

Worldmaking With Children, Place and the More-Than-Human: Making Sanctuary in Complex Times

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Abstract

This article explores worldmaking as a pedagogical and ontological process through a long-term, arts-based inquiry with a kindergarten community on Dja Dja Wurrung Country, in Bendigo, Australia. Drawing on walking, mapping, and creative mark-making events, this project foregrounds children's capacities to generate culture, co-create knowledge, and propose ways of being-with Place (Country et al, 2016; Haraway, 2016; Nxumalo, 2019). Working to disrupt dominant narratives in early childhood education that often position children as vulnerable and in need of training and future-readiness, as well as counter-narratives that can portray children as objects of purity and innocence, this research turns us toward the notion of sanctuary (Akomolafe, 2016,) or children's worlds of hope generated with Place amidst extraction, waste, and an escalating climate crisis (Jobb, 2023, 2025; Tsing, 2015). This orientation invited educators to attend to how values, relations, and responsibilities are enacted by (re)conceptualising the kindergarten philosophy as a living curricular lens. Through stories of practice, including encounters with Frank the wild lizard, a construction site, and the emergence of specific imagery in a collective artwork, this work positions Place [and materials] as a pedagogical contact zone (Hamm & Boucher, 2017). The project contributes to postqualitative research-creation methodologies by showing how arts-based processes generate openings for belonging, reciprocity, and transformation, attuning educators and children to Country through everyday worlding practices. We wonder: How might we live-with children as active worldmakers in times of ongoing colonial and ecological disruption? And, How might we make (and find) sanctuary as home in an imperfect world?

Keywords: worldmaking; sanctuary; contact zones; mapping-with; early childhood

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Djaara people of the Kulin Nation on whose Country this project takes place. We acknowledge Elders, leaders, children and families as knowledge holders in community, and we recognise Djaara as having a continuous connection to the land, sky and waters of Country. Sovereignty has never been ceded. As education professionals, it is our obligation to attend to, care for, and learn with Country as our everyday practice.

Introduction

This paper presents a practice-based inquiry into how walking, mapping, and engaging with materials, particularly paper, can transform ways of thinking in early childhood education. Drawing on established connections with a kindergarten community, the inquiry shows children¹, teachers², and researchers co-creating curriculum when moving through local sites such as an art gallery, suburban streets, and a construction zone, responding to Place³ and the more-than-human. The inquiry unfolded in tandem with the kindergarten's fiftieth anniversary year and builds on a multi-year tradition of neighborhood walks that connect children to the world beyond the classroom. The reconceptualized kindergarten philosophy functions as the living lens through which curriculum is enacted, guiding the pedagogical intentions and the unfolding inquiry.

In this project, children and educators walked together through familiar local places as sites of experimental, dynamic learning encounters. Children documented these walks through mapping and artmaking, telling stories of their surroundings and attending to layered histories of Country, community, and the ongoing effects of colonization (Jobb, 2023, 2025). Through collective conversations and drawings, children encountered Place as a complex living assemblage, where learning emerged through co-collaborative, iterative practices shaped by human and more-than-human relations (Nxumalo & Rubin, 2018; Nxumalo, 2019). Weather, stories, materials, and non-human presences actively participated in shaping the inquiry, while arts-based processes offered forms of (re)mapping that foregrounded the vitality of objects (Bennett, 2020), creatures, and ideas as co-researchers.

The arts-based work unfolded over a number of months and multiple visits to the kindergarten, including walking in the neighborhood and working with materials in the classroom and yard. Children worked primarily with large-scale paper, graphite, markers, and watercolors, culminating in a public exhibition to showcase their collective visual research, alongside a large map-like artwork tracing their daily walking routes.

Rather than offering a replicable model, this chapter provides situated examples and theoretical insights into how children's encounters with Place generate ethical, ecological, and speculative forms of learning. It offers provocations for cultivating curriculum as a living, relational process shaped with and by the world, and troubles Euro-Western research traditions that extract children from their worlds (Hackett, 2021; Murriss et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2021). The thinking we offer in this paper embraces ambiguous and emergent methods. These methods of inquiry are speculative proposals-with children (Nxumalo et al., 2018; Stengers, 2005; Taylor et al., 2021) and are conceptualised as worldmaking (Koenig et al., 2024) encounters. Worldmaking is understood here as a relational, material, and collective process through which worlds are continually composed and reconfigured in practice (Haraway, 2016; Manning, 2016; Tsing, 2015). These encounters position children as active citizens of the now (Rinaldi,

¹ The children in this inquiry are a dynamic group of three and four-year-olds attending a kindergarten on Dja Dja Wurrung Country in regional Victoria, Australia. All names are pseudonyms, and the research was conducted with informed consent from the children, families and the kindergarten community, attending to ethical practices of relational, arts-based inquiry

² We recognize the kindergarten teaching team for their openness, courage, and willingness to be coached through a slow pedagogical process. Their trust in emergent practice and commitment to renewing the kindergarten philosophy as a living, relational process was central to the unfolding of this work over time.

