

# Passionate About Early Childhood Educational Policy, Practice, and Pedagogy: Exploring Intersections Between Discourses, Experiences, and Feelings...Knitting New Terms of Belonging

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## Abstract

We are five early childhood researchers, from across Canada, thrown together amongst a series of alarming discourses, where developmental, economic, and neuroscientific rationales for ECEC drown out alternative theoretical perspectives, as well as personal experience, values, subjective knowledges, and the fierce passion we feel for our work. In the midst of this “throwntogetherness” (Massey, 2005), how do we bring our situated knowings and desires to these discursive material relational mashups? How do we engage with the throwntogetherness that is the Canadian ECEC field as we knit together alternative ways of being, doing, and acting, figuring out what resonates in localized situations (Osgood, 2006)? To begin to answer these questions, we think with feminist theory (Bezanson; 2018; Langford et al., 2016; Prentice, 2009); the politics of the event of place, (Massey, 2005) and relational and spatial networked discursive entanglements (Massey, 2005; Nichols et al., 2012; Ingold, 1995; Haraway, 2016) as we untangle three vignettes related to advocating for a competent universal public ECEC system; writing post-developmental curriculum frameworks; and weaving productive relationships between university researchers and early childhood practitioners. These vignettes illuminate our struggles to “stay with the trouble,” as Haraway (2016) suggests, stubbornly hanging on to the hope of producing new terms of belonging (Burns & Lundh, 2011) as a form of resistance, allowing us to open up spaces to imagine, tell alternative stories (Moss, 2014), and create real change within our local contexts.

## Keywords

Early childhood education; Policy; Curriculum; Relationships; Feminist theory, Throwntogetherness

### **Alarming Discourses!**

Across Canada and around the world, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is mired in alarming and alarmist discourses (Moss, 2014; Urban, 2016). As reconceptualist scholar-activists, we are concerned about how these discourses position ECEC as a cure for

multiple societal ills, from poverty to climate change, early school leaving to global economic competitiveness (Lowenstein, 2011). Despite decades of critical early childhood scholarship, the currency of neuroscientific and economic rationales (Vandenbroeck, 2017; Vandenbroeck

et al., 2017) inadvertently acts to solidify the future outcomes-oriented grip of developmental psychology, seducing policy makers and educators alike with calmly calculated answers to complex questions. Each of us, from different provincial jurisdictions across Canada, is and has been involved in community-based research and advocacy within ECEC. Fiercely passionate about our work, we talk back to discourses of certainty with what Moss (2014) calls “alternative narratives.” We challenge targeted and compensatory models of ECEC that emphasize fixing children, rather than educating them; preparing them for the future rather than being with them in the present; fitting them into a predetermined mold rather than building relationships and being amazed by their uniqueness. We also experience how alternative theoretical perspectives that value subjective knowledges are marginalized, and have more difficulty taking hold: Uncertainty pales in comparison to certainty within the public and policy realms. And yet, as Moss (2014) recognizes, the proliferation of these alternative perspectives can contribute to paradigmatic shifts, dislocating dominant discourses and introducing new possibilities (Moss, 2014).

### **The Canadian ECEC Context: Staying with the Trouble of a Never-Ending Story**

As Mahon (2000) and Pasolli (2019) clearly articulate, the struggle for universal ECEC in Canada is a “never-ending story”; filled with starts, stops, tensions, moments of hopefulness, and disappointments. In a federated country where education falls under provincial jurisdiction, the story of ECEC in Canada can be recounted as a complicated, contradictory, multifaceted series of undertakings. For the past fifty years, much of the discourse around ECEC in Canada has focused on an integrated ECEC system for children under five. Since 1970, when a national

childcare act was first proposed, there have been several federal initiatives to create a national childcare strategy (Government of Canada, 1970, 2018). Despite a history of organized and “evidence-based” advocacy (Friendly, 2009), provincial systems remain fragmented, and yet this fragmentation has led to unexpected moments of collaboration, and productive, creative change.

In this paper, we share three vignettes from our individual and collective lived experiences, recounting how we “stay with the trouble” (Haraway, 2016) of the never-ending story of ECEC in Canada. These stories within stories illustrate how we are “learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or Edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings” (Haraway, 2016, p.1). Acting as alternative narratives, our vignettes illuminate marginalized ways of knowing and being, working against the hegemony of “telling the same story over and over again, treating it as a holy writ, without a hint of doubt or an acknowledgement that other stories exist” (Moss, 2019, p. 18).

