

# Flourishing Together Like a Troupe of Dancers in the Early Childhood Art Space

Kwang Dae (Mitsy) Chung

Volume 47, Number 2, March 2022

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1090100ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18357/jcs202220248>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Association for Young Children

ISSN

2371-4107 (print)

2371-4115 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Chung, K. (2022). Flourishing Together Like a Troupe of Dancers in the Early Childhood Art Space. *Journal of Childhood Studies*, 47(2), 1–19.  
<https://doi.org/10.18357/jcs202220248>

## Article abstract

This article describes drawing events with a group of toddlers and an educator that I observed during my master's research study. The article demonstrates how their artmaking space became a pedagogical third site in which the children, educators, and materials flourished together. First, I discuss how posthuman and new materialist perspectives in early childhood education invite consideration of how humans and more-than-humans coconstruct their experiences of mutual teaching and learning. Then, discussing some of the findings from this study, I illustrate how the art space might become a meeting place where children, educators, and materials live together. Finally, I suggest some areas for future research.

Copyright © Kwang Dae (Mitsy) Chung, 2022



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

## Flourishing Together Like a Troupe of Dancers in the Early Childhood Art Space

Kwang Dae (Mitsy) Chung

Kwang Dae (Mitsy) Chung is a Korean-Japanese-Canadian early childhood educator, researcher, and artist. In spring, 2021, Mitsy graduated Master of Arts in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Art Education at the University of British Columbia. She has been an early childhood educator for over 15 years, with a primary focus on young children's drawings as event and material explorations. Her areas of particular interest are visual art as a living inquiry, a/r/tography, pedagogy, lived curriculum as well as posthuman and reconceptualizing perspectives.

*This article describes drawing events with a group of toddlers and an educator that I observed during my master's research study. The article demonstrates how their artmaking space became a pedagogical third site in which the children, educators, and materials flourished together. First, I discuss how posthuman and new materialist perspectives in early childhood education invite consideration of how humans and more-than-humans coconstruct their experiences of mutual teaching and learning. Then, discussing some of the findings from this study, I illustrate how the art space might become a meeting place where children, educators, and materials live together. Finally, I suggest some areas for future research.*

**Key words:** posthumanism; new materialism; pedagogical third site; art event; early childhood art education

*In Daisy's toddler room, charcoal, watercolours in small jars, paint brushes, paper, clay, and many more materials are always there for the children to use. For this educator, materials are an important means of communicating ideas and feelings through art. Daisy carefully watches the children's actions, listens to their multiple voices, and plays with the children and materials. She and the children are like a troupe of dancers who care for each other and perform their movements in harmony. However, just as a troupe of dancers sometimes have moments of disagreement, so too do Daisy and the children sometimes clash.*

In early childhood art education settings, there are typically two distinct roles for educators (Wilson, 2003, 2007). One is that of a *director* providing materials and giving specific guidance as to what to make and how to make it (Cinquemani, 2018; Wilson, 2003). In such an art-making space, where *preplanned curriculum*<sup>1</sup> is embedded, children's

ideas and voices are seldom invited or heard. The educator becomes a messenger and the children are the receivers. In this space, a hierarchical system exists among educators, children, and materials. A second role is that of a *curator* who organizes and beautifies the classroom, provides materials, and allows the children to learn and explore by themselves (Cinquemani, 2018; Wilson, 2003, 2007). Early childhood educators who take a curator stance believe that children will be able to learn something new by themselves when given space and materials. Consequently, these educators step back completely from the children's art-making process. In this situation, educators think the materials become the children's teacher and there is no pedagogical space where educators and children interact with each other (McClure et al., 2017; Thompson, 2009, 2015; Wilson, 2007). Some early childhood educators believe if they provide rich materials (e.g., open-ended, natural, loose parts, charcoals, paints in beautiful colours) children's creativity will inevitably follow (Filippini, 2018; Kind, 2017). However, at a presentation of the Vancouver Reggio Association, *Pedagogical Collaborations: Encounter with a Pedagogista* in Vancouver, British Columbia, in 2018, Tiziana Filippini reminded those in attendance that materials themselves are not a magical provocation for children's learning. It is only when educators create a space for themselves, the children, and the materials to interact—asking questions, listening to each other, and sharing their thoughts, desires, and needs—that materials

become “magical.” Then, the art-making space becomes what Brent Wilson (2003, 2007, 2009) calls a “pedagogical third site” in which children and educators set aside their status as child and adult, respectively, and jointly make, think, teach, and learn together. Such a space becomes collective, collaborative, and pedagogical.

How early childhood educators respond to young children in the context of art making is crucial (Wilson, 2003). In addition, disrupting child-centered methodologies<sup>2</sup> and learning through and from posthumanist and new materialist perspectives is beneficial (Diaz-Diaz & Semenec, 2020), because children live and constantly entangle, not only with humans, but also with more-than-human others, including the materials they use, such as charcoals, pencils, paints, paper, and clay. Following these lines of thinking, in this article I share drawing events with a group of toddlers and an educator that I observed during a research study that I did for my master’s thesis. This article will demonstrate how their artmaking space became a pedagogical third site in which the children, educators, and materials flourished together. To do so, I first introduce how posthuman and new materialist perspectives in early childhood education invite consideration of how humans and more-than-humans co-construct their experiences of mutual teaching and learning. Before sharing one of the case studies from my research, I reflect on who the early childhood educator might be and how they might become with children and materials in the early childhood artmaking space. Then, discussing some of the findings from this study, I illustrate how this space might become a meeting place where children, educators, and materials live together. Finally, I suggest some areas for future research.

