

Childhoods:
Becoming,
Inheriting &
Unbounding
Bodies





Childhoods: Becoming, Inheriting & Unbounding Bodies

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With the children, educators and families from
Hands on Playcare (HOP)

With support from the Terrace Art Gallery &
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With deep respect, we acknowledge that this work is taking place on unceded Tsimshian lands. Nestled between mountain ranges and the Skeena River, these lands of the Kitsumkalum and Kitselas people hold culture, language, community, strength, and care.

There are many stories about childhoods, but we often only hear one. The single narrative portrays children as innocent, pure, sponges, humans in the making.

Childhoods: Becoming, Inheriting and Unbounding Bodies narrates alternative childhoods. Real and complex childhoods.

Children negotiate “what a body can do” (Deleuze, 1990). They ask questions, propose ideas, and experiment with theories about bodies. Bodies constantly shift, move through multiple temporal dimensions, take on different identities, and even become invisible.

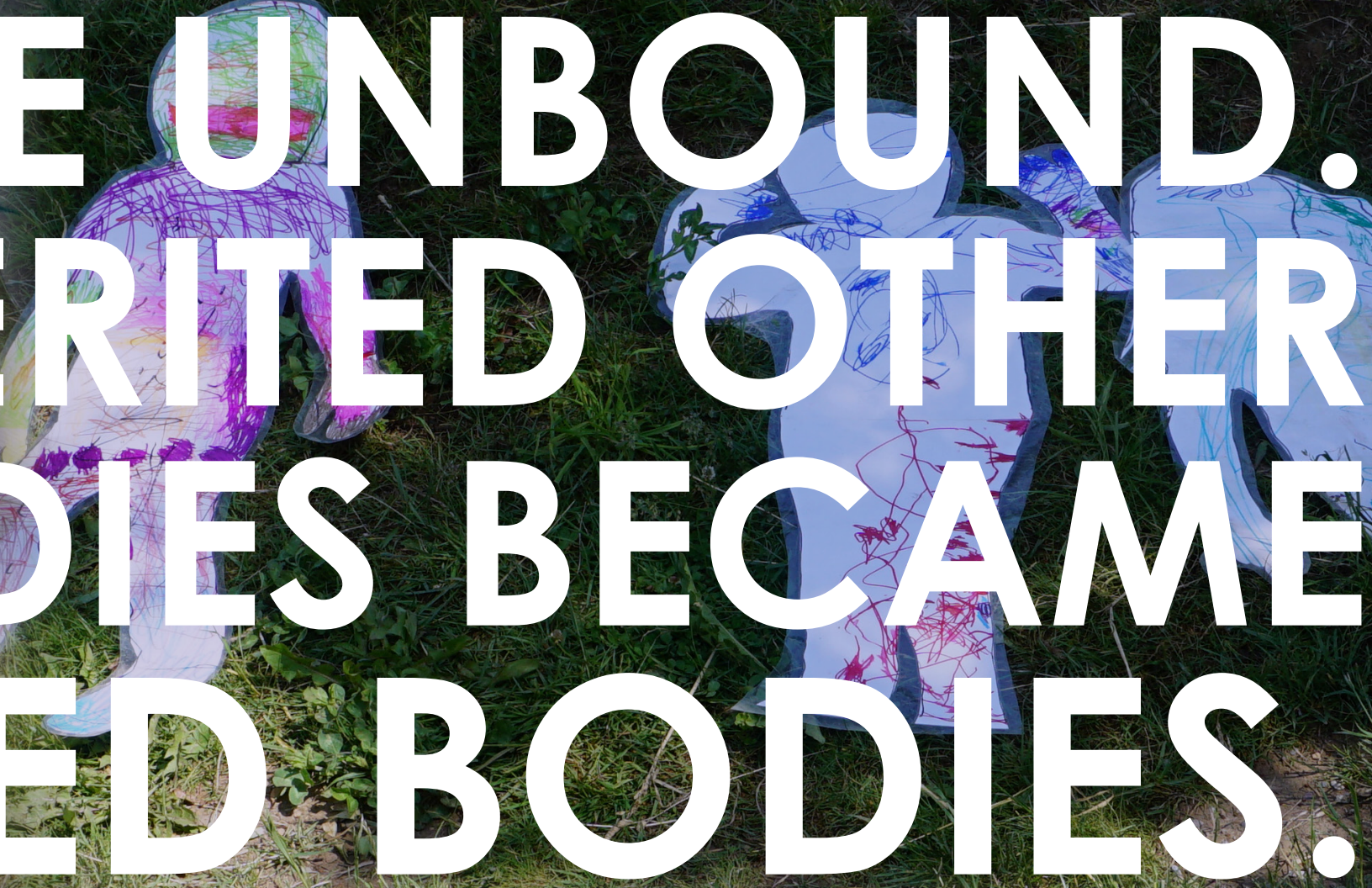
This exhibit asks us “not simply to look at bodies, but to contemplate what it is to live our bodies” (Cachia, 2012, p. 9). The children “teach us that what a body has the ability to be and do is open to question” (p. 9).

