



MATERIAL ENCOUNTERS





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CAPILANO UNIVERSITY STUDIO ART GALLERY MARCH 1 - 19, 2014

CURATED BY SYLVIA KIND



Acknowledgements

Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Sylvia Kind, and Laurie Kocher thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for generously supporting the research for this exhibit through the grant *Encounters with Materials in Early Childhood Education*. We are also very grateful to the children, educators, and families who have participated in this project, and to those who have graciously assisted with production and installation of the exhibition: Katherine Ouellette, Kelsey Wapenaar, Adrienne Argent, James Armitage, Johanna Po, Lily Wan, and Bosun Kim

It has been a wonderful adventure.

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Capilano University IDEA program

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

Material Encounters engages with *materiality* in early childhood education: charcoal, paint, paper, clay, blocks. Materials *live* in the world in multiple ways. They can evoke memories, narrate stories, invite actions, and communicate meanings. Materials and objects create meeting places. In early childhood education we gather around things to investigate, negotiate, converse, and share. Materials – a block of clay, pots of paint, a brush, a colourful wire, a translucent sheet of paper, a rectangular block – beckon and draw us in. 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.

In early childhood contexts, encounters with materials often find their meaning within the scope of children's development. Processes such as painting with a brush and working with charcoal are seen as activities that contribute to children's social, physical, emotional, and creative development. Materials are described as the "bones" of curriculum. Instructions on how to organize and arrange materials are frequently provided so that children will learn the materials' properties and functions; then, as the children become more familiar with the materials, they use them to

represent ideas and objects—a developmental progression from exploration to representation.

As educators, we tend to understand materials from a scientific, rational, or functional viewpoint and through predictable properties of colour, shape, density, mass, friction, and gravity. Further, our understandings of materials are shaped by deeply rooted cultural dichotomies—animate/inanimate, active/passive, self/other, to name a few. These binaries lead us, often unconsciously, to think of ourselves as animate agents who act on passive, inanimate materials. This conception then affects how we see materials, how we engage with them, and what we create with them.

But what if the human role in shaping materials is not as central as we believe? What if materials shape us as much as we shape them? How might we experience materials differently if we acknowledge them as joint participants in our interactions with them? What happens when we choose to see materials, not as lifeless objects, but as events? How might a shift in perspective on materiality—including our own—change how we interact with materials, with young children, and with other educators? And how might such



shifts in perspective change the nature of our engagement with society and the environment?

We are not alone in believing that engaging with materials is urgent today; environmentalists, philosophers, feminists, and others are calling for changes to the capitalist story of materials—a story that includes the rampant accumulation of materials as well as massive amounts of trashed materials that are poisoning the planet. These critics argue for the need to develop sustainable caring relationships with the world, including with materials. Materials, they argue, can be more than a commodity for humans to use and discard.

Material Encounters aims to rearticulate understandings of materials to formulate what happens when we think *with* materials. This exhibition proposes ways of thinking about materials in relation to the world that are more sustainable than the ones most children in the Western world experience today.

Repositioning materials as joint participants in classrooms and children's environments, *Material Encounters* provides a close look at how paying attention to the force and movements of materials might shift practices in early

education. The exhibition pays attention to a wide range of forces and movements: how materials physically move through time-space, how materials move us both physically and emotionally, how time moves, how air moves, how bodies move, and more.

The catalogue and the exhibit work with moments in early childhood classrooms gathered through a visual ethnographic study conducted in two early childhood centres in western Canada over three years. The project's main goal has been to engage in an art-based collaborative inquiry to broaden understandings of the role that materials play in early childhood classrooms. Thinking *with* materials provokes different ways of thinking about early education.

Material Encounters reassembles early education spaces as vibrant social-ecological environments where humans and nonhumans are always in relation. Materials and young children live entangled lives, transforming each other through various encounters. Relationality, therefore, is central to *Encounters with Materials*.

EXPERIMENTATION

Material Encounters is an invitation to invent, create, and experiment. Experimentation is a complex social-affective-political phenomenon that we might embrace in our classrooms to transform life.

Experimentation tends to focus on human agency. In early childhood education in particular, it focuses on children's expressions and excludes the dynamic role that seemingly inanimate objects play. Yet materials, objects, places, and environments are inextricably bound to experimentation. In this regard, Gilles Deleuze helps us see encounters of materials, objects, places, and humans as part of the flow of experience. In his view, we are never separate from the world; we are made up of relations; thought creates itself through encounters. For Deleuze, thought is experimentation. Stories are told through it, forces are harnessed, roles are performed.