## Posthuman and new materialist perspectives in early childhood education

### *Posthumanism*

Euro-Western humans tend to think about themselves as being first and foremost, with nonhumans playing supporting roles in the human world. How would it change their ways of living, seeing, and thinking with others if instead people recognized humans as part of the more-than-human world? The posthumanist perspective posits that there are always alternative ways of seeing, thinking about, and understanding children and others, because no one and nothing exists alone; they are always active agents in entanglements (Moss, 2018; Osgood, Diaz-Diaz & Semenec, 2020). In early childhood education, decentering humans means recognizing that children and other participants in the classroom, such as charcoals, paper, or clay, will activate each other’s ways of being, thinking, making, and doing.

In early childhood education in Canada, centering children has been believed an essential practice (Land, et al., 2020). Often, the practice focuses on constructing children as societal commodities and helping them become what they ought to be, or what the society plans and expects them to follow according to the image of the child that adults and their society have built. However, some posthumanists and new materialists, such as Rosi Braidotti, Karen Barad, and Jane Bennett, have asked us to think about the question “How are children living with and entangling within the social, material, and discursive practices, rather than staying within the humanist approaches?” (Diaz-Diaz & Semenec, 2020, p. viii). In other words, how do children enter the more-than-human world, and how do the drawings they co-construct with materials decenter “the limits and exclusivism of traditional humanist assumptions by broadening the community of expressive agencies and presences that get to matter in/with/to” (Schulte, 2019, p. 99)? In this way of building and worlding relationships with more-than-human others, children are seen, not as subjects becoming human but as co-constructors of a more-than-human world. In wondering, questioning, and thinking about this question, educators will broaden their perspective and have an opportunity to rethink how both children and educators live and learn together as co-teachers, co-learners, and co-creators. In this perspective, children’s multiple ways of being are seen as occasions “to meet with and become receptive to

difference, an opportunity to be opened to the Other and to the alterity that is produced in one's engagements with the Other" (Schulte, 2019, p. 94). Diaz-Diaz and Semenec (2020) raise the important point that "the unprecedented challenges that children are facing in the [current] global environmental, social, and economic crisis" (p. viii) require educators to rethink "what it means to be a child and their relationships with the more-than-human world" (Diaz-Diaz & Semenec, 2020, p. viii) as well as with their educators.

### *Materials as active agents*

Sylvia Kind (2014), referring to the entangled, multiple, and complex worlds of early childhood art education, states that "materials are not immutable, passive, or lifeless until the moment we *do* something to them; they *participate* in our early childhood projects. They live, speak, gesture, and call to us" (p. 865, emphasis in original). Thus, both humans (children and educators) and materials are active agents who invite, respond, provoke each other, and generate dialogues about their artistic engagements (Government of British Columbia, 2019; Kind, 2014; Lenz Taguchi, 2009). In this manner, both children's and educators' multiple ways of thinking, looking, teaching, understanding, connecting, and engaging with materials/objects are invited and respected (Lenz Taguchi, 2009; Moss, 2018).

Like posthumanism, the new materialist perspective opens up new possibilities for how each human and more-than-human agent (e.g., tree, water, paper, pencils, charcoals) corresponds to each other. These ontological realities not only allow for greater capacities of nonhuman objects but also establish a relational ethic that positions human culture in relation to living things and their environment (Bennett, 2010a).

Working further with these ideas, Peter Moss (2018) emphasizes Karen Barad's idea of material agency, which posits that materials and objects live, act, respond, correspond, interact, and dialogue together (Barad, 2007). Because no one and nothing exists separately (Lenz Taguchi, 2009; Moss, 2018), material agency is thus about "possibilities of mutual response" (Lenz Taguchi, 2009, p. 145).

In relation to materials as active agents, one of the key concepts is *intra-action* (Lenz Taguchi, 2009). Intra-action is an occurrence in-between different bodies (i.e., human to/and human but also human to/and nonhuman relationships); intra-action continuously moves, constructs, reconstructs, and makes meaning through complex entanglements (Moss, 2018). Thus, the act of intra-action will trigger a new incident and possibilities that humans have not imagined. Hillevi Lenz Taguchi (2009) explains that intra-action is different from *inter-action* because interaction focuses only on activities and relationships between humans. In intra-activity, everyone and everything has active life (lived experiences) and active voice (lived voices); thus, both humans and nonhumans continuously engage with, respond to, and change their relationships with each other (Diaz-Diaz & Semenec, 2020; Knight, 2008; Lenz Taguchi, 2009).

### *An early childhood educator and children in the pedagogical third site*

Just as educators understand a child as a unique individual who possesses 100 languages (Reggio Children, 2020), educators can also be seen as hundred-languages teachers and uncommon individuals (Moss, 2018; Rinaldi, 2006). Each individual educator will act and respond to each unique individual child, so there are multiple ways of being, learning, teaching, and living in a classroom. The BC Early Learning Framework (Government of British Columbia, 2019) states that early childhood educators are researchers, collaborators, and critical thinkers about young children, their families, and communities rather than holders of "correct" knowledge. However, when educators step into the early childhood art space where children's artistic languages live, full of possibilities and possible perspectives, does the early childhood educator need to be an artist? If not, what is asked of the educator? And, what challenges and complexities do educators face when entering into art and drawing encounters with

children?

Many educators believe that educators (adults) must step back from children's art-making processes because adults' influence will dismantle children's creativities (Duncum, 1982; Wilson & Wilson, 2011). However, Matthews (2003) and Wilson and Wilson (2011) argue that educators' pedagogical engagement will nurture children's creativities and support their visual languages. Furthermore, Duncum (1982) strongly argues that what is important is not how children produce an image but how best to support children's creativity and image making with their peers, educators, and materials by dialoguing together. Rather than teaching artistic techniques, educators can offer pedagogical and dialogical space where they provoke new or alternative ways of thinking, as well as facilitating, encouraging, and supporting children's playful creativity (Atkinson, 2018; Cinquemani, 2018; McClure et al., 2017). McClure et al. (2017) also emphasize that children need a *responsive* educator who carefully and respectfully observes, listens, and reflects on their collaborative dialogical engagements with children in their art space. To become a responsive educator, an educator rules out their adult status and authority that generally separates the domains of childhood and teacherhood (Wilson & Wilson, 2011).

