this in my research proposal as follows:

> *Within this historical moment, what should be a pressing issue for literacy scholars and educators alike? Should it be educating children along a socially constructed continuum of progress, or should it be reimagining our ways of being and meaning-making? Both options are political and power laden. Only the second option allows for an interdependent relationship with the land, with the more-than-human world (Common Worlds Research Collective, 2020). The price of admission is removing humanity from a place of superiority over all living beings and an understanding that humans have much to learn from striving to live in balance with the more-than-human world (Common Worlds Research Collective, 2020; Donald, 2019; Hackett 2022b; Hackett, 2022; Machado de Oliveira, 2021). Viewing meaning-making as not strictly a human activity stemming from a separate, metaphoric mind, but rather as deeply embedded in the more-than-human world (Hacket & Rautio, 2019), and challenging ideas of infinite economic and technological progress and human superiority (Donald, 2019; Machado de Oliveira, 2021) are important ingredients of a literacy for survival. The alternative is to continue "on a highway to climate hell with our foot on the accelerator" (Thomson Reuters, 2022), as the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres recently stated at the annual climate summit.* (Waliszewska, 2023b, pp. 19-20)

Donald (2019) captures it far more eloquently:

> "To what extent are schools and curriculum documents today facilitating the perpetuation of [a] Great Forgetting? How responsible is it to insist on the ongoing production of young versions of homo economicus when there is every reason to believe that within a

> generation people will no longer be able to "be" that way? Which mythologies promote other forms of human being-ness beyond homo economicus?" (p. 115)

2.4 Joy, precarity and literacies

How can literacies for survival be a site of joy? How can navigating precarity with all of its weight, uncertainty, and hardship be infused with joy? For many years, I have appreciated writer Arundhati Roy's perspective on the world and she invites us "to seek joy in the saddest places," (Roy, 2016, p. 59). That invitation has always resonated with me. But I also believe that joy is a crucial ingredient of literacies for survival when understood as an embodied experience engaging "the body, heart, imagination, and mind" (Leggo, 2004, p. 32) that creates spaces for healing through social justice-based literacy education (Ferlazzo, 2023; Vlach et al., 2023). Understanding literac*ies* in the multitudes described above opens possibilities for joy-filled healing and social justice work oriented around diverse print-based literacies and beyond. Chambers (2012) and Cardinal (2015) independently reflect on their "little pieces of literacy" (p. 6) that broke apart when content was severed from process. They both argue that literacy is never neutral and that's especially apparent "when divorced from knowledge and responsibility" (Chambers, 2012, p. 188), rendering it "*illiteracy*" chopped up into discrete, disjointed skills. In an interview, Muhammad similarly explains how teaching literacy "skills in decontextualized ways" ignores identity (Ferlazzo, 2023), and argues for joy as a way to recognize beauty, make art, and collaborate to make the world a better place, among other things. This view of literacy is multimodal and in close relationship with the human and more-than-human world (Vlach et al., 2023). Chambers (2012) and Cardinal (2015) argue for rich, culturally-relevant literacies that allow learners to participate in many aspects of life: public life, cultural life, political life, and life on the land. These scholars take up Donald's (2019) call to explore other ways to be a human

being. Joy lives in that call and it is closely related to social justice. There can be no joy without justice. Joy and justice allow us to step beyond the threshold of surviving to thriving.

Joy also lives in a precarious present and future through struggles for "collaborative survival" (Tsing, 2015, p. 19) *beyond* modernity/coloniality. There is joy in letting go of stories of human exceptionalism and the false separation between the human and the more-than-human world (Machado de Oliveira, 2021). There is joy and comfort in knowing that other species are capable of "world-making projects" (Tsing, 2015, p. 22). There is also joy in decolonizing literacy and embracing multiple ways of communicating, including through silence (Viruru, 2001). There is joy in sharing many, diverse stories!

To close I return to the question: "*What ways of being in the world might enable children to thrive in the future, and what role might literacies play in enacting, valuing or making available these ways of being?*" (Hackett, 2022, p. 131). This question invokes literacies amid precarity with surviving and thriving in mind. It, too, invokes joy. And so, amid the climate and nature emergency, I find joy in literacies that open up ways of being that may hospice modernity/coloniality and help us build something we haven't yet dreamed of and perhaps will be entirely emergent (Hackett, 2022; Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Tsing, 2015). I can't quite see it, but I feel it, and I know it's possible: "Another world is not only possible, she's on her way. And on a quiet day, if you listen very carefully, you can hear her breathing." (Roy, 2003 as cited in jesusdmjerez, 2012, 20:32).

Chapter 3: More-than-human Literacies

3.1 Invitation up the path

Before traversing academic landscapes, you are invited to walk up to the woods. It is a cool morning and we have our warm, waterproof layers on. We leave a couple of large, wooden buildings behind, and pause at three totem poles carved and ceremonially welcomed by local Coast Salish Nations[7]. We offer our thanks and ask for permission to visit this land. We notice the moon, a thunderbird, and an orca on the totem poles and reflect on their possible messages — we need to invest more time to learn.

Beyond the totems, we notice an empty nature playground up a small grassy hill: large logs stacked haphazardly, yet they look stable, on a bed of damp wood chips. A picnic table nearby. Is it empty? We nearly missed the Canada geese honking into this dewy, grey morning. We walk up the long, gently inclined, gravel path towards the woods. There's a hint of fog highlighting the horizon, smudging the grass with the trees. We notice a few slugs along the way as we look down at our feet. Some are slowly inspecting and glazing the path. A couple of them look torn, likely by curious, hungry beaks; guts spilling out. Small lizards scatter into the grass as we walk. We hear the bouncy double-croak of ravens flying overhead.

We hear human voices in the distance and notice a yellow pickup truck far behind us with tools and landscaping equipment. We also begin hearing children's voices singing with a gentle, clapping rhythm coming from the woods. We keep going and as we step into the forest, the path

[7] A general, regional name is used here to protect the confidentiality of children involved with this research based on guidance from the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) review at the University of Victoria (Ethics Protocol Number 24-0033). I acknowledge and thank the specific Nations whose relationships with these lands continue to this day. In my research, I did this verbally each time I arrived on site and whenever I joined the learning circle.

becomes paved. It's a short, but steep incline on this paved path and we are instantly enveloped by tall, majestic trees of this coastal temperate rainforest. Cedars, firs, and hemlocks with endless ferns in between. Shades of green and rich browns. We hear the song growing louder with each step. We take a moment to breathe in the fresh oxygen from the woods around us. We feel it enter our nostrils as we release our carbon dioxide in reciprocal exchange.