Experimentation opens up worlds, creates new venues for thinking and doing. It actively extends experience. It reveals what human and nonhuman bodies can do and produce when they encounter each other. Through experimentation we discover how something works by relations among the parts of assemblages- structures, flows, and connections.

Material Encounters sees teaching and learning as a process of creating what Deleuze called lines of flight. By testing new and unpredictable mixes of bodies, forces, and things, experimentation invents. The process of inquiry into the unknown is embedded in the experimentation of experience with all its unpredictable connections.

Experiments are not without risk, of course. Outcomes cannot be predicted or known in advance. There is always the danger of reproducing the same, of decomposing one or more elements of the assemblage. But if we are prudent in our experimenting, we can open up worlds.













MOVEMENT

Nothing is static; the world is full of movements with different rhythms and intensities. Things move, bodies move, materials move. Life is filled with movements, motion, new becomings and emergences. Movement opens up possibilities and potentialities. Brian Massumi reminds us that it is measurement that brings movements to a still.

If materials are not just static bits of matter waiting for someone to do something to them, but are always already in the midst of becoming something else, then materials have their own vitality and we find ourselves participants in an active world of lively materials. How might we use the movements of one material to open up possibilities within other materials, allowing objects, things, or bodies to suggest new relations through movements?

When we play with possibility, questions immediately arise: How is the movement of a material to be identified? What would material movement involve? How are possibility and potentiality invited to early childhood classrooms? One thing for sure, there is no master plan. Movement, again, is always present.

Tim Ingold describes improvisation as a rhythmic quality of working with the ways of the world. Following Deleuze and Guattari's ideas, he views artists and makers as itinerant wayfarers. Their work is not *iteration*, a repetition or re-presentation of the world, but *itineration* as they join with the forces and flows of the world.

Children, like artists and makers, follow materials as they work with them. They join *with* materials as they circulate, mix, and mutate. Clay blends into the river, a fire burns and leaves charcoal behind, paper is caught up by the wind, paint slides and slips over surfaces. Children join and intervene in these processes, moving with materials' own inclinations. Every mark, gesture, and action becomes a question: What can this material do? What can it become? How can I join its becoming?



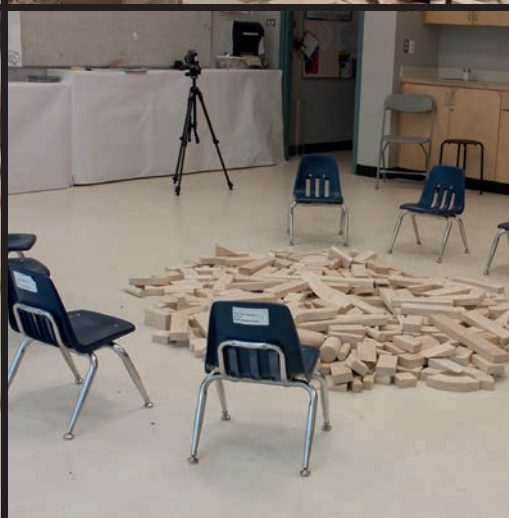




BLOCKS

STACK, CLACK, WHACK, KNOCK, TOPPLE, FALL, LOOK, GATHER, COLLECT, SORT, EVALUATE, HIDE, CONCEAL, WATCH, CONSTRUCT, OFFER, PUSH TOWARDS, GLIDE, RIDE, TRANSPORT, RUN, CHASE, BORROW, USE UP, FIND, GUARD, INTENSIFY, SPEED UP, GRAVITATE TOWARDS, DESIRE, KEEP, ASSEMBLE, ENCLOSE, LOOSEN, TEAR DOWN, EXTEND, BUILD UP, PULL OUT, OBSERVE, MEASURE, DISMANTLE, REGULATE, FABRICATE, REORGANIZE, CONSIDER, GAZE, GLANCE, BALANCE, ENCIRCLE, PAUSE, SEEK, IMPROVISE, PLAN, STAND ON, SIT BESIDE, HAPPEN UPON, RECONSTRUCT, REGARD, RELEASE, TURN AWAY, RESTART.