When an educator is openminded and mindful in the presence of each child and in each situation, both child and educator become co-learners as well as co-teachers (Aoki, 2004; Moss, 2018; Rinaldi, 2006; Wilson, 2003). Then, if educators are mindful when they are with young children, they are in a position to create a space full of possibility and equity for all (Aoki, 2004).

In this education paradigm, early childhood educators do not only listen to what young children say, answer their questions, and ask them questions that lead to a particular program; they also participate in conversation and create lived curriculum with the children (Aoki, 2004; Wilson & Wilson, 2011). The resulting pedagogical third site and the dialogues within it will bring "infinite possibilities of existence" (Koepke, 2015, p. 160) to children and educators when educators take a sympathetic attitude of not knowing rather than imposing their own objectives on the children (Kind, 2008, 2020; van Manen, 2015).

In the next section, I introduce my study and describe my research questions, methodology, and data collection and analysis.

## The research study

The research I conducted for my master's research project consisted of three week-long case studies with a total of 38 children (aged 18 months to 4 years) and three early childhood educators participating. However, in this paper, I will describe only one of the three cases. In this case, the participants were ten toddlers and one early childhood educator in a childcare centre in North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. This centre is Reggio inspired, and fundamental to the research project were encounters with materials, art events, and experiences. The educators and children from this centre participated in the study described in *Encounters with Materials in Early Childhood Education* (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017).

My master's study was guided by the following research questions: In what ways, if any, does an early childhood educator's verbal and nonverbal dialogical engagement influence children's drawing process in an art space? "How can educators become co-learners, co-teachers, and collaborators with young children?" In this paper, I focus on how these questions, when informed by the ideas of posthumanism and new materialism as well as the concept of the pedagogical third site, highlight the ways in which educators become collaborators with young children in the artmaking space.



Below I describe the methodology of this phenomenological, descriptive case study, the research methods, the research design, and the data collection and analysis. In describing my research methods, I explain my position as a researcher and phenomenologist, as well as how the methodology weaves into notions of posthuman and new materials perspectives, as well as pedagogical third site.

### *Methodology*

The aim of the study was to enhance the understanding of the nature of children's and their educators' ontological everyday experiences in an early childhood artmaking space (van Manen, 1997, 2014). A descriptive-qualitative model (van Manen, 2007, 2014; Yin, 2009) was used for the research design of this hermeneutic phenomenological case study (Yin, 2009). This model involves observing natural phenomena and human and more-than-human relationships as well as their lived experiences (van Manen, 1997, 2014). The "persistent observation" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) technique was used to identify the elements of lived experience. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that the purpose of persistent observation "is to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail" (p. 304). My intention was not to criticize educators' ways of being with children. However, to be able to identify these characteristics within the observation site through persistent observation, I spent a good length of hours a day with the children and their educator to understand and to be a part of their everyday lived experiences, social relationships, and culture. By doing so, I was able to build positive relationships with both the children and the educator. Thus, when I went back home and reflected on what I had observed during the day, this descriptive-qualitative research design model helped me to think and wonder about what I had seen and what I might have missed in each moment of inter- and intra-action.

### *Data collection methods*

In addition to using the persistent observation technique to identify the elements of lived experience, I also took field notes and generated photographs and video recordings. In addition, I interviewed the educator on the last day of the observation period. To collect the data, I set up two phases.

**Phase 1.** During the first four days, I photographed and video-recorded the exchanges that occurred between the educator and the group of young children. I continuously took written notes, not only about what the educator said or asked the children, but also her ways of understanding and observing, as well as how she approached and engaged with the children.

**Phase 2.** On the fifth and final day of observation, I planned to provide a charcoal drawing activity. The activity was not meant to produce individual representational drawings. Rather, I was interested in how the educator's and children's encounters with each other and the materials would open a moment in their pedagogy of listening and in the ethics of their encounter—would they open the "possibility of something new" (O'Sullivan, 2006, p. 2) in the space and time (Moss, 2018; Rinaldi, 2006)? In this sense of an encounter, the children and educator could not "anticipate or predict what something is, what something means, [or] what will or should happen" (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017, p. 35). Thus, they would be provoked, challenged, and motivated to ask questions by drawing their experiences.

Also on the last day of the one-week observation, I interviewed the educator with semistructured questions for approximately one hour. The purpose of the interview was to discuss the observation data, which constituted a record of the children's art experiences and dialogical engagement, as well as the educator's mindfulness toward the children and materials. In particular, I asked questions about a moment when the educator and one of children experienced conflict during the drawing event. I also brought up some moments when the educator was listening,

not only to the children's audible voices, but also to their gestures and thoughts, as well as to the materials. With her permission, I recorded the interview on a voice recorder. Throughout the interview, I did my best to put the educator at ease by maintaining a friendly and conversational style.

### *Data analysis*

When I had finished collecting the data, I transcribed the interview and shared the transcript with the educator. When she had approved the transcription, I thoroughly reviewed all the data. After reflecting on the data, I sorted it into categories. This enabled me to identify some patterns and themes that emerged in the phenomenological observation. According to van Manen (1997), phenomenological themes “may be understood as *the structures of experience*. When we analyze a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience” (p. 79, italics in the original). I consequently identified four themes from the phenomena that I observed: listening to others, encountering with dialogues, living with materials, and living inquiry and becoming. While analyzing these patterns and identifying the themes, I also looked for a metaphor for each case. For van Manen (1987), metaphors are a way of “speaking of thinking, of poetizing” (p. 49). By using a metaphor to describe a case, I believe I will be able to invite readers to think beyond the words of my initial text. In the case study I describe in this article, I chose the metaphor of “a troupe of dancers.” In the next section I present excerpts from the case study, and then discuss it in relation to one of the themes: living with materials.

