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ENGAGING WITH PLACE

Foregrounding Aboriginal Perspectives in Early Childhood Education

Catherine Hamm and Kelly Boucher

Overview

Aboriginal perspectives in Australian early childhood education are often 'lost' in wider multicultural discourses (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo & Rowan, 2014) and can be reduced to tokenistic practices that homogenise Aboriginal culture. Thinking with local, place-based Aboriginal perspectives is largely absent from the everyday practices in early childhood programs. Many teachers lack confidence to respectfully and authentically engage with these perspectives as part of their general praxis. Engaging with local, Aboriginal perspectives attends to the ways in which place is making visible, 'refiguring' (Nxumalo, 2015) Aboriginal presences. The practice of engaging with local, specific Indigenous knowledges requires authentic, respectful connections to local Indigenous groups and a commitment to engage with the full range of historical, political and ethical contexts. We present these 'refiguring' moments as narratives that attend to the ways in which stories and re-storying disrupt linear modes of knowledge consumption. The narratives that we share are situated specifically in postcolonial Australia, however, the conceptual ideas that are embedded in our narratives could be taken up in other contexts by teachers that are willing to move beyond the taken-for-granted narratives of early childhood to think with local, place-based perspectives.

This chapter shares everyday moments of practice from the university classroom and the professional experience placement *Engaging with Place* (professional experience program), undertaken by first year students in a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood/Primary) program in Australia. The university classes and the professional experience placement have been designed to work in tandem as a way to engage with complex concepts. Both contexts draw on Latour's (2004a)

notion of ‘learning to be affected’ and Watt’s (2013) ‘Place-Thought’ as a conceptual frame—two concepts reflective of Aboriginal epistemologies. Working collaboratively with small groups of student teachers, university lecturers and professional experience mentors work to respectfully embed local Aboriginal perspectives in teaching and learning for young children. We (Catherine, the researcher and course lecturer, and Kelly, the course lecturer and mentor teacher) show how our work with student teachers—both in the university context and in *Engaging with Place*—highlights teaching practices that are respectful to the Traditional Land Owners (TLOs). Local Aboriginal resources are part of everyday teaching and learning as we engage with the places where the program is located. Professional conversations with student teachers and mentor teachers are also shared as examples of how we can intentionally foreground Aboriginal perspectives in teaching and learning. These conversations highlight the tensions that are present when we move toward practices that attend to intentionally foregrounding Aboriginal perspectives in our everyday teaching and learning in early childhood education.

Our Relationship

We meet on a winter’s day in the heart of Narrm (The Kulin [First People] word for Melbourne). Kelly, an arts-educator, and Catherine, an early childhood teacher educator and researcher, meet to discuss the possibility of Kelly undertaking some tutoring work at the university where Catherine co-ordinates a teacher education program. As we talk, we see the possibilities of embedding the arts into early childhood teacher education as a way to disrupt the traditional practices in early childhood education by moving beyond a technical, structured approach to meaning-making. Since that time, we have taught classes together that work to respectfully foreground Aboriginal worldviews. More recently, Kelly has become a mentor teacher in the *Engaging with Place* program. In the process of our writing together, we bring different perspectives to the shared commitment to embed Aboriginal perspectives in everyday teaching and learning practices in early childhood. We enact this commitment by engaging with the local places where we live and work in ways that disrupt linear, Western worldviews by respectfully foregrounding Aboriginal perspectives. This involves working with student teachers to disrupt the taken-for-granted practices of early childhood by attending to concepts, pedagogical practices and worldviews that respectfully centre Aboriginal ways of knowing.

Definition of Key Terms

Common worlds: A “common worlds framework” (Taylor & Giugni, 2012) draws on Latour’s notion of ‘common worlds’, the situated, everyday contexts in which we are all (human and non-human) entangled.

Place-thought: Anishinaabe (First Nations people from southern Canada) worldview that “is based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts” (Watts, 2013, p. 21).

Learning to be affected: A term from Bruno Latour: “The more you learn the more differences exist” (Latour, 2004b, p. 213). The more we are able to shift our human exceptionalism aside, the more we are able to attend to the more-than-human others with us in places.

