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Intra-view
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Beyond Anthropocentric Boundaries, Childing as an Embodied Kind of Praxis: A Conversation with Jayne Osgood and Sid Mohandas

Más allá de los límites antropocéntricos, *childing* como praxis encarnada: una conversación con Jayne Osgood y Sid Mohandas

Més de tots els límits de l'antropocèntric, *childing* com a praxis encarnada: una conversa amb Jayne Osgood i Sid Mohandas

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Abstract

This intra-view explores the idea of "childing" as an embodied, relational kind of praxis that challenges colonial and anthropocentric frameworks in education. The authors discuss how childing disrupts linear notions of time, hierarchies of knowledge, and conventional adult-child binaries by focusing on sensibilities and relationalities. Grounded in critical posthumanist theories and thinking with Indigenous perspectives, childing invites disruption, care, re-membering, and re-turning to land and more-than-human relations, fostering experiential and inclusive ways of being, doing and knowing. The conversation highlights how embracing childing can unsettle colonial influences, and open new spaces for learning across early childhood to higher education contexts.

Keywords

Critical posthumanism; Decolonial praxis; Childing; Early childhood studies; Indigenous perspectives

Resumen

Esta *intra-view* explora la idea de "*childing*" como un tipo de praxis encarnada y relacional que desafía los marcos coloniales y antropocéntricos de la educación. Los autores discuten cómo *childing* trastoca las nociones lineales del tiempo, las jerarquías del conocimiento y los binarios convencionales adulto-niño, centrándose en las sensibilidades y las relaciones. Basándose en teorías posthumanistas críticas y pensando con perspectivas autóctonas, *childing* invita a la interrupción, el cuidado, el recuerdo y el retorno a la tierra y a las relaciones más-que-humanas, fomentando formas experienciales e inclusivas de ser, hacer y conocer. La conversación pone de relieve cómo la adopción de *childing* puede desestabilizar las influencias coloniales y abrir nuevos espacios para el aprendizaje en contextos que van desde la educación preescolar hasta la educación superior.

Palabras clave

Posthumanismo crítico; Praxis decolonial; *Childing*; Educación preescolar; Perspectivas autóctonas

Resum

Aquesta *intra-view* explora la idea de "*childing*" com un tipus de praxi encarnada i relacional que desafia els marcs colonials i antropocèntrics de l'educació. Els autors discuteixen com *childing* trastoca les nocions lineals del temps, les jerarquies del coneixement i els binaris convencionals adult-nen, centrant-se en les sensibilitats i les relacions. Basant-se en teories posthumanistes crítiques i pensant amb perspectives autòctones, *childing* convida a la interrupció, la cura, el record i el retorn a la terra ia les relacions més-que-humanes, fomentant formes experiencials i inclusives de ser, fer i conèixer. La conversa posa en relleu com l'adopció de *childing* pot desestabilitzar les influències colonials i obrir nous espais per a l'aprenentatge en contextos que van des de l'educació preescolar fins a l'educació superior.

Paraules clau

Posthumanisme crític; Praxi decolonial; *Childing*; Educació preescolar; Perspectives autòctones

Introduction

This article features an intra-view with Jayne Osgood, Sid Mohandas, and the co-editors of the intra-view section of this journal, Jacky Barreiro and Magali Forte. Intra-views take after the Baradian concept of intra-action (Barad, 2007) and differ from interviews in the sense that they allow acknowledgement of the way questions and answers mutually shape one another throughout a conversation, instead of viewing them in a binary way. As Barreiro and Vroegindeweij (2020) point out, as different ideas and references come into contact, affective intensities are produced and unexpected lines of flight open up. Throughout the text, we offer some productive interferences (Deleuze, 1989; MacLure, 2010) in the shape of a QR code, speech bubbles and hyperlinks, to show how some of these intensities manifested. We invite readers to follow these and add their own. Based on Mohandas and Osgood's scholarship, and drawing on the work of many others, this conversation dives into the disruptive praxis of "childing." The four authors reflect on its potential both as a refusal of the colonial structures that education is built upon to this day, and as an embodied methodology focused on sensibilities and relationalities. In the dire social and political times that we live in, we see the ideas brought forward in this intra-view as productively unsettling our collective thinking and practices in the field of education, from early childhood to university settings.

Intra-view

Jacky Barreiro: Following your presentation at the ECQI 2024 conference,[1] Magali and I became interested in the idea of childing that was at the center of it. It sounded new, different, and disruptive. When you answered our call on the online Posthuman Nexus (pHn) group to let us know you were interested in doing an intra-view with us, we both thought it would be a great opportunity to talk about childing as this was one of our points of entry into your scholarship.

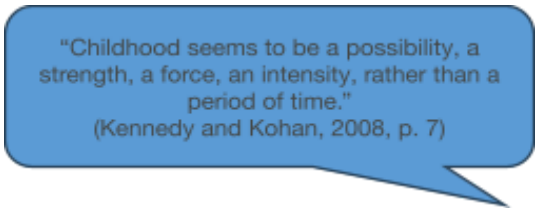
Magali Forte: I remember being struck and affected by this idea of childing and by the way you defined it during the presentation, Jayne. Also, a video that Sid had made was shared during that presentation (see QR code below) and I thought it was really interesting. I remember vividly the movement through the daffodils, at ground level, and I took it as an invitation to child with you, to think and feel from that perspective, that sensibility as you worded it.

