

# I Speak Frog: Storying Seasonal Narratives of Children's Common Worlds

**Olga Rossovska and Louise Zimanyi with Lynn Short, Avneet Singh, Kaitlin Beard, Jennifer Casale, Alessandra Silvestro, and Walter Garcia**

## Abstract

This article stories and (re)stories experiences of young children from three urban preschool classrooms participating in The Willows, a land-based program. The intentions of reciprocal relationship building with the land and the other-than-human (also known as “All Our Relations” in many Indigenous cultures) become the focus of engagement in and with nature. The central figures of children's seasonal narratives—Lucy the blue mint leaf beetle, John the snail, the Frog, the Stick, the Medicine/Teaching Garden, and the Crack Willow tree—illustrate the inter-related common worlds children live in and attend to in nature. Pedagogical documentation is used to capture the struggles to understand and adopt the “common worlds” lens and to delve deeply into pedagogies of places where children and the other-than-human live, learn, and grow.

## Key words

land-based program, common worlds, pedagogical documentation, Indigenous stories

## Author Biographies

Olga Rossovska, RECE, MEd, Professor in the Faculty of Health Sciences and Wellness at Humber College. Before becoming a college professor, she spent a decade as a toddler and preschool educator, leading environmental inquiry with children and colleagues. Olga's work and research focus on pedagogical documentation, quality in education, common worlds, outdoor play, and young children's experiences and relationships with the land.

Louise Zimanyi, MEd; Doctoral Candidate Social Sciences (Royal Roads University); Professor of Early Childhood Education, Faculty of Health Sciences and Wellness; Certified Forest School Practitioner at Humber College. Louise's work, research, and advocacy focuses on early childhood pedagogy and practice that promotes children's play and learning, particularly in outdoor and natural spaces. Louise is currently conducting research on how collective engagement, inquiry, and storytelling among educators, children, the Indigenous community, and the other-than-human world in a forest nature program may contribute to (re)storying and reshaping place-based early childhood pedagogies. Completed research includes parent perspectives of their children's experiences in the forest nature program (in press).

Lynn Short, Hon. BSc, BEd, MSc is currently the Environmental Stewardship Coordinator for the Humber Arboretum; she supports Indigenous Education in the Aboriginal Resource Centre and is a part-time Professor in Horticulture with the Faculty of Applied Science and Technology. She holds an Indigenous Knowledge Certificate from Humber College and, for 4 years, worked as an assistant to the Indigenous Elder who taught the Indigenous Knowledge Courses. Lynn accompanies groups of children on walks as part of the Forest Nature Program in the Humber Arboretum, sharing her knowledge and teachings about the natural world with the children.

Avneet Singh, RECE, BAsC, SN graduated from Humber College with a diploma and a BA in Early Childhood Studies from the University of Guelph-Humber. Avneet also completed a certificate in Early Childhood-Special Needs. She has been working at the Humber Child Development Centre since May 2016. Avneet is grateful to be a part of educating preschool children about the natural world and wildlife (Forest Nature Program). She advocates for children's health and wellness. Avneet is continuing her journey and is pursuing an MA in ECE Professional Education.

Kaitlin Beard, RECE, is a passionate advocate for creating wonder-filled opportunities for children and families to truly experience and connect with the natural world around them in a holistic way. She shares her passion as a creative educator, workshop facilitator, outdoor enthusiast, and musician. In addition to being a Registered Early Childhood Educator, Kaitlin is an accredited Forest and Nature School Practitioner, a certified Waldorf Early Childhood Teacher, and a co-founder of the Forest Nature program at Humber College. Kaitlin thoroughly enjoys collaborating with colleagues, as well as with so many wonderful educators, families, and their children, to be co-learners and explorers of the great outdoors while fostering health and wellness and a greater appreciation and respect for this beautiful place we call home.