Place as a pedagogical contact zone: Places are always in a state of entanglement of human and more-than-human others. The term *contact zone* (Haraway, 2008) gestures towards the ways in which entanglements occur and how we can learn *with* and *from* place.

Traditional land owners: First People, who are the traditional custodians of the Land.

Reconciliation practices: Teaching and learning practices that intentionally and respectfully foreground Aboriginal perspectives.

Reconciliation discourses: Reconciliation discourses in Australia are characterised by the idea of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people ‘walking together’.

Colonial gaze: Colonial ideals and imaginaries that work to overlay and attempt to make invisible the Aboriginal knowledges that are always, already there.

Mentor teacher: An experienced teacher that leads the professional experience, *Engaging with Place*, and mentors the student teachers.

Student teacher: A student undertaking a teacher education program.

Playgroup: An early childhood program for preschool children to attend with their family.

Learning circles: Tutorials are divided into small groups of student teachers to work collaboratively at university.

Introduction

Steeped in colonial logic, and framed within a Western worldview, developmental discourses of children and childhoods have dominated early childhood practice. These worldviews position children’s learning and development as linear, an individual process of achieving milestones along a continuum (see Berk, 2013). This dominant view of how children learn and develop does not attend to the complex contexts of children’s lives and leaves little room for attending to situated and everyday moments of teaching and learning. In contrast, Aboriginal worldviews are non-linear and situated in relationships, not just exclusively with humans, but also include learning with/from place and more-than-human others, as important actors in knowledge processes (Martin, 2016). One of the ways to move beyond an exclusively Western

worldview of teaching and learning in early childhood is to engage with local places by foregrounding local expressions of Aboriginal culture as part of everyday moments of teaching and learning with young children. This work requires teachers to engage with complex ideas and concepts and to make visible a range of worldviews to inform teaching and learning. Foregrounding local Aboriginal epistemologies attends to specific knowledges and practices and disrupts the idea of Aboriginal Australia as a homogenous, single culture group.

In Australia, the tensions of working to foreground Aboriginal perspectives in teaching and learning requires teachers to engage with *all* the histories, not just the sanitized colonial version. The histories relating to Aboriginal Australia are often silenced, rendered invisible and absent (Martin, 2007). In order to counter these absences, it is necessary to respectfully pay attention to Aboriginal perspectives of place, requiring us to “attend and attune to questions from the world” (Rautio, 2016). One of the ways we can attend respectfully to Aboriginal perspectives of place is to attune to the places around us in ways that do not always begin with a settler-colonial gaze. Disrupting the settler-colonial gaze requires us (settler colonials) to see places differently, in ways that attend to the ethics and politics of living on stolen land. It requires us (settler colonials) to engage with reconciliation discourses, discussions about treaty and the return of land to traditional Aboriginal owners. This action must include broad changes to structures and policies, not just token murmurings. This work is messy, filled with tension, and we must acknowledge that we are all ‘entangled and implicated in colonial histories’ (Duncan, Dawning & Taylor, 2015, p. 184). It is our ethical and political responsibility to not shy away from this messy work, even if it is unsettling and uncomfortable. To do this work with young children, we are required to rethink the perspectives that position them as being ‘innocent’, incapable of engaging with the uncomfortable realities of Australian history. We must learn to raise critical questions that take into account the ethics and politics of teaching (Lenz-Taguchi, 2010; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007), generating images of children as being capable and competent of seeing places differently. Seeing places differently requires engagement with complex ideas and perspectives, moving beyond taken-for-granted practices to ‘being present’ as teachers and learners.

In this chapter, we share everyday moments of practice from both the university classroom and *Engaging with Place* as examples of intentionally foregrounding Aboriginal perspectives in early childhood teacher education. We show how teaching and learning in these contexts is situated within the concept of ‘being present’ as a way to engage with complexity. Being present in an Australian context attends to the legacies of colonisation (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015), and it requires us to engage with place differently. We are inspired by the concept of place as ‘pedagogical contact zone’ (Common

Worlds Research Collective, 2016). This conceptualisation of place requires us to acknowledge that we (humans) are always in relation to place. We are entangled in the histories, traumas, stories of places that are always already there. We present the everyday moments of practice in the university classroom and during the *Engaging with Place* placement as short narratives that work to make visible the ways in which we are respectfully foregrounding Aboriginal perspectives in teaching and learning. These narratives also show how we are enacting theory and concepts. Pedagogy and curriculum are situated as knowledge mobilization—ways to enact knowledge, rather than just storing content. Finally, we share professional conversations that mentor teacher Kelly has with student teachers during *Engaging with Place* as a way to bring together the concepts of *place-thought* and *learning to be affected* as methods of meaning-making and being present.