We turn left and find a large, circular, wooden structure that contains the children and a few adults. A group of perhaps 40. There are multiple, thick pillars holding up the shelter. We quietly join the group and notice a circular opening in the very centre of the roof. We see evergreen tree canopies, and a few clouds in a milky grey sky. Children sit on long benches arranged in a circle around a small fire, and sing a call and response song to align their heartbeats with the forest:

I can feel my heartbeat…

(I can feel my heartbeat)

Beating to the rhythm of the forest song.

(Beating to the rhythm of the forest song)[8]

3.2 Introduction

This case study was born in response to three problems and a research gap. First, this study responds to and resists attempts to narrow and standardize literacy influenced by deficit-based, "gap discourse" (McCarty, 2015, p. 70 in Avineri et al., 2015). Following school

[8] Inspired by and amended from original song by Joe Crookston, 2004.

disruptions and shifts that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic as well as recent socio-political trends, there has been renewed momentum in Canada and the United States to strip literacy education to a basic, print-based form (Yurick et al., 2024; Zhu, 2024). Literacy approaches such as the science of reading have resurfaced in this climate of perceived learning loss and delays, stressing basic skills such as phonics (Aukerman & Aiello, 2023; Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021; Hruby, 2020). This is consistent with social trends that are further politicizing and attempting to narrow literacy through book bans and political attacks on curricula in Canada and the United States (Goncalves et al, 2024; Jimenez, 2025; Pawson, 2024; Wong, 2024). These trends are in tension with literacy research that has emphasized the value and importance of multimodality and diverse meaning making practices since at least the 1990s (Kress, 1997; New London Group, 1996), in addition to critical, culturally informed, and Indigenous literacies (Freire, 1970/2000; Battiste, 1986, 1998; Hare, 2001, 2012; Kaya et al., 2022; Kelly & Djonko-Moore, 2021). When pressures to narrow literacy grow at the expense of diverse learning experiences, what literacies and stories become silenced?

The second and third problems are intertwined and point to longstanding trends in education research. The second problem highlights that most education research happens within the context of indoor classroom environments with limited research in other settings such as community spaces, museums, and outdoor places such as forests. A quick academic database search easily reveals that education research is overwhelmingly done within the context of public schools and indoor learning environments. These learning environments come with routines, structures, and assumptions that differ from other spaces. Sometimes referred to as “the grammar of schooling” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 85), the education system is structured in standardized ways. Students are divided by age groupings in buildings containing boxy classrooms, usually

sitting at desks and chairs signaling print literacy time, and learning according to subject-segregated timetables. Most learning happens in largely indoor settings despite multiple benefits of nature-based learning (Mann et al., 2022). Furthermore, the third problem highlights that most literacy research focuses on print-based literacies and digital literacies, despite the multiliteracies turn since the '90s. While research on other diverse meaning-making practices exists, it is overwhelmed by many more studies highlighting print-based and digital literacies.

Why are these research trends problematic? Most educational spaces function to propel a story that upholds the current socio-economic system (modernity/coloniality) predicated on unsustainable, extractive practices, individualism, violence, and the twin myths of human exceptionalism and separation from nature (Machado de Oliveira, 2021). When researchers, educators, and entire education systems privilege standardized, indoor learning environments and print-based literacies, some stories are highlighted and other possibilities are hidden. This is communicated through the content of print-based literacies and through the practices of schooling where the majority of time is spent indoors within a hierarchical power structure (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Donald (2019) describes the *homo economicus* mythology as the dominant story embedded in the curriculum in Alberta, Canada. A story that emphasizes market logic, individualism, anthropocentrism, and separation from nature. A story that hides colonial violence against human and more-than-human worlds. A story that helps learners to recreate this worldview as adults and limits possibilities of other ways of living and being. Similarly, Lemon (2022) excavates the anthropocentric, individualistic, and reductionist root metaphors embedded in British Columbia's curriculum that influence both learners and educators. And Machado de Oliveira (2021) outlines the single story of modernity/coloniality, and how "formal mass schooling as we know it was created precisely to naturalize and to normalize [this] single story,

and it was extremely effective in doing so." (p. 70) The success of this single story rests on the alluring myth of progress often articulated through linear mastery and logocentric, print literacies (Hackett, 2022a; 2022b).

Finally, this study strives to respond to a lack of literacy research in non-classroom or outdoor settings, particularly with children beyond grade one (in Canada, this means older than about seven years of age). Studies that do exist in outdoor settings typically focus on very young children often in relation to play, ecoliteracy, or place (Häggström & Schmidt, 2020, for example). The implicit message is that relationships with the more-than-human world are the focus of very young children who haven't yet begun to read and write language-based texts. This made me wonder: what are the implications of schools and other social institutions valuing meaning-making done predominantly indoors with print literacy, and only by the human species? What are we missing in education, and what are we highlighting and perpetuating?

3.2.1 Logocentric literacy and the climate crisis

The wider context of this research is the climate crisis unfolding in real time and impacting every corner of our planet in often chaotic ways. This context is as important as any of the research problems or gaps identified above, because it serves as the urgent purpose underlying the search for literacies beyond logocentrism — other ways of making meaning, learning, creating, and communicating beyond human words. Perhaps one fruitful place to start is to unpack the problems associated with logocentrism and how they have fuelled modernity/coloniality and thus the climate crisis.

Logocentric literacies are human language-based practices such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing. They are at the heart of schooling and are often the unquestioned reason for

the existence and the appeal of modern education. Logocentric literacies have also been a vehicle for colonial projects through mastery-based education systems set up to propel the single story of modern progress (Machado de Oliveira, 2021). The problem lies in the twin practice of "wording the world" (ibid., p. 21), or learning through description, and separation from the rest of nature, to the exclusion of other ways of making meaning in diverse settings. Another way of thinking about it is modern education is predicated on learning "*about* the land" rather than "*with* the land" (Donald, 2024).

