

## **A Dialogue about Place and Living Pedagogies: Trees, Ferns, Blood, Children, Educators, and Wood Cutters**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper focuses on the ongoing dialogue between a small collective of early childhood educators and their pedagogista as they begin to examine their practice, and trouble the division that exists between human and non-human worlds. This enactment draws upon questions, theorizations, and research methods that are inspired by a common world's framework (Pacini-Katchabaw & Taylor, 2015; Pacini-Katchabaw, 2013). The authors reflect upon their current pedagogical attempts to shift the gaze away from child-centered practices that place the child as the central subject and privilege human –centric ways of thinking. Examples of documentation that show children's questions, concerns and ways of extending thought and empathy to species such as trees, insects and animals are highlighted to demonstrate how human and non-human worlds are entangled, complex and overlapping.*

**Keywords:** *pedagogista, collaboration, early learning, nature-culture relationship, emergent pedagogies, place, attunement, Anthropocene, listening, human and non-human, autobiography, common world.*



This paper represents a collaborative space. It enacts a series of pedagogical and, to a certain extent, autobiographical conversations between Adrienne, who divides her time teaching future early childhood educators and young children, Cristina who is a pedagoga<sup>1</sup>, and Cindy and Kelsey, who are two early childhood educators. They all work at a small West Coast university – Capilano University (North Vancouver campus) and in the Children’s Centre of the same university. We think about this paper as a dwelling and performative space. It is a dwelling because, for quite a while now, we have been together attending and forming these ideas. It is performative because we hope that this paper can enact the multilayered conversations and different interpretations that have enriched our coming together to think with the pedagogies that we are inventing. Our intention is to keep as visible as possible the conversation about place, pedagogy, and the relation between humans and more than humans visible, in a way that keeps its tensions, questions, and even contradictions, rather than trying to create a neat and tidy version of it.

The guiding voices in this paper are Adrienne and Cristina. Their writing presents the broad conceptual thread that guides the article and engages in situated and responsive pedagogical speculations in relation to the vignettes presented by Cindy and Kelsey. The paper has three movements. Cristina will first briefly introduce the pedagogical orientations of the Children’s Centre, and then Adrienne will relate and vitalize that introduction with further, and critical, thoughts that will focus particularly on the relation between nature and culture. The last movement will present Kelsey and Cindy’s vignettes and reflections as a response to Cristina and Adrienne. These reflections are weaved with vignettes from project work that they have done with the children at the center. In this third movement, Adrienne and Cristina will overlap their questions and reflections keeping faithful to the dialogical nature of their collaboration.

### ***Pedagogy and Place: Capilano University Children’s Centre***

As I (Cristina) write these lines, I am thinking about place, but also playing a little bit with this word and how it exists in language. I was thinking about how we place ourselves in place, to what we attend and what is not in our consciousness. For instance, in this moment I am seated in this chair. My body is held by the wood of this chair. Wood that has been extracted from some unknown forest by unknown humans with their machines, and

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<sup>1</sup> A pedagoga is an Italian professional figure that has gained much attention in North America through the interest in the Reggio Emilia over the last 20 years. A pedagoga is someone dedicated to think about curriculum and pedagogy. As a pedagoga Cristina supports educators and children to unfold pedagogical processes that are at the heart of the living curriculum created in the children’s centre. She also supports educators in the reconceptualization and vitalization of their practices.

now it is here holding me in place upon this cement floor of my rented home that lies on Coast Salish land - taken land.

How do we place ourselves in place? I was thinking about my father, who used to tell me in Italian: Cristina, “soltanto gli alberi hanno le radici” –only trees have roots— He was an islander and a nomad. Place was for him “the search for far away shores, unknown but not feared” or take my biological father—he was a pilot— who abandoned his family so that he could be in the only place he wanted to compose himself with: the air. I am sure he took his last breath up there in the air.

So I ask, how do we place ourselves in place, how do we dispose ourselves towards place, and how do we dispose of place? How attuned are we to place disposing of us? Especially now in these times of ecological crisis and global warming, or to use the geological term for this time on our planet, the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene is signified by the fact that humans have permanently altered and interfered with the state of the planet. Recently, in my work as a pedagoga, these questions have become central to my thinking and pedagogical commitments, and I invite the teachers with whom I work with to join me in thinking through these concerns.