³ In this article, certain words are capitalized, such as *Place* and *Country*. This is an intentional decision to recognize these words as living concepts with depth, history, and agency. In this text, *Place* is not only a location or backdrop for the project; it is a relational field of stories, histories, and more-than-human presences that shape how we live, learn, and become. Likewise, in many First Nations scholarly traditions, *Country* is capitalized to acknowledge a lively, storied concept integral to community, identity, culture and knowledge (Coff, 2021; Rose & Bates, 1996; Watts, 2013; Yunkaporta, 2019). By capitalizing these terms, we invite the reader to meet them with respect, attention, and attune to the theoretical significance they carry.

2021; Iorio et al., 2022), composing culture and worlds through collaborations with the more-than-human.

Situating Context/s

I, Kelly, a settler living on Dja Dja Wurrung Country, otherwise known as Bendigo, Australia, began working, walking, and thinking artfully with the kindergarten teachers and children in 2022 as a pedagogical leadership coach, supporting the teaching team to rethink their practice through contemporary theories and critically reflective dialogue. Alongside Kelly, I, Angela, also a settler woman living on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Country in Naarm (Melbourne), joined the project as a fellow materials scholar and critical friend. We enter this inquiry “in the middle” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 25) as early childhood scholars and pedagogical companions whose research is shaped through ongoing relations with educators, children, Place, theories, and material inquiry.

This project takes place on “upside-down Country,” a term used by Djaara, the First Nations custodians (Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, n.d.), to describe Country that has been turned over and reshaped by extraction during the feverish and damaging gold rush of the 1800s. First discovered as alluvial deposits in 1850, extraction peaked in the 1880s and so much gold was removed from the area that Bendigo was, for a time, the richest city in the world (Central Deborah Gold Mine, n.d.).

Referring to Bendigo as “upside down” Country is what Tsing (2015) would describe as a “blasted landscape” —a site of ecological disturbance, ruin, and uneven survival that continues to bear the material and historical traces of colonial extraction. Expanding on this concept, Jobb (2023, 2025) takes up blasted landscapes as pedagogical sites, attending to how children and educators encounter and learn-with these damaged yet generative places. For us, the pedagogical proposals of what we are all in the middle of on Dja Dja Wurrung Country orient us with the notion of contact zones (Haraway, 2016; Tsing, 2015) as charged spaces where species, histories, materials, and meanings collide.

Hamm and Boucher (2017) extend this thinking into early childhood by proposing Place [and materials] as a pedagogical contact zone: a relational field charged with more-than-human entanglements, where children, educators, materials, land, and histories meet in ways that resist neat narratives or linear outcomes. Attending to Place as a pedagogical contact zone, significantly shifts how teaching and learning is framed and demands the kindergarten philosophy be (re)thought and (re)newed to reflect pedagogical movement as staff open to complexity in their everyday practice.

Groundwork / Philosophy as Living Document

Following the contextual grounding on Dja Dja Wurrung Country, the work already enacted by the teaching team, with the guidance of Kelly, was a slow and tentative (re)conceptualization of the kindergarten philosophy, which had not been refreshed or critically revisited for many years. The teachers were initially anxious about making changes due to strongly held practice traditions and a sense that altering the document might mean breaking from the familiar or the secure. They feared they might ‘ruin’ what they already had in their current philosophy and its links to traditional and founding educational theorists such as Vygotsky, Piaget, and Bronfenbrenner.

However, by introducing reconceptualist, posthuman, and new-materialist theories (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2020; Haraway, 2016; Manning, 2016; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015; Nxumalo, 2019), alongside arts-based inquiry processes with children, the teachers became more critically reflective and able to disrupt the philosophy document and the pedagogical assumptions embedded within it. Through iterative cycles of practice and reflection, educators dissected these assumptions to rewrite the philosophy as a

pedagogical lens for shared orientations toward children, Place, and more-than-human relations. Over time, this process generated deep shifts in thinking, and the team now expresses great pride in the pedagogical movement their renewed philosophy has enabled. Far from the original version filled with generic references to educational theorists and sweeping statements about ‘allowing’ or ‘giving’ children certain experiences, the new statement now functions as a living dialogue with, and for, the kindergarten community. It begins:

Our Kindergarten is a gathering of children, families and educators who support a strong connection with Place. Through a culture of research and inquiry, we cultivate a love of learning and a sense of wonder for all. Children are supported and celebrated as active citizens of the world. We listen. We story our world together through empowered voices, and we come to know and care for our place on Country...

The kindergarten philosophy continues to emerge with us as we move through the community, walking-with Place and attuning to the layered complexities of human and more-than-human relations (Jobb, 2023). As Erin Manning writes, “philosophical theory is itself a practice... a practice of concepts... to be judged in light of the other practices with which it interferes” (2015, p. 54). The refreshed document is lively, open-ended, and responsive to context, yet also unruly and provisional as it also holds space for tension and uncertainty. The (re)conceptualized philosophy guided how inquiry unfolded, moving within and through the research as a generative statement that produced pedagogical questions and curriculum responses in real time.

Methodology (Research-Creation)

Our thinking-doings are grounded in research-creation (Manning, 2015, 2016, an approach that troubles fixed distinctions between theory and practice and refuses the certainty of pre-determined outcomes. Research-creation takes up the Deleuzian ‘middle’ (1988) by attending to ongoing movements where thought and practice are inseparable. In this inquiry, we wonder and wander in collaboration with people, Place, and the more-than-human, composing pedagogical life as an unfolding relation rather than a series of planned interventions.

