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Weaving pedagogy in early childhood education: on openings and their foreclosure

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ABSTRACT

Arising from the question ‘How might we think of pedagogy in early childhood education?’, this article traces pedagogy’s histories, conceptual difficulties, inherent foreclosures, and contextual particularities. It argues that within the context of early education, pedagogy has become an obscure, sophisticated supplement of some sort rather than an indeterminate field of responsive, generative, and collaborative practice of interpretation, ethical critique, and invention. Thinking through the trilogy of repair, release, and return, we make three significant moves in the paper. First, we repair pedagogy from unfortunate and quite common misunderstandings. Second, we release early childhood education from the suffocating dominant narrative of child development as its primary source of intelligibility and moral legitimacy. Finally, we return to the idea of early childhood education as a pedagogical project and offer a series of interconnected propositions that respond to the conditions of our times. Overall, we argue that if early childhood education studiously attends to pedagogical thought, its problematic developmentalism might become obsolete.

KEYWORDS

Pedagogy; early childhood education; educational philosophy; critical theory; educational practices

The question of pedagogy

We are often asked in our early childhood education circles ‘What is pedagogy?’ Our first impulse is to want to hide from the question because of the complex layers of meaning and historicity one will need to engage with and take up, particularly because the question is being asked in a North American context where the concept is often obscure, where the difficulty of the question is symptomatic. The first time we suggested, almost 15 years ago, that early childhood is a pedagogical context (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. 2014; Vintimilla 2012), we received conflicted and puzzled responses. The idea was not well received. It was seen as a threat to the notion of care, which is so important for many early childhood educators. It sounded too directive, too ‘educational’. It felt foreign, almost a new and unrecognisable language.

We hesitate to address ‘What is pedagogy?’ not only because we are unsure whether those asking the question are willing to engage with the layering of meaning and historicity embedded in the concept, but because we feel conflicted with the question itself. Asking what is pedagogy risks attempting to define it in acceding to the form of a question as a

demand (for an answer) rather than a condition for further thought and, in doing so, foreclosing pedagogical thought from the start. For us, a different question offers more generative possibilities: *How might we think of pedagogy?* This query allows us to share pedagogy's histories, conceptual difficulties, inherent foreclosures, and contextual particularities rather than merely defining the concept. Given the recent proliferation of pedagogy in North American educational contexts, this article engages deeply with the second question.

The concept of pedagogy now is no longer strange in early childhood and is even mentioned in policy and curriculum documents (Government of British Columbia 2019; Ontario Ministry of Education 2014). Its whispers of possibility are sparking imaginations. Yet, we notice that the terms *pedagogy* and *teaching/learning methods* are used almost interchangeably, as if they are one thing. Pedagogy has become an obscure, sophisticated supplement of some sort rather than an indeterminate field of responsive, generative, and collaborative practice of interpretation, ethical critique, and invention. Early childhood education seems to want to encompass pedagogy within existing thinking (i.e. child development) without questioning how we – in and as the early childhood education field – are already encompassed by, determined by, enclosed within, and limited by the assumptions of this established thinking. Such inquiry would allow us to better respond to the appearance of pedagogy in policy and curriculum documents and to invent knowledge, subjectivities, and communal forms of life.

In this contribution, we outline the inheritances of pedagogical thought in addition to the ways we extend it, within the context of North American early childhood education. Of course, our thoughts are never independent from who is thinking them – our own histories, intellectual commitments, and relations with this concept matter. Cristina, educated in Italy as a pedagoga, has been thinking education at the intersection of pedagogy, the arts and philosophy. Her work focuses on collaboratively creating spaces that activate pedagogical invention by undoing normalised determinations that suffocate the possibilities for thinking and being in early childhood (Nxumalo, Vintimilla, and Nelson 2018; Vintimilla and Berger 2019). Most of the ideas she has weaved in this paper emerged from her work alongside Canadian educators over the past 15 years, specifically in the creation of West Coast pedagogies. Veronica, as a child of Argentina's 'dirty war' of the 1970s and 1980s (see Bell and Di Paolantonio 2018), cares a great deal about the ethical and political significance of pedagogy in shaping critical societies (Pacini-Ketchabaw 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). Seeking otherwise discussions in early childhood education, she has been collaborating with Canadian educators to create life-giving spaces through critical and imaginative practices that render education as a technocratic project obsolete (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw and Nxumalo 2015; Pacini-Ketchabaw and Clark 2016).

