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Editorial: Sketching Narratives of Movement in Early Childhood Education and Care

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This special issue emerged from a desire to broaden conversations that were initiated through a SSHRC-funded research project we were part of entitled Sketching Narratives of Movement: Towards Comprehensive and Competent Early Childhood Educational Systems Across Canada (2019-2022). The project aim was to weave multiple (e.g., policy, practice, theory) and situated narratives that trace, counter, and speculate movements of change in early childhood education and care (ECEC).

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Government of Canada's (2021) announcement to invest nearly $30 billion dollars over 5 years in a Canada-wide early learning and child care plan intensified the unpredictable and interruptive power of the present. In response, we sought stories of change in movement—as "flows, rhythms, and intensities" (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010). Consequently, change, and the narrating of it in this issue, is intermittent, erratic, and contradictory, yet simultaneously persistent, relational, and relentlessly hopeful.

In order to create space for conversations and to expand the current discussion about ECEC policy, pedagogy, advocacy, and scholarship, narratives from educators, researchers, undergraduate and graduate students, advocates, and activists are included as authors in this special issue. Collectively, the authors raise critical questions about the various narratives that have generated change and continue to generate change in ECEC. The submissions include stories of slow yet substantive changes that have occurred—going beyond official reports—to better understand the lived experiences of how historically "patchwork" and colonial approaches to ECEC are entangled with present conditions of/for change. Included in this issue are also speculative wonderings that reconfigure future directions and desires for change.

To tantalize a sense of movement, we invite readers to engage with the narratives and counter-narratives of change that are shared in this issue through the prisms of time, space, and ethics.

Temporalities of Change

The COVID-19 pandemic changed time. For many, time passed more slowly (Brand, 2020; Cravo et al., 2022). For others, including those employed in what were deemed to be essential services—like ECEC—time sped up, along with increased demands for more safety, more hours, more availability, more care. In "'With Fear in our Bellies': A Pan-Canadian Conversation with Early Childhood Educators," Christine Massing, Patricia Lirette, and Alexandra Paquette closely listen to and read educators' narratives of change from two events that were part of the SSHRC-funded research project described above. First, in a public webinar event, the authors perceive narratives of loss, sacrifice, adaptation, and hope from nine educators' shared dialogue and storytelling efforts. Second, the authors look at photo collages submitted by educators from across Canada to the research project website. With the photo collage images the educators temporarily freeze time providing snapshots of "what does it mean to be an early childhood educator at this moment?" Forming an archive for future thought and movement. With care, the authors capture the "complex,

multifaceted, and shifting nature of [the educators'] lived experiences over the course of the pandemic."

In "Slowing, Desiring, Haunting, Hospicing, and Longing for Change: Thinking with Snails in Canadian Early Childhood Education and Care," Iris Berger, Emily Ashton, Joanne Lehrer, and Mari Pighini make a deliberate attempt to interrupt neoliberal-economic, quick-fix time by centering the figure of the snail. With snails as their thinking companions, the authors wonder if "snails might help disrupt the timescale of the human species" and wonder "what movements of change are made possible if we think ECEC across a range of temporal scales, including calls to 'return to normal' after two and a half years of pandemic precarity." Can snails provoke us to rethink whether returning to "normal" is even desirable? What needs to be "hospiced" in order for new and different narratives to emerge and carry weight (Machado de Oliveira, 2021)? The authors also inquire into whether snails' movements, "close to earth and immersed in the fluxes of weather," might disrupt and refuse "the narrative of national childcare as capture." They wonder about "what might be missed/or reified if we continue to think ECEC through provincial, territorial, and national borders and regulations." Thinking about borders moves us from thinking change and temporality to change and spatiality.

Spatialities of Change

A book review by Esther Maeers provides a critical overview of *Relationships with Families in Early Childhood Education and Care: Beyond Instrumentalization in International Contexts of Diversity and Social Inequality* (Lehrer et al., 2023). Maeers outlines how the authors located in eight countries: Australia, Canada, Belgium, Germany, Iran, England, Singapore, and Portugal, collectively refuse deficit understanding of parents, educators, and children as they reimagine possibilities of democratic relationships and partnerships in varied communities. From Maeers's perspective, the editors of this book have gathered together a community of scholars that take a coordinated stance against the neoliberalization of ECEC while providing alternative strategies wherein parents and educators co-inhabit in the responsibility of educating children.

In "Embracing Our Power: ECE Students' Experiences Creating Spaces of Resistance in Post-Secondary Institutions," Camila Casas Hernandez, Luyu Hu, Tammy Primeau McNabb, and Grace Wolfe explore the challenges, disappointments, and joys of becoming-resisters. As ECEC post-secondary students and practitioners who formed an advocacy group at their institution, they collectively refuse to be a "good ECE" (Langford, 2007), so long as the position is delimited by child development knowledge that excludes diversity and by neoliberalism that sees them as cogs in the wheel of capitalist and colonial growth. They take turns powerfully narrating their social locations and emplacing themselves within systemic formations of power. Through their "distinct stories," they "form collective knowledges that challenge, disrupt and dismantle Western onto-epistemologies" in ECEC. The authors move across scales from the provincial to the global, individual to the collective, and the personal to the institutional. Ultimately, though, they collectively story alternative narratives that affirm the importance of mentorship, community-building, advocacy, conversation, and care.

In "Doing Twitter, Postdevelopmental Pedagogies, and Digital Activism," Nicole Land and Narda Nelson propose Twitter as a potential space for activating postdevelopmental pedagogies. Digital spaces can queer space, place, and time relations—they can be sites of alternative world-making that bring people together in messy "micromovements" that are counter to Twitter's "neoliberal politics of promotion and capture." In this way, the authors do not

conceptualize "Twitter itself as a movement," but are "interested in the micromovements we might enact with Twitter." As such, Land and Nelson refuse the "performative self-curation practices" often attributed to individual users and instead connect through "postdevelopmental energies and alliances" that begin with their BC Early Childhood Pedagogies Network and Common Worlds Research Collective accounts and network outwards in unpredictable, uncontrollable ways from there. The authors are clear that online spaces are never free of ethics and politics—as the recent Twitter ownership transfer that post-dates this article submission makes readily apparent—but remain potential spaces "where we grapple toward a commons with questions of living well together."

Ethics of Change

Inspired by Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck's (2018) provocative work on theories of change, which moves from damage narratives to narratives of desire grounded by the concern, "How shall we live?" (p. 157), we invited authors to offer speculative wonderings that reconfigure future directions and desires for change. While all submissions engaged with Tuck's important provocation—many explicitly, some implied—we highlight three submissions below.

Throughout "Pandemic-Provoked 'Throwntogetherness': Narrating Change in ECEC in Canada," Esther Maeers, Jane Hewes, Monica Lysak, and Pam Whitty "question the potency of dominant narratives proliferated in media and policy initiatives as a way to effect large-scale change and seek to better understand alternative narratives of ECEC." The authors focus on discourses and narratives that emerged from conversations amongst Sketching Narratives project team members, alluded to above in the introduction, and with policy influencers. Many of these exchanges were part of a public webinar, which was thrown together quickly but intentionally, at a time when the global pandemic exposed the ongoing crisis in ECEC in Canada. Through a bricolage of minor stories (Taylor, 2020), and thinking with the ethics of incommensurability (Tuck & Yang, 2012), the authors individually narrate change, bringing forth parts of the webinar that resonated deeply for them, while looking to spaces where new texts are generating possibilities of moving forward. Through the process of narrating change, the authors "became more fully aware of the deeply embedded and damaging nature of colonialism and how paralyzing it can be, and of the possibilities of moving beyond—from damage to desire."

In "Node-ified ethics: Contesting codified ethics as unethical in ECE in Ontario," Lisa Johnston explores the discrepancy between codified ethics and the ethical, especially when the former is used as an instrument for ECE professionalization. Johnston evokes the concept of dematerialization to explore how early childhood educators can "become estranged from their relational, ethical and emotional selves and disappear as they are transformed into technicians through the masculinist and instrumentalizing technologies of professionalism." She transitions from this regulatory mode of codified ethics towards a speculative ethics by invoking the imagery of nodes in the dystopian film *Sleep Dealer*. In doing so, Johnston repositions ethics as a complex practice of caring and responsive relationality. In refusing to privilege the scientific and technical over the ethical and political, Johnston moves the ethical from mechanistic "nodes and networks" to relational "knots and meshworks" that have the capacity to grapple with uncertainty, ambivalence, variability, and unpredictability: "What would it mean to recognize the knotted and storied meshworks in ECEC that interrupt coded and technical networks," and, instead, invite "relations across difference"?

In a personal essay contribution, Kamogelo Amanda Matebekwane tells stories that capture the everydayness of racial microaggressions that she experiences as a Black woman, mother, immigrant, graduate student and educational researcher. She adopts a trauma-informed approach to share "Where do I come from?" "Where am I going?" "Why am I here?" and "Who am I?" (Wallace & Lewis, 2020), but reframes the provocations within a critical race theory framework. This becomes a practice of counter-storytelling within the article, and also a methodology she will use co-constructively in her future graduate work with young Black immigrant children in early childhood settings. For Matebekwane, the "generativity of counter-storytelling … recognizes the experiential knowledge of people of colour as a strength rather than weakness." These stories "build community… and deeper, more vital ethics" for living well together. They also mark a commitment to "having difficult conversations with people who are committed to social justice."

Storywork

In her book *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*, Stó:lō scholar, Jo-anne Archibald (2008) shared teachings from the Coast Salish tradition. Archibald explained that in gatherings where important stories are being shared, the person who guides the event begins by saying "our *work* is about to begin," implying that the guests are called to give the stories their full attention as those may have significance for how we are to live. We invite you, the reader, to join us and many others in doing storywork by attending to the narratives that are shared in this special issue. How these narratives will be taken up ("worked"), we cannot know; however, narratives of change, once they are made public, may "expand our own visions of what is possible" (Benjamin, 2016, p. 2), and mark a commitment to the uncertain, unpredictability of narratives of movement about creating the world we would rather be in.

To continue the movement (and move against stagnation), we are interested in deepening our collective thinking by asking you to leave a comment/response about the special issue or a specific article on the *ECE narratives* project website: https://ecenarratives.opened.ca/in-education-special-issue/

Special Issue Guest Editors: Dr. Emily Ashton, Dr. Iris Berger, Esther Maeers, and Alexandra Paquette

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Slowing, Desiring, Haunting, Hospicing, and Longing for Change: Thinking With Snails in Canadian Early Childhood Education and Care

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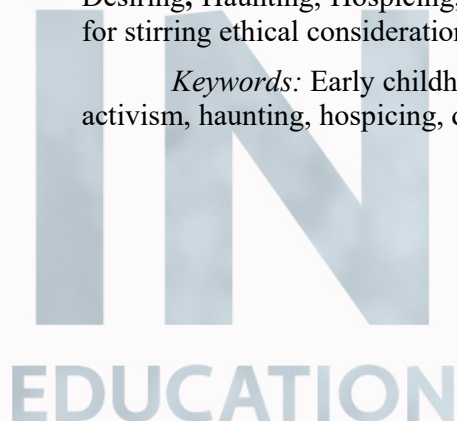
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Abstract

This paper is a collective attempt to respond creatively to a research project we were part of entitled Sketching Narratives of Movement: Towards Comprehensive and Competent Early Childhood Educational Systems Across Canada. We share our slow process of thinking, collaborating, wondering, and pausing along with the figure of the snail as we improvise a nonlinear path towards an unknown future. We think-with various theories of change as a response to narratives shared by participants in the project's knowledge mobilization events: two public webinars and the production of a series of short video interviews. The pandemic simultaneously (re)inscribed ECEC with familiar discourses and narratives, yet, it also issued forth the potential for new imaginaries. ECEC was suddenly positioned as a critical community life-sustaining space for entire systems stressed by a pandemic. Amidst the attention, however, "slimy" traces of chronic neglect, underfunding, and undervaluing of ECEC were gleaming. Given the unpredictable momentum, we argue that it is *essential* that we open up ECEC to different narratives of movement. To this end, we offer five theoretical capsules titled: Slowing, Desiring**,** Haunting, Hospicing, and Longing as provocations for storying care otherwise and for stirring ethical consideration with potentialities for slow activism in ECEC.

Keywords: Early childhood education and care, Canada, theories of change, slow activism, haunting, hospicing, desire

Slowing, Desiring, Haunting, Hospicing, and Longing for Change: Thinking With Snails in Canadian Early Childhood Education and Care

This paper is a collective attempt to respond creatively to a research project we were part of entitled Sketching Narratives of Movement: Towards Comprehensive and Competent Early Childhood Educational Systems Across Canada (2019–2022). The project was interrupted and transformed by the COVID-19 pandemic. As well, the project gained additional significance when the Government of Canada made a historic announcement in its April 2021 budget to invest nearly $30 billion dollars in a Canada-wide early learning and child care plan.[1]

As outlined below, we affectionately refer to our work as "the snail project." We share our slow process of thinking, collaborating, wondering, and pausing along with the figure of the snail as we improvise a nonlinear path towards an unknown future. We think-with various theories of change as a response to narratives shared by participants in the project's knowledge mobilization events: two public webinars and the production of a series of short video interviews.[2] The first webinar (June, 2020) entailed two panels consisting of policy experts and advocates from across Canada, sharing their visions and hopes for the future of Canadian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The second webinar (November, 2020) brought together a diverse group of early childhood educators, working in different types of ECEC programs across the country, to discuss what being an educator meant to them in that historical moment. The third event (February, 2021) was a series of short videos wherein Indigenous and international early childhood scholars shared stories of innovative curricula, research, and policy that could inspire us as we contemplate provincial and territorial ECEC systems in the process of becoming.

The pandemic simultaneously (re)inscribed ECEC with familiar discourses and narratives, such as being framed as an "essential service" to support "essential workers" (Friendly & Ballantyne, 2020), yet, it also issued forth the potential for new imaginaries. No longer was ECEC solely framed as a means to encourage women's workforce participation, it was suddenly positioned as a critical community life-sustaining space for entire systems (health, economic, educational) stressed by a pandemic. Amidst the attention, however, "slimy" traces of chronic neglect, underfunding, and undervaluing of ECEC were gleaming. Given the unpredictable momentum, we argue that it is essential that we open up ECEC to different narratives of movement. To this end, we offer five theoretical capsules titled: Slowing, Desiring**,** Haunting, Hospicing, and Longing as provocations for storying care otherwise and for stirring ethical consideration with potentialities for slow activism in ECEC.

Slowing

The snail—in its slowness, smallness, sliminess, and spirals—has become entangled with our curiosities about narratives of movement and change in ECEC. Movements that desire to counteract capitalist neoliberal, quick-solution, market logics and discourses tethered to labels such as the economy, recovery, and normalcy. Snails might help us disrupt the timescale of the human species and make us wonder what movements of change are made possible if we think ECEC across a range of temporal scales. In the *Life of Lines,* Tim Ingold (2015) invoked the figure of the snail to reverse a conventional theory of movement as drawing a line between two predefined dots. Instead, he proposed a movement of drawing-in and issuing-forth along lines of becoming. In its movement, Ingold (2015) stated metaphorically that every snail becomes a line—a living line—a slimy trace—that is never perfectly straight because a living line continuously attends to its path "fine-tuning the direction as the journey unfolds" (p. 139), pausing to recoil—to recollect, gather, and think—and then issuing forth—tentacles feeling/imagining the way, "improvising a passage through an as yet unformed world" (p. 140). In this paper, we trace our thinking with snails as we wonder about the "widespread malaise"

heightened by the pandemic, and how we might stay with, even follow, the snail's slow, small, slimy traces as a "site of contest" (Hartman & Darab, 2012).

Inspired by The Slow Science Academy (2010) manifesto slogan that states: "Bear with us, while we think," Bird Rose (2013), in her provocative manuscript, "Slowly Writing into the Anthropocene," argued for a slow movement imbued with thought and attention as an antidote to our sense of "lack of capacity to change things we know need changing" (p. 6). In the rush to cobble together a Canadian national ECEC system primarily on budgetary terms, we perceive that negotiated thinking succumbed to pressure for a rapid signing of bilateral agreements between the Federal government and provincial and territorial jurisdictions.[3]

Slowing and Storying

In his distinguished lecture at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, "The World in a Shell: The Disappearing Snails of Hawai'i," Australian field philosopher and storyteller Thom van Dooren (UMassHistory, 2020) called direct attention to snails. He spoke of the perils of conservation work and ecological documentation concerned exclusively with classifying larger species, those already "legally noticed" during a moment of ongoing crisis. A consequence of this flagship species focus is the slow disappearance of invertebrates that we will never learn ever existed because we failed to cultivate "arts of noticing" (Tsing, 2015). Snails, facing imminent extinction, are stored, anonymously, in hidden boxes in a museum. van Dooren effused his audience to shift from an ecological species-centred taxonomy of classification to an ecosystem's taxonomy of "storying the unknown." In "expansing storying practices," scientists acknowledge relational connections that "tell ethical stories of the becomings of the unknown and the unrecognizable," allowing for a reconstruction of snails' paths through their existence. Such ethical transformation allows us to care, ethically, about that which is not seen. van Dooren (2016) discussed slow care for endangered snails, and asked, "through the support for fleshy snail bodies … what kinds of possibilities for the future does it hold open?" (p. 4).

The phrases van Dooren used to describe the snails near extinction in a lab in Hawai'i, "storying the unknown" and "expansing storying practices," find resonances with ECEC and the theorizing we are attempting here. The pandemic revealed a crisis in ECEC provision, now a "legally visible" species at-risk, only yesterday an unknown species fighting for survival. More specifically, we see here a resonance with attention drawn to the perils of conceiving ECEC as a diminished "industry," reduced services, and strained financial, health, social, and educational systems. Like snails and many other unseen, undocumented invertebrates, ECEC suffers the consequences of a species-centred taxonomy approach that classifies children in ECEC programs according to ages/stages, adult/child ratios, and leaves them behind in storage boxes in mostly publicly invisible ECEC settings. Instead of continuing to use service provision and school readiness discourses that echo a classification taxonomy, we embrace van Dooren's invitation to adopt an *ecosystems taxonomy* of *relational connections* by *storying the unknown*." Just like Hawaiian snails during their brief lives, children's life-traces across and within diverse ecological spaces and places are invisible only if we choose not to notice them.

In her keynote speech at the 31st Annual meeting of the European Early Childhood Research Association, Alison Clark (2022) spoke about the need to reclaim time for children, as a way to resist the neoliberal imperative to move children as quickly and cheaply as possible toward a future that has already been mapped out for them. She outlined a slow pedagogy of place, where time is taken to pay close attention to feelings and senses. For Clark, slow pedagogies allow for being with, going off track, diving deep with children, and taking the longer view. We see connections between thinking with snail trails and ECEC pedagogies of listening and pedagogical documentation grounded in practices of revisiting and reflection where curriculum making is enacted as a movement of drawing-in—pausing to think and

reflect—and issuing-forth—making tentative curricular proposals for and with children (Cameron & Moss, 2020; Moss, 2010; Rinaldi, 2006). Similarly, Kind et al. (2019) challenged speedy pedagogies in their description of artistic practices with children and materials in the studio space: "The studio is imagined as a space of collective inquiry that affords both children and educators time to *dwell* [emphasis added] with materials, *linger* [emphasis added] in artistic processes and work together on particular ideas and propositions" (p. 67).

Slowing Return to "Normalcy"

At the forefront of our inquiry is the question, "How shall we live?" (Tuck, 2018, p. 157). Amidst calls to return to normal after two and a half years of pandemic precarity, we desire to return slowly, to turn towards slow, and to not be complicit in so-called quick fixes or Band-Aid solutions. Refuting the return to normal and any illusionary of this possibility, Dionne Brand (2020) wondered about how speed and time have been slowed during the pandemic:

> The pandemic situates you in waiting. So much waiting, you gain clarity. You listen more attentively, more anxiously. 'We must get the economy moving,' they say. And, 'we must get people back to work,' they say. These hymns we've heard, these enticements to something called the normal, gesture us toward complicity. (para. 5)

Instead, we want to think slow, to listen slow, to learn slow, to relate slow, to (re)turn slow. How might we linger with "slow"? The slime trails of some snail species "are used for communication between snails and may help them return to the same spot to rest for the day or night" (Price, 2021, para. 1).

Claire Cameron and Peter Moss (2020) claim that the pandemic has made defects in ECEC provision readily apparent. What it has also made clear is that it is "time for an ECEC revolution," one guided by a principle of "slow knowledge and slow pedagogy" (Moss & Cameron, 2020). We know it is difficult to slow down given the $30 billion dollar investment in ECEC announcement by Canada's federal government (Government of Canada, 2021), and the subsequent bilateral agreements with the provinces and territories. The sheer amount of the funds set to be transferred from the federal to provincial and territorial governments is unprecedented in Canadian ECEC history. But we know these agreements have been decades in the making, and represent advocates' slow engagement with Canadian politics.

Slow is also hard to stay with when early childhood educators are underpaid and their conditions of employment so precarious. For example, in our second webinar held in November 2021, educators mentioned feeling as if they needed to make a choice between the "passion" of their job and "making a living." Janice, an educator working in Vancouver, explained that after "putting in an 8-hour day" she also worked a "6- to 7-hour shift at night at a restaurant." She had been working two jobs prior to the pandemic and believed that her situation was not uncommon for other educators.

We understand the desire to move quickly. After decades of feminist labour and childcare advocacy (Pasolli, 2021), there is a fear that all the public support and funding could go away with a change of government. However, speed can create, according to Isabelle Stengers (2018), "an insensitivity to everything," whereas slowing down "means … reweaving the bounds of interdependency. It means thinking and imagining, and, in the process, creating relationships with others that are not those of capture" (pp. 80–81). A national childcare system ought not to be one of containment. It is time to make visible the limitations of current care practices. Moss (2006) raised similar questions about our vision for childcare: Are they "enclosures for applying technologies to children," a kind of regulated care and "maintenance of hope" in the name of child "protection" and/or "readiness" (p. 73)? Or might they be

children's spaces enlivened beyond the contour of a physical space and tethered to the world with multiple lines of diverse forms and desires?

How might snails' movements, close to earth and immersed in the fluxes of weather, disrupt the narrative of national childcare as capture? What might be missed/or reified if we continue to think ECEC through provincial, territorial, and national borders and regulations? Snail lines are very different from border lines, they do not seek to enclose (no outside and inside) but to slowly extend along multiple paths. Life, as Ingold (2015) reminded us, is not contained within bounded places but threads its way along paths in a "zone of entanglement." What are the possibilities for children's spaces to participate in co-weaving stories (tales/trails) of places, care, and pedagogy within their own zone of engagement? An effort to dwell in such zones of entanglement can be found in the Colombian early learning framework, *De Cero A Siempre (From Zero to Forever)*. Researcher Luz Marina Hoyos Vivas shared in our third snail event, that this ECEC policy "attends to Colombia's ethnocultural, linguistic, geographical, and place-based diversity" (Hoyos Vivas et al., 2021). As an example of how national policy might attend to locality and specificity, Hoyos Vivas described a participatory study from a decolonized perspective with the Embera-Chamí peoples from whose perspective the lifespan is not divided into cycles, but is a continuum in community and family life portrayed as a spiral as opposed to concentric (bordered) circles. As illustrated in Figure 1, ECEC is conceptualized as living and non-living beings who guide people in their spiritual life, transmitted through oral traditions and Mingas de Pensamiento (traditional community discussions). Children are active participants in community life and their families prepare them to undertake activities valued by the community, such as learning about the spirits of plants while planting seedlings.

Figure 1

"Pedagogic Approach for ECEC in Wasiruma Graphic Display" (Hoyos Vivas, 2020, p. 115)
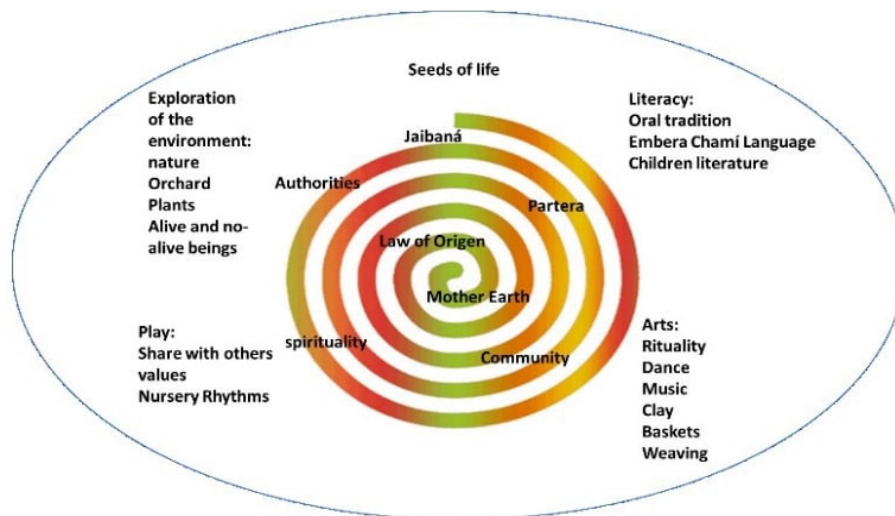
Note. Used with permission. (Hoyos Vivas, 2020, p. 115)

Panelist Martha Friendly (Webinar 1) affirmed that ECEC is a "multifaceted complicated policy area" that focuses on economy, pedagogy, parents, social infrastructure, public goods, women's rights, children's development, and children's rights and that these are "not at all exclusive of one another." While Friendly was careful to note that she was not suggesting "anything goes," we wonder if slowing down thought and opening up to difference might reveal some incommensurabilities (Stengers, 2005) that might help us rethink whether returning to normal is desirable. Can narratives promoting capitalist economies coexist with

the sort of "relationships and connectedness and community" offered in a question from the webinar audience? Are these narratives commensurable? Do we want them to be? If capitalism and neoliberalism (among other things) are the problem, does slowing down and reimagining ECEC make sense without changing the material and discursive reality of our lives? In other words, is it possible for snails to coexist among steamrollers? Perhaps what the pandemic did for ECEC is highlighted "the shortcomings of the insistence on treating the early years as a market" (Bonetti, 2020, para. 6). The discourse of ECEC as a service and a commodity does not sit easily with snails and slow pedagogies. An audience member during our first webinar with policy experts and advocates wrote in the chat:

> Could you share your views around these thoughts: In a webinar about public health and the pandemic, Dr. Bonnie Henry, Medical Officer of BC stated yesterday that while economy is important, it does not happen without "lives" ... however the current media and political discourses seem to separate these two. In thinking about lives, and within the world of early childhood education, learning, and care, I worry about the push for childcare without caring (for the needs of children, parents, and educators) about the push for learning without the notions of relationships and connectedness and community and partnership.

Educators who spoke in the second webinar shared with us actions they have taken to maintain an illusion of normality, sometimes at their own cost: they held meetings with children online, made and delivered activity packages, supported breakfast programs, participated in car-parades to show the children and families that they cared and "are still here," organized outdoor gatherings to maintain and preserve connections, called children at home, and offered additional help and family support. In spite of isolation, physical distancing, and often no funding, educators focused on relationships and their connections to community. The educators hoped that the pandemic would be a catalyst for reframing ECEC—exposing the precarious nature of employment in the sector. As one educator noted, "We're being told we are essential, but we are being treated like we are disposable."

In her contribution to the policy and advocacy webinar, Margo Greenwood (nehiyawak/Cree) spoke about the *Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework* (*IELCCF*), which forwards "distinction-based frameworks" as its ethical foundation (Government of Canada, 2018). While various Indigenous contributors came together to create the *IELCCF*, differences between First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples are honoured and inscribed in the curriculum. Distinction in this sense means that even within a shared vision, differences still matter. It means that implementation of the *IELCCF* embraces slowness as it states that—it will "be a collaborative effort over several years, through ongoing, open dialogue and mutual effort" (Government of Canada, 2018, p. 8).

Desiring

"Canada has child-care problems," we are told on repeat; "We lag behind 18 others in a recent global ranking" (Klukas, 2021, para. 1). We hear that educators are undertrained, undervalued, and that there is a "recruitment crisis" (Akbari, 2021). The *Early Childhood Education Report 2000* (Atkinson Centre, 2020) noted, "research continually demonstrates cross-country challenges with unstable and inadequate funding, poor oversight, inequitable access, space shortages, unaffordable fees, gaps in services and transitions, and often poor working conditions and remuneration for early childhood educators" (p. 3). These sorts of statements and findings are routine and were echoed by panel participants in our first two webinars. Most panelists start and end their remarks with lack and limit—in other words, they lock us in damage narratives as a habit of thought and response. Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck (2009) proposed the possibility of desire-centred research as a way to re-envision theories of change.

She advocates for desire not "as an antonym to damage, as if they are opposites … desire as an epistemological shift" that makes different imaginaries and different worlds possible (p. 419).

Tuck's (2009) refutation of damage emerged from a specific context that is important to acknowledge. Tuck (2009) requested a moratorium on damaged-centred research that obsessively documents "the effects of oppression" on "Native communities, city communities, and other disenfranchised communities" (p. 409). The consequence of this "persistent trend in research" is to instill a belief in communities that they are "depleted" and in need of external, often paternalistic, fixes (Tuck, 2009, p. 409). Instead of focusing solely on what is broken, Tuck puts forward desire as an antidote, a medicine, and a recognition of both suffering and thriving in the face of colonialism, anti-black racism, poverty, and loss. For Tuck (2009), "desire is about longing, about a present that is enriched by both the past and the future. It is integral to our humanness" (p. 417). How might a desire-based starting point in ECEC narratives of change move us towards an "elsewhere and elsewhen that was, still is, and might yet be" (Haraway, 2016, p. 31) when damage-based research is so often used to leverage resources while reinforcing a unidimensional notion of ECEC. However, as Tuck (2009) asked, "Does it actually work? Do the material and political wins come through? And, most importantly, are the wins worth the long-term costs of thinking of ourselves as damaged?" (p. 415).

When discussing what it means to be an educator in the autumn of 2021, the educators in Webinar 2 often drew on contradictory damage-based and desire narratives about quality, children's achievement, and children with additional needs. They echo a recurring tension between ECEC neoliberal narratives focused on the future (becoming) and reconceptualist ECEC narratives of the present (being), between children in need of protection who need to be shaped and formed so they will later perform, and children as citizens with rights, right now. Tuck (2009) reminds us that desire-based frameworks draw on the idea of "complex personhood" (p. 420) where people are seen and valued as multilayered and often embody contradictions. Our intention is to (re)think our responsibility as researchers to co-construct with the educators' stories of desire-based narratives by "splicing" (Tuck, 2009) damage-based narratives with stories of wisdom, vision, and hope.

We do not wish to erase damage-based theories of change completely, but rather to ask, as Tuck did, is it time for a shift? "Are damage-centered narratives no longer sufficient?" (Tuck, 2009, p. 415). We are not implying that desire narratives are "easy."—Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987, as cited in Tuck 2009) taught us that desire is assembled, crafted over a lifetime through our experiences by "picking up of distinct bits and pieces that, without losing their specificity, become integrated into a dynamic whole" (p. 418). The ECEC sector: advocates, researchers, educators, argues for change using damage-centred logic: a damaged system, damaged children, damaged parents, and damaged educators. What if we think with desire? If we did not have to convince the government to fund ECEC systems, what do we desire? Do we dare hope for recognition of the diverse roles of children within our diverse communities, for a reorganization of our lives with children, for multiple, contextualized, community-centred forms of ECEC? Do we even consider: What do children desire? And what of our desire to spend time playing, discovering, and caring for children, and to spend time apart, working, learning, and breathing? What does it mean to care as parents, educators, theorists, and as a community? What could happen if we dare to think of ECEC, not as a tool to kickstart the economy, but as a milieu in which to experiment with new modes of living and relating to one another?

Tibetha Kemble (Piapot First Nation) was interviewed about a project that sought to understand the needs of Indigenous children and their parents and caregivers in Amiskwaciy

Waskahikan (Edmonton) as part of the Indigenous and international narratives series (Event 3). She spoke of ECEC as part of a community anti-poverty and decolonial strategy, and of talking circles as part of a non-hierarchical process to build trust, and to communicate with families in a good way:

> We weren't trying to understand what cultural practices they wanted to see in daycare, but what were their experiences in the system: access, affordability, experiences with racism, intersections with child welfare, wanting to understand the complex ways ECEC intersects with other systems and how we might affect change. (Event 3)

Instead of quick cultural activities that could be assimilated into childcare centres by settler educators in the name of reconciliation, the talking circles this project implemented explored the systemic nature of colonialism as well as the possibility to decolonize ECEC through interpersonal relationships. They engaged with damage, but the damage was attributed to systems of injustice, not to the families and children themselves, and they spliced these narratives with narratives of hope, expertise, and wisdom. These slow and repetitive relational acts began "shifting the discourse away from damage and toward desire and complexity" (Tuck, 2009, p. 422) that insist upon openness and vulnerability as starting points. The project sought to understand how culturally safe care and relationships with Indigenous people and children should be, against a backdrop of ongoing racist and colonialist child welfare practices, recognizing Indigenous parents as experts and as important contributors to improving the ECEC system in Amiskwaciy Waskahikan.