This exhibit contains glimpses into an ongoing inquiry with a group of children (1-6 years old) at HOP (Hands On Playcare) Early Childhood Education Centre in Terrace, BC.

Eighteen months ago, children, educators and pedagogists were provoked by the thoughts and ideas emerging from tracing and drawing life-sized bodies. The bodies made possible the co-creation of a curriculum that challenged idyllic notions of childhoods.



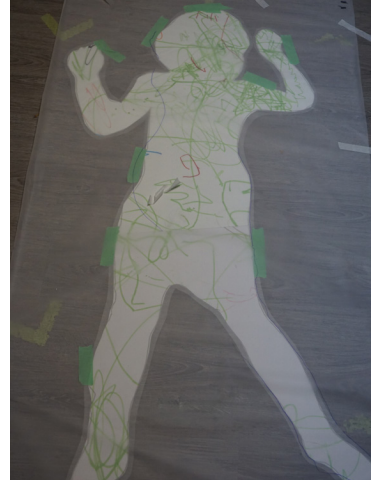
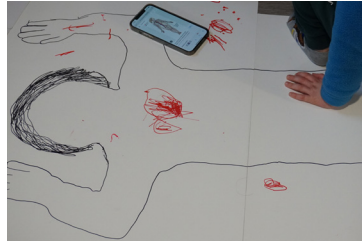
BODIES WERE
BODIES IN THE
STORIES. BODIES
CONNECT



THE UNBOUNDED.
WRITTEN OTHER
BODIES BECAME
ED BODIES.

Pedagogically, children attend to bodies' anatomy, fragility, multiplicity, gendering, impermeability, and hybridity. Blood, bones, organs, bodily fluids, and lice become protagonists in body stories. Children also actively negotiate the taboos and social norms associated with bodies.

Childhoods: Becoming, Inheriting and Unbounding Bodies invites viewers to respond to children's offerings: What might a body do? Whose bodies are welcomed? Whose bodies are excluded? What boundaries keep bodies outside of normalcy? What makes a body right? What makes a body wrong? What makes a body out of place?



UNBOUNDING



Children's bodies often live in bounded spaces – inside fenced yards, rigidly demarcated classrooms, and strict routines. Through the inquiry, children challenged the boundaries imposed on their own bodies. By tracing, drawing and enlivening life-sized bodies, children transgress boundaries and explore beyond familiar spaces. Uncontainable bodies become disorganized bodies. Anatomies are remade, removed and replaced as the children narrate body stories.



Children push even further by unbounding bodies themselves. Bodies leak, bleed, cry, host lice, scar, eat, die, age, give birth, grow, shrink. In other words, children speculate with bodies' impermeability, volatility and instability: "*Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?*" (Haraway, 1991, p. 178)





INHERITING



Children's bodies inherit the genetic legacies, histories, norms and social taboos of past generations. Their bodies shift as these inheritances encounter and become entwined with(in) experiences, relationships, injury, disease, aging, loss and other life events. Through drawing and storying the life-sized bodies, HOP children co-constructed new understandings of bodies. As you move through this exhibit, we invite you to join the children in reconsidering bodies as archives of lives lived within the ebbs and flows of a world in perpetual change. Bodies hold and narrate stories that include babies, accidents, movement, scars, menstruation, stretch marks, tears, blood, relationships, death. What else can a body hold?