Researcher and Lecturer Make Connections

We (Catherine and Kelly) meet to plan the classes for the first-year program. As experienced teacher educators, we are excited about the ways in which the first-year program is being rethought, as part of a broader course rethinking project at the university. We start 'brainstorming' how we will work with our groups of student teachers to engage with the concepts that underpin the reconceptualized program. The concepts respectfully foregrounding Aboriginal perspectives, engaging with different ways of knowing, being and doing, and positioning students and academics as public intellectuals (Iorio & Tanabe, 2015a, 2015b) also align to the professional experience placement that has been rethought. Rethinking the classes and placement to include a deeper level of engagement in conceptual thinking requires us to also mobilize complexity in our own teaching and learning practices.

We discuss how we will mobilize, or enact complexity in our own teaching and learning—how will we intentionally immerse student teachers in the class concepts before we discuss the organisational, technical aspects of teaching. This is not to say that the technical (e.g. framework documents, timetables) aspects of teaching are not important, but what happens when we don't begin with them? What happens when we create the opportunity to engage with conceptual and pedagogical ideas that are not framed by linear, technical structures and policies? Engaging with the conceptual, rather than technical, makes room for complex and critical thinking and practices as student teachers and academics collaborate to grapple with, and mobilize the concepts from the classes into placement sites.

In foregrounding Aboriginal knowledges in the first year of the Bachelor of Education program, Kelly and I talk together about how there are some knowledges that are not available to us as settler-colonial people. We talk about our intention to think with, rather than think about, or appropriate Aboriginal knowledges. As we make this distinction, we enact our conceptual thinking as pedagogy, working to make visible local Aboriginal epistemologies by shifting aside the layers of settler-colonial knowledges that dominate education frameworks.

Foregrounding Aboriginal Perspectives of Place

As a way to respectfully foreground Aboriginal perspectives in teaching and learning, we find the work of the Common Worlds Research Collective (see commonworlds.net) productive for thinking with complex ideas. The Common Worlds Research Collective are a group of interdisciplinary scholars that have research interests in environmental humanities, cultural anthropology, feminist perspectives, Indigenous epistemologies and materiality. The research centres around attending to the ways children learn from the full range of human and more-than-human relations within their immediate and ‘common’ or shared worlds (Common Worlds Research Collective, 2014, 2016). These relations include plants, animals and materials in the everyday contexts in the local places children inhabit. In an Australian context, children’s common worlds include engaging with places that are implicated in the legacies of colonisation (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015). Rather than avoid this work because it is complex, however, as teacher educators, we have a responsibility to foreground Aboriginal knowledges in our practice. It is important to make sure these practices do not become domesticated or tokenistic tick-boxing. We must attend to the ethics and politics in our work, respectfully engaging with local Aboriginal perspectives.

Our work is also informed by the critical scholarship of Tuck and Wang (2012); Tuck and McKenzie (2015); Rose (2004); Martin (2007); Nakata (2002); and Pacini-Ketchabaw and Taylor (2015). These scholars work to raise critical questions that disrupt dominant settler-colonial perspectives. For example, attending to place in complex ways requires thinking beyond space or place as ‘culturally or politically neutral while perpetuating forms of European universalism’ (Mignolo, 2003, as cited in Tuck, McKenzie & McCoy, 2014, p. 1). Thinking with place from Aboriginal knowledge perspective moves aside the layers of settler-colonial representations of place (manicured lawns, English country gardens). This acknowledges the traditional Land Owners and situates place with histories and contexts, not as just a geographical location, disrupting the dominant colonial understanding of space/place.