Our methods are intentionally ambiguous, processual, and speculative, designed to remain sensitive to emergent proposals-with children. The research is therefore not about producing data to be interpreted later, but about being in conversation with a world thinking alongside. The ‘data’ are not inert but active and lively, living-with us throughout the process. Following Lenz Taguchi’s (2009) provocation to work against the theory/practice divide, we join flows of practice that are already alive and responsive. Manning (2015) draws on Deleuzian philosophy, to frame research as a practice that thinks, thus, generating theory through the act of *doing* as research-creation. Following Bayo Akomolafé (2021), we understand ‘doing research’ as a slow philosophy of attunement, and that “the times are urgent; we must slow down and listen deeply” as an invitation to dwell in the uncertainties that open when we resist rushing toward solutions to ‘find our way’. Akomolafé’s notion of sanctuary (2016) resonates with our work: rather than seeking to fix the world, we stay with its textures and allow ourselves to be changed by what we encounter. Slowing down and becoming-with the more-than-human invites knowledge to emerge through relationships of reciprocity, discomfort, and wonder.

Methods (Walking-With; Drawing-With; Mapping-With)

Building on this orientation, our central methods of walking, drawing, and mapping, were relational and embodied acts of gathering. The kindergarten has a long tradition of neighborhood walks, which we (re)activated with renewed intention: to experience the local environment through intentional connection with people, places, and the more-than-human community surrounding the kindergarten. These walks became sites of embodied learning where attention shifted from *what* to look at, to *how* to notice and be noticed by the world.

Drawing became our central mode of thinking-with and through ideas. In this inquiry, drawing was both/and, representational and relational, where traces of movement-with children, wind, soil, and conversation were composed alongside imagery of houses, trees and a wild lizard named Frank. We orient this both/and thinking through Anderson and Harrison's (2010) description of the 'world' as "a context or background against which particular things show up and take on significance: a mobile but more or less stable ensemble of practices, involvements, relations, capacities, tendencies and affordances" (p. 8). This description gives us some openings into what might 'show up' at any given time-with children, however we contest the notion of 'background', as we conceive our encounters on neighborhood walks and in the kindergarten yard as moving assemblages of practice in relation.

Haraway (2016) reminds us that "it matters what matters we use to think other matters with...what knots knot knots...what descriptions describe descriptions" (p. 12) which urges attentiveness to the relations through which meaning is generated. We extend her provocation with: what walks walk walks, what drawings draw drawings, what sights cite sites⁴? These playful (re)phrasings invite teachers to notice how thinking, walking, drawing are co-constituted acts that make, as well as describe the world.

These are entanglements where theory and method are not sequential but simultaneous, and each walk, drawing, and map becomes a speculative gesture toward worldmaking. Our framework remained open to emergence, unfolding through affective, material, non-linear, and arts-based encounters where pedagogy and research were co-composed with the complex ecologies, histories, and materialities of Dja Dja Wurrung Country. The terrain of inquiry was shaped as much by pedagogical curiosity as by the land's own responses; the shifting weather, the uneven ground of mining scars, and the stories that surfaced through children's drawings. Such work is necessarily messy, slow, and sometimes uncomfortable.

Over time, trust in each other, the teachers and children, and in Place itself enabled discomfort to dwell productively in the not-knowing, transforming uncertainty into a site of collective learning. Emergent practice demands courage: the courage to let the world research itself through and with us and to let meaning unfold beyond human control. Our focus thus shifted from extracting meaning to *becoming-with* (Haraway 2016, 2023) the forces that shape what comes to matter, meaning that children, educators, materials, and Place are understood as co-emerging within shared pedagogical worlds. This ethical and ontological stance demanded attentiveness to the physicality of stolen land and the colonial histories that continue to shape the kindergarten's everyday world. To walk, draw, and map here is to walk upon remembered pasts and unfolding presents as a continual negotiation of presence and responsibility on Country. Through these practices, children led, wandered, and doubled back. As local places gained new meaning through

⁴ Drawing on Coleman's (2021) "site, cite, sight" framing where meaning is made across places, visual encounters, and practices of attribution/curation, our work uses the concept as a heuristic and additional provocation for thinking-with Haraway's original playful linguistics.

their inclusion on hand-drawn maps, children generated speculative proposals for learning *with and in* multiple worlds.

Worldmaking/Worlding

In *Transgressive Knowing: Lying Down with the Trouble*, Koenig et al. (2024) describe world-making (or worlding) [as] an active ontological process. “The notion of world-making reminds us that we are in a constant state of becoming as we bring forth worlds of action and meaning. We are, all of us living beings, engaged in world making (p. 218).” This view positions worldmaking as a continual, generative, dynamic process shared with materials, weather, and land. As non-Indigenous teacher-researchers walking respectfully alongside First Nations’ worldviews, we recognize the liveliness and agency of Country. Anishinaabe scholar Vanessa Watts (2013) reminds us that “the land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts” (p. 21). Similarly, Yorta Yorta scholar Kath Coff (2021) invites us to attune to the blurred boundaries between human and nature, reminding us that “things are not animate and inanimate; rather, everything is more or less animate” (p. 195).

