Chapter 3

Challenging Assumptions

In this chapter we critically examine some images of the child, the educator, and the family that are prevalent in the early childhood field. Taking inspiration from Reggio Emilia and postfoundational perspectives that situate childhoods within sociocultural, historical, and economic contexts, we explore how dominant images and taken-for-granted assumptions may limit our practices, and consider ways to complexify them.

We discuss:

- Some ways to rethink dominant images of the child.
- Using postfoundational approaches to complexify our image of the child.
- Children’s participation in curriculum-making.
- Alternative images of the child.
- Moving beyond a “diversity” perspective.
- Using a sociomaterial perspective to move beyond discourse.
- Dominant and alternative images of the educator and of families.
- Complexifying the learning journey by challenging assumptions.

Images of the Child

What if we create a different image of a child? What if we look at what a child can do, at what they can express? What if we have been vastly underestimating and “cute-ifying” what children are capable of? What if we see children as continually forming theories and then testing them? (Kim)
In our context in North America we tend to see children as having needs and vulnerabilities, mostly defined through developmental lenses. Children are seen to have emotional needs, social needs, language needs, cognitive needs, and physical needs that vary according to their stage of development. Some dominant images of children include:

- the child as incomplete adult
- the child as future citizen
- the child as nature—an essential being with universal characteristics and inherent capabilities whose development is viewed as an innate process
- the child as innocent, living in a golden stage of life
- the child as weak and in need of guidance, security, and direction from adults
- the child at risk
- the child as vulnerable and in need of protection/surveillance
- the child as an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge
- the child as deficient and in need of adult intervention

While these images of children are not “wrong,” we can look at them as dominant discourses. We use this term to describe the way things are named, spoken of, and written that become experienced as objective and true—what Foucault (1980) called “regimes of truth.” As regimes of truth, discourses hold power over individual and societal ways of understanding the world; they organize our everyday experience of the world, govern our ideas, thoughts, and actions, and determine “what can be said and not said, what we consider normal or not normal, appropriate or inappropriate” (Moss, 2001, p. 10).

Rethinking Dominant Images of the Child

Alternatives to these dominant images are emerging. In their work in Australia, for example, MacNaughton, Hughes, and Smith (2007) promote a model of the child that reflects “a new concern with young children’s rights as citizens and new knowledge about the significance of young children’s early experiences” (2007, p. 458). This image of the child is influencing policy documents, training materials, and practices in some parts of Canada. As one example, the British Columbia Early Learning Framework (BC ELF) views young children as social actors who shape their identities, generate and communicate legitimate views about the world around them, and have a right to participate in that world. The framework states:
All children are born with a curiosity about themselves, other people, and the world around them, and in this sense are born learners. This framework views young children as capable and full of potential, as persons with complex identities, grounded in their individual strengths and capacities and their unique social, linguistic, and cultural heritage. In this image, children are rooted in and take nourishment from a rich, supportive ground comprised of relationships with their families and communities, their language and culture, and the surrounding environment. As children grow and learn, they ask questions, explore, and make discoveries, supported by these roots and branching out to new experiences, people, places, and things in their environment. Every child belongs and contributes. (Government of British Columbia, 2008a, pp. 2–4)

We refer to the BC ELF in our projects, in part because it highlights the importance of pedagogies that build on every child’s potential. We also acknowledge the dynamism, diversity, and contradictions inherent in the images of childhood we all hold—and the challenge of resisting the powerful influence of dominant social constructions of children in early childhood pedagogies. In our discussions, we consider how we always work from specific images of the child yet rarely make these images explicit in our practices. Together we discuss ways to deconstruct dominant images (e.g., the child in need) and reconstruct alternative ones (e.g., the gendered child, the racialized child). In such perspectives, children may be seen as:

- curious, competent, rich, and full of potential (Rinaldi, 1993, p. 114)
- having voices to be listened to as citizens and members of social groups (MacNaughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2008)
- agents of their own lives (Moss & Petrie, 2002)
- co-constructors of knowledge, identity, and culture who constantly make meaning of their lives and the world (James & Prout, 1997)

These alternative images allow us to interrupt, if only momentarily, our dominant images and create more complex subjectivities for and with children. We don’t argue that these alternative images are better, but rather that they are necessary in our journey of complexifying practice. We are ethically obliged, from this perspective, to always question our images, even our alternatives to dominant narratives.

We view this process of continual reflection about the images of the child as key to understanding why we do what we do in our practices with young...
children. Some of the questions we critically reflect on include the following (drawn from MacNaughton, 2003, and Moss & Petrie, 2002):

- What is my perspective on the child?
- How is that perspective reflected in my practice?
- Who do I think children are?
- What assumptions are embedded in the way I look at children, talk about children, work with children?
- Which sciences do I bring in to my image of the child? (e.g., child development, anthropology, history, genetics, biology)
- What views are missing from my understanding of who children are?
- What meanings of words or concepts are key to my understanding of children?
- What meanings are marginalized, silenced, or “othered”?
- How do these meanings lead to taken-for-granted assumptions about children?
- Are there other ways of understanding what these concepts mean?

These discussions are an important component of our work with pedagogical narration, which we find to be a valuable tool for making visible the images we hold of the child and challenging some of the images presented by developmental theories. One example of a pedagogical narration that creates and makes visible alternative views of the child—including the child as meaning maker, as gendered, as not necessarily innocent—is Princesses and Pirates (see pp. 76–83). Below, Kim, the educator who created this pedagogical narration, reflects on the richness she sees in children’s meaning-making and expressions of imagination.

Having the chance to listen to children’s stories and imaginative play is a gift. The trick is to actually listen. The conversations I hear are rich with imagination and they tell me something about the children participating. Listening to children—really listening—opens up their world to us, allows us a glimpse into how they may think, how they are interpreting what they see around them. We can get clues as to how they make sense of media and of what their families and their friends do. And we can be filled with wonder to see just how much children know. (Kim)

We return to Princesses and Pirates later in this chapter to explore how children’s play is embedded in societal discourses of gender.
Complexifying the Image of the Child:
Postfoundational Approaches

Reconceptualist scholars resist viewing children through a primarily developmental lens that imagines a universalized, innocent child and views childhood as a progression of stages toward adulthood. This lens is resisted, in part, because “a developmental knowledge base is inadequate to the task of teaching children in current times” (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004, p. 44).

