



Manifesting living knowledges: A pedagogists' working manifesto

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we present a working manifesto that emerged from our projects with pedagogists – a new professional figure in the Canadian early childhood education context. Drawing on feminist scholars' work, we offer this manifesto as a feminist call to actively think against the anti-intellectualism sustained by existing structures in early childhood education, and as a response to the urgent need to think about early childhood education in more complex, pedagogical, political and ethical ways.

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For more than twenty years, we have engaged in pedagogical work propelled by our desire to think collectively about what might be possible in early childhood education, and to actively create transformative processes within the field (see Vintimilla, Pacini-Ketchabaw and Land for a list of projects). In this paper, we offer one more instantiation of this collective endeavor. Since 2018, we have been working to create a new professional figure, the pedagogist, in the early childhood education field (Land et al., 2020; Vintimilla & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2020). This figure takes inspiration from the Italian *pedagogista*, but in Canada follows its own ethical and political trajectories. A pedagogist, in her work alongside educators, families, and children, responds to the specifics of a given educational space by proposing situated pedagogical orientations that are taken up and emerge in the creation of innovative pedagogical processes. Importantly, pedagogists are not focused in psychologically analyzing or diagnosing a given individual or situation. Neither do pedagogist counsel individuals. While, generally, psychologists specialize in developing treatment plans and mentors seek to give advice, a pedagogist envisions pedagogical trajectories and prospects.

Elsewhere we outlined some propositions for educating pedagogists (Land et al., 2020). In this article, we address pedagogists' contributions to early childhood education. Following The Shadow Places Network

(Potter et al., 2020), we do so by proposing a working manifesto as a form of address that is driven by a feminist desire.¹ Our desire is encapsulated in both Virginia Woolf's (1938) famous statement "think we must" as well as Donna Haraway's (2016) proposition that "*it matters what matters we use to think other matters with...*" (p. 12). For feminist scholars these phrases are a feminist call, a summons to join other women in "making a fuss" (Stengers & Despret, 2014). For Isabelle Stengers and Vinciane Despret (2014), as well as for Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2012), *think we must* stands as a call for women who work in the university to transform it. For Haraway "*it matters what matters we use to think other matters with...*" is a call for situated work and for paying attention to epistemological doings. For us, *think we must with situated matters* enjoins us to rethink the feminized and devalued field of early childhood education.

Stengers and Despret (2014) propose that as feminists we have always done our own thinking in the midst of doing mundane everyday things like walking, standing in a line, waiting for the bus, making food, or conversing with children—that hasn't required the closed door of a university office and the comfort of a chair and soft light. They also note that for Woolf this demand for thinking was not "a question of affirming membership in a social class" but rather "a question of situating herself, *actively...* as the descendant of all those women of whom nothing more was expected other than what was demanded of a housewife, wife and mother" (p. 28). Here we hear Sara Ahmed (2017) too, who says a manifesto "allows us to articulate a *for*, a *for* that carries with it an experience of what we come up against. A *for* can be how we turn something about. A manifesto is *about* what it aims to bring *about*" (p. 256, italics in original).

Our working manifesto is about *think we must with situated matters*—as a feminist call to actively think against the anti-intellectualism sustained by existing structures in early childhood education in what is currently known as Canada. We bring forward a manifesto because *think we must with situated matters* is often dismissed as an elitist invitation for which early childhood education has no time. And, in the same beat, our working manifesto aims to bring about *think we must* as an ethic, a possibility, a manifestation that makes the work of a pedagogue that of thinking—because they *must* think—in the name of worldmaking with educators and children. For us, *think we must with situated matters* in early childhood education is urgently needed because nothing more than adhering to safety and health requirements is expected from early childhood educators.