Looking closer into our experience at Capilano Children’s Centre, I would say that our pedagogies are emergent, situated and responsive, which relates to responsibility. Our project is quite modest: pedagogically, we don’t prescribe anything but we stand for a set of commitments, we ‘manifest’ our practices. This is why we like to remind ourselves that nothing we do is innocent, therefore, what we do is political and ethical, understood not only as following a code of ethics, but as an act of responsibility and the ability to respond to the particularity of each encounter.

We work within a campus university surrounded by the coastal rainforest that belongs to the Squamish and Tsleil Waututh people. We consider the centre a Children’s Center that is a pedagogical experience and not only a service. All of these aspects come together to make a place for us. Indeed, when we think about place we don’t create an indoor and outdoor dichotomy or, let’s say, we try to avoid feeding such a dichotomy. Our efforts are driven by the willingness to pay attention and to cultivate dispositions in an interdependent way towards the human and more than human protagonists that make up our pedagogical life. For example, when cultivating rituals such as regular walks in the forest, we strive to think collectively in the presence of the more than human inhabitants. We also attend to the atmosphere and tone we create inside our classroom environments and we listen deeply to the life and agentic forces of the materials we use with the children and the role they play in the co-construction of our curriculum.

What I want to stress about our work is that for us it has been relevant and central to notice and think about the logics with which we create a collective life indoors and



outdoors. It is in the thinking about these logics that we want to pause and we are intensifying our work.

For us it hasn't been enough to say "we are all about relationships" or even to be in relationship with place. For us it has been important to ask ourselves, what kind of relationships do we want to sustain? In thinking about relationships, we have been trying to distance ourselves from human centric relations and practices, specifically child-centered practices. We do this in the name of recognizing our interdependent relations with the world. Particularly recognizing the world in its own stand and with its own logics, and not necessarily as something that exists only through our meaning making of it. In this context, our understanding of pedagogy of place aligns with the common world pedagogies (see: Pacini-Katchabaw & Taylor, 2015; Pacini-Katchabaw, 2013) that bring and pay attention to the agentic entanglements between human and the more than human. We want to stay with the hesitations and trouble that this paying attention brings up. Paying attention does not simplify or provide answers to our practice and theorizations, rather it can bring complexity and we are committed, as Haraway (2016) reminds us, to staying with the trouble. Adrienne will elucidate this much more in the second section of the paper.

Lately when doing project work with multispecies pedagogies we have been asking ourselves what modes of thinking we have available— as adults and children— to think about relationality— what modes of thinking are more dominant. This is particularly important for us, as we continue engaging with the question of response-ability and attempt to create responsive pedagogies that engage with the complexity of our times, which try to trouble pedagogies of human supremacy with its logic of consumption and profit. In the last couple of years, in my role as a pedagogista, I have invited the educators to think with questions such as: What logics or ways of thinking do educators and children have available to think-live relationships involving not only humans? Do the ways children and educators relate to each other manifest in the ways they think through human more than human relations? Is the way we conceptualize relation adequate to the time of the Anthropocene? These questions have emerged for me in very intense ways through our projects at the centre, which have involved children's theorizations about more than human worlds (not only those of the forest and animals, but also of nightmares and monsters, and the animate and the inanimate). Through this article, we wish to bring a glimpse into some of the situations and encounters that have animated such questions, as well as to illuminate how these questions have opened up onto epistemological dwellings.