Reconciliation Practices

Engaging with place by foregrounding Aboriginal perspectives requires attending to the ethics and politics of living on land that was taken by force. It requires non-Aboriginal people to respectfully engage in reconciliation dialogues, conversations about treaty, and the return of land to traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owners. Reconciliation discourses in Australia are characterised by the idea of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people ‘walking together’ (see Reconciliation.org). In an education context, this could be described as the ‘cultural

interface'. Nakata (2002) describes this interface as colonial and Indigenous knowledges coming together. It is important that we do not back away from uncomfortable or unpleasant realities when these knowledges come together. For example, when engaging with Australian history, Aboriginal perspectives are intentionally foregrounded, rather than 'defaulting' to the dominant settler-colonial view. These practices generate possibilities for reimagining the way teachers engage respectfully with Aboriginal perspectives as part of their everyday work, creating opportunities for all children (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) to see, feel and hear Aboriginal culture in their classrooms every day, not just as a "grand slam approach" (Harrison & Greenfield, 2001). A grand slam approach refers to the way that Aboriginal perspectives can be taken up in education practices, often defaulting to homogenised stereotypes of Aboriginal culture. This approach limits the possibilities for teachers to engage in the practice of 'being present'.

Being Present: Engaging With Complexity

Being present requires a move beyond taken-for-granted practices of early childhood that are often bound in developmental logic and work to "observe [children] in a 'clinical' way, positioned by the norms created from child development theories and the construct of the universal child" (Blaise, Hamm & Iorio, 2017, p. 3). Being present is a way to enact pedagogy that generates complexity and makes room for different ways of knowing, being and doing. Engaging with complex concepts and ideas positions early childhood pedagogy as generative and relational. Teachers bring themselves as part of the classroom, not separate from it and "consider the social, cultural, political and economic contexts in which [they] teach" (Agius et al., 2015). Meaning-making practices are situated and part of everyday contexts, they are entangled with bodies, knowledges and different ways of knowing, being and doing. Being present opens spaces to rethink pedagogies as a way to think *with* concepts and ideas, rather than thinking *about*, or consuming content. Thinking *about* content for learning in a universal, decontextualised way does not engage with complexity or the ethics and politics of teaching. Thinking *with* offers unexpected, unknown ways of learning, without predetermined outcomes. Thinking *with* generates a shift in pedagogy, being comfortable with not knowing and being open to the unpredictable nature of entanglement of bodies, materials, place and wonderings. Thinking *with* complexity can push our practices into uncomfortable places. For example, engaging young children in the full range of Australian histories, including some of the 'unpleasant' aspects of colonisation. Teachers that are responsive to the complexities of Australia's layers of histories understand that "the places of discomfort are the places we need to learn from . . . they are signals for us to pay attention!" (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 39).

Narrative: Catherine, Being Present in the University Classroom

It is the first day of the university year, and I walk to the classroom where I will spend 6 hours a week for the next 12 weeks with a group of eager student teachers working towards becoming early childhood or primary (elementary school) teachers. I hear excited voices as I come up the stairs; as soon as I turn the corner, they fall silent. I wonder what they are expecting this class will be about.

We begin the class with 'speed dating', as a way for the student teachers to get to know each other and begin to form relationships. There are lots of excited voices as they share their favourite movies, food and reasons for wanting to be teachers. Friendships form fast and soon the student teachers have organised themselves into four small groups or Learning Circles. The Learning Circles are a way to work collaboratively with small groups. The student teachers wait eagerly to see what will happen next. What will they need to do to pass the class? When do they need to turn in their assignments?

On the electronic whiteboard, I project a Kulin (Traditional Land Owners around Melbourne, Victoria) map and ask student teachers to identify whose country their home suburb is located on.