Jennifer Casale, RECE, BAsC has been working at Humber College Child Development Centre for seven years. She has a passion for children and supporting their growth through risky play. Jennifer attended both Humber College and the University of Guelph-Humber where she completed the Early Childhood Studies program, increasing her knowledge of children and their development. Additionally, Jennifer has shown a great interest in risky play, incorporating it into her classroom and outdoor play and building her understanding by attending multiple workshops.

Alessandra Silvestro, RECE, SN has been working at the Humber Child Development Centre since September 2015. Alessandra attended Humber College and graduated from the Early Child Education diploma program. She continued her education by completing the Early Childhood Special Needs certificate program to further her knowledge and skills to support children with various needs and their families. In addition, she is passionate about supporting children's abilities, areas of further development, and co-learning with children and families through pedagogical documentation.

Walter Garcia, RECE is a preschool educator at Humber Child Development Centre. He has a great passion for the outdoors, risky play, and natural materials. Currently, he participates in the Forest Nature Program in the Humber Arboretum, where children and educators explore the diverse parts of the forest that are on Indigenous land and engage in risky play while interacting with and in nature. He has taken diverse workshops on risky play and outdoor play programs. He is pursuing the dream of becoming an outdoor educator.

## I Speak Frog: Storying Seasonal Narratives of Children's Common Worlds



Figure 1. Conversations with Leopard Frog, Zimanyi, 2019

The arboretum pond is full of life with water skaters gliding across the surface, mosquito and damselfly larvae and pupae floating and restfully waiting to awaken, minnows darting through sunny pools, and tadpoles transforming. From within the cattails, the song of the redwing blackbird can be heard. The frogs are croaking, inviting passersby with their song.

Leo, a 3-year-old preschooler, is a weekly visitor to the pond. Always hoping to spot a frog skillfully camouflaging in the brownish greenish grey of the pond, today he is lucky as one of the croak singers is sitting on the bank inviting Leo to come closer. Slowly, slowly, on his tiptoes Leo approaches the frog, then kneels carefully so as not to disturb the singing and spook the frog. He looks around to see if other children from his class are around, but they are all busy a few feet away, dipping their sticks into the water. Leo is also camouflaged in his green khaki shirt and grey shorts; he appears to be part of the bank. Gently he addresses the frog, introducing himself and asking how the frog is doing today.

"Croak," says the frog.

"I speak Frog" replies Leo, "I know."

Humber's nature-based program The Willows is located on 250 acres of forest, meadows, wetlands, and ponds. In the Michi Saagiig language, it is called *Adoobiigok*, a land known as "Place of the Black Alders" (Humber College, 2020). Uniquely situated along the *GabeKanang Ziibii*/the Humber River Watershed, historically it provided an integral connection between what is currently known as

the Ontario Lakeshore and the Lake Simcoe/Georgian Bay regions for Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat peoples. Today the Humber River Watershed connects people of many nations and is home to an interconnected and interdependent complex natural ecosystem (Humber College, 2020). The Willows promotes land-based play and learning in all seasons and weather through three urban preschool classrooms (Zimanyi & Beard, 2016). As the educators and the children of the Willows, we explore how walking on the land with Indigenous Knowledge Holders and Knowledge Sharers might contribute to re-storying our nature encounters through the lens of multiple perspectives (Zimanyi, 2018).

In this article we educators draw on a common worlds' multi-disciplinary pedagogical framework that includes early childhood studies, children's and more-than-human geographies, environmental education, feminist new materialisms, and Indigenous, and environmental humanities; this framework considers the participants' relationship with the other-than-human world (J. Dumont, personal communication, 2016–2019; Tooker, 1979). "Other-than-human" is often referred to in literature as "more-than-human" (Common Worlds Research Collective, n.d.; Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2019; Taylor, 2016, 2017), however, the authors' choice of discourse reflects our thinking with Elder Jim Dumont who invites us all to consider those not human not as "greater than" but "other than" (J. Dumont, personal communication, 2016–2019; Tooker, 1979). We invite the reader to explore what it means to live well together, learn from/with the land, think with ethical and political pedagogies (Common Worlds Research Collective, n.d.; Nelson, Coon & Chadwick, 2015; Rooney, 2019; Taylor, 2016), and story children's relation(ship)s with the other-than-human in The Willows (Common Worlds Research Collective, n.d.; Nelson, Coon & Chadwick, 2015; Rooney, 2019; Taylor, 2016).