Inspired by Stengers and Despret (2014) call to incite thought as an act of resistance, we have enacted resistance over the years and in project

after project. *Think we must* so that we do not merely accept, comply, or conform to what is expected of us. We resist the tendency to submit our thinking to the established neoliberal terms and their consequential managerial logics of development, readiness, utility, or success. We resist the settler colonial apparatus of child development (and its alliance with the nation-state) that governs and orders the world of early childhood education. We resist the tendency to infantilize the image of the early childhood educator as someone who can only deal with simple ideas (this is often framed in terms such as “we need to meet them at their level”). We resist what Stengers and Despret refer to as the rule of “everyone for himself” (p. 18) or the stagnant relations that often are based in the egotistic pendulum of the I (teacher) you (child) in the literalism and evaluative frames with which extractive capitalism foreswears the difficult task to think a project that goes beyond the self and its logics of possession, control, and ownership (see Land et al., 2020). We resist these tendencies, along with so much else...

With resistance we incite a desire for early childhood education and its institutional bodies to engage with the need “to examine the difference between routine/busy work and the transmission and cultivation of ‘living knowledge’” (Stengers & Despret, 2014, p. 18). For us, living knowledges are knowledges capable of nourishing the field’s conditions to allow new possibilities. We insist on living knowledge rather than routinized knowledge because it provokes pedagogical and curricular acts of creation, invention, and regeneration instead of merely passing along knowledge that “tumbles down” through paternalistic capacitation (Frederici, 2020) and professional development. Unlike professional development based on logics of extraction, application, reproduction, and assimilation, living knowledge demands early childhood education to create and generate. Our manifesto, then, creates against inherited structures and epistemologies in education. It demands that we create continually over and over as we activate its ethics and politics in different contexts and within different relations.

This working manifesto is made of twelve declarations that invite us to make a fuss—not for the sake of making a fuss but to compose pedagogical spaces for imagining less destructive futures, or a future at all. These declarations demand us to orient ourselves, expose our orientation, and “find value in explicit politics” (Potter et al., 2020, p. 4). Our manifesto *manifests*: it points to what collectively matters and calls on us to dialogue, inquire, invent, and encounter. In other words, the manifesto challenges us to create ethical and pedagogical spaces through acts of *mattering* (Barad, 2007) and matters of *concern* (Latour, 2004). Again, it allows us “to make a joyful fuss” hoping for new prospects (Stengers & Despret,

2014, p. 54). Ahmed (2017, p. 255) offers that a manifesto is about “how a judgement becomes a project,” reminding us that the work, the joyful fuss, of manifesting is grounded in transforming how a pedagogist notices a judgment (an attending, an attuning, an inheritance) toward possibilities for a project that brings into being unfamiliar ways of togetherness in education.

We use this manifesto as a form of address to bring to light the possibility of new prospects and, as Bruno Latour (2010) writes, as a “warning, a call to attention, so as to *stop* going further in the *same way* as before” (p. 3, italics in original). This manifesto (and the reason for its resistance) is a call to pay attention to what we have inherited as a field and to how much of that inheritance reproduces and is implicated in a neoliberal, capitalistic imperial and colonial world. This manifesto is a call to think other ways of going forward, so that we might invent new pedagogical orientations and curricular compositions that allow early childhood education to compose with other possible ways of being, acting, and thinking: ways that are less technocratic and routinized, less capitalistic and anthropocentric.

To make the point in a different way, for us, each of these declarations has the potential to slowly and care-fully create curricular compositions that form a path, a memory, a history that activates implicit and explicit processes of becoming. These declarations compose spaces that take up the possibility to think together and compose together a myriad of small events that try out, fail, form, and deform possible pedagogical and creative processes that are activated in the spirit of what orients them. They are *a praxis*. As we offer these declarations to pedagogists, we take great care to position the manifesto as an unfamiliar document, both in its context and content and its possibilities. To get to know the manifesto as a living knowledge enlivened within inventive praxis requires that we meet it very intentionally as a companion in our thinking. Perhaps we can think the manifesto as a written body that feels strange as it demands that we inhabit it against individuality or application or comprehension or diagnosis, while always knowing that we learn from and enliven the declarations through situated, inventive processes.