QR code: Childing-with-daffodils

Jayne Osgood: It's something that evolved over time. It started life in another form for me with some work I've been doing around arboreal methodologies (Osgood and Axelsson, 2022; Osgood et al., 2023). It was about thinking beyond the rhizome, thinking *with* trees and in forest spaces, and also deromanticizing the Forest School movement. It was about going into these spaces and engaging in a posthumanist praxis, a praxis of (k)notty-(k)not-knowing, of heightening all our senses, and of exploring and experimenting. The starting place with childing is to put aside the sense of ourselves as experts, as

[1] Following their ECQI 2024 presentation and since this conversation has happened, Jayne and Sid's paper was published in the *Global Studies of Childhood* journal. The full reference can be found in the bibliographic references at the end of the intra-view (Osgood and Mohandas, 2024).

all-knowing adults, which taps into colonial ideas of the adult, as a white huMan (following Wynter, 2003). We wanted to ask: What happens when we put aside dominant ideas about how knowledge gets produced, about who can be a knower? Childing as an embodied practice in place has been fertile and generative in terms of mobilizing theory-through-doing and also of thinking about the politics of place, of methodology, etc. We acknowledge that Kennedy and Kohan (2008) who first put forward the idea of childing and thank them as it resonated with what we were interested in doing and what we wanted to prioritize in our posthumanist praxis – in thinking otherwise and doing otherwise through embodied-affective-emergent methodology.



Sid Mohandas: I think it is important to also note that others have engaged with similar conceptualisations, such as work on infantmethodologies (Tesar et al., 2021). A key component in this, as in Kennedy and Kohan's (2008) notion of childing, is the unsettling and undoing of a linear, chronological notion of time that developmental theories from the West tend to heavily rely on. There is a fundamental shift from framing time as Chronos, or numbered, to understanding it in a more qualitative sense, where childing emerges as a mode of being and doing, eluding inherited categories that shape childhood and adulthood. The audio-video creation that you mentioned, as well as the entire paper queer time. Childing involves a transgressing of the strict boundaries of chronos in which past, present and future are clearly delineated. Time is felt as an accumulation of intensity. From the perspective of Indigenous and non-western cosmologies of time, this move can be seen as a case of "re-turning." Queer and trans theories of time similarly conceptualise time as relational, intensive and inventive. As we underscore in the paper (Osgood and Mohandas, 2024), we do not claim mastery, instead the theory-practice of childing materialises as part of these broader ecologies of practices and traditions.

JO: Regarding one of your questions about whether or not childing is childlike, we fervently oppose that in the paper. And in the workshop itself, we were *not* inviting participants to be like children or to behave like a child as a way of being in the world. It was more about a deep immersion in now-time and a queering of familiar spaces. So, we had a number of participant-researchers at Middlesex University, who knew the campus very well, and who had a particular relationship to it as postgraduate researchers – adults at the pinnacle of academic study within a higher education institution. We invited them to take up this way of being in the world with the intention to engender a sense of discomfort, dis/ease, to encounter the space that they were very familiar with in new and surprising ways. For example, we invited them to take off their shoes and socks to experience the grass beneath their feet. The grass was heavy with dew because of the time of year (April, early Spring). We also invited them to attune to the sounds and I think there was an immediate anticipation that we were inviting them to listen to birdsong and to the wind rustling through the leaves. All these kinds of romantic ideas… But once they tuned into the soundscape around them, there were also jumbo jets, a pneumatic drill, the industrial brutality of building works, myriad noises around the university that are snuffed out by the usual clocking practices of life on campus and the routine regulation of space and bodies and time. Childing as a method holds the potential to get at the non-innocence of life in the Anthropocene when experienced with all our senses. Slowly, because we were

out there for quite some time, it became apparent to everybody that this was a space of atmospheric forces working *on* us, and that we were working *in* and *on* that space in a way that created new knowledge about what it is to be a postgraduate researcher, also about, for example, what it is to be brown bodies in masculinized neoliberal spaces. The political work we were undertaking quickly emerged within the situated encounters of childing. So, any kind of notion of it being an invitation to be childlike or childish quickly dissipated.

SM: At the same time, it's important for us to understand childing as a mode of refusal, a refusal of "Man," i.e. the gendered, raced, and classed conception of the human that Sylvia Wynter (2003) writes about. It's a conception that is over-represented in Education, which Nathan Snaza (2024) refers to as the "single episteme of Man" – a reference to a rational and economic conception of the human. Education is often viewed in developmental terms, aiming to transform the ontologically and epistemically inferior and feral figure of the "child" into a fully developed "human." As an early childhood practitioner, working directly with children, it is impossible for me to ignore how early childhood practices — practices of observation and assessment, the inclusion of pedagogical materials, and the organisation of space — are all oriented towards and around the onto-episteme of "Man."

Contemporary neoliberal education frames childhood as always looking ahead and aims to create future citizens who will eventually participate in the global economic race through their contribution to the labour market. In contrast, childing invites us to look around, to pay attention and be open to the more-than-human and to other-than-Man socialities. This by no means emerges as separate or detached from the ongoing formation of "Man." Instead it reworks, queers and transforms the dominant formations all at once. In my work with children, every moment presents possibilities to subvert and/or sustain the episteme of Man, whether that's slowing down and refusing the pull of the camera to constantly document or holding space for attunements that are more-than-words and more-than-human. As a practitioner, it has enabled me to be open to other modes of becoming and doing "human" which often involve embracing playfulness, pleasure, and wonder.

