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Teacher Education in "Place-based" Curriculum

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Abstract

This paper briefly presents students' investigations from one of the first-year curriculum courses in the School of Education and Childhood Studies at Capilano University in North Vancouver. The course is part of the early childhood degree program. In this class, students investigate early childhood curriculum within the context of capitalism and colonialism. A particular focus is given to our relationship with materials, and to the knowledges and practices involved in working with materials. This paper does not attempt to give a linear account of what happened in the class, nor what the students really learned. Instead, it seeks to pull out two main threads (i.e., materials and cracks) from the students' visual journals and to weave these threads together. Images and text become entwined, working together and strengthening one another. This weaving is intended as a bag to hold our challenges, questions, and hopes for us in our early childhood practice.

Keywords: *capitalism, colonialism, materials, cracks, visual journal.*

Early one morning, the clay delivery arrives at a childcare centre located on the unceded territories of the Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations on the west coast of a place we now call Canada. Several cardboard boxes stamped with the name Plainsman in thick black ink sit outside the main doors. Two educators pick up and carry one of the boxes with them and alongside the children walk into the nearby forest. Stopping at the trees by a dry riverbed, the educators open the box and place the big block of clay, which is wrapped in a clear plastic bag, on the ground. Three young children dig and drag their fingers slowly through the cold, grey clay, carving deep tunnels and dropping small bits of clay on the ground. The dropped bits pick up needles, earth, and tiny stones as they tumble over tree roots and down a small hill to the riverbed.

We, as educators, might feel excitement when we open a fresh cardboard box of clay. Lifting the clay out of the box, we feel its weight. Opening the plastic bag it comes wrapped in, and watching the children dig their fingers into it, we might wonder about their connections with clay, and our own. Our relationships with clay are particular, and we tell particular clay stories.

This ECE story about clay can be juxtaposed with other clay stories. Plainsman Clays, for example, the corporation from which the childcare centre purchased their clay, "handle[s] all aspects of the mining and manufacturing process" (Plainsman Clays Ltd, n. d., para. 5). In fact, Plainsman "mines thousands of tons of clay at a time" (para. 1). Their website tells this story about Canada's clay mines:

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> Western Canada is Clay Country, tens of thousands of square kilometers of it, the best deposits in North America. . . . We mine clay from sites in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Montana and Idaho. Beds are usually level marine sediments that are very clean and consistent. We have unlimited supplies of a very wide range of high quality clay materials. (paras. 5–6)

The stories Plainsman tells describe a specific relationship with clay. In the corporation's telling, clay becomes a limitless resource. This story becomes implicated in the ones we tell in ECE, through the boxes that arrive at our childcare centre. All of these stories about clay—the Plainsman stories and the ECE stories—can be placed alongside another story of extraction, this one told by Anishinaabe scholar Simpson (2013):

> Extraction and assimilation go together. Colonialism and capitalism are based on extracting and assimilating. My land is seen as a resource. My relatives in the plant and animal worlds are seen as resources. My culture and knowledge is a resource. . . . The act of extraction removes all of the relationships that give whatever is being extracted meaning. . . . Colonialism has always extracted the indigenous—extraction of indigenous knowledge, indigenous women, indigenous peoples. (para. 11)

The story told by us in ECE about the joys of working with clay, and the story told by Plainsman about their relationship with clay as a limitless resource, are complicated by Simpson's story about the connection of "resource extraction" to colonialism and capitalism. Mining clay, extracting it from the relationships that give it meaning, and treating it as a resource with a market value, all form the basis of colonialism and capitalism.

In Curriculum Development 1 (EDUC 173), a course that is part of Capilano University's[1] degree program in the School of Education and Childhood Studies, we investigated what it means to do curriculum in the context of colonialism and capitalism in Canada. We had no fixed definition of capitalism and colonialism that we all learned. Instead, we turned to a process of investigating into capitalism and colonialism. For example, our investigations included exploring different perspectives of materials. Juxtaposing the three stories above brings tensions to each story and its relationship to the others, and complicates our relationships with materials in early childhood education. Students in EDUC 173 work with these tensions in the course.