Figure 1: human and non-human entanglements - Photo by Cindy Lee

### ***Being troubled by and troubling the nature-culture divide: Adrienne's Reflections***

As Cristina has already indicated my colleagues and I have been living and wrestling with many very complicated, often political, pedagogical inquiries for some time now. Some of these questions that have taken up residence within our daily relations here at the Children's Centre are the following: What is the image of the west coast child? What does it mean to be in-relation to a piece of land? How can we create new pedagogical practices that respond to a time of an ecological crisis, known as the Anthropocene? These inquiries have been ongoing and they gain a slow moving momentum in our collective dialogue and actions within our centre. As with everything we do at the Children's Centre, it is a process. Cristina's questions and steadfast disposition to stay with the trouble, the murkiness and the problem of these questions, which will likely never be answered completely, have put many things into motion at Capilano University Children's Centre. Many of us educators have been called to rethink and re-envision new pedagogical practices and gradually these practices are weaving their way into our daily engagements with children and how we are situated on this land. Here at the Children's Centre we are not a well-oiled machine, and as individuals we bring our own situated histories and experiences to our practice, our work is not always harmonious or fluid. Cristina's provocations resonate in different ways within all of us and this may become evident as you read through our individual wonderings, theorizations, and vignettes from practice.

The role of nature in the education of young children has long been an important and much discussed topic amongst educators. Our pedagogical intention is not to examine nature as a separate subject or as something humans should look to as an educational benefit or cure, but rather as an interconnected network of relationships. It is from our social,



cultural, and geographic locations that we begin to re-envision new pedagogical practices and modes of thinking that are designed to respond to a time of ecological crisis. Acknowledging that we are living in the Anthropocene is a serious call to action, and one which implores humans to rethink their relations with the more than human world.

The nature-culture divide is a foundational theory that resides within the topic of cultural anthropology. It can be examined from many cross-disciplinary perspectives such as philosophy, sociology, architecture, and human geography among other schools of thought. More recently Australian pedagogue Affrica Taylor (2013) has adopted the concept of the nature-culture divide to critically reassess long-standing naturalistic discourses on childhood and nature. Scientist and environmentalist, David Suzuki (2007) stated: “In every world view, there is an understanding that everything is connected to everything else, that nothing exists in isolation. People have always known that we are deeply embedded in and dependent upon the natural world” (p, 11). It is this notion of being ‘embedded within nature’ that spurs my commitment to think through the fault line of the nature-culture divide. My attention is also called to the role of pedagogical practices that resist the temptation to place the human as the central focus. Through the process of decentering the human, we create space to welcome the complex, entangled, and mutually coexistent forces of human culture and nature (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor & Blaise, in press).

The nature-culture divide is a relevant topic within the context of early childhood education because in our acknowledgement of this concept we are forced to rethink problematic binaries that conceptualize human culture and nature into separate zones. I believe that education at all levels plays a crucial role in re-envisioning the divide between humans and nature as less of a dichotomy, and more as an overlapping spectrum of relations, both human and non-human. This would mean more than simply spending time in nature or looking to nature as a way to solve human ailments as suggested by Richard Louv (2005) in his book entitled: *The Last Child in the Woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*. Gibson-Graham and Miller (2015) pose an impactful question that helps me to situate early childhood pedagogical practices within the nature-culture divide paradigm:

When we begin to recognize that we are not alone in our livelihoods and that our human economies are inextricably linked with the economies of more-than-human others, might our ways of understanding and experiencing economic crisis, development and well being begin to fundamentally shift? (p,14)

Building upon this question we are inspired to think through the nature-culture divide by proposing new pedagogies that are concerned with the type of world that 21<sup>st</sup> century children are inheriting, inhabiting, and sharing with other humans and more than human species such as plants, trees, animal and other living organisms. We acknowledge that this is a complex topic to discuss, and our intention is not to solve a problem. Rather, we are trying to bring human culture and nature closer together so we can sit within the messy and blurred boundaries to examine the possibilities and potentialities that might dwell there. Thus, in this paper we will attempt to navigate two questions: What are some current research perspectives that address the nature –culture divide; and how might these perspectives suggest new pedagogical practices that can be infused in early childhood practices?

