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Reconceptualising disability and inclusion: Enacting relational ways of knowing, being and doing with Bush Kinder

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Abstract

In the past decade over 170 ‘nature kindergarten’ programs have emerged in Victoria, 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, my research puts post foundational, common worlds and feminist new materialist theoretical perspectives to work, employing pedagogical narration (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015) and writing as method (Richardson, 2000) to think with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) in everyday encounters with one ‘Bush Kinder’ on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri-Woiwurrung people of the Kulin Nation the traditional custodians of Narrm (the Australian city also known as Melbourne). Re-presenting encounters with Place, children, teachers, parents and more-than-human others at one Bush Kinder, I make visible and trouble essentialised and romanticised conceptions of children, ability and nature, which are antithetical to the ethical and political entanglements of real and imagined global childhoods in contemporary Australia (Malone, Tesar & Arndt, 2020a).

I employ writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017; St. Pierre, 2021b) to generate small, situated knowledges through four

pedagogical narrations which open new possibilities for thinking and doing in education. Holding developmental, scientific and neurological knowledges *about* children, 'disability' and 'nature' alongside these pedagogical narrations enact relational ways of knowing, being and doing *with* in early childhood education, making visible possibilities for reconceptualising dominant, deficit focused conceptions of 'disability' and 'inclusion'.

As others have argued before me, disability and ability are co-constituted and need to be complexified as dis/ability (Goodley, 2018). Inclusivity therefore involves broader entanglements of relatedness and mutual belonging (Taylor & Giugni, 2012). Activating these conceptions in theory and practice requires that we write with disability otherwise in early childhood education - against the dominant traditions of developmentalism and interventionist approaches. Here I enact this reconceptualisation through pedagogical narration - attuning to what children can do instead of what they can't and emphasizing the broader relational, political and ethical entanglements of humans, more-than-humans, materials and place which are always already present in early childhood education and mutually implicated in processes of dis/ablement.

Drawing on Haraway (2016) and Lenz Taguchi (2009) I offer possibilities for more response-able, inclusive and intra-active early childhood pedagogies and activist-practitioner-researcher subjectivities which attune to and amplify the lived experiences of dis/abled children themselves as well as the human and more-than-human others they are always already entangled with in the common worlds of Bush Kinder. This post qualitative work materializes new potentialities for knowing, being and doing *with*, disrupting traditional knowledges and practices which seek to know children through instrumental, developmental and ableist frames of reference which render difference as deficit.

Keywords: *Dis/Ability, Inclusivity, Bush Kinder, Early Childhood, Common Worlds, Post Qualitative inquiry, Relationality, Knowing, Being and Doing.*

Declaration

This is to certify that this thesis:

i. Comprises only my original work except where indicated,

ii. Includes due acknowledgement in the text to all other material used,

iii. Is fewer than 55,000 words in length exclusive of tables, figures, appendices and the reference list.

iv. Conforms in all respects to relevant university regulations and policies including the *Graduate Research Training Policy, Management of Research Data and Records Policy* and *Preparation of Graduate Theses Rules.*

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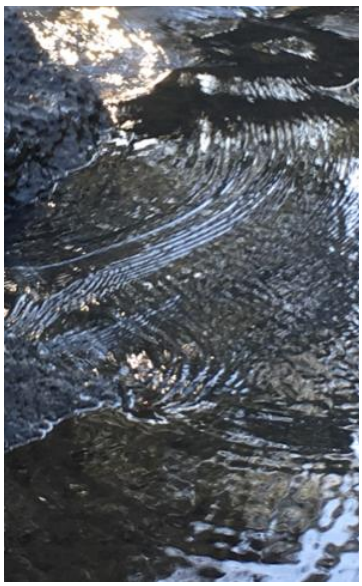







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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over 170 ‘nature kindergarten’ programs have emerged in Victoria over the last decade. Inspired by the wealth of popular and scientific literature on the benefits of nature play for children’s health, wellbeing and development (Elliott, 2018), these programs are collectively referred to as nature or bush kindergartens.They involve young children, early childhood teachers and educators routinely accessing ‘wild/natural’ environments outdoors – local bush, parklands, beaches and creeks - for extended periods each week. Like all early childhood programs, they are legally and ethically mandated to include all learners and are pedagogically and philosophically premised on inclusive theories, quality standards and curriculum frameworks.

A survey by Kids in Nature Network (2018) indicated that participation of children with dis/abilities[i] in these services is relatively high. Yet limited research has explored how these new practice approaches conceptualise and support inclusivity and participation of children with a range of diverse abilities.

As former secretary of the Early Childhood Outdoor Learning Network, a network of professionals interested in these programs, I’ve heard anecdotal accounts of teachers working hard with land managers to find wheelchair accessible bush sites to no avail and families persisting but eventually opting out of programs because the sensory environment outdoors was too overwhelming for their child. At the same time, teachers suggest these programs level the playing field by privileging unstructured, child-led and risky play, which results in adults perceiving children’s behavioural needs and challenges differently. These anecdotal accounts lead me to wonder what happens with equity and inclusivity when we take children outside heavily regulated, ‘accessible’ early childhood centres and kindergartens? What new conceptual possibilities are encountered with these relatively new pedagogical approaches? How might they inspire

us to relate to ability and disability differently? What do children with diverse abilities experience in these programs?

1.1 Situating myself as researcher

According to Leistyna (1999), “It is essential that educators interrogate the unspoken centrality of white, male, middle-class heterosexual identity” (p. 59). Researchers and critical educators must have a sense of their own identity as an emergent and ideologically situated reality. One’s ways of understanding must be explicit, so they may be contested. Leistnya suggests we need to question pervasive inheritances from the discipline of psychology. These assumptions “locate success or lack thereof within the individual away from the social conditions within which the learning process is taking place” (p.63). Critical educators, he argues, “need to stress the social nature of the mind, the ideological nature of perception and the fact that the way in which we learn to think and feel is the product of the groups to which we belong and value” (p.63).

So, who is my we, our, us? To which groups do I belong? What is the ideological nature of my ways of thinking, being, doing? How am I situated as researcher? I am a white, middle class, university educated, heterosexual, cis gendered female and fourth generation settler-colonial Australian. While my grandparents and great grandparents were all working class or service men and women, my parents and siblings, partner and in-laws are all university educated professionals - the majority are practicing or retired public school teachers. A parent of two young children, I am drawn to the experiences of education in early childhood, the challenges of parenting and the problematisation of real and imagined global childhoods in the 21st century.

I come to the current study with a prior understanding of and association with the deficit assumptions of dominant developmental discourses (Moss, 2019). Having spent the last 20 years in positions directly related to disability support, inclusive early

childhood education, tertiary pre-service teacher education, community development, strategic planning and place making. As a project officer and community planner in local government, I have employed the dominant narratives of quality, economic rationalism and high returns (Moss, 2019) in the service of local authorities. But I've also challenged the inadequacy of these as well, disrupting developmental and deficit discourses in tertiary education as a lecturer and pre-service teacher educator.

I am a parent of a child with an autism diagnosis and while his story is not mine to tell, this situatedness makes being relationally attuned to diverse ways of knowing, being and doing part of my everyday reality. I was advised by the professionals who diagnosed my son, that I would also fit the criteria for a similar diagnosis. While I have not pursued a formal diagnosis, navigating support systems - the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), early intervention and school funding have been part of our family life together. This situatedness as researcher is part of, not separate from, the positionality I bring to this inquiry. The post qualitative orientation put to work in this study through the research processes of pedagogical narration and writing, as both process and product of my research (Richardson, 2000), make visible my own situated and entangled ways of knowing through being.

1.2 Rethinking researcher subjectivity: Getting in and out of the way

It was evident from the earliest conceptions of this project that I could not and would not be separate from either the data or analysis. The inquiry process would be mediated through my own positionality, and yet it was important to ensure that amplifying the experiences of Bush Kinder for dis/abled and neurodivergent children, not be overshadowed by either the researcher as benevolent rescuer (Lather, 2012), nor self-indulgent autoethnographer. Pedagogical narration (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015) is a critical and dynamic methodological process for complexifying early childhood practices which illustrates that knowledge is not static nor reducible to a body of facts but

is an embedded, experimental and experiential means through which the subjectivity of researcher can be re-thought. Writing pedagogical narrations as a creative and critical analytic practice of post qualitative inquiry, as I have done in this study (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017) offers an opportunity for walking that line between the self-reflexivity of autoethnography and telling a story otherwise (Haraway, 2016), while valuing uncertainty, listening to multiplicity and "thinking of oneself in relation to others and the world" (Moss, 2019, p.73). Actively getting in and getting out of the way (Lather, 2012). Pedagogical narrations are not simply visual and textual accounts of pedagogical encounters, but include critical and subjective interpretations which explore multiple epistemological and ontological perspectives (Nxumalo, 2019).

My career began as a disability support worker and in play-based early childhood intervention programs and I have had a keen professional interest in inclusive early childhood education, as an academic and lecturer teaching pre-service teachers in subjects on diversity, equity and inclusive practices. When my young son showed strong sensory aversions and preferences, I found myself questioning my long held professional assumptions about an intrinsic, romantic and 'natural' relationship between children and nature. If my own child with sensory processing differences was so challenged by experiences involving dirty hands, mud and extreme temperatures then what was the experience of other children with similar diversities in these programs? How did parents and educators negotiate these? How were their experiences captured in the overwhelmingly positive evaluative literature? Did the research on benefits of 'nature contact' consider the perspectives of neurodivergent or dis/abled children themselves and what they experienced? Or draw assumptions based on adult's perception of the developmental benefits for children? I found that while some overseas research (Bradley & Male, 2017) included children's perceptions and choices in similar outdoor learning experiences, the research settings didn't always reflect the types of

programs emerging in Victoria. Furthermore, there was no research on Australian early childhood programs that explicitly looked at children as a diverse group - with a range of diverse abilities. This study works to fill that gap.

1.3 Situating the inquiry

This inquiry explores the different ways that nature, disability and inclusion are conceptualised in one bush kindergarten program - Bush Kinder - on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation along Darebin creek north of Narrm[ii] (Melbourne). Through pedagogical narration, I consider the possibilities for reconceptualizing disability and inclusion by thinking with common worlds, new materialist and critical post humanist onto-epistemologies in everyday moments of pedagogical encounter. This methodological orientation to the relational entanglement of humans *with* the natural world in early childhood education is important for engendering more inclusive and more sustainable human-nature relations now and into the future (Silova & Taylor, 2020). However, it is equally, if not more important to acknowledge that Australia's First People's relational ontologies and ways of knowing through deep connection to Country (which includes humans, animals, rocks, trees, waterways, skies and land), are the oldest, continuous examples of these ontological and epistemological orientations. As a non-Indigenous researcher, I am concious of not appropriating this relational ontology or indeed suggesting that diverse indigenous ways of knowing and being in Australia or elsewhere can be reduced to a singular unified Indigenous 'worldview'. Here I attempt to bring together and make visible relational onto-epistemologies drawn from Euro-Western 'post' theories and the work of diversely Indigenous scholars (Atkinson, 2017; Cumpston, Fletcher & Head, 2022; Kwaymullina, 2020; Martin, 2016; Moreton-Robinson, 2020; Wall Kimmerer, 2021; Yunkaporta, 2019). I do so, not to suggest that they are the same or commensurable, but to promote listening with and learning from Indigenous ways of knowing while acknowledging and

attending to the inherent friction (Tsing, 2005) that all early childhood programs in Australia are taking place on unceded lands amidst on-going settler colonialisms (Kwaymullina, 2020). Reconcilliatory futures in Australian education depend upon our collective ability to listen and respond with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

Situating the inquiry within a post qualitative paradigm, I employ writing as a creative analytic process (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017) to explore and trouble everyday encounters with place, children, teachers, families, more-than-human others and materials with Bush Kinder. In chapter two I outline a case for post qualitative inquiry which stories disability otherwise to disrupt dominant, positivist and reductive developmental discourses in early childhood research. In subsequent chapters this methodological orientation is put to work to amplify the diverse lived experiences of Bush Kinder for children with diverse abilities. This is important because so often early childhood research concerned with 'inclusion' and 'disability' pathologises difference as deficit and excludes the perspectives and lived experiences of children with dis/ability, as I illustrate in chapter three.

Much 'inclusion' research is instrumentalist in nature and seeks to find 'what works' (Biesta, 2007), 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 research emphasizes and amplifies the experiences of dis/abled and neurodivergent children themselves through pedagogical narration (chapters 4, 5, 6 & 7). I privilege the perspectives of Autistic (see footnote i) and neurodivergent authors and researchers (Garcia, 2021; McAnulty, 2020; Milton, 2012; Moriah, 2022; Thom-Jones, 2022) and trouble essentialised and romanticised conceptions of children and nature, and the dominance of ableist 'benefits discourses' which are antithetical to the ethical

and political entanglements of global childhoods in contemporary Australia (Malone et al., 2020a).

Post foundational, post qualitative and critical post humanist approaches in educational research (if they can indeed be so unified and defined) work to resist and disrupt interpretive and instrumentalist frames which essentialise and simplify our understanding of human experience and determine what works. Instead, they acknowledge relationality, complexity, uncertainty and the situatedness of human and more-than-human, socio-material entanglements that at once produce and are produced by dynamic and discursive relations of power. From these perspectives, knowing and being are always situateded and provisional, materializing in pedagogical contact zones - physical and discursive spaces where different cultures and perspectives "meet, clash and grapple" (Pratt, 1991, p. 94) while be(com)ing with together (Stables, 2012).

Moving beyond the false binaries of modernism and post structuralism, developmentalism and post foundationalism, according to Leistyna (1999) requires reseachers to understand the complexity and relations between their key concepts to ensure they are able to critically "reinvent the theoretical tenets therein and use them to inform our transformative practices" (p.64). In this research, I put this post qualitative orientation to work to explore the possibilities and complexities of competing theoretical perspectives and concepts related to dis/ability and inclusivity, opening to new potentialities for knowing, being and doing *with*.

Here I train my lens on both the experience of Bush Kinder and the relations that enable inclusivity in this particular pedagogical contact zone *and* trouble the limited humanist conceptions of 'disability' and 'inclusion' which dominate early childhood education, as I explore in chapters two and three. Pre-determined research questions are arguably antithetical to post qualitative research, however this inquiry works to:

1. Complexify disability, inclusion and Bush Kinder using relational onto-epistemologies,
2. Amplify the experiences of dis/abled and neurodivergent children themselves,
3. Explore the possibilities for doing ‘disability’ and ‘inclusion’ differently and storying disability otherwise with Bush Kinder.

This research included a 10-week period of dwelling together with place in 2019 during which I activated co-participatory data generation activities which avoided reproducing the effects of exclusion or segregating children with dis/ability. Dwelling with children, teachers and place in reflective and diffractive companionship (see chapter 4) included walking, being-with, audio and video co-recording, one-on-one interviews with teachers and parents of children with dis/ability and those without. The interviews were not focused on the child/ren and what they could or could not do, their difficulties or deficits, but the ways in which parents and teachers conceptualised Bush Kinder as place and educational program and planned for and fostered inclusivity to support participation and learning. All children in the group with appropriate consent and assent participated.

Over time, dwelling with children, teachers and place and listening as a ‘researcher in relationship’ (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015) meant attuning to processes for telling and re-telling small situated stories through oral and written pedagogical narration (as explored in chapter 4 *Diffractive Companionship*). The practice of writing pedagogical narrations became both a process and a product of the inquiry (Richardson, 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017). Through them, I began to trouble humanist methodologies and conceptions of ‘disability’ and ‘inclusion’ which dominate early childhood education (See chapter 5 *Crystal Says Yes,* chapter 6 *Water and Time* and chapter 7 *Magpie, Our Classmate*). Making visible and storying not only the relations between people but also *relations with time, discourses, materials and the more-than-human* that come to matter when we consider dis/ability from relational perspectives.

Blades (2019) calls into question whether the work of any author can be considered theirs alone – suggesting that all academic writing "first emerges as a result of voices, discourses, and historical timing that led to the creation of the publication" (p.105). He suggests that writing which "appears to be the creation of a single author is actually the result of a momentary crystallisation of many discursive events and voices" (p. 105). Conceiving of knowing and research in this way, he contends, opens spaces in which the reader is "moved from an assumption of meaning to conversation with the text" (p.105) which questions the meanings discovered by sharing alongside them, indeed wrapped within them, the stories and "crystallization of moments within an author's life which led to the appearance of the text" (p.105). He notes that alongside academic work we ought to include the stories and everyday moments in an author's multiple lives which brought the text into being. It is that which I have sought to do in this dissertation, making my own subjectivity as researcher visible in everyday moments of intra-action which tell stories of dis/ability and Bush Kinder differently. By storying these small, situated encounters, I re-present (see chapter 2) the lived experiences of dis/ability encountered at Bush Kinder, storying disability otherwise - against dominant developmental and interventionist discourses. It matters that different ways of be(com)ing and dwelling *with* place are made visible within academic literature and that we trouble romantic, innocent and ableist narratives which dominate existing discourses of children, ability and 'nature-based' education. As Haraway (2016) reminds us "it matters which stories we tell to tell other stories with" (p.12). Amplifying stories like these in educational research means attending to and making visible perspectives usually marginalised within the literature.

1.4 Reconceptualising ‘disability’ and ‘inclusion’: Storying relational ways of knowing, being and doing

Early childhood education is dominated by stories which conceptualise disability as either a medical or social phenomenon - locating deficit within the individual or the social environment respectively. Key policy frameworks and anti-discrimination legislation in Australia use many different terms for children with disability – children with special needs, additional needs or diverse learners (See, for example: Disability Discrimination Act, 1992; Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009; Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011; Victorian Department of Education and Training & Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2016). These draw upon contradictory theoretical assumptions about disability (Slee, 2011). The medical model of disability views disability as a deficit or impairment which resides in an individual, while ignoring the ways that social attitudes, structures and environments actually disable people. The social model of disability contends that people are disabled by social systems, attitudes and environments. The tensions between these two approaches is a process of constant negotiation for the early childhood teacher.

By contrast, a social relational model of disability (Cologon, 2014) acknowledges that disability is always socially and materially situated (Thornton & Underwood, 2013). Disablement thus, from a social relational perspective occurs through (attitudinal, structural and material) barriers to doing and being while paying attention to the lived experience of disablement. It advocates for the removal of barriers to doing and being but importantly also opens a critical space for those without disability to see themselves as mutually implicated in processes of disablement (Cologon, 2014, 2016; Mackenzie, Cologon & Fenech, 2016; Reindal, 2008).

Here I adopt a relational onto-epistemological approach and terms like ‘diverse abilities’ from critical disabilities studies to refer to the range of human variations within a group of children. This is not a euphemism for deficit focused terms like children with additional needs or special needs. It is used to draw attention to diversity and the pervasiveness of universal developmental norms which cast some children’s diverse ways of knowing, being and doing in deficit. I also adopt the term dis/ability (Goodley, 2018). Dis/ability (with a slash) emphasizes that ability and disability, like ableism and disableism are “conceptually co-constituted” (Goodley, 2018, p.5). Rather than residing in any individual, ability and disability arise through our relations with others and the material-discursive effects and affects of our relations with our worlds.

Reconceptualising dis/ability from this critical and relational perspective draws attention to and makes visible how reconceptualizing the child as capable means acknowledging that what children can do is open to change as we change and adapt our ways of knowing, being and doing *with* them. Barad (2007) questions how orienting to a relational conception of disability like this changes our ability to respond, ‘What would it mean to deny one’s responsibility to the other once there is a recognition that one’s very embodiment is integrally entangled with the other? (Barad 2007, p.158). In this conception, the ‘able’ cannot be conceived of without those who are ‘disabled’ - they are relationally entangled. This conception of dis/ability as relational (Milton, 2012) and inclusivity as relatedness engenders inclusive practices through both responsibility and response-ability (Haraway, 2016).

Haraway (2016) suggests response-ability is the ability to respond ethically and politically from a place of uncertainty. Instead of seeking to know the other (Blades, 2019; Lévinas & Hand, 1989) it involves making and ‘becoming with together’ through a process of sympoesis (Haraway, 2016; The Critical Lede, 2017). Sympoeisis or “making-with” (p.58) implies the relational nature of existence – nothing makes itself nor exists

alone. Haraway 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) capable. While this will not erase individual difference and should not diminish dis/abled identity, it acknowledges the experience of dis/ability as relational and opens the way for thinking of inclusivity as relatedness (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2019).

Inclu*sion* approaches imply that some people belong, but others need to be included. Conceiving of inclu*sivity* as relatedness means going beyond a preoccupation with how those who 'belong' should include those who are 'different' (Taylor & Giugni, 2012). This demands a rethinking of disability which goes beyond the deficit models of developmentalism. Contemporary dis/ability research in education, therefore, must amplify the experiences of dis/abled and neurodivergent children themselves and focus not on fixing difference but on teaching non-disabled people how to disestablish ableism. This requires acknowledging that we are all mutually implicated in processes of dis/ablement and making visible the ways in which materials, expectations, knowledge, discourses, humans, more-than-human others and place all intra-act to co-create and co-constitute dis/ability.

Relational onto-epistemological approaches like post humanisn and new materialism (Lenz Taguchi, 2009) in early childhood education make these processes of immanent be(com)ing and intra-action visible. Creative and analytic post qualitative research positions theory-making and practice as theory-practice. These situated and provisional ways of *knowing through being and doing* support an attunement to and enactment of relational ways of being *with*, doing *with* and knowing *with* (children, teachers, parents, materials and place) in pedagogical contact zones (Hamm, 2017; Pratt, 1991), as I explore in chapters two and three. This opens possibilities for figuring and reconfiguring, thinking and unthinking, doing and undoing the worlds we inhabit according to different discursive and material affects. Attuning to the intra-active

be(com)ing of children and their relations with materials, more-than human others and place by writing pedagogical narrations, as I have in this research, makes visible an approach to theory-practice which is open to all teachers prepared to think with theory in everyday moments of pedagogical encounter.

Equitable and inclusive practices are an on-going political and ethical pursuit in the education and care of young children. Exploring the multiple ways that these are understood, practiced and experienced in emerging practice settings is crucial if we are to avoid reproducing existing barriers or creating new forms of exclusion. This is enacted here by holding developmental and neurological knowledges *about* children and disability and scientific knowledges *about* nature, alongside while we encounter dis/ability as relational and inclusivity and nature as a broader entanglement of the human, more-than-human and material. I do not seek to replace biomedical or developmental ways of knowing, being or doing in early childhood education but to make visible how these are only one, albeit dominant, way to explore dis/ability and difference in our theory-practice making. Here I make visible the potentialities for reconceptualising disability as dis/ability and inclusion as inclusivity through relational ways of knowing, being and doing *with*. As Robin Wall Kimmerer (2003, 2021) reminds us, these collective threads are “simultaneously distinct from the whole, and yet part of it” (p.11).

The importance of small, situated stories like the pedagogical narrations I present here - *Diffractive Companionship* (ch. 4); *Crystal says Yes* (ch. 5) *Water and Time* (ch. 6); *Magpie our Classmate* (ch. 7) - are emphasized by Haraway (2019), Richardson and St Pierre (2017) and Lather (2016). They represent an opening to ethical possibilities (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015) which Lather (2016) characterises as “the science that is possible after critiques of science” (p.129). Critiques like the neurodiversity paradigm and movement (Dwyer, 2022; Wallis, 2022). For Lather (2016) “post-epistemological sciences” (p.129) require new researcher subjectivities and attunement to other

materialities to create situated knowledges, so that what "becomes thinkable is a science that grows out of practical engagement with the world within a different, post qualitative ontology of knowing" (p.129). In situations where science is particularly normative, including educational research, rigorous subjectivity is needed to counter the over-reaching claims of objectivity that dominate instrumental and positivist perspectives. Rigorous subjectivity, in this regard, is a recognition of subjectivity as both an epistemic necessity (as the world cannot be experienced outside oneself) and a valuable process for making meaning which includes the perspectives of those usually silenced, marginalised and/or erased from dominant discourses (Moss, 2019). Following Lather and Moss, I activate this post qualitative approach in the hope of generating research which avoids speaking for dis/abled and neurodivergent ways of knowing the world but enables the deconstruction of dominant, normative and deficit focused discourses as a prelude to constructing new and more positive ways of being inclusive and flourishing together in difference.

The small-situated knowledges generated in this thesis story disability otherwise - disrupting traditional approaches to observation and documentation to make visible how all representation is a "discursive apparatus of knowing" (Lenz Taguchi, 2009, p.18). Putting pedagogical writing to work enacts relational ways of knowing, being and doing *with* neurodivergent and dis/abled children, activating inclusive and response-able pedagogies which render us all capable and mutually implicated in the processes of dis/ablement. It opens possibilitites for recognizing and disestablishing ableism through activist-practioner-researcher subjectivities which complexify listening and seeing, thinking and doing in more inclusive ways.

A Reader's Guide: What to expect in these pages

The following is an invitation for readers unfamiliar or not yet comfortable with post qualitative research, creative analytic practices or writing as a method of inquiry

(Richardson, 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017). For those already familiar with this approach and interested to jump straight in and encounter the writing moves as they are made, please stick around as this section also lays out how I address Richardson's (2000) five criteria for evaluating creative analytic research: substantive contribution, reflexivity, expressing a reality, aesthetic merit and impact (p.937).

Given the post qualitative nature of this inquiry, the layout of this dissertation is a little different from what may be expected of a positivist or even a qualitative, interpretivist design. As outlined above, rigrous subjectivity and researcher reflexivity are central to post qualitative inquiry. Researcher subjectivity is both a producer of and is produced by the text. This situated and embedded positionality, of myself as researcher, continues throughout each chapter.

Rather than a linear progression through literature, methods, data, analysis, discussion and ultimate conclusions as discreet and separable disembodied sections - I use each chapter to weave data, theory, diffractive analysis, literature, critique, experience, discussion and purposeful un-knowing. I attune to complexity and uncertainty to re-present relational experiences of teaching and learning with Bush Kinder. I attune to multiple ethical, political, entangled and embodied ways of be(com)ing with the world (Barad, 2003, 2007). Writing is both process and product of this type of research (Lather, 2015, 2016; Richardson, 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017).

Instead of a methodology or methods chapter, in chapter 2 *Post Qualitative Inquiry* I locate the inquiry within a post qualitative paradigm and draw on Lather (2015), St Pierre (2021b), Jackson and Mazzaei (2017), Richardson (2000) Richardson & Adams St. Pierre (2017) to articulate how this approach engenders engagement with post foundational, post structural, post humanist onto-epistemologies and a refusal of predefined qualitative methods. I critically explore the limitations of interpretivist inquiry and justify writing pedagogical narrations as a creative, analytic and post qualitative

process (Richardson, 2000) of thinking with theory (Lenz Taguchi, 2009; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, 2016).

Instead of a literature review in chapter 3 *Rethinking Dominant Ways of Knowing Children, Nature, Disability and Inclusion*, I situate the tradition of reviewing recent literature within a post qualitative orientation. I critically review the emerging literature on nature kindergartens, disability and inclusion in conversation with myself - making visible the epistemic and ontological complexity of the inquiry and identifying a gap in the literature when it comes to the lived experiences of neurodivergent and dis/abled children within these programs from their own perspectives. I construct a short genealogy or history of the present (Foucualt, 1978) to critically deconstruct what the aforementioned literature does to make visible the abled and disabled child subjects it produces. Drawing on reconceptualist and post foundational theories, i argue that post qualitative inquiry and relational onto-epistemologies are needed, which trouble dominant humanist and deficit discourses in early childhood education in the context of dis/ability and inclusivity. This diffractive (Haraway, 1992) reading and re-reading of the literature through multiple lenses makes visible the dominant positivist and ableist narratives which I seek to reconceptualise through the four pedagogical narrations I present in chapters four, five, six and seven. This deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction makes visible the complex realities of thinking with post foundational theories, relationality and multiplicity in early childhood education.

I present four pedagogical narrations, *Diffractive Companionship (ch.4), Crystal says Yes* (ch.5), *Water and Time (ch. 6)* and *Magpie our Classmate (ch.7),* which bring together data, theory, interpretation, analysis and discussion. Each of these chapters generate small, situated knowledges that tell stories of diverse abilities and difference in Bush Kinder otherwise. Each chapter begins with an everyday moment of encounter and intra-action (Lenz Taguchi, 2009) between children, materials, more-than-human others

and myself as researcher, before multiple 'lines of flight' (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1988) emerge which draw out conceptual connections and allow for new ways of thinking to leak through - unsettling dominant ways of thinking and doing. By thinking and writing with reconceptualist, post foundational, new materialist and common worlds theoretical perspectives I unpack and make visible my own and other's conceptualizations of dis/ability, inclusion, place and Bush Kinder. This "thinking with" relational onto-epistemological approaches - including post humanist and new materialist onto-epistemologies, relational models of dis/ability and First Nations relational ontologies - opens possibilities for complexifying dominant ways of knowing, being and doing in early childhood education. It is important to note that Indigenous relational ontologies in Australia are some of the oldest, if not the oldest *ways of knowing through being.* They are distinct from the other Euro-Western relational onto-epistemologies I draw on. First Nations relational ontologies are diverse, not singular or unified ways of knowing, being and doing. I do not seek, as a non-Indigenous Australian, to assume that I do or ever can, understand the world from within these worldviews. Instead, in the pedagogical narrations I seek to make visible the beginning threads of my attempts, as learner, to de-colonise my listening practices to come alongside situated ways of knowing through being and doing *with* (Martin, 2016). This approach attempts to pay attention to the silences, erasures and appropriation of First Nations perspectives and place relations in nature-based education (Nxumalo, 2019), opening possibilities for more activist practitioner-researcher subjectivities when teaching and learning on stolen lands (Kwaymullina, 2020; Martin, 2016; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003).

The pedagogical narrations weave data, analysis and discussion through story. They do not attempt to find a final resting place. They are not intended to represent an essential or instrumentalist truth about what happened. Instead, they figure and reconfigure multiple ways of knowing to make visible the complexity of teaching and

learning and *thinking with* children, teachers, parents, researcher and place. The pedagogical narrations are not presented with an abstract or introductory outline. This is done deliberately to bring the reader directly into the moment of encounter and intra-action (Lenz Taguchi, 2009), to collapse space and time and dismantle the false binary between theory and practice. It supports us to be and think *with* Place (here-after capitalised to signify it's living-ness) to conceive of ourselves in affective and embodied intra-actions, mutually constituted by and entangled with materials, human and more-than-human others. Photographs and my own creative practices - as writer and ceramicist - are assemblaged with the text to story Place in ways that engender an aesthetic and immersive experience.

I put pedagogical narration to work in this inquiry as a process of meaning making and re-presentation which makes visible the complexity of everyday encounters and intra-actions in early childhood education. The analysis contained within these chapters takes off in lines of flight (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1988; Thiele, 2016) and crystallization (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017) as I activate post foundational lenses to materialise uncertainty, rethink categories and reconceptualize dis/ability and inclusivity in moments of encounter at Bush Kinder and the writing moments since. Crystallisation (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017) is not simply critical reflection (as I explore in chapter 4 and 5) but is a form of diffractive reflexivity attuned to multiplicity. It involves a critical awareness of the impossibility of a single or true representation of reality - disrupting linear ways of knowing and experiencing.

Collapsing and complexifying space and time beyond the confines of a linear construction, I attune to not knowing, and instead *think with* multiplicity, activating post qualitative writing in which data, analysis, theorising and discussion are rigorously subjective and entangled – each unable to be thought without the other. These narrations make visible and hold on to doubt. They stay with the trouble (Haraway, 2016)

of uncertainty and surface my own un-knowing, un-learning and re-learning. The pedagogical narrations attend to the impossibility of capturing exactly what happens in learning encounters in ways which unequivocally answer predefined research questions. Rather they are small, situated stories, assemblaged to think the experiences anew, generating further questions and new ways of knowing, being and doing as they unfold.

As a reader, you may note a lack of identifying names and defining features. You won't be introduced to children through a list of deficits through which you might comfortably categorise and seek to *know* them. This conscious move is intended to be deliberatively jarring. It makes visible the many times and ways in which we normally come to limit and stereotype children through fixed expectations born of discrete characteristics. Instead, each pedagogical narration begins with a moment of everyday encounter with Bush Kinder in which children, researcher, teachers, materials, more-than-human others and Place all come to matter in moments of pedagogical intra-activity and be(com)ing (Lenz Taguchi, 2009). These are then complexified by thinking with theories which decentre the humanist gaze. Children are revealed in relation with others, over time as the narrations unfold.

I take up the practice of common worlds and feminist new materialist researchers in removing "the" before living be(com)ings which might usually, elsewhere, be referred to as objects or things. This is influenced by First Nations writers like Robyn Wall Kimmerer from the Citizen Potawatomi Nation in Canada and Sara Kianga Judge a "Neurodivergent Walbunja-Yuin woman born and grown up on Burramattagal Country in Australia" (Kiangi Judge, 2022, para.7). For Kianga Judge this practice signifies how "everyone and everything is Country woven together in collective agency" (para. 7) and "even the most subtle ways we use language have the potential to bring new understandings to the ways people think about environment and culture" (para.1).

Capitalising more-than-human beings may feel out of place for some readers; however, it is a move made to emphasize the agency and intensities of more-than-human others, disrupting subject/object binaries to highlight the interconnected inseparableness of humans and nature. The creek, becomes Creek. The tree, becomes Tree. Likewise for Water and Place. Bush Kinder is capitalized to express its lively be(com)ingness. It is Place – inclusive of people, animals, plants, materials, an educational project, a material-discursive space, a political and ethical pedagogical contact zone (Hamm, 2017).

Key words and phrases are *emphasised* throughout the text to draw attention to the ways the language positions and constitutes ways of knowing and thinking about key concepts. Education is never neutral and the language we use to frame nature, children, development and ability illustrate our political and ethical positioning whether we mean it to or not (see footnote i). I invite the reader to consider the ways in which these terms may have become unquestioned in their own thinking-doing (theory-practice) in education, to question their own taken-for-granted assumptions as reflected in their use of these terms.

Where dialogue and conversation are re-presented in the pedagogical narrations through moments of intra-activity, I purposely decentre human actors, often removing their names. This makes visible the relational entanglement of children with diverse abilities, teachers, Place and researcher. Where names are included, these are pseudonyms designed to protect the privacy of individuals. I enact a pedagogy of attunement (Hamm, 2017) in these chapters - slowing down and centring Place, materials and more-than-human others in the common worlds of Bush Kinder - to make visible how listening in more sensorially affected and affective ways can offer different ways of seeing through which we might counter dominant developmental discourses and avoid reinforcing deficit narratives and ableist assumptions. These are drawn together in

concluding thoughts (not conclusions!) and possibilities for theory-practice (not strategies!) at the close of each narration to draw attention to the situatedness of the knowledges created. This move illuminates post foundational ways of knowing which attune to indeterminancy, uncertainty, the always already there and yet constantly be(com)ing nature of reality and experience.

In the final chapter I re-surface these concluding thoughts to illustrate how relational ways of knowing, being and doing offer possibilities for reconceptualising ‘disability’ and ‘inclusion’ with Bush Kinder. I also discuss where I have encountered the unexpected. These concluding thoughts and possibilities for theory-practice are not designed to be read as discreet instrumentalist practices or specific solutions which may be applied in other contexts, nor even necessarily as explicit pedagogical suggestions (Russell & Boileau, 2018). Rather they provoke further questions and critique, opening to possibilitites for doing early childhood education differently. Their impact and the substantive contribution to knowledge generated through this research is small and situated. I argue that these post qualitative practices - pedagogical narration, writing as creative analytical practice and thinking with theory - are a means of relationally opening to and listening with others while attuning to possibilities for more response-able and inclusive pedagogies and activist-practitioner-researcher subjectivities in early childhood education.

Chapter 2: Post Qualitative Inquiry

2.1 Starting from where we are: Research as be(com)ing with

In this chapter I unpack the post qualitative (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017; Jackson & Mazzei, 2013; Lather, 2015, 2016; Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2017; St. Pierre, 2021) and post foundational (Blaise, n.d.; Moss, 2019; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Clark, 2016; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2015; Taylor, 2013) methodological orientations I put to work in this inquiry. Relational onto-epistemological approaches draw on an "ethics of immanence" (Lenz Taguchi, 2009, p. 176) to reconceptualise and question taken-for-granted subjectivities (adult, child, researcher, participant, abled, disabled), subject/object binaries and qualitative methods in educational research (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). I position research as a process of being and becoming, be(com)ing, in relation with others (Stables, 2012). An opportunity for unlearning and re-learning to generate anew as evident in this short pedagogical narration

> I am nervous as I open the gate. I have spent a tense few days constructing the documentation I have come to share with twenty-six 4 and 5-year-old children and their teachers. I have been worried to put this documentation together - the pressure of ensuring it is a valid and reliable (re)presentation of our experiences and time together over term two, as the Autumn light shifted, the air cooled and muted the hot sun and warm winds of summer. However, unshaking the bonds of a quest for 'qualitative' rigour, I know that this is but one interpretation of many which could be constructed. My attempt is but one interpretation as another - not only an Other - but Another (Giamminuti, 2009). Always an outsider, but also an insider. "A part of our family" as one of the teachers recently told me when I thanked her for sharing with me via email her documentation of a small group encounter with a turtle. (Research Journal 18th March 2020)

Here, my multiple relations with children, teachers and Place as researcher, Other and outsider, but also insider and family, are made visible. I enact pedagogical narration as a methodological orientation for re-presenting (Moreton-Robinson, 2020) multiple ways of knowing and interpreting shared experiences rather than capturing an essential representation of what happened or occurred.

Attuned to the dynamics of power and multiple subjectivities inherent in educational research with young children, I position myself as both knower and learner, signalling that I am as willing to question and rethink research practices and processes as I am to implement them. This methodological orientation to research as *be(com)ing with* engenders research with children, teachers and Place as an inherently ethical and political practice or *doing* in early childhood education (Hamm, 2017).

