

With(in) the Forest: (Re)conceptualizing Pedagogies of Care

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Haro Woods is a second-growth forest situated on the unceded Coast and Strait Salish territories. The woods are not separate from the rest of the territories despite the perceived name and boundary changes that have resulted from colonization and urbanization of the area. Haro Woods is an assemblage of Douglas fir, hemlock, arbutus, big leaf maple, and cottonwood intertwined with English ivy, Himalayan blackberry, and spurge laurel. Finnerty Creek, an urban-influenced drainage-to-shoreline network, runs through the forest, while black-tailed deer, chestnut-backed chickadees, barred owls, banana slugs, and a myriad of other creatures feed, find shelter, and migrate with(in) and through the woods. Urbanization, by both passive and active presence, has caused soil and root disruption, erosion, and some disturbance to wildlife.

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Drawing on moments from an early learning forest inquiry located on Songhees, Esquimalt, and WSÁNEĆ territories, otherwise known as Victoria, BC, this paper engages with the messy politics of “care” that emerge when early childhood education and colonized forest ecologies meet. In it, we take up the challenge of unsettling our deeply held conceptualizations of care through a series of pedagogical stumblings with young children’s worldly forest relations. Foregrounding the question “what constitutes good care in troubling times?” this discussion explores the logics we draw on to respond to the increasing sense of urgency in contemporary calls to teach children how to care for the earth. Can we learn to inhabit pedagogies of care in early childhood educational practice beyond simply retooling the extractive settler-colonial stewardship frameworks that brought us to this era of uncertainty? And what happens if we invite a wider cast of participants into our understandings of care than those prevailing early learning approaches tend to promote?

Key words: *care; forest; pedagogy; colonization; nature; early childhood*

(Clark, Pacini-Ketchabaw, & Hodgins, 2014; Nelson, Pacini-Ketchabaw, & Nxumalo, 2018; Nxumalo, 2016; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2015; Taylor, 2017)?

Common Worlding Inquiry Framework

Sherri-Lynn, Ildikó, Anne, Julia, Deanna, and Johanna are early years educators who work together with Narda, a pedagoga¹ and researcher, as part of a university child care services educational team made up of a larger group of educators, staff, researchers, and pedagogical facilitators. For over five years, we have engaged in an ongoing collective inquiry process as part of an intention to open ourselves up to new understandings of children’s immediate common worlds (Common Worlds Research Collective, 2015). Among other things, a common worlding approach reframes childhood as collective and relational rather than individualistic and developmental, points we see as particularly pertinent to a discussion on care where we are trying stretch the very notion of who or what can be considered part of our community and capable of engaging in care-full relations with others (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor, & Blaise, 2016; Taylor, 2013, 2017).

Each year, we choose an inquiry theme and guiding concepts to shape common worlding pedagogies in each of

This writing emerges out of a tangle of challenge and possibility generated in the process of learning to care for, and with, young children and more-than-human others in a time of rapid environmental change. We live in an era where news and social media sites increasingly chronicle catastrophic loss created in the upheaval of accelerated climate change, mass extinction, and other violent phenomena. At the same time, social media has been instrumental in mobilizing powerful resistance movements against corporate and state fossil-fuel development projects. Within this paradox and others, indicative of the complicated times we live in, early childhood educators are called to teach children to “care for the Earth” as a conduit for enhancing childhood development and creating more sustainable modes of living (Chawla & Cushing, 2007; Collado & Staats, 2016; Cox et al., 2017; Hedefalk, Almqvist, & Östman, 2015; Louv, 2008).

Caring is what we do on a day-to-day basis with young children and families. Sometimes we are even referred to as care-givers. But increasingly we wonder what constitutes “good” care in troubling times. How do dominant Euro-Western frameworks influence our understandings of what it means to be in care-full relations with others? And can we learn to inhabit pedagogies of care in early childhood educational practice without simply retooling the extractive settler-colonial stewardship frameworks that brought us to such uncertainty in the first place

our centres from which a dynamic process of collective-focused engagement with young children can emerge. Examples of past inquiries include thinking with paint, water, compost, textiles, tape, and movement and rethinking relations with inhabitants of Haro Woods, an urban forest that surrounds the childhood centre on three sides (Clark & Nelson, 2014; Clark et al., 2014; Hodgins, 2015; Land, 2017; Land & Danis, 2016; Nelson, 2018; Nelson, Coon, & Chadwick, 2015; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Clark, 2014; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015; Yazbeck & Danis, 2015). The inquiry process is underscored by a commitment to learn to think and do differently together with materials, place, plants, animals, and landscape forms in response to the way status-quo ways of thinking and doing have contributed to the making, and everyday remaking, of the dangerous times in which we now find ourselves. As Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Affrica Taylor (2015) point out:

The recognition that ... critical changes in earth systems are primarily human-induced carries ethical implications for early childhood pedagogies. We can no longer afford the illusion of our separateness from the rest of the natural world and so educators and young children must rethink understandings of our responsibilities to the common world with share with other living beings. (p. 45)

But what do we mean when we say we want to “think and do *differently* with care” in our early childhood forest pedagogies? Pacini-Ketchabaw and Taylor (2015) argue that “in settler colonial societies, the seemingly unremarkable, everyday business as usual of early childhood education remains inadvertently (albeit often unknowingly) entangled in the social and ecological legacies of colonialism” (p. 1). With their words in mind, we want to make “caring for and with” in our forest pedagogies remark-able. That is, rather than taking what it means to care with young children for granted, we want to rethink and remark on our understandings in an effort to unhinge them from what Heather Davis and Zoe Todd (2017) call the *ecocidal logics* that are so deeply embedded in contemporary Canadian society. From our perspective, it is increasingly clear that in these “colonized and ecologically challenged times” (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor, Blaise, & de Finney, 2015, p. 3), business as usual in early childhood education is simply not an option. At least, not if we take seriously the necessity to turn away from the ongoing violence of well-established and untenable patterns of living that threaten the very existence of a growing number of communities on earth.

More than an innocuous exercise, this discussion represents something consequential and often overlooked: that is, that the moral frameworks we infuse with everyday enactments of care in our early childhood practices, as well as those we use to draw conclusions about who is or is not capable of giving or receiving care, reinforce specific patterns of relating (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). This paper is an invitation to think expansively about what might be required of us, as early childhood educators, to cultivate critical, creative, and care-full pedagogical interventions into colonial patterns of relating, particularly those that render the plants and animals we share space with as little more than instrumental conduits for enhancing childhood development. In it, we link the articulation of pedagogies of care in everyday moments to the vital project of transformation necessary for creating viable futures together. How might we mobilize care to “do otherwise” in everyday early childhood moments? And what might be required of us in early learning practices to open up space for such possibilities to emerge?

Settler Colonial Implications

In using the terms *settler colonial* and *settler colonialism* throughout this discussion, we draw from the work of Unangax scholar Eve Tuck and her colleagues Marcia McKenzie and Kate McCoy (2014), who describe settler colonialism as “a form of colonization in which outsiders come to land inhabited by Indigenous peoples and claim it as their own new home” (p. 6). Tuck and her colleague Wayne Yang (2012) write that

land is what is most valuable, contested, required. This is both because the settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. This violence is not temporally contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation. This is why Patrick Wolfe (1999) emphasizes that settler colonialism is a structure and not an event. In the process of settler colonialism, land is remade into property and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property. (p. 5)

Red River Métis (otipemisiw) scholar Zoe Todd (2016b) discusses colonialism as an ongoing form of violence that “tries to erase the relationships and reciprocal duties we share across boundaries, across stories, across species, across space, and it inserts new logics, new principles, and new ideologies in their place” (para. 2). Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2013) foregrounds settler colonial resource extraction and the connection to Indigenous dispossession as processes that work together. She describes land, plants, and Indigenous and animal bodies as framed as resources for extraction and dispossession under colonial and capitalist frameworks.

It is vital to reflect on these points to avoid falling into the trap of believing that, in virtue of our “good” intentions, we sit outside the continuation of structural settler colonial violence. It feels necessary to juxtapose them with our desire to rethink what it means to care with young children on the Songhees, Esquimalt, and WSÁNEĆ peoples’ territories, whose connections to the places we live and work on continue despite brutal histories of colonization and its contemporary forms. Keeping the seriousness of what is at stake in mind, the question becomes one of moral obligation: What can we *do* about it in our work with young children? Vanessa Clark, Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, and Denise Hodgins’ (2014) approach in “Thinking with Paint: Troubling Settler Colonialisms Through Early Childhood Art Practices” is helpful to think with in attempting to craft our approach to thinking through our own entanglements on colonized lands:

By situating and implicating ourselves in destructive (albeit active and creative), violent, imperial colonialist practices, we attempt, through our art pedagogy, to respond to the amnesia of settler colonialism (Hilden & Lee, 2010). In engaging colonialism in this way, we hope that our work can contribute to decolonizing efforts. Yet, we are leery of calling our work decolonizing, as Tuck and Yang (2012) remind us of the problems in doing so. For example ... even though we attempt to respond to settler colonialism, we cannot stand outside its messy, implicated, ongoing activities, and thus we recognize that there is no easy binary of colonizing/decolonizing.... Our art pedagogy is therefore a motion toward becoming implicated in settler colonialism, as we work to continually think through its complexities, creativities, and shifting and changing activities. (p. 754)