The underpinnings of the idea of a nature-child reunion suggest a binary relationship and position the role of nature as a separate entity that offers an escape and a remedy from the pressures of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Louv, 2008). These ideals are very much informing the pedagogical work of early childhood programs, where children are brought to nature to gain something. Human-centric thinking drives this notion of gaining or taking from nature and this ideology is what perpetuates the nature-culture divide. The challenge faced by educators is how to be present in the natural world without drawing boundaries, but rather draw attention to the ways humans and multiple other species can co-exist in enmeshed spaces. In terms of re-envisioning new practices, I wonder how places like a park, a pocket of forest, or a community garden could be understood and experienced as a place we enter into dialogue with, or as a mutually transforming relationship? As Duhn (2012) stated, “A pedagogy of place recognizes human and more than human ecologies and interaction as a field of forces or a territory with porous boundaries and multiple presences” (p, 102). In the following section we weave in the perspectives and experiences of two educators Kelsey and Cindy, both of these educators have been living with this recognition of place as a “holder of porous boundaries and of multiple presences” (Duhn, 2012, p 102). These educators bring to this paper some small vignettes from their daily practice, as well as some personal reflections, wonderings, and concerns, all of which might invite us to re envision human and non-human relations in alternate ways.

### ***Noticing the Intricacies: Cindy and Kelsey's Reflections***

For me (Cindy), one does not exist without the other. I am who I am today because of my history with place. Place as a coming together, but also as an entangled provocation of thoughts, feelings, troubles, questions, possibilities, and dreams. I have always found it problematic to put into words the role I play as an early childhood educator in creating





pedagogies of place. It is not truly tangible because what I believe I bring, offer and share is a feeling, a ‘being’ of belonging, being part of... a mattering.

Kelsey reflects on the work she has been doing at the centre and she writes: “Our forest walks with the children have become an important ritual and as we walk we observe the architecture of the cedar trees and the Douglas firs that tower over our bodies.”

We navigate through the trees, hands gently brush along the bark, feet leap over the roots, rushing to somewhere. Somewhere into the forest, they run, weaving their bodies through the trees and in between the huckleberry bushes as if they were a gust of wind. At times, moving like a wild wind, forceful and harsh, their feet stomp on the low laying sword ferns that are expanding into the pathway. It lays flat pressed against the damp soil, slowly rebounding upwards again. I feel gutted, guilty that it has been torn and squished and puzzled as I watch it slowly rebound. I pause to think about this particular fern and it being in this world. It has been lingering and jumping around in my mind demanding me to listen. We move around the trees, stopping to notice their presence and how they stand. Within the grandness of the tall cedars I can’t help but think of the tiny fern that wasn’t noticed. How do we notice? Looking closer at the sword fern I can see it has lost the tiny fuzzy dots on the bottom and the tip is torn. Looking around low we crawl on the ground to see perhaps what a squirrel might see. We look at the bark and notice tiny traces of bugs, dripping bits of sap, holes from the woodpeckers, and moss filling the cracks. The more we look, the more intricacies we begin to notice. Raindrops pooling on the tip of a branch, the skeletons of a leaf lying against a pine covered forest floor, tiny ‘baby trees’ emerging from the soil, ivy beginning its ‘fight’ at the trunk of a tree. It is in these moments when we focus in that we see the entanglements of the forest, and we become aware of the relationships and the struggles.

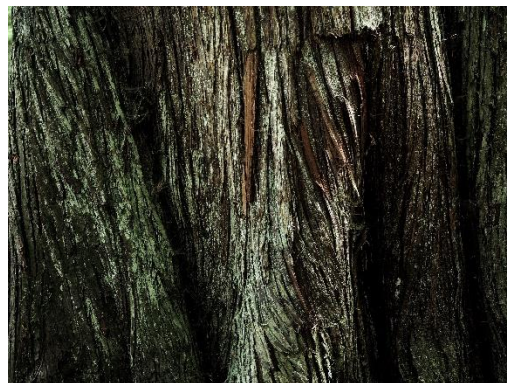
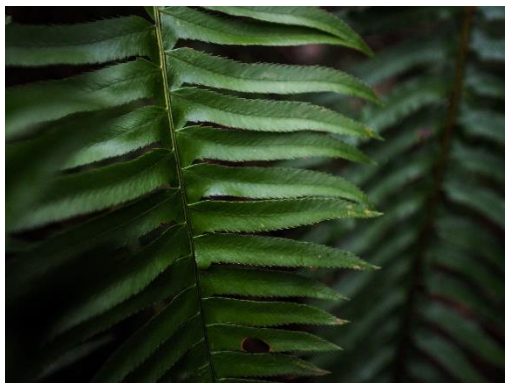


