



Finding our place in the garden

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Centre for Childhood Studies

ISSN: 2368-948X

2nd Special Edition 2023

*Curriculum inquiry, pedagogical documentation,
and their relationality*

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With our bearings of place as assemblage, as political, and as driven by context and locality, we share our story of encountering the community garden on the campus of Capilano University in North Vancouver, and our evolving relationship to this place. In exploring our relationship to place, we recognize the importance of place-conscious learning for children, students, and educators in the context of our time, as we are living in a climate crisis, and are situated as settlers on stolen Indigenous land.



Finding *our* place in the garden

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*Christina Davidson, Filippa Hyvaerinen,
Aly Bendall, Kaylie Mclewin,
Taylor Pennykid*

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Land Acknowledgment

The lands on which we gather, study, and explore, were never given to us; they remain as stolen and unceded lands. These territories rightfully belong to the Coast Salish peoples, including the territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), səlililwətaʔl (Tseil-Waututh), and k^wik^wəʔwəm (Kwikwetlem) Nations

Context and Conceptual Framework

This inquiry was invited by Dr. Bo Sun Kim as part of a course focused on pedagogical narrations in the Early Childhood Care and Education program at Capilano University. In her teachings, Dr. Kim prompted us to critically examine, wonder about, and reflect upon our relationship to a place, specifically within the university campus. Throughout this inquiry we have been oriented towards theory in early childhood education that lives within poststructuralist and reconceptualist frameworks.

In this inquiry project we were inspired by the thoughtful work of many place-conscious theorists, especially Margaret Somerville, and Iris Duhn. Grounded by these theorists we reconceptualize our work with place, align ourselves with concepts of place as assemblage, place as political, and place in the context of our time and our locality. Duhn (2012) states, that place is often taken for granted, and with this in mind, we aim to dwell with a community garden, and reimagine our relationship with this place.

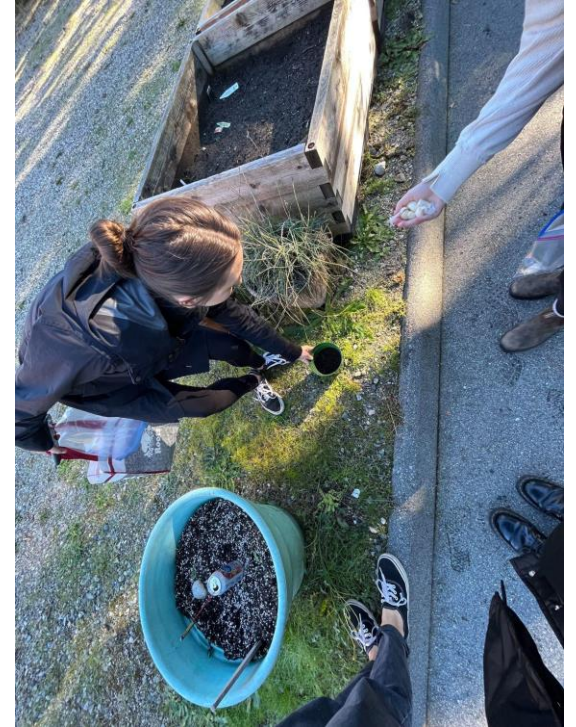
Our first theoretical orientation is to shift away, intentionally, and actively, from relationships with places that view them as backgrounds, something solely for humans to use or for humans to simply enjoy. We follow Duhn (2012) and deviate from traditional anthropocentric notions of place (p. 102), and we move to think with place as an assemblage in order to decenter the human and understand all the elements that come together to make a place. We seek to pay “close attention to flows, intensities, events and movements that give a place its qualities” (Duhn, 2012, p. 100). In a community garden, designed by humans, this means paying attention to how sun, sky, soil, human, plant, wood, and animal come together again and again creating the assemblage of this place. We know that assemblages are not static; they create and unfold into each other our place and our pedagogy, meeting and re-meeting, making and remaking over again. Thinking of our garden - this place - as an assemblage makes space for new ways of thinking, moments of creativity, and critical reflection.