Each vignette offers insights into how we experienced “new terms of belonging,” through theorizing “structures of togetherness” (Burns & Lundh, 2011, p.106) that are new, temporary, and experimental. Burns and Lundh (2011) suggest that possibilities arise when artists produce active and critically engaged art in times of crisis. Like artists, we are “striving to create dynamic sites for exchange between multitudes of actors” (p.111), attempting uncertainly to bring about change. Our vignettes present examples of this kind of “being-acting-feeling together” that strive to interrupt taken-for-granted dominant, alarmist, often simplistic discourses regarding how change takes place in complex systems. We illuminate how chance

encounters, aligned stars, and shared ideas can spiral beyond our intentions.

### **Vignette 1: Ontario’s Universal Public Childcare System That “Almost” Was and Quebec’s Universal Public Childcare System That “Almost” Is**

As Banack and Berger (2019) suggest, change happens when we “dare to experiment and face uncertainties [...] stepping into uncharted territory [...] opening up and working with the unpredictable, emergent occurrences” (p.8-9). Haraway (2016) explains that the word trouble,

derives from a thirteenth-century French verb ‘to stir up’ ‘to make cloudy’ ‘to disturb’. We—all of us on Terra—live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times. The task is to become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious <sup>1</sup> kinds, of response (p. 1).

This vignette explores the concept of knitting new terms of belonging through the interconnected notions of change and trouble, contrasting policy developments in two neighboring provinces. We examine Ontario’s development of childcare policy between 2016 and 2018 alongside Quebec’s establishment of a publicly funded and regulated childcare system in 1996-97.

In 2017, Ontario announced the creation of a universal and affordable childcare system (Monsebratten, 2017), followed by an ambitious commitment in 2018 to implement free childcare for all children from age two-and-a-half until eligible for kindergarten. <sup>2</sup> The complex and comprehensive plan was the result of extensive consultation and was claimed by childcare advocates as “a victory for advocacy efforts over the decades. Our coalition of parents, childcare programs, women’s groups, unions and social justice advocates have called for “affordable” childcare for many years

(Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care [OCBCC], 2018).

A few months later, the Liberal government and their legacy of progress on childcare and kindergarten lost the provincial election in favor of a government that cut childcare funding and introduced a tax credit for some families, drawing on neoliberal discourse of individual choice and privileging a private care system governed by market forces instead of building a public system.

For Monica, *Once again, after over forty years of childcare advocacy, I felt devastated that in a moment, all our hard work and collaboration, putting all of the right pieces in place, could be gone. The emotions I felt in 2006 when the fledgling national Foundations childcare program was lost came flooding back. On a rational level I understood the political cycle and that the defeat of the government was not because of the childcare commitment, but perhaps in spite of it. For the small group of us who had worked so intently, bringing along politicians, officials, community members and the media, the day we announced the policy for free universal childcare felt like the birth of a baby, nurtured in our collective womb. It was our moment and felt like a monumental achievement. Later, as the election unfolded, it was clear that the plan for universal childcare in Ontario would die. I felt grief for months, surprised at this depth of emotion as I consider myself a hardened policy wonk. I wondered if there was any point in trying again. Perhaps it was time to withdraw from my involvement in policy development. By the end of the year, I realized how important our work was, we had developed perhaps the most comprehensive childcare policy in Canada: optimism slowly returned. If we “stay with the trouble,” the stars may align one day. I recovered my bumptiousness. When we create these groundbreaking maps of ideas, they don’t disappear,*

*they continue to live, ready for the next opportune moment.*

Twenty years earlier, the “stars aligned” (Marois, 2008, p.xi) more favorably in Quebec. Pauline Marois was Minister of Education and responsible for the childcare dossier in 1997. She credits the success of the legislation that included the *centres de la petite enfance* (childcare centers, known as CPEs) and regulated home childcare services for five dollars a day, as well as full day kindergarten, extended maternity and family leave, and five dollars a day school-based care, to unconditional support from the premier at the time. He ignored a mandate to reduce the deficit in order to invest in children and families, and was supported by citizens who believed in and supported the legislation (Marois, 2008).