JO: Childing opens up possibilities to encounter spaces and places through temporal shifts. For example, without precise planning, we invited our participants to venture outside and experience the campus differently. Being early Spring, it was green and leafy and there were daffodils sprawling all over the place. We told them, "Experience wherever and however you like, here are some guiding principles, and we'll come and join you shortly." By the time we went out to join them, they had taken up residence in a structured space we later learnt was called "the Pavilion." We knew very little about it other than the fact that it was an outside classroom that's built of wood; a sort of a geometric space that repeats itself (see Osgood and Mohandas, 2024, for pictures). On first encounter, it had a charming wholesomeness about it. The participants nicely settled in the space. One sat on the edge with her feet brushing the grass. Another, who was finding the whole thing very disquieting, was attempting to hide behind a post. But once we joined them, we sensed that building – the Pavilion – started to haunt us. We became really intrigued by what it was made of, where it had come from, its history, its connections to that which we had not anticipated, etc. Post-workshop, we excavated, and followed the tentacles, the tendrils, followed where they went. We found out that it was part of an eco-project, designed and built by Architecture students at Middlesex with a local entrepreneurial business. Despite all its "eco" credentials –

something the university was very proud of, we started to unearth all matters of concern. Thinking-with pavilions, and where pavilions might take us agitated all manner of trouble. We were taken to the British Empire Exhibition of 1924–1925 which had taken place a few miles from campus, albeit 100 years prior. The Exhibition comprised a series of pavilions within a large exhibition ground; an exotic voyeuristic display of "othered" British colonies. Living people brought over from countries who were part of the British Empire were put on display in pavilions for the white British to come and spectate, to marvel and judge. A truly deplorable practice – pavilion-ing. So, while sitting with the trouble the Pavilion first provoked, we stumbled across these unexpected and repulsive connections. This incited a further depth of engagement with how complex structures like architecture, innovation, entrepreneurialism, commerce, and linear progress narrative, are inherently problematic. Even when, at first encounter, they might appear benign, positive and wholesome.

That's what childing also does – it agitates and provokes a deep engagement. It

> "The winds of the Anthropocene carry ghosts – the vestiges and signs of past ways of life still charged in the present. … Our ghosts are the traces of more-than-human histories through which ecologies are made and unmade."
> (Tsing et al., 2015, p. 1)

demands a willingness to be curious. This can then lead to excavating even more discomfort and dis/ease in other spaces that have much to tell us about life in the Anthropocene, colonial heritages, and dehumanizing practices.

SM: It's interesting that one of the plaques that was displayed at the pavilion advertised the structure as a flagship for innovation and sustainability, thus celebrating it as a product of European Enlightenment. As Jayne shared earlier, childing on the campus came with very specific affective intensities, which was very different from childing in the nursery. But when you consider the sort of work that the university is doing, childing actually is, in a sense, a refusal to see the university as a place of Enlightenment and as a site of liberation. This is where we drew on Fred Moten's work about the Undercommons: you see the university as a place where the work gets done and subverted at the same time. And the connections in our paper with imperialism, colonialism, and the neoliberalization of the university are deliberate moves that we make (Osgood and Mohandas, 2024).

> "It cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment."
> (Harney and Moten, 2013, p. 26)

Sylvia Wynter (1971) writes about how the emporialist forces (the market and the trading sides) are simultaneously imperialist forces. Their entanglements cannot be separated. Which connects to what Jayne explained earlier about the pavilions in the imperial exhibitions as justifications for the Empire and its violence in colonised places. Universities' complicity in sustaining imperial and colonial violence is brought to the fore with the ongoing genocide in Gaza — from collaborations with Israeli arms industry and military research to the suppression of pro-Palestinian student activism.

> "both silence and claims to institutional neutrality are important mechanisms for maintaining the status quo, an evasion of responsibility that enables institutions to profit from and perpetuate the systems of violence they should seek to critique."
> (Ziadah, 2025, p. 242)

Harney and Moten's (2013) statement that "the only possible relationship to the university is a criminal one" (p. 26) makes all the more

sense. It is not the site where thought is born or deployed, something childing at the University campus and the pavilion foregrounded very powerfully.

JB: As you describe this situation, I am thinking of childing as a way to think through the body, and its visual sensing and connecting in an embodied way strikes me. That's how I'm perceiving your description. I'm also connecting this with something I talk about with my students who are young adults and whom I teach in college: "adulting" or what it means for them to "adult," as a verb. And so, if we see childing and adulting as separate, then who is doing it? You see, it's not "I am an adult," it's "I'm adulting." And it's not "I'm a child," it's "I'm childing." And so, we are separating these from the being in a way. Who is that being? What are their relationships? And can we really take these characteristics apart?

SM: Absolutely, it's similar to Katherine McKittrick's (2015) proposal of "being human as praxis." The reality is, many of us who are "chronologically-considered" adults already do not fit the characteristics and qualities of what is desired in a fully developed human. We're constantly having to make ourselves mask or disappear, and rather unsuccessfully. I'm specifically thinking of neuroqueerness, gender expansiveness, Blackness and brownness here. For instance, José Esteban Muños (2015) writes about brownness, not as an identity but as an expansive feltness that exceeds the "human." For me, childing simultaneously speaks to the sheer impossibility for some to inhabit the category of human, in the sense that it's not so much a mode that can be switched on and off by volition. Our bodyminds as non-normative others always already inhabit an ontology of excess.