A child wearing bright orange pants, orange and white striped socks, and light-colored sneakers stands on a concrete curb. A piece of newspaper is on the ground near their feet. The background is dark mulch. A dark grey text box is overlaid on the upper left portion of the image.

PAPER

FLOAT, FLY, GLIDE, HOVER, SOAR, TEAR, RIP, PASTE, CONSIDER, CHOOSE, SWAY, ROLL, EXAGGERATE, GATHER, SCOOP UP, CRUMPLE, CRIMP, LISTEN, FOLD, BEND, TAPE, DRESS, WEAR, WAIT, COVER UP, BREATHE IN, BLOW OUT, PAUSE, LAUNCH, ELEVATE, TAKE FLIGHT, ENVELOP, WRAP, TIE, OPEN, TWIST, FLAP, REARRANGE, UNCOVER, FILL, UNROLL, EMPTY, CATCH, FASTEN, DRAPE, RELEASE, WAVE, READ, FLIP, TURN, CRINKLE, TICKLE, BUNCH, CLOTHE, WIND AROUND, PEER THROUGH, CIRCULATE, AMPLIFY, RESUME, UNDRRESS, RECOVER, SWISH, FLUTTER, PRESENT, SCATTER, COLLECT, POUR OUT, SWEEP UP, RE-DRESS.





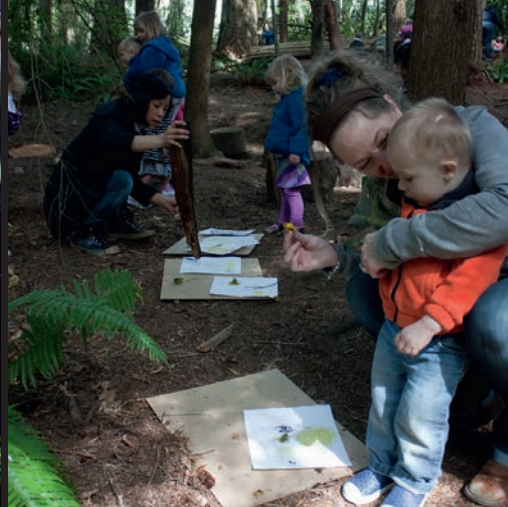




CHARCOAL

GRIND, CRUSH, SEARCH, PURSUE, CLIMB, TRAIL-BLAZE, HOWL, GROWL, SING, EXCAVATE, EXTRACT, UNEARTH, DIG, DISCOVER, MARK, CUT, SAW, WRAP, BURN, ROAST, DRAW, APPROACH, HESITATE, DARKEN, SMUDGE, DISGUISE, CONCEAL, REVEAL, COVER, UNCOVER, DRAW IN, SIFT, SHAKE, PULVERIZE, HAMMER, THUMP, TRANSFER, TRY OUT, POUR, EXAMINE, DRAW NEAR, HANDLE, GRATE, CHOP, SPREAD, DISPERSE, SWEEP, DUST, BRUSH, MULTIPLY, STROKE, ENCOMPASS, DRAW TOGETHER, ATTEND, WOUND, HEAL, DISPENSE, SELL, BARTER, EXTRAPOLATE, RECOVER, REMARK, RETURN, UNDO, REDO.







PAINT

ANTICIPATE, MIX, DAB, STAB, FINGER, PAT, STIR, STROKE, FLICK, COLOUR, LAUGH, COMPOSE, ORCHESTRATE, IMPERSONATE, RESOUND, SQUISH, SLIP, DRIP, SPLATTER, MARK, SLIDE, BLEND, MERGE, BRING TOGETHER, FLOW, DROP, SPILL, WRAP, ARRANGE, COVER OVER, PICK UP, ENACT, DANCE, PERFORM, NARRATE, IMPROVISE, CHOREOGRAPH, MODIFY, SPREAD, MASSAGE, POUR, CARESS, SPECULATE, EXCHANGE, POINT, EXCLAIM, SHARE, CONFER, TEST, IMMERSE, ABSORB, FILL UP, FILL IN, EMPTY, DRAW OUT, EXTEND, MEANDER, MINGLE, COMBINE, CONVERSE, SCRATCH, SCRUB, WIPE, WASH.