Massey (2005) calls the attempt to assert that no alternatives exist, “the cosmology of ‘only one narrative’” (p. 5). Similarly, Moss (2014) describes dominant discourses as “just stories” and urges us to scrutinize them, and understand that they are only one possible way of seeing the world. In the case of Ontario, the dominant economic narratives prevented investment in a competent ECEC system (Vandenbroeck et al., 2016), while in Quebec, somehow, an alternative discourse was not only spoken, but heard. Marois (2008) explains that the government had to “be bold, to have the credibility and the desire for risk” (p. xi), that they needed to move quickly while political will was strong. Despite Marois’ analysis that relied upon neoliberal discourse of parental choice, and deficit discourses regarding prevention, screening, and equality of chances for children living in poverty, the proposed childcare policy was accompanied by the rhetoric of social justice and social solidarity in order to justify a universal, rather than a targeted system (Marois, 2008).

Joanne reflects, *I have trouble understanding the intensity of my reaction to this deficit discourse. When children living in poverty are singled out and blamed, along with their parents, for their “lack of preparation for school,” and when ECEC is positioned as a screening tool to figure out who is lacking and who needs fixing, when this story is told again and again as if it is Truth, I feel intense anger and frustration and hopeless despair. I don’t understand how or why anyone buys into this “truth” or the insistence on continually bringing the conversation back to “children with special needs” or “vulnerable” children, instead of imagining what ECEC could be and all the amazing projects and relationships we can build with children and families. Every now and then I find myself at a “table de concertation,” a network meeting of those from various organizations who all work directly or indirectly with young children and their families. When presented with the “scientific” rationale for targeted programs, I push back. Sometimes I try to be diplomatic, sometimes I do not. But what makes me feel better is that there are always people who nod, often with relief, and share their own frustrations with me privately afterwards. In one of our collaborative presentations, Monica lamented the persistence of developmentalism and the insidious ways it creeps; the implication that educators just need to do a better job getting on board; and the enthusiasm by which other professionals who have relatively recently discovered ECEC, have shown up to tell us what to do. I am encouraged when those who work in the sector resist how it has been defined from the outside. I somehow manage to remain hopeful, that by opening spaces to listen, it might be worth it to “stay with the trouble.”*

Prentice (2009) laments the focus of much childcare rationale today on an investment in the future citizen narrative, stating that this

economic frame has replaced a feminist, justice-based rationale for childcare that was present in the 1970s. The OCBCC recognized the social justice and feminist potential of Ontario's proposed plan in 2018. We believe that this rationale, appealing to people's emotions and hoping to inflame passion for social justice and social solidarity, can and should be more persuasive than the investment narrative. However, we acknowledge that, as discussed in vignette 3, oftentimes multiple contradictory discourses circulate and bump into one another, as we attempt to knit new terms of belonging (Burns & Lundh, 2011). In this case, the feminist social justice and social solidarity rationale for ECEC seems like a dropped stitch, one that needs to be picked up again, and incorporated into a new pattern, along with those other persistent narratives, in order to create a stronger fabric, capable of withstanding multiple attacks, protecting gains, expanding the system so it is finally universal, and consolidating the idea of childcare as a fundamental right. In order for these terms of belonging to be widespread and inclusive, Bezanson and colleagues (2019) suggest that "[...] a strong childcare system, once experienced, known, and understood, has policy "legs"; its absence in the social policy landscape makes it hard to conceptualize or imagine, but its presence makes it hard to undo" (p.14).

Massey (2005) posits that public space is critical to democracy. Public outcry to proposed budget cuts to childcare in Quebec (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC], 2016) and full-day kindergarten in Ontario (Global News, 2019) showcase how both programs have grown policy legs, and how access to alternate discourses can lead to increased public participation in the project of democracy.

We suggest that competent public ECEC systems are critical to social justice and social solidarity, to children's rights, parents' rights,

and educators' rights. Free universal childcare policy is necessarily the result of conflict and negotiation, and it is our job to "unsettle the givenness," to open up space for a debate, not on the economic feasibility of public ECEC, but on public belief in well-funded, universal ECEC as a right, and as an inevitable cornerstone of the social policy landscape. This is why the two of us, from neighboring provinces, one on the brink, we hope, of launching a universal system, and one on the edge of losing the most important purpose of their system, can learn from and inspire one another.

