

A Postsecondary Institution Pedagogist's Reflection on Common Worlds Pedagogies: The space between

Authored By: Karen Liska

Category: Blog / Postsecondary Institution

Tags: curriculum, developmentalism, discourse, educator,
pedagogy, pedagogist

url: <https://www.ecpn.ca/blog/postsecondary-institution/postsecondary-institution-pedagogists-reflection-common-worlds-pedagogies-space-between>



Photo Credit: Sylvia Kind, Atelierista

On September 25th 2020 at 7pm I eagerly logged on to the [North Shore Conference: Keynote presentation](#) *Common Worlds Research Collective* with panelists Drs. Affrica Taylor, Mindy Blaise, and Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, and moderated by Dr. Kathleen Kummen. Over 300 participants from around the world had joined to be part of this event. As I read greetings from participants being typed in a rolling chat, I recognized some familiar names of people whose work I had recently read and explored with my faculty team. I felt honoured and humbled to be in such knowledgeable company and was curious about what this offering might bring for my work as a postsecondary institution stream faculty pedagogist and instructor. Throughout the evening a question kept returning to my mind about how I might engage students and educator teams with what I was hearing, and how I might bring this common worlds pedagogy conversation back to my practicum and theory courses. It is this question that I think with in this blog post, after providing a brief overview of what I took away from the keynote presentation.

The evening began with an acknowledgement of the enduring impacts of colonialism and an introduction to the speakers. An overview of the [Common Worlds Research Collective](#) pedagogical project was introduced by Dr. Kummen, who summarized the project as “a commitment to exposing and challenging education’s complicity with modernity’s larger project of colonizing minds, people, and lands. [It] ... experiment[s] with practical ways of articulating feminist, more-than-human common world ethics into grounded modes of collaborative learning with the world, not only just about it.”

Offering a notion of collaborative learning within the world, Dr. Taylor noted that “the sky, the air we breathe, the water, everything about the world we live in, is something common to all beings on earth.” Dr. Taylor reminded us that “we do not just live in a society, but we live in a world” and within this world, we share complex relations with others, including living plants, animals, materials, and lands. The common elements in the world and the spaces shared between all these other nonhuman entities connect us to one another. We are positioned, thus, to think with and make meaning *with* these others. We interact and engage in reciprocal

relationships where knowledge and experiences of kinship are cocreated in the spaces between humans and nonhuman others (Haraway, 2016).

The panelists problematized how in early childhood education the focus is primarily on sociocultural contexts of human-to-human interactions, which, in the process, ignores or minimizes other relationships and other beings within a more-than-human common world. One of the ways the Common Worlds Research Collective works to pay attention to a more-than-human commons, Dr. Pacini-Ketchabaw noted, is to challenge the dominant hold humanistic discourses of child development/developmentalism have on early childhood education.

From a Common Worlds orientation, attending to more-than-human relations cannot be separated from the everydayness we inhabit. The panelists cautioned against the seductions of attributing agency or anthropomorphic qualities to more-than-human relations. Dr. Pacini-Ketchabaw offered [an example](#) to illustrate this point. Importantly, she reminded participants that agency can be found in the interactions in the space between human and nonhuman entities or materials.

Reflecting on my role as an early childhood education and care instructor and questioning what happens when we focus our course work and practicum observational practices or assignments solely on the child and their individual development, I am starting to recognize how much of the language used in early childhood education focuses on children as social actors who are either shaping or are shaped by primarily other human subjects.

In my work as an early childhood education and care instructor and educator, I often understood and lived the role of educators as encouraging children to be more agentic, using words focused on independence, autonomy, and the individual. My word choices with students and educators, and in course work and assignments, all perpetuated this human-only narrative and dominant discourse.

In my new role as a faculty pedagogist with the Early Childhood Pedagogy Network, I want to think with how we might design early childhood education programs and curriculum experiences that are not limited to sociocultural theories, such as predominantly focusing on how children learn through social interactions with other humans. How might this notion of agency in the space between all—human and nonhuman—relations help us to think with a more collective orientation and engage us in respectful and reciprocal interactions with all others?

I am beginning to recognize and appreciate how my pedagogical lens and language are shifting away from a focus on children's agency. I am pausing to consider and attend to the context, inherent histories, and other relations present in any moment. This pause to step into the space between is where the opportunities exist for other happenings to emerge within a more-than-human world. Drawing back to my original question from the beginning of the post, I desire to

think more with this pause, when we do deeply connect with others *and* with the world around us.

As the session came to a close, I walked away with a transformed sense of purpose and curiosity to consider alternative ways of thinking and being with children, students, and educator teams. Now, four months after the Northshore Conference, the question raised at the beginning of this post continues to resonate. I was brought to ponder the enactment of child-centeredness and the discourses of agency within the courses I teach and my conversations with educators. I still wonder about how my own use of language and the texts and assignments offered to students contribute to maintaining human exceptionalism or child-centeredness as the sole way of understanding agency. I also am beginning to attend to how I might orient students to pay attention to more-than-human interactions as I encourage students to slow down, be vulnerable, and be with the world differently.

I will continue to think with the offerings from Drs. Taylor, Blaise, Pacini-Ketchabaw, and Kummen about a common worlds orientation and the ways we as educators, instructors, and pedagogists can engage in dialogue about how we can live well in the spaces between.

For further reading:

Pacini-Ketchabaw, P. (2016). *Encounters with materials in early childhood education*. Routledge.
Taylor, A. (2013). *Reconfiguring the natures of childhood*. Routledge.

References

Common Worlds Research Collective. (2020). *About the collective*.
<http://commonworlds.net/about-the-collective/>

Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press. doi:10.1215/9780822373780