DOSSIER: "EDUCATION RESEARCH: RESEARCH METHODS AND PERSPECTIVES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION"

Post Qualitative Inquiry as Activist-Practitioner-Research in Early Childhood Education

Investigação pós-qualitativa como pesquisa-ativista-praticante na Educação Infantil

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Abstract: In this article, I share small, situated knowledges from a post qualitative inquiry which activated critical, new materialist and post foundational approaches to educational research in Early Childhood Studies. Post qualitative research processes including thinking with theory and writing as method are activated to (re)story everyday moments of encounter with one Bush Kindergarten on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri WoiWurrung in Naarm (Melbourne), Australia. I make visible how activist-practitioner-research can offer small, alternative research narratives which disrupt and trouble taken for granted ways of knowing in Early Childhood Education. This article may be useful to those who wish to explore methodologies which counter deficit discourses (Iorio & Yelland, 2021) and disrupt anthropocentric and ableist norms in Early Childhood Education.

Keywords: Post Qualitative Inquiry; Bush Kinder; Activist-Practitioner-Research; Early Childhood Education.

Resumo: Neste artigo, compartilho um pouco sobre conhecimentos situados de uma investigação pós-qualitativa que ativou abordagens críticas, novas abordagens materialistas e pós-fundacionais para a pesquisa educacional em Estudos da Primeira Infância. Processos de pesquisa pós-qualitativa, incluindo pensar com teoria e escrever como método, são ativados para (re)narrar momentos de encontro cotidianos de encontro com um Bush Kindergarten nas terras não cedidas do Wurundjeri WoiWurrung em Naarm (Melbourne), Austrália. Deixo visível como a pesquisa-ativista-praticante pode oferecer pequenas narrativas de pesquisa alternativas que perturbam e problematizam formas de conhecimento tomadas como garantidas na Educação Infantil. Este artigo pode ser útil para aqueles que desejam explorar metodologias que contrariam discursos deficitários (Iorio & Yelland, 2021) e rompem com as normas antropocêntricas e capacitistas na Educação Infantil.

Palavras-chave: investigação pós-qualitativa; *bush kinder*; pesquisa-ativista-praticante; Educação Infantil.

Introduction

Research concerned with disability and inclusion in Australian Early Childhood Education settings has traditionally been informed by positivist research paradigms which materialize and reinforce developmental and interventionist discourses. By pathologising difference, these approaches emphasize deficit – attending to what children cannot do and locating the problem within the individual child, while ignoring the relational, political and ethical realities of disability and the problematic premise of 'inclusion' (Taylor & Giugni, 2012) in early childhood contexts.

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In this article, drawing on post qualitative (St. Pierre, 2017, 2021), Common worlds (The Common Worlds Research Collective, 2018) and new materialist (Hultman & Taguchi, 2010; Lenz Taguchi, 2009) onto-epistemological orientations to research in early childhood education, I re-turn to encounters with place – including people, materials and more-than-human others – which I explored in one Bush Kindergarten in my doctoral research, a larger post qualitative inquiry undertaken on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri-Woiwurrung people of the Kulin Nation, Traditional Owners of Naarm (the Australian city also known as Melbourne). Conceptualising Bush Kindergarten as a 'pedagogical contact zone' (Clover & Sanford, 2016; Hamm & Boucher, 2017; Pratt, 1991) that research made visible the complex, messy and uneven dynamics of power in Australian early childhood settings. Here I (re)turn to threads explored in that inquiry and argue that attuning to these complexities in practitioner research can amplify the experiences of neurodivergent children, activating activist-practitioner-researcher subjectivities which think-with people, place, materiality and the more-than-human - to positively affirm neurodivergent ways of being with the world.

Attending to a more-than-human sociality (Tsing, 2014), this methodological orientation attunes to ways of knowing and being which re-think ableist narratives about the benefits of nature for normative child development. By re-imagining and privileging neurodivergent relations with materials and diverse social relations with more than human others in this article, I activate a post qualitative (St. Pierre, 2007, 2017, 2021) approach to research inquiry and a methodological orientation which stories these relations otherwise, against dominant anthropocentric and developmental traditions.