Desire is concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives. It is wisdom, agency, complicity, and resistance. As the national ECEC system takes shape, we seek to infuse our research and our activism with desire. This means allowing ourselves to imagine, to dream, to hope, to listen, to disagree, to compromise, and to ride waves of joy. As Brittany Aamot expressed in our second webinar, we need to think about ECEC other than as a way to kick-start the economy, as

> a place to learn, play, grow, be cared for … The narrative of thriving early childhood communities needs to be told, families and children returning to cherished spaces after closure and restrictions, the magic and joy of children reuniting with peers and educators after this time away, that's a beautiful story that should be shared, that outweighed the fears related to safety during the pandemic. (Webinar 2)

Hospicing

van Dooren (2019) shared the story of the "snail ark," a captive breeding lab run by the Hawai'i State Government's Snail Extinction Prevention Program (SEPP). The ark—a more accurate image of which is a series of fish tanks in industrial fridges—are singularized, replicate microcosms of the forest. Every 2 weeks the vegetation gets replaced, the tank gets sterilized, and the inhabitants get counted. The Hawaiian Government's SEPP cares for snails that can no longer survive outside these controlled conditions. The typical metaphor for endangered species management is an emergency room. This implies intensive care and "a meaningful prospect of recovery. That, with some attention, species might be patched up and sent on their way" (van Dooren, 2019, para. 4). But recovery for most snails in the ark is unlikely. The majority will not be reintroduced to the forest; there is no exit from the ark. These are practices of "long-term care that are, in the final analysis, acts of delaying the inevitable. Extinction in slow motion" (van Dooren, 2019, para. 11). Perhaps, as van Doreen (2019) suggested, instead of an emergency room, the ark is "something more akin to a hospice" (para. 4). How does this revision shift our imaginary of care—from intensive care to palliative care? To slow care?

What if hospice isn't a noun, but a verb (Machado de Oliveira, 2021)? Hospicing can be a pre-emptive practice of remembering before snails are gone. It is love and preparation for haunting.

The snails help us think about what is (un)sustainable in our worlds, and how care does not stop when someone is not self-sufficient (as if anyone actually ever is or was). We also consider what needs to be hospiced in order for something new and different to emerge. Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti and colleagues (2015) proposed *hospicing a system* as practices of living with a dying modernity, which includes neoliberalism, capitalism, colonialism, extractive industry, species extinctions, unequal distributions of power, and lots of other damage, but also human rights, women's rights, children's rights, and all those conveniences that make daily life a bit easier, from cars and Instapots to Netflix.

> Hospicing would entail sitting with a system in decline, learning from its history, offering palliative care, seeing oneself in that which is dying, attending to the integrity of the process, dealing with tantrums, incontinence, anger and hopelessness, 'cleaning up', and clearing the space for something new. This is unlikely to be a glamorous process; it will entail many frustrations, an uncertain timeline, and unforeseeable outcomes without guarantees. (Andreotti et al., 2015, p. 28)

We know that modernity is killing us, but it is also in us—it *is* us. And modernity cannot be separated from market-based ECEC, low educator wages, and hierarchies of child development knowledge. It is ECEC as an essential service, necessary for economic recovery and women's labour force participation. It is the exhaustion the educators spoke about in Webinar 2, their disposability and precarity—captured so well in other papers in this special issue (Massing et al., 2022; Maeers et al., 2022). The tenacity of modernity is evident when we think of theories of change that document damage, propose solutions, but because the issues are often ingrained systematically, the pattern then repeats for the next researchers to come along. Modernity holds strong to "stories of the established disorders" (Haraway, 2004, p. 47) used to advocate for ECEC as a panacea for the economy, for patriarchy, for crime, for individual failure (in school, in life).

At its core, hospicing involves slowly accompanying a system that cannot be fixed, providing care as it dies. "Whether we like it or not," van Dooren (2019) asserted, "we now find ourselves living on a hospice earth" (para. 13). This does not mean "embracing pessimism" (para. 16), but rather it might encourage us to develop what Anna Tsing et al. (2017) have called "arts of living on a damaged planet." This "facing up to death and dying" through hospicing "is one such art, essential for our times" (van Dooren, 2019, para. 15). Importantly, hospicing does not preclude compromises (such as the federal-provincial ECEC agreements, or the snail ark), but instead helps us realize that "advocating for expansion or radical transformation of the system (e.g., through equity, access, voice, recognition, representation, or redistribution) is insufficient" (Andreotti et al., 2015, p. 7). So, while a national plan may bring in a necessary influx of childcare spaces, lowered costs for families, and, in some places, increased educator wages and post-secondary education subsidies, it does not get us out of the system that makes these interventions necessary in the first place. It is easy to be "enchanted" by the promises. Hospicing doesn't "minimize our complicity in the very things we are contesting" (Stein & Andreotti, 2017, p. 179). It is "messy, uncomfortable, difficult, deceptive, contradictory, paradoxical…prepare for your heart to break open" (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 180). Nevertheless, hospicing is how we might practice care as we enact our "slow activism" (Liboiron et al., 2018). It might "be affirmative, even transformative" (van Dooren, 2019, para. 16). We are left with many questions, modified from Stein and Andreotti's (2017) proposals: What kinds of futurities do we want for ECEC, and for ourselves within it? To what extent have dominant discourses and imaginaries "shaped our desired futurities, and what kinds of

harms would be required to achieve them" (p. 178)? "What if it is not possible" for ECEC (in its modern, technical forms) "to fulfill these desires" (p. 178)? If "we let go of these desires or at least loosened our grip on them, without necessarily exiting [ECEC], what else might become possible?" (p. 178). What can we desire if we hospice ECEC as we currently know it along with the neoliberal extractive colonial capitalism system?

Haunting

Tuck and Ree (2013) theorized haunting to contest claims of past-present and/or future settler-colonial innocence and to disrupt easy-White-hero-justice stories. Haunting is being affected by the unresolvable—ghosts that reject solutions as justice. It is about the stickiness of slime—traces of settler colonialism written into a history of erasure. But haunting is also a "constituent element of modern social life" (Gordon, 1997, p.7). Hauntology ought to slow us down. Hauntological logic challenges us to ask new questions: How do various ideologies haunt childcare? Where do discourses go when they die? And how can thinking with snails and haunting help us reimagine change in ECEC?

Our posing of difficult questions, our insistence on challenging economic and developmental rationales for ECEC, our stubborn refusal of quick fixes, our preoccupation with politics and issues of identity and justice, and our desire to create places of care and pedagogy with young children that reflect a vision of community belonging, magic, and joy in the present moment, these are examples of how we haunt decision-makers, students, and practitioners, challenging taken-for-granted knowledges about what is possible and realistic, and what is best for children and families. How we haunt the collective imaginary involves relentlessly reminding ourselves that the boundaries we set are not inevitable. The snail teaches us that with care, thought, and attention, we can bind ourselves together and reimagine possibilities.

In our first webinar, multiple panelists remarked on the generative potentiality of the supposed postpandemic moment—"What seemed impossible … now seems possible" (Andrew Bevan, Panel 2)—but they also seemed resistant to consider that the moment might invite different imaginaries. In some cases, we think there is a distinction to be made between slowness as an emergent praxis and the claim that the pandemic allowed, in panelist Don Giesbrecht's words, for some sort of "an awakening, an affirmation" that was not present before. To qualify this further, Don said, ECEC "has been a political afterthought" for a long period, yet its recognition as an "essential service" does not encompass the sorts of transformation we desire. Another panelist, Bevan, remarked in the Zoom chat that "if the question was, are there other new arguments to be made at this particular moment in support of a national childcare system, I think the basic answer to that is no". The underlying rationale was that what has long been said about ECEC remains true and what has changed now "is context" (Bevan). These narratives reflect the unresolved ghost of ECEC, the narrow framing of ECEC as a service and as a substitute for a (working) mother's care.

A question from an audience member challenged this haunted way of thinking ECEC:

I just want to clarify, is the panel addressing early childhood education as a service? Is this how we are invited to continue thinking about early childhood education? If this is the case, what can be created, pedagogically, when "service" is the concept that frames our conversations? (Cristina Delgado Vintimilla)

Tuck and Yang (2011) discussed the politics of recognition and teleological resistance strategies as prescriptive theories that assume change is always linear, progressing from oppression to liberation, from bewildered to enlightened:

Such conceptualizations of resistance rely on developmental or progress-oriented theories of change, the same theories that presume the "improvement" from savage to

civilized, wild to domesticated, and unschooled to educated. Theories of change that suppose linear progress are characteristic of Western philosophical frames, are consistent with the world views of settler colonial societies, and have authorized occupations, genocide, and other forms of state violence. Non-teleological resistance theories do not fetishize progress, but understand that change happens in ways that make new, old-but-returned, and previously unseen possibilities available at each juncture (see Deleuze and Guattari [2003] on flows and segmentarities, and Tuck [2009] on indigenous theories of change, including sovereignty, contention, balance, and relationship). Non-teleological theories of resistance are messy, and the endgame of such resistance is unfixed and always taking shape. (Tuck & Yang, 2011, p. 522)

We wonder whether we can imagine haunting as a form of messy resistance, a disruption of dominant narratives, and a way to linger with that which we long for.

Longing

van Dooren (2015) offered an urgent provocation in his call to think about what "caring practices might enable hopes for the future?" (p. 3). After exposing the limitations and possibilities of caring practices aimed at holding near extinct snail species in captivity so that they can be in the world just a little longer, van Dooren urged readers to think critically about how particular approaches to care sustain a certain kind of vision for the future. The argument is not that care for dying snails is futile, instead a sort of temporality of belonging within the palliative care of hospicing is enacted. This care is "world making that enhances the lives of others," however fleeting, in a global "time of extinctions" where it is no longer possible to disavow that "we are living amidst the ruination of others" (Bird Rose, 2011, p. 51). Longing, as we conceptualize it, queers temporality and relationality as it mixes nostalgia with futurism and desire with mourning just as it demands presence and action now. Longing is situated and durative; it is "love and extinction" (Bird Rose, 2011). We wonder: What might be opened up if we think care through/beyond regulatory frameworks? With the hauntology of desire? Against patriarchal modes of "protection," reproduction and production. What might rematriation of ECEC make possible? What if we slow down with snails for a moment and pay more attention to what it is that we are specifically hoping for and working towards?

In van Dooren's (2020) words our *desire* to "reconstruct the not-[yet]-seen" children, educators' and caregiver's paths is "relentless" transforming evidence-based reporting into documentation practices that tell ethical stories of "the becomings of the unknown and the unrecognizable." Musing on the weight of our collective responsibility to care for humans and things, Ingold (2017) offered the concept of "longing" as an impulse, a drive, a life that is "running ahead of itself" (p. 23)—not unlike the snails' feelers. Longing is also a relation with past (remembering) and the future (imagining) worlds. Yet, as Ingold (2017) further clarified, "To imagine is not to project the future, as a state of affairs distinct from the present. It is rather to catch a life that, in its hopes and dreams, has a way of running ahead of its moorings in the material world" (p. 21). Longing resonates with Rosi Braidotti's (2020, p. 468) rejection of the notion of a transcendental life, thus affirming our co-construction of one's life alongside others as a collective that converges together, but that does not represent us as "one and the same" (p. 465).

Slow Activism

In this paper, we have been drawing in and issuing-forth lines of slow revolution that engage with desiring, hospicing, haunting, and longing. We've taken time to think-with snails and slowness, which aims to resist productionism, and, instead, enacts a slow ethics, a politics, a practice, and an imaginary of speculative care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Productionism

involves reducing children, educators, and ECEC as childcare to mere resources, for example, as necessary conditions to re-start and maintain the economy, posing the risk for ECEC of becoming that last snail—extinct, in boxed categories (van Dooren, 2015). On the other hand, speculative care is a "commitment to seek what other worlds could be in the making through caring while staying with the trouble of our own complicities and implications" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 204). Speculative care is also about what Adrienne Rich (1993) called "the first revolutionary question...*What if--?--*" (pp. 241–242).

Slow does not mean inaction. In our desire-based framework, slow and activism co-exist. In an attempt to move beyond liberal politics that depend on the capture of social power, Liboiron et al. (2018) evoked the notion of slow activism. Slow activism challenges the myth of a single hero and big moments that change national policy. Slow activism engages in the mundane, everyday chores of care, as it shifts our attention from achievement to ethics. While slow activism may not be immediately effective, it may diversify politics and expand concepts of agency and action to include stories of caring otherwise. As Liboiron and colleagues (2018) explained,

> Slow activism does not literally mean actions are sluggish (though they can be), but that the effects of action are slow to appear or to trace. ... Slow activism does not have to be immediately affective or effective, premised on an anticipated result. It can just be good. (p. 341)

As we slowed down to think about a slow ECEC revolution, as we undertook this important slow work of listening to the webinar recordings and video capsules, pausing every few minutes to take notes, we were impatient, so used to the fast-paced demands of emails imposing immediate responses, and to cutting corners that taking the time to listen and to think felt uncomfortable. We, as researchers, along with ECEC and the rest of our communities, are subjected to neoliberal demands to be productive. Going deep, staying with the trouble, being so-called unproductive is unfamiliar and feels unnatural. What lies beyond servicing? Or might service be reconceptualized and infused with ethical obligation and/as care for the world? We spent days slowly listening, taking notes, reflecting, feeling guilty, uneasy, at times, for ignoring emails and pressing administrative tasks. Then we met as a group to discuss, question, propose new readings, and laugh, learning from and with one another, weaving relationships, slowly imagining a revolution. Working slowly is a privilege and a pleasure, and led to the creation of something we hope can be of use to others in the field. We hope that in slowly reading and thinking about the ideas we share here, readers will imagine other ways of making change happen in their own ECEC contexts, paying attention to the small moments of unfolding caring relations and storying unknown worlds.

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Endnotes

[1] See https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2021/04/budget-2021-a-canada-wide-early-learning-and-child-care-plan.html

[2] See https://ecenarratives.opened.ca/ for further details and to access recordings of the events.

[3] For all thirteen agreements, see https://www.canada.ca/en/early-learning-child-care-agreement/agreements-provinces-territories.html

Pandemic-Provoked "Throwntogetherness": Narrating Change in ECEC in Canada

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Abstract

In Canada, multiple, intersecting, and incommensurable narratives promote investment in a public ECEC system. These dominant narratives are typically justified through an entanglement of discourses, including gender equity, colonialism, developmentalism, investment in children as future workers, and childcare as social infrastructure. With COVID-19, renewed economic arguments propose ECEC as an essential service, jump-starting an economy ravaged by the pandemic. Taking up a conversational approach, we question the potency of dominant narratives proliferated in media and policy initiatives as a way to effect large-scale change, and we seek to better understand alternative narratives of ECEC. We are drawn to those spaces where a range of new texts and narratives are generating possibilities for transformative changes. We co-create a bricolage of minor stories (Taylor, 2020) of change, keeping in mind Eve Tuck's (2018a) theory of change and Elise Couture-Grondin's (2018) premise of stories as theory.

Keywords: early childhood education, policy, change, COVID-19, colonialism, throwntogetherness

Pandemic-Provoked "Throwntogetherness": Narrating Change in ECEC in Canada

"A Time to Organize, Not to Agonize" (Braidotti, 2020, p. 467)

We are meeting over Zoom—a now very familiar space and practice that was born of the urgency and intensity of the COVID-19 lockdown. The particular 2-year *ECE Narratives* Project highlighted in this article began in April 2020, just at the moment when the response to COVID-19 provoked dramatic changes to the way most of us work and live in the world. Given the pervasiveness of the lockdowns, we moved our planning and research meetings online and our in-person events from physical meeting places to virtual meeting spaces. In these virtual spaces, we have had hundreds of conversations trying to make sense of the uncertainties and inequities in early childhood education and care (ECEC)[1] made particularly visible throughout the lockdown. We have shown up weekly—10 framed faces across four time zones—we have virtually entered each other's homes—grateful for the project and each other. Within the context of our lives and this work, we are advocates, activists, educators, and researchers engaged in various roles with responsibilities that are often entangled and mutually informative. We, too, were experiencing the crisis. Our conversations over Zoom became a life line. And given the sudden and unexpected focus upon childcare within the pandemic, we were determined to better understand—in this moment of incredible disruption—how change in ECEC has happened and how we might quickly contribute to this national and very public conversation.

This article emerges, with hope, from within the context of a Canada-wide Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Connections grant. We four, Esther, Jane, Monica, and Pam, part of the group of 10 framed faces, are working within the *ECE Narratives* Project (https://ecenarratives.opened.ca/). Our primary research focus is on change in ECEC in Canada. In the context of this focus, we ask: What are the narratives that create, describe, and perpetuate change; how do they work; and what do, or might, particular narratives offer to the present and future possibilities for ECEC within Canada? As we began the project, our collective sense was that there were and have been many narratives aiming to influence change in ECEC in Canada, and that change has happened and continues to happen. Each of us has participated in change in different ways, changes that have made differences in the present while offering possibilities for future practice and policy. Collectively we have also experienced change in ECEC in Canada as a never-ending story (Mahon, 2000; Pasolli, 2019), a what now/where to now story, one that Kate Bezanson (2018) characterized as the government of Canada's stop-start relationship to the field of early learning (p. 191). In this article we narrate personal stories of change in ECEC as we experienced them within the *ECE Narratives* Project.

In our desire to think about and with narratives of change within ECEC, our *ECE Narratives* research group was able to create conditions and invitations for national and international conversations. Our approach to this research has been to take up conversations as bricolage with conversations acting as *point of entry texts* (POET) (Berry, 2004, p. 108). Collectively and individually, we narrate change as we experienced it in conversations with people in ECEC: policy advocates, educators, and scholars within Canada and internationally. To facilitate these conversations, and over the course of our two-year project, the *ECE Narratives* Project organized two webinars, the first in June 2020, a full year before the federal commitment of $30 billion dollars for early learning and child care (Tasker, 2021). At that time, we held conversations with ECEC policy influencers—some well-known and some who had been working unseen for decades. In our second webinar, in November 2020, we held conversations with ECEC

educators who were thoughtfully, persistently, and creatively staying focused on their relations with children and their families as childcare centres strove to stay open or as they re-opened. In conjunction with the webinar conversations, ECEC educators from across the country shared visual representations of their experiences animating the actions they were taking to stay connected with families, children, and community in spite of spatial and temporal shifts created by COVID-19 to the provision of care (https://ecenarratives.opened.ca/webinar-collages/). Our third event occurred across 2021–2022, when we had conversations with international and Indigenous policy makers and educators. From these conversations, we created videos and research briefs bringing together insights and possibilities for changes to ECEC in Canada.

Moving Forward With Uncertainty

To learn about change in ECEC through conversations as bricolage, and in the context of this paper, we focus upon discourses and related narratives we heard within the first webinar. What are these narratives and what are they telling us about change in ECEC? What might we imagine for our collective futures? Our first webinar, held on June 10th, 2020, was entitled: *Moving Forward With Uncertainty: The Pandemic as Déclencheur* for a Competent ECEC System Across Canada/ Aller de l'avant dans l'incertitude : La pandémie comme catalyseur* de transformation d'un système plus adapté d'éducation à la petite enfance à travers le Canada (https://ecenarratives.opened.ca/policy-narratives/).*

For this webinar, we brought together policy experts for a round table discussion on current ECEC realities and initiatives across Canada. The focus of the webinar was to illuminate and respond to the impact of the changing perceptions and realities in childcare as COVID-19 affected the lives of children, families, and society overall. It was our response to events unfolding immediately around us. Collectively, we had knowledge, resources, and networks to draw on. We were ready to act. Specifically, Monica was deeply engaged at the political level in ongoing advocacy work/responses to the crisis and she invited individuals with whom she was working to share their knowledge and insights. The webinar conversation came together very quickly. In making sense of how this happened, we experienced what Doreen Massey (2005) described as the "throwntogetherness" of place, "an ever-shifting constellation of trajectories," always and crucially "the combination of order and chance" (p. 151). Through planning on a national scale, we had a SSHRC grant, and although not by chance, but certainly unexpectedly, we were in a pandemic. Thus, at the beginning of the pandemic, we had collectively and fortuitously created a place where we could, as Rosi Braidotti (2020) suggested, "organize rather than agonize" (p. 3).

In the first webinar, two groups of panelists took part: the first panel was composed of well-known childcare speakers from national childcare organizations, while the second was composed of speakers, lesser known, whose work was largely behind the scenes, out of sight, underground—people whose focus was to bridge the work of the advocates with that of policy makers and politicians. We were only 3 months into the pandemic, and a palpable sense of urgency permeated the webinar discussion. There was no doubt that ECEC in Canada was in crisis. We hoped that governments and policy makers might share our sense of urgency in this moment, and be compelled to act. We were energized and inspired. We found ourselves in the position of being able to do something—to bring people together at an auspicious moment for a public conversation. To our surprise, the event drew over 400 registrants. For us, this moment in time and space animated Massey's (2005) notion of the significance of the public place and the "politics of the

event of place" (p. 149): the pandemic politics of Canada and the newly and unexpectedly public space of the virtual.

Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck (2018b) theorized that when we are thinking about how change happens, there is no single best answer. Tuck suggested that to gain an understanding of change we need to move into the messiness of conversations, to take seriously the practice of conversation within all its "mired contestations" (Tuck, 2018b, 6:08). What we learned in these mired contestations is that when narrating change there is no single best answer, no single narrative; rather, narrating change in ECEC in Canada reverberated with Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw's (2010) theorizing of "flows, rhythms, and intensities" (p. xii); moving into the messiness of conversation is "inventive" rather than "predictive" (p. xii). As we discussed possibilities arising from our long-standing and ongoing conversations, we were engaged with re-conceptualist ECEC scholarship (Ashton, 2015; Iannacci & Whitty, 2009; Moss, 2018; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2005;). In the introduction of *Be Realistic, Demand the Impossible: A Memoir of Work in Childcare and Education* by Helen Penn (2019), Michel Vandenbroeck, drawing on Foucault, described the purpose of contesting early childhood as working "to interrogate such discourses that are presented as evident, to shake up habits, ways of thinking, familiarities and to re-problematize these" (p. vi). We considered hegemonic discourses and those less dominant. As Peter Moss (2018) reminds us, a dominant discourse "never manages totally to silence other discourses or stories. … These stories may be unheard by power and consigned to the margins, for the time being at least, but they are out there to be heard by those who listen" (p. 7). We heard many stories, and as we listened and re-listened to these stories, we could hear stories narrating change.

Narrating Change

We intend this next section to be read as a bricolage of ideas from our conversations—particular moments in time emanating from our first webinar that are echoing, reverberating, repeating, haunting. In effect, these conversational moments act as point of entry texts generating the bricolage (Berry, 2004, p. 108). Collectively created through our conversations, we now share our individual narratives, narrating stories of change, recognizing their intersecting, partial, and resonating natures. Monica animates "strategic pester power," its persistence over time, in numerous spaces, and with and by a variety of people. *Pam* considers the shifting context of Indigenous knowledges and ways of being as they are re-materialized in pedagogical and literary texts by Indigenous peoples. Jane takes a closer look at ECEC pedagogy as an alternative—and potentially transformative—narrative of change, unfolding in and through Canadian ECEC curriculum frameworks. Esther describes how an ECEC educator co-creates new texts with children, creating renewed relationships to families, community, and land, providing hope in a time of great uncertainty.

Monica: Strategic Pester Power

I am a Treaty Four person, second generation Canadian, living and working with First Nations and Metis communities in Saskatchewan and Ontario. I am grateful and humbled by the wisdom and respect for the traditional knowledge of the Metis Nation and many First Nations, shared with me by elders, educators, and students.

Two years have passed since *ECE Narratives'* first policy webinar; 2 years that changed our worlds. Two years since childcare was deemed as an essential service in the face of the

pandemic, and 2 years since the 50-year struggle in childcare was brought to fruition. On April 19, 2021, Canada's first female finance minister Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland announced a $30 billion dollar commitment to creating a Canada-wide early learning and childcare program.

It was just over 50 years ago that the *Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* (Bird et al., 1970) called for national publicly funded childcare, the ramp to women's equality. The principal rationale was women's equality and access to the workforce to contribute economically. In subsequent decades, federal governments, both Liberal and Conservative, have offered various rationales, and promises for childcare and yet failed to deliver (Friendly & Prentice, 2009). For the most part, childcare in Canada has survived as a private service delivered within a market model system (Beach & Ferns, 2015). While several countries belonging to the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have established stable, universal, and public ECEC systems, Canada has not. As I think about my involvement with childcare, over 40 years as an early childhood educator, director, advocate, and researcher, and the multiple rationales for public investment in childcare, I can see that we are trapped—trying to find the one "right" narrative— the narrative that would compel the government to invest. If only we could find it. We were obsessed. WE needed THEM to do something. Like Penn (2019), "I thought of myself as someone without power or influence or connections" (p. 33).

Penn (2011), who served as rapporteur for Canada's participation in *Starting Strong II* (OECD, 2006) provided a summary and analysis of multiple rationales that drive governments to implement ECEC policy. She asserted that "sticky policies" and their rationales are rooted in countries' histories, changing contexts, and public opinion. To open up the discussion of rationales, Penn (2011) suggested that "the job of academics and intellectuals—and students—is to step back a little and analyze policies and their underpinning rationales, to be skeptical" (p. 28). Our challenge is to take up Foucault's suggestion to interrogate, disrupt, and re-problematize dominant discourses (Penn, 2019). In the pandemic, Canada's rationale for investment highlighted the dominant discourses of economic returns and women's equality which economist Armine Yalnizyan (2020) described as the "she-cession." Yalnizyan asserted that women were disproportionately affected financially by the pandemic and proposed that a Canada-wide early learning and childcare system would mitigate the negative impact and support women's equality.

As part of our research, we collected ECEC media narratives, which included: ECEC as an essential service for the economy and for women re-entering the workforce; ECEC as necessary for child development; and articles on quality care, education, pedagogy, and practice. The dominating media discourse of childcare as an essential service—for essential health care staff— was a critical one which had the ironic effect of silencing or obscuring other narratives such as those being lived and told by educators. For example, early childhood educators forced back to work during the lockdown were expected to provide warm, loving care while maintaining social distancing between adults and children as well as between very young children; they were required to meet enhanced health and safety requirements without support for additional staffing or appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). In the first webinar, we heard from more than one speaker that children's experience of lockdown childcare held new stories for families about the value of childcare for their children. These narratives were largely missing in the media.

In the first webinar, the Honourable Myriam Monsef, minister for women and gender equality, was invited to bring greetings. In her remarks, Minister Monsef thanked participants for mobilizing, for advocating, for "bringing us along with you … please don't stop" (Monsef, 2020,

7:20–8:19). This makes me think about the "us" and the "them." Who is "them" and who is "us"? Often, we construct women in government as other than "us." Are we putting up false barriers? Getting in our own way? In a recent publication, Joanne Lehrer and I (Whitty et al., 2020) reflected on the involvement of several women politicians who were involved in childcare policy issues in Ontario and Quebec. We noted that politicians, too, worked within and against their own parties, sometimes traversing lines. I was beginning to realize that it wasn't about us and them. As Braidotti (2020) wrote, "WE are in *this* together, but we are not one and the same" (p. 1).

The "we" in our first webinar included several well-known spokespeople, for example, Martha Friendly, Margo Greenwood, Don Giesbrecht, and Morna Ballantyne. There were also panelists who have worked behind the scenes, quietly and invisibly. One panelist spoke about the informal "mommy network" amongst journalists, who prioritized column space for pro-childcare reporting. Panelists were asked to address questions such as the following:

- Early childhood education and care is a high-profile issue right now, can you share your views about why ECEC is in the spotlight?

- Why has it been so difficult to advance a universal childcare system?

- How is Indigenous ECEC different?

- How has the world changed and what does that mean for childcare?

- Are there new arguments emerging now to support a Canada-wide universal public childcare system?

In *Conflictual and Cooperative Childcare Politics in Canada*, Rachel Langford, Susan Prentice, Brooke Richardson, and Patrizia Albanese (2016) analyzed and compared relationships between advocates and both Liberal and Conservative governments when a national childcare program was being proposed. They identified co-operative relationships, conflictual relationships—and at times, conflictual—co-operation. Thinking with these ideas, I considered how they might help to explain why we have stalled, time and time again; what impedes our progress? Is perfection the enemy of good? Conversation in the webinar circled around whether it was possible for multiple narratives to come together in a single Canada-wide childcare system that jump-starts an economy ravaged by the pandemic, and addresses equality for women and children's well-being in the present, as well as their education and care. We stall on this conundrum, which Kate Bezanson, Andrew Bevan, and I (2021) described as "complexity inertia." We suggested,

> Just because something is complex doesn't mean it's impossible. Rather, it compels an approach that bypasses tried-and-failed, ideological or non-system-building models… There are no shortcuts in system-building. (Bezanson, Bevan, & Lysack, 2021, n.p.)

What was it that finally compelled this government to deliver a Canada-wide early learning and care program? The "strategic pester power" of advocates was identified by Honourable Carolyn Bennett (personal communication, April, 19, 2021), a long-time childcare advocate who worked tirelessly within the Liberal party and cabinet, along with other female ministers, to deliver on the long-awaited national childcare program. In the moment, multiple narratives from multiple sources converged. With a grand-scale financial commitment and the political will expressed so clearly in the budget announcement, the new challenge becomes, how do we build a childcare system? At a recent national symposium on building the national system, the Honourable Karina Gould (2022), minister of families, children, and social development, challenged those in the room

and advocates across the country to shift how we work, emphasizing, "It is different being an advocate on the outside than it is being a builder on the inside … It doesn't mean don't call us out, that is your job—but how can we be constructive? This is an important moment ...We cannot build that system without each and every one of you." The question of who is "we" continues to resonate.

Pam: "There has Never Been Such a Framework for Our Children and Our Families."

I live and work on the east coast of Canada in Wolastoqiyik territory in what is now called New Brunswick. Wabanaki families have lived here for thousands upon thousands of years. My mother's and father's families have lived here for just over 200 years. Although Peace and Friendship Treaties were signed by the Crown with the Wabanaki Peoples between 1725 and 1779, many settlers, including myself, are just coming to understand our responsibilities as Treaty People. Cree storyteller, writer, activist, trapper, and lawyer Harold Johnson (2007) in *Two Families: Treaties and Government*, wrote of his family and mine:

> I have become convinced that my family will not be freed from tyranny until your family members free their minds from tyranny. Not until the dominant culture ceases to assume that its structures are natural, necessary and superior will it cease to impose its ideology over my family. …My family's survival as Indians depends on your families leaving us room to be Indians to be independent and self-sufficient. (p. 121)

In June 2020, Cree researcher Margo Greenwood, spoke at our first webinar, *Moving Forward With Uncertainty: The Pandemic as Déclencheur*. She spoke directly to the realities of Canada's colonialism, the historic and extensive harms done to Indigenous families and children through imposed structures and ideologies. Greenwood (2020), whose research focuses upon the well-being and health of Indigenous children and families, made very clear to the webinar participants, that colonial practices in Canada have resulted in current-day realities where immediate and intergenerational harms and trauma for children and families are evident in ECEC politics, policies, and practices:

> When you consider our history and our current day realities of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis Peoples in Canada, we cannot deny the colonial reality of Canada nor the fact that the First Nations, Inuit, and Metis Peoples have been marginalized in their own lands. We cannot deny any longer that colonialism has always been and continues to be about power and the insistence that some have power at the expense of others. (7:09–7:39)

Tuck (2018b), in her talk, "I Do Not Want to Haunt You, But I Will*,*" named colonialism as a longstanding theory of change in what is now called Canada, a theory that meets with change reluctantly. Tuck (2009) proposed interrupting this colonial power with Indigenous power, working against colonialism as "a flawed theory of change" (p. 409), a theory that perpetuated(s) damage-centered research, intended "to document peoples' pain and brokenness to hold those in power accountable for their oppression" (p. 409). Tuck (2009) advocated for suspending damage and enacting desire-based change, with "wisdom and hope" (p. 416), in part through the recognition of the local knowledge, narratives, and values carried by Indigenous People. She respectfully acknowledged that although there was a need to expose "the uninhabitable and inhumane" conditions which Indigenous Peoples continue to live in, a new historical moment calls for a shift from damage-centered research (Tuck, 2009, pp. 415–416). She suggested instead a move towards narratives of desire—to seek the layers, the complexity, the contradictions, the "not yet and not anymore" (Tuck, 2009, p. 417).

Referring specifically to the COVID-19 realities that once again "shone a light" upon persistent inequities within childcare in Indigenous communities, Greenwood (2020, 8:00) described the critical development and place of the *Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework* (*IELCCF*) (Government of Canada, 2018), pointing out that Canada is finally enacting a distinctions-based approach in ECEC with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples (FNIM). Specifically, Greenwood noted that the *IELCCF* foregrounds the safety and happiness of children and self-determination within and across nation-to-nation relationships. It is a very different starting point than other early learning and child care curriculum (ELCC) frameworks in Canada. Indigenous knowledges, languages, and culture are at the heart of the FNIM frameworks. Self-determination and children's cultural identities are centred. A distinctions-based approach, Greenwood (2020) stressed, is unique in the history of Canada: "There has never been such a framework for our children and our families" (2:16–2:30). Greenwood's haunting statement calls up centuries of the damage that has been, while opening spaces for enacting a more desired future. As Greenwood (2020) further noted, "So our children are at the core of our nations and they are its survival and ensures its continuity" (6:55).