JO: Adulting and childing as verbs, as doings, do not refer to a subjectivity or an identity. When they're verbs, when they're doings, not in the sense of something we necessarily consciously elect to do in any given moment, then, *that* breaks down the binary between adult and child.

Some of our participants were talking about the onerousness of adulting, and how they, as postgraduate researchers, found themselves uncomfortable occupying this place. At the same time, childing also felt unavailable to them. It relates to this sense of what the university does to the bodymind when we find ourselves navigating spaces where there's a persistent sense of not belonging. I think the idea of childing when it is connected to child is also another interesting thing. There is complexity to claiming that childing is not the exclusive preserve of a child.

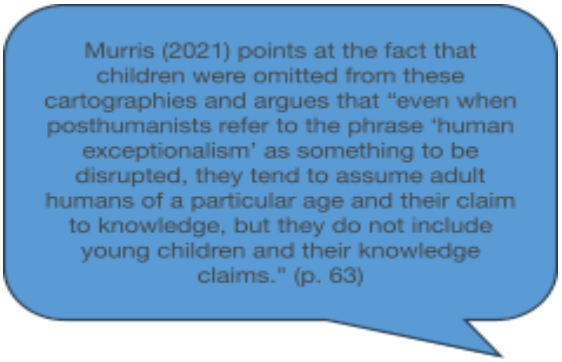
With this in mind, I took up Harney and Moten's (2013) *Undercommons* in a recent publication that contemplates refusal in the context of an early childhood classroom with four-year-olds (Osgood et al., 2025). There are many similarities to what happens in the university context around the regulation of bodyminds, and the pervasiveness of how things *should* be done. So, we might dwell upon what happens when you disrupt the "*should*-ness"? We take seriously the regulation of bodies in relation to carpet time, for example. It is common, in Reception[2] classrooms in the UK to have grids and dots are taped to the floor, intended to contain each child within a designated space, for a specific time. Of course, they writhe around like worms and peel away the tape. We wanted to work with this refusal, and we introduced a series of arts-based methods that emphasized emergent, speculative, process-oriented praxis. We were never interested in an outcome per se. We were not interested in the quantifiable learning that had taken place. Those were not our objectives. Our objective was to go in and to create a space that privileged process, and that refused success, mastery and neurotypicality

[2] Reception is the first year of primary school in England, where children are usually around four years old.

narratives. Our praxis concerned experience, collaboration, and discovery. Not getting it right. Not being the best. We sometimes got it wrong; I gave them some false facts about spider eyes and then discovered it three weeks later. I confessed, "Actually, I was wrong, spiders don't have that many eyes, and they're not on those places on their body at all." And so, we were all making ourselves vulnerable and fallible, and we *all* got so much from open-ended exploration, from discovering-with-all-the-senses.

An interesting sort of aside that emerged was with children statemented with or were awaiting statements for Special Educational Needs. Many were assigned Teaching Assistants, but frequently, they were excluded from the main activities going on in the classroom focused on literacy, numeracy, mastery, success and the relentless regulation of bodyminds. The activities offered as part of our project perhaps looked alien and a bit wild – dancing like ants on hot sand, nonsense poetry, collaging, tree hugging, and becoming-with arachnids. But for children with Special Educational Needs, it offered possibilities to be totally in the thick of things, in part because they sensed they could not get it wrong. We hadn't anticipated this. So, the idea of childing, the concept of the Undercommons, and these spaces that bubble up and allow for life otherwise to emerge – are actually hopeful, generative liminal spaces of sociality.

MF: Jayne, as you were talking about the onerousness of adulting brought up by the postgraduate students you were working with, my mind went to children. I've worked as an elementary school teacher for the past fourteen years, and this year, for the first time, I'm working as a counselor in a primary school with kids between the ages of 5 and 9. It made me realize that the educational spaces designed for children's education are actually quite constraining for all bodies, bodyminds, and sensibilities. The K-12 curriculum that we have here in British Columbia is supposed to be one of the most progressive ones in Canada, because core competencies focusing, amongst many things, on creativity are central within it. The Northwest Territories and the Yukon have adopted it too, because it's innovative and it builds on students' curiosity and meets their diverse needs. And it's a good program! But I wonder, whose perspective and worldview does it focus on once implemented in the classroom? Whose conception of learning is brought to the fore? I'm reminded of Braidotti's (2018) call to remember the missing peoples of humanism, "the real-life subjects whose knowledge never made it into any of the official cartographies" (p. 21).



JO: That's one of the questions we pose, "is childing even available to children?". It's a bizarre thing to have to ask, but it feels like quite often, it isn't.

MF: Exactly! So, what would it look like if we were open, as a society, to the possibility of an emergent, unbounded public curriculum or program that emerged from childing sensibilities? Something that would sustain classroom spaces to be open-ended, that would hold space for children and adults who inhabit these classrooms to engage in a childing praxis?

JO: I think there's an inherent fear for adults who work with young children to allow chaos in schools, which is what childing looks like. What will ensue? What will it do, where will it go, at what point will it stop? Are we talking total anarchy, or are we talking about children

hurting each other or themselves? What's the ultimate place that it lands?