Through this lens of Place and Country as active, conceptual, and sentient, we engage-with learning environments not as co-participants in the making of worlds. The Common Worlds Research Collective (n.d.) elaborates this relational stance in saying, “we are not the only makers and shapers of our ‘one world’; rather, multiple worlds are made and remade with multiple non-human others” (n.d., para. 2). Here, Akomolafe’s (2017) concept of cracks becomes crucial. These cracks signal interruptions in the smooth, linear surfaces of certainty, and are the fractures where dominant narratives of early childhood education loosen and something unexpected begins to shine through. Rather than failures to be repaired, these cracks are sites of potential; places where multiplicity and possibility can take root, and children, educators, and materials might co-compose dynamic, relational encounters. Cracks are speculative pedagogical acts that invite storying *otherwise* and open toward worlds that are plural, layered, and in-the-making.

Contexts for World-making

The children and families of the kindergarten are deeply entangled with colonial histories of the area, where mining activities continue and the city proudly declares itself ‘Built on Gold’. Some parents work in the region’s last remaining gold mine and traces of this history surface in the children’s play. Children can be found digging for gold under rocks in the yard, or reenacting local mining lore. Teachers extend this curiosity by ‘planting’ small gold-painted rocks for children to find, and by sharing songs and dances that recall mining folk lore and imagine the deep hand dug tunnels running underground.

This is land layered with ancestral, ecological, and historical relations. For example, the kindergarten is located in a neighborhood of large colonial-era homes and tree-lined streets funded by gold extraction. Situated along the continuation of the main street, with its grand municipal and commercial buildings, the children’s everyday environment is framed by a gallery and theatre precinct, historic bank facades, and Victorian red-brick architecture adorned with iron lacework. From the kindergarten, the street rises gently uphill where mansions, once built by wealthy merchants and mine owners, claim the high ground. This well-established landscape, with mature gardens and abundant birdlife, offers a continuously shifting experience of seasonal change and everyday noticing.

Children encounter the daily happenings and layers of their neighborhood; the textured patterns on tree trunks (see Figures 1 & 2), the hum of construction work, the house with free lemons, a white fence where they pause to make shadow puppets (see Figure 3), the barking dogs, and a pair of magpies that always seem to follow alongside. These streets

are dynamic places of experimental, artful practices that nurture complexity in learning. In dialogue with Djaara perspectives, we turn to stories of practice where worldmaking was enacted to consider: *What becomes possible when children and materials collaborate to gather, respond to and embody stories of Place?* And *How do teachers respond pedagogically-with children within layered complexities so present in their everyday practice?*

Figure 1. Encounters with trunk



Figure 2. Drawing with bark



Figure 3. Shadowing-with fence



Note. All photographs in this article are by Kelly Boucher unless stated otherwise.

Making Sanctuary in the Contact Zone

In this research context, mapping was not only a representational act but a relational practice, drawing together complex threads through which pedagogical uncertainties emerge and reveal a messy, layered picture of children composing worlds within the ongoing legacies of capitalist resource extraction (Nxumalo et al., 2018). Within this entangled terrain, we are drawn to *making* sanctuary as a slow, indeterminate space that resists fixing or smoothing out complexity, and instead invites deeper attunement to the world's lively textures. Sanctuary becomes a practice of (re)worlding from within, where educators dwell with pedagogical tension, friction, and uncertainty in the contact zone, and linger within unresolved spaces of educational life. In a climate marked by ecological instability, social fragmentation, and accelerating change, sanctuary emerges as a pedagogical and ethical gesture that calls educators to slow down, reclaim responsiveness and reciprocity, and be transformed by what cannot be controlled –by keeping learning alive to the world's complexity rather than protected from it.

'X' Marks The Spot

Mapping is a captivating, complex practice to engage in with children. While mapping often occurs in kinder spaces as an unquestioned practice, it has a problematic history that deserves interrogation, particularly while living on stolen land. Mapping carries national and global legacies of theft and conquest. The aerial perspectives of maps highlight borders and natural resources, such as property lines, groundwater sources, and mineral deposits. Although conventional mapping objectifies Place for settler-colonial practices of land dispossession and resource extraction, in our mapping-with process, we notice, as Poelina et al. remind us, “that places – rivers, forests, parks and gardens –have agency and are alive with energy and spirit” (2023, p. 1). Further, we witness agentive objects, things, creatures, ideas, stories, weather, and more as alive and eager to

participate in mapping, through being depicted by the children or showing up in their own way. Consequently, the children’s mapping of their kindergarten and community carries vestiges of representational thinking (X marks the spot), but also disrupts colonial representational mapping through its layered, relational cartographies. These drawings portray multifaceted and entangled relations with the kindergarten and important local sites such as the art gallery and the corner café (see Figures 4 & 5). Also present, and vibrantly so, are trees, wind, understandings, discussions, stories, and the kindergarten philosophy, all of which are shaping how mapping unfolds.

Figure 4. Drawing of the Bendigo Art Gallery (middle bottom).