2.2 Post qualitative 'knowing'

For Jackson & Mazzei (2017) the ontological turn and post foundational paradigms demand a shift from 'method' in which objects of knowledge come to be understood, not just as things to be interpreted (interview transcripts, photographs video recordings) but *doings* with their own ontological force. *Being with* data we collapse space and time, past and present, theory and practice, feeling and thought, sensory, felt, embodied and affective experiences. At the same time, through writing, new data is generated, new lines of flight emerge (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1988; Thiele, 2016). Re-engaging with these moments over time brings up fresh questions, different observations, new synaptic connections.

These 'networked' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017, p.727) thoughts crystallise (Richardson, 2017) what data is doing and undoing – not necessarily to make meaning but to highlight *relatedness*, within stories, memories and moments of encounter outside a traditional conception of fieldwork and analysis (see chapter 4). This process makes visible reflections of moments in the present that are wrapped in the past and also

suggestive of the future - illuminating the relational ways of knowing *through being* that shape the way we experience the world. *Doing* data and thinking with entanglement in this way makes visible the 'linguistic' and 'ontological' in educational research (Lenz Taguchi, 2009).

2.3 Pedagogical narration as post qualitative inquiry

St Pierre (2021a) argues that qualitative inquiry, while "supple enough to serve as a methodology" (p.4) for research that begins with the human subject, cannot "accommodate the posts – postmodernism, poststructuralism, posthumanism" (p.4). Here I activate a methodological process of thinking with post foundational theories and relational ways of knowing, being and doing to make visible and reconceptualise dominant and deficit focused conceptions of 'disability' and 'inclusion'. I mobilise theory through pedagogical narration to *complicate* (St. Pierre, 2021a, p. 7) rather than simplify the inquiry, storying disability otherwise to make visible, and disestablish, ableism (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015).

Thinking with theory

The objective of post qualitative research in education is to *complexify* everyday moments of teaching and learning (Lather, 2015; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017; St. Pierre, 2021b). To question and disrupt dominant, positivist ways of knowing and reduction to ever more specific, diagnostic categories. Thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) in this regard might be conceived of as a generative analytic practice or practices in which the researcher attempts to go beyond the interpretive to become attuned to more than simply that which is said (Blades, 2019) to question and bring into the light the discursive as well - what Levinas called the saying. I put pedagogical narration to work in this research to open a space for leaning into the possibilities of thinking with theory and attuning to complexity.

Engaging with complexity requires attending to the multiplicities of our socio-material entaglements with the world and making visible the connections, disruptions and interferences created when we attune to multiple ways of knowing which are always already partial, incomplete and uncertain (Hamm, 2017; Haraway, 2016; Iorio, Hamm, Parnell & Quintero, 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). Writing becomes both practice and product of the inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017). Pedagogical narrations are not a qualitative attempt at authentic description, or stories with a beginning, a middle and an end. Rather, they recognise my own and other's (human and more-than-human) situatedness and positionality. They are an apparatus of knowing (Lenz Taguchi, 2009) and make visible how conceptual knowledges and subjectivities are materialised and re-produced in everyday intra-actions and material-discursive encounters in early childhood education. They materialise moments of rupture, uncertainty and co-be(com)ing as I experiment with the messy ethical and political relations of *researching with* (young children with diverse abilities, materials, Place, unceded lands etc).

As researcher my own subjectivity is un-done and re-woven, as I get both in and out of the way (Lather, 2016). I quite consciously attempt to re-present schisms, interjections and uncertainty as a practice of thinking with post foundational theories. The early stages of writing the pedagogical narrations tended to expose the deafening silence of materials, the more-than-human and Place (as evident in the short excerpt above). Over time, thinking with different theories, particularly new materialisms (Barad, 2007; Hultman & Taguchi, 2010; Lenz Taguchi, 2011) opened a space for attuning to matter and material agency, as well as the affective and embodied experiences of Place and time. I began to write in ways that make visible my own ontological and epistemological shifts in be(com)ing researcher. The pedagogical narrations (chapters 4, 5, 6 & 7) pay attention to the intensities and flows of matter in research assemblages, untying agency from the confines of human consciousness (Fox & Alldred, 2015; Latour,

2004b). Layering my own researcher subjectivities within the writing, generates new data, while critically analysing, interpreting and questioning my own iterative interpretations. For example, being affected (Lenz Taguchi, 2011) by ripples in Water while walking, called me into connection with the feel of rocks and clay in my hand (see chapter 6). While writing I re-encountered those moments, called back into connection with materials and more-than-human others in ways that made me unable to think how it had not been there before. Initially I captured these moments with confusion and difficulty, unlearning and relearning in my research journal. But they ultimately became central doings of the data (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) as I drafted the pedagogical narrations. Calling out, calling me in, begging to be included. The data, like the human and more-than-human co-participants I encountered with Bush Kinder, refused to sit still. The writing refused to stop listening.

While the pedagogical narrations re-present the interconnections of multiple everyday moments' (in so far as that is possible), they also analyse, configure and re-configure the experience of Bush Kinder within and through multiple theoretical and conceptual frames. These include rights-based notions of the sociology of childhood (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999), child as capable citizen of the now (Iorio & Yelland, 2021), and onto-epistemologies - post foundational (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015), post humanist (Malone et al., 2020a) and new materialist (Hultman & Taguchi, 2010) perspectives - through which I attempt to render a more relational inclusivity in the common worlds of Bush Kinder (Taylor & Giugni, 2012).

Reconceptualising difference

Pedagogical narrations make visible everyday moments of political, ethical, epistemological and ontological complexity. They figure and re-configure our own and other's ways of knowing, being and doing. In this research they are activated to *think with* different forms of researcher subjectivity (Lather, 2016), material agency (Lenz

Taguchi, 2011) and writing as process, practice and product of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017). I put them to work here to replace typical vignettes or case studies which are common in research *about* young children with 'disability'. In the instrumentalist method of vignette or case study, the individual child subject is configured - usually in deficit - as the central character or problem which needs to be solved. Here, pedagogical narrations work quite consciously in upending this tradition, at unlearning and unhinging oneself as researcher from the "gravitational pull of humanism" (Lather, 2016, p. 126) and with it the confines and constructions of disability and inclusion as a solely humanist pursuit (as I explore in chapters 7 and 8).

The image of the child as capable (Rinaldi, 2006) is central to the epistemological and ontological conceptions of this inquiry. Dominant developmental and deterministic conceptions of the young child as vulnerable, innocent and 'in need' in disability and inclusion research are reconceptualised. Positioning young children, and particularly those diagnosed with developmental deficits and dis/abilities, as capable citizens and rights holders (Moss, 2019) is central to reconceptualising disability and inclusion through a relational lens. This requires attuning to and seeking to remove barriers to knowing, being and doing which limit chidren's potential by privilidging universal norms of development.

The re-presentation of multiple perspectives, human (children, teachers, parents, researcher) and more-than-human (animals, rocks, Creek, Trees) is done in the tradition of Spivak's notion of representation as re-presentation, "all representation in research is a form of interpretation and can never be a complete and accurate representation of an individual - their voice, their perspective" (Cited in Morten-Robinson, 2000 p.xxii). Each re-presentation, is a diffraction, not simply a reflection, but a (re)reading of one through Another (Jenkins, Ritchie & Quinn, 2020). Difference is valued as both positive and

affirmative, and multiple subjectivities and theories are mobilised to story disability otherwise (St. Pierre, 2021a).

Storying disability and inclusivity otherwise: Disestablishing Ableism

Storying disability and inclusivity otherwise (Valente & Danforth, 2016) by amplifying the lived experiences of dis/abled children and their relational encounters with Place addresses the silence and erasure of these perspectives in existing research concerned with 'disability' and 'nature kindergartens' (see chapter 3). These small stories "reveal children in creative, unexpected and unprecedented ways" (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 135). Though the chapters end these stories are never finished. They exist in a permanent state of immanent vitality and constant be(com)ing (Stables, 2012), materialising and counteractualising (Lenz Taguchi, 2011) dominant ways of knowing. They attune to *reflexive and diffractive unknowing* through which, as Lather (2015) suggests, we might humbly unhinge ourselves from seeking to know.

A recent review of Australia's national early childhood curriculum framework, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), *Belonging Being and Becoming* (Barblett et al., 2021) calls for educators to reconceptualise inclusion and adopt a relational model of dis/ability, to dismantle limiting and ableist, deficit discourses. Previously, the EYLF required educators to "move beyond preconceived expectations about what children can do and learn…to respect and work with each child's unique qualities and abilities" (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009). The recent review suggests that the revised EYLF should go beyond these dominant ways of knowing and support educators to reconceptualise inclusion as relational so they can "recognise and disestablish ableism" (Barblett et al., 2021, p.21). The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) is the curriculum framework for the state of Victoria where this study takes place (Victorian Department of Education and Training & Victorian Curriculum and Assessment

Authority, 2016). It builds on and extends the EYLF. Importantly, it emphasizes First Nations perspectives and the importance of *place and relationality* in children's experiences of early childhood education. Following these curriculum frameworks, children's identities are not conceived of as fixed and immutable, but fluid and relational - formed through the experiences and contexts in which they are situated and to which they belong.

Activating these frameworks in theory-practice requires that we story disability and inclusivity otherwise - against the dominant traditions of developmentalism and the colonial erasure of First Nation's place relations. And that is the central *doing* of this thesis, making visible how we might learn to *listen with* and be *affected by* our relational encounters with dis/abled children and more-than-human worlds in ways that unsettle deficit perspectives and disestablish ableism.

2.4 Rethinking and troubling 'participatory' methods

The participatory data generation methods I initially planned and activated while with bush kinder - child led tours, photography, audio/visual recording and digital book making (Clark, 2017b) are effective and authentic means for undertaking research with children - particularly those with diverse communication abilities, strong sensory preferences and aversions (Greenfield, 2011, p. 109). I thought designing participatory 'methods' from a rights-based, child friendly perspective in this way might avoid putting children in situations in which the power of a researcher/expert is amplified, as in one-on-one interviews outside the class group. However, *doing* research in this way rubs up against the reality of educational research as a relational and entangled, multi-spatial and multi-temporal politically situated experience. Participatory methods though rights-based and ethically and politically informed, from an onto-epistemological perspective, are ripe for re-thinking and re-conceptualisation. Enacting relational ways of knowing, being and doing *with* children means acknowledging that children, teachers, parents and

researchers are always already entangled with Place, intra-actively affecting while being affected by material-discursive relations.

Most often, once a child had indicated their assent (see 2.6 and Appendix 5) to take me on a tour or make a video together, we'd simply *dwell together*, shooting video with an iphone propped beside us or out of view. This withdrew the device as a distraction and allowed me to expose myself from beyond it. The audio/visual data this created emphasized feet, legs, earth, bark, leaves, dust, creatures, sounds and voices, embodied but also disembodied, affective intensities. Another view. A unique positioning. Using the same technology in different ways opened a space to listen more deeply to the stories of the materials and Places we were entangled with (Hultman & Taguchi, 2010; Kind, 2013, 2014). We *co-participated* recording audio and video in this way, putting less focus on capturing whole bodies, instead using the recordings as a means through which to remember and revisit certain moments of entanglement later on, to re-figure pastpresent encounters (Nxumalo, 2019) and research assemblages (video-writing-text-photo-conversations-stories) in diffractive companionship (see chapter 4). On walks, Creek encounters, during gatherings and in some moments with the whole group, small groups and occasionally one-on-one, I would set myself behind the screen once more and video or photograph, but it did not feel present, authentic, or respectful to be with children in the presence of the device. I avoid screens while with my own children when it is just us and I felt it diminished and distracted from the experience of *being with*.

Instead, I wrote after each session. These journal entries took the form of narrations, recording and documenting but also interpreting, analysing, noting theoretical lenses, concepts and ideas that might be used to further explore the encounter later on. I reflected back on them in conversation and storying with children, parents and teachers at following sessions. They weren't polished, but rushed out of my fingers, generating

new data. A walking meditation back through the day. These were indeed interpreted from my point of view, yet they captured multiplicities - children, teachers and families' experiences and words - their multiple ways of thinking, being and doing. In this thinking and rethinking with the process, the writing itself became a research activity - a generative and conceptual undertaking in which I was analysing, documenting, theorising, questioning and undoing previous thinking. In this way, the pedagogical narrations re-think participatory methods and analysis (Clark, 2005, 2017a; Mandleco & Clark, 2013) in the context of reconceptualist (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Moss, 2019; Moss et al., 2000) and relational onto-epistemological perspectives. Activating pedagogical narration as post qualitative inquiry expands who and what can 'participate' in educational research and generates new ways of understanding *listening* (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015; Taylor, 2013).

2.5 Listening and thinking *with* Place: Learning to be affected

Thinking with post foundational theories (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) and rethinking agency and materiality, enacts a generative process in which researchers can become attuned to *what*, not only *to whom* we are listening. By rethinking the material agency of matter in the narrations I activate "patterns of configurations that open up unexpected readings of and listening to materials" (Lather, 2016, p.127). The emerging fractal analysis foregrounds new subject-object relations and researcher subjectivities. The pedagogical narrations generated in this research dwell and listen with diverse bodies and materials in everyday moments with Bush Kinder. Through them I think and write with theory in embodied and affective (Latour, 2004) encounters that story both subjects and objects otherwise. The material agency (Lenz Taguchi, 2011) of lively matter (Barad, 2003) including rocks, water, creek and the more-than-human as *Place* (Iorio, Hamm, et al., 2017) *come to matter* (Blaise, Hamm & Iorio, 2017; Iorio et al., 2020; Iorio, Hamm, et al., 2017) in the ways I figure and re-figure (Nxumalo, 2019) what emerges.

Listening and thinking with Place in this way, makes visible my own subjectivity. Attuning to uncertainty it opens possibilities for encountering dis/ability and difference as positive and affirmative (Stables, 2012; Thiele, 2016).

Rinaldi's conception of a "pedagogy of listening as a metaphor for encounter and dialogue" is central to this approach. For Rinaldi, listening is a "sensitivity to everything that connects us to others" (p.4). An on-going process and attitude of openness in which we offer the possibilities of *time* for being listened to ourselves and for listening to others. The pedagogical narrations in this inquiry expand this orientation to listening as a relational and intra-active encounter (Lenz Taguchi, 2009). They engender a sense of listening as an attitude and a way of knowing *within* being. An onto-epistemological practice of being with and of the world. They make visible how all documentation and observation in early childhood education are material-discursive ways of knowing. By choosing which "stories I tell to tell other stories with" (Haraway, 2016) in the pedagogical narrations, I make theory-practice visible and disrupt what can be used to know, while consciously attempting to unknow and think anew.

Attuning to the ways we affect and are affected by the liveliness of more-than-human others in the pedagogical narations allowed me to come alongside First Nations relational ontologies and ideas about sentience of place (Yunkaporta, 2019, Wall-Kimmerer, 2021). While sentience and material agency are not the same, thinking with these ideas makes visible the interconnectedness of diverse ways of knowing, being and doing. Attuning to this broader relational *entanglement* (Barad, 2003, 2007; Deleuze & Guatarri, 1988) disrupts the false binaries of humans/nature, researcher/participant, abled/disabled, nature/culture, and encounters Place as more than just a neutral backdrop (Malone, 2016a, 2016b; Malone et al., 2020a; Taylor, 2013).

The notion of 'reflective companionship', a term coined by one of the teachers during the research (detailed in chapter 4) was instrumental in moving my conception of

multiplicity thinking (Moss, 2019) from the theoretical and epistemic to the ontological. Noting the limits of reflection as a metaphor (mirrors reflect sameness not difference) I extend the teachers notion of reflective companionship - being together, dwelling in conscious, reflexivity - to diffractive companionship. Drawing on post-modern motifs of validity - crystallisation and diffraction - I suggest that diffractive companionship enacts multiple relational ways of knowing, being and doing with children, adults, Place, materials and more-than-human others, encouraging activist-practitioner-researchers to "flourish together in difference without the telos of a final peace" (Haraway, 2007, p.301).

2.6 Ethical considerations and protocols

The inclusive re-presentation of children's lived experience and the valuing of children for their uniqueness and difference in this study is supported by Article 12 of the UN convention on the rights of the child (UNCRC) and General Comment 7: Implementing children's rights in early childhood (Lansdown, 2011). As well as Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability – Children with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). These universal rights statements, though arguably problematic in their developmental conceptions of age and maturity, nevertheless position children as rights holders. They outline not only the rights of children to participate and contribute but, particularly in the case of children with dis/abilities, to be provided with appropriate means, research processes and activities through which to do so.

Difficulty gaining ethical approval to include children under five with developmental delays and diagnosed dis/abilities in educational research is often cited as a reason for their exclusion from participation. This leads to a dearth of literature which includes the perspectives and lived experiences of neurodivergent and dis/abled children themselves (as I explore in chapter 3). In that regard this inquiry includes learnings for those interested in research which amplifies diverse experiences and perspectives through the development and activation of research protocols which

support informed consent and participation of children under five with diagnosed dis/abilities.

The ethics application for this inquiry included parent consent forms for children's participation and child assent forms for children to demonstrate non-verbally (by pointing or mark making) their desire or refusal to participate in any activity on any given day. This included non-verbal and bodily gestures (moving away, looking disinterested, turning their head or eyes away from me for extended periods, silence etc) which were recognised as removal of assent – regardless of a parent's signed consent form.

The ethical procedures included legal and distress protocols to be followed should children, teachers or parents become upset or disclose experiences of discrimination or exclusion. Information was provided to each parent and teacher about free counselling and support services that could be accessed should any of the participants become distressed and require support during or after our interactions. These protocols were designed from the outset to cohere with participatory rights based and child friendly research methods with young children in general (Clark, 2005, 2017a, 2017b) and dis/abled children in particular. I reference these protocols here for those interested in researching with children with a range of diverse abilities but deterred by the perception of ethical constraints in doing so. The project was approved by the University of Melbourne Human Ethics Sub-Committee (Ethics ID: 1852552).

The post qualitative orientation I have laid out in this chapter, privileges the research processes of dwelling together and writing as both processes and products of inquiry. It stories research in ways that both amplify the lived experiences of dis/abled children and make my own subjectivity as researcher visible. I enact this orientation in recognition that language and writing are not transparent tools that capture an external objective reality from which we, as researchers, remain separated (Moss, 2019). Rather,

language and writing processes constitute and construct knowledge. They are one of the means through which we render ourselves, others and our shared realities thinkable. In the following chapters I activate this approach in the hope of generating research which avoids speaking for children with dis/abilities and neurodivergent ways of knowing the world to enable both the deconstruction of dominant, normative and deficit focused discourses and the construction of new and more positive ways of storying and understanding difference.

Chapter 3: Rethinking Dominant Ways of Knowing Children, Nature, Disability and Inclusion

In this chapter I disrupt the positivist and anthropocentric discourses of developmentalism, quality and high-returns (Moss, 2019) which dominate much of the educational research concerned with young children, ability and nature. These discourses reinforce taken for granted assumptions regarding human exceptionalism and exploitative human-nature relations. They render difference as deficit and silence diverse ways of knowing, being and dwelling with Place. Here, I highlight the limitations of this research, the exclusion of children with dis/abilities from this literature and the need for creating the *alternative narratives* (Moss, 2019) I present in the subsequent chapters.

Firstly, I make visible the discourses that dominate contemporary research concerned with children and nature. I trace a short history of the present to contextualise the emergence of Bush Kinder in Australia and the dominant child and nature narratives found in contemporary early childhood research (Foucault, 1979). Secondly, I explore what these dominant narratives *do* and the able and disabled normative child subjects they construct as romantically connected to, though ontologically separate from nature.

Adopting a critical disabilities studies lens (Goodley, 2018), I argue that while much contemporary research has highlighted a concern with the *benefits of nature for child development* it has omitted and thereby silenced the perspectives of children with dis/ability themselves. This erasure of difference and children's diverse ways of knowing, being, doing and dwelling with Place fails to disrupt the ableist assertions of developmentalism, which render neurodivergent children and those with dis/ability in deficit. I conclude the chapter by drawing together recent research emerging out of common worlds (Hamm, 2017; Iorio, Coustley, et al., 2017; Iorio et al., 2017; Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Giugni, 2012), post foundational (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015), post

humanist (Malone, 2016a, 2016b; Malone & Truong, 2017) and new materialist orientations (Lenz Taguchi, 2009, 2011; Niccolini, Zarabadi & Ringrose, 2018; Warfield, Zarabadi & Ringrose, 2020) which put relational onto-epistemologies to work. These collective works frame an alternative research narrative which decentres the human child and listens deeply with Place to enact a situated and relational ethics in which the human and more-than-human are understood as always already entangled in everyday pedagogical encounters.

Structurally, this chapter is presented much like a conversation. With myself. Over time. A long time. Years, in fact. And over conflicting and perhaps contradictory worldviews in educational research. I use `typewriter font` to signify moments of epistemic interference, where taken for granted assumptions and conceptual inheritances from theory and practice are troubled from alternative perspectives.

This structure brings together understanding and un-learning through periods of knowing and not knowing, critique and wonder. I call upon Latour (2004) and his concern for the future of critical studies and the end of critique. Latour asks where critique can take us if we stop there, arguing that the future of critical studies is in it's becoming something new. He reframes critique as necessary but no longer sufficient.

In this chapter that 'something new' is a critical consciousness. An attunement to presence and be(com)ing with, to create situated knowledges (Haraway, 1992) born from listening in new and different ways to generative and relational stories of childhood/nature. That word again*, generative*. Jeanne Marie, my supervisor, keeps asking me, Why this word? Is it the right one? As if to say what is this doing here? But for me it is the right word – because there is something being *generated* and *regenerated* here. It is not just critique or diffraction (Haraway, 1992), the reading of one text through another (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017; Jackson & Mazzei, 2013). In thinking and rethinking these thoughts over time, re-encountering the person who thought them,

synthesized them and analysed them with a critical view to develop a position, I create diffractive patterns that map the effects of difference (Haraway, 1992) in the literature through my own interferences as researcher. Making visible the subtleties of my own critical consciousness and pedagogical be(com)ing.

In the first iterations of this chapter, I set out identifying gaps within the existing literature - the places and spaces which had not yet been explored within the growing yet ableist research regarding the educational benefits *of* nature *for* children and childhood. I was most concerned with the extent to which this research *included* children with diverse abilities and those with *dis/abilities* in particular. Encountering common worlds and post foundational authors I became concerned with the *colonising, deficit* and *ableist discourses* playing out within this humanist research and the *benefits for humans* narrative it constructed. In subsequent iterations I set out to read and re-read this literature through a more critical and post foundational lens. What emerges is a multilayered conversation, which folds these different moments in time and conflicting theoretical perspectives in upon themselves to generate another, more complex, perspective of the literature (Richardson, 2000).

3.1 Theorising 'Nature' in Early Childhood Education and Care

The idea of educating children 'in' nature and the coupling of children 'with' nature is not new. In the western cannon, it has romantic roots back to the enlightenment. In tracing the conditions which gave rise to Bush Kinder as it is understood in contemporary early childhood practice in an essay in 2015, I wrote that it was:

> *Rousseau (1762) who first declared that the best place for educating children was nature. According to Taylor (2013) Rousseau figured children as "born into an originary natural state of essential goodness" (p.3). He aligned the singular,*

natural and innocent goodness of children with the essential goodness of Nature. (Literature Review, 2015)

Rousseau rejected western civilised society, valorising 'Nature as teacher' and conflating Nature with childhood (Taylor, 2013). Taylor (2013) eloquently traces romantic figurations of "Nature's child" and "Nature as teacher" (p.8) through the work of Wordsworth and Thoreau as well as contemporary Australian children's literature and the American transcendentalist movement which emphasize the importance of wild nature as teacher.

Romantic threads connecting children and Nature are woven throughout traditional and contemporary approaches to early childhood pedagogy. Froebel's (1746-1827) "Kindergarden" was devoted to the scientific study of nature's laws and romantic ideals about children's inherent relationship with and cultivation in Nature. Montessori (1912) also adopted Rousseau's romantic coupling of children and Nature. Fusing child centred, scientific observation of the natural world with constructivist ideals of experiential learning. Traditional and contemporary early childhood theories tend to highlight the importance of children learning-by-doing. Taken together these foundational theorists "authorised and valorised the role of Nature in the learning process of young children" (Taylor, 2013 p. 44) to the extent that today the coupling of children with nature in early childhood pedagogy is rarely challenged.

Re-reading my own writing from 2015 I am uneasy - What does it say when we frame Rousseau and other western theorists as the beginning in this way? First Nations people have been educating children on Country in Australia for at least 60,000 years (Martin, 2016). Eurocentric, romantic roots and their contemporary progeny erase and colonise First Nations relational

ontologies and ways of knowing, being and doing (Yunkaporta, 2009). If Country and people are deeply interconnected, indeed inseparable, then how might claiming a 'natural' sense of non-Indigenous 'belonging in nature' function to re-colonise First Nations ways of being, doing and knowing? (Nxumalo, 2019). How would suggestions of 'wildness' be read by a First Nations audience? Particularly given contemporary scholarship on First Nations systems of agriculture and technology (Pascoe, 2018). As Fletcher, Dressler, Palmer and Hamilton (2021) question from a First Nation's perspective, what is 'wildness' except a colonising attempt to erase First Nations knowledge systems and logics?

The first decade of the 21st century saw a re-emergence of the child-*in*-nature movement. Richard Louv's (2005) *Last child in the wood's: Saving our children from Nature Deficit Disorder* articulated mounting concerns in the early 2000s with children's disconnection from nature. The book illuminated and fuelled anxieties in Australia about declining child health statistics and the increasing use of technology. Emotive and sentimental, Louv pathologised contemporary childhood, tapping into concerns about climate change and biophilia – the human capacity for *connection to* nature - questioning children's capacity for environmental stewardship in the future if they are not exposed to nature in childhood (Sobel, 1993; Kahn & Kellert, 2002). According to Taylor (2013), Louv's book hit a "collective raw nerve of concern about the endangered status of Nature's Child" (p.51) which, coupled with the fear of future climate emergency has been taken up by some proponents of nature kindergartens in the UK, Europe, the US and Australia.

It now feels novel to think of the climate emergency as a future fear or problem (Silova & Taylor, 2020). In 2022, the climate emergency is already here, "widespread, rapid and intensifying" (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2021). From catastrophic bushfires and devastating floods to a global pandemic. Many celebrated the pandemic in its early days for slowing down carbon intensive social and industrial activities contributing to human induced climate change (as people lived locally and reconnected with local places and green spaces while in lockdown). But almost three years on it is as if the pandemic has functioned only to increase the fever pitch regarding children's 'disconnection' from Nature. "Rewilding" kids is cited as a post pandemic priority in public health and Pediatrics (Reilly & Tremblay, 2020, 2021). Divergent concerns coalesce about children's social interactions, lack of outdoor play and technology use. Digital poverty experienced by some children raises equity concerns on the one hand and yet over-engagement with and reliance on technology, coupled with a lack of embodied social interaction raise developmental concerns on the other.

The 'new normal' in early childhood research is dominated in Australia by evermore literature regarding the impacts of the pandemic on children's development (Goldfield et al, 2022; Murdoch Children's Research Institute, 2022). While this is by no means a surprise, nor something to be ignored, the crisis narratives produced are inescapable, reinforcing and solidifying

the deficit discourses entangled with contemporary childhoods (Iorio & Yelland, 2021).

So far, post pandemic research illustrates how social inequities which pre-dated the pandemic, have been further entrenched by the uneven and disproportionately negative impacts significantly and unevenly borne by dis/abled people, culturally linguistically diverse communities and those with fewer socio-economic and educational advantages (Goldfield et al., 2022; Murdoch Children's Research Institute, 2022; Yarımkaya & Esentürk, 2020). From the mass exodus of families who could afford it [like my own] from cities to regional areas, to the sudden awareness that the lack of green space within walking distance in some suburbs exacerbated and would further entrench significant social inequity and adverse outcomes - particularly for neurodivergent and dis/abled children (Masi et al., 2021; Theis et al., 2021).

In the wake of remote schooling and a return to kindergartens and classrooms, the Victoria Department of Education strongly advocated for 'outdoor' learning for the first time - in the context of its value as an alternative to interactions indoors because of 'improved ventilation' (Victorian Department of Education and Training, 2021b).

The increase in practitioners operating nature kindergarten programs in Australia in recent years has at once drawn upon and given rise to an emerging popular (Louv, 2005, 2008; Gill, 2010) and academic discourse on the *benefits of nature* for the 'developing child'. For Taylor this collective work, defers to science to authorise and

reinforce humanist notions of children's 'belonging' in nature (Taylor, 2013). For examples see: Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2011; Kahn & Kellert, 2002; Kaplan, 1995; Kellert, 1997; Kellert & Wilson, 1995; Sobel, 1993. That it does so while largely ignoring First Nations knowledges systems that have educated children on Country in Australia for tens of thousands of years is problematic.

A number of emerging bush and beach kindergarten programs in Victoria have been inspired by a desire to connect with and learn from First Nations people and Country (Anderson, 2022) while simultaneously harnessing the benefits *of* nature for children and their communities now and into the future. At the same time, programs like 'Out and About' (Iorio et al., 2020) have been conceptualised from the outset from a common worlds perspective (Taylor & Giugni, 2012). Out and About attunes to the relational entanglements of place, the human and more-than-human in children's common worlds. Teachers and researchers enact multisensory pedagogies beyond learning knowledge *about* nature or being *in* nature and instead attune to *place relations* to "provoke teachers to engage in the ethics and politics of living in postcolonial Australia" (Iorio, Hamm, et al., 2017, p.124). I return to common worlds perspectives later in the chapter, however, before encountering this work it is prudent to explore the types of benefits discourses which dominate research concerned with child and nature 'connection' and the normalised 'able' and 'disabled' child subjects this literature creates.

3.2 Troubling 'benefits' and 'learning in nature' discourses

There is now almost two decades of popular and academic literature on the benefits of children's connection to nature and outdoor play in terms of the benefits for normative social, emotional, physical, cognitive and intellectual development. There have been five systematic reviews into outdoor learning in schools in the UK and further abroad (Malone & Waite, 2016).

Waite (2010) attributes a sharp decline in learning outdoors when children enter school in the UK to performance agendas crowding the curriculum. She indicates that the practice and aspiration for outdoor learning are heavily influenced by practitioner's personal experiences in youth, concluding that outdoor programs afford more participatory pedagogies characterised by open relationships which "change the norms of behaviour and provide mutually constructed ways of thinking about, rather than delivering, knowledge" (p. 15).

Notwithstanding the 'post-pandemic' calls for more outdoor play (Reilly & Tremblay, 2021). Learning *in* nature has long been linked to *developmental gains* like increased opportunities for risky play (Sandseter, 2009) and improvements in physical health and wellbeing. These include but are not limited to improved: cognitive functioning and motor development (FjØrtoft, 2004), attentional and affective capacity (Wells & Evans, 2003), cooperative play and social relations (E. Mygind, 2009; L. Mygind, 2015), sensory-motor, emotional and social benefits for children with Autism (Li et al., 2019) and milder inattentive ADHD symptoms (Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2011). In Denmark, Wells and Evans (2003) found that children who attended 'open air daycare' had better motor co-ordination and attentional capacity than children who attended regular day care. Moser and Martinsen (2010) found toddler's learning was strengthened because of the amount of time spent playing outdoors. However, neither study looked specifically at the diverse abilities of children in these settings as a potential strength.

Overall, these collected works function to either exclude children with diverse abilities altogether or to produce ableist narratives that position them in deficit to their peers. They rest on the assumption that norms of development are universal and that differences to those norms, whether social, attentional or neurological, are a deficit to be overcome. Nature is mobilised in these narratives for the benefit of children considered *less than* their typically developing peers.

Faber Taylor and Kuo (2011), the authors most commonly cited as evidence that nature is “beneficial for children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)” (p.281), explicitly state that their research was not conducted on the impacts of nature in “routine educational settings” (p.284). Studies that explore the positive cognitive and attentional benefits of nature draw upon Kaplan’s (1995) Attention Restoration Theory (ART) which posits that natural environments draw primarily on involuntary attention, allowing voluntary/directed attention to rest, thereby improving attentional capacity. However, Kaplan’s theory doesn’t distinguish between repeated or regular outdoor learning (like Bush Kinder) and one-off experiences (Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2011). Despite this, the literature on the benefits of nature for children’s health, wellbeing and development do provide an evidence base for outdoor learning experiences for children in general and this has been harnessed by advocates of nature kindergartens and policy makers in Australia and internationally.

Much of the literature concerned with the benefits *of* nature *for* children adopts a positivist and interventionist perspective positioning nature as human medicine. Faber Taylor and Kuo (2011) concluded that 60% of children with ADHD in their US study regularly played outdoors in the neighbourhood - leading them to suggest children with ADHD “self-medicate” through choice of green spaces for play. Exploring the impacts of different outdoor settings on ADHD symptoms they found that play in “wild spaces” was not related to the mildest ADHD symptoms and concludied that “greener is not always better” (p. 292) for children with ADHD. These studies, though ableist in orientation, nevertheless provide an evidence base for early childhood educators providing nature-based programs in urban settings - like Melbourne’s parklands, beaches and creeks as well as those using playground spaces for ‘nature’ play - which educators might otherwise have worried aren’t ‘wild’ enough (Elliott & Chancellor, 2014; Gordon, 2013).

It's difficult to escape the colonising impact of the word 'wild' in this literature. I encountered it again reading Reilly and Tremblay (2021). Their assertion that 'rewilding children' through outdoor play ought to be a post-pandemic priority rubs uncomfortably with an ontological notion of the child as inseparable from nature. The static image of a video embedded in their article, 'Why children need play in Nature', includes two children with a swing and another slapping dusty dirt as if in conversation. The subtitle reads "a pioneering gaze over things" and the impact multiplies. 'Wild' equals a human-made play space with dirt and swings? The assumption that human agency and power ought to be asserted over the material reinforces subject/object binaries.

How might rethinking relations with materials, making visible these entanglements, enact different ways of knowing, doing and being in early childhood research? How might rethinking socio-material relations and constructions of the child and childhood allow for multiple listening that disrupts ableist assumptions?

The colonising gaze of developmentalism reinforces and is reinforced by the ever-expanding crises of twenty first century childhoods – climate change, COVID19, digital poverty, digital dependence, a lack of nature connection. Children today were recently declared the least fit and fattest generation of children in history (Reilly & Tremblay, 2020, 2021). And yet children's perspectives and lived experiences are still largely

missing from this research, while the challenges and obstacles laid out before them become ever more complex and difficult to comprehend.

The pandemic has, in industrialised countries, further exacerbated a pre-existing trend in decreasing 'outdoor' play (Reilly and Tremblay, 2021). The amount of time young children play 'outdoors' had already decreased significantly in the past few decades (Clements, 2004; Planet Ark, 2011) while the amount of time spent in structured activities, inactivity and childhood obesity are all increasing (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005). Prior to the pandemic, decreasing outdoor play was attributed, amongst other things to public concerns regarding crime and safety (Kalish et al., 2010), increased urban living/overdevelopment, changing digital landscapes (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005; Louv, 2008), changing constructions of the child/childhood and the rise of bubble wrap/cotton wool parenting (Malone, 2007).

Initially lockdowns in Melbourne (in 2020) seemed, momentarily, to wind back these trends - giving rise to a renewed interest in re-connection narratives. Stories and images on social media documented families reclaiming lost connections to local places. In the absence of cars due to work from home orders and with an enforced 5km radius, families had one hour a day to be outside. Many devoted this time to walking their neighbourhoods, exploring parklands, beaches, creeks and the bush. While some authors used these opportunities to think *with* First Nations ontologies and Place (Hamm, 2020), re-connection narratives in popular media tended to position nature as human medicine.

Conceptualising nature as human medicine is central to the benefits discourses and interventionist approaches which have dominated this wave of the nature connection movement. The emergence of which can be traced to Forest Schools which originated in Denmark in 1952 and expanded through the emulation of codified practices

in the UK from the year 2000. Bush and Beach kindergartens like those that have emerged in Australia since the first Bush Kinder was piloted in 2011, are distinct from and yet were sometimes inspired by Forest Schools (Christiansen et al, 2018). The programs in Australia generally have less focus on delivering codified practices, activities and imported curriculum and place more importance on connecting with local contexts and places – nearby beaches, parks or areas of bush and parklands like Bush Kinder (Christiansen et al, 2018). I turn to the literature on these Australian programs in a moment however first, I consider the extent to which literature that promotes developmental benefits considers the perspectives and lived experiences of children with diverse abilities themselves, particularly neurodivergent learners and dis/abled children. I argue that the ableist discourse produced by these narratives is rarely questioned and that the diverse *abilities* and experiences of neurodivergent and dis/abled children are largely absent from these studies.

3.3 Nature kindergarten and neurodiversity: Diverse abilities

Evaluative studies of Forest Schools in the UK and Europe are sometimes referred to as evidence for promoting outdoor and nature-based early childhood programs in Australia - despite these being distinct from the services operating bush and beach kinder programs. These evaluative studies reinforce developmental discourses, listing positive benefits for children. Yet, these studies imply normative expectations of social behaviour which may be completely incongruent to neurodivergent ways of being (Garcia, 2021; Silberman, 2015; Sinclair, 1993; Thom-Jones, 2022). A systematic review of this literature undertaken by Gill (2014), found that, there was only “good support” (p.18) that Forest Schools are associated with improved social skills, self-control and self-awareness and “some support” (p.18) for claims that Forest School improves self-confidence, language and communication (Gill, 2014). An earlier evaluation of Forest Schools suggested that claims to inclusivity in the principle ‘Forest School is for

everybody' were questionable. Davies and White's (2005) review pointed out that one site they evaluated claimed they had selected children who were well behaved to participate in the evaluation.