Duhn (2012) orients us in thinking of place as a political site. She states how place is demonstrative of the politics of inclusion and exclusion, determining what it means to have a right to a place and what it means to belong to a place (p. 102). When we inquire with place and seek to unpack it, we uncover the forms and the forces that make it (p. 103). We know that places are not pure, that they have histories and tensions, they have been cared for, fought over, and governed through different power players in its lifetime. Somerville (2010), like Duhn, highlights politics and perspectives in place, giving her personal account of working with Aboriginal people in her home of Australia, noting that places can be in the in-between, where multiple ideas of place live and can ignite a productive tension (p. 330)

In continuing to think with Somerville, we orient ourselves towards considering place in the context of our time. There is entanglement in caring for place and holding concern for its future as we reckon with the impacts of climate change and what this does to our relationships to specific places. Somerville (2010) promotes creating an “intimate knowledge of local places we love” (p. 331) in order to bridge the gap between the concerns of the globe and the concerns of the local places and that we cannot take action in the global concerns without being oriented towards our local places. Somerville (2010) elaborates that when we act locally, we impact the global. Thinking with local, specific and personal examples of place in the context of climate change as it stands today can “offer alternative storylines about who we are in the places where we live and work in an increasingly globalised world” (p. 331). Somerville continues, that with our local and embodied experiences of places, we can take these experiences and share them as stories, bridging nature and culture (Sinclair, 2001 as referenced in Somerville, 2010, p. 336).

With our bearings of place as assemblage, as political, and as driven by context and locality, we share our story of encountering the community garden on the campus of Capilano University in North Vancouver, Canada, and our evolving relationship to this place. In exploring our relationship to place, we recognize the importance of place-conscious learning for children, students, and educators in the context of our time, as we are living in a climate crisis and are situated as settlers on stolen Indigenous Lands.

Introduction



Our journey took us to the garden, where our curiosities led us down a path none of us could have seen coming.

We spent weeks visiting the garden, dwelling in it, working together to understand the assemblage of human and more-than-humans who shape this place. We sought to unveil what the garden has to offer and ask if we could offer anything in return.

We came to know the garden as wilting away. As a place that had been seemingly left without attention or care. Once the thriving vegetation was prohibited from being enjoyed by visitors, made us into observers of decay. These observations provoked us to think about the visible contradictions that live within and on the outskirts of the garden.

This place called us to confront ethical tensions...

of waste in the context of climate change,

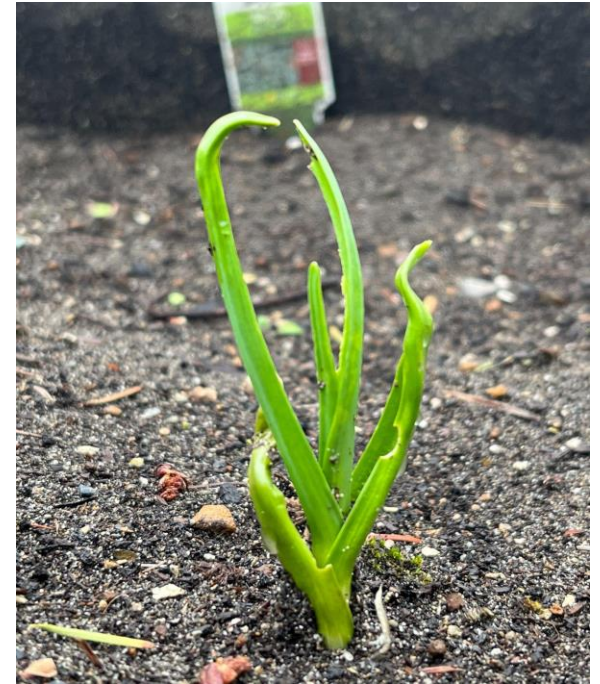
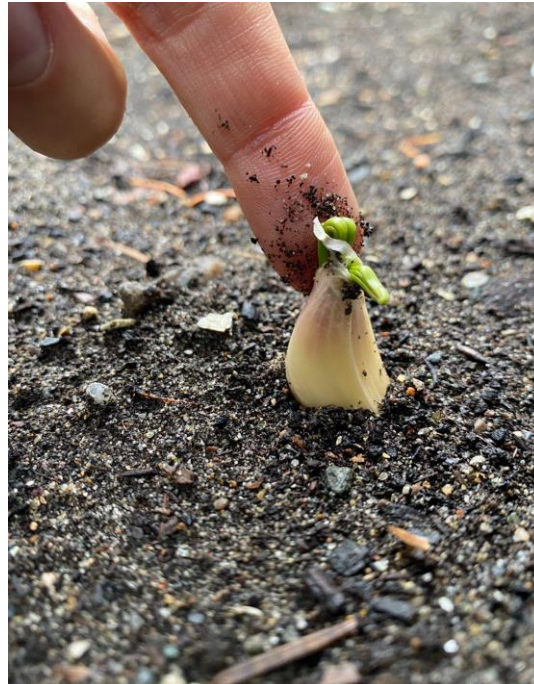
of taking something that doesn't belong to us,

of power, inclusion, and exclusion.