This vignette, focused on policy, highlights the need to make imagining a world without public ECEC impossible. It also reminds us of the importance of social solidarity and social justice, as discursive rationales, and positive outcomes of universal ECEC systems. The next vignette tells another story of cross-provincial collaboration and encouragement, how a university event became a "dynamic site(s) for exchange between multitudes of actors" (Burns & Lundh, 2011, p.111), opening up spaces for localized change to shift into a broader, provincial forum.

### **Vignette II: Knit 2, Purl 2, Repeat: Curriculum Frameworks and the Dynamism of Place**

When the Multilateral Framework Agreements (Government of Canada, 2003) were put in place in 2005, federal-provincial meetings and national forums made visible Tim Ingold's (1995) observation that "the forms that people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, arise within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagements with their surroundings" (p.76). The pan-Canadian uptake of curriculum frameworks and pedagogical documentation since 2005 has had the discursive and imaginative power of "[...]

incite[ing] counter possibilities and provocations with those of us working with young children” (Ashton, 2014, p.3). Curriculum frameworks are living political documents where differently situated knowings and desires come into discursively contradictory places. As Massey (2005) theorizes, place “[...] change[s] us, not through some visceral belonging (some barely changing rootedness, as so many would have it, but through the practising of place, the negotiation of intersecting trajectories; place as an arena where negotiation is forced upon us” (p.154).

In this vignette we focus on curriculum frameworks, revisiting moments of possibility across two Canadian provinces, 4500 kilometers apart, whose collaborations were set in motion through the “politics of the event of place” (Massey, 2005, p. 149). The pre-organized event at the heart of this vignette was a public talk by Pam, from the University of New Brunswick (UNB), at MacEwan University (GMU) in Edmonton, Alberta, in a 220-seat tiered auditorium, on a wintry February afternoon in 2012, as part of a visiting scholars’ lecture series.

As Jane, then Chair of Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) at GMU recalls: *Our intention was to use the public talk as an opportunity to profile our ECEC program and position ourselves relative to degree development in an institution newly transitioned from community college to university. We were undervalued in our own setting, still considered to be a vocational program. We could see that the New Brunswick curriculum framework had moved the field ahead and were using it and other frameworks as resources in our teaching to provoke new thinking about children, child care, early learning, and early childhood educator identity. We had experienced the accessibility and resonance of the New Brunswick pedagogical stories. And, following our study visits to*

*Reggio Emilia, we had begun to think differently as a faculty, moving beyond developmentalism as the sole foundation of practice.*

Pam remembers: *Jane’s invitation provided me with an opportunity to critically reflect upon this massive curriculum project that had engaged us with multiple collaborators in New Brunswick . Together, we had collectively cocreated what Burns and Lundh call “new terms of belonging” (2011), time-space-matterings where feminist early childhood university-based educator-scholars were researching alongside practicing early childhood educators and government ECEC staff. We strove to “maximize the research process as a change-enhancing, reciprocally educative encounter” (Lather, 1992, p. 92). Thus, I arrived at GMU, an extraordinarily welcoming space, with a collection of experiences, memories, images, theorists, and ideas on what I might contribute.*

As we theoretically revisit this event, we take up Massey’s (2005) imagining of space as open, mobile, “always under construction” (p.20), “never finished, never closed” (p.9), full of “loose ends and missing links” (p.12). In the midst of loose ends, Massey (2005) speaks to a “combination of order and chance” (p. 151) that is critical for ongoing co-constitution of space and public place open to the political. We look back at the coming together of order and chance, planned and unplanned, that produced the event.

