Doing pedagogical conversations (with spirituality and fat) as pedagogists in early childhood education

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Abstract: In this article, the authors respond to emerging articulations of the work of a pedagogist or pedagogical facilitator in early childhood education in Canada. This article is grounded in two intentions: we (1) share the tentative pedagogical conversations that we have as pedagogists who centre particular concerns, interests, and accountabilities; and we (2) launch our conversation from our desire to re-imagine how everyday pedagogies shape children's experiences with spiritual knowings and children's relations with fat. Sharing a narration from a pedagogical inquiry research project, we each offer a familiar developmental reading of the moment, gesture toward a partial re-engagement grounded in post-developmental pedagogies, and then weave our thinking with spirituality and fat together to complexify our propositions. We intentionally refuse to define the work of a pedagogist in a universalizable or technical manner. Instead, we argue that putting our pedagogist work into conversation draws our practices into uneasy, difficult, often contradictory relations and makes visible some potential futures (and their exclusions) we enact as we work to answer to the complex education spaces we inherit and re-create with educators and children.

Keywords: pedagogist, post-developmental pedagogies, children's spirituality, childhood obesity.

Amid an intensifying push, in the field and post-secondary professional training programs, toward deepening the pedagogical character of early

childhood education (ECE) in Canada, early years programs are increasingly creating opportunities for educators to connect with "pedagogists", "pedagogistas" or "pedagogical facilitators" to support their everyday practice. Who pedagogists are, what pedagogists do, and how the work of a pedagogist unfolds is a local (Ainsworth, 2016; Atkinson & Biegun, 2017; Kummen & Hodgins, 2019; Nxumalo, 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Hodgins, 2017; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2006; Vintimilla, 2018) and often controversial question. As evidenced by the multiple responsibilities, educational paradigms, and practices that pedagogist roles are justified through in various programs and municipalities (from quality assurance to promoting emergent curriculum through developing locally-responsive pedagogies), the actions of a pedagogist are never inseparable from the dominant political and ontological climate pedagogists confront in education spaces. That is, the work of a pedagogist is entangled with how the situated contours of ongoing settler colonialism, neoliberal educational imperatives, environmental precarities, systemic inequities and injustices, and privileged and silenced knowledges of childhood, learning, curriculum, pedagogy, relationality, and land shape local possibilities for pedagogical collaborations.

Concurrently, the emerging role of a pedagogist in a Canadian context is indebted to the continuing Reggio Emilia education project in Italy (Nxumalo, Vintimilla & Nelson, 2018; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot & Sanchez, 2015; Vintimilla, 2018). In Reggio Emilia (a place and a paradigm) the value, work, and training of a pedagogista is articulated in response to local politics, inheritances, and precarities. The role of a pedagogist in Canada is, then, also a question of how we might mobilize, in this place, these borrowed, displaced, and extracted practices of what it means to do pedagogical work. This means that pedagogists must answer to the unequal worlds that children, families, communities, and educators inherit while simultaneously crafting and re-crafting the practices, relations, and accountabilities that shape the role of a pedagogist as one of creating pedagogies that answer to the situated politics and precarities of this place.

We are pedagogists who locate our collaborations with early childhood educators in Ontario and British Columbia at this doubled, entangled responsibility: we work to answer to multiple histories, inheritances, lives, and precarities while constantly putting at risk the practices, knowledges, and relations that we work toward responding to our times with. Our intention in this article is two-fold. We want to (1) put into public the imperfect interdisciplinary pedagogical conversations that we have as pedagogists who centre particular concerns, interests, and accountabilities. In the body of

the article, we (2) hinge our conversation upon our discomfort with (and desire to re-imagine) how developmental perspectives in dominant ECE in Canada shape children's experiences that inform our respective research: children's spiritual knowings for Meagan and for Nicole, children's relations with fat. Arguing that engagements with spirituality and fat are highly regulated, we propose that different possibilities for attuning to spiritual understandings of the more-than-human world and to childhood obesity become possible when we trace how our situated connections with spirituality and fat layer upon, diverge from, and complexify one another.