Logocentric literacies in mainstream schooling have also defined possibilities for humans and our place in the world, and have obstructed other possibilities from view (Donald, 2019). Labeling, ordering, and describing nature in indoor classroom settings reinforces an imagined separation between humans and the rest of nature (Hackett, 2022b), and upholds human exceptionalism (Abram, 1996). The story that is implicitly, and at times explicitly, conveyed is one of human separation and dominance over the Earth (Donald, 2019; Lemon, 2022). This myth serves as a powerful justification for a modern/colonial socio-economic system built on "colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy" (Stein et al, 2023, p. 992). A justification that has also fuelled the climate crisis. Logocentric literacies are not solely responsible for the climate crisis, but they have played an important role in the modern/colonial education system along with built environments that have limited learners from forming direct relationships with nature. This system has functioned to separate humans from the rest of nature, to limit possibilities and practices for ways of living, and to hide other ways of being from learners' imaginations (Donald, 2019; Machado de Oliveira, 2021).

It seems like an intractable problem. Schooling practices rely on speaking, listening, reading and writing to such a degree that it almost seems synonymous with the role of teacher

and teaching. By and large, teachers carefully create learning opportunities for learners to learn *about* the world through description, or "a single heavy blanket of interpretation" (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 46). How might we, educators, instead facilitate learning *with* the world? Or perhaps, how might we not stand in the way? A broader, deeper, and more flexible understanding of literacies is required for this work.

Logocentric literacies are important and they can even be used in ways that do not "word the world" (p. 45), but instead open possibilities for *worlding* (Mika, 2017; Mika et al, 2020). Based on Maori philosophy, Mika (2017) offers worlding as ways in which the world is continually manifesting, co-constituting, and how "one thing is never alone, and all things actively construct and compose it" (p. 4) including language itself (Mika et al, 2020). Put another way, worlding suggests the use of language that goes beyond describing and indexing the world with one static story and opens possibilities for stories as "living entities that emerge from and move things in the world" (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. xiii); stories that invite participation, affect our bodies in sensory ways, and evade one assigned meaning; and stories that honour a complex, entangled agency. Often this is the realm of oral storytelling and all genres of prose and poetry. Magnason (2021) captures a similar idea when writing about the difficulty of grasping many concepts related to climate change: "Words have different charges to them; it takes many years for concepts to reach full charge." (p. 77). This suggests a shifting, a movement over time through experiences.

Logocentric literacies, then, have the potential for both wording and worlding. Wording has promoted the story of modernity/coloniality, hidden other possibilities from view, and supported the separation of human beings from the rest of nature. Worlding offers an ontology of possibilities, of practices and ways of being that might be necessary in a precarious world, of

"literacies yet to come" (Hackett, 2022a, p. 131). To conclude, I am guided by a more flexible definition of literacies that reaches beyond logocentrism by Lenters and McDermott (2019): "[c]ommunicative practices for forming and making sense of the world through intentional and sustained encounters with human and more-than-human entities and for opening spaces for new becomings" (p. 4). I believe this definition allows for practices of worlding through logocentric literacies and beyond that are necessary to imagine living differently and adapting to an increasingly precarious world (Waliszewska, 2025).

3.2.2 Possibilities in the weeds

Despite the endurance of the single story of modernity/coloniality upheld by institutions such as the education system, humans and the rest of nature have reached a pivotal point in Earth's history. The prevailing socio-economic system is threatening our collective survival as effects of climate change have spiralled into a climate and nature emergency (Hackett, 2022b; Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Stein et al., 2023). This pushed me to investigate what might exist outside of this powerful story. If we imagine public schools as manicured, monocrop lawns, what can we find in the endlessly multiplying, beautifully diverse *weeds* of education? What possibilities might exist there to help us survive, and indeed thrive, in the precarious "knots and pulses of patchiness" (Tsing, 2015, p. 6) of contemporary capitalism?

Before turning to the case study, I aim first to contextualize this research within scholarship on Indigenous literacies and posthuman literacies. While each of these areas is distinct, they are compatible and form a multifaceted lens that invites pedagogical possibilities. The following are general snapshots of each perspective and are by no means intended to be comprehensive or exhaustive. First, Indigenous scholars in education and beyond have stressed

the importance of learning from and with the land and noted the general absence of land-based practices from mainstream schooling (Cardinal, 2015; Donald, 2021; Grenz, 2024; Marom & Rattray, 2022). Donald argues that this omission along with curricular stories that are predominantly told in schools facilitate "The Great Forgetting" (Donald, 2019, p. 114) of existing outside of economic productivity. Similarly, Anishinaabe arts leader Jesse Wente calls for a time of "deep remembering" of cultural skills and practices not typically taught in schools (Ayed, 2024). Cardinal (2015) argues for culturally-relevant literacies that allow learners to participate in public life, cultural life, political life, and life on the land. This includes language-based literacies and equally so multimodal, arts-based, and land-based literacies.

Posthuman literacy scholars argue for more-than-human literacies that question human exceptionalism (Hackett, 2022b; Kuby et al., 2019; Lenters et al., 2022; Lenters & McDermott, 2019). This captures the notion that literacies extend far beyond the skillset of the human species alone to include multimodal, emergent, embodied, sensory, affective, relational, place-based (Hackett, 2022b), and even metabolic capacities[9] (Machado de Oliveira, 2021). I see more-than-human literacies as an umbrella term to highlight the multifaceted practices possible when literacies are unshackled from their longstanding bondage to human language. I highlight a couple of the aforementioned facets, but my previous article aimed to offer a deeper engagement with this understanding of literacies (Waliszewska, 2025). In my view, literacies are understood as emergent, because learners often do not follow linear, developmental, mastery-based paths and communication is often not rational or premeditated (Hackett, 2022b). Literacies are

[9] Informed by Indigenous worldviews, Machado de Oliveira (2021, p. 235) refers to "metabolic literacies" as the experiences and skills of bodies layered in other organisms. It's a nested system of relationships and entities.

understood to be deeply relational and entangled with the world as opposed to separate and found in individual meaning-makers. This complicates the idea of individual agency. First, individual learners are entangled with, rather than distinct from, the world. This means that learning is shaped and even initiated by the world; thus, agency is not embedded in humans alone (Hackett & Rautio, 2019; Hackett & Sommerville, 2017). Instead, it is distributed among human and more-than-human beings. These ideas are deeply reminiscent of relationality and reciprocity with the land that are at the heart of many Indigenous worldviews (Wilson, 2008 as cited in Grenz, 2024). The emphasis on relationality in posthuman literacy is also similar to kinship literacies that amplify Indigenous worldviews and scholars (MacDonald et al., 2024).