### *A troupe of dancers*

On a busy morning, two-year-old toddler Will starts making marks with charcoal on a wooden truck and an unusual surface—one of the classroom's toy shelves. Rather than redirecting Will to draw in the drawing area or stopping his actions, Daisy, the educator, attentively watches him and dwells in what she sees for a moment. She tries to understand what Will is trying to tell the educators. According to Daisy, Will's communication style is nonverbal and quiet. Thus, to understand Will's voice, she needs to carefully attend to his actions. Her responsibility, as she responds to his actions and capacities, is to think about what is included and welcomed and what is excluded and troubled (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017). Subsequently, Daisy covers the shelf with a big sheet of white paper and creates another drawing space on the toy shelf for Will and the rest of the children. Will does not make any more marks with charcoals until Daisy creates the new drawing space. However, when the shelf is ready for charcoal drawing, Will sits and starts drawing with Daisy and some other children. One, two, and then more children start gathering around the “table,” and Will, Daisy, and other children start exploring and making marks with the charcoal.

Ren, another two-year-old, comes to the new drawing surface and starts tapping a piece of charcoal on the table: tap, tap, tap, tap, tap. Ren exclaims “Wow!” and he jumps up and smiles. Ren gets so excited that he taps the charcoal again and again; then he makes more charcoal crumbs. He taps the charcoal harder and harder. The sounds and crumbs of charcoal hop and jump around. Ren jumps up and down and loudly and excitedly exclaims, “[Look at] THAT!!”

Ren does not say Daisy's name, but he looks at her face as if he is calling her to come and see the things he has created. Daisy is surprised at Ren's voice, so she draws closer to him. When Daisy comes to him, Ren chooses a piece of charcoal and gives it to Daisy. She accepts his invitation and starts making marks. Daisy does not ask what to draw, how to draw, or what Ren is drawing, but rather carefully observes and follows his body movements (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Hopping and jumping.

Now their charcoal crumbs game begins. As Ren is tapping and crushing more charcoal, his body jumps up and down. Will, who had bodily told Daisy where he wanted to play with the wooden truck and drawing, quietly watches where the marks of charcoals go, and gently moves his finger to follow the marks that Daisy makes. Noticing Will's movements, Daisy keeps moving and watching him, as well as responding to Ren's excitement (see Figure 2).





Figure 2: Charcoals and wooden truck

Ren and Daisy make quite a lot of crumbs. Sometimes both of them stop to check how many they have made. Daisy chooses a tiny piece of charcoal, puts her finger on top of it, and draws a long line until the tiny piece of charcoal disappears from her finger. Ren carefully and excitedly watches Daisy's finger. While she draws the line, Ren makes a few lines around it. Ren also crushes more charcoal and makes more crumbs for her.

Daisy draws. Ren makes more crumbs. Like a pair of dancers, sometimes Daisy leads Ren and sometimes Ren leads Daisy. Every time Daisy performs an action, she pauses for a few seconds and watches what and how the children move.

Ren looks at his fingers and notices that his hands are now completely covered in black soot. He smiles at his hands, walks to the other educator, and shows his hands to her. It is another "let's play!" invitation to the other teacher and a few friends.

As the drawing continues, more children and educators come to the table and join in the drawing activities. As more people make marks and draw, the big sheet of paper becomes covered by black and gray charcoal and white chalk dust (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Charcoal dust.

After Ren leaves the drawing table, Finn, another toddler, engages in the activity and starts making many marks. Now, Daisy and Finn play together through repetitive actions of scribbling and rubbing, tapping and wiping charcoal powder. Finn looks for more dust, so Daisy makes more marks on the surface of the paper. When the marks are ready, Finn rubs them with his hands, and his hands and fingers become covered with the dust. If Finn needs more charcoal, he shows his hands to Daisy and she makes marks on his hands, as well as on her own hands. According to Daisy, Finn is an active, fast, and tactile child who loves to put his hands into materials, and he makes or creates something through the feeling of his hands.

After Daisy has followed Finn's idea for 10 to 15 minutes, she has an idea. She starts gathering the charcoal powder between them. Then Daisy tells Finn, "I have an idea! May I?" She gives him notice that she would like to try out her idea this time. Finn does not say "yes" or "no" but curiously watches what Daisy is going to do.

Daisy keeps gathering the charcoal powder and building a small mountain with it, she excitedly but still calmly says, "Hold on, hold on . . ." (Daisy is still gathering the powder). Finn keeps rubbing the surface of the paper while watching what Daisy does. Daisy calls, "Ready? Hold on . . . watch this . . . Ready? Ready? 1, 2, 3 . . ." (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. "Ready?"

Just as Daisy is about to tap the small mountain of charcoal powder with her index finger, Finn gets very close to the pile and exclaims, "Pow!" Then Finn wipes off the powder before Daisy can act. When Daisy told Finn that she was going to try her idea, Finn did not tell her he wanted to try it out too. At this moment it is as if he has totally forgotten what Daisy was trying to do. Finn smiles and looks very satisfied with what he has done. However, Daisy is disappointed. She is not mad, but with disappointment in her voice says to Finn, "Wow, I didn't think you would do that."

Another educator tells Finn, "I want to see Daisy's idea, too." Finn does not say anything, but he stops moving his hands at that moment and looks at what Daisy is doing again.

Daisy does not yell at him, nor does she ask him to move away from the activity, but she politely tells Finn, "You can do that if you want, but please let me know you also wanted to try, because I was not ready."

Daisy calmly asks Finn one more time, "Can you wait? Can you see what my idea is? And you can do your idea again. Is that okay?"