In this article we share a moment - a narration from a pedagogical inquiry Meagan is contributing to - that animates one of our many pedagogical conversations. This narration is one example of how we bring the work of our various roles to each other and is part of a larger SSHRC-funded project in which Meagan engages with educators and children in a child care centre on a weekly basis. The children and educators from a toddler classroom and a preschool classroom embark on weekly walks to a local cemetery along with Meagan and other researchers who participate in this action-research in the role of a pedagogist. Our pedagogical conversations are often and varied, but this particular moment is one that we have spent much time thinking with and we offer it here as one example of how we put our work into conversation. We each offer a mainstream developmental reading of the moment, gesture toward a tentative re-engagement grounded in post-developmental pedagogies, and then weave our thinking with spirituality and fat together to complexify, trouble, and put at risk our propositions. The back and forth nature of our reading of this moment is deliberate and puts into practice Stenger's (2018) concept of relaying, in which the passing of ideas back and forth does not refute, but rather always adds and complexifies. Putting our work into conversation is, we contend, a necessary practice for our work as pedagogists as we endeavour to answer to the complex education spaces we inherit and re-create with educators and children. Pedagogical conversations pull our theorizing and practices into uneasy, difficult, often contradictory relations that help to make visible some edges, exclusions, and potential futures we enact. To begin, we offer our tentative approach to being pedagogists.

Responding to Situated and Urgent Inheritances as a Pedagogist

It is with caution that we offer our understanding of what it means to be a pedagogist. We want to keep open the question of what responding, as

a pedagogist, to the specificities of the Canadian ECE context that we inherit and work within might demand. We have become pedagogical co-conspirators for multiple reasons: we share methodological and theoretical commitments to unsettling hegemonic developmental discourses in settler colonial Canada; our projects contribute to wider research-practice collectives (e.g., *Early Childhood Pedagogies Collaboratory* and *Climate Action Childhood Network*) where we are encouraged to constantly think together; we work collaboratively, as part of a larger team, to support community-based pedagogists in a province-wide professional learning initiative in Ontario (the *Provincial Centre of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care*); and as doctoral students and early career researchers working in Ontario and British Columbia, we have woven our scholarly activities together as we have grown our research programs, such that we have exchanged so many drafts, theories, tensions, and stories that disentangling our work seems impossible. These activities are, for us, entangled: our pedagogical work across multiple projects and collaborations is always woven with our research, practice, and curriculum-making. While we resist offering a singular, universalized way of embodying this role, we do want to make clear that the conversations we share are of a certain mode and meaning. For us, being pedagogists is grounded in a heart-filled trust (an idea we borrow from our colleague, Dr. Cristina D. Vintimilla, who reminds us that pedagogists' labour is always "heart work") we place in our collaboration. We conceptualize our pedagogist relationship as more than an acknowledgement that our work has put us in relation with each other; we consider it an achievement that always carries the risk of failure (Stengers, 2018). In our pedagogical relations we ask each other strange questions (Stengers, 2018) - questions that do not lend themselves to easy answers and often rip open ideas that we have held dear in our research and our work with children and educators. Although our pedagogical conversations are generative, they are rarely easy. They require we have a specific form of trust, one that is based on a feminist ethic in which we refuse to compete with each other as neoliberal academic spaces often ask us to. We offer each other immanent critique (Stengers, 2008) as we acknowledge that our critical questions become generative parts of our conversational assemblages. We do not perpetuate critique that seeks to break down or falsify the ideas we offer each other.

Echoing our colleagues Nxumalo, Vintimilla, and Nelson (2018), we feel uneasy about "the currency and privilege that...the job title that we have each gone by for several years, *pedagogista*, carr[ies]...our grapplings stem from what at times feels like an all-too-smooth assimilation as 'best practice' of pedagogies and curriculum developed within very particular understand-

ings in their original context in Italy" (p. 2). Our pedagogist mentors - Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Dr. B. Denise Hodgins, and Dr. Cristina D. Vintimilla - have taught us that pedagogical collaborations are pedagogical in their difficulty. To create possibilities for doing pedagogy beyond neoliberal logics requires that we notice, and become suspicious when, our practices become habitual, transferrable, or exceptionalized. Learning from Indigenous scholars who refuse and reconfigure the Euro-Western foundations of pedagogy and curriculum (Todd, 2016; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013; Tuhiwai Smith, Tuck & Yang, 2019), we take seriously that our work as pedagogists is never removed from the violent histories of education projects in Canada and that thinking about pedagogy as white settlers is never inherently redemptive, innocent, just, nor equitable (Tuck & Yang, 2012). To reify the role of a pedagogist in Canada as a universalizable or desirable position for "improving" education is to once again participate in neoliberal education projects. In our work, we are inspired by Nxumalo's (with Vintimilla & Nelson, 2018) contention that