Parallels ripple between Indigenous literacies and worldviews, and posthuman literacies. Each perspective brings essential pieces of the overall puzzle without one necessitating submission of the other. Each approach invites learning and inquiry from a slightly different angle, and centres the Earth/land/more-than-human world/nature, regardless of preferred word choice. However, I think it's critical to centre Indigenous literacies and scholars in this discussion, because all this work is built on and expanded from Indigenous ways of knowing (Smith, 2012). This connection is often respectfully acknowledged, sometimes deeply engaged with, but at times forgotten. This is particularly the case in the posthuman theoretical landscape extended from Western philosophical traditions. These traditions stole Indigenous philosophies centuries ago (Graeber & Wengrow, 2023) and continue this epistemic violence today. Nonetheless, posthuman literacies offer valuable tools for *how* to learn in ways that embrace the full diversity of meaning-making and sense-making that might enable possibilities for surviving and thriving in a precarious world. To the best of my, albeit limited, ability as a White settler, I

am inspired by Grenz (2024) to practice epistemic openness that may amplify Indigenous worldviews alongside Western knowledge when it is compatible to do so.

3.2.3 Previous relevant research

Studies focusing on literacy practices of older children in nature-based settings are not common. One notable example is a recent, multi-year study that engaged several classes of multi-aged children in forest-based arts practices in efforts to disrupt colonial narratives (Hill et al., 2024). Hill et al.'s (2024) theoretical orientation is similar to mine as authors employ Indigenous worldviews and posthuman theory. The study is a unique example of collaborating with older children, with the land, and of finding common ground between posthumanism and Indigenous perspectives to "inform one another in generative ways" (Hill et al., 2024, p. 1065). There are also a few examples that investigated multimodal literacies with older Indigenous children in Australia partly or entirely on the land (Mills & Dooley, 2019; Mills et al., 2014; Mills et al., 2016). Lastly, there is a multi-year, ethnographic study of an outdoor school for youth (Gleason, 2022). The study focuses primarily on science education and the political and environmental implications of this program within the context of the climate crisis, and less so on literacy practices of the learners.

Most studies about literacy practices in nature-based settings are focused on younger children and there are several excellent ones. Some investigate the entangled relationship between children, objects and places from a posthumanist perspective (Hackett & Rautio, 2019; Hackett & Somerville, 2017; Harwood & Collier, 2017). Others look at ecoliteracy and place-based learning (Häggström & Schmidt, 2020); multimodality in a forest setting (Streelasky, 2019); and outdoor, multimodal library programs from a posthumanist lens and a relational,

kinship literacies lens (Lenters et al., 2022; MacDonald et al., 2024). My study is inspired by and learns from all of the above research and seeks to add to the emerging research area of older children learning with the land and through a diversity of literacy practices.

3.3 An Emergent Methodology

> "This is the provocation and challenge of post qualitative inquiry — to create different worlds for living." (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 604)

3.3.1 Study overview

This study includes one group in an outdoor, elementary, multi-age program that operates in partnership with the largest, online, public school in British Columbia, Canada. The program is run jointly by two teachers employed by the public school and Forest Mentors employed by a small non-profit organization. The stated goals of this nature-based program are cultivating children's attachment to self, others, and nature; embracing Indigenous ways of knowing; honouring children as co-teachers, among others. At the time of this research, there were 32 children in the program and several supporting adults, including two certified teachers. In this study, I focus on one group of 15 children, between the ages of approximately 7 and 11, supported by one teacher and two Forest Mentors two days a week, and by three Forest Mentors one day a week. The program runs three days a week between 9:30am and 2:30pm, and is located in southern British Columbia entirely outdoors in a lakeside forest setting. I visited eight times over two months in spring 2025 to co-gather and co-generate data with the children, adult facilitators, and the more-than-human world. Each visit was for the entire day, and I observed children during different activities including circle time, adult guided activities, child led activities, and free play. Data consists of field notes and photos as well as occasional reflections

between visits. The research question that anchors this study is: *What kinds of literacy practices do learners in an elementary outdoor program engage in, and how are they shaped by the more-than-human world?*

Leaning on Dennis and Huf (2020), I situate my research within an approach that aims to create flexible spaces for children's participation to emerge in their own ways. In practical terms, this meant that I did not ask children to create additional artifacts for the study, participate in activities of my choice, or respond to prepared questions. Instead, I joined them on their terms, in their activities (by invitation), in their conversations, and offered the option of taking photos of their creations only upon their request. It also meant that the focus of the study wasn't always human – it included the more-than-human world and invitations from all beings on the land. This study was reviewed by and has received approval from the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board (24-0033). Written informed consent was obtained from the school district, the board of directors of the non-profit organization that runs the program, as well as educators, and caregivers. Ongoing, oral informed consent was obtained from children.

3.3.2 Positionality

I have interrogated my multifaceted white settler/immigrant/educator positionality in more depth in a recent article (Waliszewska, 2025); however, it is important to highlight here that as a white immigrant and a lifelong learner/teacher, I have benefited from colonial institutions, especially the education system. Therefore, I believe I have a responsibility to help decolonize learning spaces, materials, curricula, and education research, especially since the opportunities accessible to me are continually shaped by my relative power and privilege. I also believe that all knowledge is partial, shaped by our positionality, and never neutral, which is why I have a

responsibility to learn from important perspectives in education that are being actively silenced (hooks, 1994).