We highlight the speculative and creative spirit of these declarations/praxis because, aligned with the role of the pedagogist, the intention is not to propose them in the name of heroic resistance or utopian causes. We are not trying to propose a better, more progressive way to proceed or to recover something lost or a grand set of solutions. Neither are we trying to propose a critique that brings a “world beyond this world” (Latour, 2010, p. 3). We are trying to think and to respond ethically and pedagogically to our inheritances and the conditions of our times. Therefore,

as ethical and pedagogical declarations and as *immanent material manifestations*, they come with no guarantees. Borrowing Stengers and Despret (2014) words, they come

without the slightest assurance that this might make a difference, that this might contribute to inciting possibilities to effectively resist. Thus knowing from the beginning that it's ridiculous or even derisory. Simply with the conviction that, in any case, everything begins this way, with experimentation ceaselessly recommencing, with the sense of the possible always being reborn. (p. 48)

Although this manifesto and its declarations come with no guarantees, we embrace the possibilities they might bring. Indeed, we are interested in attending to the multiple material-discursive manifestations that are incited by each declaration. To put it differently, it is the inability to follow a linear and progressive narrative that nurtures our work. We are interested, pedagogically, in the situated makings and processes that shape stories.

Declarations: a pedagogist manifesto

Pedagogical declarations are made in the spirit of response-ability (both responsible and able to respond) in education, as a shared work of culture and world making. They are offered with humility, not as a blueprint to be executed but as a companion for thinking and enacting pedagogy that is generative, nonprescriptive, catalytic, and unforeseeable. Pedagogical declarations orient us toward particular politics and ethics, and pedagogical intentions.

Pedagogical declarations publicly assert what a pedagogist stands for: educational processes that are always in relation to particular pedagogical orientations. The declarations are an invitation to respond differently in pedagogical conversations and actions.

The declarations call for pedagogists to propose creative pedagogical acts. They exist to open up processes that allow us to jump into action and creation. Because they uphold situated, responsive, and new horizons as the medium of pedagogical work, they ask us to make ethical and pedagogical decisions.

D1

We are networks of pedagogists and education scholars who work to unsettle the stagnant status quo and to agitate the conventions that structure education unjustly. We understand that we are implicated in an educational project that was and continues to be complicit in

inequality and repression, expropriation and colonization, and that works to secure the conditions that ensure injustices will continue into the future.

D2

Because we think pedagogically, we are called to challenge child development and any other discourse that predetermines what early childhood education is and can think.

D3

Our pedagogical project is about subject and world formation. It is about figuring out how to live well with others (human and more-than-human) and enacting transformative relations that respond to, and (re)compose with, the times we live in.

D4

In questioning developmental logics, we hold ourselves responsible to enacting everyday speculative practices toward livable futures. This includes opening possibilities for just worlds by collaboratively engaging with and intervening in the unequal worlds in which children, families, educators, and communities live.

D5

We respond to urgent calls to expose and dismantle the injustices and oppressions of human-centered practices. Alternative possibilities for pedagogy, curriculum, and education might therefore emerge. We honor those who invoke and bring into clear presence the interdependencies and relations that create the complex worlds in which we live.

D6

We study and inventively engage how power works. We question how managerial and profit structures maintain control of our everyday practices in early childhood education. By tracing how our relations sustain and interrupt these neoliberal conditions and logics, we turn their weaknesses toward multiple forms of collective strength.

D7

Joining a rich history of curriculum theory, we recognize that curriculum shapes and is shaped by childhoods, creates and is created by relationships, produces and is produced by life logics, and underscores the knowledges and worldviews we value and silence. Pedagogy activates curriculum. Curriculum is a collective ethical and political endeavor that grapples with speculative pedagogical processes and the commons they realize.

D8

While the role of the pedagogist emerges from a European tradition, we reinvent the role by responding to our particular contexts, questions, and contingencies. This reinvention continually remakes new professional forms and new forms of being together.

D9

We commit to listening with humility, showing up when invited, answering and being responsive to all voices, presences, lives, and futures. Our work is nourished by the possibility of participating in just commons. However, we do not pretend or aspire to already know what livable commons require, or how to work at such a project. Therefore, we keep the question of commons open.