Daisy pauses a little bit and waits for Finn's response. Finn does not say either yes or no, but he watches and waits for Daisy's next action. Daisy starts gathering the charcoal powder and making a small mountain again. When the mountain is ready, she puts her finger close to the pile. Finn and everyone keep watching Daisy's actions. They freeze in the moment. Only Daisy's index finger rises up to the top of the small mountain and tap! At that moment, the small mountain of charcoal dust flies, jumps up, and spreads like fireworks.

Everyone reacts: "Wow!" As soon as Finn sees the result, he smiles and is excited. Daisy looks at Finn, holds his hand, and says to him, "Thank you for letting me do my idea." Then, Daisy, Finn, and everyone start tapping and rubbing leftover charcoal powder together. Finn also restarts, asking Daisy to make more scribbling marks here and there because he wants to rub the marks with his hands. However, a few seconds later, from the other side of the room, a child bumps his head and starts crying. The other educators are busy in this moment, so Daisy needs

to leave the table.

### *Findings and reflections*

The young children that Daisy works with are toddlers, and their communication style is mostly nonverbal. The children and Daisy understand each other, not only by means of the spoken word, but much more through bodily gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice, as well as through slow ways of art making, drawing, and playing (Dyson, 1990).

In Daisy's room, charcoal, watercolours in small jars, paint brushes, paper, clay, and many more materials are always there for the children to use. These materials stay in the room, in the same way as the educators and children live and spend time within the space. Among the educators and the children, as well as among the children's peers, materials such as paper, charcoal, clay, and blocks are an important means of communicating ideas and feelings through art (Kind, 2018; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017).

### *Dialogue in the pedagogical third site*

Daisy carefully watches the children's actions, openly listens to their multiple voices, and plays with the children and materials. Furthermore, she creates and recreates pedagogical spaces and dialogues with the children and the materials through their art making and drawing. Sometimes the pedagogical space is disruptive and conflictive, because both the educators and children engage and dialogue with their ideas and wonder. For instance, when Daisy and Finn introduced their ideas through their active engagements, they disrupted each other. However, even though Daisy and Finn had a moment of conflict, Daisy did not stop Finn's actions and Finn did not deny Daisy's actions. Openness does not imply only niceness or innocence, as if only children's creativity, ideas, and wonderings are accepted or listened to (Davies, 2014; Kind, 2018; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017); rather, all voices need to be heard in the pedagogical third space (Wilson, 2003, 2007). Listening to children and responding to them calls for ongoing movement. It means "not passively observing highly charged events, [but] to be open to being moved and to act, to engage with emerging propositions and step into emerging choreographies" (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017, p. 42). As Sylvia Kind (2010) writes, art can be "messy, disruptive, and unsettling" (p. 119) because art cannot be always easy, nice, or pretty.

When Daisy and Ren draw and play, they become co-creators, co-artists, co-learners, and co-investigators of charcoal drawing play. Sometimes Ren shows Daisy where and how to draw; sometimes Daisy provokes Ren, showing him how to communicate and play with charcoal. How Daisy draws, makes, or plays with children does not always go smoothly. As with the small mountain of charcoal dust, there are moments of disagreement, not only among the children but also between the children and Daisy. However, they negotiate their ideas and find in-between spaces in which both Daisy's and the children's ideas live together. Readings (1996) supports this unpredictable, rhizomatic and pedagogical relation as "dialogic web of obligations to thought.... [representing] the voice of the other" (p. 145).

During Daisy's interview, she told me about how she sees her role when she makes art alongside the group of young children:

I think we are co-artists because we are collaborating, and we are in this together. This is not just what the child is doing. Different languages come out with different materials. We need to make materials more accessible to have these different languages.

Through the multiple movements of their ongoing playing, making, drawing, thinking, and learning, both Daisy and the children pay close attention to each other and look out for what will happen next. Both Daisy and the



children attentively respond to their charcoal movements. Daisy's way of attending to and being with children is like a dancer who cares for each member of the dance troupe and performs her movements in beautiful harmony with the others. However, just as a troupe of dancers sometimes have moments of disagreement or arguments, so too do Daisy and the children sometimes have small clashes.

A troupe of dancers usually learns something from the moment and from each other by negotiating and renegotiating their ideas and wills. Likewise, Daisy learned from Ren that he was more interested in crushing charcoal and making sounds than drawing. In the case of Will, she learned his favorite place to draw and play with his toy that day. With Finn, she learned that he liked to play with the charcoal powder in the same way he played with clay. At the interview, when Daisy and I reflected on what had happened during the week, she shared her learning from the children:

[As] the materials have different languages, the children get drawn to different things. Will is drawn to the drawing materials in a certain way and he moves. Finn likes to go down to the crushing of the clay and charcoals. They all have different—I think when we have this space with [the materials] all out, children are able to accept . . . [children] can accept and wonder what is going on in their hand and they see it. When children have [materials] in their hands and see them, like, “Oh I have an idea for this.” And [children] will go and they will do it. So, I think it is so important to have [materials] with us, so that both the children and we can see what is in their minds all the time. It is just there—these flowing ideas.

Hence, the ongoing making, performing, creating, and learning not only resonate in the children, but also live within the materials, Daisy, and the children. The entanglement of Finn, Daisy, and charcoals reminds me to think the question “What might emerge through entangled human and more-than-human bodies moving?” (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Blaise, 2019, p 117). Daisy's way of living and being with children is a life quest of how to live with others (Kind, 2020; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017) and what matters at each moment for those others. The others are not only humans; they include the children but also materials, the unknown, newness, oldness, and all the beautiful moments they experience (Irwin, 2008; Meyer, 2010; Springgay et al., 2005).