Growing critiques of Forest School in the UK have emerged in recent years, which argue it uncritically transplants cultural norms and practices from Scandinavia (Leather, 2018; Lloyd et al., 2018; Sharma-Brymer et al., 2018). In 2018, with colleagues from the Early Childhood Outdoor Learning Network I argued that nature kindergarten in Australia – bush, beach and creek based immersive programs developed as part of the everyday in local kindergartens - are distinct from the types of Forest School programs common in Europe and the UK. While some branded 'Forest School' programs exist in Australia, nature kindergarten programs in Victoria tend not to deliver codified Forest School practices, activities and imported curriculum. Rather they emphasize connecting with local contexts and places. In the UK, Forest School programs are not part of the core early childhood curriculum, facilitators may link the content to the curriculum, but it is not a requirement (Leather, 2018). In contrast, the programs like Bush Kinder in Australia are a core part of early childhood provision and directly linked to the curriculum of the regular 'inclusive' home kinder setting. Despite these distinctions, programs in Australia continue to draw upon the 'benefits' research conducted elsewhere, particularly the evaluative research conducted in Forest School settings and the interventionist research used to argue the *benefits of nature for children.* This research positions humans as separate from nature and emphasizes extractive and consumptive human-nature relations.

It is not my intention here to suggest that Bush Kinder is not beneficial for children or child development, but rather to make visible how attending to the messy complexity of Bush Kinder and storying it otherwise can unsettle the romantic, innocent and ableist discourses so often encountered in this pedagogical space. Unsettling the

universal assumptions of developmentalism and expectations of normative childhoods opens space for affirmatively attending to difference. It amplifies diverse ways of dwelling with Place which are messier and more complex than they may first appear.

Many of the early Forest School evaluative reports were undertaken as "appreciative inquiry designed to identify the positive impacts of forest schools" (Murray & O'Brien, 2005, p. 4). They suggest that Forest Schools are effective settings for inclusion, without considering the impact/experience of these programs for diverse learners. In Sweden, Bradley and Male (2017) investigated perceptions of Forest School from the perspective of children with Autism, their parents and educators. Their study included children aged 6-8, from an inner-city Special Education School. Each child had autism and additional "severe learning difficulties" (p.81). Their interviews focused on the benefits gained from the perspective of mothers and educators. These included physical gains, helping children overcome fears and anxieties, increased awareness about nature and links to other more traditional learning areas (i.e., linking forest school experiences to writing tasks) and increased willingness to take on challenges and engage in risk taking. The semi-structured one-on-one interviews with four children were undertaken in private after each child was shown a video of themselves in the program and focused on the things they liked and disliked about Forest School. Children were also asked to draw a picture of how Forest School made them feel. The children's perspectives highlighted friends (making friendships while participating in forest school), challenge and risk taking (pride at overcoming challenges, fears and anxieties); as well as learning outcomes (learning new things about nature and having new experiences in nature).

Of significance for my own research were the ethical considerations of research with neurodivergent children, the limitations of likes and dislikes as representations of lived experience, and practical considerations for gaining ethical child assent as well as parental consent in research with young children. The study was small-scale and

exploratory - providing a positive assessment of Forest School for children in a Special Education settings. In Wales, Pavey (2006) also evaluated Forest School as an intervention for children with significant “special educational needs” (p.2). Comparing pre/post-intervention assessments of nine boys in a Special Education setting, she concluded that improvements extended beyond existing strengths i.e., kinaesthetic skills to social/interactive skills, visual and auditory processing, concentration and reduced apprehension/anxiety about messy play and/or getting dirty). While these and other studies consider the perspectives of children with special needs (Knight, 2013), most often effectiveness studies of Forest School do not to even consider diverse learners. A systematic review of primary studies in the UK regarding the evidence base for effectiveness of outdoor learning explicitly stated that very little literature focused on the effectiveness for those with *disabilities* (Fiennes et al., 2015, p. 6).

Effectiveness itself, is a problematic construct. It uncritically applies a medical model of disability and difference. That is, the deficit is located within the individual and the efficacy of an intervention or program is a measure of how much the target intervention or program diminishes the ‘symptoms’ or ‘reduced function’ an individual suffers or displays. Or put another way, measures how much it diminishes a child’s unique ways of knowing, being and doing and makes them more like their typically developing peers (Garcia, 2021). Effectiveness studies, without discounting their usefulness for instrumentalist pedagogies, perpetuate ableist discourses and worldviews.

How ‘inclusion’ is conceptualised in these studies is also problematic. Often it is conceptualised as something that is done

to those who are different by those who belong. Belonging is constructed as a natural state of being for those who are developmentally typical while those who are developmentally different or atypical need to be included (Taylor, 2013). Taylor and Guigni (2012) trouble this construction and call for early childhood teachers to problematize 'inclusion'. Inclusion into what? by whom? who belongs? who needs to be included? And perhaps most importantly, who decides? When it comes to dis/ability, reconceptualising inclusion as a relational practice cannot be done from within the confines of a medical or even a social model of disability. Taylor and Guigni (2012) reconceptualise inclusion as a relational practice. A relational model of disability is also required.

3.4 Conceptualising dis/ability and inclusivity as relational

The concept of *inclusion* in its broadest sense in education - as a process aimed at ensuring the equitable access to and participation of all children - is inherently rights based (Armstrong et al., 2010). As explored in the introduction and chapter 2, from a relational perspective what is required is not *inclusion* - a process done by those who are deemed to belong to include those who are different (Taylor & Giugni, 2012) but an *inclusive* and *relational* approach to pedagogy that attunes to and makes visible the diversity of human experiences, perspectives, abilitites and dis/abilities from a place of mutual belonging.

Key policy frameworks and anti-discrimination legislation in Australia draws upon contradictory theoretical assumptions about disability (Slee, 2011). At times they enact a medical model of disability which views disability as the impairments and deficits of an individual but ignores the ways that society, attitudes and structures actually disable

people. At others, they highlight the social model of disability - that disablement is the result of social structures, systems, attitudes and environments. Negotiating the tensions and incongruence of these models is a process of constant negotiation. Teachers must be equity focused and recognise the rights of all children (Early Childhod Australia, 2016; Early Childhood Australia, 2016a, 2016b; Early Childhood Australia & Early Childhood Intervention Australia, 2012). They must structure learning environments and programs to remove barriers. They are regulated to develop individual learning for each child and build effective relationships for the equitable inclusion of all children, which is consistent with a social model. However, to gain access to additional resources they must demonstrate a child has a developmental delay, diagnosis or is undergoing assessment (Department Education Skills and Employment, 2021; Victorian Department of Education and Training, 2021a). A child's level of 'need' must be demonstrated to gain access to additional, yet limited, resources. Funding for additional staff, professional development or accessibility modifications to physical infrastructure require applications listing diagnoses and deficits and providing medical or other documentary evidence to demonstrate that a child is a danger to themselves or someone else (Department Education Skills and Employment, 2021; Victorian Department of Education and Training, 2021a).

Thomas (1999) and Cologon (2014) address criticisms of both the medical and social models of disability and propose a *social relational* model, which acknowledges and draws on the lived and embodied experience of "impairment". Highlighting the "social relational nature of how disability is constructed and experienced" (Cologon & Thomas, 2014, p.35). Disability in this construction is separate from impairment, or individual difference - it involves a relational experience with others and the world. It is neither in here (inside an individual), nor out there (in society), but in the spaces in between. It is a social *relation* between those with dis/ability and those without and the

worlds we contruct together. A social relational model acknowledges that disability is always socially and materially situated (Thornton & Underwood, 2013). Disablement, from a social relational perspective occurs through (attitudinal, structural and material) barriers to doing and being while paying attention to the lived experience of those with “impairments” (Cologon & Thomas, 2014, p.35). It advocates for the removal of barriers to doing and being and, importantly, opens a critical space for those without dis/ability to see themselves as mutually implicated in processes of disablement (Cologon, 2014, 2016; Mackenzie et al., 2016; Reindal, 2008).

This inquiry explores how these understandings of inclusivity can be mobilised, how inclusion is conceptualised and might be complexified in one Bush Kinder program with relational onto-epistemologies. While children, parents and teachers may not explicitly state that they hold a medical, social or social relational model of disability the ways they talk about, frame, silence and evaluate diverse ways of being is often informed by these models. In the four pedagogical narrations I present in the following chapters, rather than focus on individual children and their deficits or barriers and enablers to participation in the setting (as might be expected from a medical or social model), I instead begin with a moment of shared encounter and then draw together the relational threads of lived experiences with Bush Kinder. Storying disability otherwise, against dominant developmental traditions, I make visible the complexities of conceptualising inclusivity in this particular pedagogical contact zone, amplifying the lived experiences of dis/abled and neurodivergent children themselves. Rather than offering prescriptive strategies or tools, these chapters work to illuminate the possibilities for more inclusive early childhood theory-practice and activist practioner-researcher subjectivities when we reconceptualise dis/ability and inclusivity as broader relational entanglements of humans, more-than humans, materials and Place (Taylor & Giugni, 2012).

Defining and re-configuring dominant conceptions of inclusion and disability is a fraught, contradictory and contested process. It has the potential to further reproduce exclusion. Listening and engaging with children with diverse abilities and their material and more-han-human encounters (Hamm, 2017; Hamm & Boucher, 2017; Iorio, Hamm, et al., 2017; Mentha et al., 2015) in the following chapters, I put relational onto-epistemoloigies to work, drawing on new materialist, post humanist, common worlds and First Nations perspectives - which work to decentre human participants and *listen with* the social, material and discursive. In attuning to a more-than-human sociality and multiple ways of be(com)ing with Place, I explore the lived experiences of inclusivity from multiple perspectives (Lenz Taguchi, 2009) making visible possibilitites for doing disability differently in early childhood education.

In the following section I consider research related to kindergartens like Bush Kinder in Australia and explore how this literature is often distinct from, yet increasingly influenced by research developed from common worlds (Iorio et al., 2017; Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Giugni, 2012), post humanist and new materialist perspectives (Malone, 2016a, 2016b; Malone & Truong, 2017).

3.5 Limited research on Nature Kindergartens in Australia

While the number of empirical studies related to nature kindergartens (including bush kinder, beach kinder programs etc) in Australia is increasing, this research is still “emergent at best” (Elliott et al, 2018, p.157). In recent years, Chris Speldewinde and colleagues (Campbell & Speldewinde, 2018; Speldewinde, 2022a, 2022b; Speldewinde et al., 2020, 2021; Speldewinde & Campbell, 2021, 2022) have published a comprehensive literature on the possibilities for enthnography, Science Technology Engineering and Maths (STEM) and the exploration of gendered play and learning in Australian Bush Kinders. A recent publication by Hughes, Elliott, Anderson and Chancellor (2022) introduces a new acronym for these programs: Immersive Nature Play

Programs or INPPs. Despite this growing literature there are only a limited number of peer reviewed studies that include the perspectives of children themselves and none that explicitly consider the experiences of dis/abled or neurodivergent children themselves in an Australian nature kindergarten program. One mixed-method case study of the early years of primary school includes a cohort of children with additional learning needs (Lloyd, 2016). However, the primary school context is quite different to the Bush Kinder explored in this inquiry.

The perspectives of teachers and parents regarding programs like Bush Kinder are increasingly well documented in the literature but offer limited information about the diverse abilities of children engaged in the program and only occasionally engaging the perspectives of children themselves (Campbell & Speldewinde, 2018; Christiansen et al., 2018; Elliott & Chancellor, 2014, 2017; Masters & Grogan, 2015, 2018).

A local study by Elliott et al (2018) adopted data collection and analytic methods inspired by the mosaic approach (Clark, 2005) to investigate children's perceptions of the play affordances offered in a newly created natural playscape that they routinely visited (Elliott et al., 2018). Employing affordance theory their mosaic methodology (Clark, 2005) included creative participatory modalities like focus groups, drawing, walking interviews, photography and reflective journaling that employed children's multiple languages to elicit responses - the study found that children's ongoing engagement with the natural playspace fostered "creativity, sustained engagement and agency" (Elliot et al, 2018 p. 160). A few post-graduate researchers have also explored learning in nature programs from the perspective of young children for example - Kopelke (2012) and Deans and Bakes (2016). Their accounts privilege children's perspectives and provide voice for children in the literature in the context of their learning 'in, with and for the environment' and sustainability education, yet they tell us little about inclusivity and the diverse abilities of children in these settings. Increasingly, researchers

in this space are exploring how post humanism and common worlds perspectives provide more comprehensive and less human centric ways of relating with Place and challenging romantic tropes which position children as stewards and saviours (Hughes et al., 2022; Weldemariam, 2019; Weldemariam et al., 2017; Weldemariam & Wals, 2020).

3.6 Common worlds research: Reconceptualising inclusion

Common worlds (Common Worlds Research Collective, 2018) and critical post humanist researchers in Australia and overseas have offered critiques of the children-in-nature movement (Malone, Truong, & Gray, 2017; Malone & Waite, 2016; Taylor, Giugni, & Blaise, 2013; Taylor, 2013). Common worlds approaches emphasize that humans are politically, ethically and relationally situated and entangled with nature and cannot be considered outside of this positionality. This interdisciplinary perspective opens possibilities for rethinking subject-object relations and decentres humans as the central concern. Attuning to children's common world relations with place, materials and other species these authors reconfigure the anthropocentric approaches often used in 'Forest School' and 'nature-based' early childhood programs arguing pedagogies must go beyond simply identifying nature's benefits for humans and reinforcing saviour and stewardship narratives (Hamm, 2017; Iorio et al., 2017; Lund et al., 2018; Molloy Murphy, 2018, 2021; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016; Silova & Taylor, 2020).

While post humanist critiques seek to reconfigure anthropocentric and romanticised constructions of both nature and childhood (Malone, 2016a; Malone et al., 2017, 2020a; Malone & Truong, 2017), common worlds perspectives and pedagogies acknowledge that not all humans have conceived of nature this way. Instead, they draw attention to and foreground Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies (Hamm, 2017, 2020; Hamm & Boucher, 2017, 2017; Iorio, Hamm, et al., 2017; Nxumalo, 2019; Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015; Silova & Taylor, 2020). They emphasize that

human and more-than human relations with place and Country have always been part of First Nations people's ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin, 2016; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Wall Kimmerer, 2021; Yunkaporta, 2009).

Collectively this literature has influenced and inspired not only the critical frames with which I critique taken for granted assumptions within early childhood research in this thesis, but also the methodological orientations I adopt. For example, complexifying subject-object relations and material entanglement, foregrounding Place, thinking with post foundational theories and activating writing as method to reimagine data from within a post qualitative frame. Iorio, Coustley and Grayland (2017) explore the potentialities of pedagogical documentation from a common worlds perspective - illuminating the processes of collaboratively making-meaning, as teacher-researchers, with first and second grade children (Iorio, Coustley, et al., 2017). Adopting a common world's framework (Taylor & Giugni, 2012) they bring together nature, culture, the human and more-than-human in a geo-historically situated study of Place and pedagogy which de-centres human relations, foregrounding complexity and entanglement with place as part of the pedagogical process.

Similarly, Iorio, Ham, Parnell and Quintero (2017) consider how Place can be a provocation that "makes visible the entanglement of children, families, teachers and the more-than-human as a way to re-think pedagogy" (p. 122). Bringing together case study examples from Australia and the USA which de-centre the human and disrupt traditional developmental 'approaches that only follow the child. This collective work has inspired the alternative conceptual frames which I put to work in the pedagogical narrations to make visible the ethics and politics of theory-practice and Place relations.

Enacting relational ways of knowing, being and doing in early childhood education requires approaches to theory-practice which trouble and make visible our relations and intra-actions with Place and materials (Hultman & Taguchi, 2010; Kocher

et al., 2014; Lenz Taguchi, 2008, 2009, 2011; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016) as well as the human and more-than-humans others we are always already engaged with in multi-species kinship relations (Molloy Murphy, 2018, 2020a, 2020b, 2021). This literature informs the relational frames put to work in the following chapters. It calls into question dominant humanist saviour narratives and opens possibilities for multisensory listening and 'learning to be affected' (Latour, 2004b). I use creative and analytic writing processes which provoke new ways of thinking and being with our worlds (Roelvink, 2015). Understanding these perspectives and rethinking the ontological implications of more-than-human and material agency helps to make sense of diverse ways of knowing, being and doing.

Engaging with the ontological turn (Lather, 2015) in this inquiry (a concern with multiple ways of being and be(com)ing - not just with knowing and knowledge) has opened possibilities for my own listening to and learning from First Nations authors, ontologies and ways of thinking about the world as well (Martin, 2016; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Wall Kimmerer, 2021; Yunkaporta, 2009). While I still have significant work to do in decolonising my own ways of knowing, being and doing, if that is indeed even possible (Nxumalo, 2019; Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015), learning from First Nations authors and scholarship in this inquiry has encouraged me to take the first tentative steps towards troubling my thinking and developing my own *abilities to respond* (Haraway, 2016) to enduring neo-colonialisms and past/present colonial histories. For Iorio, Hamm and Krechevsky (2020) response-abilities refer to our ability to respond ethically and politically to everyday "moments that emerge spontaneously from being in and with the world" (p.2). Response-able pedagogies (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017) involve the relational practices of 'attentiveness, curiosity, being rendered capable and rendering the other capable' and it is these relational practices which I explore in the pedagogical narrations. Like Taylor and Pacini Ketchabaw (2019) I am aware that the

scale of this thesis and the situated knowledges created are incredibly tiny compared to the enormous multispecies challenges we face in living well together on an increasingly damaged planet (Tsing, 2015).

3.7 Drawing the threads together

In this chapter I have explored the growing research concerned with children's relations with nature in early childhood education to make visible the complex ways Bush Kinder, Nature, children, disability and inclusion are conceptualized in the literature. In tracing the emergence of ableist and interventionist discourses concerned with nature's benefits for humans in increasingly precarious times, I have mobilised diverse ways of knowing to disrupt key concepts which are central to reconceptualising inclusivity in early childhood education as relational.

In mobilising post foundational theories and critiques, I have analysed the limitations of literature concerned with 'inclusion', 'disability' and 'nature', making visible the able and disabled child subjects created by benefits discourses. These dominant research narratives reinforce ableist assumptions and can limit the possibilities for reconceptualising dis/ability and inclusivity in education as ethical and political relations. By comparison, research undertaken from common worlds, critical post humanist and new materialist onto-epistemological perspectives disrupt and trouble these dominant ways of knowing - offering possibilities for reconceptualizing inclusion and disability as relational. In the pedagogical narrations (chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7) I activate the post foundational ideas and relational approaches I have explored in this chapter, illustrating the possibilitites for doing dis/ability and inclusivity differently in early childhood education.

As outlined in the reader's guide (p.14), the pedagogical narrations are assemblaged to take the reader straight into the moment of encounter. They weave, data, theory, interpretation, analysis and discussion to make my own subjectivity and

multiplicity as researcher visible, illustrating the situatedness, provisionality and indeterminacy of knowing and knowledge creation.

Chapter 4 Pedagogical Narration: Diffractive Companionship

Charlie is high in Tree on a branch that holds itself like an outstretched arm. He is just beyond the inner elbow where the thick branch begins to narrow. Frankie, behind him, climbs up the trunk and moves along the same branch. Charlie starts bouncing. Frankie looks to him as she tries to steady herself and hold on. She gets no response. Charlie swings his legs now, holding a smaller branch above his head. He is not looking at Frankie, nor the teachers or the parents standing around. He belts out a song "*Rain-bow Liz-ard*!".

Charlie swings his legs backwards and forwards out over the branch he'd been standing on. He's holding onto a smaller, thinner branch. *It is thicker than his wrist,* I think. Rationalising, as I struggle to decide if I am close enough. I'm already filming. I move the frame onto Charlie. *Have the teachers noticed? Are they ok with this? Are they intentionally holding back, giving space, keeping their distance*? Charlie begins doing full chin ups and letting his body and legs dangle in the air. He is lithe – thin and muscular, smaller than many of the children in the group. I have heard the teachers refer to him as '*young for the group - not just in age, but socially and emotionally, a bit younger*'. Months later when I return to share my documentation, Suki, one of the teachers tells me Charlie will be doing a second year of kindergarten[iii] before starting school. In this moment his feet, heavy in rubber gumboots, drop off the branch supporting his weight. His full weight is now hanging from the much smaller branch gripped with tiny, agile hands. He continues the song, getting louder, "*Rain-bow Liz-ard, Rain-bow Liz-ard*!". There are verses in between but they are quieter - sung for his own ears and I can't catch them.

I turn to Suki, "*What's the expectation here*?" This is my fourth week visiting Bush Kinder. While I have seen Charlie and other children climbing in smaller trees, I haven't seen anyone dangle quite this high in this particular tree. Suki is quite relaxed. Nevertheless, she manoeuvres her body around to a space below, yet stepped back,

from the tree, within arms-reach. She makes eye contact with Charlie and smiles. He returns the gaze, but not the smile. He belts the tune louder "*Rain-bow Liz-ard*!". Suki looks confident and calm. "*Well, if you feel uncomfortable then we'd encourage you to tell the children that*". I look up at Charlie. And take a step closer to him, I am about 2 metres away. He looks confident, unconcerned. He can hold himself and even pull up with just his arms. I look around at Andy, another teacher, who is also watching. Further away but turned towards Charlie and the tree. He is in deep conversation with a parent, I am out of earshot but from their gaze and expressions I feel that they have registered Charlie with Tree. Neither look concerned nor make a move to intervene. I step back further and come within earshot of Angela over near the parents signing in. She speaks to two students doing work experience but has her back to all of us. I catch "…*if you feel uncomfortable then we'd say tell the children that*." While the words are the same, I'm somehow aware that she hadn't heard Suki and I talking just now.

The autumn sun and blue sky make for a golden atmosphere, relaxed and calm. I look up at Charlie. He's singing and swinging on the branch. I see Suki step back further. She eyes his boots but doesn't say anymore. I think of the drop. He's quite small – it's possibly twice his height. *Is it making me feel uncomfortable*? As I think this, I step back and look down at the camera. I realise I'm not filming.

Without warning, Angela, wooshes over from where she had been talking. A bottle of morning fresh detergent still in her hands. Her voice is a little panicked, "*No, No. Charlie you are singing and dancing in the tree. If you want to sing and dance, would it be safer to do that on the ground?"* Charlie is not looking at her. He dangles. She sounds worried still, but a little less panicked. She tries again. "*Charlie, Charlie, look at me. If you want to sing and dance around, the tree is not the place, do you think it would be better to do that on the ground*?" Charlie gets to the crescendo of his song, he looks her in the eye "*Rain-bow Liz-ard*!" He looks up and then down again, dismissively. She tries

again. "*OK, I think you probably need to think about how to get down and we can have a chat about it*".

Charlie brings his weight back onto the supporting branch and climbs himself down. Angela and Charlie walk away to chat, sitting on a log recently vacated by Magpie. They sit side by side, talking. Charlie looks up at Angela. She takes him in, nodding as he talks, her head slightly to one side, inviting more talk. They each reach down sporadically and grab at loose parts. I am too far away to see what – bark? a piece of grass? a leaf, stick or piece of debris. Their talk is calm, any panic or fear has vanished from Angela's face.

Andy, Suki and I, all fall into conversation about our multiple ways of thinking in the moment, our different perspectives of this encounter and we each muse reflectively over potential responses, we note our differing "response-abilities" (Haraway, 2016; Stables, 2012) though none of us actually call them that. For Haraway 'response-abilities' refer to our ability to respond to everyday moments of encounter in and with the world, in ways that render the other capable while attuning to multiple political and ethical realities. Our talk in this moment is a process of discussion and deconstruction. Yet, it is a generative process - attempting to know and yet not know our selves and others in our multiplicity. It is not an attempt to uncover any singular way of interpreting, understanding or making meaning. Andy, Suki and Angela's pedagogical responses to this moment were very different, yet there was no sense that anyone had done the "right" or "wrong" thing. Each had different ways of thinking, being and doing in that moment of *responding*. The spaces between those responses were also open to difference and discussion. To be picked up again in any other moment of collective thinking. Andy coined the term '*reflective companionship'* while trying to conceptualise this kind of teaching relationship.

4.1 Diffractive companions: Democratic professionals

Andy's idea of 'Reflective Companionship' reminds me of Moss's (2019) characterisation of the "Democratic Professional" (p.78). A concept developed through his reading of Malaguzzi's work in Reggio Emilia - the democratic educational project which emerged in Italy after WWII and gave rise to the image of a child as a capable rights holder, who learns and grows in relation to others (Rinaldi, 2004). The *pedagogista* in Reggio Emilia is a democratic professional, a deep "listener, a creator of rich learning environments, giver of time, a respecter of otherness…prepared to challenge and confront children to question their theories and provoke their thinking" (Moss, 2019, p. 78). The democratic professional is comfortable with "working collaboratively and non-hierarchically with others, supportive of democratic methods" (p.78) and welcoming of diverse values, understandings, ideas and readings of the world - even when these are in opposition to one's own.

I look to Suki and tell her, "*I find moments like that hard, not knowing the expectations in the space and not knowing my role as an outsider/another, adult, researcher but not the teacher*". I think to myself - I could see that Charlie was able to support his weight and do a chin up, yet I felt uneasy. I don't always know what the expectations or limits about these things are. Nor if there are hard and fast rules or if it is negotiated between children and adults in each moment (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). Are there limits to the image of '*child as capable*?' *What are they?*

Suki still appears relaxed:

> *I felt confident. Charlie is strong and lightweight. But I am often more confident with children in the trees. We're all different in that. I was actually looking at his boots, wondering if I should suggest he take them off - so he could really feel the tree, get a better connection*

Andrew laughs:

The parent I was talking to was just saying how he is such a good climber and I was saying, I was speaking to [his mum] yesterday and she was saying sometimes he is too confident when he climbs and she's not sure if he really is as capable as he seems. But he is really strong, and lightweight.

Neither Suki nor Andrew attempt to rationalize, nor criticize, Angela intervening. I think to myself that taking multiple perspectives on the same moment seems commonplace here. Unpacking. Reflecting. Sharing different thinking, different approaches, different responses – different *levels of confidence* are enclosed within all of their perspectives. These are accepted and their talk is more a discussion than judgement or criticism. Just debriefing, dialoguing, storying, viewing and conceptualizing from a different vantage point - *this is what I was thinking, these are the things I was bringing to the moment*. They don't seek to reflect or seek sameness though, but rather to diffract and open up their collective thinking (Aslanian, 2018; Geerts & van der Tuin, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2020). Perhaps 'diffractive companionship' is a more apt way of thinking about this process? Diffraction after all, welcomes difference from a place of mutual belonging (Murris & Bozalek, 2019).

When Angela finishes speaking with Charlie, she joins our conversation. "Are you ok?" Suki asks, arms outstretched to take Angela in for a hug. "*I felt confident he was ok, I wanted to get him to take those boots off*". Angela breathes in deeply:

I didn't feel confident - he wasn't giving it his full attention. *I am not as confident with kids in the trees as you. I haven't seen him in that tree or up that high before. When I spoke to him and he couldn't respond to me verbally… he was distracted*.

Andy re-tells Angela what he had told us, that in that exact moment he was relaying to another parent what Charlie's mum had said about finding him overly confident sometimes when she is with him while climbing. Angela nods and takes another deep

breath in. I connect back to what Suki had told me about telling the children if I felt uncomfortable and I wondered aloud if she had overheard?.

“No, I hadn’t heard, mmm, *uncomfortable*” Angela laughs.

I think about the strength of relationships needed to work in this way, the trust between parents, teachers and children. They don’t adhere to one right way of doing or expect to share the same point of view. There are things they do similarly - words and phrases they each use consistently as they muse over and story children’s strengths and interests and their differing pedagogical response-abilities in different moments. They’re conscious of their differing epistemological, political and ethical approaches with children, risk and challenge. The image of the teacher is not expert and *all knowing* but “researcher, experimenter” (Moss, 2019, p. 78) and companion.

4.2 Thinking *with*: Being in relationship

Everyday moments are deconstructed in relationship with others here. The thinking is not in isolation but somehow always in relationship – *thinking with* other ways of thinking, being, doing and knowing. Moss (2004) includes in his discussion of the ‘democratic professional’ descriptions of participation, characterising the multiple democratic and participatory ways of *being with* in this context. He emphasizes that reality is not objective, but constantly evolving, knowledge is partial and everyone’s point of view is relevant. Participation and dialogue are the framework for democracy itself.

I think back to one of the first days I was here. I am standing under the same trees. Andy and I are having a chat. The light is so similar this morning as it rises over Creek. While we talk, I notice Andy look up at Dave, another teacher, on Boomerang Hill, the boomerang shaped hill that makes up the south-western boundary of Bush Kinder. Dave is sitting with children. They are digging sticks into the dirt, snapping twigs. He is sitting with legs outstretched. He leans back on his hands with his face to the sun, listening and speaking. Andy and Dave make eye contact, *is it just their eyes? Does*

Andy wave? I can't be sure. They each flick their heads a little. I see Dave raise his arms up and Andy responds with a similar yet just as incomprehensible arm movement. It's some signal, but I have no idea what.

At the other end of Boomerang Hill, I don't know how, but he also has Angela's attention. Angela makes eye contact/face contact? with Andy. Does she hold her fingers up – as in a number? I am not sure. I look to Andy and realise they have all just communicated something between themselves. They are easily 20 metres from each other, if not more. No words have been spoken. To be heard they would have to be yelled across such a vast open space. And yet the hubbub of play, of children in multiple small groups – some jumping and climbing on logs, some running and yelling, some digging and uncovering debris, smashing rocks to powder and dust - hasn't broken. "*What was that*?" I ask Andy. "*Oh, just doing a head count*" he replies. Later, I mention this moment to Andy again: "*How can you all communicate like that without words*? He thinks for a moment: "*We have the time, it's just, it's our relationships*".

4.3 Relationships and time

It's the first of many times I hear these teachers refer to 'relationships' and 'time' as ways *of knowing through being* with Bush Kinder. Entangled, inseparable unable to be thought without reference to the other.The teachers make references to time which are calm, unhurried and open - they aren't the common consumptive refrains about a 'lack of time' which impede being and doing usually heard from early childhood teachers (Purdue, 2009). Here I hear things like: *we have the time, we make the time, we create the time, there is time, take time, of course there's time, we can - we have the time, here we have time*. When I ask about schedules and routines, they talk about teaching children to listen to their internal states, not in the sense of developing interoception skills or self-regulation (Hadwin et al., 2018; Nicholson et al., 2019) though those are

also something these teachers are deeply attuned to, but with regard to listening deeply to oneself and those around you.

4.4 Un-scheduling and be(com)ing together

There is no overall timetable or schedule, though there is a rhythm to each day. Children eat when they listen to their body and it tells them they are hungry, or when their friends sit together and they want to join them. The group gathers when the group feels it. It's not uncommon for children to drive what the group is doing, *should we gather now*? *Can we go on a walk today*? Teachers might feel the lull of play or noise calls for something. They are attuned and listening deeply.

Their *ways of doing* include rhythyms (gathering together, going for a walk), rituals (gathering around Gathering Rock) and at times protocols (being inside the boundary, being in front of the back boundary as we walk, standing still with your head down when a dog is off lead). These are determined by *listening* and *being attuned to one another and Place*. It is as if the scheduling is not dictated by linear clock time and external pressures but emerges from their *be(com)ing* together*, always in relationship*.

On arrival the following week, Charlie heads straight back to the same tree. He starts to climb, and I make my way closer to him, I stand within arm's reach making eye contact "Do you remember what you chatted to Angela about last week?" I ask him. Frankie is also starting to climb the tree, she chimes in, "*to keep your feet on the lower branch*". Charlie sings "Rain-bow Liz-ard" under his breath. He lays down along the branch and smiles broadly at me. Wrapping his arms around it. "*Do you remember what she said though Charlie*?" I persist. He smiles again, "*She said dancing and singing should be on the ground*". Frankie launches into a monologue about keeping feet on the lower branch and not jumping around in the tree. This time Charlie doesn't jump around. He keeps his weight evenly distributed, lays on his stomach, presses himself into the branches holding very carefully onto the thicker branches with both hands.

4.5 Data doing data

In a few weeks' time, an unexpected chance to revisit the 'fieldnote' I made titled "Rainbow Lizard: Charlie in the tree" emerges with the educators during our interviews. The story comes up inadvertently in conversation with Angela and I come to see how data is a force - not only something that we capture, though I did that too, but a *doing*. As I write this narration, it folds in on itself again and generates anew. Data doing data doing data. In the interview, Angela tells me about a student paramedic who did work experience at the kindergarten and how she told him:

> *We're actually teaching the same people. That's the 17 and 18-year-old, the 16-year-old that you're attending in a car accident. That's the child here now who's four. He's learning about risks and decision making. What we're doing now, it's important because we don't want you to have anybody to attend to, we want teenagers who make good decisions. Getting it now. That was Charlie in the tree. 15 conversations 28 educators, we all got involved in Charlie in the tree. I honestly crapped myself when I saw him hanging on the branch. All I saw was a wheelchair and two legs shattered* (Interview with Angela, 2019)

There's a temporal element to the teacher's differing conceptions of Charlie 'as capable' here - it's wrapped in with both the concept of the child as 'future citizen'/decision maker and as 'citizen of the now' (learning about taking risks and decision making in the

present by being rendered capable of taking risks and making decisions). Is it telling of the pervasiveness of 'ableism' that Angela's worst fear is a wheelchair? Perhaps, but for a 'Responsible Person'[iv] in this service under Australia's National Quality Framework, regulations, risk and responsibility are always in tension - an unspoken dynamic. Fear, ethical and political responsibilities are enmeshed with one's capacity to respond.

4.6 Relationality, temporality: Capability in the contact zone

I wonder how Haraway's (2016) notion of response-ability fits here? Not as in the ethical or political (humanist) conception of responsibility but making and *thinking with* our abilities to respond. Rendering the child capable in the common worlds of Bush Kinder depends on risky attachments with more than human others like Tree, as well as our own confidence and uncertainty (Gibson et al., 2015; Instone, 2015). How many layers of fear, responsibility and response-ability (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017; Haraway, 2016; Meißner, 2014; Stables, 2012) are also wrapped in Angela's response? A teacher's desire to *be confident* and enact an image of the child as capable holds the very real tension/friction with *responsibility* for risk and their *ability to respond* to what always already is, but is also completely unknowable. To render the child capable is an entangled negotiation of power. A 'pedagogical contact zone' (Pratt, 1991) uninhibited by the complexity of potentiality and uncertainty - ripe for reflexivity, progressive practices, debate and critique, but also transparent power differences (Hamm, 2017; McRobbie, 2008).

The 'child as capable' is both a fluid and relational concept at Bush Kinder, as evidenced in the multiple pedagogical responses in Angela's exaggeration "*15 conversations, 28 educators"*. Angela tells me again in her interview how Suki, is much more confident with children in trees. "*She is really, she's pretty practical, she can think clearly, I get a bit emotional and worried*" (Angela, 2019). Suki responds similarly when reflecting on their differing approaches, as though it is a known narrative or difference in

their ways of doing, yet it's shared openly in an on-going and seemingly never ceasing dialogue between them. Between all of them. Is it the strength of their relationships – their relational be(com)ing - which gives them confidence to negotiate their different levels of confidence with risk?

Relationships and time are almost considered a first practice here. A means of knowing through being and doing. Making the time to have the conversations, to be in relationship. Knowing that outcomes are never pre-determined, you can revisit any moment over and over again, at any time, to think it through from another pedagogical perspective, to learn or unlearn - to generate something new. In the same jarring way, developmental understandings, trajectories and milestones can be spoken in the same breath by these teachers, as diatribes about the need to disrupt 'readiness' and 'quality' discourses, to challenge assumptions about 'normal' in the context of pathologizing childhood/s and difference and in their attempts to disrupt gender stereotypes. In evolving dialogues these discussions never seem to seek nor find "a final peace" (Haraway, 2008 p.301).

The contradictory and multiple ways in which these teachers question and seek to understand themselves, each other and their practices is constantly evolving. Mixing story and experience, musings from parents and children with theoretical knowledge and concepts. They question what they see, hear and feel, relating each moment in time not as static observations but aware that each moment is a constant experience of be(com)ing (Stables, 2012) with together. Their own learning and thinking is made visible through 'storying' and listening deeply with each other. Esther Perel's husky voice reminds me in a podcast - stories and storytelling are the oldest ways that humans bond. Here storying and listening create an ethic or culture, a way of being with, thinking with, making with - not simply as an instrumental practice but an embodied means of configuring quality as relational (Clark, 2005; Giugni & Osgood, 2015).

4.7 Storying slow knowledge: Multiple listening and emergent learning

Storying (Quintero, 2019) is one way of practicing 'emergent learning' (Moss, 2019) for this community, a process and context for multiple listening. Through story the teachers open space for complicated conversations and new ways of thinking about knowing and learning in context. Story wraps lived experiences together, their own, as well as the families and children with whom they are listening/learning. Moss (2019) conceptualises Malaguzzi's orientation to 'multiple listening' and 'emergent learning' as valuing uncertainty rather than "clutching at what is already known" (p.74). Malaguzzi's pedagogy of relationships, listening and welcome, describes my understanding of this ethic of diffractive companionship really well. Dwelling together and embracing a position of uncertainty, listening and *not* knowing are sought out. The teachers seem comfortable in defying one another's expectations and assumptions. They laugh and joke about each other, teasing and ribbing. It's not just partnership, or professionalism, it's not friendship, nor teamwork - though it is all of those as well. They are often in conversation, with children, with families, with each other and with place - 'making time' for being deeply reflective*, diffractive companions*.

Constructing meaning and understanding together occurs both within that moment of encounter and all the moments before and since. Pastpresent moments where past thinking is inextricably entangled with the thought one is thinking right now (King, 2004). As I think with these stories I am reminded of Karen Martin's (2016) words as she describes the importance of stories to First Nations worldviews

> Stories are about identity. They connect us and confirm our sense of self, sense of others and a sense of belonging. We know we belong when we are ready to hear the strength of the messages a story contains. Thats why our old people will often tell a story many, many times and we often don't get the deeper messages until we are ready and able to really listen'. (p.24)

Martin makes clear why stories are important in First Nations ways of knowing through being. While non-Indigenous storying is not the same, emphasizing storying as practice or a *way of knowing* through being attunes to the idea of multiple listening.