It should be noted that this article is not intended as an overview of qualitative or post qualitative research approaches or 'methods' in Australian early childhood contexts, rather it offers a small, alternative research narrative (Moss, 2019) that aims to disrupt and trouble (Haraway, 2016) taken

for granted epistemic and ontological orientations (or ways of knowing and being) encountered in mainstream Early Childhood Education research. It will be useful to those working in international contexts who wish to explore methodologies which counter deficit discourses (Iorio & Yelland, 2021) and disrupt anthropocentric and ableist norms in Early Childhood Education.

Research context

In Australian early childhood settings, Bush Kinder is an increasingly popular means of exploring and strengthening children and teacher's relations with local places – beaches parks, local green spaces and creeks (Christiansen et al., 2018). In the state of Victoria, there are over 200 programs in which teachers and children spend one day or an extended period of time each week learning and being-with local places (Early Childhood Outdoor Learning Network, 2023). The first Bush Kinder was established by the teachers, leadership team and parent community of Westgarth Kindergarten in 2012. Since then, the number of programs has grown steadily (Kids in Nature Network, 2018). While this growth, to date, has largely been driven by dedicated teachers, volunteer parents, committees of management and service providers, recent Victorian State Government investment (A$3.6M) is set to exponentially increase the number of Bush Kinder programs in coming years, with grant funding available to service providers to support the establishment of 150 new programs, each year, until 2027 (Victorian Government, 2023).

While a large and growing body of research has explored the benefits of nature for normative child development (Chawla & Nasar, 2015; Dankiw et al., 2020; Gill, 2014; Johnstone et al., 2022; Mygind et al., 2019; Prins et al., 2022; Smedsrud et al., 2024) and educational experiences (Speldewinde, 2022; Speldewinde & Campbell, 2021, 2022), to date, very little research has included the perspectives and experiences of disabled or neurodivergent children themselves when it comes to the kinds of immersive bush kindergarten programs emerging in Australia (Christiansen, 2022). Des-

pite early childhood services in Australia being legally required to include all learners under the Disability Discrimination Act (Federal Register of Legislation, 1992) and regulated with inclusive curriculum frameworks and Quality Standards (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2017; Australian Government Department of Education for the Ministerial Council, 2022; Victorian Department of Education and Training & Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2016) until recently, very little research has explored how inclusivity for neurodivergent and disabled children is conceptualized in Bush Kindergartens.

Bush Kinder as a Pedagogical Contact Zone

Drawing on Haraway (2007) and Hamm and Boucher (2017) we can conceptualise Bush Kindergartens, like all early childhood settings, as pedagogical contact zones – physical and discursive spaces where different cultures and multiple perspectives, to quote Pratt (1991) "meet, clash and grapple in highly asymmetric relations of power" (p. 34). Foregrounding the notion that all early childhood settings are material and discursive spaces with dynamic and often transparent power differences at play is useful in this context for a number of reasons. It attends for example, to the (often ignored) reality that all education in Australia is taking place on unceded Indigenous lands, amidst ongoing settler colonialisms. It makes visible the ways that colonial logics of and extractive relations with materials and 'nature' for the benefit of humans, though largely understood as problematic in the domain of environmental education have continued to dominate in the human/psychological sciences. This is evident in the ongoing preoccupation with anthropocentric discourses in the literature on the benefits for human children, of learning in and contact with 'nature' (Chawla & Nasar, 2015; Dankiw et al., 2020; Gill, 2014; Johnstone et al., 2022; Mygind et al., 2019; Norwood et al., 2019; Prins et al., 2022; Smedsrud et al., 2024; Yıldırım & Akamca, 2017). In this regard, thinking of Bush Kindergartens as

pedagogical contact zones opens a space for thinking critically about the ways that medical and individual models of disability have become so deeply ingrained in our thinking in educational contexts regarding ability and difference, that we can forget that this is just one, albeit dominant and powerful, way of understanding diverse abilities.

Rethinking material relations with/ through post qualitative inquiry

I want to begin by (re)turning to a story which materialises being brought into connection with neurodivergent material relations in early childhood educational research. I used a short, spoken version of this narrative to open recent panel presentations at the *Australian Education Research Association Conference* and the *Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia Conference* in 2023. I (re)turn to this narrative here to quickly bring another audience into a pastpresent (King, 2004) moment of research encounter which, although small, and perhaps seemingly irrelevant, became a central moment of crystallisation or spacetimemattering (Barad, 2007) in my own be(com)ing activist-practitioner-researcher.