The class met every other Thursday evening, with a few all-day Saturday classes. We had the honour of working with Anjeanette Spelexilh Dawson of the Squamish Nation education department. Anjeanette told stories to the students about the history of the place, and also taught students to weave. One of the central assignments for the course was to create a visual journal[2] that documented our engagements in each class. The visual journal also became a place to further our investigations. Visual journals included writing, drawing, painting, photography, and collage. Through their journals, students engaged with challenges, and posed questions and hopes for us, the readers, to consider.

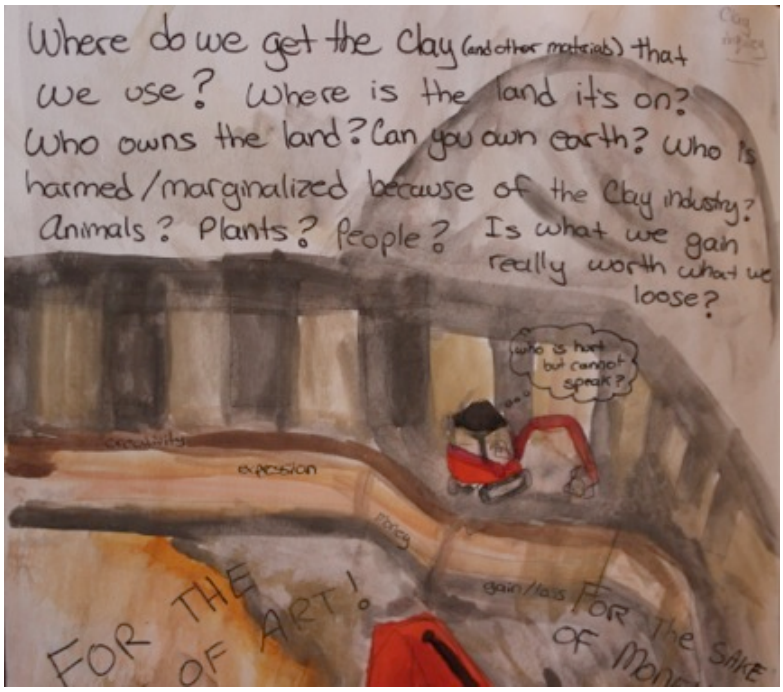
This paper pulls out and weaves together two main threads (i.e., materials and cracks) from several of the students' visual journals. Images and text from the journals strengthen one another and hold each other together.

[1] Capilano University is located on the traditional territories of the Squamish Nations and Tsleil-Waututh
[2] Thank you to Dr. Sylvia Kind for developing this assignment in the curriculum courses.

Thread One: Materials

One of the main threads in the course was to engage our relationships with materials. We questioned our relationships through the looming structures of extraction and assimilation with three common early childhood materials: paint, clay, and charcoal. Below are students' investigations.

Cassandra L'Heureux wonders about various materials in early childhood.



Where does store-bought charcoal come from? Who makes the charcoal? How might the industry behind the charcoal supply affect people and the environment?