In May 2021, 1 year after listening to Greenwood speak in the first webinar, and as we were preparing a presentation for a national conference, we learned that the unmarked graves of 215 Indigenous children were found at the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc community in the southern interior of what is now called British Columbia. The locating of unmarked graves across Canada is a stark reminder of the deep harms orchestrated against particular children, families, and communities by colonial policies and practices that created and maintained Indian Residential Schools from the 1830's until 1996. As of May 24, 2022, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Memorial Register has confirmed the names of 4130 children who died while attending Indian Residential Schools (Supernant, 2022). Kisha Supernant explained that many families were never notified of the deaths of their children; bodies of their children were never sent home; and survivors who were children at the time remember children who went missing, and in some cases these survivors were responsible for digging graves of children who had died. The immediate and intergenerational effects of this traumatic policy are now highly visible within Canadian popular media. Many settler Canadians are waking up to narratives of loss of children, culture, language, spirituality, and community, narratives of loss and lack, that Indigenous Peoples have been speaking to and about, living with, re-telling, and resisting for a very long time.

In her research with Indigenous life writings and epistolary texts, Elise Couture-Grondin (2018), drawing from Braidotti's concept of affirmative ethics, took up the practice of affirmative readings, which "follow a non-oppositional logic in which difference is taken as incommensurable singularity, instead of conceiving of Indigenous difference in a binary opposition to white settlers" (p. 318). For Couture-Grondin (2018), affirmative readings, which could also be applied to the creation and reading of Indigenous ELCC frameworks, place the "ethical reach of a text" beyond raising awareness or being educative, to the possibility of transformation by "offering alternative views of relationships, and by enacting different types of relationships in the literary field in which readers can engage" (p. 323). There is a possibility to engage with incommensurability, "in ways that counter the mechanisms of cognitive imperialism and appropriation/elimination" (Couture-Grondin, 2018, p. 321).

Affirmative readings, a taking up of affirmative ethics can also be engaged as a reading-response with picture books authored and illustrated by Indigenous Peoples. Nicola Campbell (2005), in *Shi-Shi-etko* places two stories side by side. In her one page austere black and white

preface, Campbell, a Nłeʔkepmx, Syilx, and Métis author, living in British Columbia outlines the history and harms caused by policies of residential schooling, asking the questions, what would it mean to live without families, to live without communities? The beautifully crafted, colour images by Kim LaFave show the daily life of an Indigenous community in the four days prior to Shi-shi-etko being taken from her family and community. These two apparently incommensurable stories stand together in the book, the Indigenous story justly taking up more time and space—being told and heard in its own right.

Swampy Cree author, David A. Robertson and Julie Flett (2016) of Cree Metis descent, in *When We Were Alone*, tell a different kind of double story, that of a young girl learning from her Nokum. Nokum speaks to her granddaughter about how she and a friend lived through their residential school days remembering and taking up cultural and linguistic practices from home "when they were alone." Leanne Simpson (2018, as cited in Couture-Grondin, 2018) affirmed, that with stories, Indigenous Peoples "pick up things where we were forced to leave them behind, whether songs, dances, values or philosophies and bring them into existence with the future" (pp. 49–50)—which is what Nokum does in this story with the conversation with her granddaughter, a conversation that can be engaged with, witnessed, and learned from by all inhabitants of Turtle Island.

Indigenous texts, including *Shi-shi-etko, When We Were Alone*, and the distinctions-based *IELCCF*, foreground different knowledges and stories than colonially based ELCC frameworks and colonial picture books. These Indigenous texts stand together, and are very different from most of the texts I have read for most of my life. At the moment, many Indigenous texts are written in English; thus, once again I benefit from Indigenous knowledges at the cost of Indigenous languages. My hope is that with the resurgence of Indigenous languages, with the translation and production of more Indigenous texts in Indigenous languages, and considering the foregrounding of Indigenous languages in the *IELCCF*, a different Indigenous future is materializing. Returning to Johnson (2007), perhaps in the foreseeable future, my family will finally leave space for his family "to be independent and self-sufficient" (p. 121).

Jane—ECEC Pedagogy—The Beginning of a New Story

The place I call home is on Treaty Six territory, where I grew up and later raised my own family in amiskwaciy-wâskahikan, the nehiyawewin (Cree) name for Beaver Hills House, now known as Edmonton. I have fond childhood memories of playing in the bush on the banks of the swift flowing kisiskâciwanisîpiy, until recently known to me only as the North Saskatchewan River. Since 2016, I have been living and working on the traditional and unceded territory of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc people in the nation of Secwepemcúl'ecw, in the first place where the presence of unmarked graves of children believed to be as young as 3 years of age who died while attending residential schools in Canada, was confirmed in May 2021.

In the spirit of story as theory, and conversation as bricolage, I will look more closely and critically at ECEC pedagogy as an alternative narrative of change, given momentum in Canada through the provincial ELCC frameworks created in each of the 10 provinces, and most recently a distinct First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Indigenous Framework named above as the *IELCCF* (Government of Canada, 2018). ECEC pedagogy is a new story, with the potential to shape the direction of change in this moment of possibility for ECEC in Canada. I was initially inspired by a comment in the chat in the first webinar from Iris Berger, one of our research team members:

What if we move the narrative beyond ECEC as an "essential service" for the economy, and focus on children, early childhood educators (who are more than a workforce), the role of ECEC in community, and the unique ECEC pedagogy? (Personal communication, June 10, 2020)

The creation of ELCC frameworks in Canada followed the release of the OECD review of ECEC (OECD, 2001; OECD, 2006) and the follow-up analysis of pedagogical approaches by John Bennett (2005) who led the OECD review, calling for pedagogical frameworks to be organized around a statement of principles and values, broad overarching goals, and pedagogical guidelines for reaching those goals. Like others on our *ECE Narratives* research team, I became involved in creating a framework in my home province at the time, leading the design of the participatory action research that created *Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework* in 2018.[2]

Our process in Alberta was critically and generously informed by the Early Childhood Research and Development Team that created the *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care~English* (*NBCF~English*) in 2007, one of the first in Canada. Pam Whitty (2009) described the participation of over 1300 early childhood educators involved in creation of the *NBCF~English* as a process of "reclaiming, reconstituting, and textualizing conversations and conversational moments of pedagogical learning and care from childcare educators" (p. 37). We followed a similar path in Alberta, working with early childhood educators to document stories of curriculum that was "already happening" as a starting point for pedagogical conversations (Hewes et al., 2019). Resources made available through the research project made it possible for educators to talk with one another during their workday about what they were doing and experiencing with children and families, and what they wanted to do. The process of talking about their pedagogy was challenging at first. Slowly, tentatively, and occasionally powerfully, these conversations, the "stories the players tell themselves about themselves" (Geertz, 1972) nurtured educators' identity, agency, confidence, and valuing of their work. Anna Szylko (as cited in Hewes & Lirette, 2018), one of the project pedagogical mentors, recognized, "Our staff meetings will never be about 'who left the lint in the dryer' again." Rebekah McCarron (as cited in Hewes et al., 2019), a new early childhood educator, realized a change in her sense of herself as an educator: "What I do does matter, and this realization has forever changed me" p. 49). These were heady times, when it sometimes felt like practice had leapt out ahead of theory, leaving the research team behind in our "bumptiousness" (Haraway, 2016, p. 1). We wrote and published and presented collaboratively alongside educators about this story of change (Hewes et al., 2019; Hewes et al., 2016; Makovichuk et al., 2017; Whitty et al., 2018). As others have noted, the ELCC frameworks have been helpful in moving thought and practice away from and beyond developmentalism, and towards story as the starting point for pedagogy.

Setting aside for a moment my unapologetic joy at having played a small part in such an uplifting initiative, I am reminded that we are still at the beginning of the story of ECEC pedagogy in Canada. Critical questions are surfacing about the representation of diversity, inclusion, and difference in socio-pedagogic curriculum frameworks, particularly in relationship to the positioning of Indigenous pedagogies. The notion of incommensurability, in particular an "ethics of incommensurability" (Tuck & Yang, 2012), offers insight. In a critique of South African early childhood policy, Norma Rudolph (2017) outlines how well-intentioned efforts to address the poverty of Indigenous peoples by "adding on" Indigenous content to ECE curricula have failed because they do not address "fundamental issues of commensurability and hierarchies of knowledge that silence Indigenous perspectives and ways of being prevalent in different

communities" (p. 95). Speaking to the incommensurability of Indigenous and non-Indigenous world views, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) deepen our understanding, with their description of an ethic of incommensurability "which recognizes what is distinct," maintaining that Indigenous and colonial worldviews cannot always be "aligned or allied" (p. 28). Building on these ideas, Couture-Grondin (2018) wrote:

> Incommensurability 1) insists on spaces of knowledge that cannot be appropriated; 2) signals the impossibility of comparing and putting differences on a single scale; and 3) accepts misunderstanding as a problem that does not have to be resolved or reconciled. (p. 15)

> Socio-pedagogic frameworks offer an alternative to theme-based planning and prescriptive curricula. In our efforts to enact a co-constructed, locally and culturally situated, values-based pedagogy, we forget that curricula do not exist in isolation and that all of us remain "engulfed in neoliberal, and neocolonial thinking" (Tesar, 2015, p. 192). In *Troubling Settlerness in Early Childhood Curriculum Development,* Emily Ashton (2015) contended that "a social pedagogical approach creates an air of comfort rather than critique" (p. 93) and asked:

> What differences are irreducible? When might inclusion be best refused? How might taking up incommensurability contest the taken for granted assumptions underpinning inclusion and diversity rhetoric in early childhood curricula? (p. 82)

These are urgent and provocative questions for our pedagogy. We have an opportunity as well as an obligation to act (Johnson, 2021). What would it look like if we truly believed in Greenwood's (2020) vision that it is through children that a better world will be achieved? What if we follow Ashton's (2015) advice to "stay with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016) of incommensurability as a productive space, rather than trying to resolve differences? And to document children's struggles to make meaning of difference (Ashton, 2015, p. 91)? What would taking up an *ethic of incommensurability* look like in early childhood pedagogy?

Esther: Finding Our Place in the Story, and the Story is Not Finished …

I live and work on Treaty Four territory, within the Canadian prairies, the ancestral lands of the nêhiyawak, Anihšinápēk, Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota peoples, and the homeland of the Métis/Michif Nation. My father's side of the family arrived as settlers from England and Holland and have been in Canada for generations. My mother arrived in this country as a young teacher from Scotland. I am a first generation Canadian on her side. I grew up in the Northwest Territories amongst the Dene and Inuit peoples. Western narratives were all that I learned as a young child. I distinctly remember seeing brown faces looking out of windows on separate buses headed to St. Patrick's school. As an adult, I now understand where they were going each day. At this moment, I live less than 100 km from where Treaty Four was signed in 1874. As a white settler, I am learning my place in this story.

During the lockdown, when our project began and our first webinar was quickly and intentionally organized, I found myself struggling with a lack of childcare. At that moment in time, I was propelled into the role of juggling parenting, homeschooling, scholarship, and teaching. As my children were underfoot, the narrative of childcare being an essential service rang true for me, but there is more to this story. Feeling isolated in my own work, I saw that my children were experiencing this as well. Their friends and educators were now faces on a screen. Their interactions with people were from a distance, strained, and tension filled. Relationships have

changed for all of us. Children's connections to their ECEC friends, educators, and spaces have been disrupted. However, disrupted relationships run deeper than the pandemic. In Canada, our violent colonial history has created and continues to create disrupted oppressive relationships (Little Bear, 2000).

Writing about the incommensurability of Indigenous and colonial worldviews as a non-Indigenous person, Morgan Johnson (2021) argued that an ethic of incommensurability calls on White settlers not to explain or try to resolve differences or to be bystanders to the conversation, but rather to stand aside, using their position of privilege to open a space for listening to Indigenous worldviews as distinct. Johnson (2021) went on to explain that White settlers are obligated through an ethic of incommensurability to understand who we are in the story of settler colonization, "locating ourselves within a narrative without undermining the ontologically distinct experience of the other" (p. 42) because "we are all part of the story of destruction and/or theft of land, but we have to understand who we are in that story. Some of us may be victims and some may be beneficiaries, but we are all part of the story" (p. 46). What does this mean as we rebuild relationships, as we work towards truth and reconciliation, and as we create a national ECEC system across Canada? The pandemic has perhaps provided an opportunity to move forward differently, and not return back to the way things were (Henderson & Little Bear, 2021).

It has now been over 2 years since we experienced global lockdowns; however, we continue to struggle with the ongoing impacts from the pandemic. As we emerge from this collective experience and with the federal announcement of $30 billion dollars for the ECEC sector, there is an added motivation to move forward intentionally and collectively. Braidotti (2020) pointed out that there is a need "to start by questioning who 'we' might be to begin with" (p. 467). With the notion of ethics of incommensurability and who we are in the story as a starting place, I share a profound experience in one ECEC program, in which children and adults grapple with who we are in the story of the land and how we shall live in relationship to one another.

It was the last day of school. My son, his kindergarten teacher, and his classmates were preparing to share their land acknowledgement during a ceremony for the grand opening of their Food Forest a co-created garden project. A permaculture expert helped with the preparation of the soil. A grandfather taught them how to plant tobacco in a good way. A Cree teacher helped name their Food Forest. The educator explained that she attended professional development courses to learn about local plants, stating that "when I saw some buffalo berries and sea buckthorn growing by the Creek, I knew we could grow those" (personal communication, December, 5th, 2022). The children worked with dirt and seeds, plants and water. The creation of this garden took many months. The garden was full of edible plants that the children and their teacher had learned to care for; plants that would thrive in this particular place, had been carefully chosen. There was excitement in the air, as this was one of the first face-to-face events that the school had held since the pandemic began. Smiling maskless faces were everywhere; being outdoors allowed a sense of freedom from the safety protocols that everyone had become accustomed to. Parents and family members were chatting and mingling, reconnecting or meeting for the first time. The children lined up in front of their garden, a beautiful painted mural behind them, a co-created project in which every student in the school had contributed. The ceremony began as families looked on, every child participating, hands and bodies fully engaged with actions and words; words that traveled through their bodies as they moved their arms in unison, speaking to each other, the earth, and their families. The teacher, her colleagues, and the children had co-created text, illustrations, and actions for their land acknowledgement. This was an ongoing process intended to be meaningful

and accessible to the youngest children in the school. Each afternoon the children practiced the words and actions. Each day the children and adults lived out these phrases as they walked in nature, planted and cared for their garden, learned Cree words and phrases, experienced the story of the land, and walked and learned alongside Indigenous Elders and community members. The children were given space and time to experience and express their relationships to land, humans, and nature.

The following land acknowledgement book is being shared with permission from the teacher. All the words have been included as co-created by the children and adults. However, only a few of the beautiful illustrations are being shared where appropriate.
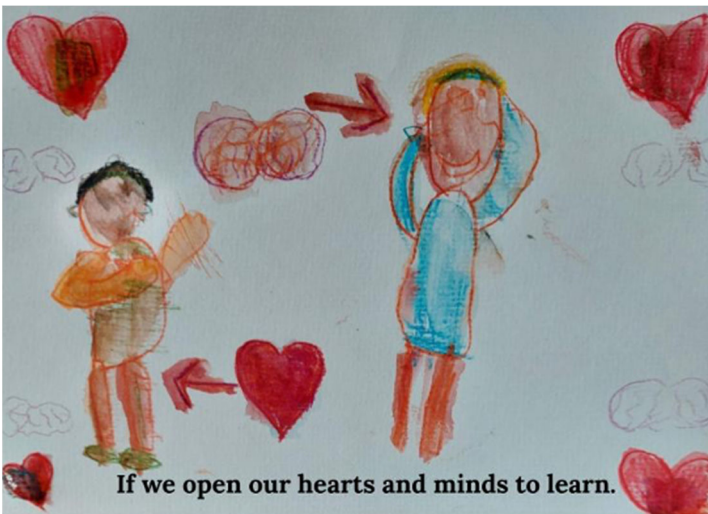
Figure 1

Land Acknowledgement Book Cover
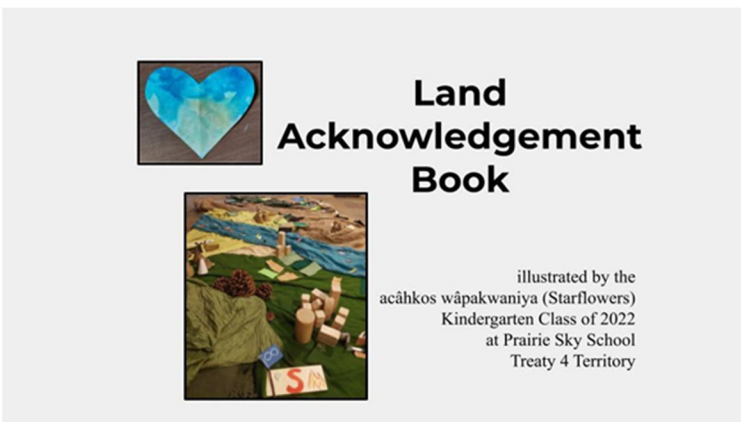
Figure 2

We Know the Land We Live On is Alive

Figure 3

If We Open Our Hearts and Minds to Learn

If we open our hearts and minds to learn.

Note. The text reads: "Mother Earth and the first land protectors have stories and teachings to share with us, if we open our hearts and our minds to learn. We take care of this place alongside our relatives the nêhiyawak, Anihšināpēk, Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota Nations and later, the Métis, settlers and then newcomers. Together, we are Treaty Four People."

Figure 4

We Are All Part of the Story of the Land

We are all part of the Story of the Land,
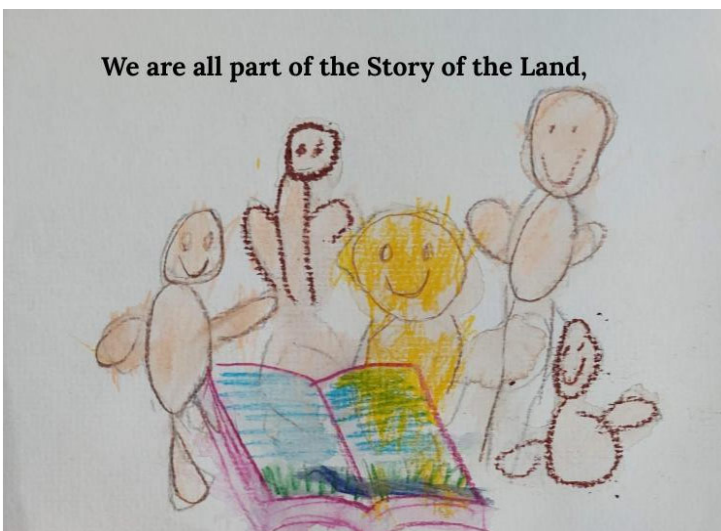
Note. The text reads: "That means that together, we are part of a living promise to protect Mother Earth along with the water, the plants, the flyers, the swimmers, the crawlers, and each other. We are all part of the Story of the Land …"

Figure 5

And the Story is Not Finished
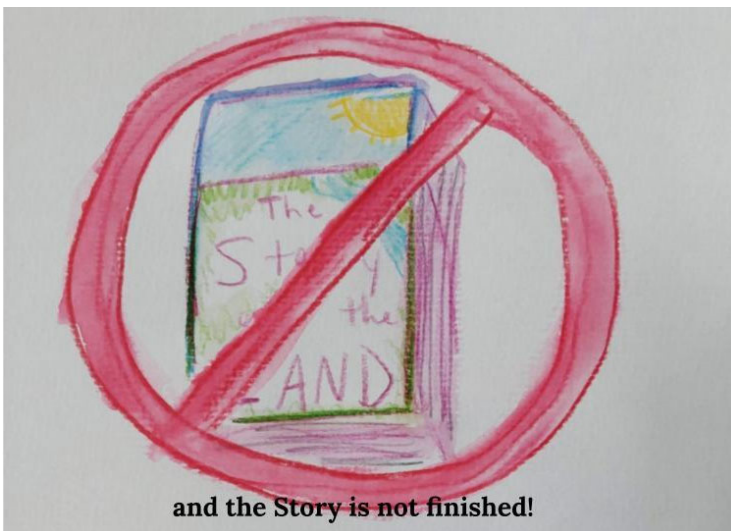
Note. The text reads: "AND THE STORY IS NOT FINISHED … We choose to heal the land and the broken relationships here so that everyone can learn and grow in harmony with nature and each other for as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the river flows."

While I watched my son recite the land acknowledgment on that hot summer day at the end of his kindergarten year, I was filled with hope. Seeing children as active participants in the story of the land and providing those opportunities within ECEC programs, moves beyond current narratives of ECEC as an investment in children as future workers, as a jump start for the economy, or as an essential service for women's equality. This alternative narrative brings forth the importance of relationships, for children, for adults, for land. Could these actions and this text be a way to envision how we shall live (Tuck, 2018a) within ECEC? Perhaps this is an example of the possibilities that the incommensurability of Indigenous and colonial worldviews can offer to ECEC pedagogies (Ashton, 2015) and how it can look if we take this "incommensurability seriously as a pedagogical starting point" (Ashton, 2015, p. 91).

My son's kindergarten teacher reimagined her place in the story of the land; she troubled her teaching practice and decentered her settler knowledge, creating space for the knowledge of Elders, community and the land, building relationships that cross boundaries (Henderson & Little Bear, 2021) and impact learning. She also worked alongside children in authentic and productive ways. In our first webinar, Greenwood (2020), referring to her dream of a world in which all children are free from oppression, powerfully stated, "Children are not just passive recipients but that this better world will be achieved through them" (1:58–2:06). Watching the children live out their land acknowledgement embodies what Greenwood has expressed. Children, when provided with the opportunity, are active participants in their story of the land. Following Tuck's (2009) provocation to move from a damage-centred focus in research to one of desire while bringing what we have learned about damage along with us, I see hope in this moment.

This brings me back to a recent conversation our group had when Monica asked: "What is the thread of hope that runs through this work?" We paused in silence, thinking about the pockets of hope exposed within the seemingly crumbling systems cascading around us. Then we spoke …

We see hope in the amazing work some educators are doing. We see hope in the underground, behind the scenes work of policy influencers and makers, passionate about universally available childcare in Canada. In spite of the persistence of post-colonial practices, we see hope in the cracks in colonialism. We see hope in young children.

In Closing … Shifting From Damage to Desire

In this article our intent has been to narrate change in ECEC in Canada specifically as we experienced it in the context of pandemic as provocation, and within the *ECE Narratives* project. In questioning the potency of dominant narratives, our minor stories (Taylor, 2020) took on new meaning as a productive starting point for moving our thinking from damage to desire. As we engaged in conversation about alternative narratives and new texts, we were able to co-create a bricolage of minor stories. We became more fully aware of the deeply embedded and damaging nature of colonialism and how paralyzing it can be, and of the possibilities of moving beyond— from damage to desire. In Monica's narrative of change there was a movement from "us" and "them" to "we," a recognition that there are no short-cuts in system building, that the search for one right narrative is naïve, and that we cannot let complexity inertia become an excuse for inaction. In Pam's narrating of change, she considers our responsibilities as Treaty People and the spaces created by particular Indigenous texts centring Indigenous knowledges, languages, and cultures. These texts shift from damage to desire while presenting the possibility of creating new Indigenous futures, and new ways of being for White settlers that focus on the taking up of incommensurability as a pedagogical starting point (Ashton, 2015) for ourselves and the larger life endeavours in which we are engaged. Jane narrates the ways in which working with curriculum frameworks opens a space for educators to value their own work, and brings forward thinking that positions incommensurability as a productive space in relationship to ECEC curricular goals of diversity, inclusion, and difference. In Esther's narrating of change, she sees hope in the way that one educator was able to co-create opportunities through which children's ways of knowing were valued, local knowledge was honoured, and the agency of the land was acknowledged. Through intentional and caring practice children and adults were able to work towards finding their place in the story of the land.

Because of the pandemic we had extended opportunities to experience movement of thought through conversation in an extraordinary moment of change for ECEC in Canada. Conversation, community, co-creation, and co-authorship were made possible through the use of various digital platforms. The crisis in ECEC, made more visible by the pandemic, reframed the scope of our research. Our "throwntogetherness" in a pandemic moment inspired us to bring people together for a broader public conversation in a virtual space, to story a multi-faceted bricolage, narrating change in ECEC in Canada.

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[1] We use the term ECEC throughout the paper to be consistent with the terminology of the OECD. In Canada ECEC is also commonly referred to as early learning and child care (ELCC) in the context of the frameworks.

[2] The Alberta framework was first published in 2014 as *Play Participation, and Possibilities: An Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Alberta*. In 2018, it was re-issued as *Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework*.

"With Fear in Our Bellies": A Pan-Canadian Conversation With Early Childhood Educators

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Abstract

The highly gendered, classed, and racialized early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce in Canada labours under exploitative conditions: low status and pay and lack of recognition. Early childhood educators have recently faced two additional contextual shifts that further complicate their daily work and practice: the COVID-19 pandemic and the Federal announcement of funding for a national universal childcare system. This paper is the result of a broader study that set out to uncover the innovative changes and practices in ECEC policy, practice, and pedagogy enacted across provincial/territorial boundaries in diverse communities across Canada with the hope of contributing to the ongoing conversation informing the development of a new system of ECEC in Canada. Qualitative data for this paper were derived from solicited photo collages and a video-taped webinar conversation with early childhood educators, responding to the following question: "What does it mean to be an early childhood educator at this moment?" Viewed through a critical lens, the findings elucidated four intersecting narratives: loss, sacrifice, adaptation, and hope. This paper contributes to ongoing discussions about the fluid and contextual nature of professionalism within ECEC. As we attempt to mobilize for transformative change and social action in the development of a competent ECEC system in Canada, it is imperative to provide space for the lived experiences, critical insights, and interwoven story lines offered by educators and children.

Keywords: early childhood education, early childhood educators, professionalism, care, COVID-19

"With Fear in Our Bellies": A Pan-Canadian Conversation With Early Childhood Educators

In spite of decades of advocacy and a number of intermittent stops and starts, until recently there has not been any sustained movement toward a national coordinated approach to early childhood education and care (ECEC) services in Canada (Bezanson, 2018). ECEC in Canada has been described as a patchwork of unplanned and often inadequate services across most jurisdictions; including a mix of regulated and unregulated, for-profit and non-profit programs (Friendly et al., 2016), thus negatively impacting families' access to high-quality, affordable childcare (Langford et al., 2016). In spite of modest increases, there are only regulated spaces for fewer than a third of Canadian children aged five and under, which disproportionately affects newcomer and low-income families (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2021; Findlay et al., 2021; Massing et al., 2020). Concomitant with the high demand for spaces, fees continue to be high, particularly in locations with market/demand-based fees charged by for-profit centres rather than supply side fees set and funded by the provincial government (Macdonald & Friendly, 2021).[1]

Situated within this context, a group of academics from eight universities across Canada conceptualized the Sketching Narratives of Movement Towards Comprehensive and Competent Early Childhood Educational Systems Across Canada project, which received knowledge mobilization funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada in March 2020. The overarching purpose of our project was to learn about the innovative changes and practices in ECEC policy, practice, and pedagogy that have been enacted across provincial/territorial boundaries in diverse communities in conversation with educators, policy makers, advocates, academics, and knowledge keepers. Their expertise, as operationalized through existing and emerging local change narratives, was shared during a series of webinar events and then disseminated via our project website: https://ecenarratives.opened.ca. It was our hope that these narratives would inform the eventual development of a universal, competent[2] system of public ECEC in Canada. Early in the project, however, the ECEC landscape shifted again in two significant ways: first, by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020), and second, by the Canadian federal government's announcement on September 23, 2020 that it would be striking agreements with the provinces and territories to create and fund a national 10-dollar-a-day childcare system (Government of Canada, 2021).

In view of these changes, we immediately sought to amplify the voices of frontline early childhood educators from urban and rural communities across the country to better understand their experiences during a time of unprecedented upheaval in the sector. We held a pan-Canadian webinar conversation on November 21, 2020. This paper will explore the narratives which emerged when nine early childhood educators from across Canada were invited to share their lived experiences in response to prompts emerging from the broad question "what does it mean to be an early childhood educator at this time?" We foreground the voices of these educators as expressed through four interwoven and intersecting narratives; loss, sacrifice, adaptation and hope.

Literature Review

ECEC Workforce in Canada

It is widely recognized that a skilled, professionally prepared, and well-compensated ECEC workforce is critical to the positive life trajectories of children (McDonald et al., 2018), yet this goal has not yet been realized in the Canadian context. The ECEC workforce is decidedly gendered (more than 95% identify as women), economically disadvantaged, and culturally diverse with 33% being immigrants or non-permanent residents, and 5% from First Nations, Métis, or Inuit

backgrounds (Frank & Arim, 2021; Uppal & Savage, 2021). As in many countries, there is a distinct separation between teachers who work in school contexts and early childhood educators who are employed in preschools, childcare centres, and other early learning settings (Beach, 2013). Formal educational requirements for professional certification vary from province-to-province, ranging from a single orientation course to a post-secondary diploma. Although current figures indicate that 71% of Canadian educators have a post-secondary education (Uppal & Savage, 2021), they still earn substantially less than teachers in the school system with a Canadian median income of less than $20 an hour (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2021; McQuaig et al., 2022). The general lack of public respect for ECEC as a profession, reflected in the poor compensation offered, represents a longstanding barrier to educator recruitment and retention (McQuaig et al., 2022). Although the emergence of the pandemic did renew interest in childcare policy and its importance to the national economy (Smith, 2021), this emphasis did not translate to enhanced working conditions, but rather served to further exacerbate these workforce issues.

According to a national survey, the pandemic prompted an immediate shutdown of 92% of childcare services, and 71% of centres reported staff layoffs (Vickerson et al., 2022). Government responses varied between and within different jurisdictions depending on provincial and territorial funding policies (Friendly et al., 2021; Richardson et al., 2021). Many childcare programs were subsequently re-opened, though, to care for the children of essential workers and/or the general public (Uppal & Savage, 2021). Educators were then labelled as "essential workers" themselves, and were expected to quickly respond to new imposed health protections including social distancing, enhanced hygiene practices and health protocols, cohort size limits and, for some, a rapid transition to online learning. Smith (2021) noted that the burden of sustaining unclear and sometimes conflicting governmental strictures and guidelines was downloaded on centres, leading to inequalities within the field. According to one Quebec study, educators working on-site reported lower levels of well-being and higher stress levels as compared with educators who were working remotely (Bigras et. al., 2021). Participants in Smith's (2021) study in British Columbia likewise spoke of high levels of anxiety and stress due to the continued lack of resources and their concern for keeping the children safe. They noted a stark contrast in the acknowledgement of their efforts versus those of other essential workers who were celebrated by the public early in the pandemic. Vickerson et al.'s (2022) national survey indicated that educators were discouraged when they were not prioritized for vaccines, which they perceived as further evidence that they were undervalued and unappreciated. Next, we review the literature on professionalism to further contextualize the nuances around educators' marginalized positioning.

Professionalism

Varied and contested constructions of the professional ECEC educator are evidenced by the perceived divisions between the educative and care functions of their work (Harwood et al., 2013; Moss, 2006; Osgood, 2010; Van Laere et al., 2012). Neoliberal accountability and standardized quality measures reflect a techno-rationalist privileging of the educative role of the early childhood professional bolstered by Eurocentric child development theories (Cannella, 1997). In contrast, care work has been associated with domesticity and femininity, rendering it "natural" and positioning educators as mother substitutes rather than as knowledgeable and skilled professionals (Langford, 2019; Osgood, 2006; Taggart, 2016). The concept of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) compels educators to manage any outward appearance of work-related emotions in the professional setting. In the ECEC setting, displays of affect or emotion in the classroom are deemed inappropriate even though work with children is complex, relational, and messy (Madrid & Dunn-

Kenney, 2010). Paradoxically, educators are often envisioned as "unprofessional" when referencing the emotional aspects of their work, yet positioning their labour in the sphere of care justifies their low salaries and poor working conditions (Colley, 2006; Moyles, 2001). Recognizing that love, emotion, passion, and emotional intelligence are integral to work with young children has prompted some scholars to advocate for ways to mobilize them as political tools to enhance educators' professional standing (Dalli, 2008; Fairchild & Mikuska, 2021; Harwood et al., 2013).

Recent perspectives on professionalism further attend to the shifting, fluid, and contextual nature of the educators' work amidst these competing, universalist discourses. Dalli et al. (2012) defined professionalism as, "something whose meaning appears to be embedded in local contexts, visible in relational interactions, ethical and political in nature, and involving multiple layers of knowledge, judgement, and influences from the broader societal context" (p. 6). Studies have shown that educators do not blindly adhere to the dominant discourse, but rather reconceptualize their practice by drawing on their own practical and cultural knowledges to respond to the specific children in their care. For instance, Fenech et al. (2010) posited that educators exercise agency in problematizing the dominant "professional habitus" (Urban, 2008, as cited in Fenech et al., 2010) through reflection, collaboration, and meaning-making. Morris (2021) and Page (2018) found that educators subverted externally imposed rules and regulations when they believed that physical affection and relational care were necessary and beneficial. Immigrant educators in Massing's (2018) study likewise defied normative mealtime practices when they were concerned for a child's well-being. Therefore, educators do disrupt normative ways of being a professional as they negotiate with their own beliefs and judgments in relation to localized, contextual factors. The pandemic, however, represented a significant shift in the landscape of practice.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is situated within a framework of critical theory, which has an emancipatory goal of disrupting the systemic barriers which contribute to the disempowerment of marginalized groups in order to effect change (Apple, 2004; Darder et al., 2009). Educational institutions such as ECEC programs function as sites reproducing neoliberal, dominant ideologies and socialization goals (Giroux, 1997). During the pandemic, educators were designated as essential workers to facilitate the continued participation of parents in the paid labour market. This language hinted at possible disruptions to existing power structures as manifested in the inadequate pay, recognition, working conditions experienced by educators. Yet emerging workplace realities required educators to respond to unprecedented pandemic conditions in a fragile non-system with a still-underpaid and undervalued status preserved by an economic, capitalist discourse. Educators were also bound to new, externally-imposed public health and safety strictures, thus further eroding their professional autonomy.