> *Every day with Bush Kinder Jules has a blue-green-purple plastic "crystal" carefully stowed in a zippered breast pocket. He brings it out quietly, twirling it in his fingers. Sitting at group times, he discreetly flicks and taps it. Holding it up to the light, he looks through it, talking about the ways different colours appear, disappear and multiply. He tells me the crystal I dug out of the ground at Bush Kinder was not a real crystal. Mine, was "manmade and had no colours". "It isn't possible to be seen without colours" he reminds me. I ask Jules if we can make a video together, showing him the child assent form, which gives him the option of pointing yes or no. Holding the crystal to yes on the assent form he responds, "the crystal says yes. I, say no", positioning the crystal for me to film. As I grapple with whether he is assenting or not I ask if he is going to talk for the crystal? "No", he tells me, "Crystals don't know how to talk".*

Drawing on a relational, post qualitative orientation to ontology in early childhood research, despite initially being 'captured' on video, the moment materialised on paper or screen which you have read in the text above is not simply a static excerpt retrieved from empirical data. It

is not intended as an exact representation of a particular inter-action between researcher and child. Though it took place at a particular moment in time and place, that past moment cannot be removed from my storying of the encounter in this present moment now. In so far as it is possible, it is at best, a (re)presentation of "intra-active world making" (Barad, 2007, p. 178). Although a video recording of this encounter was made in 2019, each subsequent pastpresent (re)turn or (re)viewing of this moment brings with it new and different ways of seeing, knowing and understanding, for myself as researcher-practitioner-writer and for the reader-viewer-listener as they engage with each storying of the encounter.

For St. Pierre (2017), post qualitative research is "an invitation to think and do educational inquiry outside normalized structures of humanist epistemology, ontology, and methodology" (p. 1). Eschewing attempts at qualitative rigour in pursuit of a singular truth, post qualitative inquiry is critical *and* generative, it offers possibilities for thinking with post foundational ways of knowing (new materialisms and other post theories i.e., poststructuralism, posthumanism and postcolonialism) which challenge taken for granted assumptions about the separability of humans from nature, and the centrality of humans and human agency in educational research.

Beyond the strictures of predetermined qualitative 'methods' (interviews, observations, audio--visual recordings) concerned with the capture, coding and analysis of static data to represent an objective truth or reality, post qualitative inquiry, following St. Pierre (2017, 2021) and Murris (2021) demands a deeper engagement with the philosophical (ontological, epistemological and axiological orientations) which inform and are informed by research assemblages themselves. Importantly, this includes the visibility and active co-presence of educational researchers within the research assemblage. The post qualitative researcher is aware of and able to make visible within their work the multi-dimensional nature of their own subjectivities. Not simply in terms of identity categories to which we belong (white-heterosexual-middle class-non-Indigenous-Autistic-cisgender-female) or occupations which we perform (researcher-lecturer-writer--mother-advocate-child) but the ways in which those ways of knowing and being with the world inform epistemic, ontological and axiological orientations which shape and are shaped by the material-discursive 'matters of concern' (Latour, 2004) to which we attend in our research.

Post qualitative inquiry, attends to researcher subjectivities as fluid, multiple, unstable, open to change and emergent – in a constant state of be(com)ing (Kuby & Taylor, 2021; Murris, 2021). It makes visible how material-discursive effects and affects come to matter in educational research. Post qualitative inquiry, therefore, is not characterised by or as a set of replicable methods. Indeed, best practice standards are unthinkable within a post qualitative onto-epistemological orientation. Instead, researchers engage in ways of being and doing, or more accurately knowing-being-doing, while thinking-with and writing--with the world. Methodologically post qualitative research becomes a process or processes in which theoretical and conceptual framings, data generation and analysis, are not only inseparable from the researcher, but emergent, ongoing and never finished ways of being in/with the world. Research in this regard, drawing on Barad (2007) becomes a series of "agential cuts" (p. 140) where that which matters is uncertain and indeterminant until the moment of emergence. Each cut makes transparent relations of power and agency momentarily intelligible, while attending to the impossibility of ever knowing the world outside of oneself (St. Pierre, 2021). Post qualitative inquiry aims not for clear and distinguishable findings, conclusions or outcomes which can be replicated in other contexts, but instead attends to the inherent situatedness of knowing and knowledge (Haraway, 1988).