Reconceptualist perspectives on children represent a significant shift in early childhood educator training in British Columbia. As ELF Project participant Kathleen Kummen reflects below regarding her experiences as a teacher of early childhood educators, the discourse of a universal child is a dominant one that is challenging to shift:

Do the students I work with see the child as a universal concept that can be “known objectively” and “governed rationally” (Rose, 1996)? From my perspective, a large number of the students describe all children as “x” with no provision made in their image for the absence of “x”.... Children are complex, contradictory, and unknown. When we tell and retell one story of a child, we construct a singular universal child. Chimamanda Adichie (2009) warns us of the danger of this single story. A universal image of the child silences, marginalizes, and oppresses the everyday lived experiences of “real” children. (Kummen, 2011, p. 3)

In our projects we draw from feminist poststructural scholars in early childhood (e.g., Lenz Taguchi, 2009; MacNaughton, 2005), among other theorists, to make visible how children are aware of race and gender and the power they hold in particular contexts. We consider pedagogical responses that move beyond developmental appropriateness, and we strive to be aware of the discourses that are at work in framing children’s interactions.

Differing Perspectives on Identity Formation

In early childhood development texts that are based on psychological understandings of identity, children are depicted as coherent beings who develop their identity in a progressive path toward a final adult sense of self. A postfoundational perspective understands children’s identities differently. Poststructural feminists, for instance, foreground the concept of subject formation (subjectivity) and describe processes of subjectivity as those in which the individual becomes a subject in the world through discursive negotiations. Feminist poststructural theorists bring attention to the way that children’s identities, or...
subjectivities, are always embedded within discourses, such as those that shape gender, “race,” ethnicity, class, language, and immigration status (Davies, 2000; Robinson & Jones-Díaz, 2005). We become subjects, Lenz Taguchi suggests,

in a simultaneous process of being subjected to dominant discourses and subjecting ourselves to them by picking up normalized meanings. Alternatively we might go against the grain of these meanings and formulate resistant meanings and discourses.... The subject can be understood as an individual patchwork or weave of materialized negotiated meanings. (2010, pp. 42–43)

As adults we act differently within different contexts. Children do the same. You have undoubtedly noticed that children act one way with you, the educator, and in other ways with their families. An educator may report, for example, that a child is very well behaved. The parent may appear shocked, saying this is not what they experience at home. Understanding that we all have many subjectivities opens up the possibility of understanding children’s complex identities.

From a poststructural feminist standpoint, an individual “emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product, but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which he or she participates” (Davies, 2000, p. 89).

In this perspective, human beings have multiple, complex, and contradictory ways of being and acting in the world, and the person is seen to emerge from discursive practices. The subject is understood not as consistent and rational, but as emerging in response to the positions that are made possible by a given situation. Thus young children (and educators) may have multiple and even contradictory positions by which they know and understand themselves.

In the following example (from Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kummen, & Thompson, 2010), a practitioner named Robert is contradictorily positioned in relation to developmental knowledge. Robert feels at ease when developmental knowledge is at his fingertips. He

thinks about the instruction he is about to give the children. He is planning to ask them to write down their names and the things they are good at doing. He starts to hand out the pieces of construction paper—it feels thick and smooth between his fingers. He positions a
box of markers in the middle of the table, next to the plate holding the remnants of cheese and crackers. He thinks about his developmental theory class—drawing upon the information about stages of cognitive development as he prepares to deliver his instruction. As he recalls the learned information, he feels a calming of his stomach and a loosening of his muscles. He is about to try out some of his learning.

When he delivers his instruction, the children look to him as they pay attention to his voice. The children continue to look at him—time appears to freeze. The lights get brighter and more piercing. One child says quietly, “I don’t understand.” Another child says the same. Then another. His hands start to feel wet and clammy. The chair feels hard underneath him as his muscles tighten. He feels a flush of warmth down his face and neck. His stomach tightens and doesn’t release. He feels the eyes of the other facilitator looking at him. He imagines a hole underneath his chair opening up gradually encompassing his body. He thinks he doesn’t belong here. He realizes it is him who doesn’t understand. He got it wrong. (pp. 348–49)

For Robert, the desire to have developmental knowledge in his professional repertoire is produced through developmental discourses themselves. A developmental worker who can use and create technologies of developmental theory to know and understand the child is also one who can be in control and feel at ease. Not having expert knowledge or not being recognized by others is risky, something to be hidden. When he fails to get developmental knowledge right, Robert jeopardizes his viability as a subject. His story shows that processes of subject formation are complex.

Children, too, construct their identities in relation to dominant discourses—discourses that create social institutions like the family, the early childhood centre, the community, popular media, and so on. In Princesses and Pirates (pp. 76–83) we can see how young children position themselves in relation to—and how they constantly negotiate—dominant gendered discourses. Please take a few minutes to read it now.

It is important to keep in mind that not only are children influenced by discourses, but they also constitute and contribute to these discourses.

Subjectivities, then, are interdependent and mutually constituted in relation to discourses of the media, the family, the childcare centre, and so on. And again, sometimes these discourses are contradictory, and children do not always choose to position themselves within the same discourse. It depends on their specific context. For example, a child might feel comfortable experimenting with makeup at home, but not in their childcare centre.
As children encounter various meanings, such as discourses of gender, “race,” class, and culture, they actively:

- read, interpret, and understand those meanings
- desire or reject them
- live, embody, and express the meanings they desire by taking them up as their own (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001, p. 128).

By doing so, children negotiate these meanings. This is not to say that they are free to construct any meanings or any identities they wish. The meanings and identities that children can construct may be many and variable, but they are restricted to the alternatives to which children have access. Children do not enter a free market of ideas but a market in which some meanings [dominant discourses] are more available, more desirable, more recognizable, more pleasurable, and therefore more powerful than others. (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001, p. 128)

Hughes and MacNaughton (2001, p. 122) remind us that:

- Identities are multiple: They have many facets, including gender, “race,” ethnicity, class, sexuality, ability, geographical location, and so on.
- Identities are (at least potentially) contradictory: Their many facets are not necessarily coherent and can often conflict with each other.
- Identities are dynamic: Subject formation is never complete and fixed, but is always changing and in the process of being formed [even in adulthood].

We can illustrate these ideas by once again returning to Princesses and Pirates. Whereas the image of the child that we see in the developmental discourse is devoid of gender, by looking at the children’s dialogues through a feminist poststructural lens, we can see that the children’s play is embedded in discourses of gender.