Fundamentally, this place pushed us towards thinking about ownership.

What does it mean to own a place and what does it mean to challenge the ownership of another?

The Garden



The fall sun is glistening on the tall cedar tops as we wander through the green corridors of the campus yard. Filled with anticipation, we listen to the rhythms of the campus; drawn to the muffled sounds, we climb up the nearby stairs, arriving at an opening.

The opening feels like an in-between place, a crossroad:

Where to now?

As we look around, seeking something to connect with, we become curious about the vibrant colors dancing in the distance. Our curiosity is contagious. We notice the attractive presence of the campus garden and rush down the ramp to have a closer look.

Three giant sunflowers wait for us at the end of the ramp. We observe the slouching postures and droopy necks: *“They look like they’re sad.”*

The sad sunflower stance feels like a dramatic farewell to summer, urging us to step deeper inside the garden to admire the joyful rhythm of colors. Once immersed in the garden, we see how the robust planter boxes with their flowers, fruits and vegetables, invite us to gather around to gaze, smell, touch, and listen.

We are affected by the intra-actions between us and the garden. As Bronwyn Davies (2014) suggests “we are each, like communities, produced through intra-actions; we are multiplicities, always in process of becoming other than we were before” (p. 9). We are moved by the garden.

We notice the bright red tomatoes streaming in between the green, calling for attention. Aly reaches for the glistening tomato, lightly touching the soft skin, and it almost seems as if the tomato is begging for attention as it jumps off its stem into her hand, surprising her.



“I didn't mean to pick these... it just popped off.. I didn't mean to do that...”

We look closer at the tomato plant and notice all the ripe tomatoes screaming to be collected.

“What's going to happen with all these vegetables.. They are going to waste!”

We hear a light thud and notice another tomato falling off.

“This one came off too. Do we leave them, or do we take them?”

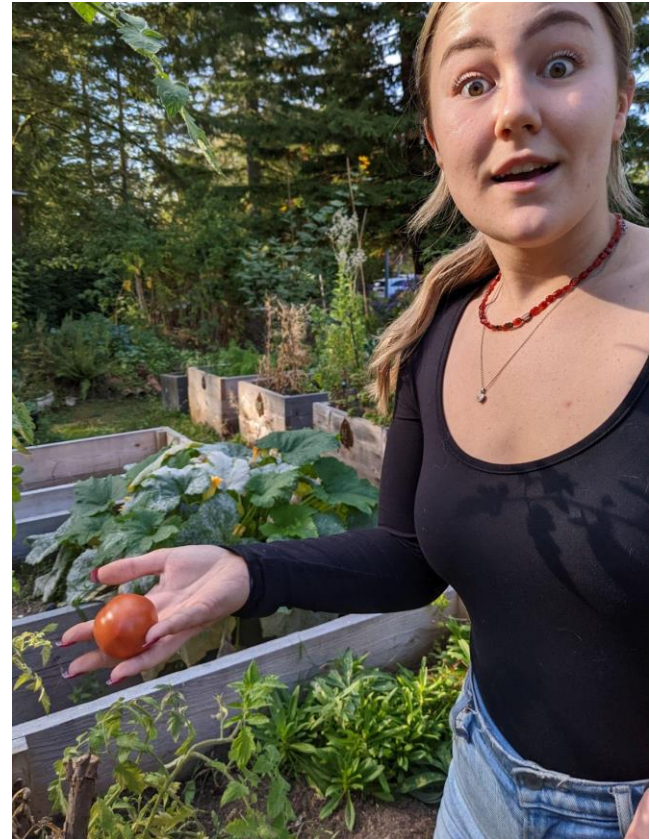
We wonder if we should take the fruit that has disconnected from its stem, or leave it?

If we take it, we are disregarding the wishes of the owner. But if we leave it, are we just contributing to the waste?