We consider relationships that our groups of children build with the land and each other as we slow down consideration of explorations to reveal possible interconnections and entanglements between human and other-than-human worlds. In doing so, we challenge Euro-Western rooted thinking as we notice responsibilities and risks species share and acknowledge inherited historical traditions of interspecies hierarchies (Common Worlds Research Collective, n.d.; Rooney, 2019).

The storying of children's narratives of Lucy the blue mint leaf beetle, John, the snail, the Frog, the Stick, the Medicine/Teaching Garden, and the Cracked Willow are attempts to focus on journeys through seasons. Within these journeys are intentions of acknowledging common worlds that create interconnections and reciprocity with other-than-human spaces and beings also known as "All Our Relations" (Kimmerer, 2013); these spaces and beings include insects, animals, water, air, fire, and land. Our attempts to find intersections between Euro-Western and Indigenous worldviews (Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017), lead us to look to Indigenous Knowledge Holders for guidance in further integrating Indigenous pedagogies in daily land-based practice (Indigenous Centre of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care, 2020; Simpson, 2014). In the stories we collected for this study, we are always entangled in the layered and inherited complexity of the land we are on.

We begin the article by unravelling our own assumptions and challenging the dominant discourses in the early childhood sector, leaning on the experiences and research of scholars (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor, Blaise, & de Finney, 2015; Taylor, 2016, 2017; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2019; Woods et al., 2018) to help us untangle our thinking rooted in developmental frameworks. We then introduce five different stories from the land-based program The Willows. We turn to pedagogical documentation to story the processes of slowing down and returning to the same places over and over again as the children become entangled in relationships with place and its inhabitants. Within each story we show how they engage in pedagogical discussions contesting Euro-Western developmental theory, highlighting the (re)emergence of possibilities for thinking across multiple perspectives (Rooney, 2019; Styres, Haig-Brown, & Blimkie, 2013). We conclude the article with questions of future possibilities.

## Re-imagining and (Re)Storying Our Own Practice and Thinking

We begin by acknowledging that most of us writing this article are settlers on the land. Our educational worldviews are heavily influenced by the dominant Euro-Western developmental discourse, and, therefore, much of what we do in our work goes on without consideration of how we might be perpetuating the colonial values privileged in contemporary Canadian society (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). Working and thinking with Indigenous Knowledge Holders and Knowledge Sharers and considering our experiences using both Indigenous and Euro-Western perspectives (or Two-Eyed Seeing (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012)) and a common worlds approach, we begin to unravel our inherited binary attitudes about the

human and the other-than-human. We challenge our Euro-Western dominant worldviews and attempt to be more intentional about how we engage and build relationships with forest ecologies (Woods et al., 2018).

Pedagogical documentation helps us search for meaning, focus on important questions, linger with ideas, examine our assumptions, deconstruct practices (Turner & Wilson, 2009), and pay attention to forming relationships with places and their inhabitants. By storying children's narratives of The Willows and making them public, we call out our first instinct to focus on the human-centred thinking and the possible benefits we will reap from encounters with other-than-human.

Pedagogical documentation encourages us to remember the value of plurality of thoughts (Turner & Wilson, 2009). We consider Two-Eyed Seeing, "always looking for another perspective and better way of doing things" (A. Marshall, personal communication, February 19, 2020). As the pedagogical discussions encourage us to slow down and connect with the land through multiple encounters as described in the stories here, they open possibilities to (re)construct and (re)claim (Styres et al., 2013) our own histories and pedagogical practices.