Several carefully planned events shaped the thinking of many who attended the public talk—an off-campus faculty retreat and book talk, a working session and critical review of proposed degree curriculum architecture, and an opportunity for 40-plus members of our ECEC Program Advisory committee, community professionals, and policy makers to hear Pam speak about the New Brunswick experience of

working with over 1300 child care educators to cocreate the Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework~English, and accompanying 36-hour program of professional learning (Nason & Whitty, 2007; Whitty 2009; Rose, 2010). What was unplanned was the time Pam spent in the child care lab school, and her thoughtfulness in featuring those experiences as part of her talk. As she recalls *“I was able to go into the University Early Learning Centre and be with the children, educators, and director, reading the learning stories displayed on the walls. This inspirational visit made visible what I might contribute.”*

We did not expect over 200 people at the public talk. The visiting scholars lecture series typically attracted 30-40 participants, most often students and faculty with a few from the broader public and professional community. We had a captive audience of almost 100 ECEC students well prepared on the topic and required to attend. We had publicized the event with our agencies and through our community networks. Jane recalls: *I knew that the event was resonating for others in ways we had not imagined possible when I saw the line of people down the long wide hallway leading to the auditorium, and our dean scurrying out in search of folding chairs so that everyone could be seated.* This was an extraordinary “event of place,” both at the time and in retrospect. The “broader possibilities for ‘being-acting-feeling together’” were palpably materializing: a dynamic site with a multitude of actors was in the making.

### ***Space as the “simultaneity of [our] stories – so far”***

This dynamic site illustrates what can happen when we think about space as “the simultaneity of stories-so-far [...] the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to

the intimately tiny” (Massey, 2005, p. 9). We recognize that our social relationships and our stories are inherently political, partial, and unfinished. These conditions construct space that invites chance encounters, opportunity, movement, risk, and possibility (Massey, 2005).

Pam’s talk began with stories and images from the GMU Early Learning Centre, stories she had just heard, in which we recognized ourselves. Then she told stories and shared images from the UNB Early Childhood Centre. These stories of everyday experiences felt familiar. We could imagine ourselves in those stories and in those spaces. She then shared images of children playing in trays of sand in the Dewey Lab School in Chicago in the early 20th century. They too felt very familiar: joint histories. Then, Pam invited one of the educators from the Early Learning Centre to join her at the podium to read a documented story of a recent field trip to City Hall, and talk about the meaning of the story. In retrospect, this was a powerful moment, profiling a voice that many in the room could relate to, telling the story of an everyday experience that illustrated how we already provide meaningful participation opportunities for young children. Pam finished with more stories from the New Brunswick curriculum framework documents—from centers across the province, highlighting familiar everyday work with children across our two provinces.

What was the impact of considering these stories simultaneously? Stories of practice that are both near to us and far away from us in time and in place. How did they provoke us, inspire us to living~learning (Sellers, 2013) the next chapter in the story? Pam’s talk invited each person in the room to imagine the possibility that they too belonged to the simultaneity of stories-so-far— we could see how the pedagogical stories from New Brunswick over the past four years were connected to our

stories and the stories from Dewey's lab school decades ago. A space was opening for many in the room to think differently about the stories in their own programs.

The Director of Child Care for the Alberta Ministry of Children's Services attended the public talk and saw possibilities immediately. She offered resources to develop a made-in-Alberta curriculum framework, setting a series of people and actions in motion (Arendt, 1998, in Banack & Berger, 2019; Makovichuk et al., 2014a), creating for a time, a throwntogetherness of space that was rich in potential for collaborative dialogue and democratic experimentalism, reinvigorating the relationship between academics and the professional field in Alberta (Moss, 2014).

The second vignette, focused on shared stories, explores the notion of space and the simultaneity of stories that created what we term "spatial and interspatial belonging" across and within local, provincial, national, international, and historical boundaries, during a series of events, both planned and unplanned, that led to significant investment and the creation of a project that did much more than simply write a curriculum document. We were thrown together in new ways, opening up new spaces for moving beyond developmentalism, valuing subjective knowledges and emotions, reimagining possibilities for belonging and inclusion.

*Play, Participation, and Possibilities: An Early Learning and Child Care Framework for Alberta* (Makovichuk et al., 2014a) took up the broad based learning goals from the *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care* (Early Childhood Research Team, University of New Brunswick, 2008. Renamed *Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework* in 2018 (Makovichuk et al., 2014b), this curriculum framework is featured in the next vignette, and demonstrates how structures of togetherness

create possibilities for a new sense of belonging by creating spaces and stories that move away from the dominant narrative of developmentalism.

