FOREWORD

Early Childhood Environmental Education and the Posthuman "Turn": Why Knowing As "We" Go *Matters*

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We Know As We Go
(A poem inspired by the pieces in this special issue.[1])

Walking with and
walking through
children's sensorial bodies.
We know as we go.

The child's body emerging
through stones, dogs,
water, sand, and sky.
We know as we go.

Open-ended swirling extensions,
carried by some force,
shit breaks down.
We know as we go?

Messy entanglements,
asymmetrical geographies,
knowing is uncomfortably at stake.
We know as we go?

Curious new worldings,
mutual reciprocity,
multispecies vulnerabilities.
"We" know as "we" go…

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[1] Here, we take specific phrases and key ideas from each paper to craft this poem. We continue to engage with the contributing authors' words throughout this foreword.

What does it mean to 'know as we go'? Who and what even make up that we? Where, for instance, is the 'we' when educators encourage children to "go out into nature," to run wild and free across an "empty" landscape that's just theirs for the taking? Here, we borrow this specific phrasing—we know as we go—from Karen Malone and Sarah Jane Moore (this issue) who draw upon the work of Ingold (2010). One way or another, these three scholars all suggest that knowledge-making is open-ended, relational, and "formed along paths of movement" (Ingold, 2010, p. 136). We highlight this idea of *knowing as we go* throughout as a way to urge readers to rethink "the self" as expansive and knowledge-making as unbounded—or as Ingold puts it, "knowledge-growing" (p. 122). Within the field of early childhood environmental education, dominant approaches to knowledge production continue to remain rooted in romanticized notions of the innocent child "out" in the "natural world" (see e.g. Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017). Such anthropocentric ways of engaging with nature and the environment (Malone, 2015; Nxumalo, 2017; Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017; Rautio, 2013; Taylor, 2011; Taylor & Giugni, 2012; Taylor et al., 2012) center the child as sole meaning maker and, in turn, the "natural world" as a blank slate or passive backdrop devoid of any agency, histories, stories, and knowledges of their own (Änggård, 2016; Malone, 2015; Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017). Yet, as Dunlop (2009) reminds us, knowledge is not contained within individual human bodies but, rather, is found within an entangled assemblage of human-nonhuman relations: "in the human eyes, in rivers, in animals, in the language of music, poetry, art, science, history, anthropology, in what is public, intimate, beloved" (p. 16; see also Braidotti, 2018).

Drawing upon more-than-human or *posthuman* theories of the subject, contributors to this special issue rethink and disrupt child-centered approaches to knowing, being, and doing. Challenging modernist colonial discourses of nature as "mute, pure, and separate" (Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017, p. 100), posthuman theories highlight how the social world we live in is comprised of an assemblage of human and nonhuman actors (e.g. things, animals, plants, affects, discourses, institutions) that are constituted through unfolding relations across bodies (writ large) within environments that are always vibrant and ever-changing (Bennett, 2010; Leander & Boldt, 2013; Lenz Taguchi, 2011). This is not to say, of course, that agency is distributed evenly across humans and nonhumans (such as human dominion over the earth), as dehumanization, discrimination (e.g. based on race, class, gender), and colonial violence (such as killing and enslaving Indigenous people) continue to both impact the social and define our current era (see Braidotti, 2018; Dernikos, Ferguson, & Siegel, 2019). As Braidotti (2018) so aptly puts it, "'We' – the dwellers of this planet at this point in time are inter-connected, but also internally fractured" (p. xxiv). In other words, we are all matter, but we have not all *mattered.*

Exploring the ongoing complexities of our markedly uneven "more-than-human" worlds, however, is not exactly a new concept (see e.g. Kuby & Rowsell, 2017; Malone, 2015; Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017). Deep ecologists as well as Indigenous philosophers have long examined humankind and nature as relational fields of possibility, rather than distinct entities (Absolon, 2010). Yet, the renewed attention given to relational perspectives within this special issue helps bring these alternative ways of relating to the 'natural world' into sharper relief, namely by urging us to consider the "ethical, political, and pedagogical implications of addressing the colonial histories and material geographies" (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015, p. 2) that shape children's more-than-human encounters. Conceptually, contributors utilize diverse theories of posthumanism and/or creative post-qualitative methodologies to (1) move beyond normative ways to think and "do" environmental education, and (2) explore the generative ways young children sense their dynamic relationships with nature/the environment and *learn with* more-than-human others. As Bettie St. Pierre (2014) posits, post-qualitative "method …[is] not a prescriptive step-by-step procedure… described in advance… in some textbook that… could easily [be] implement[ed] during 'fieldwork'" (p. 7). Rather, it involves an embodied engagement with "data"/theory that encourages new

orientations, angles, and ways of thinking that resist the fixed logic of representation (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; MacLure, 2013).

With this in mind, we return to our opening poem so as to invite readers to dive into the relational messiness of "matter on the go" (Bennett, 2010, p. 18) and the *im/possibilities* of knowing as we go. As you read across these pieces, we encourage you to slow down and re/orient your thinking a bit (Stewart, 2007; St. Pierre, 2014) so as to become better attuned to what posthumanist inquiries might offer the field of early childhood environmental education. We wonder: What would it mean for students, researchers, and educators to construct new and different understandings of posthuman worlds where we work together to displace anthropocentrism, recognize trans-species solidarity, and acknowledge our relational violence towards human and nonhuman others (Braidotti, 2018)? While embracing the unknown, as well as a more expansive conception of "the self," may very well be uncomfortable for some, we hope that doing so enables more ethically response-able (Barad, 2007) considerations that allow for movement, conversation, emergence, newness and, most of all, the possibility of different futures.

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