This project is grounded in the contention that the planning and development of a national plan for childcare must foreground the perspectives of those on the front line working with children and families. The knowledge mobilization activities became a way to enhance the collective development of *conscientizaçao* or critical social consciousness through engagement in dialogue and reflection (Darder et al., 2009; Freire, 1990; McLaren, 2007). The webinars functioned as dialogical spaces wherein viewers, facilitators, and panelists learned from one another; fostering a deeper understanding of the realities of working in ECEC, in the past as well as in the present moment, to develop co-intentionality as related to possibilities for social action (Freire, 1990). The website was constructed to advance a space in which to engage in further conversation. Zembylas (2013, 2021) invited us to interrogate how emotion and affect, dimensions embedded within

(post)traumatic contexts, are multifaceted, critical elements in any struggle for change. These spaces, then, should allow interlocutors to dwell within the discomfort, applying emotional effort to listening to one another and discussing both "the potential and the harm that troubled knowledge stimulates" (Zembylas, 2013, p. 184). According to Zembylas (2013), the mutual experience of mourning and loss, and concomitant feelings of vulnerability, can foster a sense of connection. By centring the voices and experiences of educators typically marginalized or silenced in the dominant discourse of ECEC, therefore, we hoped to co-create a counter-hegemonic space of resistance while simultaneously documenting educators' micro-acts of resistance in practice (Darder et al., 2009; Giroux, 1997; Zembylas, 2021).

Methodology

Consistent with the overall project goal of bringing together ECEC policy makers, educators, activists, and researchers to create communities of inquiry, we planned a series of three bilingual webinars with the following groups of panelists: policy experts/academics, early childhood educators, and international experts. Originally intended to be broadcast live to in-person groups gathering on campuses across the country, the pandemic shifted our conversations to Zoom and participants utilized the chat function to engage with one another and with the panelists. In this paper, we focus on the second webinar, a 2-hour event held on November 21, 2020. The agenda included a territorial acknowledgement, introductions, discussion questions and responses, a question-and-answer period, and closing comments. The panel was bilingually moderated by two research team members, and a professional translator provided live captioning in French. The recorded webinar was then reviewed by one of the team members for accuracy in French captioning, uploaded to YouTube, and linked to the project website. We also invited the national ECEC community to share their thoughts via photo collages posted on our project website.

Participants

The participants were selected using convenience sampling with the goal of assembling a pan-Canadian panel with diverse representation in terms of experience, gender, geographical location, role, and ethnocultural background. Members of our project team reached out to contacts in our networks to locate early childhood educators who would be interested in participating in a panel discussion. All of the participants were fluent in English, though they could participate in the discussions using either English ($n = 8$) or French ($n = 1$) according to their preferences. Table 1 summarizes our participant information:

Table 1

Participant Information

Name	Location	Role
Janice	Vancouver, British Columbia	Educator in an inclusive education centre
Daniel	Vancouver, British Columbia	Substitute educator in two childcare centres and ECEC college instructor

Christina	Northwest Territories	Junior kindergarten/kindergarten/grade one teacher
Brittany	Edmonton, Alberta	Manager of an ECEC lab school attached to a university
Safaa	Regina, Saskatchewan	Preschool teacher in a program for low-income families
Mallory	Six Nations territory	Educator in an on-reserve childcare centre until the pandemic
Song	Toronto, Ontario	Educator at an ECEC drop-in centre, switched to remote delivery tutoring during pandemic
Véronique	Montreal, Quebec	Educator at a childcare centre
Kristina	New Brunswick	Educator and assistant director

Methods

Procedures

An organizational meeting was held with participants 1 week prior to the live webinar to meet each other, gain familiarity with the digital platform, and co-develop the questions. The educators generated questions related to their work with children and families during the pandemic, different ECEC narratives circulating during the pandemic, additional narratives that need to be told, and possibilities for meaningful change. At the meeting, the educators were given an opportunity to view the photo-collage submissions and were asked to select one which resonated with them to speak to during the webinar.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this paper were derived from the video transcriptions and artistic data in the form of photo collages. Each of the panel participants signed a media release agreeing that we could record the webinar and share it publicly on YouTube and be linked to our project website. "The Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans" (Government of Canada, 2018) would classify this recording as being in the public domain, thus the participants would have "no reasonable expectation of privacy." With their permission, their full names were included in the presentation and publicly available video. Yet, we were cognizant of the ethical tensions around the subsequent use of the data for this paper, acknowledging that "expectations of privacy are ambiguous, contested, and changing" (Markham, 2012, p. 336, as cited in Patterson, 2018). We consequently asked participants to let us know if they objected to their comments being included in this paper and if there was anything they wanted to add, change, or delete. Participants who shared photo collages signed a release.

Three members of the research team reviewed the webinar transcript and collages individually, doing multiple readings line-by-line, jotting down notes to generate possible descriptive codes, and writing analytic memos (Gibbs, 2007; Saldaña, 2012). We then met as a

group to refine the codes and define the parameters for each one. Individual team members engaged in focused coding, reviewing the transcript carefully to apply codes, and then comparing their work with others. Finally, similar codes were combined to formulate broad themes which are shared as narratives in the section that follows.

Findings

The themes are organized into overlapping and intertwined narratives, including loss, sacrifice, adaptation, and hope. We intentionally highlight educators' voices to value and centre the important personal and professional insights, feelings, decisions, and desires that they risked sharing with us and with the audience.

Narratives of Loss

What we are describing as "narratives of loss" was manifested primarily as educators' overwhelming concern about losing their connections to and relationships with children and families, but also as a loss of certainty and professional autonomy in their day-to-day work. This photo collage submission (Figure 1) portrays the overarching narrative of loss and fragments of thoughts and feelings evoked by the new reality of working and living with COVID-19.

Figure 1

"We Keep Our Distance" Photo Collage

In response to this image (Figure 1), Brittany was reminded of a child telling her that they could not spend Christmas with their grandparents due to the introduction of limits on social gatherings. She said:

> I was really very emotional when [that] happened and I am still emotional about it now and this image brought that to my attention…it is a reminder once again about the responsibility I feel to ensure that I am doing everything I can for quality engaging programming and keeping it safe so that these children do get to see their grandparents again.

The loss of daily and in-person connections resulted in feelings of sadness and grief as educators mourned their disappearing and diminished connections, relationships, and communities. Song stated:

> Being an early childhood educator during this time is not easy and especially our job in general. We are a person who develop community, a person who support the whole family, a person who cares for those vulnerable children, right? At this point I think the most challenging thing for myself is how do we keep and stay connected with family? Those meaningful and valued connections become remotely [*sic*], become two metres apart, become almost impossible in some centres.

He recalls one incident that made him particularly emotional:

> A girl's dad sent me a message, [saying] "Song, it's not fair that the kids get to see you but you don't get to see the kids." So, he sent me a photo of [his child] touching the [computer] screen, trying to touch my face. That made me cry.

Enforced separation and distancing thus evoked an emotional response, emphasizing the tensions between emotional labour and professionalism. Educators were expected to perform emotional work, while remaining professionally detached, though Song's example underscores how difficult it was to cope with loss while being expected to maintain restraint and composure. This emotional toll, alongside an expectation to act professionally, was evident in their narratives. Educators worried that the imposed health protections would affect the nature of the care they normally provided and what that would mean for children. As Brittany described: "The stress and the worry and the compliance that sits on educators' shoulders is so heavy right now."

As the ground shifted beneath their feet, some educators spoke to their loss of a sense of certainty, a mourning of a previous sense of self and how they used to do things. For example, in one photo collage an educator wrote: "Being an ECE means to me happiness, joy, patience, and a good sense of humour. In this current moment, I am feeling lonely in a big world and unable to teach children in a way I am used to."

We observed educators actively negotiating and revisiting what it meant for them as professionals if they could not practice in ways that mattered to them. They described having to implement extraordinary changes to practice, changes that prioritized increased hygiene practices over pedagogy and required increased surveillance of children's play and interactions. As Safaa described:

> So many things in our classrooms have changed, for example, now [we] only allow for two or three children playing at the same station at the same time. We had to cancel many big activities to help children maintain social distance, [and] we have also stopped encouraging children to share toys or personal things. We also had a big challenge of getting children to wear face masks…that was so hard.

Their words suggested how uncomfortable and constraining practice in a pandemic felt; however, they had little choice but to comply with imposed directives for the sake of children's safety. Therefore, they were "simultaneously resenting and enacting the selfless role presented to them" (Taggart, 2011, p. 90).

Narratives of Sacrifice

When the role of the educator is disproportionately positioned as a maternalistic, custodial one, it implies *sacrifice*; giving up something (or oneself) for the sake of another (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2022). Early in the pandemic, educators were ostensibly anointed as essential workers, as discussed by Safaa: "We kept our centres open…to welcome the children of frontline workers, including doctors and nurses and police officers." Yet it soon became evident that, unlike other essential workers who garnered wage increases or applause on the streets, the systemic conditions and barriers that have functioned to undervalue educators' labour were to be upheld. They were expected to carry on for the sake of the economy without adequate financial compensation or respect for their work, while enduring additional challenges. Daniel described being told they were essential while "being treated like we're disposable."

Echoing a common sentiment, Kristina asserted that surrendering their own sense of safety for the sake of families was deserving of some form of recognition:

> Like we are there providing this service, this job, and it needs to be valued ... it's not just so you can go do the more important work and we'll just be over here doing this [providing childcare] ... and the fact that financially we are not compensated nearly enough for what we do and the vulnerable position we are putting ourselves in ... remaining open so that families can go out to work ... there is a huge disconnect there on what does that actually mean [to be an essential worker].

Passion and love for one's work is not sufficient to pay the bills, Janice argued, particularly in expensive cities like Vancouver, where working two or three jobs is a necessity.

Integral to this narrative of sacrifice is the notion that educators will put the needs of others above their own, maintaining their professional standards even as working conditions shifted and demands increased. At a time when little was known about the virus, they forwent their own sense of security and well-being for the sake of the children, as shared by Véronique:

On s'est rendu au travail, dans une ville fantôme … la peur au ventre, on savait pas à quoi on avait affaire, c'était quoi le virus, ... est-ce qu'on allait tomber malade, est ce qu'on allait travailler avec des enfants qui sont malades ... Nous avons mis toutes nos incertitudes, nos peurs, notre incompréhension de côté, puis on a été travailler sans hésiter. ...

We were on our way to work, walking through a ghost town … with fear in our bellies wondering what kind of virus we were dealing with, … were we going to get sick or the children we work with …We put all of our uncertainties, our fears, our lack of understanding aside and we went to work without hesitation. …

Être éducatrice s'est être épuisée par les tâches connexes qui s'ajoutent et savoir que le moindre manque de vigilance ou de patience de notre part va avoir un impact sur les enfants.

Being an educator means being exhausted by the numerous related tasks being added and knowing that the slightest lack of vigilance or patience on our part is going to have an impact on the children.

The following photo collage (Figure 2) is symbolic of this tension between sustaining their dedication to the children and taking care of themselves:

Figure 2

"Burning on While on the Edge of Burning Out" Photo Collage
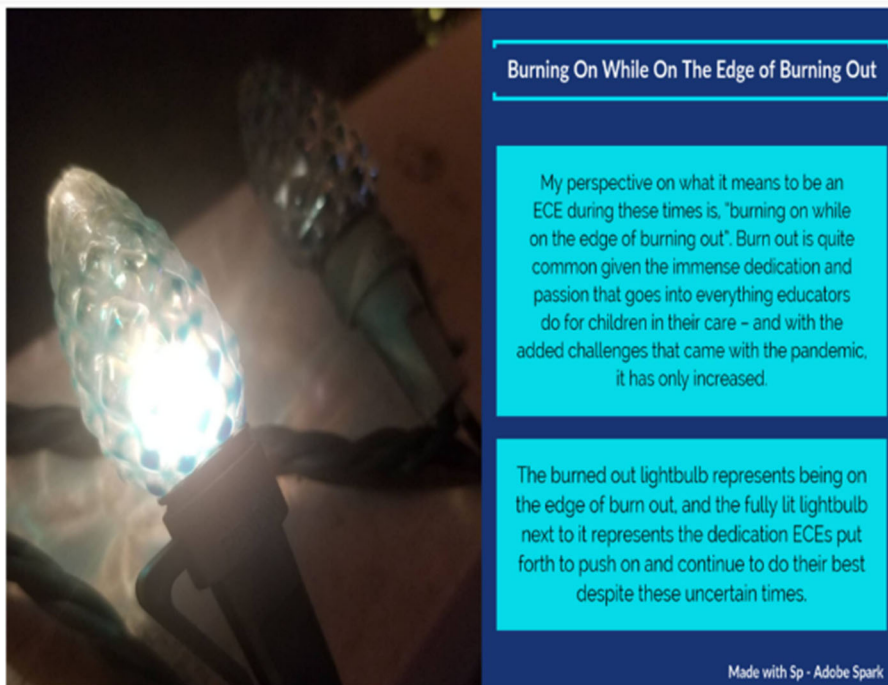
Educators were thus compelled to suppress their own fears and emotions to maintain safe conditions for the children, while applying their own professional expertise to the task of adapting to a new and constantly shifting set of policies and procedures.

Narratives of Adaptation

During the pandemic, educators had to adapt to a crisis of unknown proportions and the changing measures that it implied. They described finding new ways of working in ECEC while navigating professional practice in a constantly shifting context. In spite of the constraints, workload intensification, and their own fears, the educators maintained their dedication and commitment, persevering in their work with the children. As Véronique explained:

Nous avons continué à le faire même quand le contexte de pandémie nous demandait de plus en plus de travail et de vigilance. Pendant le déconfinement progressif, nous avons dû nous adapter à des charges de désinfection, de bulles sociales, de manque de personnel en plus de notre mandat habituel de pédagogie, de planification et de soutien aux enfants.	We continued to do so even when the pandemic context demanded more and more work and vigilance from us. During the lifting of lockdown measures, we had to adapt to lots of disinfection, social bubbles, lack of personnel in addition to our usual mandate of pedagogy, planning, and support for children.

Educators admitted that they were faced with unprecedented challenges that left them feeling unprepared and needing to learn and implement new skills and strategies. During the mandated program closures, they reflected on ways to prepare children for their eventual return to the childcare program. They invented various means to stay connected with children, families, and staff, including shifting to eLearning platforms; holding zoom meetings; streaming live story time;

and creating videos, websites, and FaceBook pages. Moreover, some implemented weekly phone calls to children's homes; held driving parades; shifted to outdoor dismissal; organized socially distanced outdoor gatherings and celebrations; as well as delivered activity packages, meals, or food hampers. All these examples illustrated the enormous amount of energy and creativity in devising strategies and pedagogical practices as they attempted to minimize and normalize the conditions imposed by the pandemic.

Another form of adaptation that emerged from our analyses as educators endeavoured to approach the pandemic from a positive perspective, citing it as an opportunity for reflection and professional regeneration. Mallory summed up this notion as follows:

> As an ECE, I believe it is our responsibility to challenge ourselves and to expand our own learning and to adapt to the new experiences and really try to take this as a learning opportunity to better ourselves and to better our practice.

The photo collage (Figure 3) which follows implies that educators were committed to making the best of their new work reality:

Figure 3

"Making Lemonade Out of Lemons" Photo Collage

Christina's reaction to the collage similarly suggested optimism:

> Although we don't necessarily get to have the same experiences we've had in the past or get to do things the same way, it doesn't mean that we can't create new experiences and still find new ways to learn, adventure, and explore, and adhere to the restrictions we all face ... [while] making new memories.

Brittany also conveyed positivity when she described how the pandemic reaffirmed the importance of listening to children and capturing the moment. She said, "We need to be recording ... [so we can] say we moved out on the other end of this over here in this new space and that's what it was like." She then concluded, "The children are speaking to us through their play and it's our job to listen."

A shift in professional role is articulated by Song when he talks about his newly learned ability to navigate online platforms (Figure 4).

Figure 4

"How Many Tabs/Apps Can an ECE Fit on One Screen?" Photo Collage

How many tabs/apps can an ECE fit on one screen?

Song explained how the pandemic brought many challenges and with it the necessity to learn new skills. He described how the ECEC community was determined to learn them in order to stay connected. To him, the fact that educators "jumped right into virtual learning without knowing anything" showed strength and he proclaimed himself to be "so proud to be a part of this community." His sense of pride translates into a desire to do better, a hopeful look to the future, which we identified as the final narrative.

Narratives of Hope

Freire (1994) asserted, "Without a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle. But, without the struggle, hope, as an ontological need, dissipates, loses its bearings, and turns into hopelessness" (p. 9). Ahmed (2015) added that hope "animates a struggle,"—in this case against the neoliberal agendas at play—and "carries us through when the terrain is difficult" (p. 2). Figure 5 elucidates how the despair, loss, and sacrifices of the pandemic and the current conditions in the sector are also accompanied by hope for possibilities and changing conditions.

Figure 5

"A New Generation of ECEs" Photo Collage
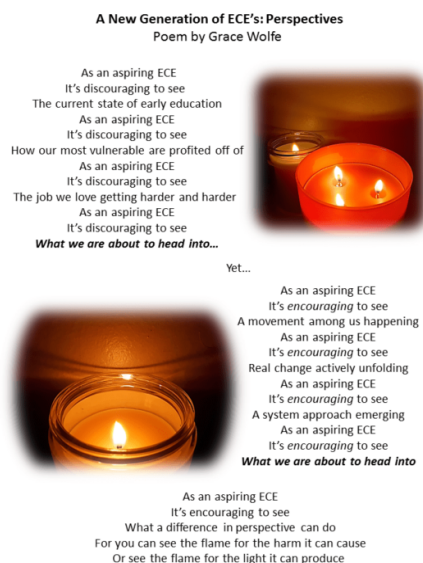
In describing feeling both discouraged and hopeful concurrently, the author of the poem in Figure 5 is not "glossing over" or erasing the emotional complexities of caring and responsibility, but instead is expressing a deeper reflective stance that exposes her awareness of how educator relationships are defined in relation to the broader political, social, and economic context (Cvetkovich, 2012, as cited in Zembylas et al., 2014). As Daniel acknowledged, hope is also derived in part from knowing they are being supported to enter a community with a long history of advocacy work undertaken by others who have come before (Friendly, 2009; Mahon, 2000; Pasolli, 2019):

> Mentors and people who I think are giants in the field have sort of taken me under their wing for a brief period of time and I only hope that I have the opportunity to do that as well. ... I think of it more as a marathon where you run as long as you can and carry the torch and then when you are tired hopefully pass the torch to someone else.

Educators shared the hope that the federal funding announcement would lead to educators being valued, recognized, and acknowledged for their crucial role "in shaping future generations" (Kristina). Societal and political recognition, they anticipated, could bring additional funding, staff, and resources to the sector, leading to improved compensation and working conditions. Their aspirations for change in terms of the dominant discourses were evident in comments such as Daniel's:

> Even if childcare doesn't affect you directly, it affects you indirectly. … When we continue to frame early childhood care and education only through the lens of the economy, we forget that, like Janice and me, [we] are working two jobs, you know, we forget that a lot of our ECEs are struggling to make ends meet.

The potential for a universal system also produced hope of a better future for families and children, as people "realize how important early childhood education is," in Song's words. Daniel sought to disrupt the overarching economic discourse: "I think when we frame it through the economy, and not through children's rights and women's rights and workers' rights, we miss a big part of why we are so important." Kristina emphasized, first and foremost, the significance of their work as advocates for young children who may not otherwise be heard:

> We spent years developing our expertise in this field and for us to be able to bring the voice ... of children in 0 to 5 [programs] to the political world and say, like listen, we're not just passing time. … Just for us to be able to continue to validate that and really drive it home— how crucial and how important it is that, you know, we live in the lives of these children.

Song invited educators to use social media and join coalitions and local organizations to help "consolidate our voice," when he affirmed, "I want ECE's to know the power of the profession, the power of advocating for the profession."

Brittany envisioned an entirely new narrative flourishing within local communities of practice: "The narrative of thriving early childhood communities is one that needs to be told … the story of children returning to cherished spaces after closures or restrictions." For her, the "magic and joy of children returning and seeing their educators and seeing their peers and reuniting after this time away is a beautiful story that speaks to what we do and that is a wonderful narrative that should be shared." Furthermore, she stated, "We can embrace the joy that is play in community. That's the narrative that is also unfolding alongside this [pandemic]. ... Children continue to play even though everything else is going on around them. I think this speaks to the level of work that ECEs are doing in the field." She continued, "So, it makes me hopeful, yeah the power of

relationships and being together in community." Brittany's new narrative presents as an example of resistance in practice (Darder et al., 2009), countering the hegemonic narrative of childcare as a means of salvaging the economy used by the government and promoted in the media as a rationale for a new system of childcare.

Discussion

For many educators, the pandemic was (and continues to be) a survival event; their previously well-known working environment suddenly became hostile, unwelcoming, and unfamiliar territory. In the already demanding context of their day-to-day work, COVID-19 enhanced the regulatory gaze governing educators via externally imposed regulations and requirements, which consequently led to workload intensification as well as a heightened awareness of the physically and emotionally risky nature of work, as they went "to work with fear in our bellies" for their own safety and that of their family members. The educators' sense of professional autonomy or control over their workplace conditions and practices was thus subsumed by immovable and indisputable public health orders, seemingly leaving little space for them to draw on their own professional judgements. Ahmed (2015) theorized that articulations of love, grief, and mourning are intensified with the experience of loss. The educators' stories spoke to their attempts to make meaning of their predicament as they mourned the way things once were and endeavoured to figure out what it meant for them as professionals if, as van Groll and Kummen (2021) noted, practice in the pandemic generated pedagogical and ethical tensions. As in other contexts, they especially grieved the loss of community and connection (Swadener et al., 2020). Their experiences of loss were inextricably linked to emotionality even though overt expressions of feeling have been deemed inappropriate and unprofessional in the techno-rationalist discourse (Osgood, 2010).

During the pandemic, the educators have been labouring under an increased culture of accountability that has further advanced governmental centralized control over practice in local contexts through the imposition of health and safety measures that constructed childcare centres as "safe" in order to keep them open (Osgood, 2010). Since the expectation of ensuring children's safety was delegated to educators and centres, they were forced to assume increased responsibility without the corresponding recognition. Educators were ambivalent towards the new label of *essential workers*, as they felt they had been ignored, neglected, and sacrificed for "the sake of the economy." The precarious nature of their work combined with their low pay and status fostered the exploitative conditions for what Tronto (2013) referred to as *privileged irresponsibility*, wherein the privileged could opt out of caring roles to pursue more lucrative economic activities while ignoring the fears and hardships experienced by educators/carers (Zembylas et al., 2014). Swadener et al. (2020) have asserted that "repairing this deeply fractured system requires the dismantling of the systems of oppression that have reinforced the disrespect and devaluation of the women (and men) who have *always* been essential" (p. 317). It was disheartening to them that even the pandemic did not legitimize or make their important work visible and, as in other studies, the additional worries and stress left them vulnerable to burnout, post-traumatic stress disorder, or mental health issues (Bigras et al., 2021; Gomes et al., 2021). Educators sustained their care for others even at a time when they themselves were not being cared for but rather were construed as expendable and disposable.

While confronted by many challenges, though, these educators, like many across Canada, pivoted, learned, transitioned, and reflected on their new roles, showing persistence and resilience in adapting to the crisis. Illustrative of the potential that troubled knowledges can stimulate (Zembylas et al., 2014), they strove to regain lost connections, albeit more distanced or virtual

versions of those they once had, and to co-create new ways of being together. Within the confines of regulatory mandates, they located spaces wherein they could inflect their practice with their own understandings to make life better for children and families. Oosterhoff et al.'s (2020) research affirmed that when regulatory frameworks operated to manage and erode educator autonomy, aspects of their working conditions, such as support from colleagues, allowed them to productively harness their emotionality. Hokka et al. (2017, as cited in Oosterhoff et al., 2020) referenced the "transformative and sustaining power" of emotions "in the enactment of agency" (p. 148). The educators did not engage in ethical subversion with respect to the new regulations (Morris, 2021) as these were aimed at child/educator protection, but rather navigated within them and practiced within their constraints to centre love and care for the children and to normalize conditions in extraordinary circumstances. While educators spoke to their fears, concerns, worries, and stresses, they also emitted pride, innovation, passion, optimism, and hope. These findings are thus suggestive of Osgood's (2010) conceptualization of *professionalism from within,* which is socially constructed in a specific socio-political/economic time and location and legitimizes emotional practice as a counter-discourse to the regulatory frameworks. It provides further evidence of their personal and collective investments "in creating a culture of care characterized by affectivity, altruism, self-sacrifice, and conscientiousness" (Osgood, 2010, p. 126).

Finally, through engagement in dialogue and reflection, Freire (1990) spoke to the potential for the collective development of critical social consciousness. These educators were acutely aware of the oppressive conditions inherent in their field, the causes of such conditions, and their own positioning within hegemonic public/policy frameworks and discourses (Freire, 1990). They expressed both skepticism and optimism in relation to the development of a universal system in Canada, fearing that, in Fairchild and Mikuska's (2021) words, "the promises of professionalization [will] do little to change the wider perspective of those both inside and outside the sector" (p. 1184). However, the webinar afforded them the opportunity to share their perspectives with a broader audience, mobilizing support for action. Fenech et al. (2010) have reminded us that professionals also cultivate a transformative ethic of resistance to practices which undermine their own expertise and are not in the best interests of the children. These acts of resistance need not be large in scope, as in the webinar, but rather may be relational micro-actions or interactions in the context of day-to-day experiences that work in opposition to dominant technical approaches. Consistent with Brittany's comments, listening, engaging, and documenting in practice might become tools to centre children's voices and make their perspectives visible in opposition to the discourses circulating by way of regulatory and policy documents.

Conclusion

The narratives the educators shared embodied the complex, multifaceted, and shifting nature of their lived experiences over the course of the pandemic. Osgood (2010) calls for "emotional professionalism to be celebrated rather than denigrated and obscured from public discourse" (p.131). The pandemic exacerbated the already existing gendered, classed, and racialized inequities and divisions of labour and enhanced the conditions creating privileged irresponsibility for some at the expense of educators (Tronto, 2013; Zembylas et al., 2014). The work of childcare educators during the pandemic and beyond requires recognition of the emotional complexities of caring and the increased demands being made. It foregrounds the consequences when the responsibility for care is not examined or prioritized. In this particular moment on the cusp of a new national system, we have an obligation to "unsettle the givenness" (Massey, 2005) of the dominant and perpetual discourses that trivialize and simplify the complex work of ECEC or that relegate childcare to an

economic activity or commodity without thought to what it means to provide just and equitable life experiences to children, families, and educators. To resist a "prescriptive and narrow quantification" of the professional role of educators (Harwood et al, 2013, p. 11), it is imperative to provide space for the lived experiences, critical insights, and interwoven story lines offered by educators and children, as we attempt to mobilize for transformative change and social action in the development of a competent ECEC system in Canada.

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[1] The Province of Québec is a notable exception. It used to offer $5/day care, though now it is $8.35/day (Ministère de la Famille, 2022)

[2] A "competent" system is defined as one which unfolds at different levels---within the individual, the program, between programs, and in governance---and is expressed through the dimensions of knowledge, practices, and values (Urban et al, 2012).

Embracing Our Power: ECE Students' Experiences Creating Spaces of Resistance in Post-Secondary Institutions

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Abstract

In this paper, we, four students with diverse social locations, explore the development of preservice educators' professional identities as political resisters. Through our experiences in an Ontario college, we found commonality in our emerging need to resist "alarming discourses" (Whitty et al., 2020, p. 8). By dissecting and analyzing the neoliberal narrative perpetuated by our educational institution, we refused the notion of being the *good ECE* (Langford, 2007). Rejecting the universalism and totalism of Western European curricular and pedagogical inheritances, we set out to create a space to embrace alternative narratives to critically question our role and the expectations of our profession in a neoliberal world. This space was used for ECEC advocacy and brought together our student community, creating an opportunity to mentor while fostering human connections from our stories. Through collaboration, we reaffirm the importance of building community and reciprocal mentorship for nurturing and developing political agency within our field. We are motivated to sustain this critical space, to serve as a place of resistance for other students who question "universal truths." Education comes from more than the diploma received.

Keywords: Early childhood educators, professional identity, resistance, student advocacy, post-secondary institutions, ethics of care

Embracing Our Power: ECE Students' Experiences Creating Spaces of Resistance in Post-Secondary Institutions

The early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce has been no stranger to challenges and these are well-documented (Akbari & McCuaig, 2022; Jones, 2022; Lysack, 2021). Discontent and frustration grew among early childhood educators (ECEs) as the pandemic continued to exacerbate poor working conditions across Ontario, Canada.[1] During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was common for ECEs to feel forgotten on the frontline (Powell et al., 2021). The new Canada-wide early learning and child care bilateral agreements[2] were unveiled with elusive solutions, adding another layer of complexity to the ECEC field. Still, countless students continue to enter the turmoil by registering into ECEC programs in colleges across Ontario. We, four such students, two undergraduates and two graduates, are connected through our shared experiences within a post-secondary institution. Our journey of establishing a student-led advocacy group[3] was a purposeful action designed to incite a transformation within ourselves and the profession we embrace.

Like most students entering ECEC programs, we aspired to educate within a responsive early years environment, supporting children while pursuing a rewarding career. We failed to see that in taking on this role, we committed ourselves to insufficient salaries, poor benefits, and little to no planning time. In each of our post-secondary classes, there was minimal reference to what our profession lacks; rather, the primary focus was what we could learn and ultimately provide as a *good ECE* (Langford, 2007). The good ECE is defined as having specific qualities of "passion, happiness, inner strength, caring and alertness to individual needs" (Langford, 2007, p. 339). Further, the ECEC diploma largely centred on skill development, and, in contrast, the third year of the ECEC degree introduced the opportunity to question the teachings and truths, prompting our analytical lens and leaving us with cognitive dissonance. Through the introduction to postfoundational theories and theorists such as Moss, Deleuze, and Penn, our minds were piqued, our senses stimulated, and our professional trajectories altered.

These new learnings allowed us to identify dominant narratives in ECEC, including the hegemony of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, Brown (2003) claimed, is a set of economic policies that reach all aspects of social life, "extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action" (para. 7). It is not strange that early childhood provision in Canada, as in many rich and democratic countries, is just another product of the market for parents to consume (Moss, 2019). Through the appropriate technologies, the educator, as an expert technician, ensures children as human capital are developed to fulfill the demands of the workforce of the future, reaping the high returns of ECEC (Moss, 2019). Furthermore, neoliberalism does not begin or end in the early years. Post-secondary institutions, following the neoliberal design of high-profit, are compensated when students achieve academic success. Jeppesen and Nazar (2012) revealed that post-secondary education removes academic freedom and replaces it with dependence on achieving successful assessments to lead prosperous professions. By following these ideological interests, neoliberals shape the path of ECEs who are professionally supportive of children and families but often ill-equipped to value advocating for their professional careers.

Consequently, rejecting totalizing features proposed by dominant narratives in ECEC offered a new beginning for us. This awakening was supported by the encouragement and constant provocation from our "femtor,"[4] Monica Lysack. Historically, mentorship has impacted students' success at every education level, providing career guidance and support. However, according to our experience, women mentoring other women adds a unique value to this relationship. In a

gendered profession such as ECEC, a femtor connects on a deep personal level with the struggles of those in the ECEC profession as they navigate and perform their roles as mothers, aunties, daughters, students, academics, and educators. As care lies at the heart of ECEC, the femtor and femtees relationship unfolds within *an ethics of care* (e.g., Rosen, 2019, p. 79). Thinking femtorship relations within an ethics of care, offers incommensurable "value for reconceptualizing self and other through relational frames of interdependence" while making conscious choices of people's needs, their sociocultural-political context, and the power and inequalities inherent of care relations (Rosen, 2019, p. 80).

The ideas introduced by our femtor allowed us to become involved in Canadian ECEC politics where political action and mobilization are needed. We discovered our political prowess, manifesting a place of resistance. Identifying the pervasive effects of neoliberalism in our profession and the curricular practices of our post-secondary institutions presented us with an urgent and necessary "source of contestation" (Vintimilla, 2014, p. 79). Casual meetings with the seven original members led to rich discussions, and, when an assignment was introduced, a few original members welcomed the idea of creating a student advocacy group. The headiness of enacting our political power produced nervous energy that original members and new recruits embraced alike. We collectively moved forward, creating a community to advocate for the future of our profession. It was a risk driven by our need to build this community of like-minded students and professionals seeking to resist "alarming discourses" (Whitty et al., 2020, p. 8). In this process, we shared, digested, and examined each of our stories, together and separately, to reveal the commonalities and differing directionalities of our professional paths. On the cusp between learning and taking action is where we found ourselves.