> taking seriously the settler colonial and anti-Black foundations of education in North America, means that the work of the pedagogista in supporting early childhood educators in their pedagogical and curricular encounters needs to include finding ways to respond to these emplaced violences from a speculative imaginary that recognizes yet is not defined by erasure, displacement and dehumanization. (p. 16)

We understand our role as pedagogists as negotiating this layered practice of, as Nxumalo contends, *recognizing but not being defined by* the complex, often violent, everyday worlds we must respond to through our pedagogical work with educators. Our work as pedagogists never rests with critical analysis and also never ignores the urgent need for critical engagements with contemporary and historical inequities. Consistent with articulations of pedagogist accountabilities offered by Atkinson and Biegun (2017), Hodgins (2015), and Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., (2015), we anchor our practice in the non-innocent, non-redemptive situated ethical and political intentions, convictions, and response-abilities (Haraway, 2016) we carry as pedagogists within neoliberal and colonial ECE spaces in Canada.

Staking (or, Beginning to Notice) our Pedagogist Intentions and Accountabilities

There are practices we hold as fundamental to our role as pedagogists in ECE in Canada: fostering ongoing collaborative pedagogical conversations

with educators (Atkinson & Biegun, 2017; Hodgins, 2014; Pacini-Ketcha-baw, Kind & Kocher, 2016); participating in pedagogical collectives that see education as a common, public sphere (Hodgins, Atkinson & Wanamaker, 2017; Berger, 2015; Vintimilla, 2018); noticing how we are implicated in, shaped by, and accountable to everyday pedagogical relations (Land & Dan-is, 2016; Moss, 2019; Nxumalo, Vintimilla & Nelson, 2018); attending and responding to multiple lives and precarities by understanding education as more than only a human concern (Haro Woods et al., 2018; Nxumalo, 2017; Taylor, 2017); deepening the pedagogical character of everyday ECE practic-es through approaches to documentation and dialogue that emphasize the complexity and politicality of these practices (Hodgins, Thompson & Kum-men, 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015); and crafting tentative, respon-sive, locally-relevant pedagogies with children, educators, and lively worlds (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015; Wapenaar & DeSchutter, 2018; Yazbeck & Danis, 2015). We also attend to our situated, personal answerabilities as pedagogists: what might Meagan (a pedagogist with a particular history, concerns, and relations) need to answer to in pedagogical collaborations? How might Nicole (as a different pedagogist with a different history, con-cerns, and relations) be implicated differently in pedagogical commons? Our responses to these questions are, of course, mobile and constantly reform-ing. However, we take seriously that as specific bodies in specific places in specific entanglements, our work as pedagogists might hold shared orienta-tions but will never be entirely coincident. Our own pedagogist work, though marked by different places and response-abilities, is acutely entangled with each other's pedagogist work. How, then, might we begin to notice our em-placed answerabilities as pedagogists who are in constant conversation?

As we think with the dominant knowledge politics we inherit in Euro-Western education, where some ways of knowing are hierarchically empha-sized (for example: school readiness, self-regulation, literacy and numeracy; Salazar Pérez & Cahill, 2016) over others (Indigenous cosmologies, bodied knowledges, more-than-human relations), we feel strongly that as pedago-gists we must refute or complexify these taken-for-granted epistemic struc-tures. We see our work as a feminist citational practice (Ahmed, 2013, 2017; Tuck, Yang & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2015): we are accountable to the knowledges we centre and silence, and to the histories, inheritances, lives, and worldviews that we presence and erase in our pedagogist work. Accord-ingly, we each locate our scholarship at unique intersections of education and early childhood studies, an interdisciplinary field. Meagan's pedagogi-cal inquiry research investigates children's spirituality and Nicole's work complexifies childhood obesity. These are both concerns that intersect dif-

ferent academic disciplines (spirituality: religious studies, pagan studies, holistic learning; obesity: physiology, critical obesity studies, critical health education). We approach these concerns with shared theoretical loyalties, including feminist new materialisms (Barad, 2007), feminist science studies (Haraway, 2016; Stengers, 2008) and common worlds perspectives[1] (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2018). Exploring possibilities toward post-developmental pedagogies (Blaise, 2014) is a core ethical and political intention for us, as we work to respond to the normalizing interpretive clout held by developmental approaches to understanding children's learning in ECE (Burman, 2008; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). We are learning that we must activate the theoretical approaches we have in common in very different ways to respond to the specificities of thinking with spiritual knowings and with fat. Our shared unease with how dominant conceptions of spirituality and obesity shape children's relations with spiritual knowings and fat in particular human-centered and developmental ways (spirituality: Lideman & Aarnio, 2007; Matheijsn, 2010; Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013; obesity: Elliott, 2016; Evans, 2010; Evans & Colls, 2011; Ward, 2016) partially informs what it is we want to answer to as pedagogists.