In this article, I activate post qualitative research processes of thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) and writing as 'method' (St. Pierre, 2007) to make visible how pedagogical narration can activate activist-practitioner-researcher

subjectivities.

Pedagogical Narration as post qualitative inquiry

In post qualitative inquiry pedagogical narrations are not simply visual and textual accounts of pedagogical encounters. Instead, they are spaces for critical and diffractive thinking with theory (Kind, 2014; Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, 2016). Teachers – as practitioner-researchers – can use pedagogical narration to support diffractive exploration of everyday moments of pedagogical encounter from multiple philosophical and theoretical perspectives (Nxumalo, 2019). Conceptualised thus, pedagogical narration is a political and ethical practice at the same time that it is creative and analytical. For practitioner-researchers interested to think with critical post theories, pedagogical narrations as post qualitative inquiry, can support the unlearning required (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 2) for engaging deeply with post foundational theories while paying attention and leaning into our own and other's uncertainty. They open a space for thinking-with and responding to the political and ethical challenges of our times (Vintimilla et al., 2021). Challenges like rethinking what we think we "know" about disability and "inclusion" in the context of and response to Autistic self-advocacy (Garcia, 2021; McAnulty, 2020; Moriah, 2022; Thom-Jones, 2022) and the neurodiversity movement more broadly, which advocate for neuro-affirming models of inclusivity beyond deficit understandings of disability and difference.

Practitioner-research becomes activist when teachers/educators recognize their inherent capacity to listen deeply and respond to human and more-than-human agency in moments of political, ethical and pedagogical uncertainty and decision-making. For Haraway (2016) this might be characterized in terms of "response-ability – collective knowing and doing in ecologies of practices" (p. 34). Response-ability goes beyond simply being culturally-responsive (responsive to the cultures of humans) within the educational ecology. Response-able pedagogies are those that activate our collective (human and more-than-human) capacities to "respond politically and ethically in moments of uncertainty" (Iorio et al., 2020, p. 2).

Haraway (2016) reminds us that we each have the power to render another capable (p. 8) and be with them, do with them and know with them in ways that render them more (or less) so. While this does not and should not erase individual difference nor disabled identities, it acknowledges disability as relational and opens a space for thinking of inclusivity as relatedness based on mutual belonging (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2019). As Taylor and Guigni (2012) point out traditional 'inclusion' approaches are inherently exclusionary. They are based on the erroneous notion that some belong, but others need to be included.

Thinking of teachers not only as practitioner-researchers but as activist-practitioner-researchers in the context of equity and social justice with regard to disability, reorients our thinking in 'ecologies of practices' (Haraway, 2016, p. 34) to how we might position research in Early Childhood Education to disestablish ableism, instead of trying to fix, change or intervene in the lives of disabled children. While it is not my intention to diminish the importance of early intervention and additional supports, resources and funding, this reconceptualization *is* intended shift the focus from the deficits of the child (and what they might do to become more like their 'typically' developing peers) and instead focus our collective awareness on our everyday capacities to respond in ways that positively affirm difference (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1988).

In the following section I take the short 'spacetimemattering' (Barad, 2007, p. 142) with which I opened this article as an everyday moment of political-ethical-response-able decision-making and consider how different philosophical and methodological (ontological, epistemological, axiological) orientations engender multiple, diffractive conceptualisations, to which teachers, as activist-practitioner-researchers, may respond. It is important here to consider that these conceptu-

alisations are presented as diffractive thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017). Each thinks with different theoretical orientations and therefore is inherently value-laden. My intention is not to present any singular 'way of knowing' as separate from or more important than the others. Instead, my intention is to map the effects of difference (Barad, 2007) and make visible what those differences *do* in pedagogical decision-making. Each informs and is informed by epistemic, ontological and pedagogical orientations which simultaneously emerge and are materially-discursively reinforced within contemporary learning ecologies.