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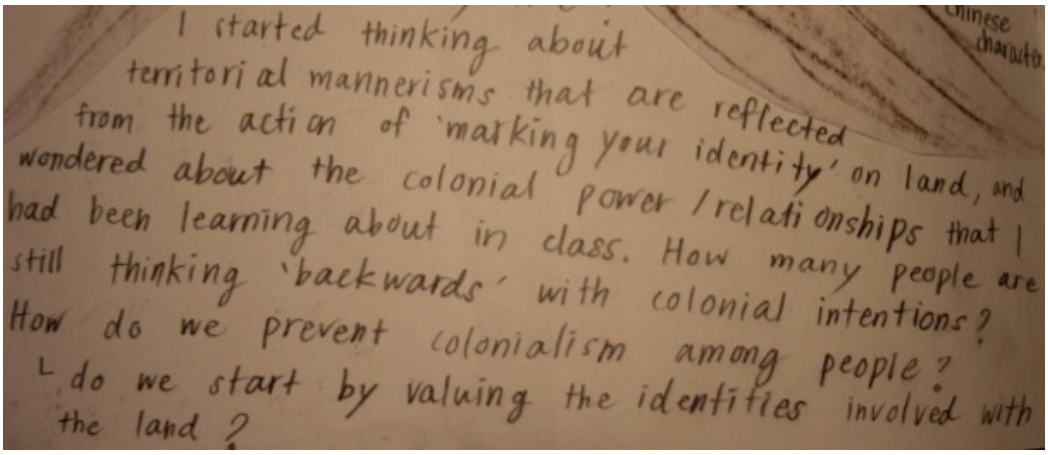
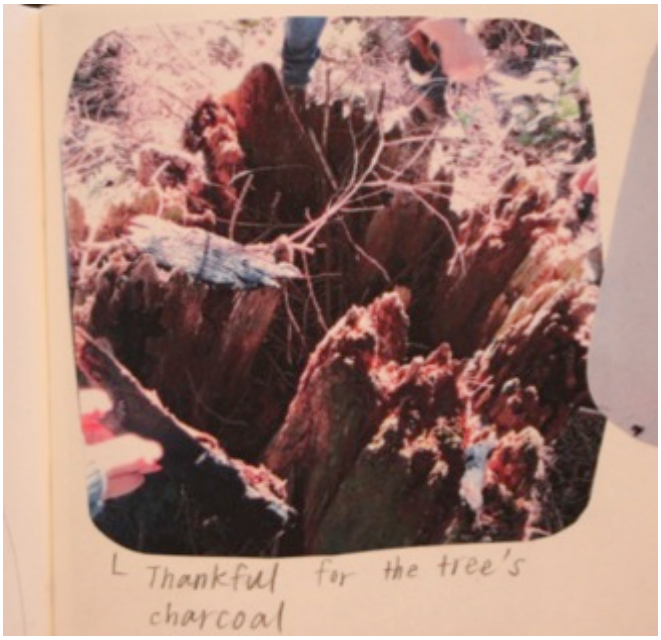
During the course, we walked together to the forest next to our classroom, stopping at a group of burned tree stumps. We paused at the stumps and struggled to acknowledge the unceded Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh territories and to honour the peoples who had to die for us to be there. We tried to show our appreciation to the trees, touching the source that gave us charcoal with which to draw. We wondered how much charcoal we needed. How much is too much? How much, if any, do the trees want to give (questions inspired by Kimmerer, 2013)?

Jenny Quach thanks the trees for their gift.

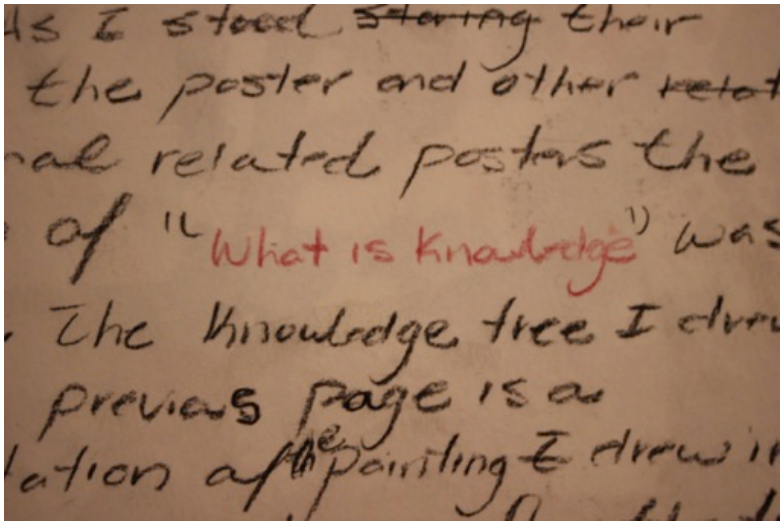




Thread Two: Cracks

The second main thread we engaged was to think with the cracks in our normalized early childhood curriculum. Cracks emerged from our collective inquiries into our foundations: We questioned our taken-for-granted knowledges and practices in early childhood education and wondered where they come from. Cracks are like openings, possibilities for something different, but also an unromantic potential that can reproduce the same.