This article is one thread of our work toward articulating why it matters that we collaborate as pedagogists (and as researchers) within the specific Canadian ECE contexts we work. Borrowing inspiration from the interdisciplinary ethics enacted by Haraway (2016) and Stengers (2008; Tola, 2016), wherein generating knowledge is a practice of risk, accountability, and response-ability, we argue that intentionally immersing our work in uneasy dialogue can expand our methods for attuning to children's relations with spirituality and fat. Our overarching intention is to make visible the uncertain, tense, and generous work of following how we might 'do' pedagogist dialogues. Thinking with a story of a 'magic tree', which Meagan experienced and recounted to Nicole, we experiment with how actively entangling our projects might work to expand our possibilities for doing spirituality and fat otherwise. We offer speculative post-developmental engagements to share with one another how we activate some of our shared theoretical loyalties differently as we attend to our respective concerns with spirituality and fat. Following this, we place our understandings into conversation to trace how they might, and might not, respond to our accountabilities as pedagogists.

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[1]   Scholars and educators who think with a common worlds perspective (please see the *Common Worlds Research Collective,* www.commonworlds.net) work to unsettle Euro-Western anthropocentric and developmental educational inheritances (Nelson, Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo 2018; Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017) by responding to how human lives are entangled with, and accountable to, complex relations with more-than-human others amid ongoing settler colonialism and ecological precarities.

Doing Spirituality and Fat with Pedagogical Conversations

A magic tree story

Walking along a busy road on the lands of the Attawandaran, Anisshinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Leni-Lunaape peoples in what is currently known as London, Ontario, Canada, a group of young children and adults head to a local cemetery. Educators and children have been visiting this place, which they have named "The Deer Park", for a long time. Woodland Cemetery has been operating in London since 1830. We share this place with various wildlife, such as deer, turkeys, geese, squirrels, and robins. The cemetery is vast and has many areas to explore. For the past month, we have chosen to stay in a grassy area that is home to mature trees and two intriguing drainage grates.

At first we feel uncomfortable remaining in this space - we feel itchy desires in our bodies to move on, to explore. Educators and researchers resist the urge to move on and encourage children to remain in the grassy space and notice what this place offers to us. Many children experiment with dropping leaves and pine cones into the drainage gates, hypothesizing about crocodiles who live there and feed off these offerings of sticks and cones; some children find memorial plaques on stones and tree trunks as adults attentively discuss the meanings of these plaques, pushing through our own uncomfortableness of discussing death with children. We offer explanations such as: "someone is buried here" and "this is a place where people can remember people they love once they have died". A child runs to Meagan as she pauses with a group of children at the drainage grate. "People are buried here," she informs the group, as she runs back to explore the plaque.

Alongside an educator, Anne-Marie, some children begin to explore a large beech tree, running their hands against the knotty bark of the tree, moss and nut shells. After we return to the centre, Anne-Marie tells Meagan of a child, Leonard[2], discovering a knot in the tree: *Leonard begins to press a large piece of bark into the knot and declares that the tree is magic and the bark is a magic key that provides entry to the tree.* The educator recalls the palpable change in the children's energy, as they run and dance and find more magical key holes in the ground. Anne-Marie describes another shift in the children, a shift from questioning to one of knowing. The children

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[2]　All children's names are pseudonyms

know that the tree is magic; collective meaning making unfolds with the tree and bark and children and uneasy relations with death. As Meagan and Anne-Marie reflect on this moment, the magic tree feels important; like a consequential relationship we have crafted with this place. The magic tree also raises many questions: should we 'correct' the children and provide the scientific explanations for knots in bark? How do conversations about 'magic' connect to the theories on life and death we make visible within the cemetery? How might we respond to children's running and dancing with the magic tree? How do we, as researchers and educators, make meaning of the magic tree with children – and, how do we collectively unsettle our familiar habits for coming to understand with the magic tree?