While my research context is Australian early childhood settings, this post qualitative and diffractive process of 'thinking with theory' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) is available to teachers as activist-practitioner-researchers wherever they are working. I argue that this process could sit in place of or alongside requirements for the documentation of teaching and learning in Early Childhood Education - depending upon one's regulatory context. Indeed, as I drafted this paper, I stumbled upon 5 issues of a magazine published by an editorial board of Psychologists and Mental Health Practitioners working out of Sydney (Australia) entitled *Activist-Practitioner* (Rhodes et al., 2020). While I am no way aligned with nor a contributor to this publication, and do not know the practitioners involved in conceptualizing and editing the magazine, the few issues that I have encountered seem to similarly conceptualise the idea of the activist-practitioner as a practitioner who stops to consider which voices and whose experiences are being silenced or amplified in theory-practice-research. The publication itself is an embodied attempt to slow down and listen more authentically, decolonizing psychology practices (insofar as that is possible) while amplifying the experiences-knowledges-expertise of those whose ways of knowing and being with the world have traditionally been marginalized and or erased by mainstream psychology and education. With that in mind, it should be noted that there will always be those practicing from within material-discursive fields who are aware of

and already trying to disrupt that which has become taken-for-granted. Once again, my intention here is to map the effects of different ontological and epistemic orientations or worldviews - not disparage or denigrate different approaches to practice-research.

Thinking diffractively with theory

Re-turning to Jules and the Crystal while thinking with a biomedical or clinical, psychological model of Autism (epistemologically and ontologically positivist) we might recognise Jule's crystal in this moment of encounter as an inappropriate attachment or a restricted interest in an inanimate object. Concerned with human agency and learning, the instrumental or clinical practitioner might evaluate Jule's social skills in the interaction and his readiness for school and socialisation. In response to this 'reading' we might posit that Jule's interest in sitting with an adult to discuss a preferred object is a moment of inappropriate attachment. Read this way, as a moment of interaction between a disabled child and adult-researcher around an object of restricted interest, we might hypothesize that what is needed is explicit instruction in and learning of neurotypical social skills which will support Jules to wrest attention away from his restricted interest/s in favour of more neurotypical, age-appropriate play with less predictable (child) peers.

From a social (epistemologically and ontologically constructivist) model of disability we might recognise the crystal as Jule's fidget – a means through which he self-settles and self-soothes when the social or sensory environment disables him. Practitioner-researchers concerned with responding to children's rights, strengths and agency might, based on this 'reading' explore strategies to minimise the effects of disabling situations and social arrangements, engineering strategies and social groups which further reduce Jule's reliance on the comfort afforded by his relationship with the crystal.

From an onto-epistemologically relational model of disability, informed by critical and new materialist orientations to the inseparability of

nature and culture, humans and place, we might suspend this seeking to know Jule's relationship with an object and propose instead that it is an entangled socio-material *relation* with whom Jule's intra-actively co-performs his capacities to assent and opportunities to speak and through which he demonstrates not only his capacity to understand theory of mind, but to perform participation on his own terms. These 'postfoundational' perspectives in Early Childhood Education, include those drawn from common worlds, critical post humanist and new materialist perspectives, which attune to the relational entanglement of humans *with* the natural world, engendering a more-than-human sociality. In this diffractive reading we might draw on Nxumalo (Nxumalo & Murris, 2021) to reimagine the text above as a 'place story' and (re)story the moment again to decentre the human child and researcher even further, see, for example, Christiansen (2022)Australia in which children and their early childhood teachers and educators routinely engage with local places – beaches, creeks, bush, parklands - for extended periods each week. While legally and ethically mandated to include all learners and pedagogically and philosophically premised on inclusive theories, quality standards and curriculum frameworks, little is known about how these new practice approaches conceptualise and support inclusivity for children with a range of diverse abilities. Dominant positivist and developmental discourses in research concerned with 'disability' in early childhood education tend to emphasize what children cannot do, pathologising difference, locating the problem within and trying to fix individual children while ignoring the relational, political, ethical and performative nature of dis/ability and inclusivity. This study seeks to resist and disrupt these dominant traditions. Situated within a post qualitative methodological orientation, this research puts post foundational, common worlds and feminist new materialist theoretical perspectives to work, employing pedagogical narration (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015. Place storying for Nxumalo (Nxumalo & Murris, 2021) is a relational mode of post qualitative, relational and new materialist

research, a gebunerative way of "attending to how young children and the more-than-human relationally participate in world making" (p. 108).