Colleen Skuggedal investigates questions about knowledge through text and image.



The Tree of Knowledge:

Facts,

Resource,

Truths,

Control,

Silencing,

Power,

Reasoning,

Myths,

Oppressive.

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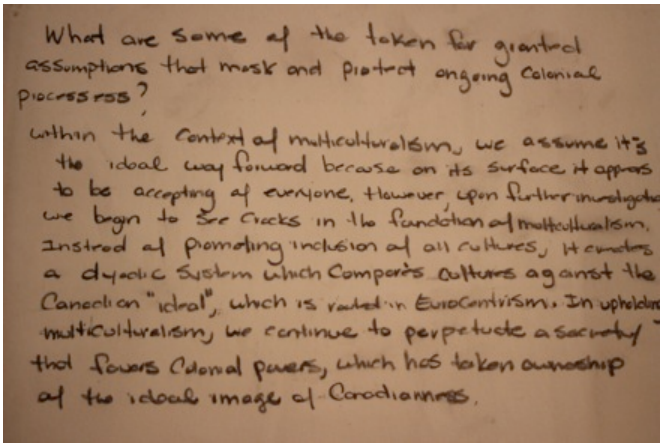
What stories do we tell children about this land?
What names do we use to refer to the places where we work with children?



Perhaps we might also see cracks in our normalized early childhood curriculum. We wondered what might flow from these cracks if we pay close attention. During the class, Anjeanette Spelexilh Dawson shared stories and taught students to weave small bags from wool. Students created drawings and wrote reflections from Anjeanette's teachings and stories.