Now we might consider questions like these:

- How are these children reproducing dominant social constructions of masculinity and femininity?
How are they disrupting dominant gender discourses?

What material, linguistic, and discursive elements come together to shape which masculinities and femininities are seen as desirable and are taken up by the children in this particular context?

How do the children use their bodies to express their “understandings and enactments” of gender (Keddie, 2006, p. 108)?

How are the children taking up popular culture in ways that maintain or disrupt taken-for-granted gendered assumptions (Keddie, 2006)?

Reconceptualizing children’s subjectivities as being formed within the dominant discourses of their particular contexts brings attention to the ways in which issues of power and equity may be marginalized in early childhood classrooms. For example, we can consider how viewing children’s play as what is “normal” for boys or girls at a particular age can lead to missed opportunities to question values and meanings. A narrow view of what constitutes normal behaviour may lead educators to avoid dealing with issues that have far-reaching effects on those with less power and privilege.

By looking beyond what is considered normal at particular ages and stages, and by situating children’s knowledge and experiences within their social and discursive contexts, we can begin to see how even very young children, like the four-year-olds who participate in the Princesses and Pirates dialogue, constantly negotiate their understandings of complex issues like gender and class. We can also see that, in working out their identities, children are likely to reflect and negotiate the mores and belief systems of the society in which they live (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004).

Educators Are Not Separate from the Images They Hold of the Child

One question that has emerged in our conversations with educators is how we can change our image of the child from a child who is in need of intervention to a child who is competent, rich, and full of potential. In our view, the idea that educators can simply shift from seeing children as deficient to seeing them as competent involves two assumptions: one, that an educator can sit outside her own practice, and two, that the image of the child is an objective entity. We see the image of the child as continually emerging through educators’ practices. In this view, the image that educators hold is not a fixed essence, but is always shifting, always in the process of becoming—and it does so through the material and discursive effects that educators materialize in the moments of pedagogical encounters.
It is not realistic to think that educators can directly transport a new image of the child from the reconceptualist readings we do in our learning circles to their practice. What we find is that educators are actively entangled in configuring and reconfiguring the material and discursive elements of the image of the child. Educators are not mere observers who bring their image of the child to life in the moment. They are part of the image—and of an ongoing articulation of the image of children in the moments of practice. As Lenz Taguchi (2011) explains, “pedagogical practices create and enact particular children and particular learning subjectivities” (p. 37); therefore we need to carefully consider what is created by particular practices.

Ethic of Resistance

If early childhood education is a site for politics, as we discussed in chapter 2, it can become a site for resistance (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). Lenz Taguchi (2006) invites us to engage in an ethics of resistance to contest early childhood education’s often unchallenged spaces of governance, which include the dominant images of the child that we have been discussing in this chapter. As Lenz Taguchi explains,

An ethic of resistance refers to conscious acts of thinking deeply about the assumptions and taken-for-granted notions we bring with us (often without awareness) as we engage in our daily work with children. As we practice an ethic of resistance, we deconstruct, or take apart, what we “know to be true,” to reflect on it, analyze it, criticize it, and resist its seductive powers arising from its familiarity. (2006, p. 259)

Through critical reflection and ethical resistance, we can create new ways of seeing, understanding, and working with children. As we do so, we also engage in resisting and reworking dominant discourses that emerge in our lives and our practices. As we mentioned above, we need practices that respond to (and resist) discourses that are important in the lives of the children and families we work with. For example, we need to critically understand how newcomer families with young children experience immigration, how their experiences are socially and historically situated, how these families constantly negotiate their way through immigration discourses, and how those discourses position them. With this kind of understanding, we can experiment with practices that are respectful and ethical based on both current experiences and historically and socially situated discourses. This is what we mean by complexifying our practices. It’s about much more than simply understanding the child as a developing child.
Children's Participation in Curriculum-Making

Rethinking the image of the child leads us to consider ways to reconceptualize children’s participation in curriculum-making (Chan, 2010). While most child-centred approaches in early childhood emphasize children’s right to be listened to, actually involving young children in curriculum development presents many challenges. Truly involving children is about more than providing spaces that allow them to feel confident to express their opinions. It is about situating the child in a social and political context that is both contemporary and historical simultaneously. It requires ongoing ethical resistance. And it involves seeing both children and ourselves as complex subjects.

Before we continue with our discussion of the complexity of involving children in curriculum-making, we briefly outline some of the prevalent approaches to children’s participation (adapted from Chan, 2010). Drawing on the reconceptualist ideas we introduced above, we then discuss ways to disrupt developmental approaches and move toward complexifying how we think about participation.

Developmental Approaches

In approaches that focus on universal developmental stages, educators act as arbitrators, overseeing the children and evaluating them against predefined categories of normal development. Educators then develop curriculum for the children based on these judgements, with the objective of helping them develop “normally.”

In such approaches, rather than the child being an active participant throughout the whole learning process, including making decisions about what they will learn, the adult is expected to observe and interpret children’s interests and develop curriculum based on them, according to “developmentally appropriate” guidelines.

A Rights-Based Approach

A rights-based approach views participation as the base on which a democracy is built and the standard against which democracies are measured. While this approach does not assume that children are too immature to participate in decisions about their lives, it typically implies that adults should decide for children the knowledge, skills, behaviours, and experiences they need to become socially competent.

A Strengths-Based Framework

Early childhood educators who work within a strengths-based framework see children as co-constructors of meaning and adults as facilitators who provide opportunities for learning. In this approach, educators look for practical ways
to develop curriculum that responds to the “the child” and recognizes young children’s competencies (Clark & Moss, 2001). A strengths-based framework begins with what children have to offer, as opposed to highlighting children’s vulnerabilities.

A Child-Centred Participatory Rights-Based Approach

A child-centred participatory rights-based approach prioritizes engaging young children as active citizens who are competent, capable, and socially responsible. MacNaughton and Smith (2008) outline the implications of such an approach. They argue that it is not enough to observe and document what young children say. To engage them as active citizens requires taking seriously the politics of what children say and acting on these thoughts accordingly. Doing so, they argue, enables children to see their thoughts, feelings, and ideas as valid, and creates spaces to support young children to learn about the complexities of including diverse perspectives in a democratic society.

An Alternative View of Children’s Participation

While some of the approaches outlined above offer great potential for providing children with opportunities to participate in the societies to which they belong (including that of the early childhood centre), children’s participation in these approaches still tends to follow a linear, progressive path that centres adults as the experts (Chan, 2010).