Our expectations of the garden and what initially drew us in was the joy of gathering, the community and what a shared garden would represent and bring attention to. However, we were surprised by the concern of food waste, the signage indicating that visitors were not able to pick from the vines, unable to enjoy the vegetation of the garden even though it is decaying and rotting, left unattended. As Margaret Somerville et al. (2011) highlights, relationality plays an important role in engaging with place. They point out that relationality enables relational learning and considering the ethical implications of mutual responsibilities to others and the world. We feel moved by these ethical implications to the others and this idea provokes us to wonder deeper about what it means to be in relation to the garden and immerse ourselves in the ethical dilemmas provoked by the garden.



Growing Curiosities



As we sit with these feelings of discomfort and these wonderings around food waste, we consider the moral dilemma we are faced with.

Do we leave the lonely vegetables or take them?

What's the right thing to do?

Is this supposed to be a shared place?

If so, why are there so many restrictions?

Who is this garden for?

Why can't we eat the vegetables?

Who are these vegetables/plants for?

The signage on some of the garden plots pose contradictions. Some welcome watering and encourage visitors to help maintain the garden while at the same time not allowing visitors to take from the garden.

The signs are surrounded by abandoned decaying tomatoes. Perhaps, if there was no signage - *"Please do not pick from my garden"* there wouldn't be any food waste.

According to Lenz Taguchi (2010), our meaning-making in the garden is dependent and affected by the material world around us, just like our thinking affects the material world.

The fallen tomatoes, the signage, and the decay affect our thinking, evoking concern, pushing us to wonder about contradictions and the ethical dilemma.

What does the dilemma say about ownership in this place?



Layers and Contradictions



As we pay attention to the garden, listening, wandering around the rectangle boxes and paths, our attention is grasped by the image of gigantic pink flowers glimmering on a large building wall opposite to the live garden, as if to extend the idea of the garden to the building.

We think about how the art piece with bright, flourishing flowers conveys a sense of gathering, and how it seems like a gift for everyone to enjoy, a place full of thoughtfulness and care.

As we marvel at its beauty we take note of the garden opposite to it, in different kinds of frames, lies *ownership, separation, and decay*.

We are reminded of the power of encountering and the self as emergent multiplicities. As we encounter each other's thoughts, the garden, and the art installation, we are shaken from our taken-for-granted ideas about this place.

This encounter challenges us and our perception of the intention of the garden, and through the new and surprising turn it moves us beyond the already known, allowing us to affect and be affected (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, as cited in Davies, 2014).



The art installation reflects care and time taken in picking a space, funding the artist and materials, designing the painting, painting the installation.

Full of larger than life florals.

The garden contains signage reminding the visitors to resist picking vegetables, yet it holds its own sense of being unkept and uncared for in the decay of florals and produce.

The garden doesn't welcome others to enjoy its features, non-owners of the plots are only asked to 'care' for them by inviting us to water. Non-owners are not able to savor the delicious vegetation before these living things turn inedible and rot.

Living in the inbetween of the garden and the floral art is a space of land, mostly empty, covered in gravel. The epitome of uncared for and unkept. This place has been separated on purpose, intention and participation of care.

The contrasting images leave us wondering about the garden..

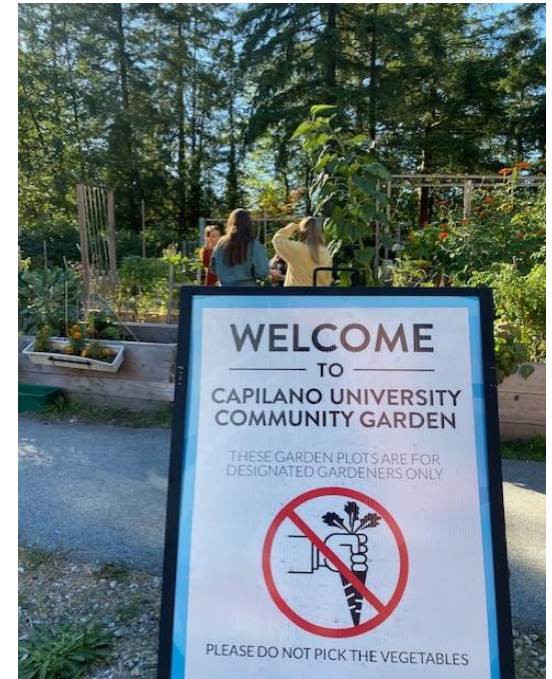
What was this place meant to be?

What was this place for?

What was the intention of it?

Why here, in this place, lying in between beauty and decay?

Ownership



What is ownership?

The concept and practice of ownership exhibits western and colonial ideas of place. That land can be divided, given, and unshared.