Continuing our engagements with pedagogy in early childhood education, in this paper we think through the trilogy of repair, release, and return. In the paper's first section, we start thinking pedagogy by attempting to repair it from unfortunate and quite common misunderstandings. Repairing damage, as Sedgwick (2003) suggests, involves intimate and close readings that work against the paranoia and suspicion that create or perpetuate dichotomies and violence. We use reparation to interrupt the idea that pedagogy gives educators direction for managing and instructing children to be able to achieve predetermined educational ends – pedagogy could not be farther from this idea. In the second

section, we seek to release early childhood education from the suffocating dominant narrative of child development. We think with the figure of the plantation to trouble early childhood education's dependency on child development as its primary source of intelligibility. In the final section, we return to the idea of early childhood education as a pedagogical project and offer a series of interconnected propositions for the field that respond to the conditions of our times.

Repairing pedagogy

Perhaps the best way to begin thinking pedagogy is to say that pedagogy is a body of knowledge. In fact, in Europe, it is considered a social science (Caride 2004; Frabboni and Minerva 2006 Baldacci et al. 2009; Cambi 2012). As a body of knowledge, pedagogy has a long history, with its cradle in ancient Greece. Specifically, the concept of *paidea*, which meant the formation and education of the ethically and spiritually complete citizen, was seen as a cultural form that guided children's insertion into society. In other words, pedagogy was (and continues to be) concerned with the creation of a collective humanity, but not necessarily the individuality of a person (Frabboni and Minerva 2006). Therefore, the mode of pedagogy's subjective engagement is ineluctably with and within a collective; as feminist educational scholar Todd (2001) declares,

pedagogy turns on the ability of the nascent subject to change, to alter, to become something other than what it was. The subject accomplishes this self-alteration through its capacity to negotiate meaning in the world in relation to the objects and persons around it. (432)

Although originally pedagogy was intimately related to philosophy, over the centuries it has found autonomy as a discipline but not from philosophical thought, with which it still keeps a close relation. Importantly, pedagogy is not interested in objectivist views of knowledge creation. Pedagogy engages in knowledge creation. As such, it demands decisions and asks its own questions, yet these are never defined in advance; they follow from contingencies, not fixed necessities, that is, they arise from history (Diaz 2019; Vico 2006). In what follows we highlight five key ideas that extend the notion of pedagogy as creative and transformative.

First, we join the tradition that proposes pedagogy as a body of knowledge that thinks educational practice. In other words, pedagogy thinks, studies, and orients education, including its purposes, protagonists, histories, relations, and processes (Diaz 2019; Vico 2006). As Calaprice (2019) notes, pedagogy is both descriptive and prescriptive. It is descriptive because it reflects, interprets, and elaborates on educational action. It is prescriptive because it theorises practice. In this dual conceptualisation, pedagogical thought makes a virtue, or condition of possibility, of this tension to live in the enmeshment of theory and practice, between what emerges and the critical interpretation, or denial or occultation of it, as the case may be. Pedagogy attends to and locates this tension in situated and contextual ways (in the everyday). For instance, the well-known practice of pedagogical documentation in early childhood education emerges from this tension by enacting a constant dialogue between what happened and what is pedagogically relevant within what happened (Rinaldi 2006).

Second, pedagogical thought and its interpretive acts intersect with a multitude of disciplines. In fact, if pedagogy has a language today, it is interdisciplinarity. Over the

decades, pedagogy's principles, concepts, methods, processes, and objects of reflection and intervention have been shaped in conversation with different disciplines and their ethical, aesthetic, and political orientations (Bertolini 2005; Diaz 2019). This is because pedagogical thought is porous and willing to be continually contaminated by diffractive and interstitial conversations with other disciplines. These conversations help pedagogy to enrich its views and engage what is familiar to it from diverse perspectives (Frabboni and Minerva 2006). For instance, pedagogy thinks the question of the human through various philosophical traditions – some very old, some critical (i.e. from within the project of Enlightenment self-critique) and some yet-to-come. Pedagogy commonly engages with the arts as a medium for making the familiar strange and proposing otherwise possibilities. Pedagogy maintains a close dialogue with literature in order to richly locate and expand the horizons of its propositions. Pedagogy thinks with architecture to invent spaces conducive to meaningful educational encounters and critique institutional specialisation. Pedagogy troubles its humanist foundations by entering into new conversations, for example, with feminist environmental humanities' provocations to reconfigure the human project and to recognise the co-articulated inseparability of, and codependencies between, nature and culture. Even though pedagogy engages with a multitude of fields, it does not do so in search of legitimation. In fact, pedagogy has a long trajectory of letting go the reliance on disciplines that dominate educational projects, such as recently included scientific management and behavioural and child psychology.