Thinking Spirituality and Fat in Conversation (with the Magic Tree)

For us, thinking the magic tree, spirituality, and fat requires that we attend to nuanced and multiple (and still imperfect and partial) understandings of the event. As we work to activate post-developmental perspectives in our work as pedagogists, we understand that how we do spirituality and fat is never an intact, paused, idealized practice. To keep our engagements with spirituality and fat lively, relevant, and responsive, we argue that we need to continually drag our understandings into uneasy conversations that complexify or call us to revisit how we make spirituality and fat matter with children. The limits and borders of our post-developmental doings are made visible to us in many ways - including, but certainly not limited to, through our pedagogical conversations. In the following conversation, we do not work to build 'better' practices for doing spirituality or fat. Participating in pedagogical dialogue together is not a "solution" for addressing the situated boundaries of the places, theories, and lives we make choices to centre and silence in our work. We do unapologetically want to craft pedagogical relations where putting our work into conversation becomes a method for constantly tracing how our work does and does not respond to our everyday relations with children. Importantly, we recognize that the conversations we share in this article are between two female white settler pedagogists with similar ontological inheritances, privileges, and worldviews. We acknowledge that in discussing magic as a way to reconceptualize relations with humans and more-than-humans, the scholarship of many Indigenous authors who have graciously shared Indigenous ways of relating to the more-than-human world (Hall, 2008; Kimmerer, 2013 Simpson, 2008; Todd, 2017; Watts, 2013). As white settlers, we hold an ethical commitment to not co-opt Indigenous ontoepistemologies to further our own scholarship, so while we acknowledge that

some parallels may be evident in how we consider spirituality and bodies in relation to the more-than-human world, we do name this as decolonizing work. Rather, this is about disrupting inherited Euro-Western approaches as part of a larger, incredibly complicated project of dismantling Euro-Western hegemonies in current early childhood discourses in Canada. We want to show how our approaches to doing spirituality and fat complexify one another, how we engage in pedagogical conversations together, and how our collaborations are partial and contingent but always oriented toward responding to our times.

Meagan: My first shift from developmentalism happens in how I choose to define spirituality in my thinking alongside children. I diverge from developmental theories that situate spiritual development as an intrinsic human capacity, rooted in biology or physiology or defined by stage theories as "change, transformation, growth, or maturation" (Benson, Roehlkepartain & Rude, 2003, p. 210). Instead, thinking with Skott-Myhre (2018) I conceptualize a specific spirituality rooted in immanence, collectivist, and minoritarian knowledges. I ground this spirituality in ecological practices to challenge the Cartesian divide between human/nature and the anthropocentric privileging of human intellect and rational thought. I consider this spirituality as not a religious one, but one that it more analogous with magic, one that works with the material world and is considered the life-force of both humans and the more-than-human (Mies & Shiva, 2014). I broaden my thinking of spirituality through common worlding and new material feminisms, and reconvene the constituents of our worlds to include non-human life-forms, forces and entities (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Kummen, 2016). By broadening my definitions of children's spiritual understandings to include the unseen or intangible associated with magical thinking I also wrest children's 'superstitious' or 'paranormal' experiences of the world from developmental classifications of imagination and cognitive deficit (Lideman & Aarnio, 2007; Mathijesn, 2010; Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013).

The magic tree, in developmental discourses, quickly loses its magic. The magic becomes a trick, a clever mechanism for scaffolding children's learning about nature and science. Developmentally, magical thinking is defined as "involving attribution of causal effects on real life events by either a thought or action that is physically unconnected to the events" (Bolton, Dearsley, Madronal-Luque & Baron-Cohen, 2002, p. 480). Magical thinking positioned this way clearly delineates what is True or Real as the tangible and physical, that which is able to be objectively measured, and thus the only knowledge deemed legitimate is that which is 'rational'. This privileging

of verifiable 'rational' scientific thought has been instrumental in silencing voices from other thought collectives (Stengers, 2018) specifically those of women and Indigenous peoples (Skott-Myhre, 2018). Developmentalists see benefit in magical thinking as long as it remains situated in the appropriate stages of sequential child development, the younger the child the more acceptable it is for them to engage in magical thinking, but as the child progresses, magical thinking should give way to logical thinking, or else it becomes problematic (Bolton, Dearsley, Madronal-Luque & Baron-Cohen, 2002; Mathijesn, 2010). Reversely, developmentalists also positively associate magical thinking with imagination (Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013) which makes magic developmentally advantageous in positive correlations to cognitive development and academic success (Smith & Mathur, 2009).