As another example of what may transpire unexpectedly in the pedagogical third site, when Will drew marks with thick black charcoal directly on the shelf that was not yet covered by paper, it was a surprising moment for both the children and the centre's educators. At that moment, Daisy and the other educators stopped, looked, and took a moment to think about what was taking place (Rautio, 2013). Daisy did not stop Will from drawing directly on the shelf. She faced the moment, recognizing in it Will's discovery that “there is another place to draw” or “there are different materials to draw on.” Daisy decided to cover the shelf with a big sheet of paper instead of asking Will to move to an area where paper had already been laid out. Daisy told me that “instead of bringing him to a certain area, we go to his zone. It is kind of interesting to think about bringing it to him and creating something around him.”





*Figure 5. Becoming.*

When everything was set differently, the children and educators started gathering around the toy shelf and making marks together. Their drawings did not simply represent some objects. Each line, scribble, or dot that each child and educator made became a collaborative drawing (see Figure 5). The sticks of charcoal became the children's and educator's voices, their musical instruments, and/or toys. The children's hands and bodies, as well as Daisy's, were no longer just those of children and an adult. The charcoal sticks and paper were no longer objectively represented materials that were separate from people's lives. Rather, their engagement and encountering (that is, Daisy's, the children's, and the materials') were becoming "social processes informing the pathways of becoming" (Atkinson, 2011, p. 7). That is, neither the humans (educators and children) nor the more-than-humans (materials) were trapped in a singular value and practice; rather, they kept moving and changing in their particular local social

context. Thus, when Daisy, the children, and the materials (i.e., humans and nonhumans) live well together nonhierarchically, the materials become an essential part of the children's, educators', and, more generally, humans' everyday lives (Ingold, 2011).

## Living with materials in an early childhood art space where the posthuman perspective is practiced

The BC Early Learning Framework (Government of British Columbia, 2019), encourages educators to “carefully observe what happens between materials and children, and consider materials in relation to the image of the child, and in relation to the other principles in this framework” (p. 23). However, early childhood educators often understand materials and objects as possessing passive agency (Davies, 2014; Kind, 2014). This means educators often unconsciously think of themselves as agents acting on inanimate and passive materials. What if, rather than thinking that people activate materials' agency, educators understood materials and objects as acting upon us with active agency (Davies, 2014; Lenz Taguchi, 2009)? This conception would likely change “how we see materials, how we engage with them, and what we create with them” (Kind, 2017, p. 867).

Kind (2014) describes children as always becoming “participants in an active world of lively materials” (p. 872). As children engage with and through materials that they are given or find, the materials respond to the children's actions. In this relationship, children and educators understand and engage with materials that are “in the midst of becoming something else” (Kind, 2014, p. 871). In this scenario, educators and researchers can think of both humans (children and educators) and nonhumans (materials and objects) horizontally—not hierarchically—living together without binary systems of animate/inanimate, active/passive, self/other, etc. (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017; Davies, 2014; Lenz Taguchi, 2009; ).

Lenz Taguchi (2009) uses ideas from Karen Barad and some other feminists (e.g., Rosi Braidotti, Erica Burman, Judith Butler, Bronwen Davies, Donna Haraway) to explain material agency, indicating that humans together, as well as humans and materials, are constantly in an intra-active pedagogy. In her words,

it is not only humans that have agency—the possibility of intervening and acting upon others and the world. Rather, all matter can be understood as having agency in a relationship in which they mutually will change and alter in their ongoing intra-actions. (Lenz Taguchi, 2009, p. 4)

For instance, Daisy did not plan how the children and charcoals should react to her actions or their own actions. The phenomenon occurred spontaneously because Daisy listened to both the children and the materials. These synchronized movements became their dialogue and non-objective performative art piece. Thus, Daisy's way of being with materials and children is “to attune to something [by] pay[ing] close attention, orient[ing] toward it, and find[ing] a rhythm and synchronicity with it” (Kind, 2020, p. 54). Davies (2014) and Osgood et al. (2020) would support the situation; they maintain that, when experimenting with materials, children's curious minds and wonderment will open up worlds that neither they nor their educators had known previously, which will invite the children and the educators to enter new avenues of thinking and doing with others. In this world-making process, educators are going to pay and bring their attention to “how children learn *with*, not just about, the world (Taylor, Diaz-Diaz & Semenec, 2020, p. 209, emphasis in original).

We might reflect, for example, on Will's act of drawing lines on a toy shelf, which was not a drawing space and was not yet covered with drawing paper. Will did not tell Daisy and his peers why he decided to draw lines on the shelf, but it might be that the shelf invited him to draw, or maybe the charcoal sticks called Will to draw there. When Daisy received the invitation to make marks on the toy shelf from both Will and the charcoal, the shelf became the

day's charcoal drawing space.

An art space can be anywhere, such as a forest, an outdoor play area, a street, the children's nap room, or a cubby area, if educators *responsibly* and *responsively* attend to the movements of children and materials (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017). Hence, in the art space, both the children and the educators respect and respond to each other and attentively and mindfully listen to all (Davies, 2014; Jardine et al., 2011; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017).

Jardine et al. (2011) maintain that everyday living practices, such as questioning, learning, wondering, studying, mistaking, or arguing, should not be affirmed as a finished or manageable object; rather, educators must understand them "as living, contested, still ongoing human projects" (p. 8). This understanding invites alternative ways of being and creates a space where humans and more-than-humans can deeply engage and intra-act with each other and collaboratively, attentively and response-ably support their everyday practices as ongoing and new every day (Davies, 2014; Haraway, 2016; Lenz Taguchi, 2009).

### Significance of the research

Many researchers of early childhood art education have declared that children's art should not be marginalized by a preplanned curriculum or understood primarily as individual works (Eckhoff, 2012; Kind, 2018; Rinaldi, 2007; Schulte, 2013; Sunday, 2015; Thompson, 2015; Wilson, 2003). For this reason, and to embrace children's immense imagination and creativity, early childhood educators are encouraged to be attentive, responsive, and mindful, and to welcome every child's unique ways of thinking, being, acting, and perceiving (Aoki, 2004; Eckhoff, 2012; Jardine et al., 2011; Kind, 2010; Rinaldi, 2006; Schulte, 2013).