Third, because it works at the intersection between theory and practice, pedagogical thought is active. By this, we mean that pedagogy seeks new bases on which to think in diverse and unfolding ways in the midst of educational practice. Pedagogical thought is reinvigorated as it transforms educational practice. In that, from it, it creates its own conditions. This is why pedagogy tries to unsettle practice to find (and sometimes even liberate) its creative force. In other words, in a very basic understanding, pedagogy is interested in creating an experience. Its questions then become: What kinds of experiences are being created in educational contexts? What is their value, their unseen beauty, unexpected risks, and potentials? Because pedagogical thought is active and unfolding, it is never neutral or innocent (Bobbio and Scurati 2008; Mortari 2007). It can support logics of dominion or try to keep the question of the collective open. As Todd (2001) writes, pedagogy

crystallises both the dream and nightmare of education itself. On the one hand, it touches on the hope that people can think differently, can change the way they relate to each other, and can form new understandings of themselves and the world that makes possible the very act of teaching and learning. . . . On the other hand, the demand for 'learning to become' carries with it a great burden—for, if pedagogy is about the becoming of the subject, then it can become a tool for the most oppressive ends. (435)

Historiographical analyses suggest these experiences can be both emancipating or subjugating, deterministic or eventful. For instance, Canada's residential schools used pedagogy to subjugate generations of Indigenous peoples (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). In contrast, the schools of Reggio Emilia, led by pedagogista Loris Malaguzzi in the 1960s, proposed emancipatory pedagogical processes that moved Italian society forward after the destruction of WWII (Cagliari et al. 2016).

Fourth, as these examples suggest, pedagogy is always interrogating (and responding to) the conditions of current times and the self-evidence of its status quo. At the same

time, it asks: What kind of human might be able to respond (response-able) to the conditions of our times? Pedagogy asks this question in relation to what a society might value, and which of those values might need transformation. What idea of the human do educational processes and curriculum-making enable? What subject formations are legitimised and delegitimised through them? What relational logics do they enact? Calaprice (2019, n.p.) puts it clearly:

There is a radical difference between considering education a normalisation practice that is aimed at promoting the conformation of individual behaviors to certain criteria of normality, or thinking of it as the opening of a 'field of experience' in which people come to understand 'who they can be.'

Because it is not psychological, that is, not foremost concerned with teaching and learning as a personal experience, or of successful adaptation to a state of affairs, pedagogy is not asking these questions in the name of normative individual centrism, of regression to norms of well-being or moral virtue. Pedagogy does not, and indeed cannot, take the personal, or personal experience, as the sole measure of value. This is not so only because of what it makes of subjects thereby (passive accommodations) but because of what it makes of worlds (disposable, neutral and exploitable datum). What matters instead for pedagogy is the careful work of the co-production of subjects who collectively engage with the question of how we might live well at this time and in this place. Pedagogy's avatar is *the ethical subject*, or that by which worlds transform and remake themselves.

Fifth, educational processes and curriculum-making are in constant conversation with this question at the same time they are creating the conditions of possibility that activate multiple engagements / diverse experimentations with the question of change itself (of how it is changing, closing and opening, becoming reiterative, abundant, sterile etc.). By doing so, pedagogy is the way we open up possibilities for *otherwise subjectivities* and modes of relation. As Calaprice (2016) writes, 'pedagogy must also activate new provocations for the education of our times' (34). This means not only analysing the status quo and its relation to education, but also activating possible orientations that will provoke educational processes to invent a living curriculum that experiments with alternative propositions and intentions – that is not enclosed within constructivism, of a future tethered to an, already belated, past. Following Calaprice (2019), we propose that pedagogy must find ways both to give education new responsibilities and to help the subject coexist with the precarity, uncertainties, and challenges of our times. We will return to this idea later in the paper, but for now we simply want to mention that we are thinking here about propositions and intentions that would allow for experimentation with different subjective processes and alternative futures. This is why contemporary pedagogy must ask education to find new responsibilities.