We follow their example from similarly fraught positions as settlers engaging in forest pedagogies on the lands of Lekwungen-speaking peoples, as well as that of Natasha Myers (2017) in turning our attention to “asking better questions and cultivating more robust modes of inquiry” (p. 3) in our forest pedagogies. This also requires us to take seriously the ongoing and uneasy process of unravelling our assumptions about what it means to care with plants and animals and others we encounter in the forest we visit every week with 2- to 5-year-old children.

Caring For, Caring With

The way we learn about what care looks and feels like and who or what is deemed deserving or cast as a passive

recipient of it shapes consequences and influences the way we world together. Simply put, the way we conceptualize care matters. Pauliina Rautio (2017) argues that

concepts can be thought of as **answers to questions posed by the world**. Concepts are answers inasmuch as they are certain ways of thinking about and acting within the world—excluding other ways. In some cases we have grown accustomed to the answers or conceptualisations to the extent that the original questions are no longer easily available. (p. 94, emphasis in original)

As such, reconceptualizing pedagogies of care, as well as putting them into action, is messy, imperfect, and sometimes difficult work. Rather than relying on universalisms to reinforce a sense of being set apart from other species in our forest pedagogies, we are learning to pay attention to moments that bind us together with forest ecologies and the histories of this place.

Our interest in thinking about care as a profoundly more-than-human phenomenon pushes back on prevailing child-centered approaches in Canadian early childhood education. An array of voices guides us in this inquiry process, including those of the children we work with, our colleagues, and Tsawout Elder, ethnobotanist, and knowledge keeper Earl Claxton, Jr., who took us on a forest walk to share some of the histories of this place and his continued acts of resistance against ongoing settler colonial degradation of these territories. In sharing a few of his cultural teachings about trees and other plants we regularly encounter in the forest, Elder Claxton also reminds us that for Lekwungen-speaking peoples, the plants, animals, and landscape forms of these territories have always been understood as teachers and kin. We are reminded here of Todd's (2016a) assertion that with growing efforts to foreground human-animal relations in academia, there is often a failure to "credit Indigenous thinkers for millennia of engagement with sentient environments, with cosmologies that enmesh people into complex relationships between themselves and *all* relations, and with climates and atmospheres as important points of organization and action" (pp. 6–7). It is with acknowledgment of the Lekwungen-speaking peoples' inclusive worldview that shaped—and continues to shape—relations in the places we now live and visit (Penn, 2006) that we strive to open up our understandings about what it means to care with others in our forest pedagogies as a vital part of challenging colonial assumptions about this place and our responsibilities here with young children.

In this discussion, we also draw on a number of Euro-Western feminist scholars' voices. Like us, they must be understood as rooted in the tradition of dominant thought that we are attempting to challenge in our pedagogies. However, we draw on both non-Indigenous and Indigenous feminist scholarship to theorize care because, as Hodgins, Yazbeck, and Wapenaar (forthcoming) point out, feminists have long challenged dominant conceptualizations of care, putting forward the assertion that there are practices and affects in everyday moments that make living possible. For example, Max Liboiron and colleagues (2017) describe care as "a form of political and ethical practice that 'holds things together' (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011, p. 90; Martin et al., 2015)," further pointing out that "care work can disproportionately affect certain groups more than others depending on gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and perceived abilities" (p. 6). In her recent book *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) conceptualizes care as an integral act of maintenance in everyday worlding relations, a "critically disruptive doing" (p. 12), and "a speculative affective mode that encourages intervention in what things could be" (p. 66).

Care emerges here as a contestable notion, one reproduced through our everyday relations. Welcoming an array of subjectivities into our understandings, while pausing to rethink the "why" and "how" we care for and with others, becomes vital in rethinking this dynamic. There is no doubt that we, and the children we work with, care for the forest. And yet, the values mainstream society infuses with everyday acts of caring for ourselves, plants, animals, and the places we live simultaneously play a role in reproducing global systems of catastrophic loss. Given the

seriousness of these times, the question becomes whether we can learn to care *differently* and appreciate modes of care in a way that resists carving care up into the imagined divide of so-called human interests versus more-than-human others, so often depicted as little more than resources to be managed for our (human) benefit. What consequences are produced in the types of care we choose to guide our everyday relations? As Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) argues,

far from being an innocent activity, care in naturecultures cannot be purged from its predicaments: for example, the tendency to pastoral paternalism, the power it gives to care takers, and the unequal depletion of resources it implies in existing divisions of labor and exploitation of nonhumans and humans.... [Care] is not about ideal “feel good” relationships, something particularly crucial to think within the context of contemporary ecological engagements in shattered and disproportionately distressed geographies of naturecultures. (p. 164)