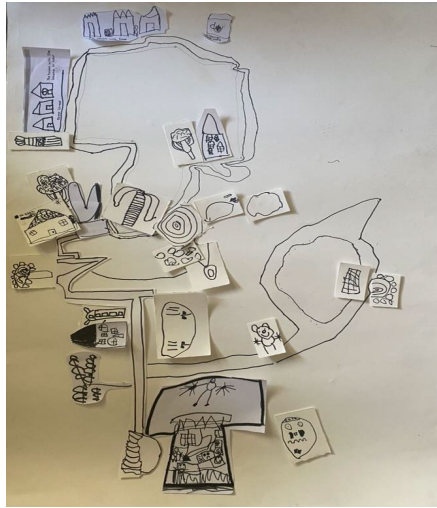


Figure 5. Placing the Corner Café on the map.



Here, we tentatively propose that the maps are representational, but not only. The “X” of the treasure maps, for these children, marks the spot of a buried treasure that carries with it tremendous implications and multi-layered histories. When these children mark an X on a map, they are not merely signifying the presence of buried treasure, they are pulling together tangled threads and creating something that has never existed before: a collective, *polyphonic story* (Molloy Murphy, 2024; Molloy Murphy et al. 2024) that can only be told in this way, in this moment. They are mapping Place-relations as a living document, and are mapping-with Place. These are cartographic inquiries that collide, crash into each other, and constantly change course. These maps are liberatory and transformative storying process that Molloy Murphy et al. (2024), explain as “taking a stance with a ‘citizenship of strangers’ to compose more equitable, care-filled, and relational ways of living, especially with young children and their families.” (2024, p. 382)

Stories From Practice (Researching in the middle) *Waiting-With Frank the Lizard.*

Frank is a blue-tongued lizard. He lives in a crevice under two large rocks in the garden and has lived at kinder for many years. Children lie tummies down across the rocks and peer over to see if he’s emerged yet. We know it’s still not quite warm enough for him to come out of hibernation, but we wonder.

We are composing our walking–drawing encounters into a large artwork, a ‘mappish’ design tracing our walk-lines around the neighborhood. Pavement, trees, and houses appear, as well as significant stops along each route: the corner café, the house with the lemons. Kinder is here too, drawn with a heart-shaped roof, and Frank’s rocks, of course (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 Frank's rocks circling the garden.



On a day we are outside composing our map, Frank becomes the topic of conversation, and we decide he needs to be on the map too. Taking a pen and paper, Benny runs over to the rocks to draw a picture of Frank with Frank. Moments later Benny yells, “Frank’s here, he’s HERE!” We run over and peer into the crevice. Delighted, we see Frank with half of his body visible, positioned in a beam of sunlight as it streams directly between the rocks. Frank is sluggish and sleepy, clearly unbothered by our presence. The children gather quietly, happy to see their friend again. Benny’s careful marks on paper form an image of Frank, which he leaves on the bench beside him in the sun – a gift of Frank for Frank (see Figure 7). These are multispecies, care-full relations, acts of reciprocity that belong to the slow rhythm of the everyday (see Figure 8).

Figure 7 Drawing Frank, for Frank.

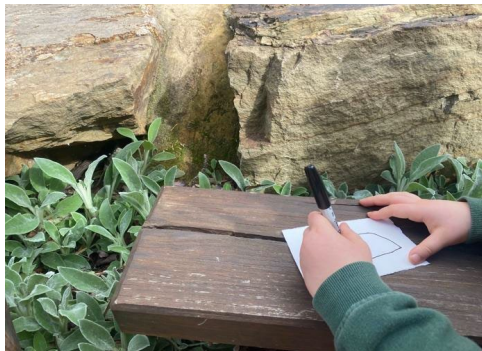


Figure 8 Being with Frank.



Frank the Lizard and the Practice of Linger

Frank shows us that not all presences perform. He doesn't emerge on cue. He teaches the children to wait, to be still, and to look differently. Frank's body, basking in the sun, becomes a pause in the day's rhythm that alters the atmosphere of the group. When Benny offers his drawing to Frank, it is not a gift *about* but a gift *with* – a gesture of

relation that does not require a response and is not mediated by adult curriculum or intentional teaching agendas.

In this encounter, the children’s slow attention and gentle witnessing become an embodied practice of sanctuary: a moment of lingering, of being-with what is already there. To linger-with Frank is to accept the uncertainty of timing, to surrender control and attend to the world’s quiet invitations. Here, children are active citizens of *their* now (Rinaldi, 2021; Iorio et al., 2022), worldmakers who show us how learning might unfold through patience, reciprocity, and attunement rather than instruction. Waiting-with Frank models sanctuary-as-attunement, re-pacing the day and re-framing curriculum-as-relation.

Construction Walk (Contact Zone)

We approach the construction site. The word Djandak⁵ (Dja Dja Wurrung Country) is prominent on a banner stretched across the fence. This is a restoration and regeneration project, a huge-scale dig-out and remake of land once mined, now being remade. Children eye the piles of dirt located inside the barrier... “They’d be so fun to play on!” (see Figure 9). We walk on, captivated by the digger zooming up and down along the fence beside us. The driver beeps as he scoops up gravel from the pile, whizzing around and zooming off again. Children squeal in delight and come to a stop, spreading out along the pavement. Here, the act of walking is a meeting place where curriculum collides with mining histories, dust, wind, and the everyday labor of neighbors. This is not an excursion about the construction site; it is curriculum made with it. The ground beneath our feet holds the memory of extraction, while the air, filled with grit and sound, calls us into relation with the ongoing reshaping of Country.