To incorporate children’s participation in ways that allow for transformation of early childhood practice, Olsson proposes we imagine the child in more open and complex ways, trying to avoid falling into the trap of thinking, talking and acting in a simplified way through the notion of the “competent child.” The ambition has been to open up this image of the child to many other expressions; to find more and unknown ways of being a child than being defined through one’s competencies. (2009, p. 14)

From this viewpoint, participation is a dynamic process that involves continual transformation through learning. The focus is on what is going on in the learning process, not on attaining knowledge or achieving goals. In other words, educators and young children may seek to expand curriculum-making in new and creative ways—ways that treat learning as “impossible to predict, plan, supervise or evaluate according to predefined standards” (Olsson, 2009, p. 117).
Alternative Images of the Child
The complexified approach to thinking about children that we have outlined here challenges us to move past notions of “truth” and to think critically about children and the world. For many educators, this shift in thinking causes a “crisis in thought” as we struggle over how to give meaning to the world around us (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007). Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence maintain that this struggle over meaning produces opportunities to see children, early childhood institutions, and early childhood pedagogy with new eyes (2007, p. 123). These new ways of thinking have the potential to enliven the concept of children’s participation in curriculum development and to transform early childhood policy-making, training, research, and practice.

Framing children’s growth as occurring concurrently across a series of domains in irregular, diverse, and constantly changing processes (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) complexifies early learning. It “replaces certain ‘hard facts’ with shifting and multiple truths” (MacNaughton, 2004, p. 92), thereby opposing notions of standards-based programming that base young children’s education on the achievement of particular knowledge and skills.

This work embraces the importance of educators and children working together in an ongoing process of constructing and reconstructing a given problem, always paying attention to the shifting contexts in which children live. Children, educators, families, and community members are all situated within contexts that are unpredictable. As educators, we need to engage in practices that allow for this unpredictability. One way of doing this is to create opportunities for everyone involved in the children’s learning to express their views through a meaningful dialogue. Pedagogical narration provides such opportunities.

Moving beyond a “Diversity” Perspective
As we have seen from the examples we have been discussing, engaging in deeper listening and consultation with children requires additional conceptual tools. Using postcolonial and anti-racist perspectives helps us to pay...
attention to the experiences of Indigenous and other minoritized children as we complexify and politicize our practices. It is important to us to make visible how North America’s colonial history is permeated by racisms and injustices. Colonialism is not a thing of the past; it continues today in the form of social, economic, and political structures and other discursive and material formations that sustain and spread inequities. We call this ongoing structural arrangement “coloniality.”

Examples of postcolonial and anti-racist perspectives can be seen in these pedagogical narrations:

- Becoming Rapunzel, pp. 85–95
- Stand Up, p. 152

To remain vigilant against early childhood education practices that marginalize Indigenous and other minoritized children, we can

- interrogate the colonizing effects of assessing Indigenous children against Eurocentric developmental norms.
- incorporate culturally appropriate assessments and images of the child.
- consider ways to work against the forces of cultural appropriation and colonial governance that emerge in children’s everyday lived experiences.

As an example of the latter, IQ Project participant Carol Rowan collaborated with children, educators, and elders in an Inuit community in northern Québec to create children’s books in the Inuititut language.

Caribou by Annie Puttayuk (2008) is an example of the books that were created. The book includes eight pictures with Inuititut-language text. The English translations are as follows.

People go hunting for caribou.
They cut caribou into pieces.
Inuit eat caribou boiled, frozen, dried, and fried.
Inuit make clothing from caribou skin; we make caribou skin parkas, kamiks, mittens, and snow pants.
When the caribou are hungry, they eat grass.
Caribou go swimming when they don’t like mosquitoes.
Caribou crouch to hide when they are tired.
Inuit kill caribou for food and clothing. (Puttayuk, 2008)

Books like this one are not available in the commercial market. The text and images in Caribou resonate with Inuit children. The story is important because almost every Inuit family has hunted caribou. Butchering caribou is an essential skill. The hunter who provides food and the person who makes clothing from the skins are respected and valuable community members. Inuit people live in relationship with caribou, so the story is rich with community-specific meanings (Rowan, 2010).

Here Carol reflects on how children’s books that draw on local knowledges disrupt neocolonialisms that have privileged the English language and Euro-Western norms for children from diverse contexts. Carol wondered,
Would the books present an opportunity to investigate Inuit ways of being and becoming? Could the bookmaking project help to uncover and reaffirm Inuit knowledge by telling stories about Inuit ways of knowing and being?... In many childcare centres serving Indigenous communities the educators are trained in developmental approaches, the majority of the books are in English, and most of the toys and materials reflect Euro-Western norms. Few books are available in Indigenous languages for children to pick up and read. Many of the story books originating from publishing houses in North America, Great Britain, and Europe show pictures and tell stories depicting the dominant discourse of the colonizer such as the cute little bunny, the domesticated doggie, trees, princes and palaces, tall city buildings, farms, highways, white-skinned nuclear families—stories that employ visual references far removed from, and written in languages foreign to, the contexts of many Indigenous children. I have wondered how these stories and images interfere with and disrupt the grounding of [Indigenous] knowledge. (Rowan, 2010, p. 161)

When we view children as actively constructing meanings within discourses, such as those that shape gender and “race,” we can move beyond simply recognizing or tolerating diversity to actively engage in issues of social justice in early childhood settings. Drawing from anti-racist and postcolonial theories presents possibilities for approaching social responsibility and diversity issues in early childhood settings (see, for example, Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007). Because we see practising for social justice as a critical aspect of complexifying early childhood pedagogies, we return to these ideas throughout this book.

The early childhood education field takes several approaches to addressing social justice. In Canada, multiculturalism has been a preferred approach. However, recent developments question or problematize the effectiveness of multiculturalism to eliminate racisms and other forms of social injustice. Early childhood scholars such as MacNaughton (2005), Robinson and Jones-Diaz (2005), and Vandenbroeck (2004) argue that multicultural approaches present fixed views of culture based on the assimilationist idea that children acquire success by becoming more like the mainstream population. Multiculturalism is also, for some authors, a legacy or a reimagining of colonial structure and practice. As a conceptual framework and approach, multiculturalism is limited in its ability to understand and address the complexities of racisms and social injustices; therefore, it is necessary to consider other frameworks and approaches.