These points resonate with our choice to take a common worlding approach in our forest inquiry work. Taylor and Giugni (2012, following Foucault [1986] and Levinas [1989]) discuss this method as useful for reconsidering “the limits of the social ... beyond a singular ethic of care of the self ... [beyond] an exclusively human-focused ethic of care of the ‘other’ ... and [beyond] an ethic of care of an externalised environment” (pp. 110–111). If the point of engaging in forest pedagogies is to foreground our shared vulnerabilities and responsibilities with others in an effort to imagine new possibilities for living together, it seems to us that thinking expansively about what it means to care and who is capable of this everyday act is an important part of the process.

Stumbling With

Far from easy or straightforward, engaging in this work demands we turn a critical lens on the way our own conceptualizations of care are shaped by cultural practices that continue to privilege settler colonial ways of knowing, managing, relating to, developing, playing in, and extracting from the places where we live and work. Despite “knowing the forest” as the place we walk at least once a week with children, sometimes we feel like we are stumbling over unfamiliar terrain in our attempts to rethink what it means to care in Haro Woods, beyond what we have been taught about stewardship and enhancing childhood development (Nxumalo, 2016; Taylor, 2017). Oxford tells us that stumbling can mean “to trip or lose one’s balance while walking, or move with difficulty” (Oxford University Press, 2018). Perhaps learning to care differently with young children—that is, in a way that refuses the foundational logics of an extractive capitalist society—means learning to stumble *more often* as part of the uncomfortable but necessary process of unsettling deeply held colonial narratives about what it means to care with(in) this place.

We embrace the word *stumbling* here, and the feeling of uncertainty it creates, to help us navigate the tensions of learning to care for and with others as settlers on these territories. To do this, we articulate three stumblings. “Stumbling I” highlights our messy attempt to acknowledge the forest as an active participant in co-shaping our experiences and thoughts throughout this discussion. “Stumbling II” foregrounds the emergence of the Euro-Western binary notion of a nature/culture divide in forest moments and the subsequent conceptual fault line this imagined split creates, also known as anthropomorphism, which we have been taught to avoid since we were young children in the Canadian educational system. “Stumbling III” draws attention to pedagogical moments with invasive plants and unruly animals. Rather than trivialize stumbling as a stigmatized means of navigating the world in an ableist society, we take it up as a tentative and powerful way of moving through the world that departs from the cocksure arrogance of settler colonialism that moves throughout this place.

Each of the stumbling articulations we propose touches on issues deserving greater attention than we can provide

within the parameters of this discussion. For example, while we touch on anthropomorphism, we do not offer definitive answers to large questions about it; instead, these stumblings represent our attempt to navigate the unfamiliar terrain of unsettling the frameworks we unconsciously invoke in choosing to care for (or neglect) certain creatures and the places they call home. In *Stumblings II* and *III* we offer brief vignettes of forest inquiry moments to provide examples of emergent everyday encounters in our work. We own these settler stumblings as part of an effort to get somewhere new in pedagogy and practice, knowing we will continue to trip through the ongoing process of trying to disrupt normative understandings of care. Rather than providing neat and tidy answers or attempting to cover up our stumblings, here we make explicit some of the everyday tensions that emerge in resisting the “tempting dichotomy” (Haraway, 1988) of either adopting the prevailing child-centered approach to care or risking the appropriation of Indigenous land pedagogies. Because neither of those two are viable ways forward, we accept the challenge of figuring out an alternative way forward and see stumbling as an inevitable and generative part of an imperfect process.

Again, this work is not necessarily easy to put into practice. Taking a common worlding approach to embrace early childhood as a situated, plural, and political process is a radical departure from the dominant child-centered approaches we (Sherri-Lynn, Ildikó, Julia, Deanna, Johanna, and Anne) learned in our training to become early childhood educators. This shift requires us to rethink the norms, hierarchies, and values that continue to inform our teaching and research practices, which can feel awkward and unsettling at times, but that is precisely the point. As evidenced in the last 40-plus years, status-quo approaches to living have proven overwhelmingly dangerous to the viability of the earth’s narrowing array of life forms.