This study explored an early childhood artmaking space that aims to put this perspective into practice with the children, as well as the importance of the pedagogical third site (Wilson, 2003, 2007; Thompson, 2015) and posthuman and new material perspectives (Diaz-Diaz & Semenec, 2020; Lenz Taguchi, 2009; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017) in early childhood art education. In an ongoing, active learning process, educators and children become part of "the emergent processes of bringing something into being" (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017, p. 9) through their collective, collaborative, and pedagogical artmaking, pedagogical dialogues, and thoughtful and care-full listening.

During this study, the key questions in relation to encountering humans (educators and children) and more-than-human others (materials) were "In what ways, if any, does an early childhood educator's verbal and nonverbal dialogical engagement influence children's drawing process in an art space?" and "How do early childhood educators think, play, communicate, feel, and live, not only with humans (young children) but also with more-than-human others, such as art materials, as children follow and join in with the materials' movements?"

In Daisy's case, her ways of playing, thinking, and living with children and materials was dialogical, pedagogical and intra-active. This engagement did not happen only between the child with whom Daisy talked, played, or made; her dialogical engagement invited the materials *and* children *and* educators to think, make, and play together (Lenz Taguchi, 2009). Through these invitations of *being with*, the children discovered something new and old from others and were encouraged to keep developing their curiosity and wonderment in the pedagogical third site (Wilson, 2003).

The study's findings revealed that when educators truly open their minds and thoughtfully listen, not only to children's spoken languages but also their thoughts, desires, and needs by maintaining a responsive, responsible, and attentive approach, the space in-between children and educators, as well as between humans and more-than-

human others (materials), becomes a pedagogical third site (Thompson, 2015; Wilson, 2003, 2007, 2011). In this space, if educators slow down their ways of being, making, listening, and asking questions, they and the children can deeply reconnect with the process of making art, as well as with their own and each other's thinking and wonderment.

- 
- 1 Preplanned curriculum often involves educators' "own interests and assumptions about ways of knowing and about how teachers and students are to be understood" (Aoki, 2004, p. 160). Furthermore, these practices are often framed within "developmentally appropriate" practices that are laid down by the vocabulary of should (Burman, 2008). Educators critically observe children by using normative assessment methods and identify questions and problems within particular ideas and "truths" (Burman, 2008; Moss, 2018).
  - 2 Child-centered practice is common within early childhood education in Canada. Child-centeredness is grounded in humanist approaches (Diaz-Diaz & Semenec, 2020) in which children are seen as commodities and understood through adultcentric perspectives (Land et al., 2020). The posthuman perspective avoids child-centered and romanticized notions of childhood because it does not see humans as the center of the world.

## References

- Aoki, T. T. (2004). *Curriculum in a new key: The collected works of Ted T. Aoki*. (W. F. Pinar & R. L. Irwin, Eds.). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Atkinson, D. (2011). *Art, equality and learning: Pedagogies against the state*. Sense.
- Atkinson, D. (2018). Art, pedagogies and becoming: The force of art and the individuation of new worlds. In L. Knight & L. A. Cutcher (Eds.), *Arts-research-education: Connections and directions* (pp. 3–16). Springer.
- Bennett, J. (2010a). A vitalist stopover on the way to a new materialism. In D. H. Coole & S. Frost (Eds.), *New materialisms: Ontology, agency, and politics* (pp. 47–69). Duke University Press.
- Bennett, J. (2010b). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Duke University Press.
- Bloch, M. N., Swadener, B. B., & Cannella, G. S. (2018). *Reconceptualizing early childhood education and care—A reader: Critical questions, new imaginaries, and social activism* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Peter Lang.
- Burman, E. (2008). *Developments: Child, image, nation*. Routledge.
- Cinquemani, S. (2018). Artistic encounters: Ethical collaborations between children and adults. In C. M. Schulte & C. M. Thompson (Eds.), *Communities of practice: Art, play, and aesthetics in early childhood* (pp. 61–76). Springer.
- Davies, B. (2014). *Listening to children: Being and becoming*. Routledge.
- Diaz-Diaz, C., & Semenec, P. (Eds.) (2020). *Posthumanist and new materialist methodologies: Research after the child*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-2708-1>
- Duncum, P. (1982). The origins of self-expression: A case of self-deception. *Art Education*, 35(5), 32–35. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3192633><https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.1982.11653355>
- Dyson, A. H. (1990). Symbol makers, symbol weavers: How children link play, pictures, and print. *Young Children*, 45(2), 50–57. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ402928.
- Filippini, T. (2018, October). *The proceedings from pedagogical collaborations: Encounter with a pedagoga*. Presentation at the Vancouver Reggio Association, Vancouver, BC.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1989). *Truth and method* (2nd ed.). Continuum.
- Government of British Columbia. (2008). *British Columbia early learning framework*. Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Children and Family Development, & British Columbia Early Learning Advisory Group.
- Government of British Columbia. (2019). *British Columbia early learning framework*. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/early-learning/teach/early-learning-framework>
- Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.
- Ingold, T. (2013). *Making: Anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture*. Routledge.
- Irwin, R. L. (2004). A/r/tography: A metonymic metissage. In A. de Cosson & R. L. Irwin (Eds.), *A/r/tography: Rendering self through arts-based living inquiry* (pp. 27–38). Pacific Educational Press.
- Irwin, R., & Springgay, S. (2008). A/r/tography as practice-based research. In S. Springgay, R. L. Irwin, C. Leggo, & P. Gouzouasis (Eds.), *Being with a/r/tography* (pp. xix–xxxiii). Sense.
- Jardine, D. W., Friesen, S., & Clifford, P. (2011). *Curriculum in abundance*. Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Keller, C., & Rubenstein, M. (2017). *Entangled worlds: Religion, science, and new materialisms*. Fordham University Press.
- Kind, S. (2010). Art encounters: Movements in the visual arts and early childhood education. In V. Pacini-Ketchabaw (Ed.), *Flows, rhythms, & intensities of early childhood education curriculum* (pp. 113–131). Peter Lang.