I was so disappointed when I realised I wasn't filming the encounter with 'Charlie and tree' and yet what evolved from experiencing and attuning to that moment, from listening in a much more connected way through the multiple entangled lenses through which we all storied it afterward, was so much richer for it. I noted in my research journal that the time and space these teachers made for storying was almost their form of documentation. An oral pedagogical narration. Though they have a community diary and they take photographs and portfolios, it's really the time and relationships they create for storying together, with children and families - a multiple listening which 'holds' the knowledges in a very contextualised and situated way. *Knowing* is in and in-between all those entangled spaces and multiple moments of listening-thinking-being-doing.

4.8 Moments inside moments inside lifetimes

A few weeks after the initial moment with Charlie and Tree, I turn around at Bush kinder and see Dave, the only teacher who wasn't there at the time. He is standing tall in the same elbow of the same tree as Charlie was. Closer to the trunk, resting a hand against smooth bark in the sun. His face is calm and almost defiant but in a very relaxed and contemplative way. Charlie is on the same branch, and they are chatting. I can't hear their conversation. I mutter, *Rainbow li-zard* under my breath. Without hearing me, Charlie looks up and into the distance - he's posed like a warrior.

I think again about the diversity of the teacher's political, ethical and pedagogical approaches to risk and climbing in this team and I remember that in our interview, this teacher described his relationship with nature and trees as a child as one of his motivations for opening the space for establishing the Bush Kinder program. It's a familiar and romantic sentiment (Taylor, 2013) which in some critical academic

moments, I do want to challenge. But his tone and the softness of his face as he relates it to me tells me he feels it very deeply "*Nature was a place of solace, my school memories are not necessarily of what happened in the classroom it was what was happening outside of the classroom* (Interview with Dave, 2019).

I snap a photo:

I smile at the multiple connections as they coalesce together in this moment. The temporality of the moment is not linear. Identity and belonging, relationships and listening, the pastpresents all tied together in a thick present (Haraway, 2016), the Long Now (Eno cited in Instone, 2015). I wonder what it feels like to be this teacher-adult-child in this moment – *with* tree, teaching and learning *with* young children. As Cressida's

Cowell's (2009) character Old Wrinkly reminds us, *the past never truly leaves us…it haunts the present in more ways than we imagine*.

4.9 Rethinking anthropocentricism and the capable child

Re-visiting the previous sections of this chapter in March 2021, I was struck by the centrality of humans to the narrative. I'd called the field note it was based on 'Rainbow Lizard: Charlie *in* the Tree'. As I place the photograph into this document the accessible 'alternative text' tells me this is a 'group of people *from* a tree*'.* The privileging and discreet categorising of humans as separate from the tree-environment-nature in my initial narration rubs up against my reflection on re-encountering the moment while reading it over and encountering the alternative text.

The categories of and relations between subject and object need to be rethought. The separateness with which I initially constructed humans as apart from nature and Place now strikes me (Meißner, 2014; Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Giugni, 2012). Teachers, parents and children are the central characters. Images of the child, teacher and researcher – the human characters and the stories they tell - are emphasized and grappled with as I struggle to understand my own situatedness and belonging as researcher. The tree is encountered as backdrop (Meißner, 2014). Inanimate yet with humanistic anthropomorphised features – an elbow, an arm. The relationships and connections between individual subjectivities are emphasized yet, the tree is silenced.

The pedagogic culture is co-constructed and while entangled and relational it is still somehow outside of and external to the Places we are all entangled with. Though it is clear that Place and the connectedness of nature and humans is understood and privileged by these teachers, the more-than human is often silent (Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Giugni, 2012). *So how might we listen with tree in this story*? I think with the materiality (Halton & Treveton, 2016; Kind, 2013, 2014; Lenz Taguchi, 2009) encountered with so

many trees at Bush Kinder, the multisensory ways I am affected by the stories inscribed on their skin, though I can't actually assume to know those stories.

We could listen to the nodes on a tree's branches. The lines in rings across the trunk when a tree has been cut through, they might tell us something about age and experience. The bumps and squiggles in smooth bark might tell us about relations with insect others (Russell & Boileau, 2020). Missing sections of bark might tell us about relations with First Nations cultures and stories (Massey, 2020). The rounded dry sap and dryness of bark might tell us about relations with water and sunlight (Wohlleben, 2016). How much they've been seeing each other lately. A tree's position can tell terrifying stories - laid out horizontal with a straight edge through the trunk tells us something of the story of death – was it quick and heavy with a clear chainsaw cut, or slow and arduous - with rough sawing and torn, splintered fragments? Funny that we know a fallen tree by another name – a log. One name living, one name dead – same as how a person becomes 'a body' after death. I've never considered that temporal element to the etymology before. What a 'fallen' or 'felled' tree does after being felled also tells us something of its resilient character - does it shoot again and start anew or dry up and

break down? Even ‘breaking down’ it ‘lives on’ as home to nesting birds - a cyclic and circular temporality that is central to Indigenous ontologies (Martin, 2016).

4.10 Storying ‘Tree’ time

In his forward to Wohlleben’s (2016) *The Secret Life of Trees* Tim Flannery posits that one of the reasons humans fail to understand trees is that we live on different time scales. Flannery cites a 9,500-year-old spruce in Sweden and points out that this tree has lived a life 115 times longer than the average human. However, his assertion ignores that some humans, particularly First Nation’s Australians, have observed and understood those timescales quite acutely and maintained connections to Country for longer than many humans are able to relate to - particularly non-Indigenous Australians.

In *Call of the Reed Warbler* Massey (2020) shares a story about First Nations Ngarigo elder Rod Mason removing the ‘scales from his eyes’ (p.24) when he asked about an ‘out of place’ Kurrajong tree on his family farm on the Monaro Plain. On walking over to the tree Rod hugs and is affected by his connection, he points out relations which Massey has never known although his family have lived on the farm since the 1920’s and he remembered the tree from his own childhood - long vertical marks where First Nations women had removed fibrous strips to make material and a hollow area of the trunk. It was located in such a way as to indicate to Rod that it had been hollowed out to make a Coolamon. Rod points out that in this place the tree is slow growing – it is actually over 400 years old, possibly beyond that.

I didn’t stop to ‘think with’ trees at Bush Kinder. To find out how old they were. Their time scale was lost on me. I didn’t stop to wonder how many lifetimes they had seen. I wonder now if there were years of contact with Wurundjeri people before, and since, colonisation? What could the trees have told me - if I had only thought differently about their presence? What was it like to be here when the parklands were a tip? When the trainline was built over Creek? They had certainly seen it long before it became

‘Bush Kinder’. What a richness of perspective. An opportunity missed. If humans and place are deeply connected and “everything got a song” (Yanyuwa women, Eileen Mc Dinny cited in Neale, 2020). How else might we listen with tree stories? Understand their relationships and temporality? (Arndt & Tesar, 2016; Blaise et al., 2017; Dernikos, 2020; Kind, 2013)

4.11 Slow pedagogies for listening in deep time

I wonder if ‘slow pedagogies’ (Moss et al., 2020, 2020; Payne & Wattchow, 2008a; Rowntree & Gambino, 2017) walking, noticing, thinking with slow knowledges, are entangled with Place in more ways than I have first conceived? I imagine trees slowing us down, pulling us into their orbit. Co-regulating (Hadwin et al., 2018) with us in the hopes that we may someday learn to self-regulate as they have done, in strong. slow. calm. breaths. I am reminded of ‘crossing’ Creek and the detritus on Boomerang Hill (See Chapter 5: *Crystal says yes* and Chapter 6: *Water and time*). The way materials call me in. Slow me down. Make me connect with and listen in new ways to pedagogies I thought I had already listened to and understood. I am reminded that the ethics of an encounter (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015) are exposed when we listen in more inclusive and relational ways with children with diverse abilities (Cologon, 2014; Mackenzie et al., 2016; Taylor & Giugni, 2012). Watching the dust swirl in sunlight by the window because I’ve noticed that is what has called a child’s attention, what they are *attuned* to, affected by (LaTour, 2004; Gibson et al., 2015), knowing that I am still that child too.

4.12 Ability as intra-active and relational

Charlie’s physical literacy with tree was evident, his confidence and comfort, resilience and creativity as well. Their risky attachment (Instone, 2015) was not so much about “danger, but about possibility; the possibilities that emerge from acknowledging our entanglements in and with things” (p.31). Despite his being a diffractive companion with Tree, Charlie’s emotional and social maturity, with humans, were at odds with a

system that requires children be ‘ready for school’ instead of making sure schools are ready for children (Dockett & Perry, 2015; Evans, 2015; Falchi & Friedman, 2015; Iorio & Parnell, 2015).

For his teachers and his family the friction was that they could see he was capable and knew it was their gaze which had the capacity to render him so (Haraway, 2016; Meißner, 2014; Moss, 2010; Rinaldi, 2004) and yet they knew the challenges he would face in a school setting that was not attuned to his ways of being. In school, he may not be seen as capable, his abilities as relational, connected with more-than-human others or intra-actively performed with tree (Cologon, 2014; De Schauwer et al., 2018). In school, teachers may not cultivate the time and space for emotional and social co-regulation with an adult (or tree) to support Charlie to learn how to regulate for himself (Hadwin et al., 2018). In school, he’d likely be expected to build relationships with children on his own, without the explicit support of the adults. Because for schools, relationships and time, and being with more-than-human others in deeply affective relationships are not foundational practices.

I didn’t get to see how Charlie may have flourished in his second year of kindergarten or if it fell in a heap because he had done it all before and got bored. So, I am not sure how this part of the story goes. The narratives of ‘readiness’ and their connection with deficit (Evans, 2015; Iorio & Yelland, 2021) are clear but there is a temporal element to readiness and deficit discourses that is often overlooked.

When pedagogy is conceived of as relational, and listening is foregrounded in deeply affective relations (Giugni, no date; Taylor, 2013), *slowness* is embedded in our ways of being, doing and knowing as a cultural and political ethic of care for self and others - human, more-than-human and material (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). Instone (2015) draws on Brian Eno’s concept of the ‘long now’ to conceptualise ‘slowness’ in this context. Eno portends that ‘now’ is never just one moment but has wrapped within it

every moment of the past as well as the seeds of the future. Instone suggests that 'risky attachments' between human and more-than human others entangled in everyday moments, like Charlie and Tree, stretch time - generating new rhythms and new networks. When this slowness, this concept of the 'long now' or Haraway's 'thick present' (2016) is missing, are we more likely, as Clark (2020) suggests, to resort to checklists and rigid universal expectations of ages and stages?

4.13 Being *with*: disrupting the temporality of developmentalism

Would new relationships with time allow for rethinking the epistemic constraints of developmentalism? Being with children on a different timescale at Bush Kinder, being *in relationship* and *being with Place* like this seems to allow the teachers to disrupt the pervasive-ness of developmental ways of knowing. Most of the teachers told me something to the effect of *Bush Kinder levels the playing field* and I discuss this in terms of it expanding on the potential for *different ways of doing and being* in chapter 4. But it also disrupts these discourses because with time and deep listening there are so many other ways *to know* (or not know) and listen and understand. So many other risky attachments (Instone, 2015) to have with so many more-than-human others. Because uncertainty is welcome, there is no rush to find any particular or singular answer. Multiplicity is fine (Moss, 2019). The focus on relationships means rethinking the ways of coming to know and understand children's capabilities and this does seem to disrupt taken for granted assumptions and expectations about universal developmental norms. Creating bigger spaces of time in which for children *to be*, reduces the performative pressure of developmental norms and milestones (Evans, 2015).

In her recent work on slow pedagogies, listening and rethinking temporality Alison Clark (2020) unpacks the relationships between these elements of pedagogy. She advocates for their adoption in efforts to transform the neoliberal governance and regulation of children's time *and* developmental performativity agendas pervading early

childhood education in the UK. She refers to ‘Out and About’ (my supervisor Jeanne Iorio and Catherine Hamm’s project) as an example of how slow pedagogical approaches are enmeshed with Place and more-than-human others. The teachers in their project work from a ‘common worlds’ perspective as discussed in Chapter 3 (Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Giugni, 2012). While this is not the case at Bush Kinder, this narration makes visible some of the ways post foundational, common worlds and onto-epistemological approaches are useful in this space to conceptualise and complexify pervasive and anthropocentric child nature ‘disconnection’ narratives.

4.15 Concluding thoughts and possibilities for theory-practice

In this chapter, I have shown how reflective and professional talk and storying with parents, colleagues and children in early childhood education is a generative and relational process of discursive deconstruction and reconstruction which constitutes and is constituted by our specific experiences, situatedness and positionality. This diffractive storying - whether oral or written down - has the potential to reinforce dominant ways of knowing and doing with regards to ‘child development’, ‘disability’ and ‘inclusion’, but can be activated to challenge taken for granted assumptions which can in turn disrupt ableist, readiness, developmental and deficit narratives and discourses.

Being together and storying in reflective and diffractive companionship with children, families, colleagues *and Place* with Bush Kinder means attempting to know and yet not know our selves and others in our multiplicity. It requires disrupting instrumentalist notions of ‘inclusion’ as something we do to include those who are different and requires attuning to multiple possibilities in each moment of pedagogical encounter as a moment of political and ethical decision-making. It is this ability to respond (Haraway, 2008) to everyday moments of encounter in ways that render the other capable that allow us to attune to multiple political and ethical realities – human and more-than-human. In this chapter, I’ve illustrated how reconceptualising inclusion as

inclusivity - a relational way of *being with* - involves taking time to hold back and make space for children with developmental differences and their teachers and families to come to know themselves in *relation with* others, to make visible their strengths, capacities and abilities to respond in everyday moments of intra-action.

In thinking with First Nations ways of knowing and relational ontologies, I've considered how important storying and listening practices are in First Nations cultures in Australia (Martin, 2016). I've reiterated how critical it is that non-Indigenous teachers and educators come alongside and learn from but do not appropriate First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). Drawing on post foundational, common worlds and new materialist onto-epistempologies illustrates that if we conceptualise pedagogy as relational, storying and listening are foregrounded in deeply affective relations with (human and more-than-human) others (Giugni, no date; Taylor, 2013). I make visible in this narration how slowness can be embedded in our ways of being, doing and knowing as a cultural and political ethic of care for self, others, Place and community. This supports a relational approach to dis/ability and inclusivity that embraces the human, more-than-human and material, drawing on both Euro-western and Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015).

Last but not least, this pedagogical narration has illustrated how slow pedagogies with Place - 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. These are not 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 to configure and re-configure how we conceptualise ability and inclusivity (Clark, 2005; Giugni & Osgood, 2015).

Chapter 5 Pedagogical Narration: Crystal Says Yes

Can I record on my video?

Jules's words tumble out and bang into each other

Put the crystal in there

Ok. But is ok to record on my video?

Crystal says, Yes

Oh, the crystal says yes. So, can you point to the yes for me?

Jules moves the crystal to the 'yes' on the assent form.

Oh, you're going to get the crystal to do it? beautiful

***I** say, no*

So, the Crystal says yes, you say no?

Jules holds the crystal in front of the camera and I verbalise my thinking as I grapple with whether he is assenting or politely declining to participate. Should I turn the camera off now? *This will be tricky… filming the crystal and not you*

I'll hide and hold it up here

Ok, yeah, you hide and we'll put it up there that's pretty good...Are you going to talk for the crystal?

No. Crystals don't know how talk

*oh, they don't know how to talk? Righ*t. *It's a really cool colour, I can see why you think mine is not really a crystal*

Did you take it? [the video]

Yeah, I'm taking it now. I hold my 'crystal' up to the camera. *Mine is clear and yours has that really cool colour*

Jules removes his crystal from in front of the camera.

I'm going to turn the video off now because the crystal is gone.

The ‘crystal’ is a small piece of lustrous plastic Jules had shown me earlier in the day - removing it with care from his zippered breast pocket. Evidently, this was not a random object, a throw away piece of plastic or ephemera as one might imagine upon first seeing it. Jules stows this crystal safely in his breast pocket once our conversations are done. And draws it out again as we encounter each other over the next 10 weeks.

The ‘crystal’ is filmy and smooth, like a large sequin wrapped over on itself. With the iridescence of a hard, flat, firm bubble. It’s ‘colour’ is attributable to ‘goniochromism’, a phenomenon in which surfaces, like Abalone shells, project colours that gradually shift and change depending on the angle or perspective from which they are viewed “*it moves and get different colours - get purple there”* (Jules, 2019). My crystal was a shard of see-through-clear smooth glass, two inches long, an irregular yet mostly square prism which I ‘found’ earlier that day sitting on “Boomerang Hill” – a Boomerang shaped mound that forms the south-western boundary at Bush Kinder.

When I first showed ‘my’ crystal to Jules, he said:

> *That’s not a crystal. This is not out of the ground, this is a bought crystal… because it’s got white on it, mine don’t. Crystals don’t have white on it. Everybody’s got colours, it’s not possible be seen without colours.* (Jules, 2019)

While ‘mine’ shimmered when held to the light and refracted a rainbow of whitelight, it was not iridescent.

As I write, the image of the crystal resurfaces unexpectedly. Jeanne (my supervisor) had given feedback on one of the first pedagogical narrations, noting Laurel Richardson in the margins, “writing as method”. I started reading *Writing: a method of inquiry* (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017) the other night, leaving it open in the browser. As I flicked between data (the video and this narration) just now, I scrolled back through the chapter. In it, Richardson (2000) suggests that post modernist and creative analytic writing deconstructs the notion of triangulation as validity:

> The central imaginary for “validity” for postmodernist texts is not the triangle—a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, and are altered, but they are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of repose—not triangulation but rather crystallization. (p.934)

Thinking with our ‘crystal says yes’ encounter, like the crystallisation Richardson describes casts me off in multiple different lines of flight as what I see is worked and re-worked depending on my angle of approach. From earlier interpretations centred on ethical and political readings of the in*ter*action, to the entangled in*tra*-actions and ethical relations of people, materiality and place with which I revisit the encounter now. I watch and re-watch everyday moments in the data (video recordings and pedagogical narrations) trying to ‘think with’ post human, common worlds and new materialist perspectives (Molloy Murphy, 2018; Nelson & Hodgins, 2020; Taylor & Giugni, 2012; Ulmer, 2017; Weldemariam, 2019; Weldemariam & Wals, 2020).

My concern with “crystal says yes” at the time we recorded the encounter and in my earlier re-views of the video were ethical and political (Dahlberg & Moss, 2004). My reading drew upon images of the rich, autonomous and agentic child (Moss, 2010). I had stored the file with the name “respecting assent”, viewing it as an example of respecting assent and dissent within the research processes. Drawing on rights-based notions of the adult-child, researcher-participant relationships in which myself and Jules were engaged (Clark, 2005, 2017a, 2017b; Mandleco & Clark, 2013; Moss et al., 2020), I had noted this as an encounter in which collection of both parent consent, child assent and multiple perspectives were important. Earmarking it as an example of those multiple and discursive dynamics of power (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Dahlberg & Moss, 2004) which existed in spaces and relationships between us. Reminded of the consistent concerns with and additional safeguards required for research with ‘children with disability’ in the ethics approval process, I viewed it as an example of the multiple ways in which children with diverse abilities *are capable* and *able* to participate in research. Especially when given appropriate opportunities to express both assent and dissent in multiple and even contradictory ways which allow them to perform participation on their own terms.

I read the interaction initially as an attempt as researcher to acknowledge unequal power relations and indicate that a parent’s permission for a child to participate was not the only consent required for children’s meaningful participation in educational research. In this regard it could be considered an expression of privileging children’s access to power (regarding if and how they are recorded) by following the obvious and explicit attempts to reorient ‘subjecthood’ away from oneself. The encounter highlights Jules’ subtle, agentic and respectful ways of declining participation while clearly knowing something of oneself and others. Jules gives voice to the crystal when he wants to render it the ‘subject’ and participate, “*The crystal says yes*”. Yet, he confirms it “can’t talk” when *he* is not interested in speaking anymore. At the time I was wrapped up in

questions of the *child's* agency and autonomy – his desire to represent himself and animate the inanimate "crystal".

Reading it now, I consider how inviting Jules to speak for the crystal was a way to respect his attempt at not withdrawing his assent but asking if he would like to continue to perform participation *not as himself* - to sensitively listen to his multiple and "separate ways of being at the same time" (Tsing cited in Trafí-Prats, 2019). By choosing not to frame Jules through a deficit lens, I sought initially to deconstruct and reconceptualise his sensory and affective capabilities, rendering an image of the child as capable (Dahlberg & Moss, 2004; Malaguzzi, 1994; Moss, 2010, 2019; Moss et al., 2020). Through this lens Jules has a crystal through which he demonstrates an ongoing and consistent relation or 'ethic of care' (Ailwood, 2017; Bloch & Kim, 2015). He has the ability to imagine his own and others' points of view through a clear theory of mind. He and the crystal co-perform his capacities to participate. This contrasts the types of deficit lens so often used to frame Autistic children, like Jules, in which the crystal may be interpreted as an inappropriate attachment to a random inanimate object. Or a "fidget" with which he stims when the social or sensory environment disables him. *Grasping* or *attempting to know* (Blades, 2019; Lévinas & Hand, 1989) through a biomedical lens of autism might suggest Jules, by virtue of his diagnosis, is less capable of this type of theory of mind or conscious awareness of other's internal sense of being (Garcia, 2021). Deficit focused, biomedical models of autism highlight, incorrectly according to autistic people themselves (Moriah, 2022; Thom-Jones, 2022), that autistic people lack empathy and the capacity to relate to other's points of view (Garcia, 2021; Solomon, 2013). However autistic self-advocates and researchers highlight that rather than a lack of empathy it is often an intense empathy and ways of communicating and sharing experiences that are unexpected by neurotypical people which leads to autistic people

being interpreted as having lack of care for, understanding of or empathy with others (Botha et al., 2022; Milton, 2012).

In another encounter earlier that day Jules had said he "*didn't know how to be careful*". Yet being with Jules over time, I had noted that his *knowing* how to be careful and *doing* things carefully in relation to others (animals, materials) was visible. There were numerous times that I had seen Jules choose options that demonstrated his *being* careful and care full with others - on walking tracks entangled along the muddy edges of Creek, on logs, jumping from rock to rock, negotiating uneven terrain, in his ongoing close proximity to and relating with adults and children - he was often found caring for himself and his sensory preferences by seeking out deep pressure in an adults lap, leaned against another's legs, against their arm or over their shoulder. His desire for closeness and attempts to access deep pressure through physical connection were understood and welcomed by the teachers. And these teachers encouraged children to understand that about Jules too, not through the lens of autism as a deficit, or disordered sensory processing. His sensory preferences and ways of being were communicated as 'another way of being' (Sinclair, 1993). A difference among many differences

> *We'll say, he really loves a cuddle, he loves to be close. We're saying, we'll understand you… if he wants to sometimes come up and greet you in that way, we are who we are. Everyone's different.* (Interview with Angela, 2019)

Jule's 'ethic of care' also extended to more-than-human others (Puig de Ballacasa, 2017). His care for material relations was visible with the crystal - returning it to his pocket and securing it with a zipper. In the 10 weeks that I visited and on my return months later Jules still had that crystal in the zipped pocket each time I saw him with the exception of one day, when he said: "*I don't have my crystal, Mum gave me the wrong jumper*". The crystal was neither a distraction nor obsession. It was special "*I'm so glad I found it*". But he kept it out of sight in his secure pocket for much of the day. This care

extended to animals and creatures as well. Jules was gentle and careful with ants as he coaxed them onto bark, gently placing bark for them to step onto - though he threw it into the air once the ant obliged. While drumming with Andrew (one of the Teachers) later that same day Jules answered Andrew's question "*What did we make the ants do*?" with concern, "*Did they die*?" and when Andrew pointed out they were not dead but running he empathised "*the ants got scared*".

The videos we recorded made visible his ethic of care for and ability to empathise with both human and more-than-human others and himself. 'Crystal says yes' further reiterates this care for self, as he adeptly negotiates the power relations around his participation in the research activities and performs participation *with crystal* on his own terms. I wondered whether his narrative that he "*didn't know how to be careful*" was a reiteration of stories he had heard about himself (*reflecting* externalities) or a self-assessment (*refracting* within himself) the overuse of phrases like "be careful"? However, this was a phrase seldom heard and actively avoided here. I came to read elements of these encounters as everyday moments in which Jules made visible his multiple ways of being with, doing with and knowing himself and others. Through a critical, interpretivist and re-conceptualist frame I centred my interpretation with concerns of Jules's experiences as an Autistic child and sought to privilege and situate his perspective, voice and participation (Ulmer, 2017).

5.1 Thinking with Place

Yet, the perspectives explored above are also inherently anthropocentric. It is becoming increasingly evident in early childhood education that, given the state of the planet and inter-generational, political, economic and ecological inequities, "children born in the 21st century are growing up in a world already out of control" (Somerville & Powell, 2019, p.16). In this context "human-centred approaches to research may not be enough" (Ulmer, 2017, p. 833). Drawing on Braidotti and Haraway, who view justice as

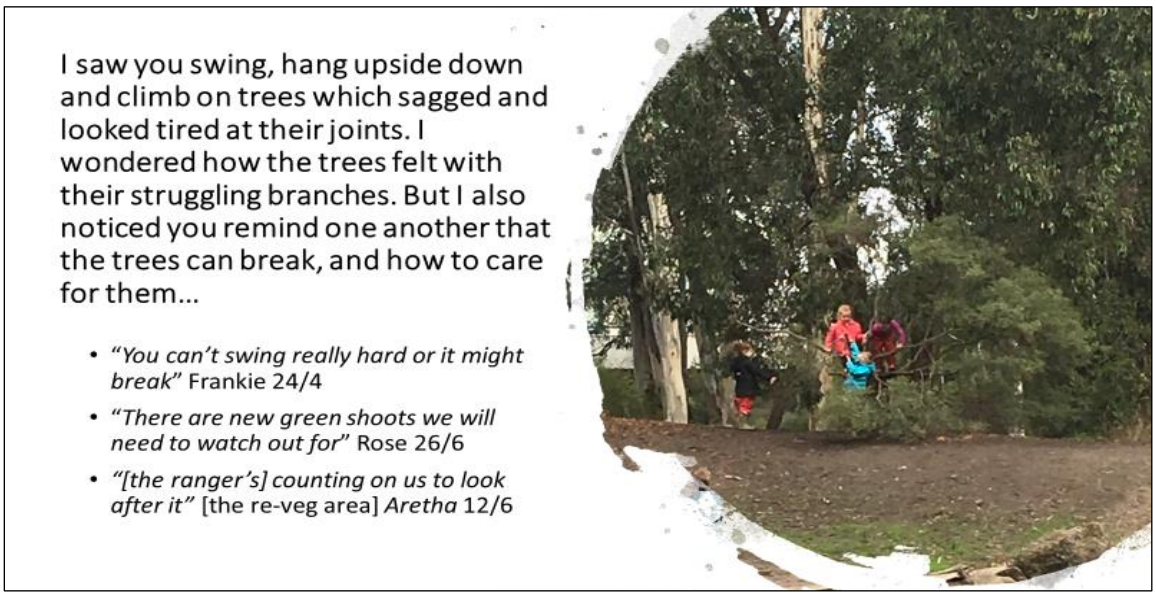
more than solely a human endeavour, we might critique this kind of critical humanist interpretation, suggesting it does little to acknowledge the “non-human elements that were always already present” (Ulmer, 2017, p. 833).

Rethinking this encounter with post humanist, commonworlds and new materialist perspectives exposes the centring of the child and the erasure and silencing of Place within my initial readings of the experience and the narrative created around it. I am drawn to the ways it may inadvertently function to privilege some and yet silence other stories about dwelling with children in shared Places. Casting myself and Jules as the central actors ignores the other material actants (Taylor & Giugni, 2012) we are assembled, always already present and entangled with (Barad, 2003, 2007). These include the plastic and glass crystals, bark, leaves and other small creatures. Not least the land itself.

While the mound of dirt we are entangled with in this encounter is currently *known* as ‘Boomerang Hill’, this is a name given to it by those that dwell with Bush Kinder today, not a name bestowed by First Nations custodians – the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations. Children, teacher’s and families storying and conversations at Bush Kinder work and rework the multiple narratives of Place around Boomerang Hill and it’s ever-changing materiality. It is, unsurprisingly, a boomerang shaped hill. It catches the morning sun as it rises over Creek and the parklands and is only very occasionally covered in inch long dewy grass during the two Wurundjeri seasons I am there (early and deep winter 2019).

When I first visited Bush Kinder in 2012, long before I thought about embarking on this inquiry, it was covered in tall grass but is now a mound of terracotta coloured dust, dirt, bark and mulch, rocks and debris. It’s watched over by child-ravaged Eucalyptus, Kangaroo Apple and Acacia trees, though these are their colonial names. Large eucalyptus trees line the path to Darebin Creek on either side.

The park rangers (Bush Kinder is situated within a wider area of state-managed parkland) also know it affectionately as Boomerang Hill. Months after the 'crystal says yes' encounter with which I opened this chapter, I asked the ranger whether the negative impact of children's entanglement with Boomerang Hill, Bush Kinder and the parklands more generally concerned him (snapped tree branches, trampled grasslands). He said: "*No. I tell other land managers; you need twenty-five 5-year-olds! They are the best weed managers*". I thought the lack of active stewardship and conservation (at times) might be cause for concern and I raised it with the children and teachers through my documentation (image below). On the contrary, the ranger emphasized the entangled and symbiotic Place relations in the shared worlds of Bush Kinder - though not in these terms. He pointed out the realities of the parklands as an urban ecosystem of human and more-than-human others which is not pristine.



The materiality of Boomerang Hill and indeed the whole parkland – with noisy trains over Creek, graffiti, bins and dog poo bags, broken glass, tiles, red bricks, rubbish and debris strewn around – lie in stark contrast to the romantic 'back to nature' narrative so often conjured in early childhood nature kindergarten imaginaries which I explored in

chapter 3 (Taylor, 2013). Children, individually and in groups spend hours each day with Bush Kinder digging and excavating bricks, glass, rocks, tiles and timber offcuts and debris like these ‘crystals’ from Boomerang Hill and the open area it shoulders. George, one of the children, told me they are from “*when bush kinder used to be a tip*”.

I was surprised in my initial encounters with children-teachers-Place at Bush Kinder that children played with materials that would often be considered ‘dangerous’ and developmentally *in*appropriate in the highly regulated spaces of early childhood education. Yet this play was not discouraged. The children were viewed as capable of assessing the risk of playing with such materials, but it was more than that, which struck me. The broken glass, jagged tiles and detritus were un-aesthetically pleasing affordances, but they were not conceptualised as ‘unnatural’ or ‘rubbish’, at odds with the natural or pristine bush setting - as a romantic view of Nature, critiqued by Taylor (2013), would contend. They ‘belonged’ here in the common worlds of Bush Kinder as much as any of the other materials, humans and more-than-human others. Children were not encouraged to collect and throw them away in the service of stewardship nor conservation. Instead, teachers and children engaged in conversations and storying about the pastpresent materiality of place and its multiple ‘lives’ within life-times. It’s life as a volcano was discussed in relation to geological indicators - small bubbles in lightweight rocks - which I used over the coming week to make marks and negative imprints in recycled clay bodies in my ceramics studio. The rock in the centre of (one of) the gathering spots was a larger example (see image below). Upon this rock children often assemblaged leaves, twigs, stones, feathers before gathering time started.

Children told me that the bubbles in these rocks are "*from when bush kinder was a volcano*". Children, teachers, families and the rangers also storied place here in terms of it being Wurundjeri Country – where First Nations families and communities had lived for tens of thousands of years and continue to have meaningful and on-going connection. Teachers and children explored Wurundjeri seasons, knowledges and language, which I was told were guided by on-going relationships with local elders.

When discussing how relationships with place were explored through First Nations perspectives one teacher said:

> *One way is, we are outside and self-care and well-being comes into it. What's the environment telling us? Well, who was here first? They probably know a lot about it, I wonder what they did or what they do. There's not a lot of people spend the*

> *whole day out here, but we know Wurundjeri did. So, we do look at what they do and the things that they would expect to see so the children know that they could see mushrooms and fungi, at the autumn, there is lots of fungi at the moment and in the front of the community journal we say "Morning and welcome to Wurundjeri late summer, we might be lucky to see this…. We might be lucky at bush kinder this week, time to light fires". We just refer to that knowledge in everyday language and tell stories about men and women that might have gone down to the water edge with baskets trying to catch them fish, it's just embedding it all in everyday stuff. We can always look back historically for information about what happened before to help us act and we talk about ourselves in our Philosophy as ongoing custodians.* (Interview with Angela, 2019)

Here the lifecycles of creatures and their connections to the Wurundjeri seasons are explored in the context of intentionally attempting to embed and foreground First Nations ways of knowing (Hamm & Boucher, 2017). Fish-men-women-baskets are relationally assemblaged through this storying of Place. While the last lines could be read as colonizing First Nations custodial relations with place, it was conceptualised by this teacher as a task of reconciliation. The responsibility of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, now and into the future. The emphasis was on *learning with* Wurundjeri knowledges and ways of *relating with Country*, not to teach content or culture, but to inform future actions and relations.

A self-guided 'Spiritual Healing Trail' developed by members of the local First Nations community and Uncle Reg Blow with approval from Darebin Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Council, shares the Wurundjeri creation story of Bunjil (the Eagle creator spirit). The trail is designed for attuning to and relating with Country for the purpose of recovery and healing. According to the local council, it was "gifted as a gesture of reconciliation…to promote health through improved spiritual and emotional

wellbeing and a sense of being connected to the land where we reside" (Darebin Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Council et al., n.d). While I am with Bush Kinder the children and teachers do not follow the trail from start to finish, though they encounter it and follow parts of the formal trail at times during their walks and while dwelling in different areas of the parklands. The physical texts and signposts of the trail are 'environmental print' with which children and teachers engage in regular, rich and repeated literacy encounters in different areas of the parklands. Each signpost on the healing trail draws humans into *attunement* with different parts of Country - Creek, fish, rocks, birds, hills, trees, leaves and themselves - as they journey toward healing that which they themselves have identified needs attention within.

Children, teachers and families also storied place in terms of the time Bush Kinder was a basalt quarry and later a suburban tip, in the era after colonial dislocation of the Wurundjeri-Woiwurrung people. Interviews with families and teachers suggested that most families have their own relationships and narratives of place. These are created as they dwell with place in the greater context of the parklands after school, during the holidays and on weekends. Multiple ways of being with Bush Kinder are explored and extended by children in the contexts of their family relations creating new and ever-changing ways of be(com)ing with place (Stables, 2012). All of these pasts and ways of knowing place are situated and local. They exist concurrently, always already there and yet constantly changing, through the storying of 'Bush Kinder'.

The materials embedded over these lifetimes in Boomerang Hill resist excavation, but the children persist. Upon excavation materials might be re-assembled, revered, discarded or in the case of bricks and rocks ground back down to dust. Mostly these materials are encountered as 'objects', to be owned, held, traded. But at times these materials are encountered as actants, agentic and on the move (Barad, 2007), disappearing and reappearing over time in different places – in the mulch pile near the

gathering place, inside, behind and on top of the large logs on the ‘trailing wing’ of Boomerang Hill.

I resisted removing the crystal that called me into connection with Jules from Bush Kinder after the encounter with which I opened this chapter, deciding that to take it home or keep it would be unethical. At the time this was born more from a sense of conservation than any real understanding of material sentience (Povinelli, 1995; Yunkaporta, 2009). In my own family as a child and with my children now, I try to resist (usually unsuccessfully) the desire to remove seeds, bark, sticks, rocks from their places of belonging. When I described the clear crystal to my four-year-old son that first night he was devastated that I had not brought it home. Five weeks later, on the other side of the clearing about 30 metres east of Boomerang Hill, the same crystal re-emerged in the mulch pile, calling me once again into a material-researcher-child connection. This time with Juliet: “*You need to talk about this glass, take it to your mum and take a picture of it*” (Juliet, 2019).

I decided the crystal was familiar with being on the move and this time took it home. That night at a meeting with the local council about an access-all-abilities playground I was on the project committee for, my son was becoming restless. I remembered the crystal in my pocket and right before the meeting ended, I pulled it out and showed him. He had never seen it before but recognised it immediately “*you brought it! You brought it home for me*!”. He placed it in a ceramic bowl which I’d made a few weeks earlier which he’d brought to the meeting. As I looked down at the crystal and bowl assembled there, I remembered I’d actually made the imprints on the clay body of the bowl with a volcanic rock from the parklands. I wondered at the assemblage, a volcanic rock (in negative print) and crystal shard of glass reconnecting in a clay body clasped in sweaty, excited four-year-old palms, kilometres from the parklands, in the offices of the municipality. These multiple stories of materials, bodies and Place are

difficult to isolate. They remain connected across time and space, drawing us-me into connection and intra-action (Somerville & Powell, 2019).

Jules's mother recounted to me weeks after the 'Cystal says yes' encounter in a parent interview, how Jules's brother, who is also Autistic, has a similar special "relationship" with Boomerang Hill. She described her perspectives of his experiences when he attended Bush Kinder a few years before: "*he found his spot in Boomerang Hill where he thought I'm just going to dig a tunnel and get from one end to the other. That was his goal".* Looking back on it, she suggested, he used it to provide himself with routine and structure, not that she saw it that way at the time:

> *He was working out for himself, how he can give himself a bit of structure. If he needed something to do, if he was a bit unsure or a bit overwhelmed with all the possibilities. He worked it out for himself.* (Jule's mother, 2019)

On hearing this I imagined him unearthing and discarding the crystals which Jules and I were to connect with years later, but ultimately, I analysed this re-telling as an expression of the autonomous, agentic child conceptualised as capable and affective - making and structuring routines and goals for himself that met both his desire for routine

and predictability as well as his sensory preferences. I interpreted it as an example of the kinds of active and agentic 'responsibility' that all children are capable of.