We present community and mentorship to describe our experiences in forming the student advocacy group during three different moments, as original members (the provocateurs), as new members (emerging femtors), and lastly, fostering allyship, a reflection on advocacy as a necessity. Following, we reflect on a neoliberal system and how it has permeated post-secondary students in institutions, producing "good" and efficient ECEs. The teachings within educational institutions transfer into the early years responding to specific images of the child, the educator, and childcare programs. Thereafter, we discuss how a student educator challenges the dominant discourse and refutes the insincere and tokenistic measuring stick that follows best practice. In breaking away from Western ideologies and our role as the so-called good ECE (Langford, 2007), we forge ahead with a student resistance movement. By embracing reconceptualization and storytelling, we become professionally prepared for the socio, political, and complex issues that lie ahead. Ultimately, we examine the presence of "alternative futures" (Moss, 2017, p. 12) to re-imagine the possibilities of the ECEC field.

Storytelling Without Monologue

Storytelling is a fundamental feature of human expression (Klevan & Grant, 2022) that serves to make meaning and reframe theories and understandings (Dei, 2017). Thus, narratives, while subjective and deeply personal, are also in constant dialogue with others. Similarly, Klevan and Grant (2022) pointed out that narratives are entangled and messy because there is always "something of our narratives from the past in the new narratives we shape together, through our new dialogue" (p. 46). Stories can provide counter-narratives that serve to challenge, dismantle, and reframe dominant narratives (Dei, 2017), both globally and locally.

Our social locations are unique to us. We are from different backgrounds, cultures, and family dynamics, and we recognize how our stories connect within the wider picture of the Canadian early years landscape. Storytelling allows us to come together and offer our collective stories to educators like us, hoping our experiences resonate with others. The plurality of our stories provides unique narratives that nurture our professional identities, as Dei (2017) asserts, "our discourses cannot be monologues" (p. 13). As care professionals, our stories might seem irrelevant, dismissed from the dominant, and deemed illegitimate. However, we aim to transform our post-secondary institutions and early childhood settings to disrupt and push back against dominant narratives that prescribe students' behaviours and subjectivities. A focus on advocacy and the few poststructuralist and posthumanist theories introduced by our femtor stirred up provocations. These influences had an important role in our directionality as advocates and the formation of our professional identities.

To this, we present our stories.

Storytelling

Camila

When I reflect on how I became an early childhood educator, I like to say that it was meant to be; it was written in the stars, you may say, but in reality, it was not. I immigrated to Canada in 2014, and, as the wife of a skilled worker, I could not perform my profession because it was regulated. The first time I heard about Early Childhood Education (ECE) was when the caseworker of WoodGreen Community Services funnelled me into the profession. I will not describe my confusion when holding a BA in Psychology, the only career path offered to me was pursuing a diploma in ECE. I have found this to be a shared experience among immigrants, especially racialized immigrants from the Global South. As an immigrant, one's credentials and qualifications are often deemed irrelevant, but as a woman, you are considered suited for care work. Believing the caseworker had my best interests in mind and was an expert in the matter, I followed.

With no further ado, I went on and completed my ECE diploma, which was not difficult because, as a psychologist, I was already familiar with theories of human development, neuroscience, and Developmentally Appropriate Practice. After graduation, I became a Registered Early Childhood Educator in a toddler room of what was considered a high-quality, for-profit childcare centre. During this time, I did not understand why I felt so defeated, unmotivated, and lacking purpose in such an important role. Due to frustration, I decided to further my education with the goal of improving my working conditions and professional recognition.

During my degree in Early Childhood Leadership, I was inspired by one professor, today a femtor, who encouraged me to question everything through critical pedagogy. By continuously challenging my thoughts and assumptions about what it means to be an educator in a neoliberal system, this professor took me, along with many of my peers, on the irreversible road to advocacy by positioning us as ECEC leaders. It was a genuinely liberatory experience.

Today, I am completing my Master's in Early Childhood Studies, and it was at the juncture between seeking professional recognition and needing to learn more about the field that I chose this path. Also, after a lot of introspection, I realized that I was motivated by the need to prove to myself and all the caseworkers out there that we, immigrant women, can achieve more than what

is prescribed by neoliberal worldviews. Contrary to neoliberal hierarchies of human and productivity values, care work is important work. As such, I choose to care.

Tammy

As early as I can remember, life was hard. I was a latchkey kid before it had a name. At age 4, I came home alone every day after school. My sister, aged 7, was instructed to walk with me, but her aversion to home led her to the path of friends. My disappointment was futile. In hindsight, I simply wished I'd had the same option. In fairness, my mother and my father were both raised in homes of absent parenting. Therefore, my siblings and I received a mirrored version of that neglect.

As an unwed Indigenous woman, my maternal grandmother had all eight of her children taken at birth. This affected my mother. She was surrendered to dysfunctional grandparents and then, as an Indigenous adult, feared the 60s scoop and her own children's removal, although she denied her heritage to anyone that asked.

Our family did not foster love, respect, or connection. Intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous families, my mother's included, did not support a foundation for positive, intimate, or deep-seated feelings. Rather, it cultivated fear, hurt, and bitterness, leaving little room for growth, maturation, or peace.

Parenting through generations of trauma themselves, my parents raised three children that carry residual effects of neglect and trauma. Personally, I possess enough grit and tenacity to manage my wounds. My siblings hang onto the damage like a lifeline even though it swallows them whole, and wreaks havoc on each of their relationships. After my parents passed and drowning in my siblings' trauma, I untethered myself from the obligation of parenting my adult brother and sister. We are now all but estranged.

During my first pregnancy, I began voraciously researching. I knew how not to parent; unfortunately, I did not know much about how to parent. Developmentalism saturated most books I read, and I was concerned that fostering love, a healthy connection, autonomy, and open communication were rarely mentioned in the parenting books, magazines, and grey material. Upon reflection, I realized that I was desperate to sever the intergenerational trauma (that I had yet to label) that plagued each generation of my family, from my great-grandmother down.

My adverse childhood experiences and the predominant developmental focus of the materials I researched led me to question where I could find the tools and resources I was personally in short supply of, which may help me teach and nurture social and emotional well-being for my own children. In my pursuit of the parental education I lacked, I researched early childhood education, the field of ECEC, and the colleges that offered the program. In 2012, intrigued with the idea that I could learn how to be a support system for others, perhaps parents with similar stories as mine, I entered the ECE college program with both hope and trepidation. Fast forward 20 years, and I am immersed in ideologies, paradigms, and discourses related to questioning the importance placed on developmentalism for the children in our care. In raising three children of my own, I am aware of the uniqueness of each child and their development. Ultimately, my femtor and the content she introduced permanently altered the trajectory of my thoughts, career, and life.

Lu

Childhood. Two decades ago, my teenage mother relinquished me. A girl serves no purpose in my culture. She placed me quietly on a doorstep, which turned into another doorstep. My identity eventually became the granddaughter of a family that wished me to bring future Ivy League status.

The next 20 years brought them disappointment as I failed to meet their expectations time and again. Vanity is an ugly trait that this family carried, and I failed to meet their envisioned expectations. Abandonment I knew first hand but just to ensure I never forgot, all but one of the adoptive relatives tormented me with frequent reminders that I was abandoned at infancy. The incessant reminders were to emphasize that I was not worthy to be a part of their family. Fear plagued me.

Rebellion came as I moved from my top university to a college for an ECE program. This decision was met with disdain as my adoptive family felt contempt for the profession and the institution.

Beauty is Only Skin Deep. My excitement showed, walking into my first ECE placement, a distinguished not-for-profit childcare centre. The excitement quickly waned when my centre advisor shared with me a dog-eating festival from my home country. Understandably, I was baffled. She then asked, "Have you ever eaten dogs before?" Frustration, embarrassment, and shame, along with other negative emotions, flooded my brain. For the rest of that placement, I questioned this profession. In subjecting me to the same question relentlessly, my centre advisor invoked my fear of not being enough, once again.

Surviving placement was a significant feat, and I was able to bring confidence to a for-profit childcare centre following graduation. The reward for my efforts was being labelled a dictator, in reference to my race, for questioning expired anaphylactic medications, mouldy bottles, and untrained staff. A dramatic situation ensued and I knew my time at the centre had come to an end. I resigned immediately, yet, pondering where support is for ECEs that encounter centres' willingness to hire unqualified staff and ignore health standards.

Not All Rainbows and Butterflies. Questioning the dominant narratives has ignited my commitment to move beyond developmentalism and the harmful side of ECEC. My experiences and finding the advocacy group created by my colleagues has made me a stronger early childhood educator. Despite my challenges, I advocate for the people in our field, our profession, and myself. My colleagues and femtors, Dhanna, Monica, and Danielle, continue to enlighten me by resisting and challenging the dominant discourses in ECEC as I walk beside them one step at a time.

Grace

Giving more to others than I do to myself has been my undoing. I have often felt lost in my commitments as an older sister, mature daughter, and group organizer, each prompting responsibilities that have added to my plate. In so doing, each diminishing my responsibility to myself. Nevertheless, these roles have contributed to my growth and aided in my evolution as a leader. I hold no regret toward the energy I have devoted, but I ponder if I have given too much and neglected my wants and needs?

Fulfilling my ambitions and wants has gradually peppered my recent years, my acceptance to a post-secondary ECE diploma program included. Consuming a vast amount of knowledge, I was pointed to the "true" practices of this field. I was immediately humbled on day one of my first

field placement. I felt defeated. Unhappy with my performance, I scolded myself for not memorizing the various steps and stages of theories. Later on in my studies, I would come to recognize that the practices deposited into me were but one approach and would not satisfy the complexities of caring and working with children.

The hope I needed came in the form of a degree program focused on early childhood leadership. We were not only asked to question the diploma teachings, but we were also expected to. Though some were unsettled, I was excited and eager to pick apart my knowledge and explore unfamiliar perspectives. We were challenged to ask the hard questions such as, "What is next?", "Who does this truly benefit?", and "Is this the only way?" My predicament now lies in entering the field. These complex thoughts bring complex anxieties. After 4 years and immense growth, I am still questioning and wondering how to be a good early childhood educator.

Thinking With Stories

Storytelling is not only engaging but a tangible illustration of the complex ways that the world has influenced another's life. A personal story creates an open space to share relatable narratives. In sharing our stories, we became aware of the prevalent issues in the field, driving us to explore advocacy to identify ourselves as resistors. This collaborative process allowed us to relate to each other and invite student stakeholders into the fold. In bringing in multiple opinions and voices with impactful stories, we created an environment to evaluate the needs in our field and celebrate the successes. Through dissecting the contradictions and similarities in our stories, we move toward examining these experiences within the larger conversation of ECEC advocacy in Canada.

As women with different social locations and diverse ethnic backgrounds, at the juncture of multiple intersections, we come together with our collective stories. Through exploring Black feminist thought, including specific reference to the essential work of the Combahee River Collective, Collins (2015) explained:

> The work of the Collective foreshadows important ideas within intersectional knowledge projects, namely, viewing the task of understanding complex social inequalities as inextricably linked to social justice, or the intersections not just of ideas themselves, but of ideas and actions. (p. 8)

As Collins (2015) pointed out, Black feminist thought as a form of knowledge and collectivity, empowers people who have been traditionally oppressed and disadvantaged by a "global system of social injustice" (p. 9). As students, and prospective ECEs in the field, we are moved by the power of collective ideas and relational frameworks to transform society. It is our compounded stories that bring us together as allies. While our stories share some commonalities, it is within our distinct experiences that we come to recognize the diversity existing in the ECEC workforce. There are so many stories to be heard.

Community and Mentorship

Through dialogue and humility, we created a space to contest ideologies and negotiate our roles and experiences. In building this shared space and inviting others to contribute their perspectives, we embraced that we were only people attempting to learn more than what we knew (Freire, 2005). Our aim was, and still is, to share our stories and build a community of collective experiences that allow us to formulate hypotheses about the systems we are in and how to negotiate the expectations of our roles and professional identities.

In so doing, we focus on the value of community building and human connections that defy neoliberal logics of individuation and blatant personal gains. There may be no clear incentives or academic awards to showcase group membership or to advance careers. Instead, our value resides within the relations we have built and the experiences and stories we share.

Our perspectives in this section summarize the life of the advocacy group during three different stages. The formation and continuation of the student advocacy group was established by our unique experiences as provocateurs and emerging femtors. Finally, we reflect on the value of building community, mentorship, and fostering allyship to sustain spaces of resistance. These moments illustrate both the challenges and successes we have encountered during this journey.

The Provocateurs (Camila & Tammy)

With our ideologies set on fire, an assignment initiated by our femtor had us ablaze with excitement. We co-created a student advocacy group within our post-secondary institution. Our profession was fighting for the rights of ECEs. We dared to enter the chaos with the intent of fusing our advocacy efforts with those immersed in the heart of advocacy in Ontario such as the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario and the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. The original members began with fervour, inciting grandiose ideas. It began with giddy excitement, stories of past experiences, triumphs, and bitter disappointments, eventually rising into "storm-the-castle" suggestions on how to improve the working conditions of ECEs. In retrospect, while we agreed we wanted to see a change in our field, we also realized we were students with different social locations, each with unique perspectives, and our agendas did not align. Although our end goal was the same, the plan of action was a forked road and our group could not agree on the same path.

We, alongside some of the original members, anticipated our purpose to be building a community to enhance students' competency and love of advocacy. As undergraduates, we wanted to share with other students, early in their emerging studies, the enticing knowledges and perspectives that led us to question and criticize ECEC as we knew it. We were provided a unique opportunity to accomplish this as the diploma and undergraduate programs coexist and had access to the same professors and online resources. While some members embraced the chance to connect with all students, others considered this approach a waste of the group's energy and resources. These other members felt we should enact a more radical approach if we wanted to see significant changes in the existing field. We, the provocateurs and a couple of the original members, strongly believed in the importance of community building, in "radical friendships" (Bailey et al., 2022) and "reciprocal mentoring" (Swadener & Nagasawa, 2017, p. 207), to actively challenge dominant discourses about ECEC for the students in our program. A connecting link between the provocateurs was the idea that we need diverse theoretical and practical influences for alternative narratives to be lived and reflected in the shared experiences of the student members. The presence of a critical friend (Brewer et al., 2021) provides an opportunity to discuss, challenge, and critically ponder ECEC. It is the stories and experiences of students and our colleagues that infuse theory and create the knowledge that should inform policy making.

The antithetical ideas caused bitter dissension and led to a break in the collective agreement and adversity ensued. A disagreement in creating the group's purpose led to a conflict that shook our core values and put into question our beliefs and commitments towards the group, creating mayhem in its wake. The detonation left behind overpowering emotional distress. The destruction was immeasurable and the harm interfered with proceeding forward as a collective. Clearly, our

perceptions of advocacy and building a community were misaligned. Our goals diverged and so did the members.

The original group dispersed. Some of us who stayed wondered if we built space for everything, for the "nice" and the "nasty"? Did we give up too soon? Did hurt feelings steer the outcome? The conflict remained unsolved as one member of the group abdicated without notice. Our partnership was strengthened due to the conflict, and, with the remaining members, cultivated respectful and inclusive ways of interacting and celebrating our differences.

Despite the failure to launch the original group, we, as initial advocates, prompted an invitation to welcome a new set of students to think critically about advocacy. As new graduates relating and existing with undergraduate students, our responsibilities within the group were modified to be enablers by providing guidance towards common goals, proxies to represent the student community, and provocateurs, inciting and igniting discussions. Being conscious of our previous experiences and challenges served as a catalyst to reframe our purposes as we recruited and welcomed new members to embark on this co-journey.

Emerging Femtors (Lu & Grace)

Enticed and captivated by an extended invitation from the same femtor, we, two current students, joined the alumni members in their advocacy journey. We were hesitant at first because we lacked confidence in our ability to advocate for ourselves and the wider field. Even though we had both started questioning the dominant narratives of our profession, we were unsure how to proceed. Admittedly, we anticipated the group to be more established and knowledgeable than us. Contrary to our expectations, we were perplexed by the immediate trust and parity we felt within the community.

This advocacy group, formed at our institution, provided an open space by fostering feelings of comfort and generating a sense of security within the both of us. Through reciprocal sharing, we offered our stories; each was appreciated and valued, and we felt comfortable. Thus, our relationship with the alumni began as equals, and a balanced sense of power allowed for equal commitment in forming the group. They became our mentors, inspiring, encouraging, and challenging us as new members. This promising mentor-mentee relationship was built from a basis of trust in one another and in the group. Their mentorship and confidence in us provided a foundation we could build upon.

There was now a palpable sense of responsibility and accountability in our leadership. However, building a new community together was not an easy task. Although we were thankful for being recognized as a formalized group, our institution required specific roles and responsibilities from us as current students. We felt moments of uncertainty as we attempted to navigate the expectations required of us as executive members, namely, our duty to design and execute monthly meetings. Despite our attempts to share these duties, the two of us felt an imbalance between the appointed positions and the ones truly enacted by the assigned members. Consequently, the work of many fell on a few.

To this, we question, what is motivating us to sustain this advocacy community? For the two of us, ECEC advocacy started as an interest that quickly became a passion. This passion grew as we committed to this space and the members within. Advocacy feels undeniably tied to our professional identities now. Our values and knowledge as educators have evolved from our work as advocates, which motivates us. Yet, we are concerned that we will be unable to continue this

community with the challenges we endure. If this space disappears, we are fearful that a portion of our professional self will be lost.

Fostering Allyship

Mentorship for us is learning and lending from one another. With this in mind, we focused on the process, on the journey of building and forming relationships. We found intention in this collaborative space by combining academic and work expectations. Through this advocacy forum, as a collective group, we can apply critical thinking to make meaning of our social realities, as we should be able to do more than regurgitate the academic content. Our roles as educators have us actively advocating for children and families but not for ourselves and we ask ourselves, why do ECEs not see themselves as political agents?

A student's lack of awareness is perpetuated by a post-secondary institution's failure to equip them with the competencies to advocate for the ECEC field. Throughout our years, we have heard and debated the gaps in our profession with our college professors; however, only a few mentioned advocacy. Jones et al. (2019) believed that student engagement in sociopolitical areas is initiated by social policy courses that allow students to understand the history of care work in Canada and how it affects our professional identities. Thus, our resolution lies in continuing this endeavour. We are motivated to sustain this critical space, to serve as a place of resistance for other students who question so-called universal truths. We believe that post-secondary institutions deem advocacy an afterthought and rarely provide spaces for educators to contest, explore and reflect on their political competencies.

What does the future hold for other student advocates in our community? We are unsure. We are struggling to recruit new executive members who are not just willing to fulfill the institutionalized role but also willing to work toward reconceptualizing ECEC. Education, in itself, is not neutral (Freire, 2005). We agree that the formation of educators as political agents is a very complex undertaking. Educators' formation is determined by a dialectic process that includes the development of student subjectivities, influenced by their institutions and interactions within their larger socio-political contexts (Urban et al., 2012). As recent graduates, we believe that the failure lies with many colleges and universities neglecting the introduction of advocacy for ECE students. Advocacy could help up-and-coming ECEs support our precarious sector.

To see the changes we envision (big or small) and build a "competent system" (Urban et al., 2012, p. 515), advocacy is required at the forefront of our profession. The creation of competent early childhood systems demands educators to understand the whole system as its creation highly depends on the "reciprocal relationships between individuals, teams, institutions and the wider socio-political context" (Urban et al., 2012, p. 515). Consequently, competent educators actively engage in critical conversations, posing critical questions about their role while co-constructing their professional identity.

Indeed, Urban (2008) supported what we envision by encouraging those participating to contribute "critical questions" (p. 149), allowing an opportunity for a myriad of potential answers as this helps form a collective group with "new understandings" (p. 149). Asking what matters beyond developmentalism, what are the responsibilities of post-secondary curriculum for ECE students, and how can we recruit ECEs to advocate for themselves are just a few of the critical questions we invoke. Similar to Urban's (2008) efforts, as student advocates, we embrace "a complex *ecology of the profession*" (p. 149), relating it to one another, as well as to the advocacy space that we created. In line with Urban (2008), we propose spaces of sustained reciprocal

relations that allow for the creation of professional epistemologies rooted and contextually situated within ECEs' practices. These efforts challenge traditional ideologies of professionalism that correlate professional development with isolated courses and workshops that respond to skill development. Despite our efforts to incite others and welcome them into our community, we have yet to see a positive response. We agree with Jones et al. (2019) that student educators are often divorced from advocacy. However, revolutionizing the field cannot be achieved without new educators joining seasoned advocates to mend the historical problems our profession has endured.

Neoliberalism in Post-Secondary Education

In conversations with ECEs, Vintimilla (2014) understood that in the forming of the educational collective, a "politics of niceness … characterized by a commitment to social harmony, to a common good" (p. 84) is predominant and remains prevalent in the field today. Informing post-secondary education curricula, this "politics of niceness" (Vintimilla, 2014, p. 84) minimizes ECEC to merely an instrumental, observable, and standardized practice. Thus, it is not unusual that, as Langford (2007) found, the good ECE is typically portrayed as having caregiver qualities such as being emotional, supportive, and warm. This reductionist and gendered description of our profession is mirrored by ECE preservice programs.

To start with, these images and discourses of the good ECE (Langford, 2007) represented in textbooks, discussions, and assignments in post-secondary education neglect to encompass the intersectionalities of the workforce, mostly consisting of newcomers, immigrants, and visible minorities (Gestwicki & Bertrand, 2003). As Dei (2017) critically pointed out when referring to institutional structures, they "are them [Whites] and they are the structure. The structures are also, a creation of the dominant" (p. 4). As such, educational institutions' curriculum outcomes serve to sustain and reproduce the benefits, privileges, and entitlements of the dominant (Dei, 2017). In serving governmental guidelines, post-secondary programs usually include classes such as Observation in which methods heavily rely on child development theory. The observation tools taught then set the stage to document children's interests and skills, but without consideration of their relations, culture, and context. Again, this mechanistic observation of young children to document their learning obliges children to fit our scripts, and when they do not perform as expected, the children are deemed as deficient. Consequently, the importance of developing critical thinking, to disrupt the status quo perpetuated by curriculum and pedagogies at every educational level, is needed.

Unknowingly, we participated in the neoliberal educational project, where our role was to perform as expected, as apolitical, to simply be immersed in our classroom bubble. Likewise, Freire's (2005) "banking" concept of education positions students as ingesters of knowledge and what is considered truth, summarizing how they engage in passive consumerism of academics while subjected to "a fragmented view of reality deposited in them" (p. 73). Such educational instruction, according to Freire (2005), leaves little room to develop "critical consciousness" (p. 73) in students and ECEs. We can speak to this firsthand.

The initial introduction to *difference* and postfoundational theorists challenged us and our previous learning. We were motivated to investigate further through exploring each theory and questioning the neoliberal narrative. We began recognizing the "inadvertent political and social consequences" (Brown, 2003, para. 4) of neoliberalism and specifically how it finds its way into education, producing "subjects, [and] ways of behaving" (Vintimilla, 2014, p. 80) and unwittingly, manufacturing the good ECE (Langford, 2007).

In recent years, ECEs have been lulled into believing that, through an emergent curriculum, they are following and respecting children's individualities. Instead, they are unconsciously applying effective technologies that yield specific learning outcomes, "'future proofing' children to fit this world" (Moss, 2019, p. 22). Documents provided by the government to increase accountability and productivity of childcare services benefit the agenda of dominant societal structures. We experience this first hand through standardization and implementation of tools to measure quality. As such, quality standards that govern our practices are defined by outsiders instead of representing the lives and entanglements of children and educators, in a specific space and place. Neoliberalism rationality makes it difficult for some to recognize that we must resist the narrative of so-called high-quality education, which uses measuring tools and developmentally appropriate practice. In this vein, Brown (2016) elaborates that governance operates to attenuate normative conflict and "buries contestable norms and structural striations" (p. 6), hiding authoritative and coercive power. These replacements allow for dominant narratives, such as high-quality education, to remain unattended and uncontested, perpetuating unsustainable ways of being. As we envision it, we introduce and participate in the storied lives of children, families, and educators allowing us to engage in small acts of refusal.

Neoliberalism in the Early Years

Neoliberal imaginary and governance impacts education, outlining the possibilities of ECEC by offering specific images of the child, the educator, and the childcare centre while increasing standards of practice and regulation (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021). As such, discourses of quality, assessments, school readiness, and interventions, among others, are deployed without a second thought (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021). Subsequently, the educator utilizes prescribed practices preparing children to be school ready and eventually, a productive citizen applying their skills to secure economic prosperity for themselves and their country by providing a competitive advantage (Moss, 2019). Similarly, as we alluded to earlier, while emergent curriculum may seem like a progressive departure, there are shared ideologies of competency, flexibility, and individualism that might re-enact the same neoliberal script but with a different label.

ECEs in the field that follow a developmental framework foresee children growing "out of their needs through linear instruction and increasingly demonstrate independence in their taken-for-granted skills and knowledge" (Langford, 2020, p. 24). For example, ECE training programs recite Piaget and his theory of knowledge acquisition that focuses on children's scientific thinking. Penn (2014) argued that "to learn about child development has been to learn about Piaget" (p. 44). Conversely, little is said about the rapid evolution of science knowledge that overthrows Piaget's thoughts, "his theories represent the time warp in which many people are stuck" (Penn, 2014, p. 44). Within developmental frameworks, children are viewed as subjects that are moulded and reshaped through innumerable unconscious discursive practices that occur in different social encounters (Langford, 2020). This predominant view not only portrays children as "empty vessels needing to be filled" (Moss, 2019, p. 53) but also represents developmental stages as universal. Curiously, through these (not so) universal conceptualizations of childhood, development, and achievement standards, some children are perpetually deemed as lacking skills and already behind, especially Black and racialized children (Nxumalo, 2021). These dominant ideas of children and childhood, influenced by developmental psychology, limit our pedagogy and curriculum, reducing the role of the child as a mere receiver. We openly reject these notions.

According to Dahlberg and Moss (2005), within our education and care system, the dominant discourse suggests that children, through technical practice, are educated to "become the

future solution to our current problems" (p. vii). On the other hand, recognizing other stories, noted Dahlberg and Moss (2005), contests the premise of the dominant discourse, notably embracing alternatives derived from a multitude of origins and diverse theorists. While dominant narratives claim universality and righteousness, the presence of alternative narratives serve as a source of contestation. Relatedly, Moss (2019) asserted, "A discourse may be dominant, yet it never manages totally to silence other discourses or stories" (p. 7). Based on our experience, we witness structured curriculum ideas as predominant, such as the themed-based approach or educators seeking activities to develop those skills deemed valuable, such as literacy and numeracy. Pedagogical practices that reflect on the issues of the world, those that address inequalities and aim for social justice, are minimal, perpetuating limited ideas of childhood, education, and care. Instead, we see stagnant curriculum, a lack of pedagogical reflection and a tendency to preserve childhood innocence in most aspects of ECEC.

Welcoming the intention of other narratives averts sameness. Other narratives permit us, students, educators, and scholars, to "abandon our preconceptions" and reframe thought and knowledge as the creation of "new understandings" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 116). Other narratives enable educators to critically think about their practices beyond complying with the fixed and reprocessed curriculum that emerges as unending theories and thoughts parroted year after year (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). Other narratives allow us to recognize that dominant narratives are just one story.

These universal, unidimensional ideas of childhood, children, pedagogies, and curriculum also usher a simplistic, unidimensional image of ECEs and the field overall. For us, advocacy, while not actively promoted within our post-secondary classes, has been a source of respite from the developmental pedagogy pushed in our program and field. Inadvertently, we met with peers and began dissecting the dominant structure of developmentalism, reverting to the fact that there must be an alternative. Among our small group, we slowly unpacked the alternative narratives of Penn, Moss, and Deleuze, to name a few, mindful that these new concepts were not the primary practice of our institute but a small inclusion to only one class. The alternative narratives we were introduced to became a springboard for our group, and although they take on different forms for each member, we welcome the multiplicities of their stories and experiences. As such, creating spaces of contestation and resistance offers students the opportunity to relate to each other and grasp how their stories intertwine within the neoliberal discourse. In this process, individual and shared strategies of resistance emerge. Our aspirations are grand; collective stories ignite us.

Challenging and Resisting the Dominant Discourse

As we move away from the discourse of developmentalism that inundates ECEC today, we reject the universalism and totalism of Western European conceptions of childhood and normality. We recognize that these developmental frameworks reinforce discourses deemed at risk, easily attached to marginalized and racialized children, families, and communities. Ideally, educators would stop seeing children as needing to be saved from the fatalism of their communities and instead learn to celebrate, embrace, and incorporate the whole child in the shared space. How can educators challenge such discourses if all they have been taught is to take out their measuring stick to see how the child is performing?

Consider the educator, compelled to follow human technologies and datafication while dispensing what is considered high-quality education (Moss, 2019). Specifically, implementing standardized assessments while collecting documentation on children encourages educators to

continue the narrative and impose benchmarks to increase "compliance to prescribed standards" (Moss, 2019, p. 13). Hence, the focus is on the investors, governments, and parents, rather than the children, perpetuating the "measuring stick" mentality.

Although we cannot completely quiet the presiding neoliberal ideology, the resistance of ECEs provides a vast and diverse movement (Moss, 2017). According to Moss (2017), ECEs are spirited and strong resistors that examine alternatives theoretically, bringing diverse advocacy ideas together to enhance ECEC. The educator as advocate, in a market-oriented childcare system, refuses damaged-centred narratives (Tuck, 2009) by enacting ECEC as a deep ethical and political work (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). ECEs resist by fostering desire-based pedagogies that contextualize and situate damage narratives to grasp the whole story, bringing hope and depathologizing deficit (Tuck, 2009). On the contrary, as post-secondary students in a neoliberal educational system, we had not experienced diverse theoretical frameworks and had been minimally exposed to voices of authors that seek to amplify the resistance movement in education.

Post-secondary institutions provide training for the workforce that bring into educational spaces the compliant good ECE (Langford, 2007). However, attending to the "conditions of our time" (Vintimilla, 2020, para. 8) demands educators be connected to the socio-cultural and political conditions of their geographies. Educators need to be empowered to talk confidentially about complex issues to introduce those ideas into their programs. Otherwise, education becomes a project divorced from the realities and necessities of our time.

Our student advocacy experience increased our focus on the realities our communities face. Further, it advanced our professional preparedness by connecting us with colleagues from different professional backgrounds, motivating us to learn more about our educational system and how politics impacts our career and increases our political accountability. Creating a space of resistance allowed us to build a network of students and colleagues that bring into the group diverse knowledges that keep us aware of current issues.

Embracing, and inserting ourselves into, the larger resistance movement allowed us to explore our uncertainties and evolve our critical lens within the field. In creating an advocacy group, our ECE academic community became a part of the resistance. But, challenging and resisting comes with a high cost. The unease of questioning years of achieved learning outcomes left us with hushed discussions of where we should draw our boundaries. Our fear of questioning the traditional narrative and our post-secondary curriculum is real for us but we stand together. With this paper, we call for post-secondary institutions to shift towards contextualizing their teachings and openly acknowledging their complicity in perpetuating neoliberal tropes. In so doing, realizing that students are owed an education beyond tokenism and developmentalism.

The Story Continues

We, as post-secondary resisters, are a collective that ideates "alternative futures" (Moss, 2017, p. 12). We find worth in our deep discussions and contribute to meaning-making with community members, reaping the rewards of "reciprocal mentoring" (Swadener & Nagasawa, 2017, p. 207). Despite the value of our discussions, we question the impact of our actions and if they are enough to provoke change.

"Envision[ing] alternative futures," (Moss, 2017, p. 12) demands that we think differently, but as Jameson (2003) argued, "It's easier to dream the end of the world than the end of capitalism" (p. 76) and we venture to say that about many of the "isms." The pressing issues we experience

today require a different approach to reconceptualizing our practices and ECEC overall. We cannot envision alternative futures without acknowledging capitalism, neoliberalism, and, in particular, sexism and patriarchy and how each influence ECEC. Consider ECEs, their role assumed as a romanticized and devalued version of the *carer* rather than the builder of a child's holistic foundation in the early years. To date, advocacy addressing the pressing issue of the carer misconception has been boldly ignored. We either accept this ignorance while being the good ECE (Langford, 2007) or rise in defence of our professional reality.

Neoliberalism has engorged the Canada wide early learning and child care system. This system, created uniquely by each province and territory, has the potential to be a viable alternative narrative for the future; however, the government's economization of everything has permeated this vision. Ontario educators are stupefied by the provincial government's exclusion of their essential work contributions and the lack of commitment to improve their poor working conditions, inadequate wages, and benefit plans (Akbari & McCuaig, 2022). Our country will soon discover that the system cannot effectively run without ECEs. This prompts us to evaluate the state of ECEC in Canada, and we recognize that developing advocacy competencies in post-secondary programs is necessary to support our current ECEC system. More student voices are needed to strengthen advocacy in ECEC. We know it is time for change.