- Kind, S. (2014). Material encounters. *International Journal of Child, Youth, & Family Studies*, 5(4.2), 865–877. <https://doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs.kinds.5422014>
- Kind, S. (2018). Collective improvisations: The emergence of the early childhood studio as an event full place. In C. M. Schulte & C. M. Thompson (Eds.), *Communities of practice: Art, play, and aesthetics in early childhood* (pp. 5–21). Springer.
- Kind, S. (2020). Wool works, cat's cradle, and the art of paying attention. In C. M. Schulte (Ed.), *Ethics and research with young children: New perspectives* (pp. 49–62). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Kind, S., Diaz-Diaz, C., & Semenec, P. (2020). Interview with Sylvia Kind. In C. Diaz-Diaz & P. Semenec (Eds.), *Posthumanist and new materialist methodologies: Research after the child*. Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-2708-1\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-2708-1_7)
- Kind, S., & Lee, C. (2017). Moon bear and the night butterfly. In M. J. Binder & S. Kind (Eds.), *Drawing as language: Celebrating the work of Bob Steele* (pp. 101–116). Sense.
- Kind, S., & Vintimilla, C. D. (2020, July 30). *Early Childhood Pedagogy Network series conversation 2*. Presentation at the Early Childhood Pedagogy Network, Vancouver, BC.
- Knight, L. (2008). Communication and transformation through collaboration: Rethinking drawing activities in early childhood. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 9(4), 306–316. <https://doi.org/10.2304ciec.2008.9.4.306>
- Lenz Taguchi, H. (2009). *Going beyond the theory/practice divide in early childhood education: Introducing an intra-active pedagogy*. Routledge.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE.
- MacNaughton, G. (2005). *Doing Foucault in early childhood studies: Applying post-structural ideas*. Routledge.
- Manning, E., & Massumi, B. (2014). *Thought in the act: Passages in the ecology of experience*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Matthews, J. (2003). *Drawing and painting: Children and visual representation*. SAGE.
- McClure, M., Tarr, P., Thompson, C. M., & Eckhoff, A. (2017). Defining quality in visual art education for young children: Building on the position statement of the Early Childhood Art Educators. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 118(3), 154–163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632913.2016.1245167>
- Meyer, K. (2010). Living inquiry: Me, my self, and other. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 26(1), 85–96. <https://journal.jctonline.org/index.php/jct/article/view/150>
- Moss, P. (2018). *Alternative narratives in early childhood: An introduction for students and practitioners*. Routledge.
- O'Donoghue, D. (2015). The turn to experience in contemporary art: A potentiality for thinking art education differently. *Studies in Art Education*, 56(2), 103–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2015.11518954>
- O'Sullivan, S. (2006). *Art encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought beyond representation*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pacini-Ketchabaw, V., Kind, S., & Kocher, L. L. M. (2017). *Encounters with materials in early childhood education*. Routledge.
- Rautio, P. (2013). Being nature: Interspecies articulation as a species-specific practice of relating to environment. *Environmental Education Research*, 19(4), 445–457. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2012.700698>
- Reggio Children. (2020). Loris Malaguzzi. <https://www.reggiochildren.it/en/reggioemiliaapproach/loris-malaguzzi/>
- Rinaldi, C. (2006). *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching, and learning*. RoutledgeFalmer.
- Schulte, C. M. (2019). Wild encounters: A more than human approach to children's drawing. *Studies in Art Education*, 60(2), 92–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2019.1600223>
- Soto, L. D. (2000). *The politics of early childhood education*. Peter Lang.

- Springgay, S., Irwin, R. L., & Kind, S. W. (2005). A/r/tography as living inquiry through art and text. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11(6), 897–912. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405280696>
- Sunday, K. (2015). Relational making: Re/Imagining theories of child art. *Studies in Art Education*, 56(3), 228–240. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2015.11518965>
- Taylor, A. (2013). *Reconfiguring the natures of childhood*. Routledge.
- Thompson, C. (2009). Mira! Looking, listening, and lingering in research with children. *Visual Arts Research*, 35(1), 24–34. <https://scholarlypublishingcollective.org/uip/var/article-split/35/1/24/203508/Mira-Looking-Listening-and-Lingering-in-Research>
- Thompson, C. M. (2015). Prosthetic imaginings and pedagogies of early childhood art. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 21(6), 554–561. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800415581892>
- van Manen, M. (1997). *Researching lived experience* (2nd ed.). Althouse Press.
- van Manen, M. (2002). *The tone of teaching: The language of pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Althouse Press.
- van Manen, M. (2007). Phenomenology of practice. *Phenomenology & practice*, 1(1), 11–30. <https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/pandpr/index.php/pandpr/article/viewFile/19803/15314>
- van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. Left Coast Press.
- van Manen, M. (2015). *The tact of teaching: The meaning of pedagogical thoughtfulness*. Routledge.
- Wilson, B. (2003). Three sites for visual cultural pedagogy: Honoring students' interests and imagery. *International Journal of Arts Education*, 1(3), 107–126. [http://ed.arted.gov.tw/uploadfile/periodical/582\\_107-142.pdf](http://ed.arted.gov.tw/uploadfile/periodical/582_107-142.pdf)
- Wilson, B. (2007). Art, visual culture, and child/adult collaborative images: Recognizing the other-than. *Visual Arts Research*, 33(2), 6–20. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20715444>
- Yazan, B. (2015). Three approaches to case study methods in education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(2), 134–152. <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol20/iss2/12/>
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). SAGE.