Thinking with post humanist, new materialist or commonworlds lenses, an onto-epistemological reorientation is required to de-centre the human and challenge human exceptionalism in these re-presentations. Boomerang Hill is scarred with new and long-since-scabbed over pock marks and broken and damaged trees that confirm the rich imperfect-ness of entangled and intra-active Place relations (Somerville & Green, 2015). While connection is often explicitly articulated in the storying and figuring of place and human actors at Bush Kinder, a separation of humans from Place/Country (animals, trees, rocks, creek) generally persists. The teacher's question "what did *we* make the ants do?" indicates a beginning to grapple with the affective *relationships* and in*ter*-actions between humans and more-than-human others as separate yet connected, but doesn't extend to an explicit exploration of entangled *relations* in which the "we" comes to include both ants *and* humans.

5.2 Reconceptualising inclusion

Reconceptualising inclusion from a common worlds onto-epistemological framework (Taylor & Giugni, 2012) requires the acknowledgement that when working at the intersection of Place pedagogies, decoloniality and discourses of inclusion and dis/ability, "nature" and Country are more than a separate and neutral backdrop against which to practice inclusion between humans (Karmiris, 2021). Dwelling is not a neutral innocent practice (Nxumalo, 2019) as different bodies dwell with place in multiple and even contradictory ways.

The idea that nature "neutralises" inequities and *levels the playing field* as a narrative or a conception of 'inclusion' in Bush Kinder is common. Multiple teachers in the interviews described being outdoors as removing limitations, boundaries and barriers to access and participation. They pointed out that early childhood classrooms explicitly

and implicitly require the use of tools with only one right way to use them "*how to hold the pen, how to sit in the chair or [on the] mat, how to hold the book*" (Interview with Angela, 2019). Just being and dwelling with place, they argued, provides sensory and affective, embodied experiences that were meaningful in and of themselves - creating opportunities to open to multiple ways of being, doing and knowing. A child's capabilities as such are evident beyond any singular or right way of doing. This was indeed visible in the types of open-ended, affective and embodied experiences with Bush Kinder. Children draw, stir and write effectively in dirt with sticks regardless of the grip with which they hold them. Sitting with the group requires, indeed privileges, being able to move bodies in ways that are responsive to the diversity of surfaces and materials and what/who one is attending to in place, rather than the strictures of contorting into a series of static right angles with bottom on the seat, feet on the floor.

The teacher's use of these examples is indicative of the multiple ways in which developmental and school readiness discourses are disrupted through the 'slow pedagogies' (Clark, 2021; Payne & Wattchow, 2008a, 2008b) adopted by these practitioners - walking, storying, dwelling, sensing (smelling, touching, tasting, seeing, feeling) noticing and reading Place. However, the narrative that Bush Kinder or being outdoors more generally by default "levels the playing field" is perhaps an aspirational over-reach. From a humanist perspective certain barriers to access and participation may be reduced or even removed as learning is reoriented and rendered more affective, sensory and embodied, particularly when developmental and readiness discourses are openly critiqued and disrupted. But is this sufficient when thinking with post humanist and new materialist conceptions of inclusive post-anthropocentric futures? These accounts only go so far to elevate 'Place' and 'Country' from the position of neutral backdrop upon which human agency and inclusion are performed.

During the interviews, teachers most often described humans as separate from but connected to ‘nature’. However, some of their stories indicated a beginning orientation to understanding the child (and humans more generally) as relationally entangled with Place in ways that included past, present and future relational ethics with materials, humans and more-than-human others. A relational methodological orientation to human entanglement with nature in early childhood education *and* acknowledging that First Nations relational ontologies are the oldest, continuous examples of these orientations is important for more inclusive and more sustainable human-nature relations now and into the future (Silova & Taylor, 2020). Inclusive and reconciliatory futures (which promote listening with and understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing) depend upon relational ways of knowing, being and doing *with* our youngest citizens *and* the stolen lands (Kwaymullina, 2020) with which we are learning.

5.3 Relational ethical encounters

Some teachers expressed a desire to open the space for thinking with creatures as animal relations and were beginning to challenge ideas of human exceptionalism. The following interview excerpts indicate a recognition that there are multiple ways of approaching these relational ethical encounters. The uncertainty and desire for feedback about a ‘right way’ of doing was notable here, as this teacher, Angela, usually expressed comfort with multiplicity, seeking out and advocating for multiple ways of doing, being and knowing

> *The other thing is the creatures. [kids saying] “Aren’t they cute” or “We have to build a house”. You know, I’d really like to get feedback on this because I often say they're actually working creatures. They are not particularly cute. Which is maybe not the right language because, maybe they do look cute. But i have tried to put the idea across that they're working creatures. They're not relying on us to*

> *build a house for them. And they don't expect to be picked up and moved around. Bring your pen and paper to the creature and do your observations and your research where the creature is. I try and promote that idea rather than they are toys.* (Interview with Angela, 2019)

This orientation to thinking about creatures from a foundational sense of mutual belonging (Haraway, 2016; Molloy Murphy, 2018), more-than-human agency and intention begins to challenge the idea of human exceptionalism. Creatures are understood as separate from and yet entangled with humans in ethical encounters. It is evident that the same teacher grappled with ideas about how to talk with children about their entanglements with more-than-human others and unpack the politics and ethics of these encounters

> *Picking up a creature that is part of that exploration and standing on it too… we have a direct impact and they impact us…it's fun to have a creature crawl on you. But in that I'll say "put your hand down on the ground or the log and if you are lucky it might take the path over your hand. You might watch it crawl across your fingers and off". I'm not ever sure of the exact right way to go. But I'm talking about it with them, if I'm right or not, it's just my experience, but that's how I feel. That's why I am doing that… I just think that the respect should be there. They're not toys. They are not playthings.* (Interview with Angela, 2019)

Angela values these encounters as a privilege "*if you are lucky*". She positions herself alongside children in a place of *not-knowing* and *un*certainty, exploring with children the relational ethics of their encounters through dialogue and story "*I don't know if it's the right way to go but I'm talking about it with them, if I'm right or not*". Place relations seem to engender a sense of uncertainty and multiplicity in this regard. Place was not understood simply as the geographical location of Bush Kinder but a wider sense of Place that encompassed shared thought and action, community - both human and more-

than-human - entangled in local, political and ethical relations that matter now and for our shared futures.

Yet, there was an obvious tension between relating ethically with creatures and animals in common worlds (as in the example above) and the tendency to position humans as apart from, and custodians of, the more-than-human-world:

> *We found the big drain in the playground, full with plastic and talked about where that water would be, where that water would go. Talked about the impact that has on creeks and rivers. Wondered what that would mean for the Creek. The following week we went down to the creek and sure enough, there was rubbish which we picked up. And the kids are so smart. They knew if they picked it up here, there is less likelihood of it coming out there…you can't just frighten children and say, "our rivers will be so polluted, the fish will die" But you can do that instead.* (Angela, 2019)

Here Angela emphasizes the connections and entangled relations of Place inclusive of people, the kindergarten's philosophy and practices, the kindergarten and school playground, drains, rubbish, fish, water, local streets, the creek and Birrarung (The Wurundjeri-Woiwurrung name for Yarra river). She problematises human behaviours and highlights that thoughtless human actions will lead to shared negative eventualities for both humans and non-human-others (water, fish, creek, river). While the vulnerabilities of both human and more-than-human others are shared, the notion of children and teacher's active agency and custodianship - human exceptionalism - are emphasized (Taylor, 2013). As Angela noted earlier "*we talk about ourselves in our Philosophy as ongoing custodians"* (Interview with Angela, 2019). However, in this conception the more-than-human is rendered passive. There is now close to a decade of post humanist scholarship in early childhood education which emphasizes the limitations of conceptualising human-place relations as such (Blaise et al., 2017; Hamm & Boucher,

2017; Iorio, Coustley, et al., 2017; Iorio et al., 2020; Malone, 2016a, 2016a; Malone et al., 2020a; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Kummen, 2016; Silova & Taylor, 2020; Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Giugni, 2012; Weldemariam, 2019; Weldemariam et al., 2017; Weldemariam & Wals, 2020). Despite deep felt connections to and relationships with more-than-human-others and a more-than-human world, the ontological and epistemological re-orientation required to decentre human actors and render the more than human world active and agentic in its own right - the post human turn (Ulmer, 2017) - is emerging in this teacher's conception of Place relations. I wonder now how this might have changed since 2019? Perhaps our earlier discussions of relatedness with and connectedness to place, and Angela's willingness to reconceptualise ants as intentional and agentic creatures; indicated an opening to thinking with the threads of a situated and partial, post humanist orientation to knowing?

Thinking with theory, particularly critical post humanist, new materialist and common worlds perspectives always seems to return me to uncertainty. Things crystallize and then retreat into nothingness again. I stumble around, unsure. It makes so much sense as a framework for inclusion (Taylor & Giugni, 2012) and yet I sit with the discomfort Ulmer (2017) describes: How does one explore situated knowledges traditionally ignored in educational research - the knowledges and experiences of dis/abled and neurodivergent children - while decentring the human? My focus was not intially invested in dwelling with this perspective. However, being with Bush Kinder, I could see it there and feel the threads. As I sit with the data generated (videos, photos, transcripts of interviews) and generate new data and thinking in the writing, I can feel it. In privileging diverse ways of knowing, I can see that complexity unfolding and refolding. Feel the threads again, ravelling and unravelling, re-ravelling and complexifying the process (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). And as such, I stumble around. Not yet sure how to draw those threads together. I am reminded to stay with that discomfort. Remain

open to that uncertainty. As Taylor and Guigni suggest inclusivity and belonging, after all, are about finding new ways to 'flourish together in difference without the telos of a final peace' (Haraway, 2008, p.301)

5.4 Concluding thoughts and possibilities for theory-practice

I opened this chapter with a child-researcher-material-place encounter which highlights how listening with children's diverse ways of knowing and being with the world can call us into connection with the material and more-than-human in ways that expand our capacities for understanding difference, dis/ability and inclusivity beyond deficit. Dwelling with Place means attuning to sensory, affective and embodied experiences with materials and more-than-human others. Attuning to how children with dis/abilitites encounter and dwell with Place differently, including which materials and more-than-human creatures come to matter in their experiences, creates opportunities to open to multiple ways of being, doing and knowing beyond any singular, right way.

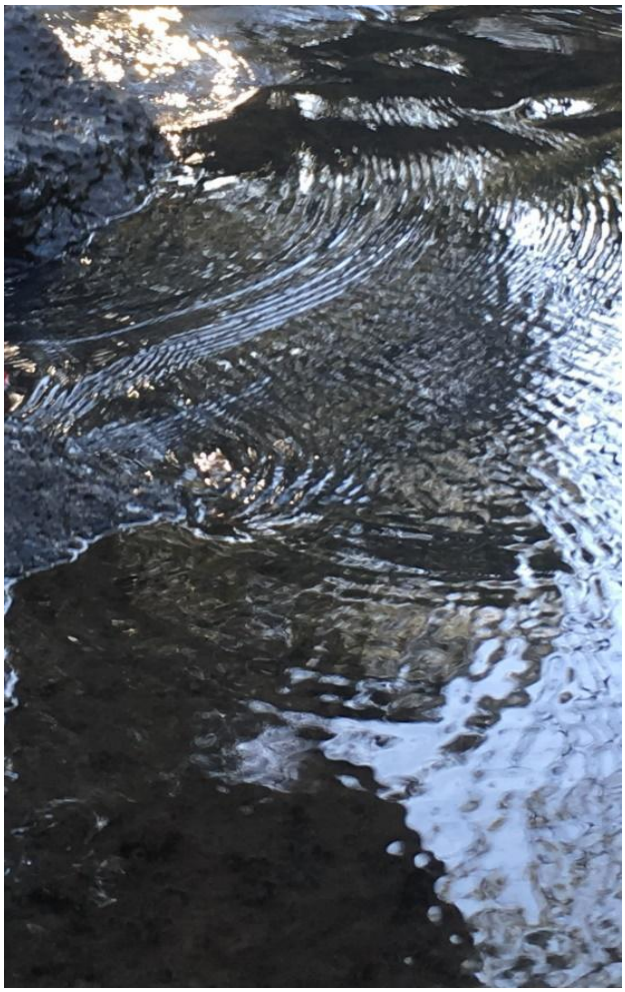
Teachers can conceptualize difference as positive and affirmative in ways that remove barriers to knowing children as capable - explaining sensory preferences and differences as other ways of being and doing rather than deficits. They can story belonging as a relational experience with children and families in ways that support multiple understandings about how to be *with* and do *with* others to remove barriers to being - defying deficit models of difference and dis/ability.

Thinking with post foundational, common worlds and new materialist theories in early childhood education, as I have done in this chapter, means positioning ourselves alongside - in a place of not-knowing and uncertainty. It requires consciously and explicitly decentring the human to explore the multiple relational ethics of our encounters with Place, materials, humans and more-than-human others. Storying disability otherwise through pedagogical narration can engender respectful and more inclusive relations. It requires that teacher-researchers are able to sit, sometimes uncomfortably,

with uncertainty as well as the political and ethical realities of learning together with stolen lands. Knowing and unknowing, doing and undoing ourselves through post qualitative inquiry opens critical and creative spaces for generating complexity and new ways of thinking about dis/ability and inclusivity.

Chapter 6 Pedagogical Narration: Water and Time

Water twists and bubbles, running, streaming, bouncing around large volcanic boulders filling small pock marks, dribbling in and out of small eddies. Distant road noises reverb against small hills. Wind in the leaves, shakes the audio, pierced by Rainbow Lorikeets *"Eeee, eek!"* We're drawn down to Creek's edge, a muddy, rocky slide.



Large rocks dot the bubbling brook. A stillness in the slowly flowing water, never motionless. Punctuated by creased folds, it wends over rocks around the corner and out to Birrarung (the Wurundjeri-Woiwurrung name for Yarra River).

A possibility silently erupts in shared thinking. Crossing here? Thirteen children dressed head to toe in waterproofs, some with gumboots. Elastic straps tucked underfoot seal the second skin, keep the under-layers dry. There is a milling and a flurry of inaudible excited questions. Two teachers, Andrew and Angela, share calm, questioning looks.

I am the “back boundary”. While a child is often the front boundary and leads us as we walk, crossing traditional adult/child territories, the adult at the back of the group always becomes the “back boundary”. This positioning is a physical form of risk mitigation against heights and slippery slopes, running water or children being left behind. My Otherness in this moment subsides as I realise I’m part of the group, trusted in this positionality. Later, I wonder at boundary crossing of a different kind - between risk mitigation and the image of the child as capable.

Let’s take a look at the edge and see…

EEee, eek! The Lorikeet pair swoop through, overhead and out of view

Andrew raises a calm arm and open palm to sign ‘stop’ which halts advancing footsteps. *You might wanna just stay where there, I’ll have a look down here.*

Shouts in sing-song: *Single file*

Angela looks to all, but no one in particular: *There’s a few things to consider. Keep your brakes on.*

Nel comes to a stop on the muddy slope a few metres back from Andrew. The other children form a row, standing in single file facing Creek expectantly, drawn in, yet still unsure if she’ll welcome them. They look down at their boots, stomp feet in crunchy mud, size up water and her depths.

Andrew surveys with an emphasized pointed finger… *Gumboots...*He stops.

Loui can you come on down here, please?

Loui stumbles in short steps down beyond the assembled bodies.

Angela notices aloud: *You know what I can see from everyone who's in a line here? You're having a good look, that's very wise*

Juliet (stepping close to Angela): *I can't cross here; I can't cross there. Ma, mum and dad unless I'm wearing gumboots.*

Angela smiles and points to Juliet's feet. Y*ou've got gumboots on your feet.*

Juliet looks down surprised and pumps the muddy ground in small steps, "*oh*".

We can't get wet

It's cold

How deep?

I'd do it up there Frankie points her finger to the shallows

Andrew kneels. He, Loui and Creek deep in conversation. Loui surveys Water, his boots, and Andrew's face, he looks to the rocks. For guidance?

Angela tunes in to the chatter: *How deep did you think Nel? I heard you taking a guess*

Zero

Zero?

Is it cold in there?

Good question. Who thinks it would be cold in there?

Loui walks from Andrew to the rocks. Stepping-stones, calling him into crossing

Andrew relays their conversation: *Loui thinks it is too high for his gumboots through there and I thought* [weighing open palms up and down like scales] *maybe not. So* [he gestures to Loui] *he's going to have a go on the rocks.*

Angela connects with Juliet: *You wanna have a go with gumboots Juliet? Your gumboots are high enough.* Their eyes meet and Juliet nods. *You want to walk down to Andrew?* The nodding stops and she shakes her head right to left.

I do, my gumboots are!

Me too!

Ok you two, Frankie, Merv work together. And Merv, [she waits until he turns to look at her] *talk to Andrew so he knows what your plan is. Discuss the plan*

Loui steps confidently from rock to rock, his rubber boots traversing wet, Tortoise shaped shells. Arms stretch out a small horizon, balancing bodies on bodies over the flow.

Excuse me Angela, Can I walk in there?

Me Too!

I've got my gumboots on

So, what are you thinking then?

Can I walk in there?

That's my question to you. That's what I am asking you, can you walk in there?

Eadie nods. Myra nods too

Ok then.

Loui reaches a gap in the stepping-stones, two rocks ‘social distancing’. Stepping-stones no longer happy to cooperate with short legs. He bends knees, estimating the jump. He reaches arms out and rolling forward ends up horizontal. A human-rock bridge, his tummy almost touching the water as it flows underneath. Helen finds my eyes. Smiling. We breathe out short breaths in disbelief at the awkward assemblage. Unperturbed, Loui lifts one precarious hand, bringing fingertip to eyes, inspecting the unexpected.

It’s a bit wobbly on the rocks

Frankie turns. Though nearing the other side, she turns around, drawn back into the pebbly shallows. She feels into the deeper spots, water splashes up to call her in.

Loui slides one end of the human-rock bridge into the water. Rocks with feet in boots sliding down, relaxing into the depth. No longer effortful, the assemblage relaxes, as water laps rubber boots.

Merv reaches the other side. He turns back: *I’m the first one across*!

Loui plunges into the deeper water, following Merv's path, straight through the brook, no longer concerned with gumboots getting wet.

Myra and Eadie waddle down, Eadie runs to the rocks but spying Myra head straight in, she reconsiders. The water becomes lines and puddles as boots splash through the flow, still barely covering toes.

Merv on the other bank points up: *This is where we saw the birds!*

Magpies warble as I watch and re-watch the video recording of this Creek encounter. Overlooking Werri beach on Dharawal Country, on the New South Wales south coast. Sun glistens off the calm. Tiny peaks to the horizon, small channels form snail trails, draining water from the beach back out to sea. Never motionless or static, constantly moving. I haven't seen a whale breech today. Not yet. It's a few days before the border between NSW and Victoria will be shut following a resurgence of COVID-19. And a full week before my home, Australia's second largest city, will return to level three restrictions, "a COVID cage" (Daily Telegraph, 2020), Lockdown 2.0. I'm reliving this encounter with Darebin creek from 900 kms away on a small screen, pausing each few moments to capture the event in words. Not words to describe exactly what happened – but *one interpretation* among endless possible interpretations, words that might make the learning visible (Rinaldi, 2001, 2004) and attune to human and more-than-human others *in relation with* each other (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016; Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Giugni, 2012). I am attempting to momentarily capture the affective and embodied vibrancy of intra-acting materials, humans and more-than-human others (Lenz Taguchi, 2009, 2011). Children with diverse abilities and bodies, water, rocks, mud, Rainbow Lorikeets, trains, detritus, gumboots and waterproofs, teachers with intentional practices and calm, slow, thought-provoking ways of doing and knowing themselves and the

children, all enmeshed with Place (Iorio, Coustley, et al., 2017; Iorio, Hamm, et al., 2017).

On my screen Merv is called up the steep muddy slope on the other side. Elliott and Louise meet water and pebbles, slowly edging in.

Angela looks to me, raised eyebrows: "*Elliott is only wearing shoes*" He steps tentatively but continues across…

Juliet looks to Angela. *Are we gonna go in the water again? I'm going, be full body. I'm going to fall over and by myself. Am I going to get a wet?*

Your gumboots will get wet. Your waterproofs will get wet.

But not my t-shirt, cause I'm going to go the rocks

ok, off you go then. Sounds like you've thought it all out.

Ok, let Andrew know what your plan is. Juliet takes small steps down the bank.

Andrew asks those assembled at the edge*: Who has made what decision?*

Three in the water, then?

The last of the children wind their way down to meet water. Stomp boots and turn around. Crunchy pebbles scrunch under rubber clad feet. Water laps at gumboots, sploshes into water-proof-pants. Fingers dip down and float up dancing between balancing bodies, intrigued by the water, pebbles, sticks, stones, bubbles, leaves and rocks. Nel joins Andrew winding across the water along the slippery stones. Poppy and Juliet communicate in silent looks, Juliet reaches for Poppy's hand, Poppy doesn't take it, focused solely on Water. Just Charlie and I are left up the embankment.

Charlie, what are you thinking?

I'm thinking about going on the rocks, I don't want to go in. I don't have gumboots on, My mum said today I can't go in water today.

She did, did she? oh.

Charlie turns to the rocks, resolved.

Did you see how Nel is going? Angela offers, motioning up to us [rock to rock]

I call to her: *Yes, that's the decision he'd just made he's going to go on the rocks.* Angela drops her arms in a smile at Charlie.

Still at the edge Poppy is reluctant, hands by her side, she looks to Angela, flicks her wrists back, unsure. Water lapping her toes, Juliet is caught in Poppy's indecision as she tries to move bodies as one.

There are two choices [Angela holds two fingers up to Poppy and Juliet]*.* She bends down and points out Nel and the rocks and then over to the group of children now immersed with ankle deep water near the other side.

Watch Louise, what do you think? Juliet nods and heads toward Louise, Poppy turns and heads over to the rocks. Juliet turns back slowly and seeing Poppy move away is caught

Angela looks to Juliet: *talk to Poppy.* She places a hand on Juliet's back and turns to move away.

Juliet appeals to Poppy. They silently agree to disentangle. Juliet steps into the bubbling water and Poppy retreats to higher ground to connect with the stepping-stones. Juliet looks back to Poppy a final time then thrusts her toes into the water and begins to splash as creek reaches up her ankles.

Poppy remains uncertain near the first stepping-stone. Resisting the call to cross. Angela gets Andrew's attention from the other side of Creek inaudibly: *Poppy is* [she turns her palm from face up to face down and back again] *Just deciding still*.

She has short boots on.

Charlie has met the same gap found by Loui and ends up horizontal as well, another human-rock bridge. His core contracts, feet make a more stable connection. He dances himself atop rocks resisting the call of water.

On the other side Angela calls the children up the embankment. Juliet's body pulls visibly in two directions at once, with the group moving away but also back to Poppy. She turns, splashing through the ankle high depths to Andrew, Charlie and Poppy.

Juliet, I've seen you've been walking through there [the deeper water] *You got any advice for Poppy about that section where you walked*?

Juliet begins to talk to Andrew but is inaudible to me.

Angela calls over, *come on Juliet* and she turns and starts to head out of the water.

Do you think Poppy would be able to walk through that water [Juliet turns and nods] *with her boots?*

Juliet [shakes her head] *No*

Juliet turns back and bounces toward Angela and the other children as they make their way up the worn and muddy track.

Charlie seeks Andrew's hand as he winds along the wide spaced stepping-stones. Taking both of Andrew's hands he dangles then drops one foot and then the other into the ripples.

Lorikeets: *Eek Eek!*

Single file!

That's slippery Charlie, so think about using your hands as well.

Poppy winds slowly toward Andrew across two, then three of the large rocks.

That one's tricky, it's a super tricky angle. He takes her hand. Then motions to the next rock. *That's a really big step, one hand or two*?

Two hands

Bodies, rocks and water assemble to take the weight and balance in the eddy, *Here we go long legs* but the water calls the boot and it skims along the surface. Poppy rights

herself and her foot is called to the next rock, stumbling and independently counterbalancing, resisting water once more.

Well done, that was a good save!

It wasn't slippery for me

Angela has come down to meet Charlie and talk him through the last few large rocks.

So, bend your knees, Can you get your hands down onto the rock?

Charlie's hands are called down to the rock, they connect and then the body-rock bridge collapses, water clapping over dry boots.

Angela's mouth makes an O and her eyes find mine, the camera and Andrew in quick succession.

The body-rock bridge collapses into a plank assembled with body, rocks and water in tension. Angela extends a hand "*Can I help*?" Boots are called back to Water.

It doesn't matter if it goes in, don't worry

Angela and Andrew talk Poppy and Charlie over the final rocks. I didn't notice it at the time, nor while watching this video prior to sitting down to write today, but the children on the bank silently split into two groups here - straight down gender lines – the girls return to the water, called back into splashing in the shallows, crunching pebbles and squelching boots. The boys move further up the embankment, two long sticks call them into play, Eli and Loui lift them high, batt them together.

The trains roars over on the track further along toward Birrarung: *Brrrammp!*

Elliot, could you remind Eli and Loui to use those safely please?

Kadunk, kadunk, kadunk, kadunk, kadunk., redun, dedun, dedun, dedun

Poppy, you want some help?

Juliet: *Can I give Poppy help?*

The girls continue to splash and slop around. Water now seeping all through the wet weather pants and gum boots. Legs rise up. Water explodes into bubbles and smaller droplets with the air. But Poppy resists the water. Taking Andrew's hand, she dances over and around water's advances, staying high and dry.

My early interpretations of this everyday moment centred on the political and ethical (Dahlberg & Moss, 2019). The reconceptualised images of children as capable, competent, agentic, decision makers, knowledgeable and trusted by teachers *in relationship* (Pacini Ketchabaw et al, 2015). I noted the intentionality of the teacher's decisions, questions and provocations and their embodied ways of communicating. The way hands are used to ask questions and empathise with indecision, when Angela *turns her palm from face up to face down and back again to say "Just deciding still".* These

embodied ways of being and listening *with* children enacted an image of the child as capable and responded to their diverse abilities with diverse and multimodal ways of doing - eschewing any single, right, safe way to practice.

Efficiency and standardisation could have been achieved here – by teachers making a plan among themselves and telling children what to do to avoid getting wet or hurt, telling them which way to go, deciding what they were capable of, justifying their decisions with the silent demand of routine and timetable - we can't be late back. But this was never an option for these teachers. Their determination to push back against children's permission seeking, meant answering questions with questions, "*That's my question to you. That's what I am asking you, can you walk in there? So, what do you think?* Making children accountable for choosing their own best way of engaging with the encounter, eschews dominant discourses of adult-child power relations and developmentally appropriate practices (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Dahlberg & Moss, 2004) in which young children are offered constant, albeit positive, guidance. They challenge the propensity for risk aversion many professionals and parents feel encountering water and slippery surfaces with young children.

What's more, the slowness of their pedagogy enchanted me, encountering creek like this was not pre-planned (Payne & Wattchow, 2008). It was a collective possibility once the group had "read" Place when they reached what we might call creek's edge (though, really, where does Creek end and something else begin? Creek's edge with what? Land? Isn't creek as much land as it is water? Is there a boundary between?) When I inserted the final image above the alt. text suggested was 'person standing next to a body of water'. Moments before we were called into this encounter we'd come to another possible place for 'crossing', the teachers had explicitly invited the children's noticing, listening and questioning whether 'crossing' here would be possible. Collectively they decided to keep walking and seek another spot. There was no limit on

how long this might have taken, time was *being made* for this affective and embodied encounter (Fittler, 2017). My interpretation centred on the intentionality of those pedagogical decisions – to make time, to enact relationships with children as capable, to slow down and not grasp the child (Lévinas & Hand, 1989) but make space for the children to be, do and know themselves in a deeply sensory and affective experience with Creek.

But even more the decisions each child made about how to encounter the water and 'cross' fascinated me – they made visible (Rinaldi, 2004) the children's understandings of themselves and their abilities as well as their conception of, entanglement with, and care for others. Their multiple relational identities (Lenz Taguchi, 2011; Mackenzie et al., 2016) were on display as they thought with the multiple relations they hold (mostly with other humans) - as friends, as learners, as children of parents - taking responsibility to care for themselves in ways consistent with their parent's desires "*Mum said I can't go in water today"* and *"I can't go in there, mum and dad, unless I'm wearing gumboots"*.

Weeks after this encounter one of the parents suggested ways in which bush kinder opened spaces for children to *be*, explore and get messy and wet

> *A lot of parents wouldn't look at crossing the river they'd be like "oh shoes are gonna get wet or we're gonna get dirty or we've got other things to do", at bush kinder they can just do that they can be. It's a license to get messy.* (Interview with Loui's mother, 2019)

I responded to this narrative by describing and re-interpreting the creek encounter above. What I emphasized was the extent to which the encounter was child-led, the accountability and capacity expected of each child to make decisions for themselves and the visibility of their thinking. The intentionality of the teacher's pedagogical decision making - their enacting of philosophical and theoretical conceptions of emergent

curriculum, collaboratively reading Place, and their capacity to *make time*, rather than feel enslaved by time, structure and routine.

It seemed evident to me that the teacher's conceptions of the child, emergent curriculum and slow pedagogies like walking, noticing, sensing, reading place and making time contributed to a form of response-able (Haraway, 2016) differentiation that ensured multiple possibilities for being, doing and knowing. Accessible and inclusive, their pedagogy supported the diversity of children's abilities to communicate, connect and participate - individually and as a group in unfolding everyday moments (Evans, 2015; Mentha et al., 2015; Stables, 2012; Warfield et al., 2020).

It struck me that the differentiation was often child-led. Children were made aware of multiple ways of doing through dialoguing and collective *thinking with* place, but the decision about the level of support they needed "*one hand or two?*" was left up to the child. The focus was on being and doing, "thinking in moments, not knowing" (Berger, 2015, p.130). Not knowing the water and depth or the right way to go but encountering them together. Multiple options and possibilities for completing the "task" (should we simplify and reduce it as such) were explored and each child's self-knowledge was engaged. There were high expectations for each child to know themselves and their bodies and abilities, to trust their own judgment and what was right and safe for them in the moment in these particular assemblages – from encountering water and rocks to playing safely with sticks and the limitations of their material clothing.

The teachers offered space and time, and intentionally held back from providing too much assistance or direction until it was requested or obviously needed.

It did not occur to me at the time that the encounter with the water was also an embodied maths and science 'measurement' experience. While earlier research in early childhood and nature-based education justifies outdoor, nature, and play based pedagogies by citing their potentiality for teaching and learning in traditional curriculum

areas (Malone & Waite, 2016), at Bush Kinder these appeared somewhat secondary to the social, affective and embodied potentialities of learning with self, others and Place. Two days after this encounter one of the educators who was not there at the time summed this up, while telling me how she characterises intentionality and intentional teaching at Bush Kinder - by way of a story about reading Mr Archimedes while the children were eating lunch:

> *I went "what is he using to measure the bath? and they went "measuring tape" right. And I went "What do we use at bush kinder, we don't use measuring tape, do we have a measuring tape at bush kinder?" and they were like [emphatically] "No! we use…." and one said gumboots, we use our gumboots, somebody said we use a stick to measure how deep it is, somebody said, which was gorgeous, "we jump in it" and I said, "oh so what happens when you jump in it?" And he said [acts out a child's thinking face] "all of the water comes out" and I was just like, I love this. For me, there's our intention.* (Interview with Suki, 2019)

The intentionality here is multiple. Firstly, 'shared reading' is intentionally removed from a routinised mat or group-time session, or book corner. Yet by all accounts it serves as an example of intentional dialogic reading in which she prompts, evaluates, expands and then repeats the children's responses (Towson et al., 2017) while asking children to link a text to real world contexts and lived experiences to explore abstract concepts. Her description summed up the way this kind of pedagogy is conceptualised with these educators - opening children to diverse and embodied experiences with Place rather than purely instrumentalised ones. They aren't using nature to teach maths concepts or setting up experiential learning or "lived experiences" of the kinds of concepts and abstractions they'd like to intentionally teach later on. Rather, they're enacting a pedagogy of being affected by and with the world (Lenz Taguchi, 2011) across time and space in encounters that occupy multiple moments of collective and individual knowing

and doing. As she recounted the story, I heard Angela's question to Nel as we encountered creek "*How deep did you think Nel? I heard you taking a guess…"*

Suki's other intention in choosing to read 'while they were eating lunch' is also significant. Engaging in storytelling, reading, listening to stories, and having conversations - linking children's everyday experiences with Place and exploring that through storying and narration was commonplace with this community of learners. At this kindergarten, unlike most, lunch and gathering *times* are set by the children – they eat when hungry, in groups they choose, at times that suit them, at Bush Kinder this can be anywhere - on a log, rock or Boomerang Hill – a boomerang shaped hill on the south-western boundary of Bush Kinder.

Home kinder is the name adopted by this community for the kindergarten building and grounds where the program takes place when not at Bush Kinder (it is a community managed kindergarten about 1km from the parklands). Meals at Home Kinder are eaten at family sized tables. Candles on the tables signify them as gathering places – places for discussion, connection, storying, eating, communing – an intentional visual indicator of shared philiosophy.

Each gathering time I experienced at Bush Kinder and Home Kinder started at different times – when educators and or children read or felt that it was the moment to gather. At Home Kinder the ritual began with lighting a candle which remained on a chair in the centre of a large circle. The children sat outside on a mat and one child was asked to decide the order in which the group would enter – attuning to who was ready by listening deeply to their 'colleagues' body movements, words or eye contact. On coming inside children and adults sat silently in a circle, knees almost touching. Once all inside, the child who decided the order of entry pours a glass of water from a glass jug. They pour it right up to the top. The whole group closes their eyes (with much side peaking, at

least for me) and the glass is passed from hand-to-hand all the way around the circle. Once returned, the child who filled the glass takes it outside and waters a plant with it.

The ritual is calm and physically challenging, listening to the where the glass is as it moves around the circle takes all the senses; to know the position of one's own hands and those of others with eyes closed; to account for the physical capacities of those you are receiving from and giving to. It positions children as trusted and capable, emphasizing their physical and emotional connections with themselves, the group *and* their cyclic and interdependent relations with plants and water. Encounters with water and time at both Home and Bush Kinder were reflective of a kind of intentional, embodied, social and affective pedagogy that I hadn't encountered before.

6.1 Rethinking place and the autonomous child

My interpretations of the encounter with Creek and in my early thinking with theory centred on the child subject. I thought of place as a geographical location, a physical space (Campbell & Speldewinde, 2018). I clumsily labelled it "river" when I was speaking to parents and educators without much thought for the difference of the two. I was intrigued with the subversion of traditional adult-child power relations which were evident in the encounter and the routines and practices of the kinder, both in the bush and at home kinder, more broadly (Weldemariam & Wals, 2020). Home kinder *as place* was conceptualised consistently by the teachers and children as a children's place. The 'welcome' introduction for visitors clearly introduces the space as "*a children's place"* not a "place for children" but a place or space defined by children (Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007). This welcome page is on display in the open kitchen utilised by children, teachers and visitors to make tea, prepare food or get water independently. It instructs visitors "*don't worry about what to do while you are here – the children will show you*" (Kindergarten documentation, 2019).

The outdoor space at Home Kinder is always available to children through the concurrent indoor-outdoor program. In our interview, Angela referred to it as a "*deconstructed playground*". It was conceptualised as a place that disrupted traditional adult-child power relations, in which the setting up of activities or experiences by adults for children was minimised, materials were always available to children and storage areas were the domain of both children and adults.

The intention behind the deconstructed playground was twofold, disrupting taken for granted assumptions about children's developmental capacity and constructing the environment as third teacher - inviting negotiated curriculum (Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007). It makes visible how teachers, children and families have together to make conscious and intentional decisions here, through on-going dialogue and experimentation. Making materials accessible means children construct their experiences, rather than engaging in predetermined play through overly adult constructed and defined play spaces, or experiences set up before children arrive. The director and lead educator described the process of developing Bush Kinder with the intention that it pared back the curriculum and "stuff" to invite children into processes of negotiating curriculum (Teacher Interview, 2019). Encountering Creek reminded me of just this type of negotiated, emergent yet inherently intentional curriculum. Interactions and power dynamics are paramount here, efforts are consistently made to disrupt taken for granted assumptions about children's power and agency.

There was also a consistent application of diverse and multiple ways of thinking about children's development within the worldviews of each teacher, between the teachers and between the teachers and families. When I sat with one of the teachers to review some of his own writing, I noted with interest his adoption of Deleuze's rhizome motif and the beginnings of his thinking with the concept of rhizomatic entanglement. His writing detailed his own grappling with interactions, interconnectedness and multiplicity.

His thinking in this way was at odds with some specific musings of other teachers during the interviews, who each discussed children “missing steps” in the developmental progression, particularly in their characterisation of linearly acquired skills for social interaction. However, the same teachers who talked about missing steps in social skills acquisition also highlighted the interaction of children, materials, bodies and abilities at Bush Kinder:

> *The environment dictates that as much as their experience and level of ability. Because we're there all year round so there's times when you go down there and the waters trickling through. And it's very sedate and calm. And there's quite a drop in that little channel we’re jumping over between the top of the stones to the water's edge. Yet another time we will deliberately go down there to show it to the children, because it's impassible. It's a raging torrent. And the discussions around that, are wide and varied but other times you'll go down and we know before we get there. This could be a time where we can or can't cross it. And we don't necessarily discuss it with each other. We'll go and have a look to begin with and then the children will make that choice too - do you think we can? So all at once again all those options of how to do it, are available. But the conditions under foot are wildly different. A child that has made some improvement, as far as their independence in this moment, might regress a little bit, because it feels uncomfortable, the water’s turbulent and it's lapping my boots and at others, that real distance between where I'm standing and the water is a real challenge because that's a long way to fall. Now it's not a long way to fall but the waters on my boots already, it's moving so fast. Even standing there is a challenge because the waters hitting you. So, it's putting you off balance to some degree, or you know, it's messing with your thought of balance.* (Interview with Andrew, 2019)

It is clear in this description that for Andrew, ability is both situated and relational. Changes to Place, and the human, more-than-human and material children are entangled with over time have the capacity to render them more or less able. This both borrows from and disrupts developmental ways of knowing. It conceptualises ability as individual and fluid but also relational.