Figure: 2 and 3: Tiny nuances of the forest – Photos by A. Argent



For me, we dwell in the tiny nuances of this particular forest, because we begin to notice a different narrative, we see the ‘birth of a baby tree,’ the children’s voice change to soften and higher, calling their friends to come see, speaking to it as if it is family. How do we learn about the cycle of new trees with the forest? As we return to the ‘baby trees’ growing, we clear the branches and leaves that cover them, collect fallen moss surrounding their base so they are not ‘cold’. We sing familiar songs softly and whisper words of encouragement.”

### ***Intensifying the Conversations: In dialogue with Kelsey and Cindy***

Cindy and Kelsey’s reflections invite us to notice the beauty and ambivalences that can emerge when living with pedagogies that attempt to be responsive to the more than human.

Kelsey’s reflection draws us into a space of overlapping relations with the forest. The forest is not experienced as a place we simply admire for its beauty, or as a space that children visit and leave, conversely the two seem to diffuse into each other, putting ideas into motion and producing bi-directional consequences. By taking a common worlds perspective the attention is pulled away from the child and from the educator/researcher themselves as both, knowable subjects and holders of knowledge. In this process of de-centering the human the forest becomes agential, a living entity with its own logics and desires. Through profound acts of noticing and dwelling within the intricacies of this place both Kelsey and children became entangled with the forest, and the human and non-human presences converge. As educators we are interested in theoretical frameworks and research methods that consequently encourage a sense of attunement and a profound form of listening that allows us to learn from what is already happening in our surroundings and unfolding relations with nature. For Adrienne, Kelsey’s vignette echoes the perspective of anthropologist Anna Tsing (2011) who has urged a sense of slowing down and draws attention to the act of noticing,

Next time you walk through a forest look down. A city lies under your feet.

This city is a lively scene of action and interaction. These organic cities that surround humans, are brimming with life and complex intra-actions, however they go largely ignored by humans. (Tsing, 2011, p.1)

This powerful quote, coupled with Kelsey and Cindy’s reflections, has evoked and helped to shape and shift Adrienne’s own envisioning of how we are situated in relation to and with our coastal rainforest at Capilano University.



### ***Situating our selves in place: Reflections from Adrienne***

As an educator I take these ideas and I make sense of them by envisioning the location of the childcare centre where I work. The Children's Centre is nestled within a coastal forest situated on a university campus in North Vancouver. The Children's Centre functions much like a complex ecosystem. Imagine if you will families, children, and educators coming and going, eating, growing, learning, sleeping, and creating, all together in one encompassing space. It is in our converging and collectivity that we learn to sustain a certain quality of life, culture, and wellbeing. However, this collective life does not begin and end in our human actions and intentions. Our very presence is folded into the natural surroundings, and our own ecosystem merges with the vibrant ecosystem of a coastal forest. The canopy of red cedars, hemlocks, and Douglas firs create the ideal condition for smaller species such as the huckleberry bush, sword fern, and the salal bush to thrive. These canopies and layers of the forest also create ideal conditions for children to gather, learn and wonder not just in the forest, but with the forest. Kind (2010) has suggested, that within early childhood pedagogical practice, educators might start shifting their perspective from "thinking-in-things" to "thinking-with-things" (as cited by Taylor, Pacini-Ketchabaw & Blaise, 2012, p, 82). The act of thinking-with the forest draws me deeper into a common worlds understanding as a way to develop a form of ethical engagement with the world. I have become increasingly more aware that this sense of being with nature, slowing down, and acts of noticing are particular forms of attunement that many children seem to possess already despite alarmist viewpoints that tell us that children are endangered or disconnected from nature (Louv, 2008). Here at the Children's Centre we have witnessed the incredible capacity for children to notice, wonder and extend thought to nature, in ways that invite the more than human perspective. Taylor (2013) has encouraged us to think about common world research "as dynamic collectives of human and more than humans, full of unexpected partnerships and comings together, which brings differences to bear on ways our lives are constituted and lived" (p, 78). We want to enact these dynamic collectives and notice the unexpected surprises that children draw us into. Indeed, children invite us to cultivate an attunement with the vibrant and agentic forces of more than human species.