I unfurl meters of soft Chinese calligraphy paper⁶. It’s light and unruly in the breeze. We contain it with our bodies, and children draw furiously as the digger moves beside us. Sharpies absorb into the soft paper fibers, and the wind makes its own contribution, slight movements that turn drawn lines into wobbles and dots. There are no instructions. Immediately, children draw maps of the route we’ve taken from kinder. There are diggers, machinery, and maps of the dam with carefully placed rocks drawn around the edges. The bitumen pavement leaves its own marks here too (see Figures 10 & 11). Paper receives impressions as do knees, shins, thighs, and elbows. Leaves and rocks are carefully composed onto the paper, joining the sharpie lines. Country is on top, underneath, and on us. This is a flurry. Children are completely absorbed. The digger zooms by in a cloud of dust.

Figure 9. Eyeing off the dirt piles!

Figure 10. Drawing with bitumen pavement

Figure 11 Multi-meter drawing-with construction site



⁵ Djandak is a cultural enterprise run by the Dja Dja Wurrung Traditional Owners of Central Victoria to support the economic development of Djaara through project consultation, advisory and co-design that honours Country in land and resource management across the region. <https://djandak.com.au/>

⁶ This was an intentional material choice, informed by Bendigo’s significant history of Chinese miners and the ongoing cultural recognition and celebration of this heritage throughout the city.

Through these embodied acts, the kindergarten philosophy becomes visible in motion, its principles of listening, storying, and caring for Place enacted in the open. The Djandak banner stands as a marker of the regeneration project and a reminder that the curriculum itself is being remade as a living practice, responsive to the forces and stories of the land.

Emerging-with Wedge-Tailed Eagle

Our papery artworks are being created with children across the kinder in different groups. Paper travels into each room and out into the yard collecting marks and traces of movements. Graphite sticks, watercolor and sharpies build up rich layers of marks across multiple sessions (see Figures 12, 13 & 14). One afternoon when photographing this work-in-progress, I, Kelly noticed a bird-like image emerging from the drawings –it looks like a wedge-tailed eagle! (see Figures 15 & 16) The wedge-tailed eagle is an important cultural symbol on Dja Dja Wurrung Country, and it was an affecting moment. With a sharp intake of breath and a heart flutter, I paused, nervous/excited.

Figure 12 Children's initial graphite lines.



Figure 13 Multiple materials are layering on



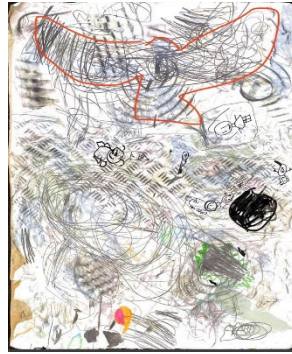
Figure 14 Layering with Place & texture.



Figure 15 Image captured when photographing the artwork.



Figure 16 An eagle appears.



There has been multiple ideas converging in this project, a confluence that speaks to the living pulse of the kindergarten philosophy, which continues to move-with and shape our collective inquiry. During planning sessions, many of the elements we have intended to propose to children (and observe how they might take them up), have miraculously appeared-with children before we even voiced the proposals. For example, as we

discussed connecting with the local First Nations concept of the *layers of Country*⁷ (https://deadlystory.com/page/culture/Annual_Days/NAIDOC_Week/NAIDOC_2018/NAIDOC-week/Mandy_Nicholson), children began to story these layers in their own way through their play and drawings. Or, when we spoke about prompting children to talk about their love of being at kinder, a child created an image of “Kinder with a heart-shaped roof!” in a making session the very next day (see figures 17 & 18). It is a fascinating process, and we continue to grapple with our wonderings as teachers/researchers: “How is this happening?” It feels magical –it’s as though the ideas are traveling ahead of us and finding their own form through children’s worldmaking. Thoughts are thinking themselves, creating paths of emergence-with children.

Figure 17 Kinder with a heart-shaped roof - artwork in progress.



Figure 18 Kinder with a heart-shaped roof - artwork detail.



Perhaps this is what it means for a philosophy to be truly living; to circulate through the collective psyche, to dwell in between the planned and the spontaneous and to linger in the space where pedagogy listens back. We are humbled, perplexed and utterly delighted by these phenomena. These are reminders that the philosophy is not only guiding us, but thinking-with and through all of us as it continues to unfold. Such moments of synchronicity attune our attention to what else is moving in the field of relation, sharpening our sensitivity to the exchanges that shape this work, and the significance of being in this space of deep noticing is not lost on the teachers when, one day, a wedge-tailed eagle is seen flying above the kindergarten.