Challenging our own focus on common anthropocentric views, where humans are above everything in the world, we turn to Kimmerer (2013) to think about "All Our Relations," to Bartlett et al. (2012) and Two-eyed Seeing, and to Taylor (2016, 2017) and Nelson, Pacini-Ketchabaw and Nxumalo (2018) to think about common worlds. Our daily encounters with the land, animals, insects, water, and weather are therefore invitations for conversation. By accepting these invitations, we take risks in exposing our vulnerabilities, inherited practices, and the ways we think and interact. By critically reflecting on our practices through pedagogical documentation and reflection, we reflect and become aware of our actions and their possible impact on larger issues such as climate change in a world of declining and disappearing biodiversity (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, 2019).

We choose to share and think with our (children's and educators') stories not to try and normalize the experiences, but rather to take the readers along on the journey so they may relate to some of the thinking and learning processes that happen in our daily encounters (Ingold, 2009). Stories we share are always implicated by the colonial histories of the place. We are conscious of the bias of one single story; therefore, we choose to share multiple stories from different viewpoints and journeys. Each story has multiple meanings that emerge based on

personal histories and encounters; each story has its own ways of influencing ways of being and relationships with the other-than-human. Therefore, it matters which stories we choose to tell and think with (Haraway, 2019). Here, we hope to evoke a common world's lens and provoke readers to think with that in mind.

### Being with the Crack Willow Tree



Figure 2. Looking way up the Crack Willow, Zimanyi, 2016



Figure 3. Climbing up to get a birds-eye view, Zimanyi, 2017

**Louise Zimanyi:** A more than 100-year-old Crack Willow tree towering over the Arboretum and Humber River (Figure 2) is a focal point of The Willows forest nature program. Children (sometimes with a parent), their educators, and students in the Early Childhood Education program develop relationships with the tree through the seasons, listen to stories and draw under its shady branches, wonder about and investigate holes in the tree trunk (Do trees eat and talk?), and climb up to get a bird's-eye view of activities below (Figure 3). Early spring flowers (catkins) provide an important source of nectar and pollen for bees and insects, downy woodpeckers tap for insects in the deeply furrowed bark, and chickadees swoop down to delicately pick sunflower seeds from eager, outstretched hands.

A summer windstorm has cracked the tree's centre wide open: children peer in and offer theories about what has happened (the tree was old, the carpenters ants ate a lot of it, maybe the inside wanted to see the sun), others navigate along the horizontal tree trunk dotted with evidence of new green life, climb over each other (sometimes pausing to peer at green-blue beetles), and move through the centre to reach the other side of the tree and unexplored territory and microworlds. Yet, the children also let one child quietly sit inside, connecting, being.

During a snowy, cold winter, a third trunk of the tree comes down (Is the tree broken? Does it hurt the tree?), and it shifts during the summer months. Perhaps, the tree and surrounding forest have decided it needs to rest. A conversation begins: Is the space still safe? Does the tree need to be removed? Do we remove ourselves from the space? Can the tree be doctored by the tree arborists, so it is less of a risk? A decision is made to let the tree and place rest. In the meantime, we make plans to journey back to The Willows to offer *Asayma*/tobacco harvested from the Medicine/Teaching Garden to the tree and forest and to say, "Thank you."

In walking with and to place (Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017; Rooney 2019), being with weather (Rooney, 2016, 2019), and (re) storying our encounters in and with nature (Zimanyi & Short, 2018; Zimanyi, 2019), we come to know about the tree (though it carries many stories that we do not know), about ourselves, our connection to the storied tree, and to the medicine of the tree (L. Short, personal communication, 2017). We notice and respond, sometimes viscerally, to changes in a place that is influenced and affected by seasons and weather (Rooney, 2016). In returning to place, walking in weather, and noticing our micro encounters with all our relations (Kimmerer, 2013), we acknowledge our interconnections with the storied past, present, and future of the tree and of place.