Theories such as anti-racism and postcolonialism can provoke new thinking about the role of social justice in early childhood education. These approaches
use a critical literacy of “race” and racialization to explore how power operates and shapes social relations.

In a similar fashion, bringing queer theories to our project discussions has allowed us to engage in deeper listening and participation and engage differently in social justice pedagogies (see The Tiara, pp. 83–86). Queer theories allow us to unpack heteronormativity and see how certain practices can be unjust. We expand on queer theories in chapter 5.

Moving Beyond Discourse: Sociomaterial Perspectives

In our work with educators, we also bring a sociomaterial (or material-discursive) lens to our thinking about subject formation. As we discussed above, subject (or identity) formation can be understood as the processes by which we (including children) position ourselves (in both normalizing and subversive ways) and are positioned within dominant discourses. Subject formation can also be understood in terms of the material processes that come into being in a particular encounter. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) emphasize that bodies (both human and non-human) operate in conjunction with other bodies to form assemblages. They highlight the relationships that exist between these bodies that are constantly engaged in a network of relations that shift over time. Their interest lies not on materials’ meaning, but on what the materials can do and how they relate to the human and non-human bodies they encounter.

In the early childhood classroom, for example, subjectivity emerges as bodies and their actions, perceptions, and emotions interact with objects, spaces, and discursive elements (including dominant discourses of “race,” gender, and class) in an embodied assemblage of multiple belongings; one’s identity is made, remade, and potentially transformed in relational connections (Braidotti, 1998; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008).

To illustrate this complex concept, let’s return to Princesses and Pirates. As we think about this pedagogical narration, we can consider not only the discourses that are at work in the children’s play, but also how the clothing the children are wearing, the materials they are provided with, the words that are said, the distribution of boys and girls around the room, the children’s and the educators’ memories of Disney movies and other media, and many other human and non-human materializations all come together to shape

Other examples of engagement with sociomaterial perspectives can be found in:

- The Pool, pp. 42–44
- Becoming Rapunzel, pp. 86–95
- Stephanie and the Sticker Moment, pp. 97–100
the children’s play as gendered in particular ways—and to create children’s
gendered subjectivities in those particular moments of encounter.

Images of the Educator

Just as particular images of the child dominate the early childhood field,
certain images of the early childhood educator are also prevalent. Four
common ones, among many,¹ are the educator as substitute maternal care,
as expert, custodian, and technician. In this section, we engage with the
question “Who do we understand the early childhood educator to be?”
We consider how dominant images of the educator might shape and limit
the work educators do. Then we juxtapose these dominant images of the
educator with alternative images that have inspired us in our journey to
complexify practices.

Dominant Images of the Educator

The Educator as Substitute Maternal Care

The idea that early childhood educators should substitute for maternal care
flows from the societal discourse that a mother’s love is required for a child’s
development and that any alternative to maternal care should be similar to a
mother’s. This ideology is deeply embedded in North America, due in large
part to its entanglement with social, political, and economic histories that came
together to create a particular image of childhood (Pence, 1989). Peter Moss
critiques this image:

The early childhood worker as substitute mother produces an image that
is both gendered and assumes that little or no education is necessary
to undertake the work, which is understood as requiring qualities and
competencies that are either innate to women (“maternal instinct”) or else are acquired through women’s practice of domestic labour
(“housework skills”). (2006a, p. 34)

The educator as maternal substitute reinforces gendered discourses and
devalues the role of families in their relationships with their children; there-
fore, it requires critical engagement.

¹ For more images of the educator see Britzman, 2003; Ellsworth, 1999; Fendler, 2003; Moss and
Petrie, 2002.
The Educator as Expert

Child development discourse positions the early childhood educator as an expert with specialized skills and knowledge of young children over and above those possessed by parents and families (Elliot, 2010, p. 7). The idea of expert knowledge implies that the educator knows what children need; it also suggests knowledge or power to which others—including families—must defer.

Educators do, of course, have specialized knowledge that allows them to engage with young children in meaningful ways. However, the concept of the expert educator tends to obscure the complexities that may be revealed when we engage with young children from a stance of not-knowing.

Often the various roles that I take up position me as “the expert” who “knows”: my knowledge is placed above that of children, families, students, and other caregivers. Responsibility and commitment demand knowledge, but “knowing” can limit my ability to learn new ways and new ideas. (Deborah)

The Educator as Custodian

As custodian, the educator is expected to keep children healthy and safe. Requirements for hygiene, nutrition, and safety are carefully prescribed, and educators are expected to adhere to them. Custodial images of educators can be found in places as varied as licensing regulations and the media (Elliot, 2010, p. 7). We also see the custodial image in how we regulate children by stopping play we believe is inappropriate. IQ Project participant Kim thinks critically about her involvement in regulating children’s play:

In my experience, when a child does something that we call inappropriate, their goal is actually quite appropriate, and it doesn’t take much probing to figure it out. For example, years ago a group of boys were playing soccer. One boy went around systematically knocking down the other players. When asked, the boy said quite sincerely that he never got a chance with the ball so he HAD to knock them down to get a turn. Very logical. (Kim)

The Educator as Technician

The image of the early childhood educator as technician is intimately connected to strong neoliberal forces that construct the child “as a redemptive agent who can be programmed to be the future solution to our current problems” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, vii). The focus of early childhood education in this perspective is to create children of the future—children who are ready for school, ready to be prepared for the future demands of the work force. This
notion of children reaching their “economic potential”—and the accompanying assumption that childhood is a progression toward adult-defined outcomes that are easily quantified—works in tandem with the image of the child as an empty vessel. It fails to value childhood in the here and now and to recognize childhood as an important life stage in its own right. This discourse holds little space for a critically reflective educator. As Enid writes,

Children’s growth and development is often represented as sequential and predictable, with a primary focus on children’s acquisition of skills. Children’s growth, as measured through articulated norms of skills and behaviours, appears simple, even straightforward. Within this vision of normatively ranked children, the educator appears as a technician whose job is to ensure the achievement of children’s demonstrable skills and abilities; her role is to facilitate children’s movement from one stage to the next. Within a developmental viewpoint (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) is an implicit belief that each progressive stage is “better” as children move to the end product of adult. The child’s contribution to society as an adult is valued as part of the future. When judging children in terms of a prescribed set of norms, lost within this view are the children’s individual patterns of growth, diverse histories and perspectives, and possible contributions in the present moment. (Elliot, 2010, p. 7)

The technician embodies “the possibility of an ordered world”—a world that is certain, controllable, and predictable (Moss, 2006a, p. 38). In our view, the image of the educator as technician erases childhood’s diversity; thus it needs to be challenged.