We tune into these layers and wonder if these multiple phenomena are the mind making a pattern? No, these layers of *Country* are always/already here showing us the strength and presence of culture. While colonial histories and legacies are still very present and damaging, we wonder whether the wedge-tailed eagle is showing us how we might (re)conceptualize our mapping processes. We see this as a request to (re)arrange dominant colonial narratives on mapping and Place relations and tune into *Country* as multi-layered, generative and present-with us in our everyday lives. In a group discussion with children about the artwork, we ask: “What can you see...?” to which someone responds, “I can see wind...” We wonder: Where does wind come from? Do birds make the ‘invisible’ movements of sky as they flap their wings above?

⁷ Dr. Mandy Nicholson (Wurundjeri, Dja Dja Wurrung and Ngurai Illam Wurrung) describes *Country* as having six interconnected layers: Below Country, On Country, Water Country, Wind Country, Sky Country, and Forest Country above the clouds (Deadly Stories, n.d., para, 12). Each layer holds spirit, story, and responsibility, showing that *Country* is alive and relational, moving through and between people, place, and time. https://deadlystory.com/page/culture/Annual_Days/NAIDOC_Week/NAIDOC_2018/NAIDOC-week/Mandy_Nicholson

Again, we turn to Kathleen Stewart's thinking as she poses, "*in any worlding we can ask how things come to matter and through what qualities, rhythms, forces, relations and movements*" (2011, p. 452) and that things hanging in the air are worth describing, both literally and metaphorically. This kind of thinking creates its own weather - a weather system of ideas. Stewart (2011) uses the term "atmospheric attunement" to describe such a phenomenon. "An atmospheric attunement is an alerted sense that something is happening and an attachment to sensing out whatever it is. It takes place within a world of some sort and it is itself a generative, compositional worlding" (p. 452). We think worlding functions as an intuitive mode of perception, an embodied alertness that transforms fleeting potentialities into tangible openings for encounter.

Atmospheric Thresholds and the Agency of Ideas

Stewart's (2011) notion of atmospheric attunement evokes a sense of breathing-with-the-world, felt in the sharp, awe-inspired intake of breath at the sight of a wedge-tailed eagle, or the flurry of children's drawing. These are ephemeral moments of co-becoming (Country et al., 2016), where ideas emerge not as fixed entities, but through weather, dust, sensation, and relational encounter. In this weather-system of ideas, we pose that breath, sensation and intuition are openings into sanctuary. These openings are moments of slowed attention and ethical responsiveness, where bodies become receptive to what the world is asking of them, without rushing to impose meaning or direction. The speculative gesture here is to pause and wait long enough for the idea to arrive. In such tentative, entangled spaces, theory does not precede experience; it gathers and produces itself through the assemblages we inhabit.

Layering-with Country

Our mapping is an assemblage of encounters, and we wonder whether the emergence of an eagle on/in our map, is theory producing its own 'atmosphere' to show us what is always/already here. In speaking of the eagles 'appearance', we do not attend to this phenomenon to surface indigenous knowledges and colonize the layers, rather, we pose this phenomenon produces 'layers of kinder', here, in Place where we are every day. By calling us into connection with what is always/already present in our everyday, we tune into the thinking fragments and stories as the 'gathering' posed in the kinder philosophy "Our kinder is a gathering of..." - a coming to know lizard, wind, movement, gold, care, friendships. A relational togetherness in/with Place. If atmospheric thresholds offer openings into the speculative and intuitive force of ideas, then mapping-with Country invites us to trace how these ideas stir up, sediment, and settle as layered presences, gathering meaning through Place-based encounters and ontological relation. The thinking/doing processes we are traveling-with throughout this project are not pedagogy-as-performance, but pedagogy-as-presence. In our slow pace, we are refusing to rush through what we see as a 'joyful discomfort' Here alongside our 'pedagogy (in)tension', we are excited and humbled by phenomena that are unexplained and not knowable to us as non-indigenous scholars.

Emergence as (Un)settling / (Un)raveling

The thresholds of not-knowing that arise through pedagogical tensions and even failures, prepare the ground for emergence –the moments when the world gestures back and refuses to be simplified into meaning. Emergence reveals the potential that resides within the limits of our knowing. As Haraway (2016) reminds us, our task is not to restore order but to *stay with the trouble* - to become wide, to be undone together. It is here, at the edges of certainty and control, that sanctuary and worldmaking converge.

We experienced this undoing most vividly when an unexpected, yet welcomed image emerged in our collective artwork (see Figures 12 - 16). To us, this was a pedagogical

unravelling, a moment beyond interpretation or intent, one that simply asked to be witnessed. Returning to Akomolafe's (2017) proposition that cracks are where we enter the unknown, the significance of the crack lies in its capacity to unsettle what we thought was fixed. We might describe this as a 'glitch in the matrix' perhaps, where our habitual 'seeing' softened and another way of knowing emerges. As non-indigenous scholars, we have grappled with the emergence of important symbols of Place, not as representations of a cultural stories (that are not ours to tell), but an encounter where Country's agency and spirit asserts and surges through the layered materials of children's making. This encounter, an ongoing and unsettling threshold of wings, wind, and story, reframes mapping itself as co-presence with Country –a cartography that watches back. We wonder: who is watching us draw?