### The Story of the Medicine/Teaching Garden

**Lynn Short:** The Medicine/Teaching Garden in the Humber Arboretum (Figure 4) was designed by students of the Introduction to Horticulture for Indigenous Students Program and incorporates the teachings of the Four Directions (Neewin wayndawnimuk): Kindness (Gizhaywaadiziwin), Honesty (Gwayako bimawdiziwin), Sharing (Mawda'okeewin), and Strength (Zongiziwin) (J. Dumont, personal communication, 2016–2019).



Figure 4. Medicine Garden, Short, 2019

The plants in the four sections include three of the four sacred *Muskiki*/medicines: *Mushkodaywushk*/Sage, *Weengushk*/Sweetgrass, and *Asayma*/Sacred Tobacco. These three sacred medicines are collected each summer for use in and by the Aboriginal Resource Centre. The fourth sacred medicine is *Geezhigawndug*/Cedar. It was not included in the plantings because the numerous deer in the arboretum would eat it. Consequently, the students incorporated cedar wood in the upper structure to represent it. There are mature cedar trees growing nearby in the arboretum.

Children from The Willows visit the Medicine/Teaching Garden and learn about the Four Directions. The rocks that surround the garden are respected as elders (the oldest beings on the earth) and not climbed upon. We have been able to observe the Painted Lady caterpillars feeding on the Pearly Everlasting plants and experience the scents of the *Mushkodaywushk*/Sage and *Weengushk*/Sweetgrass, the hair of Mother Earth. We use tobacco as a gift to the sumac bush when we ask to harvest enough to make sumac tea.

We welcome *Neekaanagana*/"All Our Relations" (J. Dumont, personal communication, February 19, 2019) into the garden. Robins nest in the upper structure each summer, snakes bask on the rocks in the sun, many animals feed on the leaves and berries, nests are made in the garden, and insect pollinators enjoy the flowers. The connection to the land and our relations is an important one for all who visit the garden. It is hoped that all visitors will internalize this connection with the land and take it with them everywhere they journey beyond the garden. In beginning to learn with Indigenous cosmologies, in learning not only names but the stories of "All Our Relations," (Kimmerer, 2013) we plant the seeds for how we might regenerate our reciprocal connection with and responsibility to the land.

### John the Snail

On a morning with bright dew sparkling in the sunshine, a small group of preschool children begin their first explorations in the arboretum. As they gather in the cedar grove to greet the day, their senses awaken to their surroundings as the wet grass touches bare skin and the gentle breeze tickles their cheeks. Something catches their eye on a blade of grass; curiosity and wonder begin to unfold. "What's that?" one child asks. "A bug," said another. "I think a snail," replies yet another. The dialogue continues and a child ventures over, peering into the long grass. Another child joins and eventually and gently holds the snail between his fingertips. "It looks wet," he says, "the round thing is stuck," while another child points to the shell. A name is chosen: John, John the snail. John the snail is located most mornings nestled in the grass or on a tree

trunk. Sometimes John looks bigger, sometimes smaller, and the children begin to wonder what he eats, where he lives, and how he moves.

**Avneet Singh and Kaitlin Beard:** Snails become visible everywhere, with each passing season. Often empty snail shells are found under trees or beside rocks, and the children ask, Where did the snail go? Is it away? Did it leave its home or did something else eat it up? Senses heighten and personal risk is taken as children hold the snails or shells at different points during explorations.

One day, a child noticed a snail! The educator asked, "Where is the snail?" The child stuck out his index finger and began to gently drag his finger across patterns on a log shaped like spirals. "Right here, the snail, he is so big." (Figure 5). When children have opportunities to directly increase knowledge about creatures, animals, and insects, their way of thinking and forms of representation can go beyond the physical scope of things (Rooney, 2019; Taylor, 2016; Zimanyi & Beard, 2016).