By de-centering (but not ignoring) the human and human agency in educational-research assemblages, these relational approaches attend to more-than-human agency in an effort to attune with place - including materials and more-than--human others - which are always already present in educational ecologies. The agency in this reading is both human and more-than-human. It emerges at the moment of intra-action (Barad, 2007, p. 178). This doesn't mean the crystal has conscious human agency (Latour, 2004) or that the humans speak for the crystal. Jules is correct after all in his assertion that "Crystals don't know how to talk", at least in the sense of verbal-communication. Rather, this reading attunes to the more-than-human within the research assemblage to consider how un-learning what we think we know about nature and culture might be useful in understanding neuro-divergent experiences of being with/in the world. While the crystals in this moment of intra-action do not talk, they are agentic. Beyond simply calling the humans into connection, they intra-act in ways that "contest and re-work what matters and what is excluded from mattering" (Barad, 2007, p. 178).

These theoretical orientations bring us to an epistemic and ontological positionality in which disability is not simply located with/in an individual or the material or social context but emerges from/with/in all of the above through intra-action. When we fail to see the ways that materials come to matter to neurodivergent children in educational ecologies, it can hardly be argued that they are the ones in deficit. Attending to post foundational and new materialist onto-epistemologies, activates a relational conceptualisation in which materials and nature are not just romantic and neutral, a mere backdrop to human agency and education. Instead, active copresence in pedagogical contact zones attends to human and material agency, where transparent dynamics of power are always at play. Conceptualised thus, people are (re)positioned as part of nature, not

separate from or above it and children are not future custodians or future citizens but agentic rights holders (Iorio et al., 2020; Iorio & Yelland, 2021) and citizens of the now (Rinaldi, 2021). I say (re)positioned here because many Indigenous ontologies have always conceived of humans and nature as inextricably connected (Gershon, 2016; Martin, 2006, 2016; Wall Kimmerer, 2021).

A relational, new materialist reading, following Gershon (2016), offers activist-practitioner-researchers opportunities to slow down and attune to Indigenous ways of knowing and being, making visible the connections between relational onto-epistemologies drawn from Euro-Western 'post' theories while drawing attention to their silence on the ways Indigenous relational ontologies have always already been non-anthropocentric (Martin, 2006, 2016; Moreton-Robinson, 2020; Wall Kimmerer, 2021). While I do not suggest that all First Nations relational perspectives are the same or commensurable, engaging with multiple perspectives in this way promotes listening and learning from Indigenous ways of knowing while attending to the inherent friction (Tsing, 2005) that all early childhood programs in Australia are taking place on unceded lands and that education itself is an on-going settler colonialism (Kwaymullina, 2020). Indigenous and non-Indigenous reconciliation is a subject of much debate in Australia (Grant, 2023) particularly following the catastrophic failure of a recent national referendum which sought to enshrine an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'Voice to Parliament' in the constitution. Despite an overwhelmingly positive vote for the Voice in Indigenous communities. If reconciliation is indeed a future possibility in Australia, then it depends upon the ability of non-Indigenous Australians to respectfully listen and respond in moments of ethical and political uncertainty with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing.

Each of the approaches explored above (epistemologically and ontologically) require that we story inclusivity and disability in Early Childhood Education differently. As Haraway reminds us it matters which stories we tell to tell other stories with (Haraway, 2016). For Hohti (2016) educational researchers have for too long ignored the things which matter most to children in educational assemblages. If that is the case then the things that matter most to neurodivergent children are not only ignored but are all too often dismissed as problematic. Attuning to the politics of 'tiny things' (Myers, 2014) highlights how that which may initially seem small and irrelevant can, if followed, make visible the messy, entangled, agentic and material connections through which children *know* through *being*. In research, in teaching and in life, being an activist-practitioner-researcher means training one's lens on those small things and the matterings which seem to matter most (sensorially, affectively, ethically and politically) in our everyday encounters with the world. Research that makes visible the ways in which we collectively *know through being and doing*, and responds ethically and politically from places of uncertainty, highlights possibilities for storying educational research differently.