So, we checked in with the teachers whose Reception classes we were in. They welcomed us with open arms but they didn't really have a clue of what was unfolding. We gave them a vague idea of what we were planning. It was all very fluid; mark-making and dance this week, nature trails the following week, and here are a few materials we might need but we might have to improvise because of the weather. One teacher told us that she needed to know exactly what we were going to do. She also wanted a clear timeframe so that she could build resources around it. We told her that she could if she wanted to, but that she also didn't *need* to. So, we went in, and suddenly there were these math sheets with questions like "how many dots on the ladybug?". And we were like "oh, that's not what we're doing." It was like something had to be done about numeracy. And then it was about spelling "spider" and writing "spider." And we were like "no, we aren't doing that either." There was this kind of overwhelming compulsion to put it into numeracy and literacy spaces that were recognizable and safe.

JB: Back to adulting.

JO: Exactly! There was this one particular teacher who was quite controlling from what seemed like a fear of losing control ("I have to impose something that's recognizable and that I know, I have to produce evidence that these children have learned some facts, that their learning hasn't been neglected because they've been participating in this madness"). Well, when we spoke to them during the last week of our project, she said she was really emotional because after 12 years as a teacher, she was reminded why she came into teaching in the first place. She had become so consumed and shaped by the machinery of contemporary schooling that she had lost trust in herself. She felt the habitual burden of behavior management, demonstrating and documenting against the curriculum, measurability, reporting and accountability. All of which completely overshadowed the motivation to become a teacher and work with young children in the first place. And she said, "I will take so much away from this. You can improvise and let things unfold. And if it's a bit chaotic, it's not the end of the world. And actually, something's happening that we don't need to measure, we don't *need* to know." I think that's what "we" as adults have lost touch with. I say that as a parent, I think it's true in all spaces of life. We endlessly have this messaging that we *have* to be in control, and we *need* to control children. I think it's desperately sad that that's what education has become.

JB: This makes me think of the idea of play becoming central in a school of the High Andes in South America, where I worked for 10 years as a teacher and as a school principal. I created a curriculum that included lots of moments of free play, and this was such a disruptive idea in the rural High Andes. I worked with Mestizo children, and it was overwhelming to see how Western imperialistic education had taken over to the point that play wasn't part of the curriculum where recess in public schools is 15- or 20-minutes on cement grounds. So, when we implemented free play for the children just with a bunch of toys in a big room or outside, we struggled with parents who were afraid that their children were not doing anything productive and that they were wasting their time. And then, what happened was that other schools and people from the university nearby wanted to come and see this innovative measure involving children having playtime. This points at how disruptive play and childing can be when Western ways of adulting have taken over what it is to learn and to be a child.

MF: This goes back to the importance of paying attention to the place you're coming to as a teacher and as a researcher. Sid and Jayne, you told us how the pavilion came to

haunt you with all of its coloniality. Western education as a whole, in its "modern" version, is more than haunted by coloniality too. It is alive through colonialism, and I'm reminded of the words of Catherine Walsh (2021) who, following Peruvian scholar Anibal Quijano's work on the *Coloniality of Power*, insists that coloniality actually never ends. It constantly mutates and reconstructs its matrices of power. And that's true of the places we work in, spatially, as much as it's true of the curricula and the programs we follow and implement.

I think it's lovely that the teacher you were working with, Jayne, saw the project as a kind of awakening and realized that she had forgotten the joy of why she came to education in the first place. Sadly, that's what the system will do; it will just cover up that joy. Helping bring those childing sensibilities back to the surface makes me think about Catherine Walsh's (2021) idea that we need to figure out how we begin to "fissure or crack the colonial matrix that exists in universities and begin to create other ways of learning, of knowing, of thinking, of sensing, of being, of doing that are interconnected" (12'00). The emphasis you're putting on refusing a mode of teaching, learning and being that was imposed by the white man and that's still very present in mainstream educational structures and curricula in so-called "modern" Western societies is powerful.

JO: Sid, in your doctoral dissertation, you pick this up through these minor moments, these atmospheric forces of seemingly not very much. Maybe you want to say more? This is really important work, and it's hard work. It is really valuable, and it can take us to places in early childhood that reveal the kind of depth, heritage and violence that's been layered over many generations, and that still bubbles up through the everyday and unremarkable.

SM: Sure. In my thesis (Mohandas, 2023), my relata chapters take shape through encounters with seemingly insignificant "objects" that one wouldn't normally associate with research on gender – such as tea, iPad cameras and snot.

During the many months I spent in fieldwork at the nursery, a private early years setting in London (UK), there were numerous instances that moved and grabbed my attention. Amongst these was the moment when the head of the nursery offered me a mug of steaming hot tea, right in the midst of children playing outdoors. I remember my body being tense, haunted by memories from a nursery I had worked at before, specifically one about their hot drink policy and related disciplinary mechanisms. The hot drink policy at the nursery in question was implemented with intentions to be beyond reproach and circumvent the disciplinary gaze of school inspections. This was a reflection of wider masculinist neoliberal policy reforms that sought to tightly regulate and control early childhood practitioners and providers, needless to say, a principally feminised workforce. However, this was contrasted by the more relaxed manner hot tea was handled in policy and practice at the nursery where the fieldwork was carried out — where staff were placing tea on low surfaces right in the midst of the play outdoors. The affective atmospheres set in motion and the stickiness they generate are what make such encounters stand out.