Figure 4: Noticing the unexpected – Photo by C. Lee

### ***Trees, Hearts, Seeds, Huckleberries, Children: Live-living Pedagogies***

Reflecting upon our pedagogies of place and our interest to trouble human centric practices, in the last three years we have been paying attention to encounters between children and the surrounding cedar trees. We wanted to learn to notice the transformative processes that can emerge from such encounters. The vignettes that we share here are insights into some of these encounters. Our interest is to think with these moments in light of the ideas we have exposed in this article. These vignettes were created in two different rooms and with different groups of children and educators over a period of time. However, it is interesting for us to notice how ideas travel through rooms and with the children as they move throughout the centre.

#### ***Vignette 1:***

##### ***Trees and Birds Talk to me***

Through walks to the nearby forest, community garden plots, and time spent in the Children's Center park, children keep encountering and paying attention to the very tall cedars that surround us. Multiple dialogues are constantly unfolding. In one of these walks, a little girl named Nasha pie confidently tells us that trees talk to us. The idea that trees communicate creates a discussion, and it seems to present a problem for the children:

Nasha pie	Trees do talk to you!
Dakota	How can they talk - they don't have a mouth or ears.



Marcus                      Trees don't have a face

Later in the year we noticed that the idea of the more than human talking keeps presenting itself to the children, this time with birds:

Bourna    If I talk to birds. They hear me! They talk to me!

These are moments that emerge from everyday encounters with birds and trees. "Trees and birds do talk!" Nasha pie and Bourna tell us. They embrace a relation with the more than human and at the same time they confront us with the problem of how to cross the divide, how to become more intimate, how to communicate. Staying with the problem of communication, of wanting to talk and who is being listened to, forces us to think in different ways about our cohabitations. Who is talking? Who can listen? Who does not have a voice?

## ***Vignette 2***

### ***Taking Trees Down: Is there a Heart?***

A few years ago our playground encountered some changes. For a period of about six weeks our centre's outdoor space was closed to us while landscaping took place. Each day the children watched from the windows as playground equipment was removed, pathways lifted, and trees cut down. Although the children were interested in the machinery that dominated our playground and the acrobatic feats of the tree fellers, it was the questions, concerns, and worry that dominated weeks of conversation.

As educators we decided to embrace what the children were experiencing. Although the experience evoked for me uncertain and ambivalent feelings, knowing the implications of removing trees and the fact that they will not grow again in our lifetime. Interestingly, I (Cindy) rarely heard the children ask about new play equipment. They were largely concerned with the changes that were taking place.

Owen    The tree cutters cut down the trees. He's feeling hurt. The tree cutters cut his heart. Do you want me to show you where the hearts are? They are in the middle, they are in the side and in the roots. Maybe by patting on the trunk's bark it would make it better? His heart is broken, his heart is broke, his heart is broke.

Owen sees a spider on the tree stump and says: Spider, the tree cutters cut down your tree.

Owen invited us to notice how implicated we are and that this Other (spider) is a related one for whom we must take responsibility. As a pedagoga when I think of Owen, reaching down, bringing his face close to the spider, I think of how this moment is deeply impregnated in the lure of mutuality and particularly of mutual affect.

Then, Adam continues:

- Adam                    They can't get back up! Trees are a kind of plant, they started as a seed. Trees don't have hearts or blood.
- Diana                    There's blood inside the trees. They knock down the trees and there is blood inside.
- Ella                      Trees don't have hearts. They are just made of tree.
- Tua                        They have hearts, a hundred hearts.
- Adam                    They have hearts and they can drink but they can't bend down. They don't have arms. They have branches that look like arms.
- Lars                      The trees have fire in them. they have blood. If we cut their branches the blood comes out.
- Cindy                    What happens to the animals after the trees are cut down?
- Ella                        The animals need the trees, they can't live without the trees.
- Lynnea                    The birds house are on the trees. If the tree is cut, the birds would come to school. The rabbits and mice would come to school too.