Furthermore, during every stage of this research I negotiated multiple roles. I am a parent of one of the children in this program, I am a board member of the nonprofit that helps to run this program and employs all Forest Mentors on site, and I stepped into the new role of a researcher. One of the biggest challenges that often comes up in ethnographic research is gaining access and building trust in a research relationship (O'Leary, 2021; Yin, 2018). My familiarity with the program and the community facilitated access and seemed to reduce the unease that can occur with case study or any in-depth research. I was able to quickly establish trust in the research relationship given that it built on pre-existing relationships of reciprocity, responsibility, and accountability in the community. I was also able to lean on my teacher positionality to collaborate with relative comfort with the learning community and my teacher lens was helpful during data analysis.

3.3.3 The entanglement of research design, methods and data generation

> "Worlding stories are not trying to index reality in language, to arrive at a perfectly secure place of description or prescription, or to wrap the world with a single heavy blanket of interpretation." (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 46)

In the initial stages of planning this research, I envisioned a classic qualitative methodology for this case study: a critical ethnography aimed at documenting children's diverse practices with the land through description. Initially, I was inspired by sensory ethnographic approaches (Pink, 2015), and "the arts of noticing" (Tsing, 2015, p. 37). I was guided by my understanding of critical ethnography as theory-driven and I aspired to interrogate adult/child

power relations (May & Fitzpatrick, 2019), but from the beginning, there was a mismatch between qualitative methodology and my theoretical orientation steeped in posthumanism. I didn't set out to do post-qualitative inquiry, but like St. Pierre (2018; 2025), I felt a deep tension between the philosophical assumptions of qualitative methodology and my theoretical orientation that questioned concepts of agency, rationality, human exceptionalism, atomization and separation of objects and beings from the world, and recognized the dangers and limits of symbolic, abstract representation of the world through language (Hackett, 2022b; Machado de Oliveira, 2021; MacLure, 2013b).

Given that my fieldwork was infused with my theoretical orientation, I was necessarily pulled towards post-qualitative inquiry and the tug became stronger still during the sense-making ("analysis") and writing process (St. Pierre, 2018). It could not have been otherwise. Just like my understanding of literacy shifted over time toward diverse practices including and beyond language (Waliszewska, 2025), so too my research practices needed to shift beyond human-centric, language-based practices, and into the deeply entangled, more-than-human world. It was naive for me to think that I could keep the methodology neat and tidy within distinct qualitative themes and categories, but as a novice researcher, the entire process was new, complex, emergent, and at times challenging.

My post-qualitative inquiry process has centred on the challenge to think/feel/imagine differently to remember new ways of doing/being (St. Pierre, 2025). During fieldwork, I was open to invitations from all research participants, human and more-than-human. Sometimes this involved a verbal invitation from a child. Sometimes birds made themselves known and present through persistent calls. Other times still, the weather was a strong force shaping the day and what I attended to. After fieldwork, I spent months thinking, reading, writing, viewing photos

from the visits, assigning flexible, tenuous categories (that often overlapped and could not be disentangled) to the field notes, re-reading, and writing some more. According to St. Pierre (2018), the writing process *creates* the field and "is, after all, a method of inquiry" (p. 607). Furthermore, MacLure (2013a) argues that there is no separation between researchers and their inquiry, and warns against reductionism, Western rationality, and symbolic representation of children's embodied, sensory, and material experiences. Yet the practice of coding facilitates deep engagement with data when it is flexible, slow, and relational, and MacLure (2013a, 2013c) argues for data that "glows", that emerges over time with intensity and even chooses the researcher in a seemingly agential way (2013b, p. 661). In this way, data can be seen as "sense-event[s]" (MacLure, 2013b, p. 663), or more specifically "literacy as event[s]" (Burnett & Merchant, 2020) that defy disentanglement from the world in which they live, or fixing still in one, neat description. From this perspective, data can remain alive in sensory, relational, and affective ways enabling movement and *worlding*.

3.4 Invitation into the Forest

> "To enlarge what is possible, we need other kinds of stories—including adventures of landscapes." (Tsing, 2015, p. 156)

Do you recall the circular, wooden structure you happened upon at the beginning of our journey together? Below you will find a collage containing two images of the Roundhouse and three more images of the lands around and beyond it (see Figure 3.1). Local Coast Salish Nations in what is colonially referred to as southern British Columbia have long lived in relationship with these lands – lands that have never been surrendered. Teachers and students in the nature-based program in this case study have a daily practice of greeting, acknowledging, and thanking the

land and the rightful caretakers as part of their ongoing learning practices. I, too, asked for permission, offered gratitude, and acknowledged the land, more-than-human beings, and the local Indigenous Nations as part of my practice during the visits.

These daily, relational practices of greetings, offers of gratitude, and territorial acknowledgements are important literacy practices in the nature program. They are oral, embodied, and deeply relational with the human and more-than-human participants of the forest with the implicit aim to make "sense of the world through intentional and sustained encounters with human and more-than-human entities" (Lenters & McDermott, 2019, p. 4). Furthermore, these practices reach beyond descriptive understandings of the world and step into the realm of worlding – enacting possibilities into existence through daily experiences. I offer a snapshot of this daily practice with gestures in italics:

> Thank you to earth, *(adult educators and children speak together in unison, standing in circle, and reach down to touch the earth)*
> Thank you to sky, (*everyone speaks and reaches up to the sky)*
> Thank you to trees, (*everyone speaks and poses like a tree)*
> And birds in the sky. (*everyone speaks and flaps their wings)*
>
> Thank you to water, (*everyone speaks and moves hands like water)*
> And fish in the sea. (*everyone speaks, puts palms together and swims like fish)*
> Thank you to you, (*everyone speaks, reaches hands out, and sweeps around the circle)*
> And thank you to me. (*everyone speaks and puts hands on heart)*

> And thank you to the [local Coast Salish] Nation on whose land we live, play and grow. [Thank you spoken in the local Coast Salish language]! (*everyone speaks and holds their hands up in gratitude – a gesture practiced by many Indigenous cultures locally)*