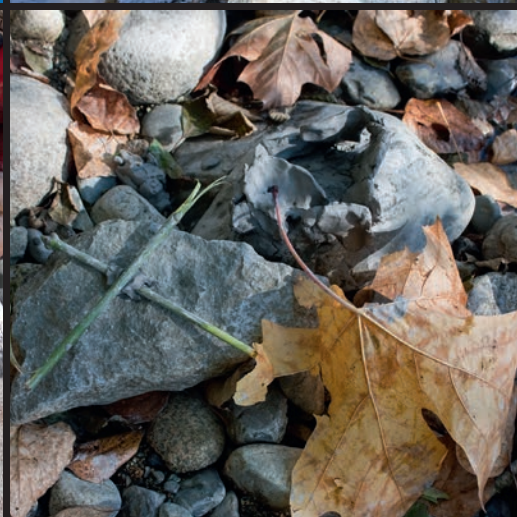




CLAY

WALK, PAUSE, WOBBLE, LIFT, PINCH, POKE, PRESS, STICK TOGETHER, SLICE, ENGRAVE, CARVE OUT, JOIN, EMBELLISH, DECORATE, BURNISH, MOLD, FORM, WASH, MELT, TRICKLE, SEEP, CARRY, MOVE, HEAVE, SPLASH, THROW, DROP, MAKE, SHAPE, SCULPT, SIT, TELL, STORY, GESTURE, WANDER, SOAK, SPRAY, TEAR, BREAK, MEND, DIVIDE, DISPLACE, EXTEND, RINSE, ATTACH, CONGREGATE, HOLLOW OUT, GATHER, REPOSITION, ACCUMULATE, ADD TO, ENCLOSE, SCRAPE, TRAP, SURPRISE, ALTER, AMEND, DRIZZLE, SCRUB, POLISH, PAINT, TRACE, FILL IN, SLIP, SPILL, WAIT, COLLECT, POUND, FLATTEN, REPLACE, RELOCATE.







TIME

Once upon a time there was time. Tick tock tick tock tick tock tick tock. We tend to link time to predictable, measurable, regulated movement or change. In early childhood education classrooms, time is perceived as linear, extensive, having homogenous and equivalent units.

But what if time encompasses more than this linear static movement? Along with many theorists and artists we question the epistemic, ontological, and political status of time. Time is not a neutral medium in which life can be framed or matter constructed. It is an active, dynamic participant in framing life. Physicist Karen Barad refers to 'temporality' instead of time. Time is unpredictable, a materializing force that brings newness and surprise.

What if we think about time as an intensive flow? What if we conceive of time, not as discrete compartments that follow one another, but as durations? Through the concept of duration, we can understand time as particular to bodily experiences. Perhaps time is an external state that organizes a body's movements. Perhaps it is not discrete compartments that follow one another but an internal, unified, multiple flow of difference. Dynamic.

How does time endure in bodies? How is it experienced differently in different bodies? When we see time as becoming, as duration, we can see that it doesn't exist as an organizational structure outside of, or regardless of, children's experiences. As duration, time is particular to a body's experience of it.

We are provoked to engage with everything each moment entails, as artist Leah Oates reminds us: hundreds of small gestures, motions taken, sounds heard, words spoken, images recorded, the wonder, the many confusions, the intensity of the whole moment.





TIMELINESS

Long moments of waiting, spontaneous moments, pulsating moments of intensities at the edges of time, produce the *flow* of time. During intense moments materials and bodies intra-act. Particular rhythms are produced beyond sequential, easily manageable units to a dynamic, rhythmic flow.

Ripping, tearing, curling paper. Time after time sheets of newsprint are torn into tiny pieces. What memories are held within these curled papers? As fingers glide along the text, searching for the paper's grain or a familiar image, what do they remember? As paper transforms into fluttering pieces, time intensifies. It takes flight with the paper.

Collecting, grinding, smudging. Charcoal covers bodies. White floors turn black with traces of footprints. The charcoal spreads, transforms into tiny pieces. Hands collect the charred pieces of wood, sticks that were collected from the forest and placed in a firebowl. What do these hands remember? Time intensifies. Human and nonhuman bodies are in motion. They transform into charcoal-bodies, hands and faces disguised in black.

Time is layered. Bodied memories of tearing and fluttering paper, histories of the material, the now, and the future, are entwined. Entanglements between the past, the future, and the now exist as children move from the studio to the classroom, carrying with them the transformative, airy qualities of the paper. How do we see these complex spaces in between? Travelling across the road to the classroom with tiny ground pieces of charcoal stuck in the crevices of their clothes, emerging from the cracks to encounter other fluxes of movements. Our bodies become distanced from the intense intra-actions in the studio, yet the force of time continues to move with our bodies.