Left over right, under the loop. Twist at the edge. Jenny Quach

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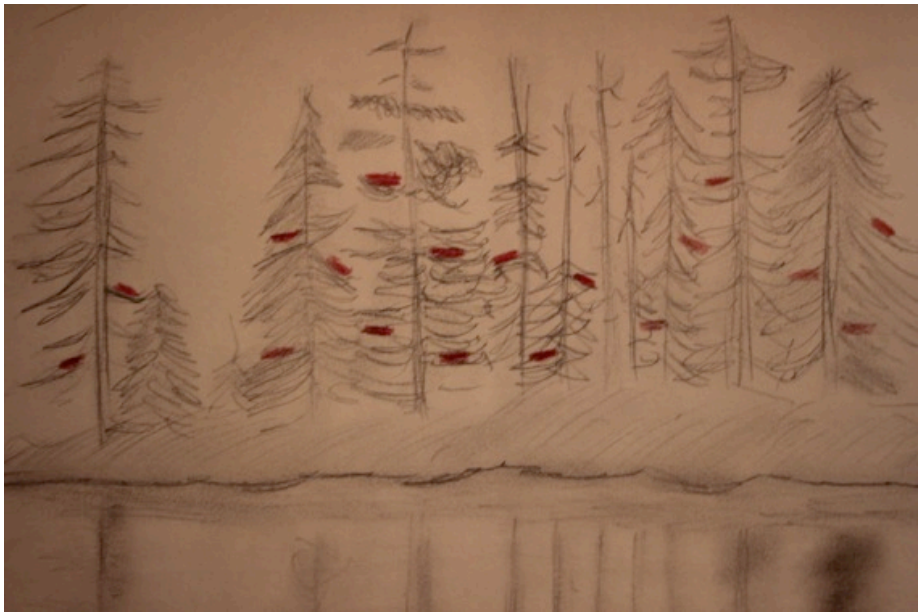
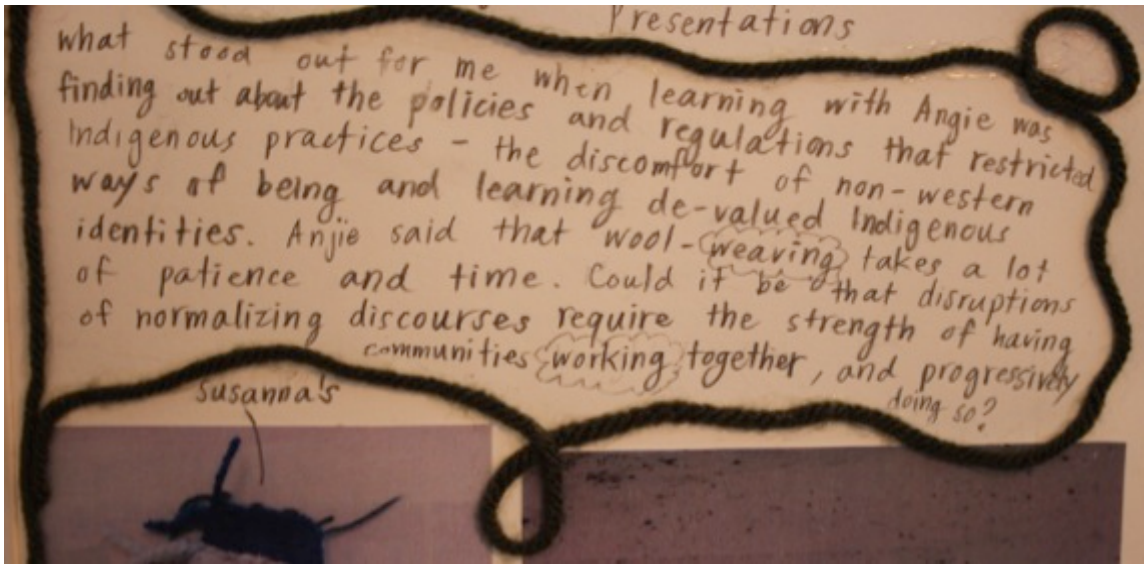
Zak Sinclair drew an image of how dead bodies used to be cared for by the Squamish Nation in the days before contact with Europeans.

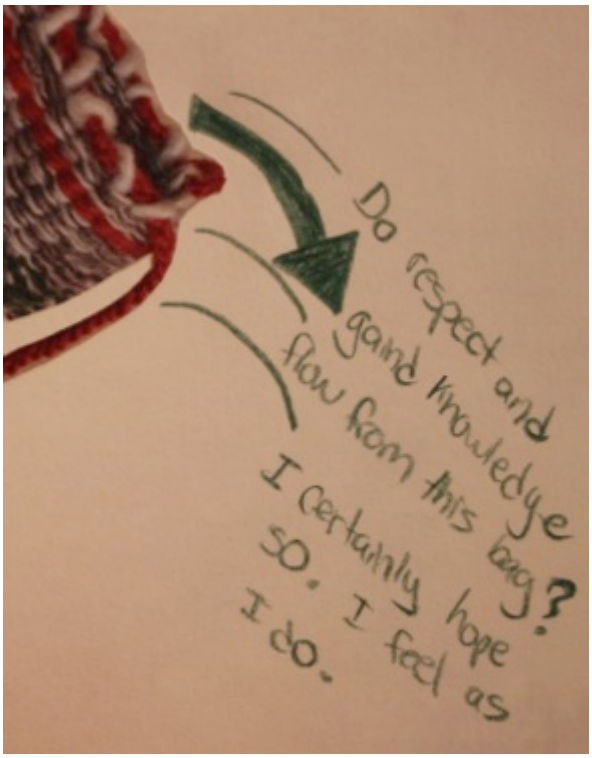


Jiani Zhang presents cracks in multicultural pedagogy through weaving.

Jenny Quach wonders about the potential of communities working together.



Cassandra L'Heureux presents her hopes with her bag



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