One way to understand experiences such as this one is through Burnett and Merchant's (2020) concept: *literacy as event*. Compatible with the definition of literacies outlined above as well as with the concepts of worlding and sense-events, literacy as event gestures toward the complex experiences that underpin literacy practices and seeks to make sense of the moving processes as opposed to finished, fixed products (Burnett & Merchant, 2020). Literacy as event, then, is a process-based concept that understands meaning-making and sense-making as occurring relationally, often in surprising ways that defy prior predictions, and therefore containing multiple possibilities. The collective, embodied, repeated and land-based aspects of these practices (above) are as important as the specific words spoken. They interact to create powerful meaning-making and sense-making literacy experiences that transcend language. The sensory, embodied aspects cannot be reduced to gestures alone, because they are always interacting with the more-than-human world – the sounds of the birds, sensations of the rain or wind or sun on particular bodies with unique experiences, unique affects, etc. These daily practices, then, are always slightly novel and "exceed what can be conceived and perceived" (Burnett & Merchant, 2020, p. 49) offering multiple possibilities for experiences. The same is possible for literacy practices in indoor spaces with printed texts, but outdoor settings open up a wider realm of experience rendering land acknowledgements more salient when experienced in direct, sensory contact with and informed by the land. Indigenous scholars, as well as knowledge keepers have emphasized since time immemorial the strong connections between land, self,

culture, and language (Cardinal, 2015; Donald, 2021; Grenz, 2024; Prince, 2025). Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, learning "*about* the land" and learning "*with* the land" is an important distinction that shapes meaning-making and sense-making experiences (Donald, 2024). Outdoor settings are more conducive to learning *with* the land as the example above illustrates, although this is not automatically the case. Learning with the land happens when lands shape learners' activities *and* when they understand themselves to be in relationship with the land. The daily ritual described above is one way that land relationships are cultivated and maintained on an ongoing basis.

3.4.1 Shaped by the land

As we step back into the forest, I offer the following entrypoints (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2) to address the research question: *What kinds of literacy practices do learners in an elementary outdoor program engage in, and how are they shaped by the more-than-human world?* I offer these photographic examples as a way of trying to highlight some of the sensory intensity and complexity entangled within the data. I resist the temptation to describe them purely in words and I offer them to point to recurring, "glowing" (MacLure, 2013b) moments that emerged from my reading of the data. These snapshots are not exhaustive nor representative of all of the possible experiences and literacy practices. As one researcher entangled with this data, they are but one possible pathway at this time with many more to come.

Figure 3.1 The Land

This collage captures snapshots of some of the diverse, forested lands where the forest school usually happens. The edge of the Play Forest can be seen in *top left*, where free, unstructured play sessions happen on most afternoons. There are some built structures as depicted in the *bottom right* and in the *circular* photo (the Roundhouse); a temporary tent in the

top left photo; and the majority of the land is lush with plant life, fungi, and many other kinds of more-than-human beings, both perceptible and not easily detected by the children (*top right*; *bottom left*). Every day children step back into their unique relationships with these lands and these lands are more than places or settings – they are more-than-human teachers with stories and lessons to share (Jickling et al., 2018). Figure 3.2 below explores land-human relations more closely through four examples.

Figure 3.2 Literacy as event: Invitations from the Land

This collage captures four events with multiple, overlapping literacies deeply entangled in children's experiences. *Top left* shows a shelter built, used, and regularly maintained by several children. This shelter was involved in elaborate, multi-month, recurring pretend play full of opportunities for rich meaning and sense-making – literacy as events. It was hard to tell where the line was between an invitation from the land for this built structure at the bottom of a small, rocky hill, and children's imaginations imposed on the land. This one shelter offered many opportunities and prompts for storytelling; dramatic, embodied and emergent play and experimentation; and multimodal design and construction. Over multiple visits, I witnessed children repairing their shelter, adding to and altering its design, using it as a basecamp for an ongoing battle game, and on one occasion children invited me over to quietly explain the medicines they were "mining" for in a log that had specific, invented healing purposes in the battle game. It provided a glimpse into some of the backstories, mythologies, and shared logics of the game negotiated and co-created by the children. Some of the most spirited, high-energy children were drawn to this place and their battle game which facilitated relationship building and communication with other children in ways not always possible during quiet or adult-facilitated activities.

Top right shows rainboot imprints in a rotting tree stump. Children found this significantly rotten tree stump one day in the Play Forest, a large forested area usually visited for free, unstructured play time. They found it to be of similar consistency to quicksand. Initially, this experience was sensory and embodied as the children revelled in its consistency as the rotting stump tried to suck their boots into itself. They stomped and squished repeatedly. They marvelled at its novelty and uniqueness. They became delightedly dirty and covered with a rich, muddy rot! After some time, this led to questions and conversations about decomposition. An

adult joined the conversation and allowed the children to take the lead, think out loud, and share their scientific hypotheses about how the stump became this way and what might happen next. The adult responded when needed, shared thoughts about decomposition adding nutrients to the soil and its general importance within a forest, and soon this initially embodied, sensory experience lived side by side with scientific learning. This rotting stump invited and shaped learning in deeply surprising and emergent ways. One might be tempted to label this as "child led learning," but that would deny agency within the stump and an entangled relationality with more-than-human beings (Dennis & Huf, 2020). This literacy as event represents how a diverse repertoire of literacies (in this case: embodied, sensory, oral, emergent, relational, and place-based) can become pathways to deep learning, particularly when invited and shaped by the more-than-human world.

Bottom left shows a tree bridge made of live roots. Children invited me to cross this live bridge one day over a small creek nearby and excitedly explained how they found it and how exciting it was to find out that the tree was alive. The land holds many such opportunities for exciting, surprising discoveries and invites children into learning through ongoing relationships with the more-than-human world, *with* the land (Donald, 2024). I noticed that children often returned to familiar spots or previous, surprising discoveries and these repeated visits seemed to deepen their attachment to and understanding of place, seasonal changes, and other species. For example, repeated visits to the creek that flows under this tree bridge sometimes resulted in noticing tiny Pacific tree frogs, despite their perfect camouflage in surrounding greenery. On one special occasion, children even spotted a pregnant frog in that area resulting in excitement and revelry.