To provoke change, we bring forward alternative narratives that enrich and diversify ECEC, distancing us from the gaze of dominant narratives. Our audacity as advocates has led us to agree with Arndt et al. (2018) that we are a diverse group of ECEs, yet, we "have more in common than what separates" us (p. 112). Through our distinct stories, we form collective knowledges that challenge, disrupt, and dismantle western onto-epistemologies. In some cases, advocating with students simply offers a space for ECE students to enhance their political agency. In other instances, it provides space for their stories, each bringing value to student advocacy.

Despite our failures and triumphs within the group, we reaffirm the importance of building community and reciprocal mentorship for nurturing and developing political agency within our field. We volunteer with this new advocacy community to illuminate students' concerns and introduce new concepts and narratives. And at the same time, we empathize with the altruistic advocates that have endured a career-spanning fight for the rights of the educators in our field. Researchers, advocates, professors, and government representatives have sacrificed immeasurable time and energy toward making sustainable changes. We join them. We attempt to become bridgers, bringing diverse levels of experience towards building a better understanding of the field, acting as a connection between new students and seasoned advocates. In doing so, we asseverate this space as political agents and open it up for all those wanting to challenge or critically question the dominant narrative. As provocateurs and emerging femtors, we stand in solidarity with students and seasoned advocates alike.

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[1] We are situated throughout Ontario, Canada, on Indigenous unceded and ceded lands.

[2] "The Government of Canada made a transformative investment of over $27 billion over 5 years as part of Budget 2021 to build a Canada-wide early learning and child care system with provinces and territories" (Government of Canada, 2022, para. 1). For more information see https://www.canada.ca/en/early-learning-child-care-agreement/agreements-provinces-territories.html

[3] This paper reflects on our experiences of coming together as an advocacy group. The opinions expressed within this paper are solely the opinions of the four authors. We do not aim to speak on behalf of others who experienced the same circumstances.

[4] "femtor" or female mentor. We purposely decided to use the word femtor to describe our distinct bond to disrupt traditional ideas of mentorship. With this move, we seek to bring forward the continuous work of many women whose life work has been dedicated to inspiring, mentoring, and igniting others to reconceptualize ECEC.

Node-ified Ethics: Contesting Codified Ethics as Unethical in ECEC in Ontario

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Abstract

In this conceptual article, I argue that there is a difference between codified ethics and the ethical. I begin by situating code of ethics in the broader professionalization movement in early childhood education. Drawing upon Gunilla Dahlberg and Peter Moss (2005), I discuss the dematerialization of early childhood educators (ECEs) and the instrumentalization of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Ontario through the implementation of the Code of Ethics by the College of Early Childhood Education (2017). Thinking with Eve Tuck's (2018) question of "How shall we live?" (p. 157), I take up a critical invitation from Sharon Todd (2003) to consider how codified ethics in education may be rethought "as a relation across difference" (p. 2). I work conceptually with the imagery of nodes from the film *Sleep Dealer* by Alex Rivera (2008) as an aesthetic device to examine the effect of codified ethics on ECEs. Finally, in conversation with Joanna Zylinska (2014) and Tim Ingold (2011), I re-frame instrumentalized nodes/codes of ethics within the complexity of knots and meshworks to recover the ethical in early childhood education. I offer this piece as a warning that solely relying on codified ethics completes the transformation of the ECE into a worker technician and may be leading us toward a dystopian future and as a call to activism to engage in the complex ethical work required in the small everyday spaces of the early childhood classroom.

Keywords: early childhood education, codified ethics, ethical, nodes, dematerialization, instrumentalization

Node-ified Ethics: Contesting Codified Ethics as Unethical in ECEC in Ontario

Are codes of ethics ethical? Some argue that the reduction of ethics into universalized moral rules favours a scientific and technical rationality for solving problems over an ethical and political response to issues encountered in daily human and more-than human relations (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Todd, 2003). I begin this article by situating code of ethics in the broader professionalization movement in early childhood education and care (ECEC). Though codes of ethics are common in ECEC, emerging out of the broader professionalization movement in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Canada (Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, 2008; Australian Early Childhood Association, 1990; College of ECE, 2017; Early Education, 2011; Feeney & Kipnis, 1989; The Office of Early Childhood Education, 2022), regulatory bodies, such as the College of ECE in Ontario, are rare. The rarity of regulatory bodies in ECEC means that they have not been explicitly included in critiques of the instruments of professionalization, nor in advocacy regarding regulation of the sector. In this article, I contest the ethical as described in codes of ethics both generally and specifically as they have become legally enforceable in the ECEC sector in Ontario through the establishment of the College of ECE (2017). Thinking with Eve Tuck's (2018) question of "How shall we live?" (p. 157) and a critical invitation from Sharon Todd (2003), I consider how ethics in education might be "rethought together as a relation across difference" (p. 2). Drawing upon Gunilla Dahlberg and Peter Moss (2005), I discuss the dematerialization of early childhood educators (ECEs) and the instrumentalization of ECEC in Ontario through the implementation of the Code of Ethics by the College of Early Childhood Education. I engage in a speculative critique of codified ethics located within a regulatory body by invoking the imagery of nodes in Alex Rivera's (2008) film *Sleep Dealer.*[1] The film depicts a violent techno-rational step into a dystopian future where workers are connected to a network through cables and wires inserted into their bodies via nodes. I work conceptually with the idea of nodes, depicted in the film as points of connection in a network, to present a haunting metaphor for the dematerializing and instrumentalizing effects of codified ethics on ECEs, and in conversation with Joanna Zylinska (2014) and Tim Ingold (2011), I reframe instrumentalized nodes/codes of ethics within the complexity of knots and meshworks to recover the ethical in early childhood education. I offer this speculative piece as both a warning against the instrumentalization of ECEs and a call to activism to reposition ethics as a relational practice in ECEC and to reclaim the imagery of nodes/knots as points of ethical relations (Ingold, 2011; Zylinska, 2014).

Codes of Ethics and the ECE Professionalization Movement

During the late 1980s and early 1990s movements to professionalize ECEC were gaining momentum across Europe, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada (Cannella, 1997; Langford et al., 2013; Osgoode, 2006; Popkewitz, 1994; Saracho & Spodek, 1993; Urban et al., 2012). Professionalization in ECEC was driven by a number of factors including, but not limited to, an increasing demand for the accountability of ECEs by the public and the struggle by ECEs themselves for better wages and working conditions as well as the recognition of ECEC as professional work (Cannella, 1997; Langford et al., 2013; Osgoode, 2006; Popkewitz, 1994; Saracho & Spodek, 1993; Urban et al., 2012). In the mid-20th century, in Canada and the U.S. specifically, the proliferation of child study and child development theories began to form the foundations of preservice training programs for ECEs (Cannella, 1997), which further contributed other strategies of professionalization such as certification, credentialing and licensing of ECEs and ECEC programs (AECEO, 2010; Saracho & Spodek, 1993). The creation of codes of ethics

also emerged out of this movement toward professionalization and were intended to provide guidance and consistency for ECEs in navigating the moral and ethical dilemmas they grappled with in their everyday work with young children and families (AECA, 1990; Early Education, 2011; NAEYC, 1998; see also Feeney & Kipnis 1989; Katz, 1984; The Office of Early Childhood Education, 2022).

ECEs in Ontario, like their counterparts internationally, have historically suffered from low wages and poor working conditions including a lack of respect, job security, and benefits (Child Care Sector Human Resources Council, 2013; Doherty et al., 2000). Achieving professional status, it was hoped, would address these issues and bring about better wages and working conditions for ECEs (Langford et al., 2013; Urban et al., 2012). As the professional association for ECEs since 1950, the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) has been actively working toward the professionalization of ECEs through certification, credentialing, and professional development as well as actively advocating for the recognition ECEs in the form of professional pay and decent work conditions (AECEO, 2016; Langford et al., 2013). The AECEO developed its own code of ethics in 1982, which was revised in 1994 and distributed to all licensed childcare programs in Ontario (AECEO, 2010). Two years later, the AECEO campaigned and proposed legislation for the establishment of a regulatory body. Claims put forward by the AECEO suggested that a regulatory body would realize the goal of "legislative recognition" of ECEC as a profession and, therefore, was expected to naturally translate into professional pay and better working conditions (AECEO, 2010, p. 21). Though the AECEO's attempt to pass their bill for a regulatory body was unsuccessful in the Ontario Legislature, they continued to lobby for a College of ECE and in the meantime voluntarily assumed the role of a regulatory body for ECEs predominantly though their certification process (AECEO, 2010).

In 2007, the College of ECE was finally established in Ontario. The first of its kind, this regulatory body ushered in a new era of professionalization signaling progress and promise for ECEs in Ontario. With the creation of the College of ECE a new code of ethics was introduced. Like its predecessor, the College of ECE's code of ethics outlined ECEs' moral and ethical responsibilities to children, families, colleagues, the profession, the community, and the public (College of ECE, 2017, p. 7). Alongside the code of ethics, the College of ECE also introduced six standards of practice: Standard I: Caring and Responsive Relationships, Standard II Curriculum and Pedagogy, Standard III: Safety Health and Well-being, Standard IV: Professionalism and Leadership, Standard V: Professional Boundaries, Dual Relationships, and Conflicts of Interest, and Standard VI: Confidentiality, Release of Information and Duty to Report. Each standard has three sections that outline the principles, knowledge, and practices required of ECEs in their practice as professionals (College of ECE, 2017, pp. 8-20).

The role of the College of ECE in establishing professional status for ECEs, however, is often misunderstood. It does not provide any direct benefits to ECEs themselves but rather indirectly raises the professional status of ECEs through its mandate to protect the public and to maintain the integrity of the profession (College of ECE, 2017). In exchange for the right to practice as and use the protected title of Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE), RECEs must not only abide by the College of ECE's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, but they must also meet the minimum requirements of a 2-year college diploma in Early Childhood Education at an accredited college or university, pay annual professional dues comparable to Ontario Certified Teachers (Ontario College of Teachers, 2022), and demonstrate evidence of their continuous professional learning (CPL).

While most codes of ethics in ECEC act as prescriptions for what professionals should and should not do, the location of a code of ethics in a regulatory body necessitates legal sanctions as consequences for non-compliance. Lichtenberg (1996) argued that codes of ethics do not necessarily require sanctions; however, when they do, they, in fact, contradict the true meaning of ethics because they impose external motives for acting ethically. This is evident in the way the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice as well as the other professional requirements mentioned are enforced by the College of ECE. RECEs are held accountable through a public registry, random audits of their continuous professional learning portfolios, and disciplinary processes and potential consequences, such as losing their license to practice, related to reported violations of the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.

Initially seen as a victory in the fight for professional recognition of ECEs, the establishment of the College of ECE has arguably failed to deliver that promise. Instead of an improvement in ECEs' wages and working conditions, RECEs now face increased expectations and accountability, tighter surveillance, and more serious consequences for not meeting expectations. The AECEO itself acknowledges and identifies the discrepancy between the increase in professional expectations of RECEs and the corresponding lack of improvement in wages and working conditions as the "professionalization gap" (AECEO, 2016, p. 2). The irony is that the push for professionalization has come from educators and advocates. In their desire for change, educators have welcomed and even advocated for more training, certification, licensing, credentialing, and even regulations, such as codes of ethics, in the hopes that raising the status of the profession would also result in raise in their pay, improved working conditions and more respect to the profession (Langford et al., 2013).

This should come as no surprise, however. Though the struggle for professionalization, and the idea of what professionalism means in ECEC, has been important and critical for the feminist movement, it also has its critics. In 1997, Gaile Cannella prophetically wrote, *"*One can understand why women would hope that professionalization would lead to advanced status, respect, and more pay. However, professionalism has actually fostered the patriarchal, modernist notion of control and rationality" (p. 147). Jayne Osgood (2006) referred to this as the "regulatory gaze" (p. 5), pointing out that professionalism is a masculinist construct that cannot account for the emotionality of the work that educators do in caring for young children and where emotionality has no exchange value. Thus, when professionalism's patriarchal logics are applied to a feminized profession the result is increased regulation in the form of top-down policy making and disciplinary technologies, thereby creating, as I will discuss in the next section, ECEs as technicians.

Contesting Codified Ethics

My primary concern in writing this article is that while Ontario has had a code of ethics since 1982, it was not until it became legally enforceable by the College of ECE that the code of ethics has come to dominate the profession in Ontario, so much so that I wonder if we in Ontario have lost sight of the ethical in ECEC. I explore the discrepancy between codified ethics and the ethical by turning to Todd (2003) who asks the question "WHAT, OR WHERE, is ethics in relation to education?" (p. 1). For Todd (2003), codified ethics instrumentalize education, making it about having the right knowledge and applying moral codes passed down by "experts," implying that we as ordinary people do not already act ethically towards others or that we are at least committed to acting ethically towards others. Todd (2003) also asks, "And what does this say about our experts' attitudes toward the 'ordinary people' who, ostensibly, are waiting for knowledge to be bestowed upon them that they might 'become' moral?" (p. 6). For ECEs, I also ask, how does the code of

ethics instrumentalize ECEC, and how does it dematerialize the educator by implying that they become moral when they adhere to the code handed to them, a code that is enforced by the experts? Importantly, Todd (2003) also reminds us of the position of experts and education in the context of colonialism and imperialism, thereby questioning their authority in determining universal moral codes. In this article, I am interested in exploring Todd's (2003) invitation to think about how "in focusing on conditions instead of principles, codes, and rules, ethics might be considered in terms of those *moments of relationality that resist codification*" (p. 9).

Keeping Todd's questions in mind, I build on Dahlberg and Moss's (2005) extensive discussion of the instrumentalization of ECEC through the discursive-material logics of neoliberalism and psychological theories of child development and argue that the codification of ethics in ECE completes the transformation (dematerialization) of the educator into a worker-technician. According to the Oxford English dictionary, the verb *dematerialize* means "to deprive of material character or qualities; to render immaterial" (Oxford University Press, n.d.). In this article, I take up the concept of dematerialization to explore how ECEs become estranged from their relational, ethical, and emotional selves, disappearing as they are transformed into technicians through the masculinist and instrumentalizing technologies of professionalism.

I explore this transformation in conversation with the near dystopian film *Sleep Dealer* written and directed by Alex Rivera (2008) and specifically through the aesthetic device of the film's imagery of nodes and node workers from which I have derived the concept of "node-ified" ethics. I draw on the following quote by Dahlberg and Moss (2005), who described the ways that ECEs are shaped by the logics of neoliberalism and return to it again and again as I pick up its threads and weave them into my argument:

> Increasingly hegemonic economic and political regimes require the formation of a particular subject, autonomous, active, flexible, response-able, a bearer of rights and responsibilities, self-governing, a practitioner of freedom. New and continuous forms of discipline and control provide ever more effective ways to form and govern this subject. The subject is inscribed with scientific knowledge and instrumental rationality, forms of knowledge and reason connected to a regulatory mode [code/node] of modernity pledged to dispense with uncertainty and ambivalence. Technical solutions are an intrinsic part of modernity's instrumental culture. (p. 59)

Guided by this quote, and images from the film, I trace the regulatory mode of codified ethics through the aesthetic device of nodes that both inscribe and form the subject of the worker/educator through the instrumentalization of the work and the dematerialization of the body. Following this, I will return to Todd (2003), in conversation with Zylinska (2014) and Ingold (2011) to recover the conditions of ethical relationality in ECEC. I position this conceptual and speculative piece as both a warning and a call to activism, while also recognizing that it is itself a moment of activism as I risk engaging in a dark critique of the College of ECE in Ontario and suggest that codified ethics may be leading toward a dystopian future (if indeed we are not already there).

Sleep Dealer by Alex Rivera

I will now conjure the imagery of nodes as depicted in the film *Sleep Dealer* as I weave in a critique of codified ethics through Todd (2003) and Dahlberg and Moss (2005). *Sleep Dealer* (2008) is set in Tijuana Mexico in a near dystopian future where South American migrant workers no longer need to cross the border to work in the United States. Instead, through nodes surgically implanted into their bodies, workers can connect remotely to robots somewhere across the border

in the U.S. By manipulating these robots, they can pick fruit, build skyscrapers, and even take care of children.

In large warehouses, row upon row of node workers in oxygen masks and translucent contact lenses that allow them to see through the "eyes" of the robots, move in slow, pantomime-like motion manipulating their robot on the other side (see Figures 1 and 2). Nodes in the film are used as a compelling and violent techno-rational solution to the "problem" of migrant workers. Nodes offer a future of "all the work without the worker" (Rivera, 2008, 36:27). Solving the problem of the unpredictable, unreliable, uncertain worker is also the function of codified ethics where the worker/RECE becomes invisible and irrelevant so long as they perform the work and do not violate the code.

Figure 1

Image of the Main Character Memo as a Node Worker

Note. Image from the film *Sleep Dealer* (Rivera, 2008, 39:13). Copyright 2008 by Alex Rivera. Used with permission.

Figure 2

Image of Node Workers in a Factory

Note. Image from the film *Sleep Dealer* (Rivera, 2008, 316:19). Copyright 2008 by Alex Rivera. Used with permission.

In the film, we meet the main character, Memo Cruz. He and his family are farmers in a small South American town where the government controls the water, held in a heavily guarded reservoir behind a huge dam. Memo and his father must pay for small amounts of water to take back home to water their meagre crops and to use for cooking and washing. The government is always looking out for aqua terrorists who try to steal the water. When Memo's home-made transistor radio is noticed by the government, he is mistakenly targeted as an aqua-terrorist. A drone is sent to bomb his home, killing his father. Devastated and distraught that his home-made radio caused the death of his father, Memo leaves home and heads for Tijuana. He has heard of nodes and hopes that he can become a node worker so that he can send money back home to support his family. For Memo, the idea of becoming a node worker is uncertain and yet it holds promise as the solution to his desperate situation, much like the Ontario ECE professionalization movement's desire for a College of ECE and codified ethics to solve the desperate problem of poor wages and working conditions.

We also meet Rudy Ramirez, the soldier who carries out the drone attack that kills Memo's father. In this dystopian reality, drone attacks are televised like game shows and incite viewers in the fight against aqua-terrorists. This is Rudy's first mission. He controls the drones through his own implanted nodes. The first drone attack is a direct hit on Memo's house and as his drone hovers over the burning building, Rudy watches Memo's father drag himself out of the house bloodied and broken but still alive. Memo's father looks at the drone hovering over him. The host of the show announces to the audience that it is a rare occurrence for a soldier to get a chance to look into the face of the enemy. The show host and the audience are in a frenzy as they cheer on Rudy to kill the terrorist. As Rudy looks into the pleading face of Memo's father, he realizes at the

last second that Memo's father is not a terrorist at all, but it is too late. There is too much at risk. He pulls the trigger. Deeply troubled by what he has done, Rudy seeks out Memo to make things right and, in the end (spoiler alert), Rudy uses his own node connection to blow up the dam in Memo's hometown.

What does it mean to think of both codes of ethics and nodes as "technical solutions [that] are an intrinsic part of modernity's instrumental culture" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 59)? Staying close to this description/depiction of the ECE in neoliberal times, there are a number of points of connections between the College of ECE's Code of Ethics (2017) and Rivera's (2008) nodes that I wish to explore, namely the dematerialization and instrumentalization of the ECE through the privileging of the scientific and technical over the ethical and political, through distance and the acceptance of regulation in exchange for the false promise of freedom, and through forms of discipline and violence that force compliance in exchange for the ethical and political. Or how we get "all the work without the worker" (Rivera, 2008, 36:27).

Dematerialization and Instrumentalization of the ECE

The Privileging of the Scientific and Technical Over the Ethical and Political

The dematerialization of node workers bodies occurs directly with the act of having nodes implanted into their arms and upper back. The human body, as it was, disappears and is transformed into something else by the implantation of nodes, which are like electronic ports in the flesh into which needles attached to cables can be inserted. Instrumentalization happens when the cables are inserted into the nodes and connect to the Internet and to a corresponding robot somewhere in the U.S. The imagery of the dematerialization of workers' bodies in the film through the implanting of nodes (see Figures 3 and 4) can be imagined as the dematerialization of the RECE through the implanting or inscribing of scientific knowledge (child development) and instrumental rationality (neoliberal regulation) transforming the RECE into a worker-technician. Once implanted with nodes, ECEs, like node workers, can hook into the network, the machine, "[in]to a regulatory mode [node/code] of modernity" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 56), into a profession dominated by the instrumentalizing developmental and neoliberal discourses that dominate it; discourses that do not require or recognize complex ethical relationality but rather seek to eradicate the "uncertainty and ambivalence" of human and more-than-human relations (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, p. 59) through the neutral or apolitical application of codified ethics. I also see the dematerialization of the human through nodes and codes of ethics as related to Dahlberg and Moss's (2005) de-politicization and de-ethicalization of ECEC through the privileging of the scientific and technical over the ethical and political. Taking the ethical and political to be that which makes the human *human*, means that reducing the human to the scientific and technical is in effect a dematerialization of the early childhood educator into a replaceable worker-technician. What is more, the scientific and technical also "privileges the universal over the local" (p. 56) thus dematerialization through distance becomes even more evident.

Figure 3

Nodes Being Implanted Into Memo
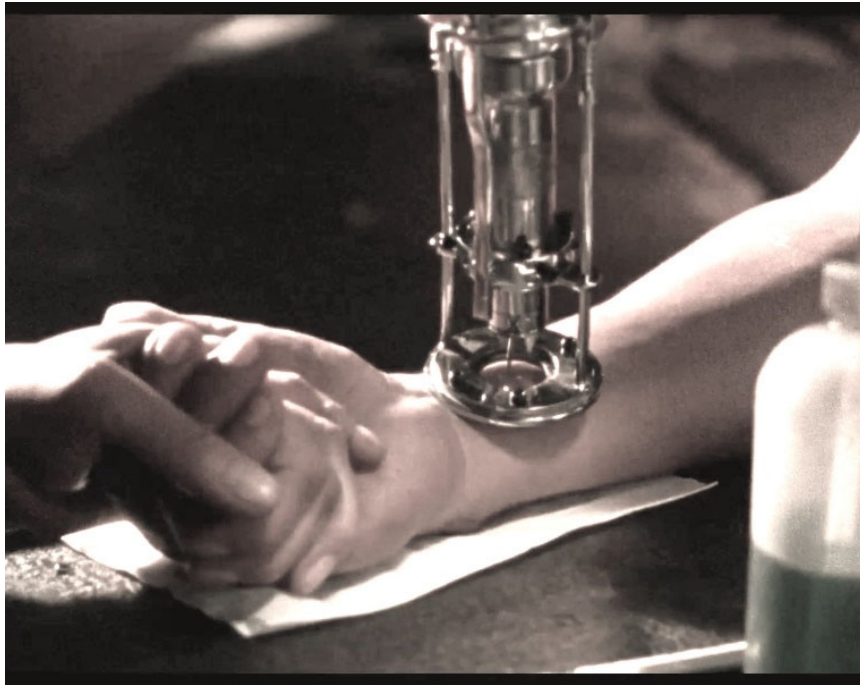
Note. Image from the film *Sleep Dealer* (Rivera, 2008, 35:02). Copyright 2008 by Alex Rivera. Used with permission.

Figure 4

Connecting to the Machine via Nodes

Note. Image from the film *Sleep Dealer* (Rivera, 2008, 37:29). Copyright 2008 by Alex Rivera. Used with permission.

The organization of the College of ECE's code of ethics around distinct standards is also instrumentalizing and dematerializing as it separates each standard into predetermined outcomes of achievement that operate independent of each other. Each standard is like a discreet node. Standard I: Caring and Responsive Relationships (College of ECE, 2017, pp. 8–9), for example, stands alone from all the other standards, yet it constitutes and infuses everything that a RECE does. Separating caring and responsive relationships from curriculum and pedagogy or health, safety and well-being compartmentalizes and simplifies each of these expectations within its own category, with its own set of recognizable and countable outcomes. Caring and responsive relationships, however, are difficult to quantify and are only recognizable when they are not caring or responsive. Otherwise, caring and responsive relationships are taken for granted while other standards that can be measured like curriculum and pedagogy or health, safety, and well-being are given precedence.

An ethical dilemma that has been a central question in my own experience as a RECE, and that drives my research, addresses the tensions between the expectations for curriculum and pedagogy and engaging in caring and responsive relationships with children in the everyday moments of an early childhood classroom (Johnston, 2019). Without the material support of paid planning time, I, like many RECEs, was expected to complete all the requirements for planning, documenting, and sharing documentation with families during the confines of the workday, but often ended up working outside of my paid working hours or completing paperwork while in program with children. When I made an ethical choice one summer to forego the paperwork in favour of truly being present with children and families, I was "caught" and reprimanded during a licensing inspection for not having my program plan complete. The messages I took away from this experience were that the paperwork was more important than the relationships I was engaged in, that I was not a "good" educator, and that the curriculum I was implementing did not count if it was not written down. The certainty of the paperwork outweighed the uncertainty of relationships. I had tried to unhook myself from the nodes and, therefore, became unrecognizable and unmanageable, so I was re-inscribed with compliance with the techno-rationality of the paperwork over the ethical relations.

Distance and the Acceptance of Regulation in Exchange for the False Promise of Freedom

The nodes in Rivera's (2008) film work to dematerialize the human and the body in the way that the work takes place across vast distances and transforms the human into a robot on the other side. I see the "autonomous, active, flexible, response-able subject" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 59) as a dematerialized subject. In *Sleep Dealer* distance manifests as no direct human oversight of the node workers in the factory. Rather, workers are managed and regulated from a distance through technology. In much the same way the code of ethics regulates RECEs from a distance through their formation as autonomous subjects, just as I was governed from a distance through the paperwork. The images in Figure 5 depict a moment in the film when Memo sees the reflection of the robot he is controlling in a pane of glass. In this moment he realizes that he has become the machine. Similarly, I argue that RECEs reflect and are reflected by the College of ECE's code of ethics and standards of practice.

Figure 5

Memo sees Himself as the Robot Reflected in a Pane of Glass

Note. Images from the film *Sleep Dealer* (Rivera, 2008, 47:11 and 47:18). Copyright 2008 by Alex Rivera. Used with permission.

The formation of the subject of the RECE thus occurs as the College of ECE grants educators the right to call themselves a Registered ECE. Simultaneously RECEs become subject to the code of ethics and standards of practice in their dedication to upholding their ethical (and personal)

responsibilities to children, families, their colleagues and the profession, the community and the public. Like Todd's (2003) argument that educators become receptacles for knowledge in the form of codified ethics, as RECEs internalize the code of ethics and standards of practice governing themselves according to these codes and standards and acting autonomously within them, they come to recognize themselves and are recognizable by their knowledge of adherence to the code of ethics. Drawing on my own example again, had I continued to sacrifice the relational and less visible aspects of my work with children and families so that I could complete the material aspects of the work, I would have been recognized as a good educator (Johnston, 2019).

These forms of regulation are readily taken up as the trade-off for the freedom and promise of the technology. While nodes offer the promise of work, the code of ethics offers the promise of professionalization, creating the subject as a "bearer of rights and responsibilities, self-governing, a practitioner of freedom" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 59). The freedom that Dahlberg and Moss (2005) refer to here is a certain kind of freedom that enables the autonomous subject to exercise "freedom-as-choice, especially through competent participation in the marketplace and rights-based contractual relationships" (p. 45). This illusion of freedom, however, only works through an elaborate system of convincing the population to govern themselves. For the ECEs this elaborate system now includes a legally enforceable Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, continuous professional learning requirements, yearly professional dues, and the threat of discipline or someone reporting them to the College of ECE.

What originally prompted me to investigate the imagery of nodes in *Sleep Dealer* in relation to the code of ethics was this notion that, just as workers in the film could only work if they had nodes, ECEs in Ontario can only work and use the title of RECE, if they are registered with the College of ECE. There is a widespread misunderstanding that the College of ECE is supposed to do something for ECEs, through the recognition of their education and expertise, when in fact, as stated earlier, the mandate of the College is to "protect the public interest and the integrity of the early childhood education profession," not the professional. Again, it states that "no person shall engage in the practice of early childhood education or hold himself or herself out as able to do so unless the person holds a certificate of registration issued under this Act" (College of ECE, 2017, p. 3). In other words, I speculate that in a dystopian reality that this could easily be read as one must have nodes to work as a RECE.

Forms of Discipline and Violence That Force Compliance

Finally, once dematerialized, node workers/ECEs become surveillable, punishable, and replaceable through the very connections that legitimize their work. Node workers in the film are docked pay if the network detects a pause in their productivity (see Figure 6). When Memo nearly passes out from over work and exhaustion, he is startled awake by an electronic voice telling him that he has been inactive for 10 seconds and his salary will be adjusted. Node workers are also susceptible to infection and possibly fatal surges of electricity that may feedback from the network/machine into their bodies through the nodes. Similarly, ECEs are highly susceptible to illness especially during COVID when working with unvaccinated children. When a node worker is no longer able to work, they are unhooked, and another takes their place. Indeed, Dahlberg and Moss (2005) noted that nation states must cultivate a "ready supply of suitable labour – flexible, responsive, skillful" (p. 49) to remain competitive global markets, recognizing preschools as technologies that maintain current labour participation and foster future human and social capital. Strikingly, Rivera's (2008) imagery of nodes and node workers in factories eerily echoes Dahlberg and Moss's (2005) use of the metaphor of the factory to describe early childhood programs

rendered by neoliberalism as services rather than educational spaces. They noticed how "the concept understands institutions as places for applying technologies to children to produce predetermined, normative outcomes, for the efficient processing of children by workers-as-technicians" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 28).

Figure 6

Memo's Productivity is Monitored by the Network/Machine.
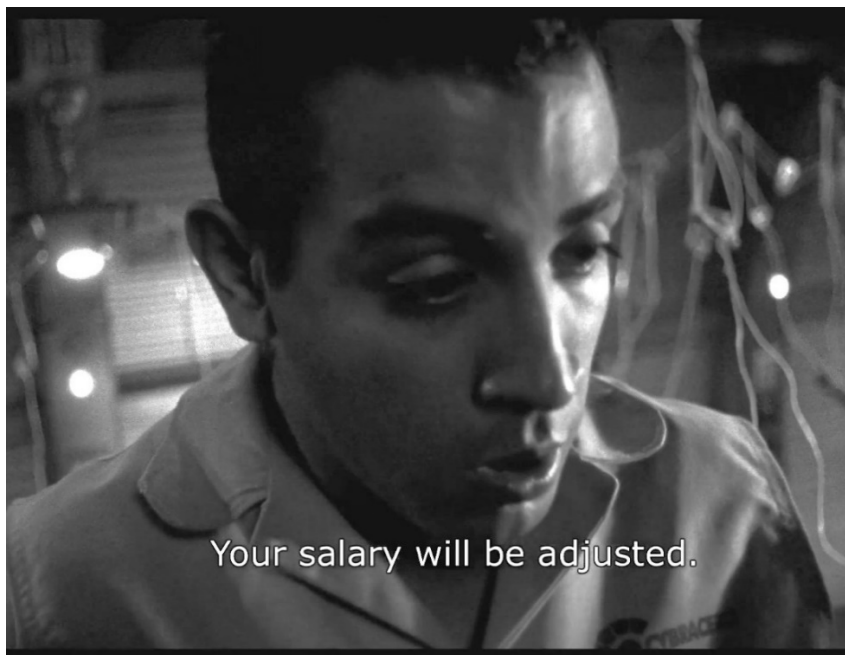
Note. Images from the film *Sleep Dealer* (Rivera, 2008, 1:06:28 and 1:06:37). Copyright 2008 by Alex Rivera. Used with permission.

RECEs, subject to the code of ethics, are always under surveillance by the College of ECE through their annual professional dues and through random audits of their professional learning portfolios. RECEs are also surveilled by the public through the public registry of members in good standing, and by their supervisors and colleagues. Every RECE under Standard IV: Professionalism and Leadership is responsible to "report professional misconduct, incompetence and incapacity of colleagues which could create a risk to the health or well-being of children or others to the appropriate authorities" by their colleagues (College of ECE, 2017, p. 15). This standard opens a lot of grey areas and exposes the non-neutrality of codified ethics, where racism, for example, can seep into personal and professional judgements. Recall Todd's (2003) warning that the moral authority in determining codes of ethics is founded in colonial and imperial ideals.

In my own experience of being reprimanded for not having completed my paperwork during a licensing inspection, I faced considerably mild punishment; however, I was aware that it could have been worse had I not been protected by being in a unionized position. Punishment such as the suspension of one's right to practice can also occur because an RECE has not paid their professional dues on time, or they have not completed their expectations for Continuous Professional Learning (CPL), or they have falsely claimed to be a Registered ECE. For RECEs who continue to make low wages paying yearly professional dues can be a financial strain. As well the expectations for CPL require time to engage in some form of learning that may or may not be paid for, or that either requires time outside of working hours or time off work to complete. The process of documenting one's CPL is also a time-consuming process that is not supported within the paid workday. In essence, the expectations on RECEs for maintaining their professional status directly impacts them financially. When RECEs are working on their own time, they are essentially lowering their wages even more, whereas registering as an RECE is meant to significantly increase wages.