Releasing early childhood education from child development's grip

Our task entails first paying close attention to the intersection of pedagogy and early childhood education, and then to what pedagogy might do to it. However, for early childhood education to engage with pedagogical thought, it needs to be released from its dependency on its sources of legitimation, specifically its attachment to child development as the body of knowledge that defines the borders of what is possible and impossible to think within

the early childhood field. Like others have done (Burman 2017; Cannella 1997; Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence 2013; Jardine 1988), we want to interrupt the narrative that child development imposes on early childhood about the socialisation and enculturation of the developing self-regulated child. Our intention is not to entirely dismiss developmental psychology but to question its dominance in early childhood education. Purporting to know in advance who the individual should be, child development's goal is seen in this critical work to prescribe a trajectory that will mold the child into an ideal citizen who will serve an already-specified society. It is this onto-epistemological servitude to the state that we attempt to break through here by introducing the capitalist and colonial figure of the plantation through which to consider pedagogy's potential.¹ As Anna Tsing (2012) notes, 'the great 'progress' projects of the last several centuries have built on the legacy of the colonial plantation to make scalability work in business, government, and technology' (162). Plantations, arising as a colonial project extension, follow very closely the logic of capitalism, which, Tsing (2015) asserts, is 'a system for concentrating wealth, which makes possible new investments, which further concentrate wealth' (62). In this analysis, child development serves as a progress project (Burman 2017; Rose 1999); it acts as a capitalist plantation in that it homogenises and flattens relations, is devoid of and evacuates local social relations, focuses on instrumentality and direct application, is a scalability project, and is driven by investment.

Through child development discourses – such as developmentally appropriate practice, self-regulation, and the science of brain development – early childhood education becomes saturated with key characteristics of a plantation, such as homogenisation and the flatness of sameness. Child development defines what early childhood education should be, who the child should be, who the educator should be, and what the curriculum should be (Cannella 1997; Dahlberg and Moss 2005). Within its grip, curriculum-making is stripped of explorations and experimentations that are not circumscribed as developmentally appropriate. Children are disciplined into docile subjects as they are constantly exposed to practices aimed at emotional self-regulation. They become cognitive biological bodies that develop in genetically and biophysically predetermined ways, thus their environment is constantly monitored to eliminate anything that deviates from the idea of a determined path. Educators simply facilitate one activity after another without considering the specificities and indeterminacies of the space in which they practice (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kummen, and Thompson 2010; Vintimilla 2012, 2014). In this way, early childhood education is self-contained and blind to encounters that offer multiplicity, incommensurability and the unprecedented. As described by educational philosopher Mario Di Paolantonio (2019), an education that thinks with predetermined outcomes is restrictive:

Admittedly, as we come to restrict education to predetermined functional outcomes (to what we believe we make appear and make cohere as 'evidence' through our models and theories), we end up with an education devoid of the possibility of gratitude and admiration for that which 'is as it is,' for that which can spontaneously appear through our interactions beyond what is manufactured by our theoretical calculations. (225)

Like in plantations, early childhood spaces organised through developmental discourses are devoid of local social relations. Relations outside the parameters of developmental psychology are made superfluous. Child development imbues early childhood education with alienation. As Tsing (2015) writes, alienation is 'the ability to stand alone, as if the

entanglements of living did not matter' (5). It is through this alienation that education for young children is simplified and valorised. For example, in early childhood, experiences and spaces fragment the richness of children's worldly relations, as if children do not live within a world. The classroom becomes an artificial space without relations with the outside world. Local histories and surrounding conditions become irrelevant to daily happenings. As children are kept happy and safe through educators following regulations and policies, early childhood spaces guarantee their unperturbed development within a logic of security.

Child development creates the perfect conditions within early childhood education for a focus on smooth instrumentality and direct application. As in plantations, experiences, relationships, encounters, and events are measured against their applicability and utilitarianism, creating a limiting world for early childhood education and its protagonists. For instance, concepts and ideas are not worthy of attention, or even welcomed, if they are not directly applicable and easily digestible and do not have foreseeable ends within regimes of 'quality management'. Direct application also creates the perfect circumstances for educators to become easily replaced: Every educator can do the same because they all have exactly the same expertise – that is, the ability to apply developmentally appropriate practices and ensure children's emotional well-being through self-regulation techniques of acceptable subject formation.