Multiplicity is sought out and embraced by these teachers, and as I explored in chapter 4, teachers lean into the experience of diffractive uncertainty and not *knowing*. On the one hand, children's individual autonomy and agency is paramount and the notion of progression and acquisition of skills and abilities in predetermined patterns of development and regression is evident. On the other, an eschewing of readiness and "predetermined finishing points" (Moss, 2019, p. 117) and universal ages and stages is emphasized. Deleuze's rhizo approach to *multiplicity* thinking, instead of *simplicity* thinking is visible.

6.2 Relational and collective dispositions in common worlds

Thinking with commonworlds and post foundational ideas I am drawn to the complexity of trying to de-centre, though not ignore, the human child (Taylor & Giugni, 2012; Ulmer, 2017). Relational and collective dispositions are certainly fostered through these philosophical, pedagogical and curriculum decisions. A relational ethic of 'care for self, others, community and environment is evident (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015; Ritchie et al., 2010). However, I wonder if there is an accompanied epistemological and ontological shift with this relational ethic and re-thinking of materials, time, space, place and routine that extends beyond the relationships between and the benefits *for humans*? I don't think that shift has quite taken place here. Perhaps it is yet to come. In narrating the encounter with Creek as I have done above, I sought to listen more deeply to the more than human and materials - I've sought to try and think with water (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Clark, 2016) and listen more deeply to Country - water, rocks, sticks,

trains, detritus, Rainbow Lorikeets. This expands upon the slow intentional pedagogies of these teachers to think and listen *with* Place, making visible how relational ethics and onto-epistemologies might make visable possibilities for reconceptualizing our relations with one another and more than human others.

Every time I read post humanist and common worlds perspectives I come away feeling both buoyed and enthused at thinking and knowing the world in a new way (listening and knowing with, as opposed to knowing of) and yet feel paralysed and concerned that everything to date that I have written is too innocent, techno-cratic, human-centred and therefore short-sighted. I feel concerned that I can only just grasp and grapple with the multiple epistemological and ontological shifts required to conceptualise and theorise these approaches. Yet, I can see within the relational and ethical practices at Bush Kinder many aspects of philosophy and pedagogy that are to some extent, yet not explicitly, post humanist and post foundational. The beginnings of encounters with Place as agentic. The inclusion of and relationships with materials matter. Though materials are not viewed explicitly by these teachers as agentic in and of themselves they are certainly (at times) concerned with the ways that materials and matter, come to matter (Barad, 2003) to children. But is this only in so far as matter, matters for humans? Thinking about the enmeshment of human and more-than-human others and how these make us relationally implicated in shared common futures I come back to Taylor (2013)

> Twenty-first century children need relational and collective dispositions, not individualistic ones, to equip them to live well within the kind of world they have inherited… they will need a firm sense of belonging and shared responsibility within the natureculture collective of their immediate common worlds… they will need to be able to build upon a foundational sense of connectivity to this nature culture collective. Such dispositions and capacities will never be fostered through

> the application for a child-centred and hyper-individualistic developmental framework. (p.117)

The pedagogical dialoguing and decision making at Bush Kinder employs multiplicity thinking. Deploying discursive developmental knowledges that speak the individual child subject into being, yet also actively engaging relational and collective dispositions, being attuned to the interconnectedness and deeply enmeshed relations of individuals, groups, place, material and more-than-human others. The interconnections and ethical relations of children to self, others, community and environment are emphasized and put to work. In pushing back, they seek, intentionally, to unsettle dominant narratives which reinforce developmental, readiness and quality approaches. An entanglement of relations - children, teachers, families, place, materials is evident in the pedagogy in this learning community, but it is inter-active or intra-active?

6.2 Intra-active pedagogies

Lenz Taguchi (2011) conceives of intra-active pedagogies as those informed by new materialist onto-epistemologies in which the human and more-than-human, material and discursive, are necessarily entangled. The agency of material beings in this approach – materials and matter – matters. “Intra-active pedagogy requires recognition of and working with material beings that are just as agentic as humans” (Moss, 2019, p. 151). According to Lenz Taguchi (2011) Intra-active pedagogy requires teachers to make visible and

> Do justice to what the learning child brings into the play or learning situation, without imposing our own moral values and aims of learning on them… to be in a listening dialogue, where we negotiate our diversities and differences in meaning making and strategies of doing things. (p.30)

When I read the quote above it brings to the fore the experience of encountering Creek, yet when I consider if materials in that interaction were conceptualised as agentic when

we discussed the encounter, no, I would have to say they are not. It thus became important to me as I drafted this chapter that I captured something of the material agency of Creek not as a body of water 'to be crossed' but as a relational entity with which the human and more-than-human are entangled.

Thinking with Lenz Taguchi's idea of intra-active pedagogies, I find myself grappling with the idea of material agency. While extending the concept of agency to non-human others feels simple (almost Baader Meinhoff in the sense that once it is seen, known and felt, it is every where). The idea of agentic inanimate materials is a different way of knowing the world. Can sand be intentional? Can a stick or rock, without consciousness, be intentional? Is not the movement or response of those inanimate non-human-others simply another physical force? gravity, for example? If everything is subject what, if anything, is object? Does collapsing the two (ala Deleuze) matter? I reach the limit of my philosophical understanding and am unable to answer. Watching an interview with Affirca Taylor, this finally became clear (Giugni, 2015). Taylor suggests drawing on Bruno Latour's (Latour, 2004b) notion of material agency to 'think with' this idea. When we commonly think of agency as intention, and more importantly conscious intention, we are predisposed to defining it as conscious human intention. Latour's conception of agency is not only intentional conscious agency and as such is open to more-than-human-others, the inanimate and material.

As the January 2020 fires raged around us, I read Sand Talk, Yunkaporta's (2019) exploration of Indigenous worldviews and their utility for 'saving the world' and was called back into connection with these ideas. Yunkaporta is a member of the Apalech clan in Cape York, Australia. In his shifting academic to camp-fire voice, I encountered the idea of rocks as animate and sentient, upending my ontological pre-dispositions (Povinelli, 1995). I had to put the book down for a few days as I processed the implications. The year before, I'd heard Shaun Andrews, a Mununjali and Palawa

man, speaking at a conference. He suggested that non-Indigenous Australians often misunderstand the concept of elders when acknowledging Country. Elders need not be people, he told the crowd, trees, mountains, boulders, are also considered Elders. At the time I thought I'd understood. But the waves of understanding came slowly.

I reiterated this ontological shift in thinking when I next made an Acknowledgement of Country at our community garden. Taking a moment, I asked the group to consider and acknowledge the elder in our midst who we hadn't previously recognized - a tall Eucalypt with smooth bark, long thin leaves and small white blossoms at this time of year. Though here long before us and integral to our being with place – we'd entirely overlooked their elder-ness. I wondered if Creek is also an elder? Yunkaporta (2019) suggests there are

> Ancient paths of Dreaming etched into the landscape in song and story and mapped into our minds and bodies and relationships with everything around us: knowledge stored in every waterway and every rock… It's no monument. This place is alive. Every Rock is animate and sentient - but in our worldview this is true of all rocks. (pp.24-25)

I wonder what thinking with this worldview might mean in the context of an 'ethic of care' at Bush Kinder? Here ethics are already considered relational, not simply 'universal moral codes' (Moss, 2019), but highly contextualised ethical relations requiring creative decision making from one moment to the next. Caring for self, others and community is ever present in the interactions and learning, yet this is not always extended to more-than-human-others. While it is without question extended to Magpie as I explore in chapter 7, and at times ants and creatures as I explored in chapter 5. Rocks? Stones and branches? Almost exclusively, no. If we take the position that rocks are sentient and animate, then I have witnessed countless acts of violence. Hurling, bashing, stomping,

jumping, breaking, smashing - the grinding of souls to dust. Child perpetrators. Adults, complicit, unaffected witness/es.

6.3 Rethinking relations with materials

From a relational materialist perspective (Lenz Taguchi, 2011) we may suggest that the play taking place while we encounter creek is *in-between* the children and water, rocks, silt, mud and sticks. The forces and intensities of materials and children are always already present and constantly moving, ever in a state of flux and flow. Describing their idea of relational materialism Hultman and Taguchi (2010) gaze upon a girl and sandbox, consciously de-centering the child, and the humanist gaze, opening possibilities for material relationality

> The playing is taking place in-between the girl and the sand. We contend that there is no clear border between them in the event. The force of the girl's body and the force of the sand overlap and extend onto each other. (p.38)

In intra-active pedagogies the sand is understood as active and agentic, not in the sense of humanism's conscious intentionality (Giugni, 2011) or First People's sentience, but as an active force. In this way materials (water-rocks-gumboots) might be considered active *in relation with* humans. Drawing again on Lenz Taguchi (2011) these active forces "include the ways in which a perfectly balanced body needs to be adjusted to a range of material conditions" (p.38). A perfectly balanced body in this sense is not a 'developmentally on-track' 4-5-year-old body that can keep themselves upright, or follow a direct straight line or cross their midline, but one that adjusts and responds to the diversity of material conditions with which it needs to *intra-act in this particular moment.* The child as learning subject *becomes-with* creek – arched into a horizontal bridge between rocks, dangling off the arm of a teacher dipping into the wet, raised on tip toes over pebbles through the depths, splashed and sploshing - squelching within rubber

boots and socks. There is no clear border, the learning, playing, balancing - *doing* - taking place is *in between*.

In this way, an assemblage is formed, yet always-already-there. Rather than "thinking about the child's identity in a taken-for-granted way" (Lenz Taguchi, 2011, p. 38), we might consider the child be(com)ing with, being *affected by* multiple material encounters and inter and intra-relations across time and space. Juliet, from this gaze, is not simply a four-year-old female child with gross motor, coordination, social, speech and language *delays*. Rather she will "form a new assemblage in her encounter and inter-relations within each encounter. Her body and subject become multiple" (Lenz Taguchi, 2011, p. 38), affected by the multiple and material encounters she becomes-with. This gaze exposes the material as well as social relational nature of dis/ability. Juliet's strengths and abilities become visible – her ability to negotiate silent and affective connections to Poppy, the water and rocks, her verbal *and* non-verbal conversations with teachers and other children, her relational identities are emphasized in this moment, this encounter with rocks and Creek, instead of her identity as a four-year-old with developmental delay or dis/abilities. Had I trained my gaze on the "developmentally delayed or disabled child" I would most certainly have narrated this encounter quite differently.

A few days after this encounter with Creek, my four-year-old son and I encountered Creek in the same spot. While I watched the assemblage form, child-gumboots-wetpants-water-rocks-currents, I was called in to the ripples and flows, light crystallising off the water surface. Affected, I snapped an image of the ripples and thought about how that same diffractive pattern could be captured in a clay body.

The volcanic rock (top left image 1, bottom left image 2) is pock marked. While the water, dribbling, *felt* smooth in my mind, and to my hand, capturing them in clay would require scrapping and scratching with a stainless-steel kidney. I wondered at the sensorial juxtaposition. Later in my ceramics studio I play it out, dragging a steel kidney over a clay vessel to recall the water. I push a small chunk of the volcanic rock from Bush Kinder into the clay to make pock marks. The clay resists. Yet, once glazed black, the calm smooth renderings of the water are re-storied, embodied in clay. The ripples and pock marks feel matte and watery, cool to the touch. Hands make steamy marks on the surface. The vessel calls me back into connection with water and multiple Creek encounters. It reminds me that I am in connection with Place, with people, with children, with materials through multilayered moments of space and time. It gathers me together. I heat wax and steady a wick inside it. Wax pours quickly and settles into a candle as it cools. When I return to the kindergarten to share my documentation with the teachers

and children, I gift them the candle and a printed poster of the rippled water, explaining how their water practices and candle rituals inspired the clay form and in recalling them in my studio, it's shape and texture emerged. I tell them about how our shared encounters with Creek, water and rocks called me into connection with clay, a steel kidney and a volcanic rock like the one they gather around at Bush Kinder. Tiny fingers run over the marks made between rocks and clay to capture the encounter. The candle has potential to burn but the clay texture is cool and calming to touch – justaposed like volcanic stones "smoothed by water and time" (McAnulty, 2020, p.96).

6.4 Concluding thoughts and possibilities for theory-practice

Developmental lenses are not the only means through which teachers and families can view children. In this chapter I have considered how doing disability differently in early childhood education requires challenging assumptions about and disrupting unquestioning adherence to dominant developmental ways of knowing. A critical understanding of dis/ability as relational means conceptualizing individual and group strengths, deficits and challenges - of teachers and children - as both relational and situated.

An intra-active approach to pedagogy makes visible what the child (and other material actants) bring into play and learning, without grasping or imposing our own ways of knowing, being and doing on them. Being relationally attuned means negotiating our diversities and differences as well as our ways of making meaning and our strategies for doing things. It makes visible our connections to and relations with others. Ability is both situated and relational. Telling the stories of disability in early childhood education differently, as I have done in this chapter, requires focusing on what children already do and can bring to a learning encounter. I make visible the potentialities for our relations with material and more-than-human actants to activate a critical relational understanding

of dis/ability. The following narration extends this thinking to another significant more-than-human other at Bush Kinder – Magpie.

Chapter 7 Pedagogical Narration: Magpie, Our Classmate

Magpie sits sentinel, watching, not moving. Eyes dart over me - up and down, their head confidently shifts to catch me in a hard gaze. They let me come closer than I expect. I hear Angela refer to them by name, though I don't think at the time to write it down. "Maggie?" I can't remember. Angela, one of the teachers, tells me that Magpie is always here at Bush Kinder, sometimes with babies, other times alone. Often, found with/alongside/in-connection with the large logs that make up the collective, imagined

boundaries. The teachers tell me there have been multiple magpies over the years and children and teachers alike have sometimes ‘borrow’ magpie’s stories.

‘Maggie’ is the affectionate first name with which I address all magpies. Stopping to chat and wonder with them, listening to their guttural and warbling songs, watching tenderness with noisy babies. Parents and hungry children, I empathise with tired devotion. It has been a constant yet not-quite-conscious relation I’ve shared with many Magpies, in many places for many years. Each past encounter informing an inexplicable familiarity in the present moment. Always already there.

Be(com)ing with Magpie at Bush Kinder (Stables, 2012) feels apt, they return week in and week out. Hopping, from group to group, bag to bag, perhaps hoping to find a lunch box left open and unattended. Magpie sits close to the children and while I never observe them offering or dropping food for Magpie to find, they are entangled in self-directed, unstructured and impromptu gatherings to eat, watching and staying close, balancing along logs, picking at the bark and leaves. Magpie minimises the space between self and human others, not only when darting in to grab a fallen morsel.

I notice Magpie waiting in the Bush Kinder wings as the children don wet weather gear before setting out to walk. One day I spy Magpie running over to bags near the logs before we have even set off. I notice Juliet’s snack box open near where the children are forming a make-shift line ready to set out and ask Juliet what will happen if she leaves it that way. Magpie is not within her view and yet I am not surprised by her reply. “*Magpie*”. She says “*Magpie gon’ eat it*”. She rushes over to replace the lid and stows it in her bag, out of Magpie’s view. I imagine Maggie chiding me for prompting Juliet’s ethic of ‘care for self’ over her ethic of ‘care for others’ (Dahlberg & Moss, 2004; Taylor, 2013). Maggie’s disappointed eyes - *there goes my lunch*.

I stop to think in these moments and the writing moments since, why is this species ‘kin’ (Haraway, 2016; Taylor et al., 2013) for me, above other birds and more-

than-human-others? Why, and since when, have I - albeit subconsciously - recognised or questioned the agency and consciousness of Magpies? Seemingly so attuned to and connected with their human others? Or am I anthropomorphising here? I think with past magpie interactions that might have informed these musings and multispecies relations (Haraway, 2016). A story comes swirling to mind - though it is not my own. When riding his bike from Sydney to Melbourne in 2007 my partner came across an injured Magpie on the road. He sat with her while she lay dying and relayed to me when he arrived the profound sadness with which he watched and was drawn into her eyes as she passed away.

In his first book, *Diary of a Young Naturalist* Autistic teenager Dara McAnulty (McAnulty, 2020) speaks directly to my evolving, grappling, relations with more-than-human others. Dara's writing is not explicitly attempting to present a post humanist perspective, though he often arrives at similar ontological and epistemological vantage points. He recounts his relations with special places and what Haraway might call 'multi-species kin' (Taylor et al., 2013) as his family transitions from one county to another in Ireland. His use and love of story, myth, science and *relations with* more-than-human others is written in an own voice narrative which affects me so deeply I have to section it off, reading in small heart-bursting chunks, slowing my progress toward the inevitable final page. As with Yunkaporta's (2019) *Sand Talk*, I can consume only a few pages each day. Taking breath for days, weeks, months before opening the book again. Devouring the narrative in a slow, controlled way, so as not to burst my mind or crack my heart too wide open. Dara's knowledge of self and Autistic identity is so clearly articulated. His explicit descriptions about and strategies for his own specific anxieties and overwhelm are incredible to read. His knowledge about and deeply affected relationships with more-than-human others stop me at every turn.

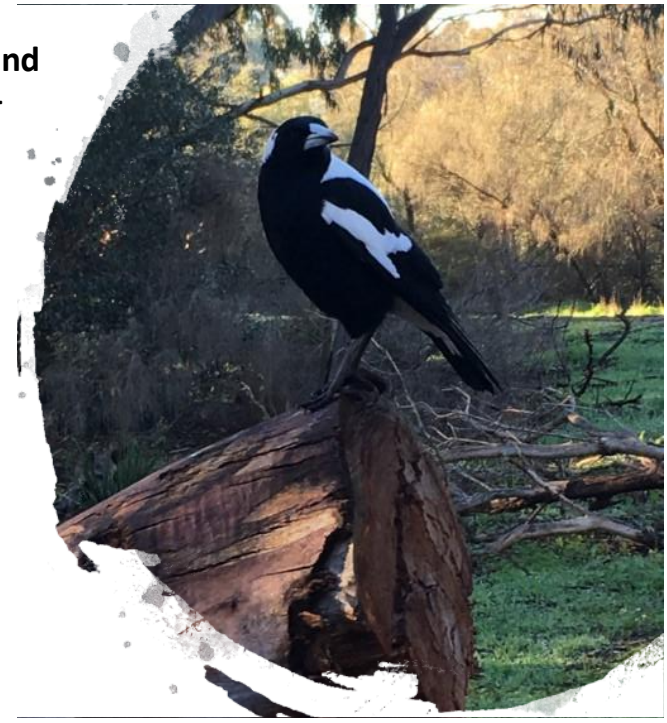
I set out, in this research, to open a space for listening deeply to the lived experiences of neurodivergent and dis/abled children with nature kindergartens. Reading Dara's words is like hearing those voices now, from the future, opening an embodied, deeply affective, deeply affected and response-able (Stables, 2012), empathetic listening relationship (Blaise et al., 2017) with the world. McAnulty (2020) weaves story and experience in ways that inspire me to think with diffractive companionship (see chapter 4) with my own mind

> In Celtic mythology there's a story about a flock of jackdaws who pleaded with the king to let them enter town to escape the bullying rooks and ravens. The king refused, but the jackdaws persisted and found a lost, enchanted ring which had previously kept the province of Munster safe from Fomorian attack. The king changed his mind and the jackdaws were let into the town as avian citizens.
>
> I do love these stories. They enrich my life as a young naturalist. Science, yes always science. But we need these lost connections, they feed our imagination, bring wild characters to life, and remind us that we're not separate from nature but part of it. Avian Citizens? Why Not? (p.45)

I re-read the words and stop. "Avian Citizens, why not?" It drops me back into the data. What were the words? "*Magpie is our classmate*" (Myra, 2019).

At the end of the term-long period of being with Bush Kinder, I revisited the kindergarten to share a compilation of words, photographs and artefacts to check my understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Rocco, 2010). I made a presentation which brought together photographs and quotations which I hoped illustrated how I had listened. Not just to words but multiple means of expression - including the nonverbal - movements and actions that made our learning and experiences visible (Clark, 2005; Dahlberg & Moss, 2004; Rinaldi, 2001, 2004).

The children listened and ‘ooh-ed’ and ‘argh-ed’ when they heard me say their names, they pointed themselves out in the pictures and asked me to touch the ‘artefacts’ I’d collected, and the clay candle I’d made for them (see chapter 6). I talked about what I had learned about their relationships with more-than-human others and included a slide with Magpie and my observations and interpretations of their interactions and experiences entangled together at Bush Kinder.



I printed the presentation on A3 pages and read it aloud as if it were a large picture book then passed around the pages so the children could look more closely at them. I unpacked the less child-friendly terms “theorise, *means think deeply about*…”

At the end, I invited the children to tell me if there was anything I needed to change, anything I had got wrong. Myra, in a tiny little voice turned to one of the teachers “Magpie is our classmate”. The teacher, always happy to explore how an assumption might be disrupted, smiled at hearing her correct my interpretation and asked her to share it more loudly, “Ah, she squeaked, *Magpie* is our *classmate*”. I was disappointed at the time to realise how poorly I had characterised the relationship with

Magpie. I thanked her for correcting me and asked if she minded me adding that in for further thinking.

Looking back on that ‘documentation’ as I write this narration, I note just how poorly I had characterised those relations. Our conceptions shared an understanding of the experience as one of being with and relating to Magpie, not as a separate other about whom one should know facts, but one with whom we are always already entangled (Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Giugni, 2012). Yet my ‘documentation’ had inherent political, social and gendered assumptions I had entirely overlooked.

My words conceived of Magpie as male, yet I had no real knowledge of whether Magpie was male or female and this assumption disregarded the conversations with teachers about Magpie bringing babies. Or did it? Urban ecologist, Daryl Jones (2002) claims Magpie fathers do much of the parenting. Characterising “him”, my words imagined an adversary - not a doting father, with a baby off to the side. A competitor for food. An outsider, an Other. He, to *our/we/us*. For Myra, Magpie is part of the We. Included in the Us. *Our* classmate. She’d corrected me. And Dara McAnulty’s (2020) words reiterated that correction. *“We're not separate from nature but part of it. Avian Citizens? Why Not?”*(p.45). Reading Dara’s words months, possibly a year afterward, I found that lost connection. My intent to position the child as citizen in designing and implementing the research activities was clear. Yet in the analysis, in thinking again with the theoretical, I stumbled against the limitations of anthropocentricism and human exceptionalism for studies with children in the Anthropocene (Malone, 2016a; Malone et al., 2020c; Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Giugni, 2012).

And even still, as I draft and revisit these pedagogical narrations over time, I chide myself on dwelling here. What does this (these encounters with Magpie) have to do with inclusivity and dis/ability? What of those readers who find the exploration of these more-than-human encounters to be a mere digression from the real (humanist)

questions of “how to”. How do we *do* inclusion and equity in early childhood education? The inherent need to justify that which is not solely instrumental and instructional at these times is strong and yet that thread is slipping more firmly and happily from my grasp.

The question resolves itself for me. How am I making that connection visible? The decision and desire to move quite consciously from instrumentalism to embrace a position that is almost disinterested in “what works” discussions? As Biesta (2007) reminds us “what works” is not enough. Engaging with complexity and multiplicity, encounter and entanglement mean that whatever “worked” in any one moment, will not work for everyone, nor even for the same of us again in any other. Nor is there any guarantee that that which was perceived to have “worked” by the adult (as though early childhood education is a simple technical practice or production line) would be experienced as having “worked” by the child/ren involved.

The biomedical model (Cologon, 2014, 2016) that seeks *to fix* the individual, diminish their *disorder, intervene* in just the right way to close the gap between those that are able and those that are not, is so dominant in our practices and our thinking in early childhood education. Inclusion has so often been defined by the collection and implementation of tips and tricks, resources and strategies (Dahlberg & Moss, 2004, 2004), that I find myself concerned with that old question, but how will this be *useful to teachers* who want to be inclusive in their practices?

Well, it will be useful in the centering of connection and belonging in inclusive pedagogies. In the expansion of ideas about who and what and where can be included in our conceptions of who belongs and to what (Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Giugni, 2012) as we challenge dominant deficit narratives of difference. It will be an illustration of how we might explore empathy and diversity and seeking *not* to know, *not* to grasp (Blades, 2019; Dahlberg & Moss, 2004; Lévinas & Hand, 1989). It might be useful in that it sets

out the importance of *being in relationship* (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015) and dwelling relationally with the frictions of difference and the incomprehensibility of the Other that is always, already ourselves. “We are not separate from nature but part of it” (McAnulty, 2019, p.45). Magpie is not separate to us, but part of our *being with Place*, our being together. Inclusivity and being with kin as diffractive companions (see chapter 4) extend beyond that which is human. So “*how might these encounters undo us? as well as our practices with young children?”* (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2012 p.3)

According to Pacini-Ketchababw et al (2013), Anna Tsing’s concept of ‘friction’ is a way to “conceptualise the diverse and conflicting social interactions that make up our contemporary world” (p.1). Attending to friction opens our eyes to “historical contingency, unexpected conjuncture, and the ways that contact across difference can produce new agendas” (2012, p. 510 cited in Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013 p.356). For Tsing (2013) a more-than-human sociality means “actors learn about each other in actions and researchers become companion participants in sticky webs of connection engaging in experimental and inventive practices” (p.51). Reconceptualising how we attend to dis/ability and inclusivity in early childhood education requires making visible this messy more-than-human sociality. What then of a new agenda? And how then can I encapsulate any “new agenda” without engendering a “what works” narrative or falling into instrumentalism and essentialism? I am reminded here of Dahlberg and Moss (2005) who argue that preschools are often overly instrumentalised as a means to produce predetermined, measurable ends through technical practice, which necessarily requires efficient methods. The processes of deconstructing and disrupting best practice systems, environments, and eschewing standardised practices for complexity and being in diffractive companionship (see chapter 4) on the other hand seem to ensure that curriculum at Bush Kinder is lived differently. *Making time* and *being in relationship* as first practice, makes both curriculum and pedagogy intra-active and re-generative.

Concerned as much with uncertainty and the *spaces in between*, teachers here are attempting instead to try *not knowing* - to open spaces for children to theorise and make their learning and thinking visible. It feels like an invitation for thinking differently and listening respectfully with multiple ways of knowing.

7.1 The problem with inclusion as an entirely humanist pursuit

The problem of inclusion in early childhood as an entirely humanist pursuit is the extent to which it ignores the multiple, relational commonworlds (Blaise et al., 2017; Hamm & Boucher, 2017; Hamm & Iorio, 2019; Iorio, Coustley, et al., 2017; Iorio, Hamm, et al., 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2012, 2013; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Clark, 2016; Taylor & Giugni, 2012, 2012), of children's be(com)ing (Stables, 2012), which are always already entangled. Our busyness with 'how to do' inclusion ignores that it is underpinned by the notion that some belong, and others need to be included (Taylor, 2013). It distracts us from all other possible realities, that children, like everyone else, exist in relational worlds, they are always already connected and in relation with others and their environments. Nowhere is this more evident than in the writing of Dara McAnulty (2020), whose own voice narrative captures his multiple ways of being, doing and knowing with humans as well as Place and the more-than-human. His perspectives, captured through deep listening, convey a sense of connectedness and belonging (with family, with animals, with Place) that is felt through his deep Autistic empathy, listening and a rich understanding of self and others which an instrumental, humanist account of inclusion risks overlooking with its narrow focus on social inclusion as making (human) friends and building social 'skills'.

Inclusion as relatedness (Giugni, no date), as a relational experience of being with and being affected, particularly as it relates to encounters with more-than-human others was not a direction in which I expected this inquiry to go. However, being with children with Bush Kinder, listening with deeper attunement (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Clark,

2016; Warfield et al., 2020) to the multi-sensorial and intra-active (Hultman & Taguchi, 2010; Lenz Taguchi, 2011; Malone et al., 2020c) everyday moments of children, place, teachers and more-than-human others brought this quite obviously to the fore. I've found myself leaning into these moments in the pedagogical narrations, to "mobilise theory to complicate the inquiry" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017; St. Pierre, 2021a, 2021b).

Two separate stories pop off rhizomatically (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1988; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015) as I consider the multiple trajectories of this inquiry over time. Though seemingly a binary they function more like a capillary, moving every which way, confusing my direction, but ultimately bringing me back to the same path. The first is the problematic essentialism of humanist inclusion discourses, the second is the posthuman turn in recent philosophies of childhood (Malone et al, 2020). The latter acting as theory with which to mobilise against the former (St. Pierre, 2021a, 2021b) and think it otherwise.

The first concerns two separate memories that have melded together over time and crystallised (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017) in the practice of writing. Mere seconds in separate conversation that sit together, synaptically fused. Moments of confusion, awkwardness, and disappointment - my own and others - felt deeply and not yet forgotten. Professor Faval Rizvi. On our first meeting, after I had explained the premise of my proposed inquiry: "*To explore bush kinder from the perspectives of children with disability, their parents and teachers*". A simplified and what I thought at the time succinct summation of my research intention at that time. He reflected that a reporter could write that story, what did I hope to bring to it theoretically? I interpreted this as what would come out of it and explained that my hope would be children's perspectives, from which policy makers, teachers and families might understand and make sense of the emergence of Bush Kinder as it related to including children with disability. I thought it might answer the question of whether or not bush kindergarten could be considered an

inclusive educational project? I said the study might identify ‘practices’ to be implemented by teachers in other services as they developed bush programs to ensure ‘Inclusion for All’.

The expression of disappointment on his face was ever so momentary. A small drop of one cheek? An exhale? A slightly longer blink? I am not even sure from whence it came but the words that accompanied it, I inhaled. “*Perhaps it is just a purely instrumental study then*?”

Though it took time to understand why that might be a disappointment, it does and has for some time now, felt clear. That project does nothing to bring new thinking to the discourses of inclusion or challenge the normative and ableist (Bottema-Beutel et al., 2021) power it wields. It doesn’t make any attempt to disrupt the deficit discourses or systematic oppressions it leaves in its wake. It does nothing to rethink the notion of inclusion itself (Giugni, no date; Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Giugni, 2012). Or question whether inclusion in and of itself as a purely essential, individual and humanist pursuit is problematic from the outset. It ignores the ontological and epistemic shortcomings of ‘inclusion’ as a premise. That is, that by its very construction, inclusion is exclusionary – it deems that some belong, yet others need to be included (Taylor & Giugni, 2012). Most of all it does not question who and what ought to be included, beyond the human, for us, All. Of. Us. To truly “flourish together in difference” (Haraway, 2007, p. 301)

The second memory, synaptically fused to the former, is also of Professor Fazal Rizvi. When I expressed weeks later, after grasping his initial concerns with essentialist and instrumentalist instructional research, a concern with his proposal that I use phenomenology as methodology, as it seeks the development of a singular account, an essential instrumental experience. To my mind, in the context of children, family and teacher’s experiences of a phenomenon this could only ever be a completely impossible fiction. This time he smiled, “*to seek the essential, need not mean we have any intention*

of ever finding it". I understood this as 'one need not begin as they intend to proceed', that I could begin as intended but should remain open to the possibilities of methodological uncertainty and embrace the unexpected as the inquiry unfolded.

Recently, reading St Pierre (2021a) these moments flashed through my mind. In defending her refusal of method, St Pierre argues that qualitative inquiry, "cannot accommodate the posts – postmodernism, poststructuralism, posthumanism" (p.4). The process of thinking with theory, mobilising theory to complicate (St. Pierre, 2021a, p. 7) rather than simplify our inquiries, requires writing as method (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017). It is in writing *with* these multi-layered, rhizomatic, synaptic connections, gestures, thoughts, stories, concepts, memories and inspirations, that knowledges (small and situated though they are) are formed. Writing surfaces pastpresents - moments of the past wrapped in moments of the present - which interfer and interrupt, creating obstacles and new/old forms of knowing (King, 2004).

In this research, *thinking with* data and theory in everyday moments has led to research that complexifies rather than simplifies the epistemic and ontological. Like the slow pedagogies I encountered at Bush Kinder - reflecting while walking, dwelling with Place, attuning to, and encountering with - it has involved an unlearning. An unknowing, unknowable-ness. Of methodology, of anthropocentrism, of the individual child subject (Lévinas & Hand, 1989; Malone et al., 2020c; Walkerdine, 2000). A re-thinking of inclusion discourses and their global yet narrow focus on the human subject, which attends to more-than-human sociality (Malone, 2020).

As an orientation to theory-practice, this requires engaging in "sensorial knowing, encounters, relations and response-ability as pedagogical principles" (p.137). Paying attention, attuning to and noticing relational complexity in everyday

moments means grappling with, be(com)ing together, in relation with human and more-than-human others. It requires thinking old thoughts in new and potentially more complex ways so that we might begin “deepening our understandings, rather than narrowing them or reducing them to codes, categories or simple ideas”. (Malone, 2020, p.137). And with that, the seeming binary – the narrow humanist pursuit of instrumentalist ‘best practice’ and the post human turn which encourages an orientation to all agentic beings in childhoodnature – turns capillary once again.

There was certainly no conscious intention by the teachers at Bush Kinder to apply post humanist pedagogies. In the pedagogical narrations Crystal Says Yes (ch. 5) and Water and Time (ch. 6) I explore the beginning emergence of thinking more consciously with the more-than-human at Bush Kinder as a pedagogical contact zone in which relational, sensorial and response-able pedagogical encounters emerged. Here these are in relation to affective inter-actions and the effects they have unsettling taken-for-granted humanist notions of inclusion and development. Yet, inclusivity in this learning ecology is not seen as an end point or even a process. It is a series of relations, values and dispositions that engender *relations* that recognize children as capable and knowledgeable and intentionally hold back adult interference and dominance. Children are given time and space to recognize and explore things that are challenging and interesting to them - alone and with others.

These relations demand that we do disability differently, challenging assumptions about and disrupting unquestioning adherence to dominant developmental discourses and Otherness. While developmental lenses are used regularly and knowledgeably, they are not the only means through which teachers and families view the child. Children’s abilities are explored regularly, formally and informally through dialogue, talk stories and critical, reflective companionship. Individual and group strengths, deficits and challenges - of both teachers and children - are understood as relational and situated.

Grasping the Other through labeling, pathologising and intervening is resisted in favour of letting the Other be and supporting the ethical and political encounters which unfold through listening and democratic decision making and action. ‘Letting the other be’ in this regard, should not be interpreted as ignoring, silencing or erasing children or teacher’s areas of difficulty or need but rather respect for and acknowledgement of diversity that does not seek sameness. This relies on a critical understanding of disability as a social relational experience - not a deficit which resides in any particular individual. This doesn’t mean that external and systemic supports are not engaged where they are necessary - early intervention services are regularly engaged with the service, though the community of parents and teachers have found it easier more fruitful to work with professionals who share their image of children as capable, knowing, interdependent and relationally connected. This philosophical and pedagogical lens requires rethinking and disrupting discourses of readiness, and this relies on trusting relationships between adults (teachers and parents) and shared understandings and images of children.

Doing dis/ability differently thus, in this context, is not and does not seek to be a universal approach that could be applied elsewhere but rather is situated within and specific to this context, for this community, for these children. Post foundational lenses are used to open all members of the community to the possibilities of welcome and divergent experiences of belonging and be(com)ing.

In sharing excerpts of the pedagogical narration ‘Water and Time’ (chp. 5) at a conference in 2021 a colleague expressed interest and surprise that my research had included a broader post humanist conception of inclusivity and relational encounters than they had anticipated. They suggested that as I came to think about sharing further work it would be good to think about how to keep the outcomes of the research relevant to practical application by a practitioner audience. I felt their unease and uncertainty about straying too far from conceptions of inclusion as a purely humanist endeavour.

But the dynamic, active and relational encounters with both humans and more-than-human-others are an important aspect of the inclusivity encountered at Bush Kinder throughout this study. While the emergence of post humanist philosophies of childhoodnature may not yet have consciously taken hold in the philosophies of practice of these teachers and families, the philosophies of the children have always, already been there. Their bodies, sensing, are dynamically drawn into being with the more-than-human, particularly animals, plants and beings which are always already there - Magpie, Ants, Tree and Creek in deeply embodied, material engagement with their worlds.

Molloy Murphy's (2018) critique of the back to nature narrative and its conception of nature as a place (separate and independent) from animals that live there and from which humans are disconnected is useful here. Her narrative rethinks multi-species kinship relations and ethical and pedagogical approaches to contact with more-than-human-others. She considers who and what belongs and who is 'the other'/Another (Taylor and Guigni, 2012). She draws upon Latour's (2005) critique of the nature/culture binary which challenges the notion that humans are separate from nature and disrupts conceptions of human exceptionalism that figure humans as nature's rescuers, stewards and preservers. Arguing instead that what is needed is a reconceptualization of child, nature, adult, creature and Place not as separate but rather "entangled in mutual natureculture (Haraway, 2008) becomings" (p.64).

Inclusive, multispecies kinship narratives are, when they don't simply anthropomorphise or attempt to speak for the animal, useful in thinking through relations with more-than-human-others encountered at Bush Kinder as a pedagogical contact zone (Arndt & Tesar, 2016; Blaise et al., 2017, 2017; Giugni, 2011; Hamm & Iorio, 2019; Iorio, Hamm, et al., 2017; Malone et al., 2020b; Molloy Murphy, 2018; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013; Weldemariam et al., 2017). In particular, children indicated their kinship relations with Magpie as a classmate. This characterisation implies the same sort of kinship

relations which Molloy Murphy recounts. Illuminating multispecies ethical entanglements in the common worlds of Bush Kinder.