Care itself is not exempt from producing this dynamic. The type of care we learn to cultivate through Euro-Western frameworks tends to carry with it a belief that “we” belong to an undifferentiated humanity, the *Anthropos*, which exists outside of a passive “nature” at our disposal for human benefit (Taylor, 2017). Because this construct remains largely uncontested in mainstream Canadian ECE discourses, we believe it must be unsettled if we are to move away from perpetuating the frameworks underlining unsustainable global patterns of living. Taylor and Giugni (2012) write that working with a common worlding approach means “[taking] account of children’s relations with all the others in their worlds—including the more-than-human others” (p. 108). Taking up this intention, we are committed to thinking with more-than-humans as if they *matter*, that is, as coparticipants in storying and caring for and with the places we live and learn (van Dooren & Rose, 2012).

Stumbling I

In writing this manuscript, we feel compelled to acknowledge Haro Woods as coauthor in its creation. This is problematic for a number of reasons. And it is here we begin to stumble. Because we cannot set ourselves outside of a long line of settlers who have laid claim to these territories in various ways, we list Haro Woods as a coauthor in this paper with the understanding that this is not a neutral act. However, we also feel this is an important step in decentering ourselves and interrupting the belief that we (humans) are sole creators of the forest pedagogies we work with. We also see this move as consistent with the common worlding approach we work with and through which we are attempting to learn to care *with*, think *with*, do *with* other species and landscape forms (elements) as active coparticipants in worlding practices.

While uncertain about naming Haro Woods as a coauthor, knowing it could be misconstrued as an assumption that we see the land is a willing participant in writing our version of the story or see ourselves as entitled and capable of interpreting the voice of the forest, we feel we could always find reasons to stay safe and complacent in our work. Maybe it is time to risk doing something differently in our writing instead of saying something in

practice and neglecting to do so in academic circles. Remembering Earl Claxton Jr.'s suggestion that settlers need to try to do things that feel uncomfortable, such as say hello or thank you in local Indigenous languages, to try to get somewhere new even if we risk making mistakes, perhaps we can think of this simple act as an expression of care, in the hopes it might crack open space for other readers to question their own interdependencies with the places where they live, learn, and work. We tentatively take this step with the recognition that we continue to benefit from living on Lekwungen-speaking peoples' lands and that much work remains to be done to check our everyday structural privilege and support Indigenous struggles for justice.



Figure 1. Sticks-bridge.

Stumbling II

We are walking in the forest. The forest floor is littered with sticks. We wonder how they got here. Windy days? Dying trees? Sawed off? Belt loops, pockets, and hands grasp, carry, abandon, and pick up again. "En garde!" Sticks become swords, bridges over fast flowing creeks, forts protecting from heavy rains and hiking poles guiding through deep water and up hills. We recognize "this stick's alive!" as we crouch down carefully, petting moss or examining mushrooms rooted within. "It's not a hole, it's a home!" We discover termites and wood bugs weaving their way through, leaving us to wonder who else might inhabit these homes. What microorganisms are we not seeing as we grasp, carry, abandon, bridge, fort, and hike? We struggle to leave sticks behind.

We are walking in the forest again. Among the trees, soil, deer, and moss we also find abandoned bike parts, sharp metal, beer cans, broken chairs, plastic shards, and condoms. At times, our eyes seem keenly primed to notice these things above all else—as we walk, a child calls out "broken glass!" and an educator with glove on hand picks it up and carries these left-behind pieces through the forest and back to the centre for "proper disposal." Other times, our attentions are drawn to "forest things"—we crouch down low, heads together, to watch closely as a banana slug crosses the trail, never seeing that small piece of glass just to the side. Still, there are times we silently notice, make note in our minds, say quietly to ourselves or maybe even out loud "broken glass," but we walk on—acknowledging and wondering but leaving behind.

What happens when we invite a wider cast of participants into our understandings of care in early learning pedagogies? For example, as Sherri-Lynn and Anne highlight above, what if a stick's need to care for and with the forest factors into a conversation with the children about how many sticks we should remove? And, is it possible to care for the garbage we find in the forest outside of dominant environmental education approaches that position young children as eco-heroes? Of course, these speculative thoughts emerge from our perceptions. Rather than sharing them here as part of an attempt to transcend our settler positionality, we follow



Figure 2. Sticks-garbage.