Figure 5 and 6: Child-tree encounters – Photos by C. Lee

The children witness these dramatic changes taking place on our playground. The once so familiar landscape has been violently altered. Unsettled by this the children observe, respond, and perhaps grieve these human made actions, a very visceral reaction has been put into motion. We listen to the children navigate this situation through debate and theorization about the life of trees. We think that this discussion enacts what Affrica Taylor (2015) refers to as “acts of risk attachments” (p, 148) where logics of control and separation are undone. Blood-hearts-branches as arms-emotions as well as sensitivity to the many interspecies relations that exist in-with-and amongst trees become evident. There is a deep sense of empathy for these fallen trees as the children begin to attach personifications and affective qualities to these life forms. The deep sense of empathy continues and flows into other vignettes.

### ***Vignette 3***

#### ***Ewan’s Love Declaration and the Networks of Human and More than Human Affect***

Some children gathered together with Cindy near one of the told windows that surround our classrooms. We look at the old trees outside. “I love trees” Ewan says. A declaration of love sets in motion a dialogue that evokes not only the complexity of more than human relation but also the possibility to think and feel something new:

Ewan

I love trees.

Ella

The branches look like snakes, it’s so beautiful.

Cindy I wonder how those trees grew so tall and strong?

Ella The rain comes down and goes on the trees and they drink from the top. The roots get bigger and bigger.

Cindy That giant tree was once a tiny seed. I wonder how it feels to be a seed under the ground?

Ella It will be dark, just like night time.

Cindy Do you think the seeds like to be in the dark?

Ella It doesn't have eyes or a face, it's just a seed. They can be pink or brown.

Cindy I wonder how it feels to be covered in soil?

Ella It's just like a tiny blanket, it does help.

Ella It does help when trees grow. It helps our city. We need to eat, we need to feed the earth, we need to plant the trees, we need to help.

Lynnea I saw construction people. They had to cut down trees. My brother's ladder is made of wood.

Cindy That wood was once a tree in a forest.

Lynnea And now it lives in a house. They actually like living in my bedroom.

Emily No! They actually like living in the forest.

Lynnea I can't hear it crying when I'm sleeping, trees don't have feelings.

Emily They have happy feelings and mad and angry. They have excited feelings.

Lynnea If it was mad it would shake its branches and the branches would fall.

Cindy What makes the trees excited?

Emily The children make the trees happy when they come to play and when children have their birthday parties in the forest, they (the children) get excited and then the trees get excited.

Ella The wind makes them excited.

Lynnea If the trees died we would die right away. The trees copy us...they breathe, they breathe in and then out and that is how they live. I have a lot of trees by my walkway, it's almost to a mountain. The worms take care of the earth, they make soil for the trees to keep the trees alive. I wish I was a bad guy to the people that cut down the trees. I want to save the trees and the





other people who are not cutting down the trees. Trees get angry. They pick up watermelons from the ground and throw it at us. You can stay close to the tree...but if you do something mean to him, he will throw watermelons at you.

There are many interesting ideas a play here within the discussion. Lynnea states: “My brother’s ladder is made of wood...It actually likes living in my house”. With this statement such an interesting struggle with relations emerges and we listen to the child move back and forth from a surprising acknowledgement of a ladder made of wood, a ladder that lives in the house, a ladder that was once was a tree and an object made out of wood that holds emotions. She then takes on protective almost activist imbued language: “I wish I was a bad guy to the people that cut down the trees.” These statements remind me of the complexity of human relations with nature; our lives are deeply entangled and the division between human and non-human worlds is near to impossible to separate. As we think with the children’s dialogues and listen carefully to how ideas and speculations create different and stimulating affectations, we become more committed to exploring pedagogies that create the conditions for “collective thinking in the presence of others” (Taylor, 2015, p, 149).