Complexifying Practices: Toward Alternative Images of the Educator

The images described above are not inherently “bad,” but we contend that they are limiting perspectives that lead to viewing early childhood practice as simple and straightforward. As we have been expressing throughout this book, we believe that early childhood practice is a complex journey. As such, it requires that we complexify our image of the educator.

Below we present two images of the educator that have allowed us to extend our discussions and the work in our projects: the educator in relationship and the educator as researcher. Many other images are possible. We encourage readers to generate additional images of the educator that might help to complexify taken-for-granted understandings of what it means to work with young children. For example, we might also think of the educator as an artist, the educator in question (Vintimilla, 2012), or the educator in process.
**The Educator in Relationship**

Relationships are essential in the work we do as early childhood educators. In our projects we encourage educators to critically engage with the idea of relationship. We dig deep into understanding how we are engaged in relationship with children, families, and other educators. We challenge ourselves to unpack the assumptions we make in these relationships. How does power come to matter in our relationships? How can we challenge our assumptions about how relationships ought to be developed? What happens when relationships do not materialize in the way we anticipated? How do we value relationships that are difficult, challenging, or unwanted?

Pedagogical narrations such as Hunters, Good Guys, and Bad Guys (see pp. 37–38) reveal some of the complexities and ethical tensions we encounter in our relationships with children when we try to provide space for the questions and issues with which children struggle. These are the moments when we test what it means to be in relationship with children. Edmiston (2008) notes: “To be addressed by a child means we must be listening. To be able to answer, and to create spaces for children to address one another, we must be in radical dialogue with children” (p. 174). This statement resonates for us when we think of the image of the educator in relationship. The educator in relationship involves struggle, tension, and embracing the unknown of being with others.

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All of the pedagogical narrations in this book reveal the complexities and ethical tensions we encounter in working with young children. See, for example:

- Stand Up, p. 152
- Building a Fort, pp. 105–112
- Entangled Bodies, pp. 96–105
- The Tiara, pp. 83–86

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**The Educator as Researcher**

As we mentioned above, our work with educators in British Columbia has taken inspiration from the complex roles educators play in the early childhood centres of Reggio Emilia, Italy. In Reggio Emilia, educators do not simply guide and observe children, nor do they follow a prescribed curriculum. They seek ways to extend children’s learning and engagement, and they make children’s theories and ideas visible through pedagogical documentation (see chapter 4).
Importantly, the Reggio Emilia educators are committed to what Carlina Rinaldi (2001) terms a *pedagogy of listening* in creating an environment that is open to multiple perspectives and is deeply respectful of children and their families (p. 65). As co-constructors of knowledge, educators partner with the children, families, and their colleagues to collaboratively research, document, critically reflect on, deepen, and share their contextualized understandings. The educator as researcher and co-constructor considers new provocations and resources to build on the children’s questions, learning, and interests (Rinaldi, 2001).

This commitment to research and the co-construction of knowledge complexifies our idea of early childhood learning processes beyond the prescriptive transmission of knowledge that we see in images of the educator as expert or technician. As Moss explains, this approach reconceptualizes knowledge as

perspectival, partial and provisional, where the image is a rhizome ... something which shoots in all directions with no beginning and no end, but always in between, with openings towards other directions and places. This is very different to learning understood as the transmission of a body of knowledge, proceeding in a linear way to a predetermined outcome, passing through progressive and predictable stages. (2006a, p. 36)

Rather than seeking conformity to predetermined outcomes, the early childhood educator as researcher is open to the unexpected, open to learning that is, as we described above, “impossible to predict, plan, supervise or evaluate according to predefined standards” (Olsson, 2009, p. 117).

When we move away from images of the early childhood educator as technician, custodian, expert, or maternal substitute and embrace images of the educator in relationship and the educator as researcher, among many possibilities, the idea of professional development changes. If the educator’s role is a complex one that negotiates subjectivities, seeks social justice, and embraces “curiosity, the unknown, doubt, error, crisis, [and] theory” (Rinaldi, 2003, p. 2), then professional development cannot be simply a linear, finite process of acquiring and then applying prescribed knowledge.

The early childhood educator as researcher “is open to the other, striving to listen without grasping the other and making the other into the same” (Peter Moss, 2006a, p. 37).
Reconceptualizing Professional Development

Alternative images like these ones we discuss above allow us to reconceptualize professional development for early childhood educators. By exploring the notion that change is both constant and intra-active, we hope to turn the idea of professional development on its head.

As we noted in chapter 2, professional development programs for early childhood educators in North America tend to aim at changing educators’ knowledge, beliefs, skills, and practices to effect improvements in children’s learning outcomes. The emphasis is on changing the educators and their practices by implementing a specific source of change, such as a program (Smith & Gillespie, 2007).

We problematize three interrelated assumptions embedded in this idea of professional development; these assumptions are:

- That professional development is a neutral, objective, passive event in educational processes.
- That professional development is linear and sequential (e.g., that you start at point X and as you do more professional development you travel in a straight line, always getting better).
- That the educator who participates in professional development is a stable, unchanging subject.
- That change is something exceptional, while stability and order are the norm.

In our work, we do not presuppose a static, knowable educator. Instead, we view the educator “as an incomplete project” (Britzman, 2007, p. 3). This alternative view shifts the focus of professional development from being to becoming. A focus on being—which is typical of professional development in the North American context—concerns itself with the organized state of things—their unity, identity, essence, structure, and discreteness. In contrast, a focus on becoming allows for dissonance, plurality, change, transience, and disparity (Chia, 1995). We explore this shift in focus below.

Moving Beyond Representational Thinking

In modern thought, representational thinking works through language to deem objects, concepts, and events as real and as having a concrete entity unto themselves. Underlying this view is “an unshakeable assumption that reality is essentially discrete, substantial and enduring” (Chia, 1999, p. 215).

The term professional development is understood to accurately represent “an external world of discrete and identifiable objects, forces and generative
mechanisms” (Chia, 1999, p. 215). Guskey (2002) acknowledges that professional development involves different processes at different levels, but he views them as purposeful endeavours that need to be carefully evaluated to determine whether they are achieving their purposes.