There is a certain tension, or nervousness, that bubbles up regarding our interventions and our choices to hold emerging ideas in a particular way. We remind ourselves that emergent practice is not the absence of planning, but the courage to disrupt what has been taken for granted. It requires deep trust in each other, in the research process, and in Place. Within the loose enabling constraints of materials and method, (the size of paper, the types of media curated for children etc.) we are called to let the research research itself (Guattari et al., 1994; Stengers, 2015, Haraway, 2016).

We want to activate a particular pedagogical *thing* or way, yet we often resist being undone. True emergence asks us to be disrupted, to allow our work to be unfolded, refolded, or even scrunched up a bit. Here, our *middling* becomes not only a methodological gesture but an ontological sanctuary, a way to stay with what is unresolved, to listen for what has been buried beneath mullock heaps, beneath curriculum standards, beneath the push for outcomes. We stayed with the unfinished. We mapped-with. We storied-with. We walked as if walking (re)threads relations. Here, our methods of walking, drawing, and mapping are more-than-pedagogical; they are practices of inquiry that grapple with making sanctuary, and offer the fragile becomings of the *not-yet-known* (Manning, 2009).

In the shifting terrain of early childhood education, such emergent acts become slow, tentative practices of attuning to the material and affective textures of the pedagogical contact zone. It is here, within the friction and flux of the contact zone, the ethical and political stakes of pedagogy surface. As Haraway (2019) urges, we are called to make a stand for some worlds and against others (Molloy Murphy, 2021; Molloy Murphy et al., 2024), and in doing so, we echo Osberg & Biesta's call to "keep the way open" (2008, p. 325) and to remain attuned to the unfolding, the tentative, and the still-emerging.

Citizens of the Now / Conclusion/s

We recognise that the trails and traces of this project have always already been happening, and faint reverberations of it will continue indefinitely. Although the project created a significant visual outcome in the form of an exhibition (see figures 19 & 20), it is not, and will never be complete; however, we can begin to speculate on what it means and how it might matter to those involved. Through these pedagogical encounters, children have revealed themselves as producers, not consumers, of art, theory, and culture. In the act of walking-with neighborhood and materials, children and Place co-created new lines of connection, new understandings, and new relations with their local environments. They are forging relations that matter *now*, not in a distant future, as capable and contributing citizens of their places and communities (Iorio et al., 2022).

Figure 19 Exhibition installation
view 1.



Note. Photo by Jodie Parker -
M.A.D Creative Studio.

Figure 20 Exhibition installation
view 2.



Note. Photo by Jodie Parker –
M.A.D Creative Studio.

As educator–researchers, we are always present in this unfolding. Every choice and gesture shapes, and (re)shapes, the direction of the work. To collaborate with the world is to trust emergence and to ‘catch’ the unfinished wonderings that appear in the moment and let them guide us. The map of the kindergarten and its surrounding neighborhood (see figure 21) gestures toward this collective making. It is not a fixed representation but an assemblage of relations –a living document that grows through encounters, gestures, and materials (Molloy Murphy, 2020).

Figure 21. Map of completed artwork - kindergarten
and surrounding streets



Note. photo by Leon Schoots

Even though we cannot respond to/with all the children's doings, all children are present in the liveliness of Place. The walking and mapping processes continually reconfigure both the bodies-that-walk and the ecologies they walk through, like meeting new neighbors, receiving the gift of fresh lemons from a tree, or noticing wild lizards sunning on the path. This work is necessarily unsettling: how can we be settled while doing this work on stolen land? These tensions become invitations —to (re)turn, to (re)enter, to stay open when our colonial gaze drifts too far.

From this project, many insights emerge:

1. **Philosophy as curricular lens:** a methodological compass and ongoing (re)frame that guides inquiry as a living, relational process.
2. **Walking–drawing–mapping as thinking practice/s:** embodied modes of worldmaking with more-than-human others.
3. **Sanctuary as practice:** a way of staying-with uncertainty, rather than resolving it.
4. **(Re)mapping as interruption:** unsettling colonial habits of representation through attunement to Country.

These insights remind us that pedagogy is a slow art of attunement, of learning to listen differently, to sense and hold the fragile, atmospheric moments where the world gestures back. In this way, children's walking, drawing, and mapping practices become ethical and ecological acts of worldmaking, where philosophy and curriculum blur into the same living, breathing practice, and an opportunity for teaching teams to radically (re)think and (re)conceptualise philosophy-as-living practice/practise in/with the everyday moments.

Afterword: A Breath, A Drift

To hold this project, both the making of the kindergarten philosophy and all that followed, as a 'speculative container' as such is to refuse closure. It is to remain porous. Akomolafe's oeuvre reminds us that some containers are shaped to remain open, offering spaces for the world to enter and circulate. Sanctuary is the moment when we attune to the world otherwise, where micro-moments and pedagogical emergence interrupt our routines and invite us to listen-with what we have not noticed before. The connections we are being called to make here respond to how children co-create their worlds and these thresholds of not-knowing prepare the ground for emergence. This orientation invites educators to dwell with uncertainty, to attend to what gathers at the edges of perception, and notice what spills out when we try to contain our practice/s. We conclude by offering the following provocation:

If sanctuary is understood as a relational practice of becoming-with the world, what pedagogical possibilities emerge when we make sanctuary with/in the entangled, unfinished and unknown present of everyday life?

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