Nicole: Dominant Euro-Western frameworks for understanding childhood obesity adopt a medicalized and developmental approach. Critical obesity scholars including Guthman (2013) and Rich (2010) detail how this developmental framing allows for excess body fat to be marked as an unhealthy pathology because of the present and future risks of inhabiting a body that does not meet normative age, race, and gender-based bioscientific markers for health. As Elliott (2016) and Evans and Colls (Evans 2010; Evans & Colls, 2011) make visible, these approaches to doing childhood obesity invest in developmental trajectories that decisively assert that fat children become fat adults. This understanding of obesity positions fat as readily quantifiable and knowable, human-centered, necessitating tracking and intervention, and roots fat within social discourses that stigmatize and moralize against fat bodies (Beausoleil & Ward, 2010; Rice, 2016; Rich, 2011). Narratives of normative, fit, and healthy childhood development facilitate the creation of fat phobic and fat mitigating ECE curriculum, which reminds children and educators that it is their personal responsibility to become healthy adults through carefully controlled practices of healthy eating and exercise.

Adopting a developmental childhood obesity lens, the magic tree matters because it draws children outside and into movement. The magic tree is a resource that I might deploy to encourage children to run, jump, and climb as they reach their recommended 180 minutes of daily physical activity. With children, I might hope we can investigate where more magic key holes are, carrying the magic as a motivator for us to move our bodies across the grassy terrain of the cemetery. I may capture the curiosities the magic tree invites, encouraging children to keep letting the energy the tree shares move their bodies quickly as we run around the space and raise our heart rates into a 'healthy' activity range.

Meagan: Feminist new materialisms and common worlds allows me to think beyond the allegiance to rational thought offered by developmental psychology to break from the binaries that western ontologies use to separate mind/body, nature/culture, spirituality/rationalism. This involves a recognition that being in the world allows us to have knowledge always produced and reproduced by engaging with the material world (Taylor & Ivinson, 2013). Children's bodies intra-act (Barad, 2007) with tree bodies and in this intra-active assemblage tree/children/educators/spaces/magic become agentic, not in ways in which one element causes or precedes the other but as multiple and emerging in consistently different ways as they intermingle (Barad, 2007). To see beyond the singular and universal developmental understandings of the magic tree moment, I must slow down and pay close attention (Starhawk, 2004; Tsing, 2015) to how the tree, children, adults, and other more-than-human actors mutually shape this particular assemblage. I ask 'what do trees do?' 'what do children do?' and most importantly 'what do trees and children do?' This act of slowing down itself resists progressive neoliberal logics that are deeply embedded in early childhood practices; logics that push educators to move children through sequential stage theories towards becoming a rational adult who participates in society in acceptable and preferred ways (Burman, 2008; Swadner, 2010).

Thinking post-developmentally, I think *with* magic. And name magic deliberately knowing it is a word that makes uncomfortable and disrupts scientific rationality (Starhawk, 1982). I choose define magic, not as fictional imaginings, but as relations with natural materials that foster new ways of relating to natural entities (Schutten & Rogers, 2011). By taking seriously children's spiritual connections to this magic tree, the child/tree intra-action becomes a place of meaning-making, one that challenges the individual agency of children, and instead calls attention to the collective construction of meaning (Lenz Taguchi, 2010) and forefronts more-than-human assemblages (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor, & Blaise, 2016; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Khattar & Montpetit, forthcoming). Thinking *with* (Rautio, 2017) magic foregrounds the historical, cultural, and political governance of spirituality, and by taking magic seriously I begin to see the multiple stories that take place simultaneously in this intra-action as a site for possible disruption of neoliberal developmental discourses of individualism and anthropocentrism. Here, stories of androcentric erasure of spiritual feminist knowledges (Skott-Myhre, 2018; Starhawk,1982) grapple and speak with taxonomic classifications of dendrology to challenge the taken-for-granted ways that developmental psychology silenced some and made others norm.

Nicole: My understanding of obesity responds to dominant childhood obesity discourses by foregrounding children's relationships with fat(s) as an ongoing activity, rather than a biological axiom governed by developmental logic. This call to 'do' fat(s) is grounded in post-developmental approaches to ECE, such as those articulated by scholars including Blaise (2013; 2014), Lenz Taguchi (2011) and Rautio and Jokinen (Rautio, 2013; Rautio & Jokinen, 2015). Rather than foregrounding pre-articulated developmental curriculum frameworks, these scholars attend to how lively and situated relationships, responsibilities, politics, and tensions animate our learning encounters (Nxumalo, 2017). I am interested in *doing* pedagogy as a reciprocal, ongoing, complex process (Iorio, Hamm, Parnell & Quintero, 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind & Kocher, 2016). I argue that a post-developmental understanding of childhood obesity might take seriously how we *do* obesity with children – that is, how we craft, respond to, and silence different relationships with fat in everyday moments. This situates fat as an ethical, political, and pedagogical activity, where educators, children, place, and fat cells are in constant conversation with dominant discourses of childhood obesity, and we need to be accountable to the relations with fat that we enact and silence with children.