As for replaceability, we are currently witnessing a retention crisis in the ECE workforce in Ontario (Jones, 2022b) due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its exacerbation of the historic and systemic issues of poor wages and working conditions. The response has been to increase recruitment—simply train and replace a new set of workers. Billions of dollars have been poured into compressed college programs and free tuition for ECE students (for example see Durham College, 2022; George Brown College, 2022), while the current wage floor for ECEs has been announced at $18.00 an hour, well below what ECEs who work in Full Day Kindergarten make and well below what is needed to have a livable wage in Ontario (Jones, 2022a). If RECEs are simply replaceable then the transformation of the RECE into the worker technician is complete. The ethical educator is not needed to be present, only a dematerialized body that adheres to the "new and continuous forms of discipline and control [that] provide ever more effective ways to form and govern this subject" (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, p. 59). All the work without the worker. Is this how we shall live?

Rethinking the Ethical

I return now to Todd (2003) and her concern with rethinking ethics and education as an ethical relationality. What Todd (2003) means is that we must not solely rely on an epistemological understanding of ethics in education, an ethics based on having the right moral knowledge and applying it to the knowability of the Other through categorizing their social and material position in relation to intersecting forms oppression. Rather, education and educators must also take up a philosophical understanding of the Other. Todd (2003) refers specifically to Levinas's concept of the Other as a radical alterity with whom we are already in ethical relationality. How is ethical

relationality already an orientation that punctures the codified standard of caring and responsive relationships? How might embodying this ethical relationality re-materialize the ECE?

In *Sleep Dealer*, Rudy Ramirez, the soldier and drone operator who kills Memo's father, thinking that he is killing an aqua-terrorist, is confronted with the ontological otherness of Memo's father when he looks into his face (see Figure 7). This moment creates uncertainty for Rudy that he cannot reconcile. While the expectations of his employment are that he carries out orders in destroying the enemy, once he is confronted with the face of the Other as a radical alterity and *not* as an enemy (even though in the moment of seeing the face of the Other, he does follow orders), he is deeply troubled by his actions which he now experiences as unethical.

Figure 7

Rudy Looks Into the Face of Memo's Father.

Note. Images from the film *Sleep Dealer* (Rivera, 2008, 16:16 and 16:31). Copyright 2008 by Alex Rivera. Reprinted with permission.

Rudy's next actions answer this question. No longer able to comply with the expectations of the system, Rudy is compelled to make an ethical choice to use his nodes, his connections to the system, to subvert it. Together with Memo, he sneaks into the node factory, connects to his drones, and uses them to blow up the dam in Memo's village (see Figure 8). This act brings relief and access to water for everyone in Memo's village. Though this act brings more uncertainty for Rudy's future, it also brings hope and a way of living well together. So, "what happens to ethics and [early childhood] education when learning is not about understanding the other but about a relation to otherness prior to understanding?" (Todd, 2003, p. 9). How might we recover nodes as a way of enacting ethical relations like the way Rudy uses his nodes to act ethically in relation to the Other? Again, Todd (2003) invited us to think about how "conditions instead of principles, codes, and rules, ethics might be considered in terms of those *moments of relationality that resist codification*" (p. 9). What are these conditions in ECEC?

Figure 8

Blowing up the Dam.

Note. Image from the film *Sleep Dealer* (Rivera, 2008, 1:22:11). Copyright 2008 by Alex Rivera. Reprinted with permission.

In *Sleep Dealer,* blowing up the dam is a moment of relationality that resists codification. Rudy knows that killing Memo's father was unethical even though it was sanctioned by the state, and he was lauded as a hero for killing an aqua-terrorist. Blowing up the dam is an ethical act that defies the status quo and the disciplinary technologies of the government. It is extremely risky and in fact Rudy must leave Tijuana and go into hiding. He can no longer be a soldier; he can no longer

work. At the same time, it creates conditions for an ethical relationality between Memo and Rudy that extends beyond them to Memo's family and his village. Likewise, my choice to be present with children and families was also a moment of relationality that resisted the codification of writing the program plan. Time and support were the resources being held behind a dam. In the neoliberal and patriarchal context of professionalism in ECE, not having paid planning time meant that I was expected to do more with less time and support and constantly worked against my ethical commitment to cultivate caring and responsive relationships with children and families. This is the reality for many RECEs currently and even more so with the increased expectations for cleaning and sanitizing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It may be why RECEs are leaving the profession and why preservice students are choosing to bypass this profession and use their college training as a stepping stone to somewhere else. For me, not doing the program plan and writing this article are small moments of blowing up the dam, of resisting the codified identity of professionalism. It is risky. However, the current masculinist construction of professionalism is also risky and harmful. There is too much at stake not to take the risk. Ethical relations require time and are not quantifiable. How then do we reconceptualize professionalism in ECE as ethical relations? Materially RECEs need to have paid time in their workday to collaborate with each other about what this means in their own situated contexts. They also need other ways of thinking about their work and valuing the ethical relations they engage in every day.

In considering how we might recover nodes as conditions for ethical relations, I draw on Zylinska's (2014) work to think about how nodes are a network of relations in conversation with Ingold's (2011) concepts of meshworks and knots. Zylinska (2014) was concerned about how we live in the context of the Anthropocene, this geologic time that we are currently living in as one that has been greatly impacted by human interaction, and that warnings of an oncoming dystopian, ruined future. In response, Zylinska (2014) argued for a minimal ethics that hinges on a repositioning of the human from a place of supremacy, predicated on scientific ontologies that claim certainty in knowledge, and that use knowledge to create technological rationalities to justify their degradation of the planet, to a place of human singularity that acknowledges our actions as contingent and consequential. From this place of singularity, Zylinska (2014) invited us as humans to see ourselves as situated always and already in relation to the processes of matter and time that extend beyond our capacity to comprehend them.

Zylinska (2014) thought about the human as "an entangled and dynamically constituted node in the network of relations to whom an address is being made and upon whom an obligation is being placed, and who is thus made-temporarily-singular precisely via this address" (p. 74). This conceptualization of a node is different from the intentional function of nodes in *Sleep Dealer* in that it invites uncertainty, ambivalence, and complexity in its singularity. It resists codification. The instance when Rudy looks into the face of Memo's father a node is created that did not exist before. It was not predetermined. Memo's father addresses Rudy who is obligated in that moment to respond to the radical alterity of the Other. Even though he does not act ethically in this moment, the obligation to make things right drives him to use his position as a node in the network to respond to the address.

Further, Zylinska (2014) reconceptualized nodes from a techno-rationality into a relational ethics by reconceptualizing the network not as a dematerializing system of cables leading to somewhere, but as a network of relations. Rudy, Memo, and Memo's father form a network of relations operating within and outside of the techno-rationality of the network. Referring again to my own experience shared earlier, I think about how the ethical choice I made to engage deeply

in a network of relations with children and families was a response to the address placed on me by the Other, and how it also created nodes of ethical relationality in the network that were unrecognizable to the licensing inspector.

Zylinska's (2014) use of the word *network* in relation to the concept of a node, however, still echoes a sense of the scientific and technical. I want to trouble further this by intersecting with Ingold's (2011) thinking of meshwork and knots to reposition and situate nodes as more than static and organized points of connection. For Ingold (2011) networks evoked images of efficient points of connection that one can be connected to and may be entered into from various points or nodes in the network. A meshwork, however, is much less organized, technical, and predictable than the concept of a network suggests. Ingold (2011) also envisioned a meshwork as storied and thus relational:

> It is a world of movement and becoming, in which any thing—caught at a particular place and moment—enfolds within its constitution the history of relations that have brought it there. In such a world, we can understand the nature of things only by attending to their relations, or in other words, by telling their stories. Indeed, the things of this world *are* their stories, identified not by fixed attributes but by their paths of movement in an unfolding field of relations. Each is the focus of ongoing activity. Thus, in the storied world, things do not exist, they occur. Where things meet, occurrences intertwine, as each becomes bound up in the other's story. (p. 199)

Ingold's (2011) meshwork conjures sensorial images of looped and knotted string or rope entangled together and instead of nodes he thought with knots. In fact, node and knot both originate from the Latin *nodus* (Etymology online, n.d.). Where a node is a point of connection in a network that one can connect into (and disconnect from) as illustrated in the imagery in *Sleep Dealer* (2008), a knot in a meshwork gives the feeling of a deeper processual permanence. The meshwork is created through the making of knots and/as stories in and with the work. The human is thus repositioned in relation with the storied knots in the meshwork. The human's place in the meshwork is also contingent on their relations and the stories that are woven together through their relations. In this way the meshwork then makes space for "uncertainty and ambivalence" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 56) as well as for variability and unpredictability. To create a meshwork requires trust and "relations across difference" (Todd, 2003, p. 3) that respond to the ethical and political in human and more-than human relations. What would it mean to recognize the knotted and storied meshworks in ECE that interrupt coded and technical networks? Or to take up Dahlberg and Moss's (2005) concept of "children's spaces" or "meeting places … where the coming together of children and adults, the being and thinking beside each other, offers many possibilities" (p. 28), as not just physical spaces but also social, cultural, and discursive spaces where stories are woven together into the fabric of democracy. Might it reassert the ethical into early childhood practice as professionalism?

Everyday ECEs encounter the radical alterity and otherness of the children and families they share spaces with. They are story tellers with children and families, attuned to and continuously co-creating conditions of relationality and care, yet the storied meshworks of their relations are continually reshaped and fitted into techno-rational networks of accountability and compliance and node-ified ethics. Like my own story of non-compliance, I had no longer accepted this reshaping of my practice, the counting of my work only as the recognizable program plan instead of an impromptu trip to the park. Our collective call to activism is to reassert the ethical in early childhood education by recognizing and valuing the knotted and storied meshworks of

educators that already exist, and to support them with the professional pay and working conditions that provide them with the time and space needed to engage in the ethical relations that blow up coded and technical networks.

In this article, I have taken up Tuck's (2018) question of "How shall we live?" (p. 157) to problematize the ethical in codes of ethics in ECEC. I began by situating codified ethics within the broader context of professionalization in Ontario and internationally and offering a critique of how professionalism has not brought ECEs the promised material recognition they were seeking but has rather resulted in more regulation. Drawing on Todd (2003), I took up a philosophical critique of codified ethics and explore her invitation to rethink ethics in education as an ethical relationality. I then weave together Dahlberg and Moss's (2005) analysis of neoliberalism's creation of early childhood educator as a worker-technician, the College of ECE's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice and my own experience as an RECE along with the aesthetic device of nodes in the dystopian film *Sleep Dealer* (Rivera, 2008), to explore how codified ethics, as they become enforceable within a regulatory body such as the College of ECE, instrumentalize and dematerialize the early childhood educator. Finally, in conversation with Zylinska and Ingold, I repositioned nodes and networks as knots and meshworks and offer this article as both a warning and a call to activism to reposition the ethical and relational as central to early childhood education, to nurture not only the lives of children and families but also the ethical, political, and liveable futures of early childhood educators.

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[1] View the official trailer for the film at https://www.sleepdealer.com/packages/sleep-dealer-the-movie/videos/sleep-dealer-official-trailer

Doing Twitter, Postdevelopmental Pedagogies, and Digital Activism

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Abstract

In this article, we interrogate how we might manifest early childhood education's Twitter purview as a space for thinking with postdevelopmental pedagogies. Accordingly, we pay attention to the ethics and politics that shape our Twitter practices, asking how these activate postdevelopmental provocations. In this sense, postdevelopmental pedagogies refer to processes and questions that interrupt the assumptions, objectivity, universalism, and technocratic instrumentalism of child development that so often pervade ECE practice, including much of the #earlychildhoodeducation content. Anchored in the two Twitter accounts that we coordinate, we outline four practices for doing Twitter with postdevelopmental provocations: counterpublics, counter-narratives, and counter-memory, collectivity, and digital feminist activism. We then work through two examples, showing how we draw these practices into our decision making as we craft tweets to activate postdevelopmental questions. We conclude by offering forward questions that educators, pedagogists, researchers, and activists might carry into their own Twitter practices.

Keywords: early childhood education, Twitter, postdevelopmental pedagogies, digital activism

Doing Twitter, Postdevelopmental Pedagogies, and Digital Activism

Working in digital pedagogical spaces that are knitted together by a collective of scholars, educators, and activists invested in thinking early childhood education beyond the technocratic bounds of child development, this paper takes up the question: how do we do Twitter as a fragmented, situated, and responsive online activist practice entangled with postdevelopmental provocations? Phrased otherwise, our question is how our Twitter practices become a pedagogical —and not just instrumental nor self-promotional—provocation, one that matters for what we set in motion with our tweets and how our tweets dialogue, ally, and contract with the messy online world that is #earlychildhoodeducation. As we have written elsewhere (Land et al., submitted), we are interested in thinking how Twitter becomes a pedagogical space, one where we grapple toward a commons with questions of living well together. We want to acknowledge that our Twitter engagements are deeply emplaced amid ongoing settler colonialism in the lands currently known as Canada, with Narda engaging with Twitter as a settler on the lands Songhees, Esquimalt & WSANEC First Nations in Victoria, British Columbia, and Nicole on Anishinaabe, Mississaugas and Haudenosaunee homelands in Toronto, Ontario. We note the place-fulness of Twitter early on in this paper as we want to rethink colonialism outside the overdetermined conceptualization of this violent process as linked only to land. Ocean waters criss-crossed with cables, server farms, online niches and power dynamics, and conceptual colonization are constantly at work and matter deeply to how we encounter Twitter. The hybrid world that is Twitter is never removed from the ethics and politics that our classroom postdevelopmental pedagogies work to respond to in the name of living well together with children and with the situated systemic injustices that matter to a particular place.

In this paper we share provocations, ethics, and politics that guide our thinking as we coordinate two different Twitter accounts: the [BC Early Childhood Pedagogies Network](#) (ECPN)[1] and the [Common Worlds Research Collective](#). We begin by highlighting our relationship to Twitter, then naming four practices relevant to our online labour, followed by two examples of putting these practices to work in ways that activate the ethical and political intentions we carry into the way we use Twitter. These ethical and political intentions are critical to our Twitter engagements because they name the pedagogical commitments (Vintimilla et al., 2021) that we work to manifest through our tweeting. This is where our Twitter labour intersects with the Call of this special issue to articulate narratives of movement: we see Twitter as a pedagogical project grounded in educational processes, and as such we resist allowing Twitter to become technocratic or instrumental. We lean in to seeing Twitter as a potentially pedagogical space that moves beyond only individualist, performative self-curation practices. More than seeing Twitter itself as a movement, we are interested in the micromovements we might enact with Twitter. While we share how we (quote unquote) use Twitter, we are equally as conscious that Twitter uses us. We refuse the humanist hubris (Taylor, 2020) of imagining ourselves as a controller in charge of what happens on Twitter, where we guide the dialogue and make interventions that reiterate our power. We know Twitter is messy, and that it makes and remakes us as Twitter subjects, over and over.

First, what do we mean when we invoke the words "postdevelopmental pedagogies"? To think with postdevelopmental pedagogies is to join with a collective of early childhood education scholars, educators, and activists who reject and reconfigure the tenets and consequences of child development. This means studying developmentalism for the knowledges and relations it manifests (Burman, 2016; Dahlberg et al., 2013): technocratic practice, instrumentalism, universalism, assessment, pathologizing, and linear trajectories of growth and of temporality.

Holding these knowledges, postdevelopmental pedagogies intervene in these logics, imagining how we might think pedagogy outside of the confines of normative developmentalism, where pedagogy shapeshifts from a technology of building proper neoliberal child subjects (Moss & Roberts-Holmes, 2022) to a process for figuring out how to live well together with children with the complex worlds we inherit together (Land, 2022; Land & Frankowski, 2022; Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2022; Nxumalo et al., 2018; Vintimilla & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2020). To think with postdevelopmental pedagogies, then, means invoking a world (in our case here, a digital space) where the logics of child development are intentionally made messy and, through the creation of alternative ways of coming together in early childhood education spaces, become too unstable to exert their normalizing power. Postdevelopmental pedagogies, it is critical to note, are not content to rest as critical pedagogies; their work is more than that of analysis and destruction. They ask questions of invention, of how we might think in the wake or ruins of child development and create more livable worlds together. As Murris (2017) offered, postdevelopmental pedagogies are "driven by a desire to show how matters of ontology and epistemology have implications for ethical relationships in educational institutions, and that they cannot, and should not, be reduced to apolitical governmental concerns about efficacy and standardisation" (p. 532). For example, in decentering the child as the primary actor and acted-upon body in education, postdevelopmental pedagogies ask questions in the vein of "how [we] might invent alternative dynamics beyond the predictable and stable rote centering of the child that is rooted in developmental psychology" (Land et al., 2020, p. 110). Invention, affirmation, and accountability mark the grammars of postdevelopmental pedagogies. Accordingly, when we argue in this paper that we are thinking with developmental provocations, what we mean is that we are taking the questions that postdevelopmental pedagogies ask—questions of knowledge, process, ethics, and life beyond developmentalism's bounds—and imagining what the work of taking these seriously in our Twitter practices might create. We are crafting provocations that intentionally intervene in technocratic practice, instrumentalism, universalism, assessment, pathologizing, and linear trajectories of growth and of temporality. We take this work seriously as we think about postdevelopmental Twitter pedagogies: how can we connect to postdevelopmental energies and alliances through how and why we tweet? How can our tweets carry and enliven postdevelopmental provocations?

Twitter-ing and Inheriting a Context

Since 2020, Narda has been managing the ECPN Twitter account, which has approximately 790 followers today. This Twitter account is "a public forum to advance pedagogies & establish a network of pedagogists who support ECEs" throughout BC in an effort to promote "pedagogies responding to the conditions of our times." Nicole manages the Common Worlds Research Collective account, which started in 2014 and has approximately 1,500 followers. This account links to the work of the Collective, where interdisciplinary researchers come together to think with children about more-than-human worlds, feminist worlding practices, and anti-colonial orientations. We situate our practices of tweeting and retweeting as activism/advocacy because of the way Twitter is in continuous dialogue with our complex, ever shapeshifting worlds—to hold a presence, take up space, on this platform is to stake an identity and a project amid a larger common project at hand. Because of this, we see Twitter worlds as entangled with ongoing complex more-than-digital worlds, where our contributions are always in dialogue with ethics, politics, and an activist's attention to how it is we mobilize this ethico-political milieu. We have written on the political contours of using Twitter in pedagogical ways elsewhere (Land et al., submitted), where we detailed how we might activate our pedagogical commitments through our Twitter practices.

We know that Twitter thrives on a deeply neoliberal loyalty to the instantaneous and its continual reach for new terrain, transitory communication, and hyper-drive for individualized attention that neoliberalism demands. Working within a site designed for self-promotion makes it impossible to argue that we work outside of such logics. Born of neoliberalism, Twitter constantly risks capture by the very forces that make it possible; even when Twitter *is* a liberatory space, it walks a precarious line of recapitulation, of being gobbled up by the neoliberal politics of promotion and capture. This is, perhaps, what makes Twitter so interesting: the way some people and groups are able to generate small pockets of alternative worlds, where these worlds are rich through resistance against the flush of power held by dominant forces. This raises an absolutely critical question—a question that is even more of a juncture than a question: how might we use Twitter in pedagogical ways? This "how" is important because it gestures to a practice, something ongoing and methodological in its consequence. It hints at the whispering possibility of capture by the dominant forces that ignite Twitter. How can we use Twitter beyond a source of advertising? As more than a battle for airtime and attention? This raises another question: if Twitter always runs the risk of capture, why stick with it? Our answer is a return to the question we just asked: how to use Twitter in pedagogical ways? We want to work at Twitter. What might be possible to put into motion, on a platform wrought with imperfections, but also so capable of sustaining hopeful and speculative world making?

Tied to this question of pedagogy, we note the multitude of pathways through our activities on this platform; where tweets meet with others through complex algorithms, & feedback loops directed by artificial intelligence mechanisms. We do not control the spatial or temporal conditions that bring others to our tweets. We do not get to set the conditions upon which others encounter our tweets and writings. This unpredictability threads through our attention as 280 characters become tentacular, threading together with others' online.

We want to propose that, thinking with postdevelopmental provocations, Twitter as a practice of advocacy or activism can be categorized in a few overarching shared projects, as follows:

- cultivating a community online, where community names the anti-colonial, anti-neoliberal, anti-capitalism imaginaries that we are working toward together in early childhood education;
- thinking with interdisciplinarity and cross-pollination on Twitter (what do we do with interdisciplinarity when we are not seeking "the next best thing," or simply accruing numbers, but slowing down with what a concept shared in a tweet actually does in reimagining pedagogy) while taking seriously that our tweets will be in dialogue with countless others, knowing this is not something we control;
- recognizing Twitter as littered with dominant images of romanticized Euro-Western childhood and the economies of education that sustain such images, we want to interrupt this as a site for mere self-promotion—or technological "elbowing in" for air time—asking what we are *doing* with Twitter, where "we" means early childhood education, and the pluralities within; and
- thinking carefully about the ways that Twitter does urgency and archive, where we constantly respond to what happens with "a future on the verge," as Twitter grasps for immediate attention, simultaneously creating a repository of what was; this space where temporalities blur and something new might emerge, we want to treat the

histories and presences of our tweets as pedagogical questions—what becomes of old tweets; what do our Twitter archives manifest, and how?

To pause in this section, we want to note that tweeting during the COVID-19 pandemic has been a slippery project layered onto our ongoing work. Dominant discourses circulate about Twitter as saving us from isolation and our digital relations keeping us going during the pandemic. Within this context, our tweets take on strangely higher stakes amid increasing pressure of curating a digital world amid the "together-alone" of quarantine, as we contribute to creating past-present-future knowledges and possibilities amid the shifting ground of an uncertain world. We note this because our postdevelopmental affinities for thinking Twitter and pedagogy are situated and timely, and the analysis that follows is grounded in Twitter work that unfolded during the COVID-19 pandemic. Twitter, and our tweeting practices, encountered what Phelan and Rüsselbæk Hansen (2021) named as the "suspensions" of the pandemic. That is, there has been no Twitter-as-normal over the past 2 years and as we have worked to keep postdevelopmental provocations alive in our tweeting, we have encountered what Phelan and Rüsselbæk Hansen (2021) described as,

> An opportunity to reclaim (educational) spaces—that is, as zones of indistinction in which the suspension of normal rules and innovative leaps from the neoliberal utopian logic that ordinarily governs education—in which we not only focus on and discuss ethico-political questions related to socioeconomic inequality, human vulnerability, and public spirit but do so in ways that playfully embrace paradox and tension. (p. 20)

Tweeting for us in and of this time is never separate from the viral worlds we inhabit and we refuse to see our tweets as contributing to a "new normal" where the power relations, structures, and inequities of prepandemic life are reiterated under the guise of postpandemic life. As we work through the four Twitter practices to follow, we carry near the need to attune to the breaks and the stutters of viral worlds, including the viral worlds that we inherit and craft online.

We turn now to thinking with four Twitter practices that guide how we activate our tweets with postdevelopmental provocations. These include counterpublics, counter-narratives and counter-memory, collectivity, and doing feminist digital activism.

Tentative Twitter Practices With Postdevelopmental Provocations

Now we will detail four practices that guide our thinking of Twitter as a site for advocacy and activism. What we hope you will pay attention to here is the immense interdisciplinarity of these practices—few come from education research. This further situates our own tweeting practices amid complex more-than-human ethical and political 21st century worlds; the same worlds we inherit with children. We do not intend for this to serve as a comprehensive literature review. Rather, it is us visiting with different literature that thinks with Twitter, imagining what these projects might do in conversation with ours.

Practice 1: Counterpublics

We come to thinking counterpublics through an article on animal welfare debates on Twitter in the Netherlands by Wonneberger et al. (2021) who noted that "counterpublics may be identified as communicative clusters that can be observed as distinct from communicative activities of elite actors, such as media or political actors" (p. 1698). This means that counterpublics are minor collectives that stand in the face of dominant forces or organizations. A counterpublic is in dialogue with a public but refuses the conditions of subjectivity and relationality engendered by that public. This means that our tweeting toward counterpublics must

both refuse and speculate, doing more than offering critical thinking and instead doing the hard work of caring within a public. A postdevelopmental pedagogies proposition at play here relates to subject formation and the notion that we are composed, over and over, differently through the constantly recomposing publics of which we are a part (Vintimilla, 2020). To tweet with this provocation is to recognize that tweeting is a practice of making ourselves perceptible to the publics that inhabit a space, be those dominant publics or counterpublics, and that to become knowable to and within a counterpublic is an intentional decision; we are always public-facing as we tweet, and we need to take seriously what publics our tweets advance, contradict, and elide— and why.

Counterpublics make us and we make counterpublics. Kuo (2016), in the context of racial justice activist hashtags, wrote:

> Making subversive use of both visibility and invisibility, members of a racialized digital counterpublic who have been perceived as "invisible" within the public at large utilize hashtags to make their presence and message more visible to publics dominated by whiteness. (p. 499)

Here, we learn that counterpublics are a practice of making and taking space, of asserting an existence amid a public that makes little space for such an existence. That counterpublics are spatial is a postdevelopmental provocation against the universalism and displacements of child development, where developmentalism is positioned as a knowledge that applies in multiple contexts in multiple places. To think counterpublics for how they are spatialized and emplaced is to echo the calls of postdevelopmental scholars (Kraftl, 2020; Kraftl & Horton, 2018) and to plug in to our contention, in the introduction to this paper, that it matters that we tweet from the lands currently known as Canada amid ongoing settler colonialism. In the face of the colloquial—and dangerously digital—disembodied avatar of Twitter, to tweet into a counterpublic is to join with tweets grounded in a time and place and responsive to our ethical obligations within that time and place. What this means for us is that we never tweet outside the context of ongoing settler colonialism; our tweets always need to answer to our multiple responsibilities of being embedded in a particular ecological, political world. Counterpublics, accordingly, are high stakes; we never want to lose the immense responsibility that comes with trying to articulate and nourish any counterpublic on Twitter. This echoes a postdevelopmental provocation toward figuring out how accountability happens within a space, without already assuming the ethical commerce of an interaction. Here, ethics becomes about responding, being implicated, and becoming vulnerable to the worldly impurities (Shotwell, 2016) that make us as subjects within an early childhood education postdevelopmental commons (Giamminuti et al., 2022; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2018). What this means for thinking about our tweeting practices is that we are constantly walking a tightrope of inhabiting digital space; we traverse the status-quo terrain of Twitter and its demands that we participate in dominant publics through dominant hashtags to gain power in dominant online spheres. We, concurrently, always hold the potential to turn toward a different public, a counterpublic, one fighting for space amid what already exists, and create tweets that feed such a counterpublic. This is, in a sense, what it might mean to tweet against child development: to tweet toward not already space-taking, not already perceptible, post-developmental digital spaces.

Practice 2: Counter-Narratives and Counter-Memory

Through Vats' (2015) article on #PaulasBestDishes in the wake of food celebrity Paula Deen's racist comments and the Black activists who re-asserted food narratives beyond Deen's

White-centered history, we learn of counter-narratives as a Twitter practice. Vats (2015) argued, "The tweets demonstrate the continuing realities of racism and equalize the often unequal politics of time across race. #PaulasBestDishes thus illuminates Twitter's role in circulating counter-narratives of food in ways that confront embedded forms of inequality" (p. 210). From Vats, we learn that counter-narratives are temporal; they are the stories that we tell that grapple with the inequalities of a time and of a place and that take on the work of making another time and place, with other politics, in Twitter swirls. Counter-narratives challenge dominant stories but it is *how* they challenge these stories, not just the content of the stories, that gives them life on Twitter. How we create counter-narratives, or reiterate existing stories, is a question we carry with us in our tweets. Storying is a postdevelopmental provocation, one that asks which stories of life and living we tell in education and which we silence in the name of child development. Nxumalo & Tuck (2022) named an "interruptive visual and textual storytelling" (p. 138) that works to "disrupt a human-centric storying" (p. 138) of, in Nxumalo's case, children's forest relations, where storying becomes the work of making some knowledges perceptible and others imperceptible in the name of caring with knowledges that interrupt the dominant epistemological networks that we inherit. As we tweet, this means that our tweets must be interpretive storytelling mechanisms and that they must do the work of storytelling otherwise, beyond the pillars of child development. This means participating in counter-narratives that refuse, as we often find ourselves working at, objective responses or "nice" tweets that gently pivot from a problematic tweet, and instead taking counter-narratives and storying as an ethical obligation to more directly contravene problematic tweets and to not let "let's just ignore it" stand. The temporal nature of counter-narratives, as Vats invoked, is also deeply relevant as a postdevelopmental provocation against the universalism and out-of-placeness of developmentalism (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Kummen, 2016); it is a reminder that our tweets have a life through time; they become visible and invisible with the idiosyncratic rhythms of Twitter time. For our tweeting, this means that we have to understand that our tweets endure and disappear, sometimes in the same timely moment in different peoples' feeds due to algorithmic pulses. We have to write tweets both of a time and out-of-time, understanding that Twitter time does not obey the linear trajectory of clock time (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2012).

We come to thinking counter-memory through Bosch's (2017) discussion of youth Twitter activism in South Africa via the #RhodesMustFall project. Bosch (2017) wrote,

> The #RMF campaign could be framed as a collective project of resistance to normative memory production, creating a new landscape of 'minority' memory and bringing to the fore the memory of groups who have been rendered invisible in the landscape, thus speaking to an alternate interpretation of historical events. (p. 222)

With Bosch, we learn that counter-memory, like counter-narratives, are both temporal and spatial on Twitter; they engender an archive and take up space as a presence. How our tweets make and take space is a question we often grapple with. This connects to a postdevelopmental provocation of understanding placemaking as an epistemological project, where we have to work hard to continue thinking alternatively amid the overwhelming spatial and temporal power of dominant narratives and dominant trajectories of memory. Vintimilla et al. (2021) proposed a postdevelopmental provocation where "think we must with situated matters—[matters] as a feminist call to actively think against the anti-intellectualism sustained by existing structures in early childhood education in what is currently known as Canada" (p. 2). Here, there is a postdevelopmental call for our tweets to think; to set into motion kinds of spacemaking that are rich with thinking against the instrumental and technocratic demands of the early childhood

education canon. Twitter place and spacemaking is work, where places and spaces do not exist for our ready consumption or for us to parachute into, but that we are actively involved in collectively formulating how and why a space matters. What this means for thinking counter-memory alongside postdevelopmental provocations is a call to fight for these alternative streams of memory, storying, and space as we tweet; as Vitimilla et al. proposed, to insist on thinking in our tweeting.

Practice 3: Collectivity

Haymond (2020) wrote in the context of #PeriodsAreNotAnInsult, and noted that "there is greater value in exploring how the group of tweets functions as a whole. It is the very use of the hashtag that permits collective analysis. The tagging mechanism allows for the collection and categorization of tweets" (p. 76). Collectivity, we learn, happens through hashtags. We also learn to pay attention to a hashtag as something with a life, as something with an assembling and disassembling function. How our tweets function, as Haymond said, as a whole, is a very interesting question for us. In the context of postdevelopmental early childhood studio work, Pollitt et al. (2021) wrote of co-labouring (Vintimilla & Berger, 2019), proposing:

> Co-labouring practices are not centred on the individual subject (be that the child as learner, or the adult as teacher). Rather, the attention is in the multiple acts of responding and corresponding that emerge in the everydayness of studio work. (p. 2)

To tweet with thinking about co-labouring and collectivity means understanding that a commons is made in the work of tweeting, where no one tweet is easily severable from another tweet. Our tweets are a compendium, a body, a bundle of stories, narratives, and memories that do something together, in dialogue with the publics and collectives they make and unmake. This means that we, as humans, never tweet in isolation and that our tweets, as digital marks on the world, never exist in isolation. To tweet is always to dialogue with a collective—how, and which collectives, are the questions that Twitter continually poses to us.

Yang (2016), speaking of #BlackLivesMatter, offered that "the temporal unfolding of such an incident [#BlackLivesMatter] is a process of people interacting with one another and collectively creating a larger narrative" (p. 15). This means that creating a larger collective narrative is work—Twitter is work, it is labour, it is common in its formation of a collective. Twitter does not and cannot presuppose a public, but counterpublics are made through collective labour against existing structures. This raises questions for us around the kinds of collectivity that our tweets do, and do not, make possible—and how we pay attention to these collectivities. A postdevelopmental pedagogies provocation of the commons matters here: what do we mean, what worlds do we plug into, when we say "commons"? What collectivities and commons can our tweets engage and not engage? Taylor et al. (2021) sketched the contours of common worlds pedagogies, proposing that common world pedagogies—which we position as postdevelopmental in their refusal to engage with the individualist, essentialist, bounded human subject of child development—are "concerned with the common good and with finding ways of learning how to live well together with our differences (human and more-than-human). They are neither individualistic nor competitive" (p. 75). This means that to think a postdevelopmental provocation of the commons with Twitter, we must grapple with questions of learning to live well together as we tweet—that is, that our tweeting must be oriented toward crafting more livable worlds even if we do not yet know what these words might engender. For us, this means that tweeting always

brushes up against world-making and is, therefore, extremely high stakes. To tweet with questions of the commons is to tweet with questions of multiple futures and to delve into worlds to come.