Bottom right shows a dragon nest created by one child. This nest was part of long-term, recurring activities about nature dragons and their mythologies involving a few children. While the nest was created by one child as a spontaneous art project, the stories that shaped it were co-created by multiple children and the nest was used in their storytelling. Some children shared with me that "no one owns a nature dragon," and showed me where they live with a mama dragon, near children's sit spots in an area of the forest that they visit regularly. The dragons themselves were uniquely shaped trees and logs. One day, I was invited into a family of dragons storytelling sequence that incorporated my research activities. The children informed me that I was a researcher observing the dragons (them), but needed to earn their trust by being patient, gentle, and offering them fish. When I acted out the role accordingly, the dragons learned to trust me and invited me into their home. This literacy as event points to a practice of worlding whereby children take inspiration from the world around them, including the land and their lives outside of this program, and creatively blend them to see what might happen. Worlding is a practice of new becomings and possibilities that invites participation and evades one ascribed, fixed meaning. It is a flexible process that opens spaces for "new becomings" (Lenters & McDermott, 2019, p. 4) aligned with our definition of literacies above. On the surface, this recurring pretend play sequence may appear unimportant in the context of literacy practices that are generally adult-planned and adult-led with the assumption that children progress toward mastery defined as adult literacies (Hackett, 2022b). Upon deeper reflection, though, these kinds of emergent, worlding, oral storytelling and pretend play practices weave together embodied, sense-making and meaning-making (Burnett & Merchant, 2020). They are rich with multimodal, place and arts-based literacies that are relationally entangled with human and more-than-human worlds.

3.4.2 Entangled literacies

As the examples from Figure 3.2 show, more-than-human literacies in this study were often entangled with one another (embodied, place-based, relational, emergent, and multimodal) and with the land (Donald, 2024) as sense-making and meaning-making mingled. Another example of this was during the regular practice of sit spots during which children enjoyed a few quiet, solitary minutes in nature to practice their own "arts of noticing" or being, or to write and draw in their nature journals in structured, guided, or loosely guided ways depending on the day. This practice is deeply embodied and place-based as children were encouraged to attune to their bodies and senses as they were held by the land in all seasons and all kinds of weather; and deeply relational with the more-than-human world. Sometimes children noticed familiar wildflowers such as shooting stars returning in early spring reminding them to steer clear of their seedlings; other times they noticed geese nesting nearby. This practice is also emergent and non-linear since it is open to possibilities that time spent with the land offers. Even adult-guided activities were open-ended by design such as nature journalling activities with the prompts: *I notice, I wonder, It reminds me of* (Laws & Lygren, 2020). Lastly, this sit spot practice is multimodal. Sometimes the multimodality was expressed through an activity of learning to notice, identify, and record bird calls in writing and/or artwork. Sometimes children could choose to read. Children expressed themselves in ways that worked for them and had the option of sharing their creations in circle. Shared entries included poems, observations, artwork, and even lyrics – all forms of expression were welcomed and received equally well. What I noticed throughout my field notes was that logocentric, print literacies were present, but not privileged. Children's diverse ways of expressing themselves were welcomed and celebrated.

Figure 3.3 shows a wheel diagram of more-than-human literacies at a glance with an additional dimension – criticality. While interrogating identities and power dynamics was outside the scope of this study, a critical dimension is an important and indispensable part of literacies (Freire, 1970/2000). Indigenous and posthuman scholars have elaborated on this point as well (Battiste, 1986; Hackett, 2022b). This study focused on the diverse meaning and sense-making practices of multiage children in a forest school. While there were no recorded instances of children or adults interrogating power structures and identities, this study is limited to only eight visits over two months. In future research, it would be worthwhile to investigate how critical literacies unfold on the land and in the learning community, and to what degree criticality may be present or absent.

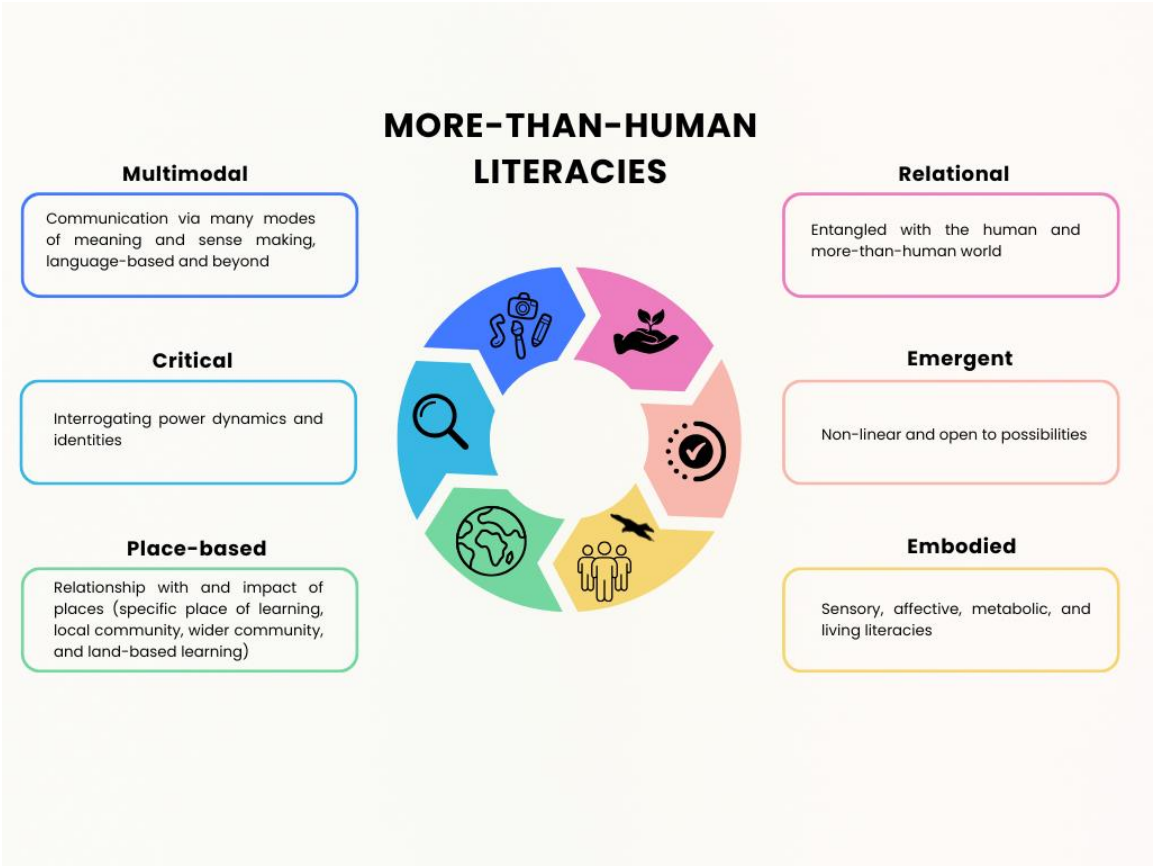

Figure 3.3 More-than-human Literacies

Note. The diagram above is a visual representation of understanding literacies rooted in posthuman and Indigenous perspectives.