Throughout this pedagogical inquiry, children troubled bodies' visibility and invisibility. Whose bodies were welcomed and celebrated? Whose bodies remained unseen or excluded? Attending to inheritances and stories all bodies hold prompted children and educators to consider that *“bodies shared, bodies hollowed and flattened out are not bodies to be feared, but are all too real even if, for the moment at least, they are also all too invisible”* (Buttigieg, 2011, p. 55).

Who can a body be?



“Her skin is cracking. Why is it red?”

“Those are stretch marks.”

“I like the cracks.”

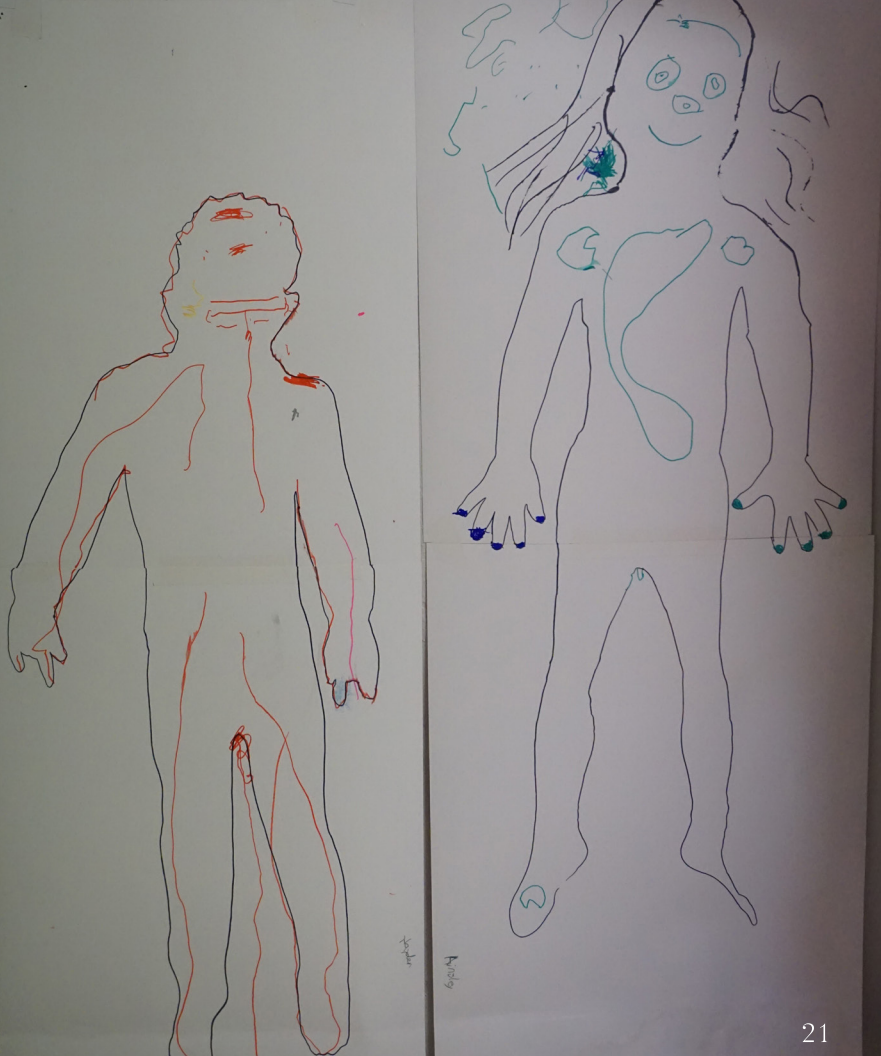


“My hand is cracked!”



“Boys can’t have babies!”

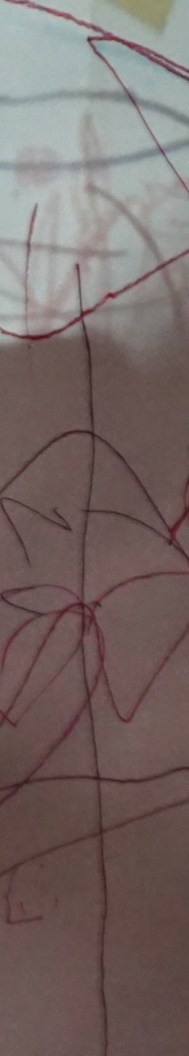
“But a frog is a mom or a dad!”