Anna Tsing (2015) in situating our (human) speculations about more-than-human others as the only starting place we have to invite new considerations of, for example, a stick's need to stay in the forest versus automatically giving in to the desire to take, extract, and consume without wider consideration of others' needs. Like us, a stick or a piece of garbage does not cease being part of the ecological system once it leaves the forest space. However, its ability to engage in a type of relational reciprocity changes depending on where the stick or the garbage continues to live. While we stumble with the challenge of not contributing to the reification of so-called nature spaces as existing separately from human spaces (the forest versus the childhood centre), we are simply trying to open up new considerations beyond a child's personal desire to extract (sticks, in this case) from the forest.

Pacini-Ketchabaw and her colleagues Sylvia Kind and Laurie Kocher (2017) describe encounters such as this one as "a moment of meeting, where things and forces and human and non-human beings come together in spaces of difference" (p. 34). By meeting with, they suggest, "we decide how to respond—whether to follow, join with, intervene, provoke, perhaps work against. Something is set in motion in this encounter" (p. 34). We wonder about the power such moments hold to crack open space for *learning to be affected* (Latour, 2004, as cited in Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015), learning to attend, not only to our own ability to care, but also to the abilities of those we encounter in the forest. Here, we stumble with unravelling our assumptions about how the world works. Water, sap, soil, wood bugs, logs, and mushrooms are mobile, intra-active participants in our stick-y encounters, each affected by the other, each affecting each other, each requiring us to listen with all our senses and be open to becoming different, vulnerable, affected (Davies, 2014). Listening in these encounters, as Bronwyn Davies (2014) writes, "is not about being bound by what you already know. It is [about attuning ourselves to] life as movement" (p. 1), where something as seemingly still as a stick on the ground is in care-full motion with the forest in ways we had not previously imagined.

In the Euro-Western philosophical tradition, acknowledging sticks and garbage as active agents in forest relations means opening ourselves up to the charge of anthropomorphism. Inspired by the example of Lekwungen-speaking peoples, for whom so-called inanimate objects and other creatures have always been understood as kin who actively co-shape place relations, we return to Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), who speaks to the Euro-Western discomfort with including more-than-humans in our understandings of care. Katie Ulrich (2018) puts it well in discussing Puig de la Bellacasa as:

ready to risk the charge of initiating an anthropomorphist ethics of more-than-human care" because speculative thinking will be necessary for imaging more caring worlds, and anxieties about anthropomorphizing cannot be allowed to "paralyze our ethical imagination" (219). She says we can't let charges of anthropomorphism prevent us from acknowledging how nonhumans do shape us, how the "cared for coforms the carer too" in cases when it seems humans are the main ones doing the caring (219). (para. 6)

Opening ourselves up to thinking about how to care for and with the garbage we encounter in the forest might be one of the most challenging stumbling blocks we regularly encounter in this process. Can we learn to remediate spaces where care has been abandoned, where neglect itself becomes an act with repercussions? Over the past few years, we have been paying attention to the garbage we inevitably face each time we enter Haro Woods, in our endless, unsettling encounters with glass, abandoned bike parts, sharp metal, plastic shards, condoms, etc. At times we put on gloves and remove the garbage; other times we examine it and move on. Sometimes we don't, or choose not to, even see it. While antithetical to the pristine images conjured up when nature-spaces are imagined, garbage in the forest is one of the most predictable "others" we encounter. The conflicted feelings we experience about the abundance of garbage in the forest feel, in many ways, unreconcilable, yet demand care-full attention.

Whether we like it or not, it is a reflection and a reminder of our own complicity in consumer-culture patterns of relating.

In grappling with these tensions, Anne engages the children with a story called *What Matters*, written by Alison Hughes and illustrated by Holly Hatam (2016), which she finds helpful in thinking about the ongoing materiality of garbage, the connections it creates, and the question of how to care *with* it by focusing on waste-flow connections rather than resorting to an out-of-sight-out-of-mind philosophy. As the story goes, “a small, small, thing” (p. 5) like removing garbage comes to matter a great deal. Myra Hird (2016) talks about the need to come to terms with waste’s indeterminacy, that is, its ability to matter beyond human neglect, as a critical factor in coming to terms with the “imprescriptibility of our ethical responsibility to future human and environmental sustainability waste-world making” (abstract). Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), too, highlights the ethical necessity of “remediating neglect,” wherein “these ethics attract attention to the invisible but indispensable labors and resources [of earth others]” (p. 162). “The ethicality here,” she says, “is about making us care for what humans—most of us—have learned to collectively neglect” (p. 162).