With the magic tree, a post-developmental ethic of doing childhood obesity refuses any easy translation of pre-set physical activity promotion activities into this moment and instead attunes to how the questions, connections, and pedagogies we make possible shape how children might craft different situated relationships with fat. If I try to harness the energy the tree makes with children toward meeting a physical activity requirement, how can I be accountable to the moving, relationships, and connections that I prohibit? What happens if I understand moments of children running their fingers along the bark of the tree while their subcutaneous fat cushions their finger bones as moments of exploring this cemetery place with fat? When childhood obesity rhetoric constantly shouts morbidity and mortality statistics, what kinds of relationships with fat might we make with a place already storied with nuanced narratives of living and dying? How can I be accountable to the fats that I make possible here, in this place, with this magic tree, with children?

Meagan: Going back to my understanding of spirituality, one that I couple with magic, I think about how Dahlberg and Moss (2005) name meaning making as an inherently political act. I can link the silencing of magic back to modernist aims of making the Other into the same (Skott-Myhre, 2018; Starhawk, 1982) and through this I can think about whose voices have been

silenced in the erasure of collective spirituality, specifically Indigenous and women's voices. But where I am grappling, is what does centring magic do now? What other possible ways of knowing may also be validated by taking magic seriously. I want to be clear: I am not advocating that everyone should believe in magic (Stengers, 2018) or begin to incorporate immanent feminist spirituality in their pedagogical practice. What I am concerned with is how dominant ideas of science and rationality define certain ways of knowing as dispensable (Stengers, 2018). I wonder how I can let magic flourish and resist urges to *use* magic as a technology to reproduce dominant neoliberal ideologies that are so taken-for-granted in the discourses of quality ECE (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013). By thinking with magic, I wonder how I might continue to make meaning of pedagogical practices in ways that attend to the lives of the children and educators I collaborate with.

Nicole: I think that this tension of *using* vs *sitting with* magic is really timely – I hear echoes of post-developmental scholars, like Peter Moss (2016), who make visible how instrumental pedagogies – here, pedagogies that use magic – shape childhoods in line with neoliberal ideas of citizenship and success. This feels to me like a type of meaning making that plays a match game with magic, trying to find where magic slots into pre-set curriculum and then taking those as the 'valuable' pieces of magic. I think that's a really relevant critique, but what I think is really interesting when we put our work into conversation is how our practices of meaning making with magic are rooted in our existing relationships with magic – and, how those relationships are entangled with our research and pedagogical intentions. I think that there's something in your work where you carry an intention to notice magic; that your work with spirituality means that you work hard to attune with magic. I do not know if my commitment to thinking fat outside developmental logic already 'knows' magic, and I think that matters. It reminds me of Haraway's (2016) idea about "passing patterns back and forth, giving and receiving, patterning, holding the unasked-for pattern in one's hands, response-ability" (p. 12). I can almost think of the idea of noticing how our understandings of magic matter with fats as an unasked for pattern that I have to stick with. I would not have thought about how I make fat differently with our practices of making magic meaningful, but different responses with magic definitely enact different relationships with fat: relationships with fat that co-opt magic to technical ends, relationships with fats that push into tree trunks, relationships with fat that sit quietly shivering on a chilly morning. I think these all matter. They all have different consequences, and, importantly, they matter with magic, which kind of tugs at the importance of putting our different concerns into conversations for me.

Meagan: I do actively attune to magic but your discussion of fat and magic has me thinking of magic in ways that I have not thought about before, which is really important. It is important because even though our pedagogical and research focuses are different, we have an obligation to put them into uneasy conversations. This is at the heart of why we wanted to write this paper. When we first starting thinking about writing this, one of the biggest challenges was finding a way to connect magic and fat. As we have continued to think about this and engaged in discussion, I have become less concerned with making concrete connections and become more interested in the way these transdisciplinary conversations matter. Modernism and neoliberalism, and most definitely settler colonialism, have established a singular way of knowing (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2003; Tuck, 2013). I hope that the type of transdisciplinary conversation might be a move toward disrupting positivist Western ways of knowing that have been so predominant in ECE. When we weave together different knowledges we highlight how layered our stories and our worlds are. Drawing attention to these layers is important and politically significant because it manifests a way to engage in fluid multiplicity in our pedagogies. By nesting stories or knowledge, I believe we have the potential to hear and centre voices that have been previously marginalized through desire for consensus and universality.