Practice 4: Doing Digital Feminist Activism

Finally, we turn to Mendes et al.'s (2018) analysis of #MeToo and challenging rape culture to think about the work of being a feminist activist on Twitter. Mendes et al. (2018) wrote,

> Like other types of 'women's work', the labour involved in running these digital feminist campaigns is highly affective, precarious and exploitative—and as such, we raise questions about the sustainability of such unpaid labour in light of online abuse, burn-out and other issues around work–life balance in the digital age. (p. 239)

Here, we are reminded that doing Twitter with feminist convictions is hard—counterpublics, counter-narratives, collectivity: doing these in the name of feminist work is difficult, uncertain, speculative, risky labour. We take this seriously in our tweeting, recognizing that there is nothing easy about Tweeting into the life of the feminist projects we dialogue with and contribute to. This connects to a postdevelopmental provocation that centres the work of care as a feminist project. Here we turn to Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's (2011) feminist ethics of care as a mode for tweeting with postdevelopmental provocations. For Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), care is as "an affective state, a material vital doing, and an ethico-political obligation" (p. 90) that makes visible that "these three dimensions of care—labor/work, affect/affections, ethics/politics—are not necessarily equally distributed in all relational situations, nor do they sit together without tensions and contradictions" (p. 5). This means that, as we think with tweeting, we take the work, the affective potential, and the ethical and political backbone of care seriously as a practice for guiding our tweeting. We tweet from within Puig de la Bellacasa's triad, knowing that our tweets must always traverse work, affections, and politics as we weave these concerns together. Put differently, following Puig de la Bellacasa we do not see tweeting with care as an instrumental, simplistic practice. Instead, we want to get to know Twitter as a project of "carr[ying] [this complex form of] care—as 'ethics-work-affect'—into the terrain of the politics of knowledge, into the implications of thinking with care" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 13). This raises for us questions of what other conditions might living such forms of care via Twitter (algorithmic care? Techno-childhoods care?) crack open or contribute to the creation of? What is required of us in the doing of our Twitter practices?

Tweeting With Counterpublics, Counter-Narratives, Commons, and Feminist Activism

We turn now to giving examples of our tweeting practice. First, Narda will share a tweet that Nicole tweeted from Common Worlds and will walk through how and why she would retweet this tweet. Nicole will then work with a tweet Narda created with the Early Childhood Pedagogy Network and will think through how she might amplify this tweet.

Retweeting With the Early Childhood Pedagogy Network

Original @Common_Worlds (2022), (Nicole) Tweet:

————@EcpnBC (2022), (Narda) Retweet:

Ethical relationality is an ecological understanding of human relationality that doesn't deny difference, but rather seeks to more deeply understand how our different histories & experiences position us in relation to each other. (Donald, 2009, p.6)

2nd part of this quote (to build on, from Z. Todd's, 2016, An Indigenous Feminist's Take on the Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' Is Just Another Word for Colonialism): This form of relationality is ethical because it does not overlook or "invisibilize" the particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a particular person understands and experiences the world.

Narda's Tweet Thinking:

I approach this tweet by asking: What is important (within the set of pedagogical commitments the ECPN works with/from) to uplift/expose/refuse/support here? Commoning is a tricky word. Within the romantic, "homogenous & happy" narratives imbued within ECE, commoning risks slippage into a flattening. Circling back to think with Kuo (2016) about counterpublics, Donald (2009) came to mind to counter the habit of rendering certain bodies "invisible within publics dominated by whiteness." (p. 499)

Thinking with Practice 4, doing feminist digital activism, alongside Fikile Nxumalo and Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, (alongside the work of Marisol de la Cadena, for example, de la Cadena, 2020; de la Cadena & Blaser, 2018), commoning necessarily invokes a sense of the uncommon commons, where we can refuse simplistic, romantic renderings of "the commons" as an imagined, neutral white space. Where rich, political forms of difference and resistance are not co-opted into easy forms of consumption. Where something already in motion, risks capture in digital space. So, in a minor and partial way I simply thought beginning with Donald (2009) could be helpful in crafting a response, to add to the conversation in a way that resists while gesturing towards commoning as more than "happy together" spaces.

Retweeting With the Common Worlds Research Collective

Original @EcpnBC (2022), (Narda) Tweet:

Oft we can think the child thru dev perspective. But there is a childhood situated w/in the context of Canada. We need to think w/Indig knowledges, w/post-colonial theories, w/ideas that remind us how to live w/in [transform] anti-Black space. Multiple perspectives help us think. ... and respond with where we are & what we might want to create right here. Not only ideas that come from somewhere else. What children might be saying & doing, acting out. Connected to what we are doing here right now.

@Common_Worlds (2022), (Nicole) Retweet:

'Here right now'—a proposition for thinking about inheriting past-presents; "The work of holding open the future and responsibly inheriting the past requires new forms of attentiveness to biocultural diversities and their many ghosts" (van Dooren, as cited in Rose et al., 2017 p. 12)

Nicole's Tweet Thinking:

I first revisited the orienting concepts of the Collective—commoning, worlding, and inheriting, thinking how I need to activate these and thinking about the imperfect practice of inheriting as both inheriting a now and a past and gesturing toward a future. I wanted to emphasize the "here right now" of the original tweet because I felt cautious that sometimes inheriting, as we inherit it, comes with a tinge of nostalgia, with a temporal logic that separates past from present from future; here right now emphasizes the present but not at the expense of the work of inheriting. I link this to the discussion of counter-narratives and counter-memories also being temporal

projects: how we remember and how we storytell is not abstracted from temporal and spatial accountabilities and possibilities. In emphasizing "here right now" and inheriting, I am trying to invoke a counternarrative the reconfigures inheriting as a practice without a bounded trajectory, one that doesn't rely on humanist divides between past and future. Then, thinking of inheriting, I thought first of Deborah Bird Rose's and Thom van Dooren's (i.e. 2017) work on the temporal entanglements of inheriting in common worlds of life and death. This is where I first learned of inheriting; I find it nourishing to think inheriting in the company of Bird Rose. This connects to collectivity as a Twitter practice, as I am pulling in scholars to think in the company of while also pointing toward the work of thinking with van Dooren and Bird Rose—there is nothing easy in their provocations here, nothing simple about assembling a collective around their words. Finally, thinking about the feminist risky labour of tweeting, this quote from van Dooren speaks of attuning to a present while also inheriting the situated relational "ghosts"—a dangerous, precarious, world-making provocation for thinking about life, temporality, and being implicated that I hope readers will carry with them.

Doing Twitter

We have shared how we want to think *doing* Twitter as an act of advocacy and activism, where we do not always know the worlds our tweets might bring into being but where we hold closely to the practices we think/hope will stretch possibilities for inheriting and living well in common worlds together. In thinking with the tensions of Twitter amid capitalism, free speech, human rights, and a myriad of other debates this social media platform is embroiled in, we propose counterpublics, counter-narratives and counter-memory, collectivity, and doing feminist digital activism as possible anchors—slippery and contextual as they need to be to respond to a context underwritten by hateful elements of society (transphobia, racism, ableism)—as practices that help us remain accountable to at least work with a serious intention of offering up tweets that do something; tweets that care about making more livable worlds. To conclude, we want to offer a question: What concerns, ethics, politics, or relations nourish decisions about how to engage with the imperfections and inventions of Twitter? Why? And, how?

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Endnote

[1] As of September 26, 2022, Narda no longer manages the ECPN Twitter account.

Counter-Storytelling: A Form of Resistance and a Tool to Reimagine More Inclusive Early Childhood Education Spaces

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Abstract

In this essay, I reflect on my lived experiences as a girl child growing up in my home country of Botswana, and also as a mother in a foreign country, Canada. I am experimenting with my personal essay and making connections with academic articles that will help me understand my behaviors, attitudes, and responses to challenging situations that seemed unfair and unjust. I believe sharing my experiences not only gives me a platform to reflect, but also renders an opportunity to unearth hidden ideologies that perpetuate dominant discourses that continue to undesirably affect early childhood education. Sharing the unfortunate events for me brings healing and comfort. My essay is guided by critical race theory that provokes and challenges the normalized practices in education that continue to marginalize the minority community. Also, my inspiration for this piece was drawn from Wallace and Lewis's (2020) book, which described humans as narrative creatures who need stories/narratives to make sense of the world around them. The essay unpacks and discusses four critical questions, at the same time, offering acts of resistance and refusal by applying counter-storytelling methodology.

Keywords: counter-storytelling, critical race theory, lived experiences, racialized minorities, early childhood education, acts of resistance and refusal

Counter-Storytelling: A Form of Resistance and Tool to Reimagine More Inclusive Early Childhood Education Spaces

One evening in 2008, I had dinner with a friend and her family and friends in London, United Kingdom. It was an informal gathering as children were present. I was the only Black person within the crowd and I felt out of place and uncomfortable most of the evening. The evening got worse when one of the children genuinely asked me if I had AIDS. Before I could answer, she asked another question, if I were sleeping with lions and elephants in my home country of Botswana. The child was 5 years old. Instead of being shocked or surprised by her inquisitive mind, I felt sad and instantly blamed her parents and early childhood education (ECE) centre for her mis-education. I never got the chance to answer her questions because she was quickly dragged to her room and I never saw her again. Indeed, it was a missed opportunity for learning and unlearning for the girl and the rest of the dinner guests, too.

A decade later, I was working part-time as a support worker in Regina. My main role was to support young adults with intellectual and physical disabilities. One day, a 20-year-old girl asked me if I had enough food and clothes at home because media always present Black people as poor and sick. I was taken back to that child in the UK. It broke my heart that 10 years later, I was still hearing the same story. This time I was not sure whom to blame. Should I still continue blaming the parents? Or media? The girl? The support work program? It took me a while to realize that blaming people for their different perspectives posited a delimited approach to dealing with complex and systemic situations. Ultimately, listening to people's different perspectives about Black people made me extremely frustrated, and I began to avoid engaging in conversations about race and/or ethnicity. However, Wong et al. (2022) indicated that ignoring racist behaviors "may not only be harmful for students' wellbeing, but may also mean that implicit forms of racism remain unchallenged or even dismissed" (p. 657).

The two examples of an inquisitive toddler and young lady illustrate the manifestation of *majoritarian* stories. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) described majoritarian stories as stories that generate from a legacy of racial privilege. They are stories that "privilege whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as natural or normative points of reference" (p. 28). Any ideology outside the normative falls in the category of abnormal, invisible, or unrecognizable. Because of the stories shared on media, in educational materials, and from a Eurocentric worldview that dominates Western society, stories about minority people are shared through a deficit-based lens.

Counter-Storytelling

Delgado (1989) argued that a form of resistance to majoritarian stories is counter-storytelling. He further suggested that stories shared by minority communities aim to subvert the reality constructed by the dominant group. Also, sharing stories about oppression and victimization can lead to healing, liberation, and improved mental health because "oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation" (p. 2436). Likewise, Liu (2015) advocated for acts of sharing individuals' experiences, most importantly reflecting on their actions because by so doing, individuals have an opportunity to step back and evaluate the situation that can inform new action and knowledge. Similarly, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) advocated for naming one's reality by using various platforms such as parables, poetry, fiction as well as revisionist histories "to illustrate the false necessity and irony of much of current civil rights doctrine" (p. 57). In a similar vein, this personal essay reflects my reality as a

Black woman, mother, immigrant, graduate student, and educational researcher. I was inspired to share my experiences after reading Wallace and Lewis's (2020) book, *Trauma Informed Teaching Through Play Art Narrative (PAN),* which described humans as narrative creatures who need stories/narratives to make sense of the world around them. Wallace and Lewis challenged individuals to ask themselves four critical questions: Where do I come from? Where am I going? Why am I here? and Who am I? Using these questions as a structuring framework, I add to them a perspective that takes into account the generativity of counter-storytelling and critical race theory (CRT) (Fairbanks, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2003).

The aim of this essay is to unpack these four questions using a critical lens and at the same time reflect on my lived experiences both in my home country, Botswana, and my new home, Canada. I am adopting the framework of counter-storytelling, a significant praxis of CRT. I chose CRT because of its mandate to highlight how race and racism manifest themselves in the education pipeline (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Also, CRT promotes recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of colour as strength rather than weakness. By sharing their experiences, people of colour can reclaim the power to challenge the status quo and teach about racial subordination (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Further, by using CRT through counter-storytelling, I aim to center the lived experiences of marginalized people as a way of exposing and questioning the racial hierarchies that exist in the society.

My positionality as a Black person living in a space where monovocal (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) stories dominate the society has a great potential for creating detached and lonely relationships between Black people and non-Black people. Therefore, my counter-storytelling aims to foster community building among the minority community as a way of providing venues that could remind them, they are not alone. Similarly, Delgado (1989) posited that stories build community and consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and deeper, more vital ethics. Also, counter-stories have the potential of offering alternate perspectives about reality, and ultimately giving people opportunities to explore a different life than the one that has been constructed for them. Delgado (1989) suggested that sharing our stories "enrich imagination and teach that by combining elements from the story and current reality, we may construct a new world richer than either alone" (p. 2414). My stories might not have any impact on the current status as far as discrimination and subordination of marginalized people are concerned. However, sharing my stories may act as a commitment to reimagine and work towards creating spaces in which every child, regardless of their skin colour or ethnicity, can enjoy their childhood experiences without feeling uncomfortable and unwelcomed. I am not talking about solving the racism and discrimination crisis in Canada. I am referring to understanding how racial subordination manifests in the education spaces and how to reconceptualize it in a way that can transform my ways of building relationships and having difficult conversations with people who are committed to social justice.

Where do I Come From?

Growing up in Botswana as an extrovert had its peaks and downfalls. But mostly I remember getting into trouble because of my inquisitive character. Whenever I encountered a complex situation, I would immediately request an explanation. Reflecting on my childhood years, I was taught that asking for an explanation from an adult was considered an act of insolent and arrogance. The cultural ideology of limiting children's ways of knowing fueled the existence of power hierarchy between parents and children. For instance, keeping eye contact with adults when having a conversation was prohibited. Unfortunately, this mindset of continuously reminding children that

they were minor and unimportant weaved into education settings. My elementary school teachers were not fond of my appetite to know more. I remember one morning in Grade 5 when I was 10 years old, my teacher asked a question and before raising my hand, she called out my name, and told me to be quiet until the end of class. Ever since that day, I started to learn silence. At the same time, an *imposter syndrome* manifested and introduced a deficit mindset that I carried into my interactions at a later stage of my studies. Bothello and Roulet (2019) explained an imposter syndrome as a growing sense of anxiety and self-doubt that exist when questioning one's legitimacy of their position, in this case, my position as a student within the education system. The school became terrible; I lost interest in taking part in-class activities, and I was suffocating because my teacher was irritated by my ways of knowing and learning. According to her, I was making too much noise by asking many questions. Two years later, I went to high school and things got much better; my teachers encouraged active participation and school became fun again.

This experience is an example of how an education setting—one elementary school, one classroom, one teacher—had a significant impact on my personality, confidence, self-esteem, and my interactions with teachers and other students. Applying this example in the current context, my concern remains on the Canadian education system that is embedded with dominant discourses that continue to marginalize students from diverse cultural background (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Nxumalo, 2021). I still wonder, how far can the education system stretch to accommodate the unique and complex identities of immigrant children to help them feel comfortable and have a sense of belonging? How is the education system dealing with the mismatch of cultures between White teachers' beliefs and experiences and their diverse students from various ethnic backgrounds? These are some of the questions that remain unanswered and act as learning opportunities throughout my academic journey.

Where am I Going?

My youngest son who is 4 years old is the friendliest person I have ever met. All my other children were very shy and not that sociable at his age—he is the exception. Wherever we go, at the stores, playground, daycare, and doctor's office, he always says "hello" to everyone we pass by. However, during these encounters with different people, I have observed that some people felt uncomfortable when my son greeted them, some would respond with a hello and a smile, while others would look at him unresponsive, and would give me a bizarre look. At the playground, when my son excitedly moves towards White children to play with them, their parents would quickly, but quietly, pull their children away. When this happens, my son gives me a confused and sad face, and I respond with a hug and smile. When we get home, we will have a chat about the event at the playground or the women at the store who ignored him. Personally, explaining to a 4-year-old child about racism is one of the most painful experience a mother could ever encounter. After reading Sullivan et al.'s (2021) study, I better understand why some adults felt uncomfortable letting their children play with my children at the park. Sullivan and colleagues (2021) stated that too often White parents are hesitant to talk about race. Most of the time when a child brings race into the conversation, even without harmful intent, such as "Diana's skin is not the same as mine, why is it dark?" many adults disapprove and respond "It's not polite to say things like that," or they would adopt a colour-blind approach, "skin colour doesn't matter," and emphasize the commonalities between humans "because we are all the same inside." These approaches have shown to be detrimental to race relations for both adults and children because children consequently learn to avoid talking about race themselves (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). However, when adults teach children to talk about race and ethnicity constructively, they develop empathy for others, learn

about new perspectives, understand their own identity, avoid engaging in practices that reproduce structural inequalities, and even exhibit less racial bias (Sullivan et al., 2021).

Nonetheless, I believe White parents are often reluctant to talk to their children about race because their children benefit from the effects of Whiteness. Parents of colour may talk with their children about race more frequently and in more depth because they are significantly affected by the White supremacy system. As a mother, I have to constantly remind my daughter of her strengths and abilities on daily basis because as the only Black girl in class, her difference is magnified every time she walks into the classroom. By constantly talking about her abilities I hope somehow to allow my daughter to see herself in a positive lens, a mechanism of counter-storytelling. Additionally, I have taught my sons to reach out to their teachers whenever they needed help with course content. Because I have read, experienced, and learned that the education system marginalizes non-White Canadian students. I have created a strong foundation for open communication in my family so that any single incident of unfair treatment at school, playground, or wherever, my children will be able to discuss it with us and assess whether it's a race issue or a playful moment. Also, at times my conversations with my children tend to be thought-provoking. For instance, when my fourth-grade daughter shares an incident at school about other children exchanging hurtful words with each other, I ask her what would she do if she was in that situation. Listening to her perspective in this kind of complex situation helps me to understand her problem-solving skills, and, ultimately, I will find ways of enhancing her knowledge by sharing my childhood experiences that depict the same kind of situation.

Why am I Here?

As a mother, I have to find ways to teach my children about the social injustice that exists in our daily interactions. Since the teaching and learning resources in their schools and public libraries lack diversity, I have to improvise and find strategies that help my children to see themselves in picture books with brown skin, afro hair, native language, and cultural clothes. One of the practices that foster representation in my family is visiting the public library and searching for books that represent diverse cultures. Based on the *Star*'s second annual diversity survey conducted in 2019, about 419 books with a Canadian author or illustrator were published in Canada, featuring 525 main characters (Dundas, 2020). Of those books, 37.5 per cent featured main characters who were White, while 29.3 per cent had main characters who were Black, Indigenous, East Asian or South Asian. About 11.5 per cent of main characters in picture books were Black (Dundas, 2020). Because of our frequent visits to the library, my children and I have built positive relationships with the librarians and they are always willing to help us find good books that my children can feel proud and confident about themselves.

In addition to supporting my children's education in a Canadian context, I created a picture book with them as my final project for one of my graduate courses, *Critical Perspectives in Preschool Education*. After realizing that the majority of books in libraries and schools represented either White children or animals, I asked my children to create a story about themselves using their best qualities. As indicated by Ladson-Billings (1998), naming one's own reality with stories can affect the oppressor. By using their voices, marginalized people can share their experiences and realities which is a "first step in understanding the complexities of racism and beginning a process of judicial redress" (p. 14). The task started casually but then I realized how my daily praises and encouragement impacted my children's confidence and self-image. I was pleased to witness the results of disrupting stereotypes about Black people. The list was endless, we are strong, beautiful, resilient, friendly, respectful, unique, generous, courageous, happy, and

so forth. This was an emotional project because even though my children viewed themselves in a positive lens, the education system had its stereotypes and had already labeled them as troublesome, irresponsible, and other negative labels associated with students from the minority community (Bernstein, 2017; Eddo-Lodge, 2020). Therefore, to challenge the stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination embedded in the education curriculum, we created our story by using our native language, *Tswana*, and my children's strengths and abilities to represent positive perspectives about children of colour. This task was much better than explaining daily acts of racism faced by my family at school and in the community.

In a similar vein, Kim and Hachey (2021) conducted a study in South Korea to examine how preschool-aged children negotiated, represented, and (re)created their voices through engaging in counter-storytelling about fairy tales. In the study, the children were given opportunities to playfully manipulate the original story using their creativity and imagination, at the same time exploring unheard voices and multiple viewpoints. The children played with themes and messages embedded in the fairy tales and recreated the stories using their own voices through drawing. For instance, when the children and teacher explored a *Cinderella* Disney storybook, children offered alternative endings of *Cinderella* in a critical and creative way. The children deconstructed the ending of the story and shared that Cinderella could have overcome her hardship through acquiring good education, studying a Korean language, learning how to ride a horse or making a robot so that she could become famous and rich. This example indicates the power that young children have to challenge the status quo and magnifies the discrimination that is interwoven in the teaching and learning materials. Also, counter-storytelling activities "offer a rich context in which young children practice deconstructing the dominant discourses, learn to tell their own stories and learn to listen to the stories of others" (Kim & Hachey, 2021 p. 644).

As an educational researcher, I am always appreciative of learning ways of incorporating counter-storytelling in early childhood education. I am here to learn alternative ways of making meaning, in particular, challenging the normalized ways of understanding the world around us. I am also here to appreciate the work that early childhood teachers engage in with young children on daily basis, doing their best to foster creativity and imaginative skills at the same time as dealing with the pressures of producing evidence-based results for their school administration. I concur with Lewis and Hildebrandt's (2019) notion that stories and storytelling are central to human experience and understanding. They further alluded that narrative understanding is an innate human capacity; we think, live, and dream in story form, making it one of the principal forms of human meaning-making.

Who am I?

I am an immigrant from Botswana, a peaceful country located in the Southern part of Africa. Before migrating to Canada, I had worked as an early childhood educator for 2 years. However, my career ended earlier than expected because I refused to become a bystander and wanted to stand up to a system that was not achieving its mandated goals and mission. In other words, my theoretical perspective of early childhood education (ECE) was disconnected from the practices that were implemented in ECE settings. ECE programs in Botswana remain highly exclusive and are driven by the supply-demand approach. The government only provides an enabling environment and the expectation is that once the environment has been created, both access and quality of preprimary education will improve (Maundeni, 2013). Because the government has no accountability in the operations of these programs, the private and civil society sectors are the ones leading the programs and they are concerned about generating profit. Consequently, the high fees

charged to access the ECE programs make them exclusive and children from low socio-economic background are often denied opportunities to benefit from the programs. Due to the concerns of ECE programs, I was motivated to leave my job and enrolled in my master's program at the University of Botswana so that I could empower myself and resist the complacency of being a bystander.

Throughout my graduate studies, my research interest was always rooted on the well-being of young children. I am currently a graduate student at the University of Regina pursuing my doctoral studies in early childhood education. My lived experiences in a Botswana early childhood education context have built a strong foundation and desire to learn alternate ways of engaging with complex issues that affect children's well-being. I am an educational researcher who enjoys working with early childhood teachers and building relationships with them to understand their ways of teaching and being. As a way of familiarizing myself with the education setting, I have decided to become an active committee member in my children's schools and usually engage in fundraising events, field trips, and school activities. In a way, spending time in school settings boosts my confidence as a doctoral student who will be soon co-researching with young children and their teachers.

My doctoral research aims to examine ways that immigrant children construct their identities in early childhood education settings in schools within the context of widespread anti-Black racism. My proposed study will engage children in Pre-K to Grade 4, their families, and their teachers. The study was motivated by the experiences my children encounter at schools and other immigrant families whom I have been in communication. Further, it has been estimated that by 2041, in Regina, the proportion of persons from racialized groups is projected to increase from 18% to 41% (Statistics Canada, 2022). However, at least two major concerns remain. First, the teaching workforce is predominantly comprised of White, middle-class women. Because immigrant families bring their culture to a new place, the mismatch of cultural values and beliefs existing between home and school has a great potential of negatively impacting children's identity development (Diallo, 2021; Sturdivant & Alanis, 2021). Second, ECE curriculum is embedded with a Eurocentric worldview (Dow, 2019; Gillborn, 2006) that continues to create cultural, experiential, and linguistic discontinuities for students and educators from diverse backgrounds.

CRT will guide the proposed study to understand the social situations of Black immigrant children, and question the racial hierarchies in schooling and aiming to transform schooling for the better (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Schools are likely immigrant families' first contact with formal institutions in Canada, but Saskatchewan schools may be unprepared to create culturally safe and inclusive spaces for them (Massing et al., in-press). Therefore, magnifying the conditions of Black children's experiences in school has great potential to question and destabilize the normalized practices of ECE with the goal of transforming education so as to foster positive identity development for Black immigrant children and their families. It is hoped that my proposed study will generate recommendations for key stakeholders in the education sector to improve the conditions of schooling for Black immigrant children and their families.

Further, the proposed study intends to center immigrant children's voices and experiences. I will adopt Milner and Howard's (2013) scholarship of using counter-storytelling or counter narratives as a research method. They tend to use two-fold counter-narratives: first, for conveying the voices of those underrepresented in research, and second, magnifying these voices as analytical devices to identify and critique majoritarian narratives, especially those that target people of colour. I intend to provide the children in my study ample opportunities to share their

stories and to engage in counter-storytelling. I believe and have witnessed the power that children hold to challenge the normalized practices if given space to explore their creativity and imaginative abilities. As Kim and Hachey (2021) advocated for, "Counter-storytelling, as a critical literacy practice, can offer early childhood teachers a rich context for early instruction by positioning preschoolers as capable critical literacy thinkers, powerful storytellers, and multimodal meaning-makers" (p. 644).

Conclusion

In small and incremental ways, I believe marginalized people can reclaim the power of dismantling stereotypes and majoritarian stories associated with their existence. By applying counter-storytelling mechanisms in the learning spaces, encouraging young children to challenge the normalized ways of learning, and creating safe spaces that can allow different perspectives from diverse students, I can envision an inclusive early childhood education. The reimagination of the inclusive ECE spaces include the paradigm shift of resisting the norms of traditional teaching that involves teacher-oriented activities, pen-paper learning, and high expectations from the school administration in allowing children to be powerful storytellers and to create their own picture books that can be used to teach in early childhood education classrooms. My journey as a Black mother, an immigrant, graduate student, and educational researcher will continue to nurture my collegial relationships with people who are willing to put extra effort to create spaces that can afford social justice to young children who are continuously marginalized by the society.

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A Review of *Relationships with Families in Early Childhood Education and Care: Beyond Instrumentalization in International Contexts of Diversity and Social Inequality*

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Joanne Lehrer, Fay Hadley, Katrien Van Laere, and Elizabeth Rouse, the editors of *Relationships with Families in Early Childhood Education and Care: Beyond Instrumentalization in International Contexts of Diversity and Social Inequality,* have curated a collection of 15 chapters that foreground diverse voices and perspectives of parents, educators, and children that move away from harmful discourses and positionings, and that work towards creating and sustaining democratic relationships. The book is part of the European Early Childhood Education Research Association's (EECERA)[1] book series, Towards an Ethical Praxis in Early Childhood, and was borne out of conversations within the EECERA Working with Families special interest group.

Within international contexts such as Canada, Belgium, India, Singapore, Germany, and Australia, the chapters of the book provide examples of parent and educator relationships, skillfully weaving together theory, practice, reflection, and praxis in ways that allow one to see new possibilities for working alongside parents, families, communities, and children. The chapters are organized around three sections, Disrupting Partnerships, Parent Perspectives, and Innovative Enactment of Partnerships. The series editors, Tony Bertram and Chris Pascal, begin with a preface to situate this book as an important contribution to the growing critique of "neoliberal discussions of education," with specific regard to parent partnerships and the role of parents in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) (p. xiv). The forward, written by Michel Vandenbroeck, provides a historical snapshot of education regarding achievement gaps, inequality, underachievement, and oppressive educational systems that put the blame and sole responsibility of educational success on the individual. Vandenbroeck goes on to emphasize the urgent need for books such as this one that provide alternative strategies wherein parents and educators share in the responsibility of educating children.

The introduction and conclusion written by the editors both contextualize the book and summarize other ways of thinking about the themes, topics, and elements within each chapter. In the introduction, the editors describe the chapters as "possible alternatives to the instrumentalized role of parents and families, focusing on ethical, social, and rights-based rationales for engaging with families" (p. 1). Within the field of ECEC, Lehrer et al. (2023) propose the need to move beyond the instrumentalization of parents as recipients of education or as bodies who work to progress and/or support the agenda of ECEC centres. Instead, they contend that educators and researchers should establish authentic reciprocal relationships with parents, families, children, and each other. Lehrer et al. (2023) provide a window into the typical understanding of parent involvement within the field of ECEC. Partnerships with parents have been seen as an investment in a child's future success, as "a contributing asset to society and the economy" (p. 1) and the responsibility of parents to initiate. A lack of parent involvement has been blamed on individual parents. However, the editors bring forth a plethora of research that works towards troubling this notion showing that parents may face a variety of obstacles such as institutional racism and feelings of being unwelcome in ECEC spaces that impedes the develop of partnerships. The introduction serves to bring forth theory and research that supports the topics and studies presented in the subsequent chapters, thus creating a shared understanding in regard to the terms and concepts utilized.

The first section, Disrupting Partnerships, focuses on barriers to creating meaningful partnerships in ECEC, such as educator practice (Chapter 1), the instrumentalized role of parents (Chapter 2), stereotyped gender roles (Chapter 3), lack of children's perspectives (Chapter 4), and the perceived challenges and deficits within remote communities (Chapter 5). In the second section, Parent Perspectives, the chapters highlight diverse parent voices in relation to racial and cultural identity (Chapter 6), deep listening (Chapter 7), difficult emotions (Chapter 8), and parent roles (Chapter 9). The final section, Innovative Enactment of Partnerships, draws attention to relationship-building strategies that have been implemented within ECEC centres internationally. The focus areas include creating access to culturally relevant resources (Chapter 10), collaborative and supportive environments (Chapter 11 and Chapter 13), decolonizing practices (Chapter 12), respecting difference and diversity (Chapter 14), and heart connections (Chapter 15). To conclude, the editors reflect on how the chapters "add to our understanding of democratic partnerships?" (p. 187). Lehrer et al. (2023) review important elements of resonance between and across chapters such as the value of family knowledge, respect for diversity, supportive community, importance of local context, and listening to understand. The authors provoke us to think about the systems and policies that must be re-imagined and the courage and leadership needed in order "to do things differently" (p. 189).

This book has incorporated many international voices attesting to the importance of respecting diversity while building relationships between educators and parents. Jan Peeters (Chapter 3) writes about the marginalization of fathers within ECEC settings and practice, explaining that mothers are generally understood to hold knowledge of parenting and children, and male role models are often lacking in ECEC settings. Patricia Hall and Rachel Berman's work (Chapter 6) focuses on the perspectives of Black mothers, the racial socialization practices they engage in with their children, and the lack of resources (such as picture books and toys) within many ECEC settings, that depict the everyday lives of Black families. Angela Chng (Chapter 9) takes a look at the roles of mothers, fathers, grandparents, and domestic helpers in the education of children in Singaporean culture. Through an anonymous questionnaire to parents, the author found that there were opposing opinions on whether or not grandparents and domestic helpers should be part of ECEC-parent partnerships. Lennie Barblett and Caroline Barratt-Pugh (Chapter 10) explain a book gifting program which ensures that Indigenous resources are accessible to the community. The chapters highlighted above provide an accessible understanding of barriers to partnerships, the support needed for parents and educators, and ways to move forward when working in diverse communities. However, as the editors pointed out up front there is a lack of 2SLGBTQIA+ representation within the book which is unfortunate. Although diversity is embraced in terms of racial identity, cultural differences, and gender roles, some non-traditional families are also absent. This means that building relationships with blended families, families who have adopted or who foster children, and so forth are not mentioned. Of course, there is no way of including every kind of family, however, educators often struggle with bridging the gap with families that differ from their own so these exclusions might be addressed in future editions of this volume.

This reviewer is particularly drawn to the chapters that work towards dismantling or troubling divides between Indigenous and settler communities. These chapters in particular are encouraging for educators working in colonized countries such as Canada, where this reviewer lives and works. Lisa Provencher, Andrea Maurice, and Kim Rud (Chapter 12) describe how they embarked on a learning journey centred on decolonizing the transition from childcare to school. The authors uncovered ways in which institutional forms, typically used to seek information from

families, can be reconstructed so that families feel empowered to share their stories and knowledge instead of feeling constrained and silenced. Bernadette Hayes (Chapter 13) focuses on moving away from enrolment criteria that promotes a negative discourse about families and instead they have described an ECEC centre in Australia, situated in a predominantly Indigenous community, that focuses on the strengths and unique qualities that each family possesses.

Reading literature about parent partnerships, it quickly becomes clear that terms and definitions overlap and, at times, are contradictory. It was refreshing to read that each of the chapters within this book built on the notion of *reciprocal partnerships* wherein parent knowledge and educator knowledge are valued equally. This book beautifully merges theory and practice in ways that inspire action and reflection in its readers and, for this reason, would be of interest to educators, teacher educators, university students, and researchers alike. It demonstrates how work being done internationally to break down barriers and bring forth diverse perspectives yields contextualized strategies that can be taken up and adapted to many global settings. In closing, this reviewer appreciates how the editors have created a diverse collection of chapters that does not read as a one-size-fits-all guide to democratic partnerships.

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[1] The European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA) is a non-profit organization committed to supporting international research focused on early childhood education. Visit https://www.eecera.org/ for more information regarding resources, research, and up-coming events and conferences.