Rather than focusing on picking up garbage within the good/bad binary descriptors attached to acts of “recycling care,” perhaps we need to shift the focus to how these acts might impede or promote others’ ability to care. In Hughes and Hatam’s (2016) story, the act of picking up a soda can becomes less about the care-full act than about how it comes to matter to a series of other lives—those of an ant, a snail, a spider, a worm, a stream, a dog, baby birds, an ocean—all in connection with that can. This story sheds light on some of the tensions and contradictions emerging in our practice as we engage in (re)conceptualizing pedagogies of care. While we have learned to recognize the shapes care takes in binary terms of good or bad, right or wrong, perhaps we can learn with young children about questioning or contesting where certain modes of care come from, why we value them, and what they continue to do in the process of creating or worlding new ways forward.

Stumbling III

We are walking in the forest. We notice some trees covered with ivy. The sun shines brightly through their green leaves. On other trees, we see the ivy has been cut. It surrounds the tree, dead-brown-decaying. As we continue to walk, we ask the children, “What are your thoughts about ivy in the forest?” Some walk away without answering; others look around; one child responds, “It’s pretty, its leaf is like a heart”; another comments “It’s choking the trees!” As we continue to walk, some children drag previously cut vines behind them. Others use them to create a measuring stick. We wonder about weaving baskets. It is time to make our way back to the centre. We drop the ivy vines we have been carrying. We leave them in Haro Woods.

An almost archway of Himalayan blackberry bushes moves over the path we are walking on. As we stop to pick “ready berries,” we are startled to see a mouse on a bramble eating too. We are wildly curious. Our eyes dart around trying to catch a glimpse. We decide to move back to give space. One educator crouches



Figure 3. Ivy.



Figure 4. Picking blackberries.

down to model stillness and the mouse scampers down a long, trailing bramble, taking cover under the educator's skirt for a moment and then out the other side and into another blackberry bush. We feel relief and excitement about our encounter. A child expresses later in the day, "We share the forest. We share the berries."

We have come to know English ivy and Himalayan blackberries as invasive and damaging to the forest. But, as Ildikó and Johanna discuss, we stumble here again with an impulse to appreciate the beauty of the sun shining through heart-shaped ivy leaves, the possibility of weaving baskets with its trailing stems, savouring the sweet (sometimes sour) taste of a "ready berry," and sharing in the excitement of seeing a mouse eating the same berries we like to eat. We find

joy in splashing in pockets of water left behind because of soil erosion and watching deer drink from these same pockets. We watch deer sometimes eating from "colonizing" plants and notice the way birds find shelter in the ivy. One child excitedly cuts ivy to "save trees" while another looks horrified at the prospect of killing it, asking "Why can't we save the trees *and* the ivy?" Care-full lines become blurred and entangled with carelessness, and we wonder where responsibilities lie. Does care for one take care away from another? Pedagogista Nicole Land asks, "What makes it possible for us to care with these connections as connections that matter—as we think about inheriting and navigating settler colonial worlds" (personal communication, April, 2017)? We see such questions as critical in our attempts to create pedagogies of care that refuse to blindly follow settler colonial patterns of relating.

What might it mean to learn to care *with* "invasive" plants and other unruly species? What happens when we meet with those deemed out of place? How might we attune ourselves to their modes of care-full existence across the designations that flatten our understandings of where they belong while disregarding the histories of how they got here in the first place? Learning to care for and with more-than-human others might mean appreciating the complexity of a plant or animal beyond such categorizations. Robin Wall Kimmerer (in conversation with Bowers, 2012) is helpful to think with here in response to the question of how to respond to invasive species:

One perspective which is often well represented in indigenous thinking, and less so in Western thinking, is this notion that the plants themselves, whom we regard as persons (as we regard all other species and elements of ecosystems) have their own intelligence, role, and way of being. When we look at new or "invasive" species that come to us, instead of having a knee jerk reaction of "those are bad and we want to do everything we can to eliminate them," we consider what are they bringing us. Plants are our teachers, so what is it they're trying to teach us? What is the presence of overabundance of Phragmites teaching us, for example? What do we need to learn about that? We need to learn about controlling nitrogen and phosphorous. Those plants are here because we have invited them here. We have created the conditions where they're going to flourish. (Bowers, 2012, paras. 46–48).

Of course, as Kimmerer also points out, this does not mean we sit apart from making decisions and taking actions

that impact others in caring for a place. Similarly, Annemarie Mol suggests that learning to care is not something we can cultivate by sitting outside of the world, suggesting that “[doing] is not necessarily having a choice” (in conversation with Boyer & Howe, 2016). Rather than spiralling down into paralysis or recentering ourselves by foregrounding misplaced “settler guilt,” the point of our forest engagement is more about disrupting simplistic top-down Euro-Western stewardship models that have contributed to creating the frameworks that underscore untenable patterns of living.