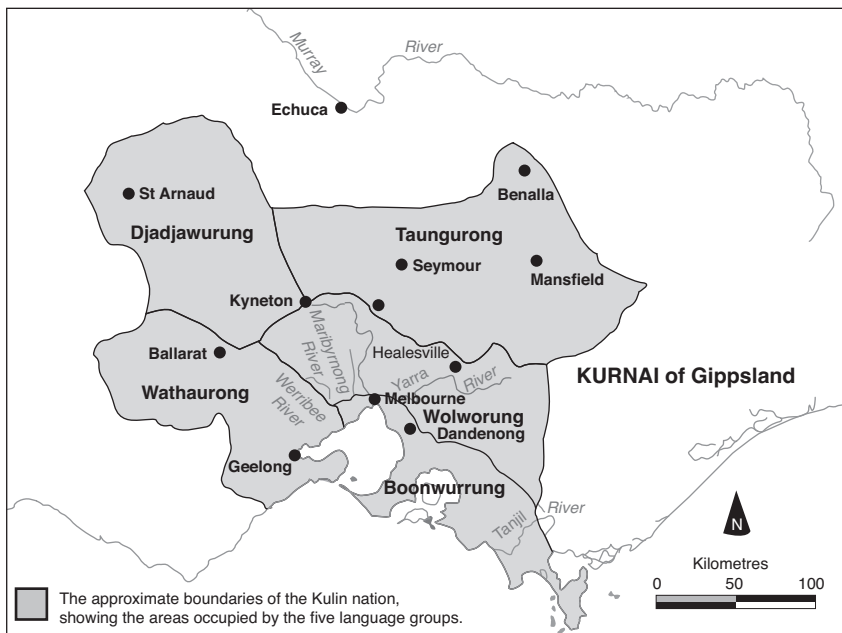


FIGURE 4.1 Kulin Map

Jacaranda. (2004, 14 September). *The Kulin People*. Retrieved from <http://jaconline.com.au/downloads/sose/2004-07-02-kulin.pdf>

For some student teachers, this is the first time they have considered anything other than a settler-colonial perspective of the place where they live. There is much discussion in the Learning Circles about why the settler-colonial voice has dominated their understandings of the place where they live. We have a large group discussion about how the conceptual underpinning of this class works to acknowledge Aboriginal people as the first people of this land and that their voices have held and continue to hold unique stories of place, belonging and ceremony. We begin to raise questions; In Australia, what is required to be ethically and politically responsive to the dominant settler-colonial narratives? What does it mean to be with place in place? What is required to think through local Kulin knowledges about where you live? How do these questions situate place as a ‘pedagogical contact zone’?

Situating Place as a Pedagogical Contact Zone

In situating place as a *pedagogical contact zone* (Common Worlds Research Collective, 2016), we acknowledge that places are always in a state of entanglement of human and more-than-human others. The term *contact zone* (Haraway, 2008) gestures towards the ways in which entanglements occur. Haraway sees contact zones as entanglements of unknown, unpredictable, “diverse bodies and meanings [that] coshape one another . . . The partners do not precede the meeting; species of all kinds, living and not, are consequent on a subject and object-shaping dance of encounters” (p. 4). We find the concepts, *Place-Thought* (Watts, 2013) and *learning to be affected* (Latour, 2004b), useful ways to make room for understanding place as a generative *pedagogical contact zone*. This framing attends to the ways in which places are entangled in all kinds of bodies and works to disrupt the settler-colonial imaginary of place. Thinking with *place-thought* and *learning to be affected* are concepts that underpin *doing*. New *doings*, or mobilizing knowledge, is required if we are to foreground Aboriginal perspectives and to shift away from the colonial gaze.

Thinking With Place-Thought

We work to shift aside the dominant settler-colonial perspectives of place by thinking with the concept of ‘Place-Thought’ (Watts, 2013). The concept of Place-Thought is derived from the Anishinaabe (First Nations people from southern Canada) worldview that “is based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts” (Watts, 2013, p. 21). To introduce this concept as a starting point for thinking with place in our university context, we walk together with student teachers around campus and engage with place with the view that the creeks, rocks, trees and many other more-than-humans have agency and are entangled with us as we walk with them. We acknowledge that these entanglements are always already present in the places where we live and work.

Student teachers think with Place-Thought as they complete their assessments, write weekly blogs, engage in class discussions and undertake their professional experience placement.

Learning to Be Affected

Latour asserts that learning to be affected “means exactly that: the more you learn the more differences exist” (2004b, p. 213). In the context of our work in the first year and *Engaging with Place*, we understand that the more we are able to move beyond or suspend the dominant human ways of knowing, the more we are able to attend to the more-than-human others with us in places. Taylor and Giugni (2012) challenge us to be curious about places and state, “For it is only when we exercise curiosity to find out more about where we are, and who and what is there with us, that we find hitherto unknown dimensions to our common worlds” (p. 110).