D10

Interdisciplinarity, a traversal of worlds, is the pedagogist's language and medium. We are for sustained, careful, ethical conversations that inventively trouble logics of fragmentation of knowledges and their mastery by attending to different cosmologies, lived knowledges, and situated experiences. We work to make early childhood education an intellectually vibrant space, a climate rich with lively ideas that stand to revitalize relations that have been captured by capitalist and colonial logics of extraction, production, and compliance.

D11

The pedagogists' modes of thinking do not comply with what is already established and prescribed. Pedagogists work in collective and collaborative ways because they live pedagogy as a common project. This is why we understand the work as avowing both collective and ethical invention.

D12

We engage in pedagogical conversations and practices to activate the orientations and commitments of specific educational projects. We are not interested in a project of redemption, of the legitimation of expertise, of solutions, or of the latest round of best practices.

Declarations and their pedagogical prospective(s) ²

Each of these declarations carries multiple and potential pedagogical prospective(s) (prospectivus) soliciting us into an inquiry and activism that unsettle normalizing discourses reproduced within everyday practices in early childhood education. Pedagogical prospective(s) deeply matter to the work of pedagogists because they require that we learn to inherit a past (with its beauty and injustices) and also open ourselves to what is unfamiliar and not yet recognized within the field. Yet, pedagogical prospective(s) require the ability to project and envision without a guarantee of certainty or mastery. They ethically and speculatively engage us with an unforeseeable future. We are referring here to a future that cannot be prescribed within the grammars of our present because pedagogical prospective(s) do not seek to predict future events. Instead, they allow us to think with the present to pose speculative responses for the times to come.

As we put this manifesto to work, we have experienced that declarations—more so perhaps than the praxis itself—have been the occasion of irritation, difficulty, struggles, and even outright rejection. As Ahmed (2017) writes in regard to feminist manifestos, these reactions may be a testament to the declarations' generative and transformative force. We wonder if such responses might be related to the irritation and difficulty—the “trouble,” that is—of reorienting thinking and practice within other possible grammars of recognition, other possible futures.

This manifesto is unrelenting and unsettling, where taking the risk of “un” holds space for the messy, imperfect work of undoing the status quo. As we work to stay with the trouble (Haraway, 2016) of this working manifesto, we consider these struggles and open space with Woolf's cry: *Think we must.*

Contributors

Cristina D. Vintimilla is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Education at York University. She is also a pedagoga within the Italian tradition. Cristina's area of research is pedagogy as living knowledge and as that which thinks and troubles education as a normative project. Cristina is particularly interested in the intersection between pedagogy and the arts as a generative conversation for imagining alternative educational worlds.

Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw is a professor of Early Childhood Education in the Faculty of Education and Director of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Research in Curriculum at Western University in Ontario, Canada. Her writing and research contribute to the Common Worlds Research Collective (tracing children's relations with places, materials, and other species), and the Early Childhood Pedagogies Collaboratory (experimenting with the contours, conditions, and complexities of 21st century pedagogies).

Nicole Land is an assistant professor in the School of Early Childhood Studies at Ryerson University. Thinking with early childhood educators and children, her work is curious about the inherited and inventive relations we might create with fats, muscles, and movement. Nicole and collaborators share questions and provocations from their work at Moving Pedagogies Blog.

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Notes

1. Manifestos are prolific in the social sciences and humanities, including education (see Ahmed, 2017; Bear et al., 2015; Biesta & Säfström, 2011; Gibson et al., 2015; Haraway, 2003; Latour, 2010). We join these authors to manifest a vision for pedagogists in early childhood education. At the same time, we want to acknowledge and refuse the viler use of manifestos for anti-Semitic, fascist, and terrorist purposes (e.g., in Norway in 2011 and New Zealand in 2018).
2. Pedagogical prospective(s) is our translation from Spanish *prospectivas pedagógicas* and Italian *prospettive pedagogiche* into English to speak about the yet to come that can be envisioned but not mastered.

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