7.2 Rethinking categories

A new line of flight (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1988) emerged in Blades' (2019) *Critical reimagining of science education beyond Levinas*, as I closed browser windows last night. It festered as I slept and percolated back to the surface as I walked this morning and encountered Tsing and Haraway unexpectedly in a surfing magazine while I waited for coffee. A baby Magpie wandered alone across the footpath cutting me off as I made my way back home and I was called back into connection with the writing.

Blades (2019) questions whether any author's work can be considered theirs alone – suggesting academic writing "first emerges as a result of voices, discourses, and historical timing that led to the creation of the publication" (p.105). Writing which "appears to be the creation of a single author is actually the result of a momentary crystallisation of many discursive events and voices" (p. 105). Conceiving of academic thinking and writing in this way, he contends, opens spaces in which the reader is moved from assumptions of meaning into deeper conversation with the text which question the meanings discovered by sharing alongside them, indeed wrapped within them, the stories and "crystallization of moments within an author's life which led to the appearance of the text" (p.105). Alongside the outputs of academic work, he suggests, we ought to include the stories and everyday moments in an author's multiple lives which brought the text into being.

Blades (2019) captures in his writing the experiences and everyday encounters that make his own learning visible, as he reads, writes and grapples with the need to reconceptualise his craft - science education - upon encountering Levinas 'unknowable Other'. His critique of Levinas is that Levina's work is helpful as we try to *be and become with* and *not grasp* the human Other – but is limited in that it makes no mention of how

we might apply this radical notion of alterity to the more-than-human. Both the human and more-than human are infinitely and always unknowable in their alterity and this leads him to question the very foundation of science education - the classification and demarcation of categories - the measuring of difference, normality and deficit. Blades' exposes the vulnerability of an academic untethered from the comfort of knowing, on a precipice, questioning the very epistemological and ontological foundations of their work, yet like Tsing's (2015) the vulnerability encountered is productive.

Blades draws on Llewelyn (1991) and Derrida (2008) to adopt a post-Levinasian approach to the Other in which the very notion of a *category* (predetermined by discursive knowing) is untenable and suggests we need to radically rethink the foundation of science education from a "practice of conquest, to a state of constant unknowing" (p. 112). This reimagining calls us into *be(com)ing with* in deep, ethical, listening relationships and offers opportunities to include within science education Indigenous onto-epistemologies which have always emphasized the inseparable connectedness of humans with Country. Blades chapter closes with the question, *what are categories?* and he invites the reader not to refuse categories but to reconceptualise them as 'useful fictions' which need to be 'held lightly in the recognition that they are, after all, open to change" (p.113).

Rethinking categories as 'useful fictions' brings to mind the neurodiversity movement which rethinks neurodivergence (Autism, ADHD, etc), as simply 'another way of being' rather than an Other way of being. One way of being amongst infinite possible ways of being. On the one hand, this supports conceiving of dis/ability as relational (disability as separate from neurological difference) and mutually implicates the abled in processes of dis/ablement. But on the other, it could be used to remove the structures and supports - the additional resources - that are mobilised in the name of inclusion, particularly in the context of disability, i.e., the National Disability Insurance Scheme

(NDIS), Kindergarten Inclusion Subsidy (KIS), Inclusion Development Funding (IDF) etc. Without care, rethinking categories could lead to the erasue of positive, affirmative dis/abled identities and inadvertently, undo the important and successful work which disability advocates have achieved in the last few decades to secure equity funding in Early Childhood Education and Care - predicated as these economic supports are on notions of individual deficit and need.

7.3 Concluding thoughts and possibilities for theory-practice

From the outset in this project, I grappled with how to approach and respectfully engage with the categories of difference which abound in traditional narratives of inclusion and disability and the dominant developmental discourses of early childhood education. With the teachers at Bush Kinder I noted how dominant developmental discourses were used to discuss and reflect upon the children's learning and ways of being, doing and knowing. But that deference to these universalist ways of thinking did not go unchecked and unchallenged. There seemed to be a knowledge both between the educators and at times amongst the parents that developmentalism, as a narrative apparatus, was useful and at times necessary to navigate the support systems available, wrapped up as they are in normative, neoliberal outcomes. Neo-liberal policy settings currently dominate early childhood education, rationalising investment in intervention and quality for their capacity to deliver high economic and social returns in the future (Iorio and Yelland, 2021). Neoliberalism relies heavily on child development and human capital theories which perpetuate deficit narratives *about* children while justifying and rationalising economic investment in early learning with "little or no recognition of the important part that young children play in their communities and beyond" (p.8) in the here and now. At Bush Kinder, I encountered a consciousness of that friction - a recognition that ableist and normative conceptions and categories (particularly to do with ideas about 'normal' developmental expectations and school readiness) produce

discursive effects which rub-up against the ethical and political imperatives of figuring children as capable citizens of the now (Rinaldi, 2006).

Categories and binaries were present but also resisted by the teachers: able/disabled, delayed/typically developing, Autistic/neurotypical, boy/girl. I added to these in the pedagogical narrations: subject/object, teacher/student, adult/child, child/parent, researcher/participant. These frictions and the teacher's vulnerabilities in terms of their capacity to disrupt this type of binary thinking, were even more present as they grappled with coming alongside First Nations knowledges and more-than-human others as I have explored in chapters 3 and 4.

Conceiving of categories in education as 'useful fictions' (Blades, 2019) makes them lighter. That which keeps me awake at night - decisions about how to frame, situate and theorise dis/ability, my positionality and this inquiry more broadly - feel more manageable. Frictions like: Am I creating normative and exclusionary conditions if I am interested in dis/ability? Is it even possible to discuss such categories from a post foundational perspective? Is it possible to de-centre humans in a study concerned with dis/ability? Reconsidered, as 'useful fictions' such categorises do not have to define or seek to know, but can remain instead mere fictions, forever unknowable and infinitely open to interruption and change.

Chapter 8 Concluding Thoughts: Opening to Possibilities

Each of the preceeding pedagogical narrations includes a generative analysis in which ideas and experiences are read through theory and critique to complexify thinking and generate small, situated knowledges. Key elements of these narrations are brought together in this chapter - not to provide definitive *answers*, *strategies or solutions* but to synthesize, summarise and critically analyse the knowledges created. This inquiry has:

1. Complexifed disability, inclusion and Bush Kinder using relational onto-epistemologies
2. Amplified the experiences of neurodivergent and dis/abled children,
3. Explored the possibilities for doing 'disability' and 'inclusion' differently and storying dis/ability otherwise with Bush Kinder.

The discussion that follows, however, should by no means be considered a definitive conclusion. It is but one interpretation, as prone to reimagining questions as attempting to find their resolution. In the spirit of imminent becoming (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1988), I consciously refrain from offering finite conclusions however practical this discussion may be for those interested in engagement across difference and the pedagogical complexities of living well with others in inclusive, response-able and co-participatory futures (Haraway, 2016).

8.1 The importance and limitations of story

Haraway (2016) reminds us "it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with… It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories" (p.12). Paying particular attention to the situatedness and relationality of knowledges produced through story, she advocates for holding scientific knowledges alongside other ways of knowing, being and doing. Holding both, all, these stories together brings to the fore relationality, indeterminacy, embodied entanglement and the intra-active (Haraway, 2019). Stories like the pedagogical narrations you have just encountered, she suggests, need to be

brought alongside scientific knowledges, not as secondary or 'less than' but side-by-side so that both are regarded as actual ways of knowing - an example of "which stories story stories in which both stories story stories and another story emerges if we're really lucky" (For The Wild, 2019).

This is enacted here by holding developmental and neurological knowledges *about* children and disability and scientific knowledges *about* nature, alongside while we encounter dis/ability as relational and inclusivity and nature as a broader entanglement of the human, more-than-human and material. Not to replace biomedical and developmental ways of knowing, but to story disability otherwise. These small stories represent ethical possibilities (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015) which Lather characterises as "the science that is possible after critiques of science" (Lather, 2016, p.129). In which new researcher subjectivities and attunement to other materialities create situated knowledges, so that what "becomes thinkable is a science that grows out of practical engagement with the world within a different ontology of knowing" (Lather, 2016, p.129).

It's no coincidence that Indigenous worldviews and their relational ontologies also emphasize the importance of story. Story and Songlines are oral narratives, which retain and transmit embodied knowledges of First Nations people (Neale & Kelly, 2020), are central to understanding First Nations sovereignty and custodial relations with Country, as well as First Nations people's connectedness to and inseparableness from place in Australia. While non-Indigenous stories are not the same, Karen Martin (2016) emphasizes the importance of non-Indigenous Australian's 'coming alongside' these relational ways of knowing, being and doing through story (Martin, 2016).

Autistic teenager Dara McAnulty (2020) also reminds us that stories are important, particularly as we encounter/re-encounter our inseparableness from nature. McAnulty re-makes lost connections to more-than-human characters through story,

forging pathways for deeper understanding of other ways of being, thinking and engaging with the more-than-human. He acknowledges that story has always been the medium for those connections - even if today they may sometimes seem lost to us “they remind us that we're not separate from nature but part of it” (p.45).

It is not my intention to replace developmental, neurological or scientific ways of knowing about disability or learning in and about nature, but rather to attune to other possibilities, other ways of being and thinking with. Storying these encounters otherwise creates small, situated knowleges which complement and complexify scientific ways of knowing these phenomena. That is to say that each point of this discussion is conscious of the impossibility of offering anything more than small, situated, non-conclusive truths amongst a range of possible interpretations. The scale of the knowledges created here are deeply situated within these particular relations and relationships, these rich ‘everyday’ encounters and multi-layered writing moments. The interpretations of and thinking with theory is fluid and dynamic and open to change and diffractive re-thinking. The possibilities created are intimately entangled with, indeed inseparable from my own experiences, emergent knowledges and ways of *be(com)ing with* the world. These practices - writing as a method, pedagogical narration and thinking with theory - are open to all teachers and students who position themselves alongside, as activist-practitioner-researchers.

This chapter includes provocations and further questions. To borrow from Pacini Kechabaw et al (2015) these are intended as ‘opportunities for opening to other possibilities’ (p.143). They are drawn from the pedagogical narrations as well as the ‘unexpected’ encountered along the way and acknowledge that research, as a practice and an embodied way of being with and of the world, has no end and is never finished.

8.2 Complexifying Bush Kinder with relational onto-epistemologies

Bush Kinder is at once conceptualised as a program or educational project, a community, a philosophy and a Place. As an educational project and learning community it enacts (both implicitly and explicitly) a number of philosophical, political, ethical, pedagogical, epistemological and ontological positions. These include reconfigured images of the child as both capable rights holders and citizens of the now; the child as deeply connected to - though ontologically separate from - nature; developmental knowledges as only one way of understanding and configuring the child and conceptions of ability and capability as deeply relational. Pedagogically, the teachers foreground reflective companionship with each other and the children and emphasize the importance of relationships and time through slow, intentional pedagogies. They disrupt normative and deficit discourses regarding diverse abilities, gender, school readiness and quality, and foreground First Nations relational ontologies to create a deep learning ecology inclusive of people and Place.

Putting pedagogical narration to work as a creative and analytic research method as I have done here, allows for a critical rethinking of moments of pedagogical encounter at Bush Kinder through the critical lenses of post foundational theories which attune to the social and material entanglements of common worlds (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2010). This critical and diffractive reading demonstrates how reconceptualised images of the ‘child as capable’ at Bush Kinder are necessary but not sufficient for understanding the complexity of children’s entangled *relations with* their human, more-than-human and material others as we see in each of the pedagogical narrations.

Thinking with theory - particularly common worlds perspectives and relational onto-epistemologies in which children-adults-animals-materials-place are *relationally entangled* not just *in relationship* - offers generative possibilities for critique and disruption of binaries in the stories we tell to tell other stories with. Here the pedagogical

narrations make visible opportunities to reconceptualise dominant and binary ways of thinking about children and nature, disability and inclusion.

Enacting relational onto-epistemologies

The focus on *relationships* (between separate and discreet human subjects) rather than *relations* (all that we are entangled with) in the teacher's conceptualisations of Bush Kinder, may function to limit the capacity for conceptualising children and humans more broadly as part of nature, not separate from it. Each of the teachers and all of the parents emphasized and did not trouble an image in which children are deeply and 'naturally' and romantically connected to (though ontologically separate from) nature and with that, more-than-human others.

In this way *place*, though it contains things that are 'alive', is not explicitly considered 'lively', i.e., made up of material and human actants with agency, in the teacher and parent's conception of the program (Arndt & Tesar, 2016; Barad, 2003; Blaise et al., 2017; Haraway, 2016; Kind, 2013; Lenz Taguchi, 2011). Although there were emerging, beginning understandings of these ideas. Bush Kinder as *a place*, though highly valued, loved and regarded was still conceived of as somewhat separate from (though deeply connected with and important to) humans. The connectedness between humans and nature as well as place was acknowledged – particularly in reference to First Nations 'interconnectedness' with Country as we saw in chapter 5, to which I will return in more detail in a moment.

At the time of the interviews, I had some theoretical resources to unpack the subtle ontological and epistemological differences in these conceptions with the teachers (relationships vs relations, entanglement, matter as object vs matter as lively subject) but at the time, this felt uneasy or a little peripheral. I was unsure how those threads would weave back in or how to interrogate them more consciously with deeper understanding. I may have uncovered quite different responses with different provocations. At that time

however, my confidence thinking with these theories and was only just emerging and I was not able to interrogate more dominant material discursive conceptions or come alongside them with the depth and confidence I would now. At the time, one of the teachers had begun explorations using a Deleuzian rhizomatic lens and was beginning to conceive of relations and entanglement with place as we see in chapter 7.

In conversation, the teachers reiterated that there were different narratives to be engaged depending on the audience i.e. developmental knowledges etc (Moss, 2019; Moss et al., 2000) They clearly identified that 'benefits' and 'nature connection' narratives are important for engaging with families, authorities and media – particularly in the context of rebalancing concerns with 'perceived risk'. While thinking which aligns more closely with First Nations ontologies of Country - human connectedness with and inseparableness from Place - were more commonly and tentatively explored in professional discussions and while relating with one another.

One of the teachers recounted a story as a way of explaining his desire to think with but not appropriate First Nations ways of knowing and being with place. The story was about an elder who visited the program and as they walked past one of the eucalyptus trees the elder took a leaf and held it, turning it over in their hand, crushing and breathing in the oil. When the teacher's eyes lingered the elder said something to the effect of 'just saying hello'. It was this relating and communicating *with* Country that the teacher sought to understand as relationship with Place - not as an outside Other - but as a relation to whom one would and should always say hello. Great care was taken in the teacher's storying of this moment not to appropriate that relation or take it for their own but to try and foreground those ways of thinking and being as a perspective from which to respectfully start to listen and learn.

The tension evoked through these opposing 'connection' narratives is stark. One is emphasizing the 'naturalness' and connection of (predominantly non-Indigenous)

children to stolen land and the benefits of that connection for their own health, development, social and emotional wellbeing. While the other is emphasizing an awareness of and desire to reconcile the dislocation and dispossession of First Nations people from Country - an ongoing rupture of First Nations connectedness which began with colonisation and has continued to disrupt the spiritual and physical health and wellbeing of First Nations people and their own children for generations.

This tension goes to the very heart of critiques of nature kindergarten pedagogies. Relating with care and foregrounding First Nations relational ontologies (or ways of knowing *through* being) while taking care not to appropriate them is an integral part of educating children on Country in Australia and elsewhere around the world. To respectfully learn from and foreground First People's perspectives and ways of knowing, being and doing with Country is a key challenge for current and future early childhood practitioner-researhcers.

As Taylor and Pacini Ketchabaw (2019) remind us the cultural politics of settler environmental stewardship and the assumption that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people might automatically share an understanding about 'care for land', risks ignoring and/or silencing diverse cultural understandings of the nature/culture divide (or lack thereof). The importance of creating the time and space for slow pedagogies in early childhood education and stories which support the respectful development and exploration of Place relations for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and educators in Victoria, and globally, cannot be overstated.

Doctor and Aunty Sue Atkinson Lopez's (2017) 'possum skin pedagogy' seeks to bridge the gap between First Nations and non-Indigenous early childhood educator's practices to address past failed attempts, tokenistic and one-off tourist efforts at 'inclusion' by non-Indigenous educators. For Atkinson Lopez (2021) 'foregrounding' First Nations knowledges, means positioning non-Indigenous educators as learners

journeying under the cultural guidance of First Nations elders and community to understand the cultural importance of narratives and practices and the wider complexities of respectfully navigating reconciliatory relations with people and Country. She emphasizes the importance of "building relations and consulting with local First Nations communities; recognizing oneself as a learner; being aware that some topics must be delivered only with involvement of a member of the local First Nations community and seeking out and acknowledging cultural and intellectual property rights by only using resources that are constructed by or in partnership with your local First Nations community" (p.9).

While I was with Bush Kinder in 2019, I did not imagine the extent to which relations with First Nations relational ontologies and ways of knowing and thinking *with* Country would emerge in the writing. While this was not an oversight - I had a broader intersectional understanding of equity and inclusion – I wanted to focus quite specifically on dis/ability and amplifying diverse experiences in the literature. Nonetheless, this means I did not always probe deeply enough in the interviews or informal discussions with teachers. I did not always foresee the extent to which everyday moments of acknowledgement, questioning, conscious uncertainty and trepidation that the teachers expressed about educating children on Country would come to the fore, nor more specifically, it's connection to the inquiry. While I knew that the teachers who founded the program were inspired by the fact that First Nations people had always educated children on Country, I did not probe the depths of their connections with local elders, the knowledges and understandings which informed their concerns to tread a respectful path foregrounding First Nations knowledges without appropriating them.

Foregrounding First Nations knowledges and perspectives

There was a strong acknowledgement in the storying practices of the teachers and children that First Nations people have been educating children on Country forever.

In chapter 5, we see teachers story Place in terms of it being Wurundjeri-Woiwurrung Country not as a static historical, past reality but integrally entangled with the present, as well as possibilities for reconciliation in the future. This emphasis foregrounds Indigenous worldviews and relational ways of knowing - relating with Country through season and story in deep time - not to teach content or culture but to highlight historical injustices and pastpresent (King, 2004) colonial inheritances "*who was here first*? *What do they do?*" and learn from these perspectives to inform future actions and relations. This was shared through the community journal to make this orientation visible to families and visitors so that they might also situate themselves as learners on Wurundjeri Country. Through formal Acknowledgements of Country, everyday storying, slow pedagogies and diffractive thinking, the teachers acknowledged their privilege to be working, playing, and being with unceded lands, skies and waterways.

The fact that the children, families and teachers are predominantly from relatively affluent, working or middle-class, non-Indigenous Australian backgrounds represents a larger tension in postcolonial race relations and 'on-going settler colonialisms' (Nxumalo, 2019, p.iii) in Australia, in which non-Indigenous children, particularly in early childhood education are privileged with opportunities to learn language and learn on Country that are not as often afforded (indeed, were historically violently denied) to First Nations children. Bush Kinder is open to critiques levelled at place-based approaches - that non-Indigenous claims to connections with place are neo-colonialisms in which non-Indigenous educators "reinscribe settler connections to Indigenous Land" (Nxumalo, 2019, p.9). One of the teachers from this team felt that inequity acutely and while it is not my story to tell, has spent time working with First Nations teachers and children in recent years to learn from and come alongside these perspectives (Martin, 2016).

In thinking with post foundational and socio-material onto-epistemologies in the pedagogical narrations, I have sought to trouble these threads and disrupt the silences

and erasures of both diverse abilities *and* First Nations place relations in dominant child nature connection narratives. Without colonising Indigenous ontologies and worldviews, I have attempted to bring these perspectives alongside as I thought with other western relational onto-epistemologies. The teacher's slow pedagogies (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017; Clark, 2021; Iorio et al., 2020) inspired *being and thinking with* Place (Iorio et al., 2020) rather than learning 'about' nature and while this was not explicitly an attempt to decolonise their practices, it inspired in the pedagogical narrations an attunement and connectedness with materials and a relatedness with more-than-human others, which informed my attempts to question the political and ethical relations of these encounters. I have sought to reconceptualise and re-present Place in a way which foregrounds but does not appropriate First Nations perspectives within my writing practices by thinking with post humanist, new materialist and post foundational ethico-onto-epistemologies which similarly seek to disrupt an assumed nature/culture binary and human exceptionalism/superiority (Hultman & Taguchi, 2010; Lenz Taguchi, 2011; Malone, 2016a). While common critiques of post humanism include it's preoccupation with the Anthropocene and the extent to which that ignores the respectful, reciprocity of First Nations relations with Country, the process of thinking with these theories while writing the pedagogical narrations (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017; St. Pierre, 2021a, 2021b) has created a space for thinking with Place and matter as lively - more than just a neutral backdrop (Nxumalo, 2019). As a non-Indigenous researcher this has been an attempt to respectfully explore relational ontologies without assuming that as a non-Indigenous person I can ever truly 'think with' First Nations worldviews.

Pedagogical narration has been put to work here as a creative and analytical research practice. It supports attuning to the "weight of the material" (Lather, 2016, p. 129) and the colonial. It is clear from the pedagogical narrations, particularly *Crystal Says Yes* that some of the teachers were considering the entangled, embodied, ethical

and political relations with both human and more-than-human others, and their capacities to foreground First Nations perspectives - though they did not necessarily unpack these so explicitly. Importantly, children's own conceptions of their relations with Place, the material and the more-than-human were conceived of as entangled and *relational* as we see in the pedagogical narrations. It would be interesting to see whether and how this emergent conceptualisation has taken shape since those early lines of flight (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1988). I look forward to further research, which explores these perspectives with children-teachers and more-than-human others, as well as future research written by Indigenous, neurodivergent and dis/abled authors who experienced these programs as children.

The slow, intentional pedagogies at Bush Kinder are driven by strong relationships with people and Place formed through deep sensory encounters, repeated anew over extended periods of time. However, they tended to ignore the potential for material agency and First Nations conceptions of the sentience of Place - rocks, waterways, trees, plants as lively. Diverse First Nations relational ontologies, as writers like Robin Wall Kimmerer (of the Canadian Potawatomi nation) and Tyson Yunkaporta (of the Apalech clan in Cape York, Australia) remind us, disrupt the ontological separation of humans and more-than-human others. Wall Kimmerer points out the English language limits our capacity to describe other beings as anything but an 'it'. She asks us to imagine how we might respond incredulously to a child calling their grandmother an 'it' but expect this of them when relating with other elders – including animals, trees and rocks. Like Yunkaporta (2019), Wall Kimmerer (2003, 2021) echoes the suggestion that rocks hold the earth's stories. Thinking with Indigenous onto-epistemologies and conceptions of relatedness asks us to attune to the 'being-ness' and 'personhood' of all living things because "ways of being in the world cannot be told by data alone" (Wall Kimmerer, 2021, p. 6).

The post qualitative methodolgy enacted through pedagogical narration in this inquiry has creatively explored and listened with human and more-than-human participants brought together in moments of everyday encounter at Bush Kinder. I have taken care to try and do so without anthropormorphising or appropriating First Nations knowledges. In the pedagogical narrations I have attuned to, reconsidered and reconstructed relations with rocks and water to make visible where anthropocentric humanist ontologies and worldviews dominate non-Indigenous thinking. This is not done to appropriate Indigenous ways of knowing through being, but to extend and broaden my own thinking from relationships to *relations*. Doing so prompts consideration of more-than-human time scales. Attunement to the timescales of trees, mosses and rocks through the storying of Place, as encountered in the work of Yunkaporta (2019), Massey (2019) and Wall Kimmerer (2021) invite us to shed the thinking that human-timescales are the only timescales available. This is important now more than ever. Confronting the climate emergency depends upon it. Relationships and time were central to the ways teachers and parents conceptualised and storied inclusivity at Bush Kinder. In the pedagogical narrations I have extended this to consider how other ways of being, doing and knowing might shift our gaze relationally and temporally as we amplify the ways children with diverse abilities experience the Bush Kinder program.

8.3 Complexifying disability and inclusion through a relational lens

While teachers at Bush Kinder tended to emphasize *relationships* (separate but connected individual subjects) between children, teachers and parents rather than *relations* (entangled inseparable subjects-objects). It was interesting that ability and disability were largely conceptualised as *relational.* In chapter 6, teachers conceive of their own and children's abilities as fluid and relational – changed and changeable with different *ways of being in, with and of the world.* These ideas tended to dominate the teacher's conceptions of dis/ability.

Their discomfort with ‘readiness’ and ‘quality’ discourses attested to their commitment to unsettling developmentalism and it’s inevitable framing of difference as deficit, as we see in chapters 4 and 5. Dis/ability was understood, though not explicitly articulated, through a relational model or lens (Cologon, 2012, 2014, 2016; Mackenzie et al., 2016). The potential for adults, other children and ‘the environment’ - as well as collective and individual ways of knowing, being and doing - to both enable and disable, to both create and remove barriers to being and doing was understood and quite explicit as we see in each of the pedagogical narrations.

In contrast to a biomedical or social model of disability, in a social relational model, disability is not characterised as an individual or societal deficit but is itself fluid and relational. Ability is affected by and able to affect, the ways we think, be and do with others. It is in these *ways of thinking, doing and being-with* that dis/ability is co constituted, performed, produced and re-produced. Barad (2007) questions how orienting to such a relational conception of dis/ability changes our ability to respond inclusively from a place of mutual belonging.

Response-ability, the ability to respond “ethically and politically from a place of uncertainty” (Iorio et al., 2020, p.2), instead of seeking to know the Other (Blades, 2019; Lévinas & Hand, 1989) through predetermined subjectivities and categories, involves sympoesis - making and ‘becoming with together’ (Haraway, 2016; The Critical Lede, 2017). Haraway reminds us that we each have the power to render another capable and be with them, do with them and think with them in ways that render them (more or less) capable. While this doesn’t erase individual difference and should not diminish the experience of dis/abled identity, it acknowledges the experience of dis/ability as relational and opens the way for thinking of inclusivity as relatedness (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2019). Inclusivity as relatedness means going beyond a preoccupation with how those deemed to belong should include those who are different (Taylor, 2013) and

demands a relational rethinking of disability beyond the deficit models of developmentalism. It requires us to story disability otherwise and amplify the lived experiences of those with dis/ability themselves as I have done here in the pedagogical narrrations.

Development: Only one lens through which to imagine the child

A relational model of disability dominated the collective conception of how to live and relate well across difference at Bush Kinder. However, this is not to suggest that developmental ways of *knowing about children* were not understood or utilised. Indeed, developmental lenses, discourses and narratives were deployed, through conversation, in dialogue and documentation. However, developmental lenses were just one way, among multiple possible ways of knowing. The teachers in this study enacted an ethico-political response-ability in which developmental lenses could be applied but were not relied upon as the singular frame from which to view difference. Ability in this conception was temporally, spatially and *relationally* situated. The idea that difference need not equal deficit was explicitly articulated in the teacher's professional discussions as well as their conversations with families, children and researcher (see chapter 6). This re-imagining of abilities as relational opens possibilities for resisting the colonising gaze of categories (Robin Wall Kimmerer, 2016) and their natural corollary – normative, deficit discourses.

Unsettling normative discourses

Normative dicourses concerned with ability, readiness, quality and gender were consciously unsettled in this inquiry. While parents tended to lean more unconsciously into dominant and normative narratives particularly with regard to gender and ability (as we see in chapters 3 and 4) the teachers engaged in continual collective dialoguing and provocation, when these taken-for-granted assumptions surfaced in conversation and

story. Their critical storying of difference disrupted these narratives wherever possible as we see in each of the pedagogical narrations.

This is perhaps best summarised in the shared conception of 'reflective companionship' amongst the teachers and educators which I reconfigure as diffractive companionship (see chapter 4). This way of being together, dwelling together and 'making with' through slow pedagogies – noticing, walking, sensing, reading place, listening with (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017), enacts a political and ethical space in which the desire to challenge and be challenged in everyday pedagogies a measure of quality. As Moss (2019) suggests this activates an 'alternative narrative' of quality - one far more respected by this learning community than any external, disembodied or instrumental measure of quality like the National Quality Standard (Arndt & Tesar, 2016; Dahlberg et al., 1999; Moss, 2019; Moss et al., 2020; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., no date). For Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., (no date) this is just how quality ought to be reconceptualised - as a 'constant doing' which engages with everyday contingencies which emerge "differently and every day, through and within the pedagogical processes (p.2). In chapter 4 I extend this concept to diffractive companionship, as the knowledges created in these moments come not from standing at a distance and seeking sameness but from "direct material engagements with the world" (Barad, 2007, p. 49) which values difference.

Slow, embodied pedagogies in deep time

The desire to disrupt and challenge normative narratives of quality and high returns (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Moss, 2019) at Bush Kinder was as much about eschewing positivistic and regulatory discourse as it was about slowing down and attuning to the ways that children always already make meaning with their worlds. While the teachers did not explicitly characterise their slow intentional pedagogies - walking, sensing, dwelling, noticing and reading Place - as becoming attuned, or learning to be affected (Latour, 2004, p.206) in material encounter. Their everyday conversations and

wonderings with one another were deeply attuned to ‘more than cognitive’ (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2019) sensorial and affective relations – the small everyday ways that children’s bodies moved and were moved by materials - rocks, water, plastics, glass, debris as well as plants and creatures.

The pedagogical narrations explore my own more-than cognitive modes of attention to these relations (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2019). In the pedagogical narrations, I re-story teachers and children’s attunement to both micro and macro systems of change through these pedagogies. From teacher’s conceptions of their own and the children’s abilities and the ways these change over time and in relation with others, to Wurundjeri-Woiwurrung seasons and transformations in deep time - through death, decay and regeneration. The teacher’s intentionally slow pedagogies drew me in and forced me to notice and wonder and reflect in ways that changed my own thinking and made me question my own ways of being, doing and knowing as well.

In chapter 6, we see how walking together and boundary crossing with Creek, becomes embodied, slow and intentional pedagogy - a “subjective, provisional and uncertain form of meaning making” (Hamm, 2017, p.85). Children and teachers *read Place* and *attune to Creek*. They reflect on this moment in the context of pastpresents (King, 2004) - encounters in deep time in which past moments and previous experiences from months, and in the teachers case, even years before, are inseparable from and continue to inform this present moment now. Noticing together, children and teachers take in Creek’s muddiness, the ways stones and rocks have shifted, mosses that have grown or spread and become slippery. Water and her depths measured against gumboots and the words that Mum spoke this morning about getting wet today. The weight of the material - stones, waters, rocks, gumboots, leather boots, sticks, a tennis ball – slows us all down.

The ‘teaching’ in these moments is consciously, intentionally, far less instructional. Listening deeply, being called into connection, sensing, thinking and pondering (Hamm, 2017; Iorio, Hamm, et al., 2017). Asking and wondering, creating space and time for children’s decision making. Facing the consequences of those decisions together. Time and space for uncertainty and ‘not knowing’ for both children and teachers are highly valued in these slow intentional pedagogical practices of ‘being with’ (Clark, 2021; Haraway, 2016).

For teachers this was often enacted thorough freedom to wonder with children, not provide answers, or tell them what or where or how to be, but to encourage listening to their own collective ways of knowing, ideas for doing, theory-making and experimenting. It is through the teacher’s conceptions of ability in relation with Creek through these slow pedagogies that we get a sense of how ability and disability are conceptualised through a social relational model at Bush Kinder. Attuning to rhythms, flows and context over deep time, in relation to and connection with others is foregrounded (Yunkaporta, 2019).

These slow pedagogies (walking, sensing, noticing, reading place) are co-participatory. They render both adults and children capable (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017; Haraway, 2016). In the pedagogical narrations I extend this capability and agency by de-centering the human characters and attuning to the more-than-human and material which are always already present in these moments (Haraway, 2016). Yunkaporta (2016), describes his engagement with traditional processes of carving boomerangs as “an act of composition that preserves oral-culture patterns and ensures knowledge shared with [him] has longevity over deep time” (Yunkaporta, 2019, p.177). He points out that when we learn knowledge with or from others, that knowledge exists in the spaces in between us. The act of carving, he suggests, creates a thousand interconnected threads infinitely more complex than can be captured in the written word. In chapter 6, I

revisit the Creek encounter with children and teachers at Bush Kinder by carving a ceramic vessel using a rock from Bush Kinder to remake the ripples of the water surface in the clay body. Adding wax and a wick to make a candle for future gathering rituals. While drafting this chapter I re-encountered this motif once again through Aslanian's (2018) conception of diffraction as the ripples created when a pebble is dropped into existing ripples (Aslanian, 2018). These knowledges are small and situated their multiple threads working and reworking themselves through each layer of this manuscript.

This slow pedagogical engagement with deep time also surfaces when teachers story seasons with children through their understandings of Wurundjeri relations with the parklands. Children generate theories about how volcanic geological formations shape and form the textures of Gathering Rock - the same type of rock with which I carved the clay for the candle. Other material relations with found plastics and unearthed debris emphasize Bush Kinder's imperfections – it is not a romanticised, pristine Natural environment, it's damage and decay marks the colonial inheritances of multiple pastpresent lives.

8.4 Amplifying lived experiences of neurodivergent and dis/abled children

It matters which stories story stories and the stories we tell to tell other stories with (Haraway 2016). Here I have put post foundational, common worlds and new materialist perspectives (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2010, 2015) to work to listen deeply with the lived experiences of children with diverse abilities at Bush Kinder, most notably when their words and actions functioned to decentre themselves from the narrative and brought our collective awareness to their rich everyday encounters with materials (Water, Crystals, Stones, Rocks) and more-than-human others (Magpie, Ants, Trees) which matter most to them.

For Hohti (2016) educational researchers have for too long ignored the things which matter most to children in educational assemblages. Attuning to the politics of 'tiny

things' (Myers, 2015), highlights how that which can initially seem small and irrelevant can, if followed, make visible the messy, entangled, agentic and material connections through which children *know* through *being*. Here, I have trained my lens on those small things and matterings which seemed to matter most to children in their encounters with Bush Kinder – making visible the ways in which they *know through being and doing* - with crystal, with Tree, with Water, Ants or Magpie. In so doing I make visible the possibilitites for storying children, nature, ability and disability differently in educational research.

Of the more unexpected opportunities encountered through this research were the potentialities for rethinking participatory research methods and listening authentically to children in educational research (Nimmo & Molloy Murphy, 2021; Nimmo & Molloy Murphy, 2021). In gaining ethics approval and planning for data collection and generation with children with diverse abilities, I paid particular attention to how and which participatory methods would most authentically capture children's lived experiences and listen most intently to their perspectives. The first premise of the project - working with children considered vulnerable in the context of the ethical conduct of research *because* they have a diagnosed disability and/or developmental delay (National Health and Medical Research Council et al., 2007) necessarily focused my attention on pre-defined research methods and techniques for informed consent, assent, data collection, validation and reporting which would maintain the children's rights to participate in ways appropriate to their dis/abilities.

However, it became apparent within the first moments of being with children at Bush Kinder that while gaining assent was not an issue, many of the data collection methods and the foundations upon which they had been conceived needed to be rethought. From child led tours, to video recording and digital book making, the participatory methods I had envisioned were all slowly but surely peeled back,

reconsidered and refined. They were still facilitated but their limitations became clearly apparent (See chapter 2 and 4). Though I had a clear idea that 'voice was not enough' (Lundy, 2007; Lundy et al., 2011), being with children and attuning to the social and material ways in which they constituted and were constituted by the common worlds of Bush Kinder (Silova & Taylor, 2020; Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Giugni, 2012; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2019) made for a much richer experience, not only for the purposes of exploring the lived experience of Bush Kinder as an ethical encounter, but also for troubling my own and other dominant conceptions - of Bush Kinder in general, and 'disability' and 'inclusion' in particular. Troubling these aspects of research methodology and my own practitioner-researcher subjectivities enables opportunities for rethinking the methodological implications and limitations of participatory methods and child's rights discourses which ignore more-than-human sociality.

Methodological opportunities: re-thinking participatory methods

Attuning to the social and material relations children already have - with people, Place and more-than-human-others by following the ways they decentred themselves means paying close attention to the more-than-human sociality children are always already entangled with (Haraway, 2016). This onto-epistemological shift engenders a rethinking of the social and material relations of early childhood pedagogies. It moves us from a position of participatory methods in research to attending instead to *intra-active* entanglement. Writing pedagogical narrations in this inquiry made visible opportunities to re-encounter and re-imagine the centrality of relationships and time in early childhood education and extend these to explore relationality and temporality as well.

Post qualitative approaches in early childhood research (Lather, 2015, 2016) demand we *think with* a range of theoretical perspectives to complexify and complicate our inquiries. Here this brought to the fore new materialist (Hultman & Taguchi, 2010; Lenz Taguchi, 2009) and common worlds theoretical approaches (Silova & Taylor, 2020;

Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Giugni, 2012; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2019) in which human/more-than-human agency materialises “in complex encounters rather than located only in human individuals” (Rautio, 2013, p.396).

Researching with children in these everyday moments of encounter was illuminating. Rethinking what I thought I had known about the pedagogy of listening (Rinaldi, 2001) and attuning more deeply to the social and material affects of human and more-than-human relations (Lenz Taguchi, 2009, 2011) exposed the limits of participatory humanist research in Early Childhood Education and the limitations of humanism (Taylor & Giugni, 2012) for conceptualising dis/ability and inclusivity (see chapter 7).