Activating relational approaches to Disability and difference

Critical and relational approaches in disabilities studies reconceptualize and trouble developmental and interventionist perspectives inherited from positivism and educational psychology. They foreground an affirmative and positive approach to difference and an image of the child as capable. By complexifying disability and ability as conceptually co-constituted (Goodley, 2014) they enact relational rather than medical or social models of disability (Cologon & Thomas, 2014; Goodley, 2018; Mackenzie et al., 2016). These approaches advocate for the removal of barriers to doing and being but importantly also open a critical space for non-disabled people to see themselves as mutually implicated in processes of disablement (Cologon, 2016; Mackenzie et al., 2016; Reindal, 2008). Activating these conceptualizations in early childhood research-practice demands a re-thinking of instrumentalist teaching not simply as practitioner-research, but activist-practitioner-research which is capable of re-storying edu-

cation in ways which make visible and attend to the political and ethical challenges of our times (Vintimilla et al., 2021). Storying disability and inclusion otherwise through pedagogical narration, opens possibilities for listening differently to co-create more inclusive and intra-active early childhood pedagogies as we attend to and are affected by relations with people, place, materials and more-than-human others.

Activating pedagogical narration as a post qualitative and co-participatory methodology with children, teachers, parents and place, through walking, storying, diffractive companionship (Christiansen, 2022), thinking with theory and writing and re-turning as 'method' supports the co-creation of pedagogical decision-making as an everyday practice of theory-practice-research-making. This involves listening deeply with the lived experiences of children with diverse abilities, particularly when their words and actions decentre themselves from the narrative, as I have explored here. In attending to these moments, teachers as activist-practitioner-researchers bring collective awareness to rich everyday encounters with materials and more-than-human others which matter most to those usually marginalized by educational research and normative developmental discourses.

Attuning to matters of concern (Latour, 2004) in learning ecologies requires that our research methodologies attune to a more-than-human sociality (Tsing, 2014). This is important for more inclusive and sustainable human-nature relations now and into the future (Silova & Taylor, 2020). Here I have argued that post qualitative inquiry is one means by which activist-practitioner-researchers can put these theoretical orientations to work, troubling essentialised and romanticised conceptions of children and nature, and the dominance of ableist 'benefits discourses' which silence and erase diverse ways of dwelling with place.

Postfoundational and post qualitative approaches to educational inquiry do not seek to find a final peace (Haraway, 2007). However, activist--practitioner-researchers can activate pedagogi-

cal narration to crystalise temporary (or enduring) moments of ethical and political decision making - affording possibilities for practice that do the heavy work of listening and thinking with theory in moments of political and ethical uncertainty. Pedagogical narration, as a post qualitative practice of writing in educational research assemblages activates activist-practitioner-researcher subjectivities. It highlights the importance of creating the time and space for slow pedagogies (Clark, 2023) which story education otherwise in relation with materials, people and place, making visible how slow pedagogies with place – walking, sensing, dwelling, noticing, storying, listening and thinking-with (humans, materials and more-than human others) enact ways of knowing through being with, thinking with and making with, that are not simply instrumental practices for including difference or improving skills and individual abilities, but embodied means of attuning to children's diverse relations with their common worlds. In as much, this orientation to research-practice configures and re-configures how we conceptualise ability and inclusivity, being and be(com)ing (Giugni & Osgood, 2015).

Conclusion

Discrete and knowable findings and conclusions are antithetical to post qualitative approaches in educational research (St. Pierre, 2021). While all research opens possibilities for theory-practice-making, the onto-epistemological premises of post qualitative inquiry contend that findings from one context cannot be immediately exported and/or replicated in other settings, not least because each moment of pedagogical encounter is in itself contextual, intra-active, emergent and situated. In this article, I have shared small insights or situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) from my own post qualitative inquiries which activate critical and new materialist concepts in early childhood research by thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) and writing pedagogical narrations as 'method' (Richardson, 2000; St. Pierre, 2007, 2021).

Here I have (re)turned to a particular moment

of encounter and activated diffractive modes of thinking with theory to illustrate how post-qualitative inquiry activates response-able activist-practitioner-researcher subjectivities. By drawing on post foundational, common worlds and feminist new materialist approaches (Blaise et al., 2017; Hamm, 2017; Hultman & Taguchi, 2010; Iorio et al., 2020; Lenz Taguchi, 2009; Nxumalo, 2019; Pacini--Ketchabaw et al., 2015; Taylor, 2013)2015; Taylor, 2013 in early childhood studies I have diffractively explored diverse epistemological and ontological orientations in inclusive early childhood research, centering a critical and relational approach to disability studies which disrupts ableist and colonial narratives and attunes to a broader sense of relatedness and mutual be(com)ing.

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