### **Vignette 3: Animating a Curriculum Framework: Knitting New Possibilities**

This meandering, partial tale describes my (Tricia's) role as part of a team of academics co-researching and co-writing *Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework* (Makovichuk et al., 2014b), a multi-year action research-curriculum project, instigated at the public event described in Vignette 2. The project began with a combined sense of excitement and uncertainty—can we take on this intimidating task? Co-creating the curriculum framework alongside educators, in the light of a sudden public focus on early learning in Alberta, made our joint work visible to others who were working within different paradigms. Consequently, we were tossed into swirling discourses, introducing tensions into the taken-for-granted and pervasive developmental discourse prevalent in childcare, postsecondary ECEC programs, partner organizations, and advisory panels. As we uncovered and introduced alternative narratives, we struggled with how to respond to the alarmist discourse of developmentalism. How do I speak back—when I am often unable to shake free of the grasp of these discourses, myself?

During our work with *Flight*, participatory patterns between the University and community shifted. Early on, we left the insulated space of academia, shed our expert hats, and begin *talking with* instead of *about* educators. Working onsite and alongside educators required forging new relations, building trust, and living with each other in uncertainty and experimentation. Taking up participatory action research, we were very actively involved, "acting as resources" (Nichols

et al., 2012, p.31) rather than maintaining an impossible stance of objectivity. We shifted between the complementary and conflicting roles of researcher, mentor, observer, recorder, participant, teacher, and learner. Negotiating our joint approach to research meant that we were swept along with the flow as energy generated by the project took over. We were not separate from our research encounters, but part of and emergent with them (Davies, 2014).

I soon recognized the power of a motivated collective to spark change, growth, and learning. *Flight* was mapped onto and drawn from educators' practice and thinking. A new set of discourses was courageously taken up by educators who drew upon their situated knowledges—leading rather than following the researchers. Our research team mantra, “there is no one right way to do it,” was greeted with trepidation initially, but soon led to creativity and experimentations in each local site. As Massey (2005) states, “place is always different. Each is unique, and constantly productive of the new. The negotiations will always be an invention; there will be need for judgement, learning, improvisation; there will be no simply portable rules” (p. 161).

As we co-imagined innovative ways of thinking about living curriculum alongside children and families, *Flight* acted as a provocation to “open up the imagination of the single narrative to give space for a multiplicity of trajectories” (Massey, 2005, p 5). There were many unexpected lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) as educators and researchers thought, felt, and acted alongside one another. Educators took steps into the unknown: changing the format of their annual general meeting to engage with families about their child as a mighty learner and citizen, reorganizing their staff meeting times to allow for curricular conversations, and introducing new staff positions to support educators' curriculum

meaning making and pedagogical documentation practices. The ECEC community rallied to support us as we tried to make sense of *Flight* ourselves and what it would mean for practice, finding joy together in shared “aha moments” and gaining comfort with the unpredictable.

### ***Twisted yarn; Dangerous encounters; Complicated relations***

As academics, we were acutely aware of competing discourses that were circulating through the province and wondered if we had set educators adrift (Nxumalo et al., 2017) with the new discursive formations in *Flight*. How were educators navigating encounters between discourses? In the context of new networks and relationships, we had many “complicated conversations about contested matters” (Banack & Berger, 2019, p 5) and tension-filled moments of negotiation, reflecting “dense knots of entanglement” (Banack & Berger, 2019, p 5). We muddled in the messiness related to historical, contemporary, political, and ethical notions of curriculum. These discourses of readiness, deficit, compensatory, and pathology (Haydon & Iannacci, 2008) butted up against and became entangled with the concepts and ideas in *Flight*. Thus, we lived within a tension-filled space “of fuzzy and permeable boundaries” (Nichols et al., 2012, p. 5) with traditional views of curriculum imposed to assess children's readiness for formal schooling.

Child care settings are always already contested spaces where different actors regularly introduce new discourses influencing time, space, and relationships. According to Nichols and colleagues, “the rhetoric of collaboration and partnership creates openings for a diverse array of players to lobby, mobilize, forge alliances, attempt to influence the agenda and jostle for resources” (2012, p.5). Often new professionals arrive with a sense that they

“know” ECEC, yet their knowledge is strongly associated with discourses not always reflective of the lived reality of childcare. Our experience was productive of new connections and extending networks, and as Nichols and colleagues (2012) remind us, “not just with those we actively seek to make” (p.27). What, then, is our ethical respons-ability within the throwntogetherness of the ECEC field? “How might new terms of connectivity be negotiated?” (Massey, 2005, p.151).