Developmental discourses of instrumentality and applicability also create the conditions for early childhood education to become a scalability project – that is, a project that has the ability to 'expand without changing [its] framing assumptions' or its organisation (Tsing 2015, 38). Early childhood spaces are controlled and stable environments with very little room to transform. Change only takes place through the application of elements of the latest in-vogue educational approach that can be added as a layer without troubling the established market system, excluding any possibility for transformative relationships. These plantation-like conditions have created a rampant anti-intellectualism in early childhood education, fueled with the subject-forming neoliberal logics of practicality, efficiency, and immediacy (Vintimilla 2014). Moreover, everyday life is shaped and confined by these familiar logics that serve to maintain smooth functioning. Anything that might interrupt them is quickly neutralised through avoidance and indifference. Nothing unfamiliar enters the field; nothing foreign can grow; nothing different from the norm is accepted (Phelan & Vintimilla forthcoming). This serves as a kind of circular and self-reinforcing hermeticism – as early childhood ideological freightedness and capture.

As a capitalist project, plantations are driven by investment and the promise of constant growth (Tsing 2015). So is early childhood: 'Early childhood is a period of astonishing cognitive, social, emotional and physical growth that launches developmental trajectories into the years ahead' (Science of Early Child Development n.d., para. 9). Aiming to prepare the citizens of tomorrow, child development discourses frame the child as an investment in the future – assuming a sort of comity between human and economic development. For instance, the biological development of children's brains and bodies is carefully crafted by offering children positive experiences that will guarantee successful adult life, health, and well-being. Early childhood education becomes a commodity chain in service to this investment. Within this framing, the child has no future in the very sense of what the future is. The future has already been decided/prescribed for the child. The child is

an asset and an investment who fits a system rather than being seen as someone who creates a history and sustains the cultural fabrics of a place. The focus on the child and how the child fits the future obviates any attention to the child's entanglements with worldly relations. Children stand alone as an investment in the future, easily removed from their lifeworlds, as often happens in early childhood classrooms. Recognising life as eventful, opening up to vulnerabilities and uncertainties, and engaging with difficulty as pedagogical troubles the notion of investment.

Unlike the figure of the plantation which early childhood education evokes in its relation with child development, we argue that pedagogy must be explicit and constantly organise to create conditions for the generative tensions of transformative and mutual relations. As introduced above, pedagogy resists the conditions of the plantation because it requires interdisciplinary contamination and uncertain relationalities. In other words, we propose that early childhood education release its hold on child development as its dominant legitimising narrative and experiment with the openings created by the vital void of indiscernibility left in its wake. Recognising that these openings come with no guarantees, we turn towards pedagogy and pedagogical thought as one way to compose with, regenerate, work at, and create with and in mutual correspondence with such uncertain encounters. It is within this void that pedagogy thinks early childhood education, not as a predetermined project but through open questions, such as: What is education? What are education's purposes? What is education for, and for who and what has it been hitherto? Importantly, these questions stay open because pedagogy does not dogmatically answer them, but instead works through their undecidability, irrelationalities, tensions, contradictions, impossibilities, aporias and impasses (Vintimilla 2012; Biesta 2006). The intention is not to paralyse education through aporetic modes, but rather to claim that they – like history itself – are the conditions of the activation of pedagogical decisions that are situated, eventful, generative and response-able (rather than dutiful to a model). In this, pedagogy makes education *ethical*, in the ancient sense of the search for the right ways to live (Giles 2014).

Returning now to pedagogical thought, in the next section, we offer for discussion and activate a series of interconnected propositions for early childhood education that attempt to respond to the conditions of our times.

Returning to pedagogical thought for early childhood education

Proposition #1. For us, pedagogy invites educator to consider that it is not enough to continue 'window shopping' for the newest educational approach or model to apply. Much more is at stake, and much more is possible. Pedagogy demands that early childhood education become ever more attuned to the situated complexities in which we live. In other words, pedagogy requires that we carefully and attentively study the conditions that create early childhood education, and that early childhood education creates. As we have learned from feminist scholars such as Isabelle Stengers (2015) and Donna Haraway (2016), studying the patriarchal capitalist tentacles that grasp and feed early childhood education is paramount as the planet faces multiple challenges.