Duhn speaks to these ideas of ownership, contrasting how “non-Western knowledges of *place*” are “articulated in the notion of **guardianship** instead of **ownership** of place” (Duhn, 2012, p. 101).

The garden, with its assigned plots, waiting list, and exclusive signage, demonstrates these western ideas of separating and owning individual and unshared spaces, with no room for others. However, it is not an entirely black and white situation, as it also lightly invites guardianship and participation via signage by welcoming others to specifically water plants.

Ideas of ownership help us to understand place as not only a “grounded physical reality and the metaphysical space of representation” (Somerville, 2010, p.330).

*For us, it has been important to think through
what it means to own a space in this garden,
what it means to be a caretaker of this garden,
and what it means to participate in this garden.*

Challenging Ownership



Just a few days ago the tiny cloves of garlic were resting in the bottom of the fridge, waiting to take part in the food chain. Little did these cloves know, that their taken-for-granted journey would be transformed by our curiosities and desire to challenge ownership.

“Should we tpu them here? (in the garden)”

“But should we rather put them in between the plots?”

“Yes, I’m thinking not too close to the garlic planters, so they won’t be right on someone’s plot.”

“Maybe on the side with the other pots?” (there are three smaller pots next to the bigger planters)”

“It’s almost like these other smaller ports started a line that is intended to grow.”

“Should we put it at the end of the line to continue it?”

“How about here? It’s not really protected over there”

“Maybe between the three pots, so there is a little protection?”



Looking at all the controlling signage in the garden made our group question and contest the ownership of the garden.

Who owns this place? Why does it have such contradictory signs?

After feeling uncertain about the ways that the garden was controlled, we thought about ways to challenge the ownership that was clearly present in what is supposed to be a ‘communal’ place of gathering.

We decide to bring our own plant into the garden. Curiosity grows as we are anticipating how people will react to our plant being placed in this garden. We are reminded of our entanglement with this place. Karen Barad (2007) describes how instead of being simply outside observers or simply fixed into one place, we are, through ongoing intra-activity always part of the world. Thus, we respond to the challenges and invitations of the garden, living with its complexity, and transforming with this place as a multiplicity.

As we think about our active part in this garden-ownership-students assemblage and intra-activity, we reflect upon how the event of placing our plant in the garden will impact the place in relation to ownership. Placing the pot too close to someone’s plot feels invasive, but simultaneously challenging and enlivening. Placing it too far away shows respect to the space of others, but simultaneously leaves our pot looking forgotten and left out. We sit our pot next to other pots of chives and rosemary, moving it a few times to test the amount of sunlight it will receive. We leave it, though slightly unsatisfied that it will reside next to a Halloween firework.

Will anyone move our pot because it's not a designated area?

How will people react to it being here?

Will the firework- this litter, still be left in the neighbouring flowerpot?

Disruption



Coming back to the garden we become anxious and excited to see if our planter has still gone unnoticed by the people that pass by and ‘maintain’ their own garden plots. What we may have overlooked was the presence of the more than human, those who also call this garden space *home*.

Iris Duhn (2012) describes places as assemblages as she points out that when we consider place to emerge from human-nonhuman multiplicities where “places negotiate flows and create spaces where matter, desire, human and more than-human come together to modulate the self in relation to the world” (p. 104), we create space for something new and unexpected to emerge, provoking transformation. We are reminded of Duhn’s notion of place as a human-nonhuman assemblage as we arrive to our pot, finding it scattered on the ground.

“The pot is empty! The content is scattered next to it. A few of the garlic cloves are sitting near the clump of dirt.”

“What happened?”

“Looks like an animal did it because it is all scattered.”

“Probably a squirrel wanted to eat the garlic!”

“The garlic near the scattered dirt makes me wonder why it wasn’t eaten?”

“Should we put it back together?””

Christina puts the pot back together.

Through encountering this ‘disruption’ we begin to recognize ownership in a different way, decentering the human and seeing this space for the more-than-human too.

Although it may have felt as if our encounter with the garden was ‘disrupted’, we have come to the realisation that non-human forces entangled with the garden, garlic pot, and our desire to challenge ownership, created in us and for us an opening for transformative assemblages (Duhn, 2012).

Continuing Wonderings



As we continue to think with our time in the garden, we begin to consider what we would do if this project were to continue. We think back to the firework left in the pot next to ours. We considered preparing a Ziploc bag with a string and pencil to write and secure a note in the hopes of catching the attention of either a garden caretaker or the person responsible for the firework. We debate about writing the note and conclude that we will wait to write anything until we arrived at the garden.