This normative depiction of the effects of professional development assumes that the learning that takes place in professional development involves responding “to pre-formulated questions and eventually arriving at pre-existing answers” (Bogue, 2004, p. 333)—a passage from non-knowledge to knowledge, from ignorance to enlightenment. Reflected in this model is an individual who can be known, defined, and represented.

By giving priority to being—and consequently to representation—the transformation that is professional development’s primary goal is seen as something exceptional that takes place under specific circumstances with the help of certain people who are referred to as agents of change (Chia, 1999). This view privileges outcomes and end-states. Through this lens, individuals are viewed as primarily unchanging entities. As one example of professional development that takes this view, Michael Fullan (2001), a leading scholar on educational change, writes that real change “represents a serious personal and collective experience characterized by ambivalence and uncertainty; and if the change works out it can result in a sense of mastery, accomplishment, and professional growth” (p. 32). Fullan contends that people need pressure to change; he identifies dos and don’ts that support the view that change is an exceptional process through which individuals need to be led, and which must be carefully orchestrated (2001, pp. 108–109).

In contrast to this view, Tsoukas and Chia (2002) borrow from process-oriented philosophers Bergson and James to argue that change is not an exceptional capacity of individuals, but a pervasive state of life:

Individuals ... are themselves tentative, and precariously balanced but relatively stabilized assemblages of actions and interactions. (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 592)

Below we discuss some pedagogical narrations that capture how change took place during the IQ Project. Here, rather than thinking about the early childhood educator (in this example, Christine), as the main change agent, we think of change as intra-action.

Change as Intra-Action
Christine was interested in challenging dominant ways of thinking about the child. She was troubled by the material-discursive meanings that were commonplace in her centre regarding Stephanie, a girl with special rights. After being
introduced to the idea of a competent and rich image of the child in the IQ Project learning circles, Christine wanted to challenge and unpack the ways in which she viewed and worked with the children in her classroom.

In Stephanie and the Sticker Moment (pp. 96–101), Stephanie has an encounter with another child and a much–prized sticker. Stephanie approaches Sally, taking her hand, and walks across the room with her. Sally is surprised by the gesture, and she is even more taken aback when Stephanie removes Sally’s sticker from her shirt and places it on her own. Christine watches the girls from a distance as they resolve the situation.

In two other examples, Stephanie and the Art Supply Cart (pp. 101–103) and Stephanie and the Paints (pp. 104–105), Christine observes the gentle acts of kindness offered by several of Stephanie’s classmates as they make silent gestures of friendship to her. Kindness, generosity, and connection are the focus of Christine’s analysis.

In these examples, Christine’s practices are agentive in that they play a role in producing the very phenomenon (the image of the child) they set out to grasp (Barad, 2007). The observations Christine makes of Stephanie’s engagement with her classmates, the sticker, and the art materials are part of the configuration of the image of the child in its intra-active becoming.

The image of the child is always shifting, always in the process of becoming. It is made to matter through material–discursive practices—through the intra-actions materialized in the moment as well as the intra-actions that materialize themselves in the process of writing about and discussing the pedagogical narration.

To read that Christine moved from applying an image of a deficient child to conceptualizing competence is to assume both an educator who can sit outside her own practice, and that the image of the child is an objective entity. Neither of these assumptions is accurate. Regarding the first, an educator is always entangled in her own practices. Regarding the second, the image of the child is constituted and constitutive; it is always configuring and reconfiguring itself—and the educator, the children, the environment, the intelligibility of practice, and so on.

The image of the child that we see in Christine’s pedagogical narrations is not a fixed essence that she transported directly from her readings during our meetings to her practice. Rather, Christine is actively entangled in configuring and reconfiguring the materiality and discursivity of the image of the child. “Reality,” Barad says, “is an ongoing dynamic of intra-activity” (2007, p. 206).

In her pedagogical narrations, Christine not only brings to us the intra-actions that are enacted between the children and the materials. She also makes visible the intra-actions in which she herself is entangled. Christine is not a mere observer who brings her image of the child to life in the moment.
Rather, she is part of the image—part of the ongoing articulation of the image—of the children.

More analysis of Christine’s pedagogical narrations can be found on pp. 96–105.

Images of the Family

Thinking about relationships with children is complex, but what about relationships with family members? Aren’t most of us still finding our way through those? How do we view a child as competent in relation to a parent who is struggling? (Kim)

The importance of family–educator partnerships has long been emphasized in the early childhood education field. Partnership, though, as Laurie and her parent co-authors point out, “is an amorphous term that does not always make explicit either the nature or the unresolved terrain of family–educator relationships” (2010, p. 177).

Evidence suggests that many relationships between early childhood educators and the families of the children in their care are strained, with communication between them perceived as “highly complex and problematic” (MacNaughton, 2003, p. 259). Many factors may contribute to strained relationships. Both educators and parents may be stressed and tired, for example. Cultural differences may exist, and these—among other differences—may lead to conflicts about the focus and content of the early childhood programs.

MacNaughton (2003) identifies another potential point of tension between educators and families: educators often hold views of families that conform to dominant normalizing discourses. For example, she points to evidence that educators tend to judge their knowledge of children as more important than families’ understanding of their own child because educators tend to see their knowledge as research based while parents’ knowledge is based only on their own child. As a result of this perception, when educators think about working with families, they often focus on parent education. Kim, for example, wondered early on in her involvement with the IQ Project:

How do we view a child as competent in relation to a parent who is struggling?...
I keep coming back to parent education! But I see that there are a lot of problems with this concept. (Kim)

We touched on some of the problems Kim alludes to in the section above on the image of the expert educator. Power dynamics is one of them. Educators...
are often seen as experts, and they may use their knowledge and position to maintain existing social relations of power. MacNaughton (2003) suggests the following ways that educators can transform their relationships with families.

- Always be aware of potential power dynamics between educators and families.
- Avoid judgements and seek instead to understand families through respectful dialogue, negotiation, and compromise.
- Be conscious of one’s stereotypical and discriminatory reactions to families.
- Engage families in discussing their children’s learning.
- Allow for time to negotiate shared meanings and understandings about the child.
- Be culturally sensitive to parents’ comfort level with sharing information about the family.

To illustrate the challenges of embracing these ideas, below we share a situation that emerged in Sabrina’s preschool. Our intent is not to present Sabrina’s story as an exemplary piece, but to demonstrate the complexity of educator–family relationships and the critical engagement required to transform them.