Following this encounter, tea became a matter of deep interest to me. Inspecting the Twinings tea product box in the nursery kitchen with its Royal Warrants and product description that read "*We've been picking the best leaves and buds for three centuries*," further complicated the status of tea. It became clear that tea is not just a hot beverage but composed through an eruption of stories – stories of past and present colonial capitalist tea trades, imperial tales of conquest and expansion, stories of tea plantation economies, stories of displaced Dalit and Adivasi women slave labourers and

their "casted" inheritances, stories of earth violence and killing of complex ecologies through forced monocropping, and so forth. Enmeshed in these are also stories of feminist liberation as well as stories of Dalit women walking out of tea plantations and factories in refusal. As Haraway teaches us, such practices are about making "visible all those things that have been lost in an object; not in order to make the other meanings disappear, but rather to make it impossible for the bottom line to be one single statement" (Haraway and Goodeve, 2000, p. 105).

The generous offering of tea at this nursery was not an isolated case, tea was regularly served and shared. Not just for visitors, staff members brewed tea for one another. It was further brought to my attention that making tea at the nursery was a kind of spiritual ritual, akin to taking a deep breath, marking a pause and slowing down from the constant hustle of childcare practice. One picks up these minor moments, takes them seriously and wallows in its emergent relationalities. Childing, in the same way, allows for slowing down, noticing and being open to where our curiosities can take us.

This is all tied to a refusal of colonial conceptions of place and land. Instead of viewing land as mere backdrop, or as a resource for extraction, it is viewed through relations of reciprocity. In our paper (Osgood and Mohandas, 2024), we wrote about our encounter with daffodils at the university campus and the gendered, raced, classed, and colonized childhoods were re-membered. We used the concept of re-membering from Barad's (2007) work, which is not so much about going back to what was, but rather about material reconfigurings. For Jayne, it was about re-membering the patriarchal feudal relations that came from living on a farm shaped by the landed gentry. For me, it was about how daffodils played a constitutive role in colonial education in post/colonial India. The material-cultural politics at work, particularly how daffodils became part of my childhood through the rote memorization of Wordsworth's poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*. This is especially interesting for a childhood like mine that had never witnessed a daffodil before. I first encountered them in my teens on a trip to the Ooty Hill Stations, a place the British would go to to escape the heat of the Indian plains. There were major land transformations through the planting of European trees and plants to give a sense of "Englishness" to "nature" there.

To counter all this, the audio-video assemblage that you saw at the ECQI 2024 presentation was created as a way to upset the various divides between nature and culture, nature and technology, childhood and adulthood, past and present, and so forth, towards re-membering and re-embodying otherwise.

JO: This project that I am currently working on called "Making Oddkin" or "Multispecies flourishing from the ruins of the Anthropocene" also focuses on the significance of place. A small number of the four-year-old children we work with are very new to the London Borough of Barnet. They do not speak English. Some of them are from South America, others are from various places around the Mediterranean so, their familial relationships to minibeasts is very different from the fairly unremarkable and totally unpoisonous, harmless insects that we have in North London.

When we first started to talk about what they knew about minibeasts, which minibeasts were their favorite, the answer was "We hate them all! They'll sting us and bite us and we will stamp on them." There was this kind of real hatred, fear and distrust of minibeasts. Throughout the project, we went on nature trails, and it was freezing cold, pouring rain, in the depths of February. All bundled up in waterproof clothing; "Let's go find some minibeasts but we must be respectful because they're probably sleeping." And so,

children then became connected to place, to *that* place, as residents of the London borough. And we asked, "What creatures live here? Who or what is my neighbour? What relation do I have to them?". And then, they realized that these minibeasts don't bite, and they learned about the 'snail-ness' of snails, for example. It came down to the capacities, and the invitation and permission to connect with the more-than-human. The project ultimately culminated in the production of a children's picture book through arts-based practices done *with* the children (collage, mark-making, photography and storytelling). Through their nonsense poetry, their imagery and their artwork, a beautiful story with no beginning, no ending but a depthless middle has taken shape. One thing we did was to make paper; we went with a bucket and picked grass, flowers, and twigs from their local neighborhood. We crafted sheets of paper that turned out browny-green and that form the fabric of the book. We gifted the book to each child to share with their families and have in their family homes. As such, it's an alternative to "environmental education." It's a testimony to their experience of forging connections to place in a semi-urban space. And it allowed us to seriously contemplate how prevailing ideas about the environment and the burden of responsibility on young shoulders can be disrupted. It is possible to avoid moralizing, and instead bring space, geography and connection to place to the heart of work with young children.

MF: The daffodils and the minibeasts are making me think about different Indigenous and Métis perspectives. One of them is coming from Max Liboiron (2021) and their book *Pollution is colonialism*. They make the distinction between small-l "*l*and" and capital-L "*L*and." Small-l *l*and stands in a colonial framework. Capital-L *L*and is "fundamentally relational" (p. 45). I also thought about Robin Wall Kimmerer's (2013) idea of "remember[ing] things you didn't know you'd forgotten" (p. ix), which is an invitation for all of us to participate in the "re-memberance of other ways to live, and figur[e] out a way to inhabit those stories" as she says it (Wall Kimmerer, 2021, 1'01'20), whether we're Indigenous or not. It's about putting these stories back together and working against that linear notion of time to find again the histories and the different layers, the learnings and the teachings that are embedded in capital-L *L*and, that have always been there, in the daffodils, in the trees, in the minibeasts, in everything that "surrounds" us. It's all been there for longer than we humans have. I think it's lovely that the children engaged in that praxis of making earthy brownish sheets of paper, and that these stand as a material trace of what becomes when we engage with Land.