Researching and writing the curriculum framework brought us into contact with the larger public, political, and bureaucratic realms, with new actors and spaces with powerful agendas and resources, systemic power and influence; a space of uncoordinated and swirling discourses and shifting imperatives. Despite the uncertainty and messiness, there were also multiple new opportunities for movement, networks, and relationships. In this “joyful composition” (Davies, 2014, p. 20), I lived as an educator-researcher, alongside others, open to being affected, building capacity for thought and action; striving “to compose ourselves anew” (Davies, 2014, p. 20).

Living the ebbs and flows of this ongoing research project was not without challenges. As a team, we keenly felt the lack of time and resources required to meet the educators’ eagerness and desire to work with new ideas and concepts from the framework. These realities meant introducing *Flight* one professional learning session at a time, resulting in a worrying sense of perpetuating inequality. Who was left out? Who had access to us and who didn’t? Recognizing that *Flight* was unevenly taken up and networked across the province, we committed to making the framework free and accessible to all, creating a website to house the document and resources. However, we still struggled to reconcile our inability to meet every request.

To support the introduction of the framework, we learned to do professional learning differently. Keenly resisting pressure to “workshop it” or to adopt the “train the trainer” model, we “stayed with the troubles” (Haraway, 2016) and complexities, living inside the messy and organic nature of “curriculum-ing” (Sellers, 2013) with young children. Knowledgeable leaders from the field emerged, turning traditional top down professional learning sideways.

I began to recognize that I cannot control how the curriculum framework I/we had drafted is taken up and animated, nor can I ever fully recount the paths *Flight* took. This became apparent when I heard stories from participating educators about text messages they had been sharing with one another after a series of community events. Educators’ new relationships and virtual networks were completely invisible to me as a researcher until much later. How could I possibly hope to tame and tell this ever-expanding story? Taking on a life of its own, with rhizomatic expansion, the complexity of the project became too big to describe or track with intentionality. The framework has taken off, moving both physically and virtually within and across physical (cyber)spaces. It swirls through/in space and time, travelling to and fro through “multiple situated sites of practice” (Nichols, 2012, p. 24) in ways no one could have predicted.

This final vignette, focused on bringing a curriculum document to life, in/through relationships, demonstrates how deeply affective work amongst swirling discourses requires reciprocal, respectful listening, and openness to the unexpected. Collective energy and ingenuity, immersed in local and intuitive knowledges, risk-taking and thinking alongside others leads to dynamic movement, change, and transformation. This story highlights the power

and productivity of uncertainty, messiness, and danger.

### **Not Casting Off: Using a Stitch Holder Instead**

In the midst of alarmist discourses and a sense of “throwntogetherness” (Massey, 2005), we set out to investigate two questions: how do we bring our situated knowings and desires to these discursive material relational mashups? and How do we engage with the throwntogetherness that is the Canadian ECEC field? In retelling our experiences as vignettes, we knit together our situated knowings and desires to imagine alternative mashups and terms of belonging. From this collaborative knitting of discourses, experiences, and feelings, four ideas stand out for us: the simultaneity of stories (Massey, 2005); the politics of refusal (Moss, 2014); acceptance of the never-ending story (Mahon, 2000; Pasoli, 2019); and the joy that emerges when we are open to the unpredictable and can embrace not being in control.

The simultaneity of stories creates a sense of belonging. As we knit our storied experiences and discourses into a larger pattern, dialoguing across provinces in Ontario/Quebec or Alberta/New Brunswick, and across sectors, between researchers, practitioners, and decision makers, we let go of the need to control the narrative. Rather than supplanting developmentalism, which leaves us frustrated and hopeless, we have highlighted how the narratives of developmentalism, economic rationales, and brain science are pieces of the story that can be challenged as they stand alongside the alternative perspectives that we articulate. Similar to the 100 languages of children, 100 languages of advocacy are needed to rationalize investment in a competent ECEC system. This kind of thinking helps us imagine post-developmentalism as more-than-developmentalism, as opposed to anti-

developmentalism. Can we open ourselves to our own critique to avoid losing potential allies, and with them, the possibility of changing the ECEC world together? As Urban (2016) so eloquently puts it,

In our individual and collective attempts at distancing ourselves from the monsters that mainstream research in our field has helped to create, are we at risk of losing—or worse, of carelessly abandoning—the transformative, emancipatory element of critical inquiry that aims at changing the world? There is a risk, I argue, of losing critical inquiry in early childhood to an equally dangerous monster trying to drown the entire project in a sea of privileged discourse that is self-referential at best, and borderline narcissistic at worst (p.108).