Figure 5. "Look, a snail!" Singh, 2019.

Every day in the arboretum unfolds differently, and as educators, we continue to listen to the children, wonder, speculate, foster curiosity, and ask open-ended, thought-provoking questions. In nature, children connect with one another, engage in conversations, express ideas, and share knowledge beyond what they know and can do (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Throughout the shared experiences in the forest, children identify and recognize physical characteristics of themselves through John the snail or distinctive patterns of a snail on a log. In the arboretum, children begin to also notice caterpillars, ladybugs, bees, butterflies, worms, and millipedes through the changing seasons. They also wonder where these creatures go in the winter when the snow covers the grass. It is important to bring children (including their families) (Zimanyi & Rossovska, 2020) back into these common worlds so they can experience and notice that all live in shared environments with animals, humans, and plants (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Khattar, 2018; Shillington, 2014).

We authors can say that the snails and natural spaces have taught us to wonder at the small things in life and given us space and time to let that wonder unfold naturally and unconfined. The process of "snailing," (R. Khattar, personal communication, January 16, 2020), which is a slower, more thoughtful approach to developing pedagogy, wonder, and human capacities, is made visible in the snail. Forest

School Canada (2014) writes about building relationships with that which is greater than ourselves (the world) and those in it. It is this practice of listening and learning the stories of the land that gives us the ability to know a place intimately, so we can return again and again, and understand and recognize processes of change in our relationships within these common worlds.

### Storying with Microworlds: Lucy the Blue Mint Leaf Beetle

The Crack Willow is alive in spring, the new leaves and fungus emerge in unexpected spots along the trunk, encouraging the children to pay close attention to how they interact with the tree. While climbing on the fallen trunk, the children are mindful of where they step, making sure not to disrupt the emerging new branches. There, among the fungi and the new growth, a colourful blue mint leaf beetle basks in the sun, shimmering with bright blue, green, and black hues. The children get closer to inspect it; disrupted by unexpected shadows, the beetle begins to crawl through the cracks in the bark. Still mindful of their movement, the children follow it, slowly crawling the tree trunk to see which way the beetle will go. Excited about their discovery, the children call for the educators to see what they found walking through the cracks of the bark and help them identify the beetle. Not learning an identity, the children quickly come up with the name “Lucy,” and the stories and questions about Lucy’s adventures in The Willows begin (Figure 6). “Where are you going, Lucy?” “Are you looking for your family?” The children talk amongst themselves about the colourful beetle. They find a stick and place it for the beetle to climb on, eager to introduce their classmates to their new friend. When it is time to leave the Crack Willow, the children are sad to say goodbye to Lucy. “How will Lucy find us?” — they leave with the hope of seeing Lucy again.

**Olga Rossovska and Alessandra Silvestro:** Stories about the blue mint leaf beetle Lucy are told and retold



Figure 6. *Conversing with Lucy.* Rossovska, 2019

to anyone who will listen—to keep the memory of the encounter and to remember the names of the biodiverse species that live in The Willows. In storying about Lucy, we wonder if we are raising future environmental stewards who will take care of nature and all other-than-humans. However, Taylor (2017) cautions us that these common settler assumptions of children as future stewards are problematic and outdated; they romanticize children’s encounters with the land and assume that the land needs to be cultured and improved by humans, notions that are colonial. Therefore, we try to shift our thinking from self-centred focus (Harwood & Collier, 2017; Taylor, 2017). We begin to think with the common world pedagogies and consider children’s relations with Lucy the blue mint leaf beetle—its shimmer beckons interaction.