"But seahorses, dads have the baby."

"Their bellies are broken."





“This is the blood.”

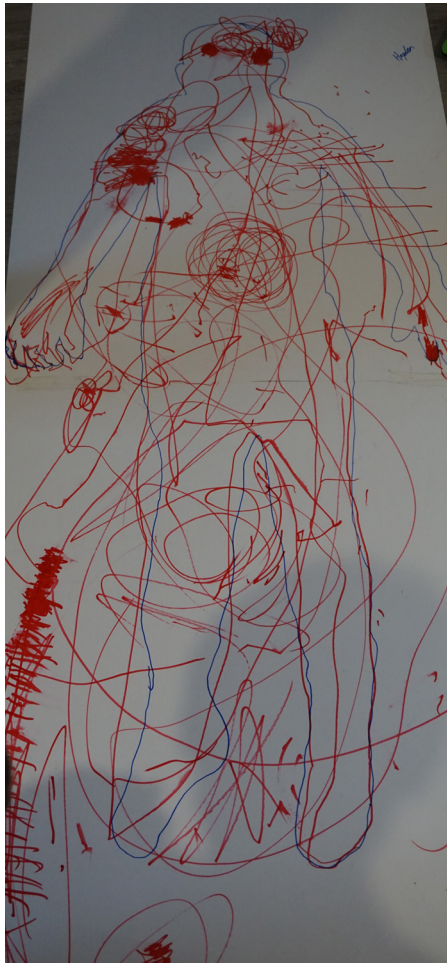
“Don’t cut the blood out, I want it to stay.”

“The blood is pouring out of me.”









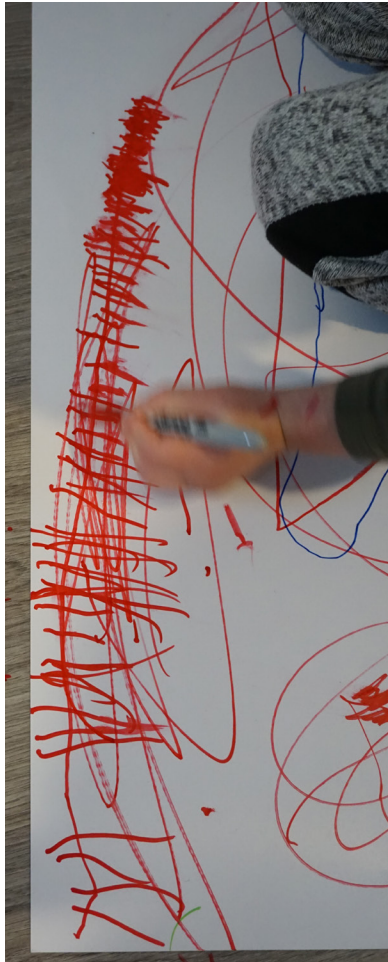
*“My uncle does
have feet but he’s
in a wheelchair.”*

*“He has feet,
but his back
doesn’t work.”*



*“Hey, there’s bugs in my hair! I
TOLD you!
It’s not a trick.
It was...bugs.”*

“The bugs make you sick.”



*“My uncle’s head cracked open,
like a BIG crack.”*

*“He run into the bridge and there
was blood all over his face.”*

“This is my uncle’s stitch-up.”

BECOMING



“The human body is understood by Spinoza to be a relatively complex individual, made up of a number of other bodies. Its identity can never be viewed as a final or finished product... since it is a body that is in constant interchange with its environment. The human body is radically open to its surroundings and can be composed, recomposed and decomposed by other bodies.” (Moira Gatens, Imaginary Bodies)