We realize that this position puts us in danger, at risk of messy complexity and potential conflict. However, whether doing policy work, creating and implementing curriculum with educators, or carrying out research projects, we are confronted with the same multiplicities. By letting go of established hierarchies, and the need to position ourselves in opposition, we can and do engage in authentic and productive relationships.

When we think beyond resistance to dominant ideologies and discourses, the politics of refusal (McGranahan, 2016; Simpson, 2014, 2016) catapults us into new subjectivities. All of a sudden, as Clark Rubio and Okune (n.d.) argue, “the imperative to imagine freedom beyond what hegemonic forces delimit as politically imaginable present those who refuse with the dilemma of having to stop a story that is always being told (Simpson 2014, p.177)”. To refuse, Ball (2016) and Moss (2019) argue, means engaging in a rigorous process of questioning our own identities, acknowledging that we are always making choices. Burns and Lundh (2011) affirm the value of acting in ways that are new, temporary, and experimental during times of crisis. Our vignettes illustrate

this through stories of dynamic movement and small moments where change happened, as we stayed with the trouble and the turbulence, and strengthened or reinvented structures of togetherness.

Recognizing our situated knowings and desires as fleeting (Ingold, 1995), we take these experiences of being, acting, and feeling together into “unfinished configuration of places, times, matters, meanings” (Haraway, 2016, p. 1). In this way, we make sense of the tangled relationships we are always enmeshed in (Ingold, 1995), acknowledging that *our work will always be incomplete* (Lather, 2013; Massey, 2005). Indeed, ECEC is a never-ending story everywhere, not only in Canada. Thus, we begin to look for “loose-ends and missing links” (Massey, 2005, p.12) as generative possibilities, rather than something to be cast off and resolved with certainty. Knowing we are both within and co-creating a never-ending story renews hope, and brings to light the cyclical inevitability of change required in constantly creating a competent ECEC system with others. We understand that our work will always need to adapt to the “specific relational contexts of their practical engagements with their surroundings” (Ingold, 1995, p.76).

In examining the role of chance encounters, unexpected resonance, and aligned stars in our vignettes, we are aware of the need to be open to the unpredictable, and *the joy that emerges* when we embrace our inability to control. We are reminded of Callois’ (1961) concept of *ilinx*, or dizzy play, in which the player “gratifies the desire to temporarily destroy his bodily equilibrium, escape the tyranny of the ordinary perception, and provoke the abdication of consciousness” (p.44). *Ilinx* is the player’s deliberate intent to create uncertainty and experience imbalance in an effort to experience it fully (Lester & Russell, 2008; Sutton-Smith, 1977, cited in Hewes,

2014). Similar to children at play, we seek to fully experience our ongoing unpredictable entanglements, and make visible previously unimaginable possibilities for being, acting, and doing together, joyfully.

Focusing on “new terms of belonging” as a form of resistance to alarmist, alarming, and hegemonic discourses acts as a paradigm shift. Small stories (Georgakopoulou, 2006) such as the ones we have knit together with our vignettes can encourage shifts, inspiring optimism and alternative moves. Opening up spaces for imagining the unimaginable, the impossible becomes possible. Seeing what’s happening elsewhere—connecting what we are doing with what others are doing is a time-space-mattering that offers hope. Stubbornly, bumptiously “staying with the trouble,” we are committed to pursuing “new terms of belonging.” Bringing our situated knowings and desires to various discursive-material-relational mashups, we continue to advocate for competent ECEC systems, and to prepare and support educators for the throwntogetherness that is the Canadian ECEC field, so they too are able to knit together new ways of being, doing, and acting.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “being self-assertive or proud to an irritating degree” (Bumptious, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Kindergarten is the first year(s) of primary or elementary school in Canada. In Ontario, children begin kindergarten the year they turn four (Government of Ontario, 2019).

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