While children are brought up in environments with colonial histories and are surrounded by the mostly Euro-Western worldviews of educators such as ourselves, they seem to be more open to listening with less bias and to developing their own ideas (Rooney, 2019). Children have their thoughts and opinions; they influence the dynamic of their understanding of nature and the natural environment by imposing their own notions of the world around them. They “appear to understand and articulate their relationships with animals not in the terms which dominate adult discourses [...] but in terms which make sense to them and resonate with their social lives” (Tipper, 2011, p. 160). The relationships reveal more ethical pedagogies where multiple species can coexist in a postcolonial world; we consider these relationships as examples of common worlds pedagogies (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2012; Taylor, 2016; Tipper, 2011).

In these types of pedagogical discussions, we grapple with multiple tensions and moments of messiness and complexity (Rowan, 2017). By being present in the moment, we are encouraged to re-think previous interpretations that have shaped our knowledge base up to this point. We slowly unravel the lessons that the common worlds’ encounters offer us and the children. We begin to wonder whether thinking with the common worlds’ perspective could be an agency to access Indigenous knowledge (Rowan, 2017) alongside our Euro-Western worldviews without creating binaries or imbalance.

### Thinking With Sticks

For the children in the forest school, sticks were weapons, magic helpers, seatbelts, boundary markers, art representations, ladders, tools to write and draw with, and much more. The stick was also a friend, carried and cared for by the child. At times, the stick also acted as a conduit between the children, fostering twisting and

turning storylines as the often complex and sustained play unfolded (Harwood & Collier, 2017, p. 345).

Sticks are of great interest to the children because they are alive; they are agential, drawing children to pick them up (Harwood & Collier, 2017). For preschool children, we see that the stick is more than “just a stick”; it is a constant companion and protagonist in daily stories. Sticks are collected and used to make fire in the Kelly Kettle for mint tea; at the same time, other sticks are used to create a boundary line to remind children not to get too close to the fire. Sticks are also used in caterpillar encounters in the outdoor playground.

Two children find a small caterpillar in the playground; they want to give the caterpillar a house (Figure 7). They decide to build a structure using Birchwood sticks recently donated to the children’s playground by one of the community



Figure 7. Children talk about the home they made for their caterpillar friend. Casale and Garcia, 2019.

We do not know the (hi)story of these sticks, but now they are on the playground and a perfect building material for the caterpillar’s home. With wooden planks as a base for the structure, the building commences. As described by the children themselves, they try to recreate the shape of a “tepee” (hut) similar to the one they built while in the forest. There are some minor complications while placing the sticks in a cone shape. The sticks do not always seem to be willing to stay up and keep falling; they seem to communicate with the children about how to place them within the structure. The children work on negotiating the stick position in the structure after noticing that the bumpy surface may be the reason the sticks continuously fall. Utilizing some thinner sticks as shovels and wooden bricks as hammers to pound the Birchwood sticks deeper into the ground, the sticks stay grounded and balanced. When the tepee is complete the children create a bed for the caterpillar using smaller sticks and leaves.

**Jennifer Casale and Walter Garcia:** The encounter with the sticks, these interactions, demonstrate the importance of allowing children to use their imaginations and the meaningful role of a stick as an agent in collaborative thinking (Harwood & Collier, 2017).

As educators, we are constantly reflecting. For us, sometimes it can be difficult to determine what materials

are safe for children; therefore, we take risks in exploring the unknown. Exploration of the outdoor environment opens up endless possibilities as children use nature to support their relationships with the other-than-human. The children show empathetic gestures for both the land and the other-than-human as they work on creating a home for their caterpillar friends and explore the plants and natural materials they carry back from the forest to the playground. The children create their own stories with the focus on the stick, shaping the sticks into a home for the caterpillar, and, other times, pretending the stick is their guide on the walks. In each story, the stick becomes an irreplaceable protagonist.

## Discussion

### Children’s Common Worlds in an Urban Early Childhood Setting

The stories we choose to tell in this article help us challenge our tendency to consider only Euro-Western dominant discourse and pedagogies. We use a common worlds framework to (re)story what it means to be learning, thinking, building relationships, and living well with each other (Nelson, Pacini-Ketchabaw, & Nxumalo, 2018; Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017; Taylor, 2016).