SM: Your sharing of Kimmerer's quote beautifully expresses how I feel about much of my own childhood in Kerala and its inseparability from land. Such intimacies with land are not always crystallised or extracted in the form of a concept. For those of us who have experienced land in this way as part of our way of being, Indigenous and more-than-human approaches offer a way of re-turning to body-land intimacies.

For instance, for me it is impossible to think of Malayali childhoods without thinking about child-ant relations. This is by no means a romanticised account of ants, rather it is about co-inhabiting relational complexity. As children, we spent countless hours following ant trails, soaking up their movements, lovingly speaking to and playing imaginatively with them, while also trying to eliminate them or torturing them by feeding them to the burrowed sand pits of *kuzhi aana* (which translates humorously as "burrowing elephants," i.e. antlion larvae).

What I find fascinating is how smells are such a key part of these relations. Among the vast variety of ants, each carries a distinct smell — almost impossible to describe, but making them instantly sensed and recognisable. For

example, the red ants often found on mango trees exude a sharp, sour smell. They weave intricate nests with mango leaves that we instinctively avoided. Yet, as we climbed those trees in search of unripe mangoes, what I find most striking is how it was almost impossible to smell the mango leaves or the unripe mangoes without simultaneously experiencing the smell of those red ants. It is these kinds of intimacies of body-land that Western humanist education, with its disembodied taxonomies, seeks to erase.

JB: This reminds me of the idea of "land as pedagogy" from Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's (2014) work. The idea that Land teaches you, thereby "disrupting settler colonial commodification and ownership of the land" (p. 8). That was beautifully illustrated in the stop-motion short film *Biidaaban* (Strong, 2019). There was this main character in it who was going out and learning directly from the Land. It's this exact same idea, this way of connecting directly in an exchange of knowledge, with an openness to the world with the whole being, not just in a cognitive manner. Being stung by a bee, for example, really teaches you. Thinking about the bees and the children in different places, this reminds me I had a student who was stung on the tongue once. I told them to stay close by so that I could keep an eye on them. After a little while, we had to rush to the hospital as their tongue was so swollen they couldn't talk anymore. That gave me a different idea about bees and what can happen when we get stung by them!

JO: During the Making Oddkin project, I noticed a girl. What drew my attention was the fact that, whilst she participated in all the activities with a good degree of enthusiasm, she didn't speak. She would come to me, take my hand and lead me somewhere to show me what she was interested in, but she didn't speak. For weeks, we engaged in arts-based activities as part of our research-creation project, and, by the end, I wanted to have opportunities for children to tell their stories. I asked the teacher which children she would recommend to be storytellers, and, rather predictably, she volunteered the most vocal and boisterous ones. I wanted to hear this girl who hadn't spoken at all throughout the project. She responded enthusiastically to my invitation and joined me in the playground with her piece of artwork. She skipped outside, ran across the playground, but still, she didn't speak. She pointed, found a piece of chalk, drew things on the ground. Through nonverbal storytelling, I gained a sense of what was going on. I asked her if she wanted to tell me a story about minibeasts; she nodded. I urged her, "I think you might need to speak if you're going to tell me a story." And all of a sudden, she started talking and she told me all these fantastical stories about birds and bugs and robins. She had been absolutely fixated by snails the whole time, and she had been squirreling them in her pockets. The teachers noticed and told her to put them back in their habitat. This became a bit of an obsession. The kind of relationship she had with the snails had transformed who she was: she suddenly became the child who was brave, the one who would pick up the slime-ridden snail and put it in the palm of her hand and then shove it in her pockets. Something happened in terms of these relationalities with the snails, and who she was permitted to be.

And then this amazing story unfolded, and her obsession with snails continued. I wrote a piece about it, about child-snail relationalities, and about what it means in relation to becoming gendered (Osgood, 2024). Because of course, snails are hermaphrodites. So, this took me to all sorts of places with Haraway's SF philosophy, to Science Fiction, Science Fact, So Far, Speculative Fabulation, and Snail Fact – I've added a new SF in there! I wonder if that girl and the snail would have formed these connections, if it wasn't for the time of year, for example. Minibeast projects do not happen in freezing, foggy February; curriculum

design dictates they happen in Spring, when all the new babies are being born – it's all about the butterflies and the bees. The snails and the slugs don't get a look in, usually. But they took on sort of a superhero status, because it was the tail end of winter and they were the only things around. “Everybody, we found the slug!” and twenty children swarmed to see the slug. The stories that got told were probably those that would not have been routinely told when minibeasting happens in June and July.

JB: I’m thinking about who the child is. When you think about who’s the child, it’s also tied to some political conceptualizations. I’m thinking about citizenship and immigration status. My wife and I recently became citizens of Canada, after about eight years of struggle with the permanent residency process. I’m also thinking about the children in Gaza as well, and the ones that end up becoming casualties. And even here in Canada, when we say, “every child has the right to education,” I wonder who the child is when we say that, because even here, until recently, if you didn’t have a legal status, you could not attend school. So, it’s an important question: “Who is the child, really?” It’s a term that includes, and also a term that excludes. So, going back to childing, how does that connect? What tensions are there? We’re usually thinking about the children who run on the playground. But not everybody gets to do that. Do we run the risk of focusing on certain populations, on certain groups, when we speak about children and childing here?