We live in a time when the value of experiences and life is measured by how much private profit can be gained from them. Private accumulation serves as our compass. As navigators of growth and progress, we always seek new opportunities that answer to the

logics that feed capitalism. As Stengers (2015) writes, capitalism must be understood ‘as a mode of functioning, a machine, which fabricates its own necessity, its own actors, in every conjuncture’ (52). In other words, capitalism defines our lives in its service and through its fragmentary logics of immediacy, production, efficiency, growth, and progress. It offers a ‘lifestyle’ and creates it as the only acceptable and desirable one. These logics shape, and are perpetuated in, most realms of our lives. Early childhood education is no exception.

Capitalism is a ruthless force that disposes of anything that might not provide profit, destroying ‘those who haven’t been able to saddle up for the new opportunities’ (Stengers 2015, 52). At the same time, it perversely and strategically captures everything in its path to simply transform it ‘into a new field of opportunity’ (Stengers 2015, p. 54); as ‘a (maleficent) “spiritual” type’ (53), capitalism constantly ‘captures, segments and redefines always more and more dimensions of what makes up our reality, our lives, our practices, in its service’ (53). As Stengers says, capitalism is ‘radically irresponsible, incapable of answering for anything’ (53). The problem is that it often is the only legitimate way of thinking a life. Unfortunately, we imagine we lack alternatives.

Capitalism’s irresponsibility, its inability even to hesitate (Stengers 2015, 57), becomes extremely tangible through the current ecological crisis the world is facing, of what is now multiply named the Anthropocene, the Plantationocene, and the Capitalocene (Haraway 2015). We have come to realise that through its desire for progress and profit, capitalism is destroying both human and nonhuman lives. Without sounding environmentally messianic (Badiou 2018), we want to highlight that Earth is collapsing as capitalism unceasingly extracts and destroys by capitalising on the modern Western foundational premise of human supremacy. Such a premise positions humans above all other beings and nonbeings, who are seen as resources for human use and benefit. In other words, Earth beings and nonbeings have become capital. Within this logic, worldly relations are simplified and disentangled from their mutual co-dependencies, creating the illusion of human autonomy and sovereignty. Education normalises and socialises us into this world order through humancentric everyday practices, routines, rhythms, activities, celebrations, and, of course, mandatory curriculum and policies. Education positions the successful ideal human as an independent, lifelong, self-making learner who is taught that success comes from profiting from every opportunity that advances the quest for progress (both within and toward an ideal life). Narcisistically feeding the *Anthropos*’ presumption ‘to be the universal signifier of humanity,’ early childhood education ‘naturalises and validates ‘Man’s’ dominion on earth’ (Taylor 2019, 3).

Given the ways in which the capitalist machine fabricates a life, its memetic ideology, the borders it creates, and the narrow horizons that its logics of progress offer to early childhood education, we propose that early childhood education must grapple with how it thinks, knows and organises itself in profound implication with creating and maintaining this capitalist machine, especially through its plantation-like practices.

Proposition #2. Becoming ever more attuned to the conditions of our times forces us to be inventive and imaginative. We propose to engage with pedagogy and its inventive force through the educational processes it activates. Here we offer a second pedagogical proposition for early childhood education: That it joins multidisciplinary ethical efforts to rethink the human project so that it responds to the ecological crisis caused by capitalist logics.

The capitalist idea of the individualistic, autonomous, self-made, sovereign human that, as outlined, early childhood education helps to support is inadequate for the demands of responding to ecological crisis (Taylor 2017, 2019). To re-inscribe this capitalist forms of subjectification, we invite early childhood education to rethink its focus on the child and activate processes that interrupt the humancentric pendulum that oscillates between the child and the teacher (Land, Vintimilla, Pacini-Ketchabaw, and Angus *forthcoming*). Such interruption would make early childhood education a worldly affair in which children become subjects within messy, imperfect, and mutualistic relations. In this way, pedagogy reinvigorates early childhood education by proposing a project that rejects the old educational idea of autopoiesis (being self-made) and returns to ontological and epistemological praxes that remind us we have never been *one*, but are made through sympoiesis, as we are *always already in relation* (Haraway 2016). We speculate that becoming with others puts in motion symbiotic subjective processes of dynamic practices in co-making, co-composition, and re-composition (symbiogenesis, or the co-making of living things). When early childhood education recognises onto-epistemologies that do not divide the world and emphasises instead the vibrancy of symbiotic relations and co-makings (Haraway 2008), it might inexhaustibly create conditions for otherwise subjectivities to emerge through pedagogical processes that unsettle capitalism as the only possible form of worldly organisation. In other words, through pedagogy early childhood education has to create everyday situations and practices for engaging in alternate relational economies. Curriculum might then create, in material and tangible ways, the conditions for multiple encounters that both trouble human supremacy and begin to recreate worlds.