**Staying Alive to Complexities: Sabrina’s Story**

Sabrina’s preschool group meets twice a week in the afternoons. Sabrina is experiencing multiple pulls and anxieties in relation to the preschool community. Her concerns are interconnected, but to explain them, it is easier to separate the components (the children, the structure, and the families) and discuss each individually. Keep in mind, however, that Sabrina’s concerns are not like layers of sediment lying calmly one on top of the other; they intermingle. Sabrina’s biggest concern is that, until recently, she was not seeing signs of a cohesive learning community coming together.

**The Children**

The children are a diverse, lively group. There are four or five very young and nearly 3-year-olds who are coming to a group setting for the first time, and Sabrina has her hands full preventing pokes and punches and keeping an eye on the youngest ones as they make their way through the day. A pair of twins have their own shared language (mostly non-verbal), another child has significant language delays, and an autistic child has an aide. The classroom routine has been simplified to create a minimum of transitions, and snack is served as early as possible. The children arrive excited, and they happily wave goodbye to their families as they leave.
The Program

Sabrina is the only educator in the group. Because the preschool is a co-op, the teacher and families make up the ratio for licensing. To qualify to be assistants, family members must have training, which takes place at the beginning of the year and in parent meetings throughout the year. Sabrina has a class coordinator who helps schedule the parents for their duty hours and keeps everyone informed about classroom issues and activities. There has been a lot of confusion about the schedule, and many days have begun with a scramble for qualified duty parents to assist that day. A number of the children have food sensitivities, and three are strict vegetarians. Because the class shares a snack provided by the duty parents, the children’s dietary needs pose an extra challenge every day. The class went through two coordinators before a third settled in and was able to organize the duty schedules to accommodate everyone. The time for the afternoon class was moved back half an hour because parents were having difficulty eating their lunch and getting to the preschool on time. Sabrina has spent more time than usual on administrative tasks like making duty lists and guidelines for assisting in the classroom. Time and energy spent on classroom organization means less time for pedagogical narration and other planning.

The Families

The diversity of families in the preschool group has been an added challenge for creating a community. There are young families, lone parents, a military family, a family from Libya and one from Germany—families in very different circumstances.

Sabrina is concerned about her relationship with the family from Libya, whose members are Muslim and speak Arabic. With the barrier of language and culture, Sabrina feels it is taking longer than usual to get to know the family. When she speaks with them, she is not always sure that she and they understand each other. They are the parents of the twins, so they have double the number of duty days, and only the mother takes on the task. So far she has been scheduled for eight duty days but she has done only one because, with all the confusion regarding the schedule, she was not aware of her days. One time when she was ill, the father came to substitute, but since he hasn’t had the training required or undergone a criminal record check, Sabrina worried that they would not be in compliance with the licensing regulations. Because of the language difficulties, Sabrina finds it hard to explain her concerns to the twins’ parents. She also wonders how she can share with them the many things that happen at preschool. She doesn’t know how much they understand when she shares anecdotes about their children.
Transforming the Educator–Family Relationship

No simple solution exists for the complexities of working with children and their families. In our efforts to collaboratively transform educator–family relationships, however, we engage with Glenda MacNaughton’s (2003) work to help us examine how inequities based on taken-for-granted assumptions may shape these relationships. We are also guided by questions like the following, which are drawn from BC’s Early Learning Framework (Government of British Columbia, 2008a).

- How do the children’s families contribute to creating the learning community?
- How do we nurture and encourage contributions from home, including from families of children with additional support needs?
- Have we spoken to the families of children with additional support needs to discover their expectations and goals for their children?
- How can we engage families whose first language isn’t English?
- How do we help the children’s parents, families, elders, and other important community members feel welcome in our programs?
- How do we ensure that our assessments of children reflect the diversity of cultures in our learning community?
- How do we foster acceptance of diversity within our learning community?

In our projects, just as we seek to think of children as competent and full of potential, we seek to engage with families with the same respect. Laurie, writing with a group of parents in her learning community, suggests that rather than approaching families with the agenda of teaching them how to be better parents or to simply support the school’s agenda, [a] relational approach engages families around their own interests and values and respects their contributions. In this process, both educators and families can grow and change, and a new kind of relationship can emerge—one that centers on shared understandings of children’s learning. (2010, p. 198)

In our work, pedagogical narration has proven to be an invaluable tool for fostering shared understandings of children’s learning among educators, children, families, and the wider community. For example, in her reflections on Building a Fort (see pp. 105–112) Kim describes presenting the
pedagogical narration to the children’s parents at their monthly meeting. An open discussion followed in which the parents shared stories of feeling vulnerable and judged when their children engaged in gun play in public. While an undercurrent of tension could be felt through the discussion, Kim noted that the mood was warm and forgiving. Similarly, in her reflections on Princesses and Pirates (see pp. 76–83), Kim describes discussing the play with family members. One of the themes that emerged from their discussion was the difference in children’s dramatic play at home and at school. Both of these examples highlight how sharing pedagogical narrations with families provides a means for children’s families to be active participants in a pedagogical community and to contribute vital knowledge about their children.

Challenging Assumptions Complexifies the Learning Journey

This chapter has explored our journeys in rethinking images of the child, the educator, and families. Among the many lessons we have learned in our projects is the need to reconsider our assumptions—both about children and childhood and about the purposes and goals of early education. Complexified images of the child, the educator, and families allow us to design early childhood programs that centre children’s learning and build on the potential that all children possess.

As in Reggio Emilia, our approach recognizes educators as researchers who not only have knowledge about pedagogical theories but who also, and more importantly, construct educational theory. We encourage educators to enjoy learning as much as they enjoy teaching, to appreciate questions as well as answers, and to view alternative points of view as opportunities for discussion. Together we rethink how we position families in our classrooms, and how we privilege certain images of families and silence others.

Having explored how engaging with complexity, reflecting critically, and challenging our assumptions about children, families, and early childhood educators can help us to complexify our practices, we now present several examples of pedagogical narrations created by participants in our projects. Please explore the narrations at your leisure. In addition to the reflections and analysis presented with them, we refer to these examples in various places throughout the book.

Following the pedagogical narrations, in chapter 4 we explore theories and processes of this valuable tool and discuss how it can be used to make visible both children’s learning and the dominant discourses that shape their learning, and to keep curriculum alive.