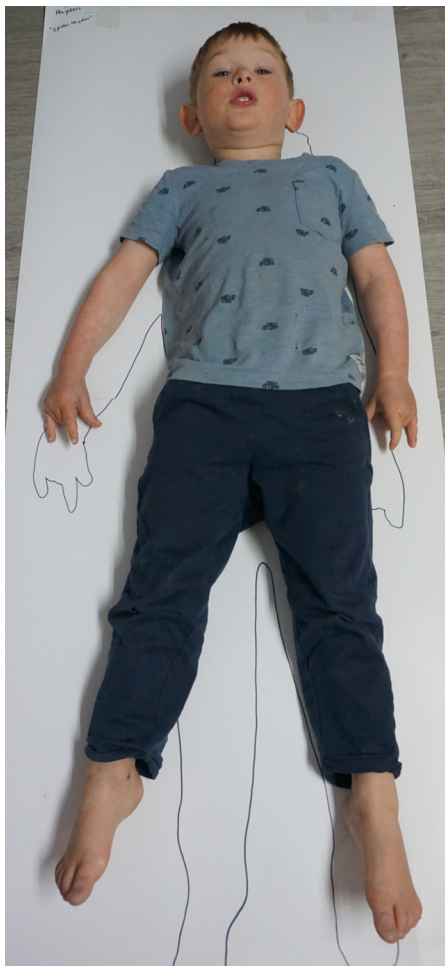
Individual bodies become collective bodies. The HOP bodies are made of other bodies. Over and over, with cut-outs and x-rays, children “try on” the life-sized bodies. Human bodies move over the paper and plastic shapes, becoming practiced with the positions necessary to fit them. Familiarity grows, but bodies must be continuously reconfigured. Carefully placed heads, legs, arms, and fingers show an attunement to other bodies as we wonder: What does it do to become a posture, a face, a gesture, or a skeleton?



“I was little.”

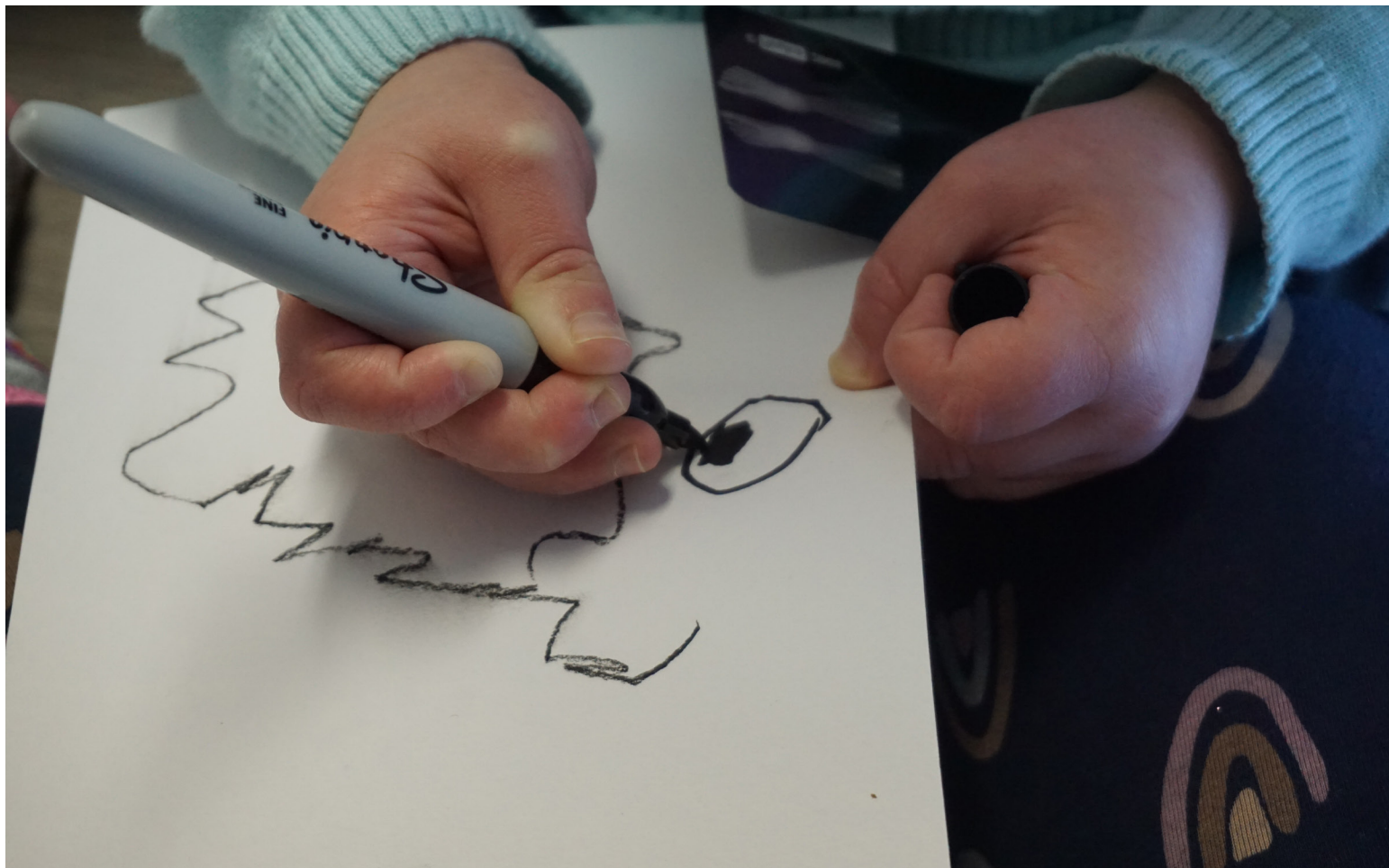
“Why aren’t my feet fitting?”