Putting the Concepts to Work: Engaging with Place

The professional experience, *Engaging with Place*, has been devised as a way to make strong connections to Aboriginal worldviews in early childhood education. *Engaging with Place* is a playgroup and takes place in long day care centres, preschools, schools and libraries. The focus is on creating relationships with children, families, the mentor teacher and place. Learning and teaching is focussed on place-based pedagogy (for example, see Somerville, 2010, 2013; Duhn, 2012) and what it means to be a teacher (both mentor and student) that foregrounds and embeds Aboriginal perspectives into teaching practice. The professional experience is a way to make connections to and enact the concepts that underpin the classroom teaching in the university context. Student teachers, together with their tutors, engage in the ethics and politics of living in postcolonial Australia by bringing complexity to ontological and epistemological knowledge creation. For example, how do we think *with* local, Aboriginal perspectives?

Narrative: Kelly, Being Present With Wurundjeri Country

I am with Wurundjeri country, it is Waring (Wombat) Season—Southern hemisphere late autumn/winter. I sign into the visitor's book, arms laden with resources; I have forgotten the security code again and wait for someone to let me through the heavy glass door to the other side. The glass doorway is a boundary I cross every Tuesday morning—a barrier from an outside public realm into a building full of children. A large oak tree stands at one end of the yard and a Lillypilly tree (Indigenous to Australia) at the other. A robust grape vine spreads out along part of the fence in a striking display of autumn colour.

This place is a preschool in the Western suburbs of Melbourne, Australia. The yard is full of movement and sounds: children's bodies, climbing frames, tan bark, rocks, sandpits and small built structures. I walk through this space where children move about within the confines of doorways, walls, rooms and fences. Marin Baluk are the local people of this area and I wonder why their presence on country is not obviously visible to me here, even though I know their story is always already present.

Each week, three student teachers and myself come together with a group of 4-year-olds to engage with this place by foregrounding local Aboriginal perspectives. I walk through the yard to a small pergola and put down the box I am carrying. The pergola is our gathering space. Out there beyond the fence is Cruickshank Park, a large parkland full of gumtrees and shrubs. I can also see Stony Creek, a small waterway connected to grasslands that make up the Victorian Volcanic Plain that stretches from the central north to the southwest of Victoria, Australia, covering an area of 2.3 million hectares (Friends of Iramoo, n.d.). I begin to unpack the box I have brought with me. I pull out Bunjil the wedge tail eagle and Waa the crow hand puppets. Bunjil and Waa are creator spirits for Kulin people and hold great significance in Kulin culture. I also pull out play materials that represent trees, flowers and native animals. These materials reflect Victorian Aboriginal culture and have been carefully selected to build curriculum for young children. This is an intentional practice as a way to highlight the diversities of Australian Aboriginal cultures.



FIGURE 4.2 Bunjil and Waa

(Local, Aboriginal Resources by Yarn Strong Sista) Image credit—Kelly Boucher

Today we begin with a storybook set in the traditional lands of the Yorta Yorta people in Northern Victoria. Yurri's *Manung* (Atkinson & Sax, 2013) is a story about a small nocturnal marsupial (a mammal, unique to Australia) who is looking for a warm place to sleep as the weather gets colder in her home, the Barmah forest. Yurri asks her animal friends if they have room for her in their homes—none of them do and she is left feeling cold. This story is about community, belonging and connection to place. With advice from their Aboriginal Elder, Yurri's friends decide to work together to build her a *Manung* (a shelter) of her own.

Upon hearing this story, the children immediately connect with Yurri and her need for a home, and they set out to build a *Manung*. We gather materials from around the yard, and the group works together to create a structure they can fit inside. During the building process, the children's conversations focus on the Australian native animals from the book, as well as providing for Yurri's comfort by including food, bedding and things to play with in the *Manung*.

The following week we read Yurri's *Manung* again and discussion flows. Children talk about how they have played in the *Manung* all week. Together we repair walls and gather more branches from the yard. One particular branch catches the children's attention as it is covered with patterns made long ago by a burrowing insect. We wonder why the insect has made these patterns, are they writing us a letter? The insect-text incised on the surface of the branch poses questions and invites fingers and palms to imprint the pattern onto skin.