Our forest encounters influence thinking and emotions beyond the forest boundaries. They also defy quantification. Traditional Euro-Western early educational pedagogies tend to emphasize *matters of fact* in policy and practice—for example, when programming is anchored in observing children in a theorized clinical developmental way. Instead, we work to shift our emphasis on pedagogies to enmesh *matters of concern* (Blaise et al., 2017) with *matters of care* (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). This includes recognizing care through the act of appreciating the possibility of shared desires to inhabit place, as Deanna explores in the following vignette.

We are walking in the forest. A child says, “Hello.” We had not heard anyone approach, but a strong-looking male stands nearby watching our investigations. He belongs here, appearing comfortable and sure. We wonder, are we welcome or are we intruding? Our group is large, spread out, and loud in what seems the stillness of the forest. He seems relaxed, and he is not alone. His group has quietly spread around us. We count them—six deer companions are present, some very close. Someone suggests we move back, allow space. We wonder, how do we respect and share this place with our more-than-human-other companions?

Can we say that stopping to notice multiplicities of care with young children is itself an act of care? Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) suggests that “[if] to care is to be attracted, to be entangled with the recipients of care in a relationship that not only extends but obliges (us) to care, then *a world is being made* in that encounter that rather than determining (us), shifts (our) priorities” (p. 167, emphasis in original). But, as she cautions, “care is not about fusion; it can be about the right distance” (p. 5). This is again a point of stumbling for us in wanting to avoid the settler colonial habit of appropriating Indigenous ideas, beliefs, and experiences and repackaging them as our own. Culturally specific relations of Lekwungen-speaking peoples with more-than-human others on these territories is not something that is available to us to simply try on. Settler colonial relations continue daily to make and unmake worlds in this place, something else we need to remember. With this in mind, we are trying to learn from an array of perspectives, theories, and teachings that *are* available to us to start reimagining what might be required of us to be in reciprocal relations with the plants and animals we encounter on a weekly basis.



Figure 5. Deer tracks.

Within the Forest Inquiry

We spend a great deal of time visiting and thinking in Haro Woods with the children. An assemblage of movement, encounters, and stories fills our forest walks, leaving us to wonder how we constantly, and often unconsciously,

enact care with(in) these particular common worlds. As Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind, and Kocher (2017) suggest, in our walks we come together and pull apart: “our movements are recursive, acting on each other in a continuous exchange back and forth” (p. 27), always in motion, enacting, reacting, changing, and challenging movement. Walking in the forest, thus transformed, becomes intertwined and interdependent with and as our means of noticing (Tsing, 2015), our way of exploring rhythm (Olsson, 2009), enmeshing human and more-than-human others together in a complex assemblage unable to be pulled apart. Focusing on the socialities, agencies, and lively stories others tell, Blaise, Hamm, and Iorio (2017) write, “is a strategy that makes room for relationality, or the ways in which humans and more-than-humans are integral parts of the universe” (p. 39).

(Re)conceptualizing pedagogies of care is important in our work as early years educators. The way we learn to understand what it means to care, who gets to care, who is constructed as deserving of care or as a passive recipient of care shapes consequences and influences the way we world together. Understanding our common worlds as produced through mixed-up heterogeneous world relations (Taylor, 2013), rather than as separate or innocent, opens up space to take notice, become attuned, and listen to other ways of caring with and storying place. It invites us to be curious and to consider more-than-human others as narrative subjects, weavers of stories, and carers of place (van Dooren & Rose, 2012). Paying close attention to others’ lifeworlds also draws us into powerful modes of care that exist outside of contemporary human desires in these colonized and ecologically challenged times. Consideration of these multiplicities of care beyond the human reminds us to shift our understandings and be care-full in our practice, to think with pedagogies that enmesh matters of concern with matters of care. As early years educators, we invite you to look for and reflect on those interdependent, messy moments that bind us together with forest ecologies and the histories that have brought us to these challenging times and continue to shape place relations. What happens when we invite a wider cast of participants into our understandings of care in early learning pedagogies?

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(Endnotes)

- 1 Drawing from the work of Carla Rinaldi (2006), Fikile Nxumalo (2014) writes: "The role of a pedagogista takes inspiration from the preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, where the presence of a pedagogical mentor to support, challenge and deepen educators' practices and thinking is an embedded part of early childhood education policy and practice" (p. 50). Clark et al. (2014) further describe the role as one "working collaboratively with educators to deepen and broaden pedagogies in the classroom, including attending to ethical/political aspects of early childhood pedagogies" (p. 752).