Nicole: This reminds me of a provocation offered by Hamilton, Subramaniam, and Willey (2017), who speak about the politics of scientific ways of knowing and how these contribute to perpetuating settler colonial ways of knowing the world. Hamilton et al. contend that "science is constitutive of colonialism. Science is more than simply an instrumental extension of colonial power. Science and colonization are co-emergent, co-constituted, and co-produced; one cannot understand science without colonialism or colonialism without science" (p. 613). This makes me think about what our ways of meaning making in ECE are constitutive of, as they speak back to traditional knowledge politics: why does it matter that we think about magic as a conversational, transdisciplinary doing that is rooted in both of our intentions for research? How does putting magic and fat and spirituality into conversation unsettle epistemic divides and help us to weave together different knowledges to build differently responsive words and pedagogies? I think that this, to me, shares an ethic that feels really timely: this idea that we need to constantly put our divergent ideas and focuses into conversation in order to create uneasy alliances or conversations, while also refusing to reconcile or merge these concerns.

Meagan: This brings me to an uncomfortable question: what are the limi-

tations or the questions our work as pedagogists can't answer? We have talked about how post-developmental theorizing challenges some taken-for-granted neoliberal and colonial assumptions and I hope by offering these divergent ways of thinking about moments with children, educators, and the more-than-human we are leaving room for other ways of knowing to enter into dialogue with pedagogical practices. But I am hesitant to conclude that they will. We discussed in the beginning of this paper the specificities of the Canadian context we work in and although I think our relations with magic and fat might open up different conversations that may respond to *some* of the specificities, there are very real, tangible aspects of the lives of Indigenous and historically and continually marginalized Canadians that this work does not answer. For me this acknowledgement is very important. Pretending that the work we do can answer all the questions or *fix* through pedagogy (let alone the lives of humans and more-than-humans in this place) feels like a slip back into offering master narratives.

Pedagogical Conversations and Connections

We approach this conclusion with a specific uneasiness and borrow from Pignarre and Stengers (2011) a resistance to conclude. Like Pignarre and Stengers (2011) we have not answered, nor attempted to answer any of the burning questions that surround how and why pedagogists might practice in certain ways. Instead we have offered our imperfect method as we try to avoid comfortable alliances and resist any imperative to make developmentalism and spirituality and obesity work together to create universalised understandings of children and childhood. Our decision to write this article was born of months of pedagogical conversations, consuming and generative for both of us, but also haunted by simultaneous desires to make visible our shared thinking and to hold close something that has become very dear to us. We have purposefully avoided defining what a pedagogist is in a transferrable or technical sense and instead have activated what pedagogical conversations generate and ask of us in our pedagogist roles. Our unease with this is multiplicitous. We need to be explicit that in our advocacy for situated, localized ways of doing pedagogy, we do not adopt a relativistic, anything goes stance. We make decisions and specifically think beyond developmental psychology, knowing that no decision is ever innocent and that what we choose to do and not do matters to the futures we contribute to (Stengers, 2018). We also worry that our desire to make visible how we think and work together may be interpreted as call for others to engage in pedagogical work in precisely the way we do. This is resolutely not our intention. With this paper we hope to create spaces to enact and invite varied

and situated pedagogies that respond to local contexts, where pedagogies of fats and pedagogies of magic may be taken seriously. Instead of ending with a summation of this 'heart work' we offer an invitation to think with this article beyond reflexivity and critique and instead with an "ecology of partial connections" (Stengers, 2018, p. 127) that requires a way of learning from others that acknowledges that we are transformed by others and indebted to one other. We believe that the value of our, and any pedagogical work, is in its responsiveness to the local worlds it labours to answer to. We also take seriously that our thinking and conversing sometimes fails to answer to some of the questions that we know to be central to the contexts in which we live and work. To 'do' pedagogical conversations then, requires that we trace who we are in dialogue with and that we care for the pedagogical relations that trouble and expand how our ongoing conversations answer to situated lives, precarities, and inheritances.[3]

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