The dialogue with the branch and children continues. A large block of terracotta clay is added to the conversation. I quietly position the clay on the ground next to the *Manung*—the clay posing questions to the children—a call and response ensues. Insect-text-clay investigations imprint every surface in and around the *Manung*. Clay moves onto bark, trees, rocks, sticks, tyres and child bodies. Clay presses, pinches and smears onto bodies, collecting debris as it moves through the yard. Clay moves and squishes onto the wires of the fence, pushing through the diamond-shaped holes and landing on the ground 'outside', closer to the park. Clay calls the children into connection (Rose, 2015; Blaise, Hamm & Iorio, 2017) with this place. Clay plays.

In the following section, Kelly shows how she works collaboratively with student teachers to make meaning of their teaching and learning experiences. At the end of each *Engaging with Place* session, Kelly engages in a professional conversation with the student teachers. The practice of a professional conversation is intentionally positioned as a tool for engaging with complexity.

Professional conversations are utilized as a way to engage with complexity in our work, to move beyond the taken-for-granted practices of early childhood education. We do not discuss individual children's growth or developmentally appropriate practices; rather, we discuss the ethical and political tensions that are made visible when we intentionally foreground Aboriginal perspectives in our practice. These conversations centre around child-material relations in and with the place (in this case the preschool yard) and highlight the tensions that are present when reconciliation practices are enacted in early childhood education.



FIGURE 4.3 Clay Imprint

Image credit—Kelly Boucher

Narrative: Kelly, Place as Provocation for Making Meaning Together

In preparation for our Engaging with Place sessions, the student teachers have spent time researching the history of Cruickshank Park and Stony Creek. We wonder; what is the Marin Baluk name for this place? Who was Cruickshank? We discuss that when researching Cruickshank Park, the history of the park (from the local authority websites) begins from 1939 onwards—although we know there must be a much longer history of this place. We question why that information is not present and accessible? How can we engage

with this place to foreground local, Aboriginal knowledges in ways that don't privilege colonial heritages when Aboriginal histories are not easily accessible?

Thinking back to the ways in which we are engaging with place and how it provokes our pedagogy, we experiment with some practices to engage with the concepts of Place-Thought and learning to be affected. There are no human sounds. The water rushes by in Stony Creek as the thick grass brushes bare ankles. The slope moves bodies downwards and the stepping stones invite bodies to wobble across the creek and into Cruickshank Park. The flow of the creek beckons towards the shrubby tree branches that move gently with the breeze.

The place generates teaching and learning practices by engaging with the ideas presented in the Aboriginal story books, Yurri's *Manung* (Atkinson & Sax, 2013) and *Bartja and Mayila* (Atkinson & Sax, 2015). (*Bartja and Mayila* is a story about Bartja's best friend Mayila leaving the forest to live at the coast. After searching her forest surroundings without any luck for a gift, Bartja handmakes Mayila something special to treasure—a gift from Yorta Yorta country.)

The creek provokes discussion: one student teacher immediately raises the concept of Place-Thought and how the themes in the books foreground Aboriginal ways of knowing by highlighting the importance of connecting to place. Reading the names and places in the stories in Yorta Yorta language, disrupts the dominant colonial framing of place. Attending to the Indigenous trees in the playground in an intentional practice for engaging with place. For example, there is a Lillypilly tree in the playground (a small evergreen tree with edible berries). This tree also (coincidentally) features prominently in the book *Bartja and Mayila*. We discuss the spontaneous discovery of the tree in the book being the same one in the playground as an example of how the place is creating our curriculum; how we are always already in relation-with (Haraway, 2008) our surroundings. Being in relation-with the tree is a way to bring Aboriginal perspectives from the books into the playground; collecting berries; painting with them; arranging them in patterns at the base of the tree; laying them on top of the leaves of the crimson grape vine, is the 'doing', where we think with Kulin knowledges to highlight how we think with the concept of 'Place-Thought' to theorise the doing; generating curriculum as we go. Thinking conceptually with Aboriginal perspectives of place shifts us beyond standard practices where theory and concepts come together in the doing. We also wonder if these practices work to shift aside the dominant colonial conceptions of place in a meaningful, respectful way. How could we think with local Aboriginal perspectives in relation to the Lillypilly tree? Learning with place and the tree generates teaching and learning opportunities around the Kulin weather patterns, birds and animals. We discuss how these 'doings' are the mobilizing of ideas and concepts from the university classroom into the field/children's spaces and shows us how we are doing practice differently. We discuss Lenz Taguchi's (2010) idea that 'practice is in fact continuously and already doing and enacting educational theories' (p. x). Our material-discursive experiments and investigation of ideas activates a pedagogy of place—a presencing of local stories, those present and not immediately accessible, rather than the importation of homogenised cultural clichés.