As I re-storied these encounters outside the deficit lenses of developmentalism, I *listened with* the rich normality (Giamminuti, 2013 p.78) of intra-active, *co*-participatory multisensory everyday moments of experience, the “precious in the small, the meaningful in the invisible, the rich in the everyday” (p.78). What I had initially taken as a lack of environmental stewardship discourses and narratives at Bush Kinder was reconsidered. Was this actually the teachers and rangers rendering children capable (Haraway, 2016) in multiple other ways outside the strictures of developmentalism and the colonising gazes of ‘Developmentally Appropriate Practice’? The teachers conceptualised play with found materials (particularly those dug out of the dirt and dust on Boomerang Hill) not as an opportunity to lean into humanist white saviour narratives which encouraged ‘recycling’ or ‘tidying’ the bush, but as an opportunity to see what children and *materials might do together*. Their approach inspired a desire to make visible the multiple ways in which children with dis/ability might be rendered more capable by de-centring them from our gaze and attuning to their multisensory capabilities, particularly their material, social and affective entanglements. This is one of the central ‘doings’ of this thesis. Choosing which *stories we tell to tell other stories with*

(Taylor et al., 2013), opens possibilities for doing disability and 'inclusion' differently and storying disability otherwise – against the dominant traditions of developmentalism. The lived experiences of dis/abled children in this study are not conceptualised through the lens of individual deficits and the benefits of nature or the program for overcoming, intervening and fixing them. Instead, this work makes visible and amplifies the multitude of ways in which children are rendered capable (Haraway, 2016, p.8) *with* Bush Kinder – *in relation with* each other, with materials, with Country, with colonial histories and inheritances. It attunes to the ways in which children and teachers *always already are capable* and highlights the ways that we can come to see that if we are prepared to listen a little differently. So, what possibilities does this re-imagining offer us? What are the possibilities for doing 'disability' and 'inclusion' differently with Bush Kinder in the context of multiple listening?

8.5 Possibilities for doing dis/ability and inclusivity differently

The possibilities I consider in this section reiterate the ways in which the discourses and narratives deployed in the nature kindergarten movement generally, are at times reinforced at Bush Kinder and how these might be recast for more inclusive and reconciliatory futures. These relate particularly to the extent to which assuming inclusion and equity by default and emphasizing benefit discourses reinforce the nature/culture binary and anthropocentric conceptions of inclusion – rendering it a solely humanist pursuit. These narratives, though well intentioned, impede a broader conception of more-than-human sociality and inclusivity.

Attuning to and making visible this relational, political and ethical reimagining of Bush Kinder (as a socio-material-discursive space in which difference need not equal deficit), offers both a generative critique and the potential for cultivation of more inclusive and response-able pedagogies. These are not necessarily suggestions for pedagogy,

either within Bush Kinder or beyond it, though they might inform our thinking and being with children and place in more response-able, co-participatory and intra-active ways.

Disrupting binaries: nature/culture, adult/child, able/disabled

Enacting an illusory imaginary in which nature is separate and disconnected from humans but should be utilised for the benefit of humans is a fundamental and yet almost sub-conscious ontological and epistemological assumption of the nature kindergarten movement. Nature connection narratives and 'nature play' pedagogies as they are popularly conceived reinforce the separate-ness of humans and nature, as I illustrate in the deconstruction of these discourses in chapter 3. This functions in multiple ways to render the child subject and contemporary childhood in deficit - prescribing romanticised, pristine Nature as the remedy (Taylor, 2013).

This study troubles the rich normality of everyday moments with Bush Kinder in which these generalisations are both present and absent and the ways in which they can be challenged in early childhood education. Here I have illustrated how pedagogical narration, thinking with and mobilising theory to complexify our everyday encounters makes visible what these assumptions *do* in our pedagogical decision and theory making with children. Consciously exploring other possibilities for *being, doing and knowing-with* means attuning to the social, material, colonial and discursive inheritances of contemporary childhoods in Australia.

Foregrounding relational ontologies and First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing support a reimagining of 'connectedness' and 'inclusion' which challenge the taken for granted assumptions of the nature kindergarten movement. Assuming that humans and nature are separate is actually a barrier to inclusivity in Bush Kinder. Not only a barrier to the extension of inclusivity to relational understandings of humans in general and dis/ability in particular, but also a barrier to a broader reconceptualization of

inclusivity as our ‘ability to respond’ (Haraway, 2016) - which extends moments of relational, ethical encounter to include consideration of more-than-human others as well.

Assuming a nature/culture binary reinforces anthropocentric conceptions of inclusion – rendering it a solely humanist pursuit. But inclusion is more than just a humanist pursuit. Myra’s response to me in *Magpie Our classmate*, helped to reconceptualise my ideas about the pedagogy of listening (Rinaldi, 2001). Illustrating how decentering the human allows for wider conceptions of inclusivity which make it hard to ignore wider questions of entanglement and other inter-sectionalities as well - with regard to gender, First Nations worldviews and inter-connectedness with Country and ability. While I could not see at the outset how decentering the human child to encounter Place as more than a neutral backdrop would weave back into the research, it became central in the process of writing.

A disposition for multiple listening and attentiveness (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017; Haraway, 2016) means ‘learning to be affected’ (Latour, 2004b) through slow pedagogies and paying attention to past/presents (King, 2004) and how they are entangled with multiple ethical and political relations in early childhood education. Central to this is thinking with theories that rethink ontology to reconceptualise matter as lively and humans and nature as entangled rather than separate and individual. Extending subjectivity (Roelvink, 2015) and agency to Place, to water, to rocks, to materials through pedagogical narration and conversation in early childhood education is central to thinking and re-thinking inclusive practices into *ways of being and doing* beyond the limitations of dominant binaries including but not limited to nature/culture, adult/child and ability/disability.

Rethinking the nature/culture binary means avoiding unconscious adoption of romantic re-connection and stewardship narratives in early childhood education. This includes recognising that instrumentalist ‘benefits’ discourses and ‘what works’

approaches are ableist and normative in orientation. In seeking to advocate for nature-based programs through claims of the benefits for children in general and children with diverse abilities in particular – we need to explicitly disrupt the ableist assumptions that function to erase and silence multiple and divergent ways of being, knowing and dwelling with Place.

Enacting inclusivity: Disrupting benefits discourses

Discourses that emphasise benefits of nature for humans are anthropocentric. They impede a broader conception of inclusivity and more-than-human sociality. While it is not my intention to argue that Bush Kinder is *not* beneficial, benefits discourses rely on normative, universalising knowledges about children's development. They unconsciously and unwittingly render the child and contemporary childhood in deficit. This positions nature as the salve for the ills of contemporary childhood in pursuit of the ultimate neoliberal outcome - normal, productive future citizens - ignoring the fact that neoliberalism itself is a bigger threat to the collective survival of both humans and the planet.

Benefits discourses, by their very nature, subscribe to the grand narratives of developmentalism in early childhood education, rendering difference as deficit. They are narratives of progress which render an image of the child as incomplete, as citizen of the future. This is quite at odds with the dominant reconceptualised images of children as capable, agentic citizens encountered at Bush Kinder and yet benefits discourses, when useful, are put to work here as well, despite the dominant conception of dis/ability as relational. Qualifying and paying attention to these narratives and how they are put to work is necessary for creating transparent discussions in education about what these discourses *do* in terms of limiting broader conceptualisations of capability and inclusivity.

8.6 Opening to possibilities

There is a deep historical and often unchallenged assumption in early childhood education of the naturalness of children's belonging *in* Nature (Taylor, 2013). It was the corollary of this assumed naturalness and the extension of this assumption - by default - that nature is a natural 'leveller' or 'equalizer' that I set out to trouble in this inquiry. I thought I *knew* at the outset that reconceptualised images of the child which render the child capable are paramount for defying deficit discourses in early childhood education. What I had not expected, was that rendering the other capable and extending this radical alterity to more-than-human others through new forms of response-ability, attentiveness and listening across difference, would make these other stories possible.

Towards consciously response-able pedagogies

Honing the response-ability (Haraway, 2016) to pay attention, to embody curiosity and be accountable to transparent dynamics of power in entangled, multisensory moments of encounter through pedagogical narration, activates new ways of storying disability otherwise. In this inquiry holding universalising knowledges alongside and attuning to the multiple ways in which diverse bodies dwell differently with place, opens possibilities for deep multisensory explorations of situated, relational ethics in which difference need not equal deficit. Dwelling with people, Place and the more-than-human over time, generates new curiosities and small, situated knowledges which make visible the ethics and politics of enacting a broader reconceptualisation of inclusivity as relatedness and response-able pedagogies in education which render ourselves and others capable in more agentic ways (Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Giugni, 2012).

In the fortnight prior to submission of this thesis the Victorian State Government committed $3.6M to support the establishment of 150 new Bush Kindergarten programs every year for the next 4 years. This exponential scale up means effectively doubling the

existing number of programs, which have taken a decade to establish, every year until 2026. Making the perspectives explored in this thesis accessible to the services, teachers, families and children who will be tasked with the enormity of that scale up could not be a more-timely contribution to early childhood education in Victoria. While I refrain from offering prescriptive solutions or definitive strategies, this thesis makes visible some of the orientations needed to ensure that scale up foregrounds First Nations perspectives and reconceptualises relations with Place to consider more than just the benefits for humans. Most importantly, it makes visible how we might reconceptualise disability and inclusion to disestablish ableism - paying particular attention to the different ways children dwell with Place differently.

Activist practitioner-researcher subjectivities

Knowing and knowledge are not static, graspable and unchanging, deposited into one's memory for safe keeping and infinitely retrievable in the same form, with the same meaning. We are not computers. Knowing and knowledge are situated and relational, encountered in space and time, in relation with others, events and circumstances. Our multiple subjectivities as practioner-researchers require that we think, and re-think, the politics and ethics and our capacities to respond in everyday moments of pedagogical encounter. Six pages into *Journeys*, Pacini Ketchabaw et al (2015) reiterate Rinaldi's (2006) conception of *relational* professional development, which encapsulates the idea of activist-practitioner-researcher subjectivities enacted in this thesis

> Personal and professional development, like education, should not be seen as static or unchangeable qualities, achieved once and for all, but rather as a process, an ongoing path that we follow from birth throughout our lives, now more than ever. Personal and professional development and education are something we construct ourselves in relation with others, based on values that

> are chosen, shared and constructed together. It means living and living ourselves in a permanent state of research. (p.137)

Drawing on Rinaldi's perspective, they re-conceptualise professional development as a transformative and disruptive means through which to *stay in motion,* journeying with others and challenging taken-for-granted pedagogical assumptions and approaches so that new (and multiple) ways of being, doing and knowing can emerge. They disrupt instrumental conceptions of the teacher as an all-knowing technician and the common, yet unhelpful conception of theory and practice operating separately from, and often in spite of each another. Open and dynamic practice, they suggest, necessitates further theoretical wondering. "At the same time, the creation of theories requires experimentation and extension through practice" (p.6). Post foundational onto-epistemological approaches turn away from instrumental, universal conceptions of the child, teacher, researcher, participant and Developmentally Appropriate Practice, advocating a deep critical and reflective engagement with everyday moments of meaning making and activist-practioner-researcher subjectivities. This involves bringing diverse onto-epistemological perspectives to bear and complexifying theory-practice. It has felt comforting in the final moments of writing this thesis to be able, once again, to reconcile myself to a permanent state of research - a simultaneous state of knowing and not knowing. That ambivalence has been with me such a long time and yet I encounter those threads anew each time. Relationality. Multiplicity. Complexity. I/we learn and re-learn over and over again, and each time it is a new encounter, a new entanglement, of subjectivities, Places, discourses, materials and perspectives. A new opportunity for diffractive companionship and meaning making. For that appears, to me at least, to be the nature of knowing and knowledge, and the experience of be(com)ing with the world.

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Appendix 1 – Plain Language Statement Kindergarten

Plain Language Statement: Kindergarten

Project title: Equity Case Study - Nature Kindergarten

Project investigator: Ame Christiansen

Introduction

My name is Ame Christiansen and I am a Doctor of Education Candidate at the University of Melbourne. I am undertaking a research project focusing on inclusion and equity in nature-based kindergarten programs like bush and beach kinder. The project aims to explore how teachers and families understand the nature program and plan for the individual learning needs of all children. I will be interviewing teachers and parents who would like to participate and will visit the children and teachers once a week over a ten-week period (one term) to observe their participation in the program. I am looking for a case study site with children participating with a diverse range of abilities including those with diagnosed additional needs and undergoing assessment. Documentation will be in the form of audio-recorded interviews, photographs, video, observations, child led tours and book making and informal conversations with teachers and children. The proposed dates for this project are Term 2, 2019. I would visit the kindergarten one day per week for 2-3 hours each visit for one term. The exact number of hours for each visit and which term are able to be negotiated with the kindergarten.

Who is conducting the research?

This research is being conducted by me, Ame Christiansen. I am a sessional academic at Victoria University in the Bachelor of Early Childhood and Primary Education. I have worked in early childhood inclusion support and disability support services for almost 15 years and have conducted consultation and engagement sessions using similar participatory methods with children as an

early years' planner in local government. The research will be conducted with the support of my supervisors, Associate Professor John Quay & Dr Daniela Acquaro in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne.

What is the research about, and what is it for?

I am interested in how teachers and families understand the nature kindergarten program and work together to ensure all children participate in the program. Nature kindergarten programs are an exciting and relatively new innovation in Australia and at the moment there is little research about the experiences of children, teachers and families in these programs or how teachers and families plan for and facilitate the inclusion of all children in these new practice settings. The project aims to understand more about nature-based programs in Australian early childhood education, identify how teachers and families plan for individual learners and key factors that facilitate participation, as well as any challenges encountered.

What will the service be asked to do?

The research project is a case study of equity and inclusive practice in one nature kindergarten program. I will visit the program one day per week for one term as a non-teaching participant observer in [2018 or 2019]. The service Director and leadership team will be asked to consider whether their site is appropriate site for a case study on equity and inclusion. The focus of the case study is on planning for all children not only those with additional needs. No children will be singled out during the research activities, however, the participation of children with a diverse range of abilities is necessary. If the service does have children enrolled with cognitive or intellectual disabilities there may be additional information their parents/guardians need to consider due to additional ethical requirements under the National Statement on the Ethical Conduct of Research (Section 4.5). If this is the case, additional information will be provided for these parents/guardians to ensure they can make an informed decision and are aware that their participation is very valuable and is totally voluntary and there will be no adverse impact on them or the service if they

decline. The PLS and Parent/Guardian consent forms for children's participation will be left at the centre for all parents/guardians to read and if desired provide consent to their child's participation.

What will the Teachers/Educators and Director be asked to do during the project?

Teachers/Educators and Directors are invited to participate in a 45minute interview. This is voluntary. It will be audio recorded and significant statements that will be used in the project will be forwarded to the participant to check or change if desired, alternatively participants can opt to meet again for a follow up interview if preferred. The interview questions are focused on how teachers/educators and the director conceptualise the program and how it was developed. The focus of this research is not what individual children can and cannot do, I am interested in how you plan for all children in the program, factors that have facilitated participation and any challenges or barriers you have encountered. The interviews will be conducted at the kindergarten at a time convenient to the participant. Teachers will be asked to take 10 photos of the program which they think best captures the experience and we will meet again midway through the term to share and discuss these in another 45min interview. Teachers and educators will also be observed during the weekly visits to the program and engage in informal conversations which will be recorded in field notes.

What will parents be asked to do during the project?

Four parents/guardians selected by the Teacher/Director will be invited to participate in a voluntary 45minute interview based on who may have time to participate and/or a unique perspective with regards to inclusion and equity. The parent/guardian interviews will be audio recorded and significant statements that will be used in the project will be forwarded to parents/guardians to check or change if desired, alternatively they can opt to meet again for a follow up interview if preferred. The interview questions are focused on what

parents/guardians understand about the program and why they chose a kindergarten with a nature-based component for their child. The focus of the research is not on what individual children can and cannot do, I am interested in factors that have facilitated their child's participation in the program and any challenges or barriers encountered. The interviews will be conducted at the kindergarten at a time convenient to the parent/guardian or at another location of their choosing. It is possible for parents/guardians to consent to their child's participation in the research without participating in an interview themselves (these are included as separate consent forms).

What will children be asked to do during the project?

Should the service agree to be the case study site (and if parent/guardians and children also consent to being involved), children will be asked to participate in 2 main research activities

1. Children will be invited to take me on a "child-led tour" of the nature program and show me what it is like to participate in the program. They can choose to do this with a peer or in a small group if they would prefer. I will ask them to take a photo or I will take a photo for them that we could use to tell someone who had never been to the program what it is like. I will video record their tour.
2. Children will be invited to help me compile a book about the program, choosing one photograph (from all the child-led tour photos taken by children and 10 photos taken by the teacher) that best captures being in the program. I will compile these photographs and children's description of what is happening in the photo into a book which will be stored securely and only used for the purposes of this research project/not for publication or distribution.

All children at the service will be invited to participate in the activities, I will observe the program and participate in informal conversations with children and teachers over the ten-week period. However, data will only be collected and stored from those children with Parent/Guardian consent and child assent. Care

will be taken to ensure that those not participating in the research are not captured in any of the recordings. Any photographs or video in which children's faces or identifiable features are captured will be blurred/masked/pixelated in the thesis and any publications or presentations arising from the research.

I will be available to talk to the committee/staff team as required and will schedule a time to speak with Parents/Guardians at morning drop-off on a day decided by the service in case they would like further information.

What are the possible benefits?

The benefits of participating in the research include improving knowledge around nature kindergarten programs and ensuring children's diverse experiences of the program are captured in the research literature. There is currently a lot of popular support for bush and beach kindergarten programs. Exploring if and how they provide opportunities for all children to participate and documenting children's own experiences in these programs will ensure that services providing these programs can be evidence informed.

What are the possible risks?

There are limited risks associated with participation in the research. The risks for children are minimal as the research activities and questions have been designed to be familiar to them and do not focus on sensitive topics. Children will be free to opt out of the activities even if parents/guardians have given prior consent to their participation. Children's 'assent' to participate in each of the activities will be gained prior to the activity in the presence of their teacher/educator (they will be asked to point to yes or no on the child assent form attached prior to each activity) and they will be free to refuse, cease or withdraw from the activity at any time, which they can indicate with their words, physically (by shaking their head, or fist, or moving away) or just by showing disinterest.

Parents/guardians and teachers/educators and directors who consent to an interview will be asked questions about their experience of participating in the

program. There is a risk that some participants may become distressed at sharing information about their experience if it is sensitive to them. Before the interview begins I will provide participants with contact details of the support services below. If participants become distressed during the interview, I will:

1. Indicate that it is appropriate to cease the interview
2. cease the interview if you agree
3. spend time with you and provide assistance within the scope of my abilities, as appropriate
4. recommend that you contact one of the services listed below for professional support
5. follow up with you the next day to make sure you are alright and again provide the contact details of the professional support services below

Parent line (13 22 89) who provide qualified, anonymous, professional counselling support regarding any issues that impact parent/carer – child relationships. Parents can self-refer to this service on the number provided between 8am – midnight, Monday to Friday, every day, including public holidays. The only information you will need to provide is your postcode.

Carers Victoria advisory line (1800 242 636) who provide short term professionally qualified counselling services (up to 6 sessions) catered to the needs of carers of people with a disability. Carers can self-refer to this service on the number provided between 8.30 am - 5.00 pm Monday to Friday (except for public holidays) from anywhere in Victoria (free call from local phones, mobile calls at mobile rates). The service will ask for some identifying information including your name and contact details. The service appreciates a voluntary co-contribution, though this can be waived for those who are unable to pay.

Beyond Blue (1300 22 4636) Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All calls and chats are one-on-one with a trained mental health professional, and

completely confidential. Although you may be asked for your first name and some general details, you can let Beyond Blue know if you'd like to remain anonymous

Disclosure of Discrimination

Should any interview responses indicate that the kindergarten has contravened their legal obligations (directly, indirectly) under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 or the Disability Standards in Education 2005 (i.e., by excluding or secluding them). I will ask if participants would like assistance to discuss the issue with the most relevant authority (i.e., the kindergarten director or committee, Department of Education and Training or The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission - an independent statutory body that helps people with complaints regarding discrimination, sexual harassment, victimisation and racial or religious vilification. It provides a free dispute resolution service that aims to achieve results by mutual agreement).

Do I have to take part?

No. The service is being sought to self-select for participation, it is completely voluntary. We are looking for a service that is keen to document the work they are doing regarding equity in the nature program. The service would be able to withdraw from the research at any time without any adverse impact. Individual participants - teachers/educator/directors, parents/guardians and children would all be able to personally withdraw their consent or any unprocessed documentation at any time without adverse impact on them or their children, even if the site remained the case study site.

How will confidentiality be protected?

We intend to protect anonymity and the confidentiality of participant's responses to the fullest extent possible, within the limits of the law, in accordance with the Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988 and Victoria's Information Privacy Act 2000 (i.e., we will disclose information about a participant's responses only if we feel

that the health and safety of your child or another child is at risk). The information you provide will not be provided to the other participants. However, given the small sample size it may still be possible for some people to guess the service or participant's identity. In the final report, the service and all participants will be referred to by a pseudonym. We will remove any references to personal information that might allow someone to guess the identity of the service or individual participants. Photographs and videos that capture children's faces or other identifiable features will be masked/pixelated/blurred in the thesis and any publications/ presentation of the findings. On completion of the project, de-identified data will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet at Melbourne Graduate School of Education or in password protected data storage, in accordance with university policy.

How will I receive feedback?

Once the thesis arising from this research has been completed, a brief summary of the findings will be available to participants and will include a single page child friendly language version for children. It is also possible that the results will be presented at academic conferences and written up into journal articles.

Will participation prejudice us in any way?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should the service wish to withdraw involvement or individual participants wish to withdraw involvement at any stage, or to withdraw any unprocessed documentation supplied, you are free to do so without prejudice.

To ensure a supportive and inclusive environment, all children will be invited to participate in the activities, however data will only be collected from those children with Parent/Guardian consent and child assent.

How do I agree to participate?

If the service would like to be the case study site, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing (Director) the accompanying *Consent Form: Kindergarten Service* and return it to me.

Are there any potential conflicts of interest?

I am the secretary of the Early Childhood Outdoor Learning Network (ECOLN) – a not-for-profit, volunteer run network of educators who support and advocate for outdoor learning in early childhood education. While I will not gain directly, in-directly or financially from the outcomes of this research due to my affiliation with ECOLN, a potential conflict of interest may be perceived, so is disclosed here for your information.

Where can I get further information?

Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact myself or the project supervisors via information listed below

Associate Professor John Quay **(Principal Researcher)** **Ph**: (03) 8344 8533 **Email:** jquay@unimelb.edu.au	**Dr. Daniela Acquaro** **(Co- Researcher)** **Ph:** (03) 90354698 **Email:** d.acquaro@unimelb.edu.au	**Ame Christiansen** **(Student Researcher)** **Email:** achristianse@student.unimelb.edu.au

HREC: 1852552.1; **Date:** 1.8.18; **Version:** 1.1

Appendix 2 – Consent Form Kindergarten

Consent Form: Kindergarten

PROJECT TITLE: Equity Case Study – Nature Kindergartens

Name of Director:
Name of Preschool:
Investigator: Ame Christiansen
Research Supervisors: Associate Professor John Quay & Dr. Daniela Acquaro

1. I consent to this service participating in the project named above, the particulars of which have been explained to me. A written copy of the information has been given to me to keep.

2. I authorise the student researcher to use for this purpose audio recordings of interviews, photographs, observations and video of the program.

3. I acknowledge that:

   (a) The possible effects of the audio recordings of interviews, videos, photographs and observations created have been explained to me to my satisfaction;

   (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw the service's involvement from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied;

   (c) The project is for the purpose of a University of Melbourne, Doctor of Education Research Project;

   (d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information provided by participants will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;

1.

   (e) I understand any identifiable images will be masked for publications/reports/presentations;

   (f) I understand that the service and participants will be given a pseudonym in any reports arising from the project;

2.

   (g) I understand that given the small sample size it may still be possible for some people to guess the identity of the service or participants.

Signature Date

(Kindergarten Director)

HREC: 1852552.1; **Date:** 1.8.18; **Version:** 1.1

Appendix 3 – Plain Language Statement Parent Guardian

Plain Language Statement: Parent/Guardian for Child Participation
Project title: Equity Case Study - Nature Kindergarten
Project investigator: Ame Christiansen

Introduction

My name is Ame Christiansen and I am a graduate researcher at the University of Melbourne. I am undertaking a research project focusing on inclusion and equity in nature-based kindergarten programs like bush and beach kinder. The project aims to explore how teachers and families understand the nature program and plan for the individual learning needs of all children. I will be interviewing teachers and parents who would like to participate and will visit the children and teachers once a week over a ten-week period (one term) to observe their participation in the program. Your child's kindergarten has chosen to participate as a case study site because of the diversity of children in the nature program group. Documentation will be in the form of audio-recorded interviews, photographs, video, observations and informal conversations. The proposed dates for this project are Term 2 2019.

Who is conducting the research?

This research is being conducted by me, Ame Christiansen. I am a sessional academic at Victoria University in the Bachelor of Early Childhood and Primary Education. I have worked in early childhood inclusion support and disability support services for almost 15 years and have conducted consultation and engagement sessions using similar participatory methods with children as an early years' planner in local government. The research will be undertaken with the support of my research supervisors, Associate Professor John Quay & Dr Daniela Acquaro in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne.

What is the research about, and what is it for?

I am interested in how teachers and families understand the nature kindergarten program and work together to ensure all children participate in the program. Nature

kindergarten programs are relatively new in Australia and there is little research about the experiences of children, teachers and families in these programs or how teachers and families plan for and facilitate the inclusion of all children in these new practice settings. The project aims to help us understand more about nature-based programs in Australian early childhood education, identify how teachers and families plan for individual learners and key factors that encourage families to choose nature programs for their children, as well as any challenges encountered.

What will your child be asked to do?

Should you agree for your child to participate (and if your child also consents to being involved), your child will be asked to participate in 2 main research activities

1. Your child will be invited to take me on a “child-led tour” of the nature program and show me what it is like to participate in the program. They can choose to do this with a friend or in a small group if they would prefer. I will ask them to take a photo or I will take a photo for them that we could use to tell someone who had never been to the program what it is like. I will video record their tour.
2. Your child will be invited to help me compile a book about the program, choosing one photograph (from all the child-led tour photos taken by children and 10 photos taken by the teacher) that best captures the program. I will compile these photographs and children’s description of what is happening in the photo into a book which will be used solely for the purpose of this research project. The book will not be published or distributed.

All children at the service will be invited to participate in the activities, I will observe the program and participate in informal conversations with children and teachers over the ten-week period. However, data will only be collected from those children with Parent/Guardian consent and who give their own assent.

The teachers and director will put forward the names of a few parents to participate in an interview, please contact me if you would like to be interviewed. I will be available to Parents/Guardians at morning drop-off up on April 24 if you would like further information.

What are the possible benefits?

The benefits of participating in the research include improving our understanding of nature kindergarten programs and ensuring children's diverse experiences of the program are captured in the research literature. There is currently a lot of popular support for bush and beach kindergarten programs. Exploring if and how they provide opportunities for all children to participate and documenting children's own experience of these programs will ensure that services providing these programs can be evidence informed.

What are the possible risks?

There are limited risks associated with participation in the research. The risks for children are minimal as the research activities and questions have been designed to be familiar to them and do not focus on sensitive topics. Children will be free to opt out of the activities even if you have given prior consent to their participation. Your child's 'assent' to participate in each of the activities will be gained prior to the activity in the presence of their teacher/educator (they will be asked to point to yes or no on the child assent form attached prior to each activity) and they will be free to refuse, cease or withdraw from the activity at any time, which they can indicate with their words, physically (by shaking their head, or fist, or moving away) or just by showing disinterest.

Do I have to take part?

No. Participation is completely voluntary. You are able to withdraw from the research or withdraw your consent for your child's participation at any time without any adverse impact on yourself or your child. The participation of children with a diverse range of abilities is necessary. If your child does have cognitive or

intellectual disabilities, there may be additional information for you to consider due to additional ethical requirements under the National Statement on the Ethical Conduct of Research (Section 4.5). Please see the director for further information if this applies.

How will confidentiality be protected?

We intend to protect anonymity and the confidentiality of participant's responses to the fullest extent possible, within the limits of the law, in accordance with the Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988 and Victoria's Information Privacy Act 2000 (i.e., we will disclose information about a participant's responses only if we feel that the health and safety of your child or another child is at risk). We will remove any references to personal information that might allow someone to guess the identity of your child. The information your child provides will not be available to other participants. Given the small sample size it may still be possible for people to guess the identity of your child. In the final report, the service and all participants will be referred to by a pseudonym. Photographs and videos that capture children's faces or other identifiable features will be masked/pixelated/blurred in the thesis and any publications or presentation of the findings. On completion of the project, de-identified data will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet at Melbourne Graduate School of Education or in password protected data storage, in accordance with university policy.

How will I receive feedback?

Once the thesis arising from this research has been completed, a brief summary of the findings will be available to participants and will include a single page child friendly language version for your child. It is also possible that the results will be presented at academic conferences and written up into journal articles.

Will participation prejudice my child in any way?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw your consent for your child's involvement at any stage, or to withdraw any

unprocessed documentation you have supplied, you are free to do so without prejudice.

In order to ensure a supportive and inclusive environment, all children will be invited to participate in the activities, however data will only be collected from those children with Parent/Guardian consent and child assent.

How do I agree to participate?

If you would like your child to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying *Consent Form: Parent/Guardian for Child Participation* and returning it to the office.

Are there any potential conflicts of interest?

I am the secretary of the Early Childhood Outdoor Learning Network (ECOLN) – a not-for-profit, volunteer run network of educators who support and advocate for outdoor learning in early childhood education. While I will not gain directly, in-directly or financially from the outcomes of this research due to my affiliation with ECOLN, a potential conflict of interest may be perceived, so is disclosed here for your information.

Where can I get further information?

Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or my project supervisors via information listed below

Associate Professor John Quay **(Responsible Researcher)** **Ph**: (03) 8344 8533 **Email:** jquay@unimelb.edu.au	**Dr. Daniela Acquaro** **(Co- Researcher)** **Ph:** (03) 90354698 **Email:** d.acquaro@unimelb.edu.au	**Ame Christiansen** **(Student Researcher)** **Email:** achristianse@student.unimelb.edu.au

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Appendix 4 – Consent Form Parent Guardian

Consent Form: Parent/Guardian consent for child participation
PROJECT TITLE: Equity Case Study - Nature Kindergartens
Name of Parent/Guardian:
Name of Child:
Name of Preschool:
Investigator: Ame Christiansen
Research Supervisors: Associate Professor John Quay & Dr. Daniela Acquaro

4. I consent for my child to participate in the project named above, the particulars of which have been explained to me. A written copy of the information has been given to me to keep.

5. I authorise the student researcher to use for this purpose audio recordings of child led tours, observations, photographs and material artefacts created.

6. I acknowledge that:

   (a) The possible effects of the audio recordings of interviews, observations, photographs and material artefacts created have been explained to me to my satisfaction;

   (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw my child's involvement from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied;

   (c) The project is for the purpose of a University of Melbourne, Doctor of Education Research Project;

   (d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information my child provides will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;

   (e) I consent to the child-led tours being video-taped;

   (f) I consent to my child being photographed;

3.

   (g) I consent to my child's words and the images they choose being included in the children's book about the program and this will be used for the sole purpose of this research project and not published or distributed

   (h) I understand that my child will be anonymous, and that identifiable photographs and video will be blurred/masked/pixelated in any reports, presentations of publications arising from the project.

Signature _____ Date _____

(Parent/Guardian)

HREC: 1852552.1; **Date:** 1.8.18; **Version:** 1.1

Hello,
I'm Ame!

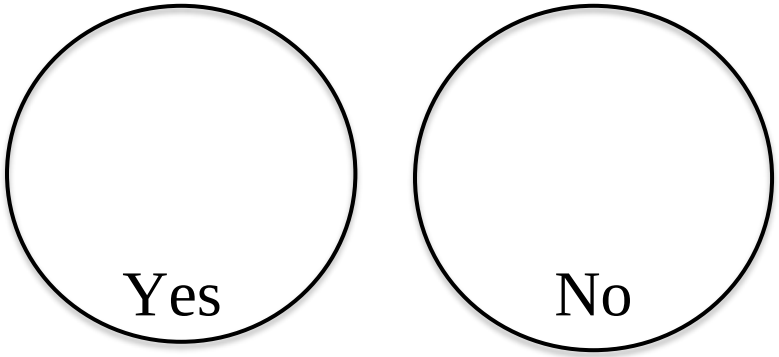
I'm coming to your preschool to learn about Bush Kinder

On Bush Kinder days each week, I'll be coming along so you can show me what it's like to be in the program. I will be taking photos and videos as you show me around and play in the program. In a few weeks, I'd love your help to make a book about the program. I wonder what you can tell me about it?

HREC: 1852552.1; **Date:** 1.8.18; **Version:** 1.1

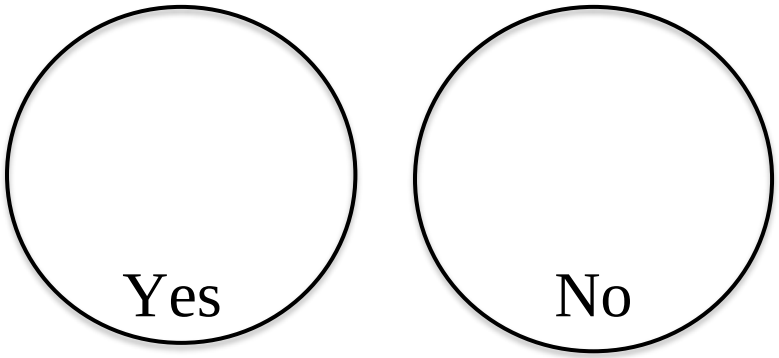
Assent Form – Child Led tour

Can you take me on a tour?

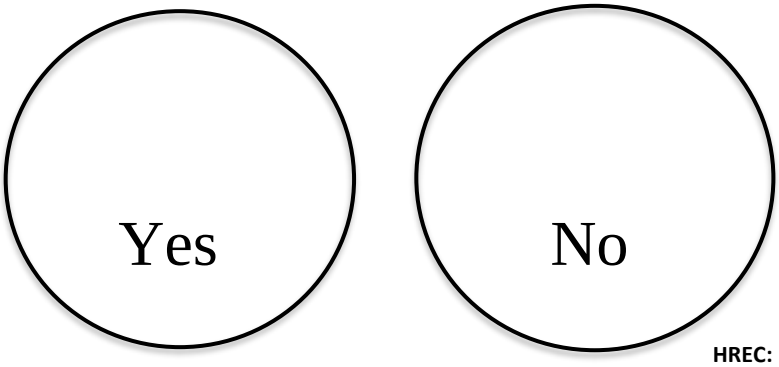


Name:

Can I video the tour?



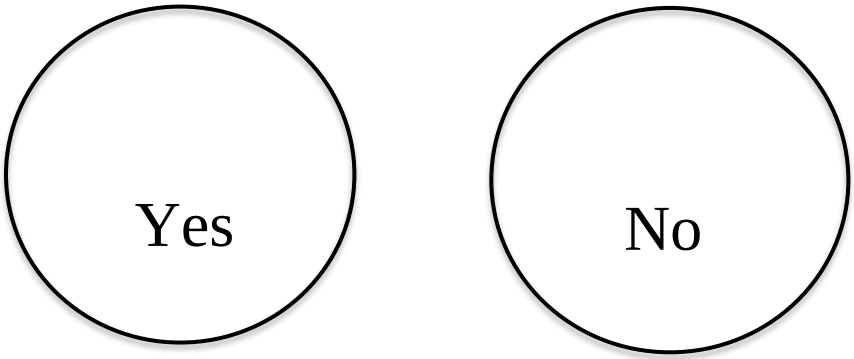
Can you take a photo for me to add to the book?



HREC: 1852552.1; **Date:** 1.8.18; **Version:** 1.1

Assent Form – Book Making Session

Can I add your photo and words to the book so I can remember them later?



Name:

HREC: 1852552.1; **Date:** 1.8.18; **Version:** 1.1

Footnotes

[i] A note on language. Language is fraught and it carries significant weight. Disabled people/people with disability/ies obviously do not share a singular or universal identity and have a right to define the language most comfortable for them. For clarity, I predominantly use identity-first language (e.g., Autistic, disabled, dis/abled person) though at times I do use person first language (e.g., child with a disability) depending on the context and whether or not a preference is indicated by the person themselves. While this may be jarring to those familiar with the predominant use of person-first language in early childhood education in Australia and the US, it is informed by critical disability studies and disability pride, as well as the self-advocacy of the late Stella Young who argued that one's personhood should never be in question, so person-first language, though well-intentioned can be offensive.

I am aware that Autistic self-advocates consider autism an identity, not a dis/ability. This thesis is aimed at progressing that conceptualisation more broadly in education, where it is still often encountered from a medical perspective. My aim is to unsettle the dominance of the medical model, not reinforce it, I apologise to any Autistic people who feel offended by my inclusion of autism in discussions of dis/ability.

Further elaboration on why I use dis/ability (with a slash) is explored in the introduction and chapters 3 and 8. It is used to indicate the co-constituted nature of disability and ability (Goodley, 2018). Though I know disability (without a slash) can be preferred by some self-advocates, here I use dis/ability to pertain to a reconceptualised view that disrupts dominant and ableist conceptions of disability as deficit in early childhood education.

[ii] Naarm (Melbourne) is the traditional land of the Kulin Nations. The Kulin Nations include Boon Wurrung/Bunurong, Wathaurrung, Taungurung, Dja Dja Wurrung and Wurundjeri. This link explains why I use the term Wurundjeri, not Wurundjeri-WoiWurrung/Woiwurrung.

[iii] In Victoria, Children are eligible for a second year of funded 4-year-old kindergarten if they show "delays in developmental outcome areas of the VEYLDF" https://www.vic.gov.au/second-year-funded-four-year-old-kindergarten

[iv] Responsible Person as set out by Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-08/ResponsiblePersonRequirements_2.pdf