“I grewed.”

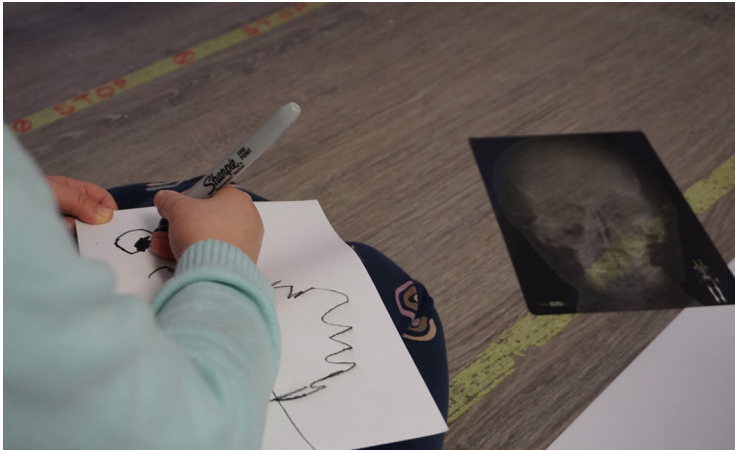


“Hey, let’s try these on!”





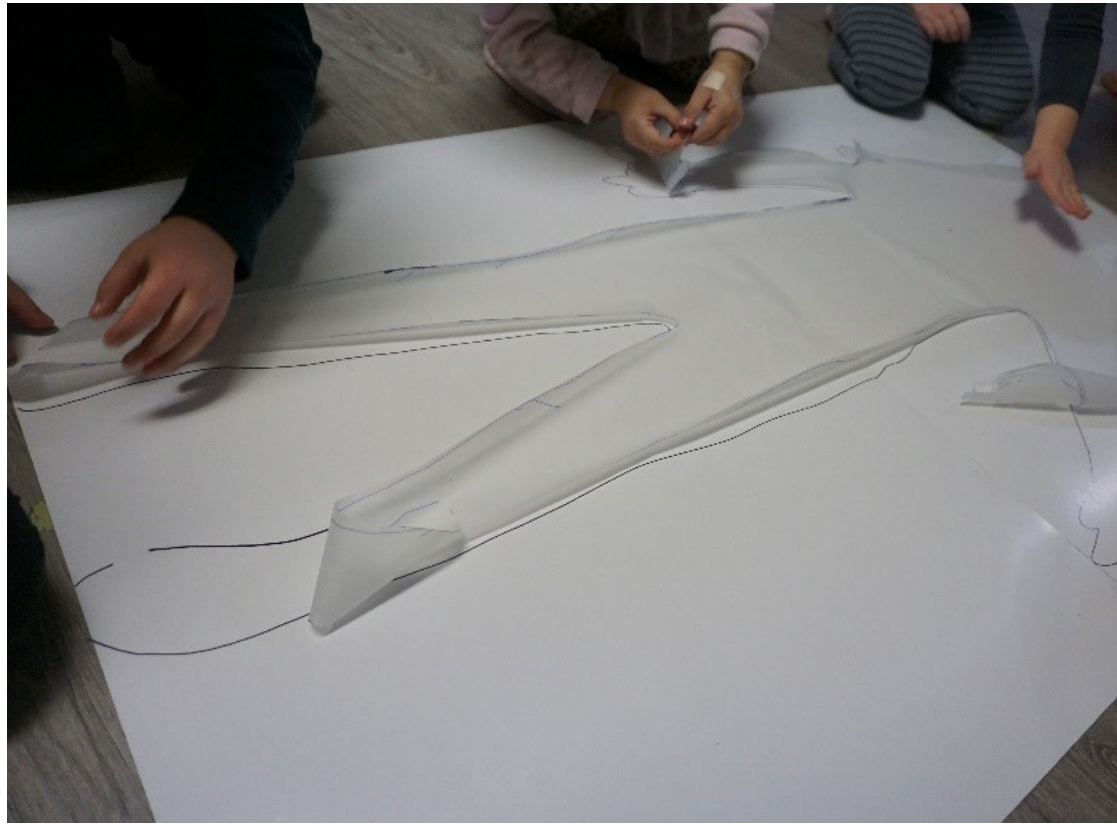
“What colour are our bones on the inside?”