At this point, our conversation turns towards the materials. We discuss how in order to activate the doing, we must attune to the material bodies within the place, that materials also make up the pedagogical contact zone (e.g. entanglement with bodies of thoughts, ideas, children). Here, beside the creek, we think with materials in order to activate pedagogy.

Clay Play

Focusing on the earlier insect–text–clay conversations, we identified the children as being called into connection (Rose, 2015; Blaise, Hamm & Iorio, 2017) with this place through the materials. We discuss clay as another way to engage with our surroundings that focuses on non-human conceptions of place. We wonder how the clay might support the conceptual underpinning of *learning to be affected*. How can we think with clay to generate perspectives of place that attend and attune (Rautio, 2016) to the more-than-human? How can we think with clay to be curious about others with whom we share our common worlds? Engaging with place in this way moves beyond the taken-for-granted practices of early childhood. For example, clay is often used in early childhood settings as a material to manipulate, to improve fine motor skills with certain expected sculptural outcomes. Kind (2010), attends to clay relations:

What we think clay is for shapes our experience with it, and the language we use to talk about the experience constructs particular meanings. If, on the other hand, we think about movement, place, impermanence, and relationality, then we may consider the possibility of moving toward and away from the clay, attending to the relationship of clay to its surroundings, and inviting interaction with others.

(pp. 123–124)

In this way, to think with materials in relation to/with place invites possibilities and offers meanings that are not fixed (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). For example, how can we think with clay through Kulin perspectives? We consider sociomaterial practice as a way to intentionally explore different ways of thinking with ideas and theories not usually represented in ‘traditional’ early childhood practice. In doing so we are responding to affective relationships with place, materials, and children and recognise that “practice is in fact continuously and already doing and enacting educational theories” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2009, in Lenz-Taguchi, 2010, p. x).

These ideas and snapshots of practice we have presented are not without their own challenges and messiness. We question our own assumptions of how to ‘do’ this work.

In our conversations, we wonder whether building a Manung is being tokenistic; are we just ‘bolting on’ Aboriginal perspectives of place? Do we interrupt

children's experimental play by intentionally placing materials close to them in anticipation of their 'doing' rather than waiting for the materials to call the children into dialogue? We acknowledge that part of this work is about becoming comfortable with not having all the answers, to remain 'unknowing'.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have shown how we situated 'being present' as a way to engage with the ethics and politics of living and teaching in postcolonial Australia. We presented the concepts of *Place-Thought* and *learning to be affected* as ways to attend to places by foregrounding Aboriginal perspectives of place, shifting aside the settler-colonial layers of inscription to "critique the dominance of Western knowledge" (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 206). We shared everyday moments of teaching and learning from both the university classroom and the professional experience placement, *Engaging with Place*, as examples of how we are attempting to mobilize these concepts in our practice. This situates pedagogy, curriculum and education as knowledge mobilization, something to be enacted, rather than consumed. Situating pedagogy in this way makes room to generate practices that engage with complexity and acknowledge that this 'messy' work is never completed (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015). We have illustrated how professional conversations can be a way to engage in meaning-making that moves us beyond the taken-for-granted discourses of child development, towards complex practices. This work requires us to engage in the tensions that come from examining our practices and pushing us into uncomfortable places. By engaging with the notion of place as a pedagogical contact zone, we work with the understanding that places are layered with complexity and continue to hold the legacies of colonisation. There are no resolutions to these tensions; this messy work remains as part of our everyday practices of being present.

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