Listening to the Frog, slowing down with John the snail, developing relation(ship)s with Lucy the blue mint leaf beetle, and sharing spaces with “All Our Relations” (Kimmerer, 2013; J. Dumont, personal communication, February 19, 2019) in the Medicine/Teaching Garden opens our thinking to noticing and learning through multi-species encounters. When the Stick challenges us to find a sturdier way to build a tepee and the Crack Willow tells us it is ready to rest after the changes that happen throughout the seasons, the slowing down and listening helps us notice the impacts of our human presence on the ecosystem and the biodiversity of the species around us (Nelson, Coon, et al., 2015). “[...], we are learning to pay attention to moments that bind us together with forest ecologies and the histories of this place” (Woods et al., 2018, p. 48).

We borrow the question from Nxumalo and Pacini-Ketchabaw (2017) of “what it could possibly mean to inherit the histories of companion species [...]” (p. 1416). We use it to unravel our own ideas and the experiences we live with. We ask ourselves, Are we dependent on All Our Relations for our existence? Do our stories perpetuate anthropocentric views, taking natural materials out of their environment, or do they favour relational reciprocity, for example, considering whether the snail may not want to be picked up? Each of the stories provokes questions as

we seek to explore multiple meanings in our encounters.

We know that we have a lot of unlearning and learning to do. Some of us find it challenging not to romanticize our encounters with the other-than-human; others simply may not consider alternative perspectives to the dominant discourse. We seek guidance in Indigenous worldviews and stories that share meanings behind human yearning for engagement with plants, insects, and sticks. In our co-learning with Indigenous worldviews and with children, we are starting to recognize the kinship and the histories we share. We are interested to know more about how our intentions impact current and future practice and generations as we are influenced by the land, experiences, and the pedagogies of the past.

In storying the narratives of the land, we hope to challenge the common colonial binary thinking about human versus other-than-human and nature versus culture, assuming the possibility of animals and plants being fellow citizens of our socially constructed world (Tipper, 2011). “With these values, we hope to subvert the anthropocentric, transcendent ethical paradigms privileged in colonial reproduction and foreground silences, histories, and new possibilities” (Nelson, Coon, et al., 2015, p. 3).

As we recognize the “lively ethnographies” (Van Dooren & Rose, 2016, p. 89) of children’s common worlds (Common Worlds Research Collective, n.d.), we use a Two-Eyed Seeing (Bartlett et al., 2012) perspective to disrupt settler colonialist views we might bring into our land-

based program (Rooney, 2016, 2019; Rowan, 2017). Do we disrupt the natural existence of the Cracked Willow, the Frog, and others and impose ourselves with our ways of seeing and being? As educators, we challenge these dominant ideas, thoughts, and ways we may project them onto children. We ask ourselves if we leave enough room for alternative and Indigenous worldviews in education (Rowan, 2017).

We acknowledge that our entanglements with nature manifest themselves through the stories we choose to tell, the stories we choose to linger on, the stories that dominate our thinking, and the new stories we create to understand our relation(ship)s with the land (Nelson, Coon, et al., 2015; Styres et al., 2013). The stories are complex, and they trigger our thinking about our purpose and our impact (Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017).

Through pedagogical discussions and documentation that are interdependent and reciprocal (Rinaldi, 2020), we challenge Euro-Western child-centred, teacher-directed pedagogies. In continually disrupting and (re)storying our complex encounters (Nelson, Coons, et al., 2015) such as those with the Frog, thinking deeply with common worlds and walking with Indigenous Knowledge Holders and “All Our Relations” (Kimmerer, 2013), we endeavor to ensure that the seasonal micro-encounters of land-based program are relational, respectful, reciprocal, responsible, and contribute to a transformative pedagogy for social and ecological resilience.

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