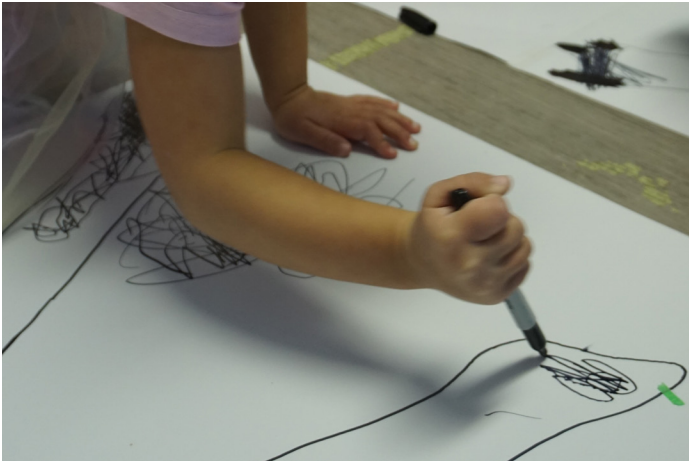




*“My head is starting
to get old.”*



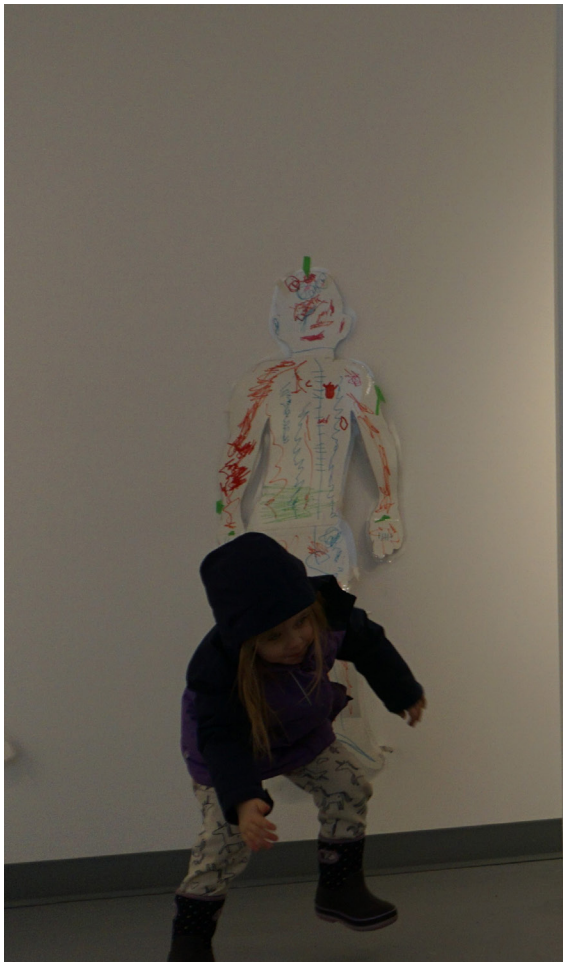
*“No, no, no!
This is me!
That’s my body. I’m a people.”*















References

- Gatens, M. (1996), *Imaginary bodies: ethics, power and corporeality*. Routledge, London, p.110.
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Early Childhood
Pedagogy Network

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