A question that Adrienne ponders in her own practice is: What do children pay attention to and how do they use language and gesture to nominate importance and give affective qualities to nature? Through a deep sense of listening, we can begin to think from the perspective of plants, trees, animals, and other more than human organisms. The indigenous writer and scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) poetically weaves together indigenous wisdom with scientific knowledge. Her attentiveness and poetic voice brings to life the inter-connective-ness and vibrancy of the natural world in ways that reposition species such as mosses, trees and berries as complex and dynamic organisms of knowledge and communication (Kimmerer, 2013). Her writing has beckoned me to closely examine the rituals that children create with their surroundings, and also to ask what does nature extend back to the children and to me as an educator? Kimmerer (2013) writes about children’s own wonderings about nature:

Our toddlers speak of plants and animals as if they were people, extending to them self and intention and compassion—until we teach them not to. We quickly retrain them and make them forget. When we tell them that a tree is not a *who*, but an *it*, we make that maple an object; we put a barrier between us, absolving ourselves of moral responsibility and opening the door to exploitation. (p, 57)

Kimmerer's cautious words echo the same form of ethical engagement and overlapping identity that a common world perspective suggests is possible between humans and nature. Thinking with a common world perspective is more than a teaching method, it invites a deliberate sensitivity and an attunement to our many inter-relations with the natural world.

### ***Live-Living Pedagogies: Reflections from Cristina***

At the Children's Centre we have been considering if, through a deep sense of listening, we can begin to notice the agentic presence of plants, trees, animals, and other more than human organisms. We have noticed that by following children's experimentations, gestures, languages, and theorizations we are better able to think through the nature-culture divide, and acknowledge the dynamic and affective qualities of the relationalities among humans and more than humans. Our latest efforts, which we hope to elucidate here through the following vignettes, meet my invitation for our work to open up pedagogical processes which recognize that relationships are not happening in a bubble with us in the centre, but that there is a world, or in fact, there are many worlds. Such pedagogical processes walk away from child-centered practices. These processes welcome a more complex world where educators and children coexist and collaborate in contingent and largely indiscernible common inquiries. These are inquiries that often take up life through the arts.

In participating and taking up life within such pedagogical processes we are constantly faced with the difficulties and richness of becoming listeners of what collectively matters. This means that such processes demand of us to consider, in this case child-tree encounters, as emergent and agonal encounters. Emergent because the pedagogical effort within such encounters is not to find prefixed realities into which to inculcate children, but to hold open the space for what is indiscernible or how such encounters could bring the otherwise. For me emergence puts in motion what Erika Manning and Brian Massumi (2014) referred to as "live-living". Indeed, live-living understood "as how the world worlds, across individuals, across species and scales, tending, always, towards the flickering" (p.30). We are inspired and interested in the moments of flickering that emerge within our pedagogies, its pedagogical flare, and dance.



## **Conclusion**

These vignettes allow us to think beyond ourselves as central holders and creators of knowledge and create opportunities to engage in life and the living world in overlapping and expansive ways. Jardine (1995) poetically stated: “From the pine tree, learn of the pine tree. But, also, from the pine tree, learn of ourselves. It places us into question” (p. 173). It is from this place of ‘question’ that our human centrality becomes dismantled and it becomes possible to think with the generative possibilities of the non-human world. These vignettes show how the processes opened up by such pedagogies put in motion something that collectively matters, that vitally participates in and recreates common, and not so common, worlds.

The forces of humans have created this new era, known as the Anthropocene, and now we are faced with the massive challenge of undoing some of our actions on the earth. In a time of ecological crisis, it is important to look to education as a way to generate solutions and new modes of thinking that are designed to restore human relations with the natural world. One way we can attempt to do this is by dismantling some of the traditionally held assumptions that divide humans from the natural world. Thinking that is firmly rooted in binaries, such as the nature-culture divide, creates constraints in both action and discourse. It further eliminates possibilities for creative, responsive and adaptive strategies to emerge and take hold within society. Through developing a commitment to ‘think-with the world’ rather than having dominance ‘in the world’ we can begin to forge new pathways in research and practice that draw us into common world spaces.

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