JO: That’s a really important point. There’s this special issue I was involved in with Karin Murris which focused on the risk of erasing the child in posthumanist studies, specifically in the field of early childhood education (Murris and Osgood, 2022). The collection of papers in that special issue is really diverse, and, together, they get at how “child-as-phenomenon” is produced differently in time and space and across political contexts. It also highlights the imperative to keep child central whilst also working with these flattened hierarchies that bring all this other stuff that really matters into the frame of our investigations. So, I think that there are some powerful examples of how it *is* possible. But I also think that, with our appetite for posthumanism and with our enthusiasm to mobilize interesting concepts and theories, sometimes there’s a risk that our thinking becomes depoliticised, even though there have always been those who are very political.

That being said, I think there's some really exciting counters to that currently, where researchers, writers, scholars bring Indigenous scholarship, Black Feminist scholarship and ecofeminist scholarship – *not* the dead white men – into conversation. Bringing these other subaltern voices squarely into the fray has re-politicized the field in a way that is really needed when one is researching with children and childhood.

SM: Thank you, Jacky, for bringing up Gaza. One of the criticisms raised when this paper was presented elsewhere was how childing seemed depoliticised, particularly in the context of an ongoing genocide in Gaza. The events in Gaza have compelled me to go back more deeply into Black/non-Western Feminist writings. Never before have I felt whiteness so viscerally, with such intensity. I had naively clung to this belief that, besides occasional encounters with overt racism, it operated at subtler levels. What’s happening in Gaza has laid bare how whiteness is so intricately and deeply woven into the Western psyche and institutions. Equally unsettling has been the silence – or outright indifference – of scholars who claim expertise in decolonial and anticolonial praxis yet remain unmoved by the colonial violence in Palestine.

Your question – “Who is the child here?” – or more precisely, “what conception of ‘child’ underpins the praxis of childing?” – is crucial. Scholars within the Black radical tradition

have long examined the "darkening of childhoods" and the "adultification" of Black children, while Palestinian scholars like Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2019) have described the "unchilding" of Palestinian children. The way a CNN news presenter referred to Hind Rajab – a six-year-old Palestinian girl targeted and murdered by Israeli occupation forces – as "a woman" speaks to the broader politics that systematically deny childhood to Palestinian children.

While our paper is not about Palestinian childhoods, we see the same imperial forces at work across these locations. The inclusion of colonised childhoods, for instance, is a deliberate move in our commitment to retain the political edge in our work. However, we are also explicit in our refusal of abstract universals, for example, regarding what liberation should look like. Refusal could involve boycotting Israeli goods, regularly showing up for marches, refusing the scholarly "turns" that seek to sanitise the violent legacies of colonial education, as well as cultivating other worldly possibilities through arts, music, poetry and fiction. The refusal of "Man" can be dreamt multiple.

MF: The ecofeminist piece seems important in your work and in how you're articulating and taking up this childing sensibility. Would you tell us a bit more about this sense of ecofeminism, how you came to it, and what layers it brings to your work?

JO: Ecofeminism has been critiqued on the grounds of being white, privileged and western. But there's been a rereading, reconfiguring, and resurgence of ecofeminism focused on worldly injustices. This has allowed for a shift away from environmental education as a moralizing project of human exceptionalism that can fix planet Earth towards a sort of Harawayian *sympoiesis*, becoming with, and response-ability, allowing for a recognition that we are always in the thick of it. This shift to contemporary ecofeminism, as it is threaded through with critical posthumanism, is a welcomed one. There's a special issue of the Gender and Education journal that was recently published with some great pieces that really breathe fresh life into ecofeminism. They highlight its relevance for contemporary thinking about the human condition and what it means for intersectionality and injustices, and, within that, obviously, for children and childhood. Haraway's work – which I've always found incredibly inspiring, enriching and generative – has always brought all of these things together. And so, it feels like there's an imperative on us early childhood scholars as well to do that work of bringing *all* the threads together *all* of the time. So, this paper I've written about child-snail relationalities (Osgood, 2024) pulls all those threads. It *can't* only be about the human subjects' experiences of being, of gendered subjectivity, because it isn't only that, it can never be only that.

SM: I think putting theories and concepts in conversation with each other can be generative and it can also be super tricky. But as Sara Ahmed tells us, "trickiness is what makes the work matter" (in Schmitz and Ahmed, 2014, p. 106). In a recent paper, I write about theorising as an embodied practice and I trace the theoretical connections, tensions and contradictions that come with inhabiting the interstices, by bringing together post/colonial and Dalit lifeworlds in intra-active analysis (Mohandas, 2024). I think this materialist and embodied commitment to theorising is critical so we do not repeat the violence of what Haraway (1991) refers to as the "god-trick."

We start our paper by taking Todd's (2016) critique about "the subtle but pervasive power afforded to white scholarship" (p. 12) in discussions around ecology and climate seriously, by foregrounding the work of Indigenous feminists. What we are really mindful of again is to approach this tentatively

and humbly without claims to mastery. Kristin Arola and Adam Arola (2017) beautifully unpack this through the notion of "an ethics of assemblage," where they consider what a theoretical assemblage *does* and *who* it benefits. I think this is crucial to keep in mind to ensure theories and concepts are grounded in relations and so that we do not shy away from the tensions that arise.

JB: I think this is a great way to end our intra-view. We're grateful for this space where we were able to "think in conversation" as Segato (2018) put it!

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