How do we live with the rhythm of these moments of intensity throughout the day? If moments are not linear, do not end, might they flow *with* our bodies?







ACTS OF NOTICING

SYLVIA KIND, *ATELIERISTA*
CAPILANO UNIVERSITY

Every photograph involves particular decisions; decisions of what, and in what way, to take notice of what is going on. Using a camera means you have to look *somewhere*. The difficulty, of course, in photographing, and in some way recording children's experimentations, is that it is often difficult to know or to recognize what is really happening. Where should I look? At what should I look? How should I look? What is important to me about paint or paper, and what I already understand about a material, process, or situation, may not be what concerns children, and in particular, may not concern *these* children *here* at this time and in *this* place. Even more puzzling is how to see and enter the between-space, the space of intra-active (Lenz-Taguchi, 2010), event-full entanglements where children, materials, spaces, places, educators move together, where children and educators are there but not always in charge of what goes on, where something we can't fully comprehend is happening.

In this project we have tried to pay attention to the incomprehensible, to gesture, movement, a glance or look, a pause, moments of hesitation, times of gatherings, collectings, and dispersals, and to the doings and undoings. We have been interested in the play between bodies, our participation and implication in the midst of everything, and

what Anna Tsing (2013) calls the serious work of noticing. This exhibition is an opportunity to pause and consider these processes and acts of paying attention; to consider what noticing *does* and what is produced by noticing. We are convinced that something is always produced in these acts of attentiveness.

For instance, at the beginning of the project we deliberately set out to pay attention to the properties and movements of materials and to imagine something other than meaning residing in children's understandings, words, and actions. We noticed how particular materials moved, how the precisely cut geometric wooden blocks tended to be steady and slow, weighed by particular histories and rules of behaviour, while the gracefully curving long willow-wood sticks moved freely and often wildly, joining the paper tubes and buckets as they ran about with the children. This shifted the kinds of questions we were asking and led to more attention to the fluxes and flows of materials (Ingold, 2011), and to times of intensity, pause, and moments of confusion and undoing. Attending to the coverings and uncoverings, makings and remakings, comings and goings. To the rhythms of repetition, the motions of again and again and again and again; rhythms that, seemingly inconsequential, produced many small yet



vibrant variances. To the verbs and doings, to how things *are* their movements and stories (Ingold, 2013).

As we paid attention to these things it brought them more clearly into view, which in turn, amplified what was already going on. It encouraged us to give more space to the material so the material had more *play*. We attended to how paper slipped under the door and covered the hallway floor after each studio-event. We noticed its delightful airy waywardness, its desire to take flight, and, as a result, brought paper to meet fan, wind, and the large outdoor vent. We noticed how charcoal spreads, moves, covers, and infiltrates the places it enters and so sought to design spaces so the charcoal *could* move more freely. Paying attention invited us to work more playfully and also much more seriously *with* the materials.

This generated a great deal of anticipation and expectancy: expectancy, not just in the creativity and innovativeness of children--for, as we have found, children never disappoint, rather always exceed our expectation--but in the play of the material, in the spaces between, and in the anticipation of what might emerge. What would paper do next? Where might charcoal lead us? We were met with surprise, delight,

puzzlement, and, at times, genuine bewilderment. Most of what we experienced together with the children exceeded our capacity to know. Nevertheless, this was not our aim. We were less concerned with understanding what was going on than we were with paying close attention to the fluxes, movements, and rhythms of the materials, the indefinite and unpredictable encounters, and the generative forces and relations among with and between children and materials. I think we can say that, as a result of this project, we are learning to see differently.

In this exhibition, largely a collection of photographed moments, we are interested in doing more than reporting on experience, relaying information, or describing the world as it is. Our goal has not been to capture or record accurately, even if we could, the divergent and inventive processes of children, the many transitory, ephemeral and inconclusive acts, or the movements and lives of materials. Rather, being aware that methods *produce* realities (Law, 2004), we set out to open up our perception to the vibrant entanglements, happenings, and intra-actions: to speculate about how the world might be, so that we might more carefully, ethically, and attentively *respond* and in turn enter more fully into children's processes and fabrications and the vibrant life of things.

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