We argue against the proposition that early childhood needs to have an already defined ideal of humanity. Our suggestion is that pedagogy orients early childhood to keep the question of the human project open and in constant correspondence with the world in which it operates and brings newly into being thereby. We are aware that the reinvention of the human project is never innocent; it is always risky and comes without guarantee against ontological violence (Todd 2001). Our proposition requires education to engage with the ethical question of what possible, more livable and otherwise futures for all can be collectively created. In philosophical terms, it eschews necessity for contingency: That history is not *what happens* (or even what should happen) but what happens *in the contexts of what could happen*, and all the possible ways our worlds could have unfolded, but did not ... but may yet still (Phillips 2013).

Proposition #3. It is clear to us that early childhood education has not yet engaged in life-making processes, or even in making curriculum that enacts such processes. Thus, we propose that through pedagogy we become particularly interested in creating a collective space that struggles with the following question: What does it mean to live well with others in the times in which we live? Pedagogy is interested in the creation of a life – not as a model or an ideal, but as an everyday practice that puts thought into action (Jardine and Field 1996; Manning and Massumi 2014), that is interested, not in prescribing a life, but in working at a life, becoming studious of it, being interested in its different forms and formations in what it does and what it invites and in how we become of it. We do not propose that early childhood education prepare children for life. Instead, we see early childhood education as a space for making life, life that is autogenetic in and via this search, that is itself life-making in the engagement of pedagogy. Until now, as we mentioned in the previous section, early childhood education has been simply engaged in reproducing,

and socialising children into, a particular kind of life that is centered on the logics of capitalism, or is minimally in tacit or obscure accommodation with them. But, borrowing from Stengers (2015), in current times it makes no sense for pedagogy to compose with capitalism, instead ‘it is a matter of struggling against its stranglehold’ (Stengers 2015, 53).

We take seriously Stengers’ invitation and propose a life-making curriculum that intentionally, slowly, and thoughtfully, in all its gestures, undoes capitalism’s stranglehold. This is why the pedagogical orientations we propose are life-making. They need to work intentionally at bringing life to the situations that strangle it. This life-making is profoundly inventive and far from predetermined. We *do* life through the small, everyday, mundane gestures of co-composing through rituals, encounters, exposures, working at dissensus, interrupting hegemony and normativity, working through rather than intervening in problems. As anthropologist Thom van Dooren (2019) eloquently writes in his multispecies ethnography, we co-create worlds with others through interruptions and propositions:

These [life making] experiments might be understood as ethicopolitical *interjections*, that is, actions that simultaneously *interrupt* the status quo — or perhaps just a particular vision of the world and how it is or ought to be—and *propose* something new, an alternative configuration of how we might get on together. To interject is ‘to throw or cast in between’ (OED). It is a richly material-semiotic (Haraway 1997) possibility: one can interject verbally or bodily, but however it takes place it involves interrupting, getting in between what is and what might be, in an effort to reorient, to disrupt, to express or realise something different. (40, emphasis in original)

In early childhood education, these doings/interjections are not based on educators’ personal views or random developmentally appropriate activities they choose to offer to children for their entertainment, as we so often encounter in our work with educators. Neither are they made as preventive gestures to avoid tensions or disagreements so the day flows smoothly and personal feelings are protected. This making of a life is intimately related to the early childhood educational project’s pedagogical orientations that bring us all together under a common creative project. The decisions we make, as well as our intentions, are always in conversation with these orientations and weaving multiple and collective processes that nurture unique pedagogical spaces and create an ethos.

Yet, life-making is not a process created through consensus or through applying an already decided definition of life. We propose that it happens *in the midst* of struggles, interruptions, and even failures. We are cautious not to bring the idea of life-making as a project. It is the self-inadequation of the concept of life we want to bring in, because we want the question ‘What does it mean to live well with others?’ to be unanswerable, and to constantly push us to think it, again and again. Recognising the impossibility of life as a project to be built and worked, or as something to be always filled with a meaning or substance is pedagogy’s invitation – which might give early childhood education the necessary distancing and leave the void of meaning open so that life can happen.

Note

1. Our use of plantation as a concept does not attempt to trivialize the plantation as a colonial oppressive system on Black bodies. Rather, we use it recognizing the violence of both the plantation and child development as projects for governing subjects.

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