We wonder if the firework would still be in the garden or if the note is even necessary? Would leaving a note accomplish our goal of the firework being removed? Is this a way to connect with the caretakers of the garden? Does this show that we care about the integrity of the space?

A few of us end up putting the soil back into the pot, breaking up the cold and slightly frozen clump, and replanting a garlic bulb that we found back. We clean up the mess and leave the pot inside the planter next to it. If we were to continue with our time in the garden, our intention would remain to challenge and disrupt the idea of ownership. We would also be interested in engaging with the more-than-human disruptions we have encountered throughout our visits as well as experience all that the garden has to offer throughout the seasons. If we were to continue this inquiry, we would look forward to deepening our relationship to this place, knowing it intimately and participating in the assemblage of the garden as it changes over time.

“I think about knowing a place day in and day out, over seasons and years to really know what is going on.”

(Somerville, 2010, p. 329)

At the beginning this inquiry we were engulfed by assumptions about the reciprocal relationship that a community garden is meant to have as humans and plants care for each other. We were curious as to what was the assemblage of this community garden. Through our time in the garden, we were able to shift away from extractive and anthropocentric notions of place and think with Duhn to consider the “vibrant matter” (2012, p. 100) that makes it. We considered the vibrancy and life of tomatoes, the transformations of soil and water, the sprouting of garlic, the structured wooden planters, and the others who made this place when we weren’t there.

In the garden, we were troubled by the notions of boundaries, garden plots separated by human ownership, divided, organized and contained. We thought with Duhn again, of how boundaries of place often show up in early childhood centres and spaces, with common statements such as “*you can’t bring sand inside*”, certain toys and materials are outside toys, blocks stay in the block area, etc. (Duhn, 2012, p. 104). We wondered about how divided wooden planters affected the assemblage of this place, and how would it feel if they weren’t there. We aimed to disrupt these boundaries of place by adding our own pot with soil and garlic cloves in-between the plots.

As we spent time in this place and learning its assemblage, there came tensions. For weeks on end, we grappled with the tensions of our relations in the garden. We had to prioritize whom to think with, within this assemblage: the garden plot owners, the rule-makers, the lively plants... and consider our own ethical obligations. We knew that places were inherently political, but we did not expect what unfolded as we became enlivened by disrupting power dynamics. Our work unpacking these specific power dynamics in this place was initially unintentional but came to feel unavoidable. Unpacking power dynamics in the garden generated an almost Foucauldian awakening of starting to see power dynamics everywhere.

Considering Somerville, we tuned in to how the specificity and the context of this garden, in Metro Vancouver became a site for us to grapple with environmental justice and with social justice. We were faced with observing waste in a time of climate change, watching produce waste away while many people do not have access to these plots, and even more people are currently experiencing food insecurity in Metro Vancouver.

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ISSN: 2368-948X

2nd Special Edition 2023

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Lead Inquirers

***Christina Davidson** is a fourth-year student at Capilano University and has worked as a licensed Early Childhood Educator in Vancouver for seven years. She is deeply passionate about place, and building relationships to place with children. Her most recent inquiry projects at Capilano University have been place-conscious in focus, concentrating on decentering the human and knowing places as assemblages. This has included a project with children, deepening their collective relationship to an urban park, while attuning to assemblage, and unpacking power dynamics. Additionally, she participated in a project with fellow students, telling the lively stories of the more-than-humans who enliven a local man-made island. She believes in the power of co-constructing knowledge with children, sharing their theories of the world, and engaging in collective critical and reflective practices. Supported by the faculty of the Early Childhood Care and Education Department at Capilano University, her dedication to disrupting dominant discourses of children and of early childhood educators continues to grow.*

***Filippa Hyvaerinen** is a devoted and passionate third-year Early Childhood Education student at Capilano University with several years of experience as an early childhood educator in Finland. During her time at Capilano University, Filippa's passion for education and learning has been further fueled by her exposure to reconceptualist and post-humanist theoretical perspectives. As a result, she has developed an interest in cultivating practices that value children's relationships and learning with place and the more-than-human community members, and she believes in the importance of thinking, learning, and building theories together with children. In addition, Filippa is committed to challenging and shifting dominant narratives about education and knowledge and advocating for practices that are open to multiple perspectives. In pursuit of her goals, Filippa is eager to participate in the development of critical and transformative practices in early childhood education..*



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