3.5 Forest Literacies

How might human educators facilitate learning *with* the more-than-human world? What might it mean to consider forests and more-than-human worlds as agential with the capacity of inviting and shaping learning? To consider forests as teachers, human educators must be willing to relinquish some control and be willing to explore what children *might* learn when not directed by adults. What do forests want to teach us if we are willing to listen and experience? Forests might reveal possibilities for living differently from what is usually obstructed by "a single heavy blanket of interpretation" (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 46) of modernity/coloniality. They might cultivate more-than-human relationships and ecological accountability that question human exceptionalism. And they might very well surprise learners and educators alike. Opportunities for time spent outside are more easily available to the youngest of children in daycares, preschools and with their families, but this study demonstrates that older children benefit from learning with the land as well. These experiences open up a world of diverse literacies to learners that allow for sensory and affective attunement and relationship building with the more-than-human world.

Yet access to the outdoors, let alone forests, is typically restricted with the majority of learning occurring in indoor spaces (Mann et al., 2022). This reinforces a myth of separation of humans from the land and the rest of nature. In this unique moment in Earth's history of human-caused climatic and ecosystemic disruption, it is time for a "deep remembering" (Ayed, 2024) of reciprocal, responsible, and accountable relationships with our more-than-human kin (Grenz, 2024). This requires a diverse repertoire of literacies, language-based and beyond, and a

recurring practice of learning *with* the land, not simply about it, especially in these critical times of significant change.

I will not walk back with you. Instead, I invite you to stay awhile in these woods. They contain deep time mysteries, lessons for survival, opportunities for diverse practices, and also lessons in decomposition, death, and transformation. I wonder how the forest will hold you and transform you.

Figure 3.4 New Growth

Chapter 4: New paths

I promised I would not walk back with you. There are too many paths to follow. Your path is different from mine, and I aim to offer possibilities rather than directions. My own paths have multiplied and widened. I am reminded of all the paths not taken and snippets of writing that did not make the cut. I have a list, multiple lists really, of future pieces asking to be written. There are unresolved knots, wrinkles, and tensions needing to be carefully tended to, rather than smoothed out. One knot is a disciplinary one. Depth education and wild pedagogies have deeply influenced my work, but I made cuts to keep the focus on literacy. I return to them here in an effort to resist disciplinary divides and to acknowledge the connections between them and my work.

I am reminded of Machado de Oliveira's (2021) concept of depth education that is built on practices to "dig deeper and relate wider" (p. 43), and a recognition that education is more than schools. This stands in contrast with mastery education (mainstream education) that focuses on linear achievement metrics like university degrees. Depth education focuses on developing authentic engagement, embraces complexity, and seeks to help learners develop accountability and responsibility within modernity/coloniality. Learners embrace the mystery of the world as opposed to certainty and absolutes. In the context of climate education, depth education seeks to help learners build their stamina, intellectual, affective, and relational capacities to survive and thrive in a precarious future (Stein et al., 2023). Throughout my degree, and especially in the last year and a half, I have been building *my* stamina and *my* capacities to thrive in an increasingly precarious present and future. In my view, more-than-human literacies offer ways to build these skills, too.

Through its six touchstones as guides, wild pedagogies return nature to the centre of learning: nature as co-teacher; complexity, the unknown, and spontaneity; locating the wild; time and practice; socio-cultural change; and finally, building alliances and the human community (Jickling et al., 2018, pp. 77-106). Through these pedagogical touchstones humans are decentred, the role of nature is embraced, deep time is honoured and relationships are cultivated in efforts "towards telling a new geostory of a world in which all beings can flourish" (p. 97). It is deeply political work that acknowledges the role of education in social change. It draws from diverse academic scholarship, including Indigenous worldviews, and offers many possibilities in the weeds of education, so to speak. I see depth education and wild pedagogies as ways of deepening more-than-human literacies, and as allies in adjacent disciplinary fields.

Another knot is for future, new paths. Questions have been bubbling up for me throughout the research process. Some are practical questions about how educators can practice diverse literacies in hostile political climates that continue to put pressure on narrowing literacy. These pressures seem to be deliberate attempts to limit critical literacies. Other questions are about land-based learning and anti-colonial efforts which are deeply connected to the important, nuanced differences between outdoor education and land-based education. Other questions still are about highlighting the rich overlap as well as possibly teasing out the differences between play and diverse learning experiences. And most importantly, questions about how, we as humans can repair our relationship with the more-than-human world.

The article format of this thesis has put constraints on what paths I was able to take and highlight in this document. There are methodological considerations from a posthuman perspective that I am still thinking, reading, and writing about. That work is only beginning for me. I am interested in writing about the complexity and messiness of agency in research with

children. I am also interested in writing about the many stories that did not make it into chapter three. For example, the land in my research contains stories, including multiple colonial, local Indigenous, and multispecies stories (with remnants as invitational evidence that children and adults in the program often stumble upon). I am also called to pursue multispecies relationships in research with children as a relevant extension of more-than-human literacies.

Lastly, I am frequently pulled into autobiographic narrative landscapes. I did not intend to write one for this thesis. Somehow one wrote itself. I am currently thinking about and planning an autoethnographic piece about teaching teachers using a more-than-human literacies lens. Positioning myself at the centre of my work may be a lifelong tendency. If so, I hope it is not in a self-indulgent way, but rather as desperate, persistent attempts to make sense of things when things often do not make sense. And here I remind myself, and you as well, that making sense must include *all* of our embodied and relational capacities and not just our "academic" heads. I invite you to put your device aside and step out into the (probably cold and rainy winter) day. Despite the cold, I am always glad when I do.

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