It Doesn't Matter Where You Start – But Where You Start Matters...

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Complicity readers are invited to “pick up” this special issue dedicated to early childhood education where they feel most drawn, circling back and forth, and/or iteratively making connections. But we hope you start here. Not because this is somehow a beginning, but because it might act as a middle that teases out emerging themes, while it resists resting at final meanings. [Sellers' work with rhizomatic analysis](#) speaks to the importance of defying beginnings and instead of working generatively with middles which might open up vocalities for seeing the complex work of children's learning.

When we first set out to assemble a special issue of *Complicity* dedicated to Early Childhood Education it seemed like both a logical and opportune idea. The last few decades have seen an increased interest in early childhood education in many spheres. Research into the growth and development of the youngest brains is burgeoning. Governments throughout the world are examining and expanding their policies and support of education for the very young (Neugebauer, 2007). Educators and practitioners are experimenting with a range of approaches and strategies and scholars are seeking to understand under how and under what conditions our youngest minds learn best. In our experience, we have noted a peculiar divide between early childhood research and practice on one side of this divide, and broader educational research more generally defined. We've seen this curious divide at both academic and practitioner levels. It seemed to us that much exciting work was happening in isolation, and

that gathering ideas and practices from these different spheres, not to combine or even contrast them but to see what dialogue might erupt, what questions might arise, was a provocative and timely project.

This increased attention to early childhood education may be partly due to the increase in research findings about robust early years experience and its many impacts, including brain development. In June, 2014 the American Academy of Pediatrics called for parents to read to their children *from birth* (O’Keefe, 2014). Internationally, early childhood education programs are now serving more and more children and families as, increasingly, parents and caregivers are working in full-time capacities, and questions of quality, transparency and accountability are becoming more rigorously interrogated (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007; (UNESCO, 2010). Governments in Canada and elsewhere have become increasingly involved in defining what makes for good quality in early childhood education; economic and political arguments and brain research seem ever to point to the necessity for exposing ever younger children to educative experiences (Franklin, McNinch & Sherman, 2013). More attention is being shed on the early years and its promise (or failure) of getting children ready for “real” school. [Evan’s paper](#) interrogates this idea of readiness, and problematizes it in the context of a study of “school-readiness” and “learning-readiness” in England.

Part of the interest in early childhood also stems from a recognition and acknowledgement of children’s rights (see e.g., Covell & Howe, 2001; UNCRC, 1991), the problematization of developmental approaches to learning (see e.g., Burman, 1994; Katz, 1996), and the seeking of alternative views of the child. A recognition that young children have much to contribute to pedagogical dialogue, and by extension to a view of children as competent co-producers of knowledge and culture, offers much to this transformation. That children have multiple ways of expression, or a *hundred languages* (Malaguzzi, 1993), is explored through [Wood’s paper on multi-literacies](#) and [Knight and Rayner’s vignette on hybridized knowledge](#). In addition to these pedagogical stances, others view early childhood education through a political lens and understand it as an opportunity to promote not only deep learning but more robust understandings of diversity, democracy and to contribute to the development of active responsible citizens (Canella, 1997; MacNaughton, 2003; Moss, 2010). Clearly, investigations of early childhood education both invite and require complexity.

Innovative pedagogical approaches are literally and conceptually transforming the landscape of the early years. Both established and emerging philosophies surrounding the education of the young child, including Reggio-inspired, Waldorf, and Montessori offer rich approaches that grapple with principles of emergence and multiple perspectives and that value the child as a competent, capable meaning maker. [Wood, Thall, and Parnell’s vignette](#) offers an example of what pedagogy can look like when seen from these rich and robust perspectives, drawing on a Reggio Emilia inspired approach (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012).

In Ontario, Canada, where we both work, one as a lead teacher or *pedagogista* at a K-12 school, and one as a professor in an Honours Bachelor Early Childhood Education Programme, we are experiencing remarkable transformations in the landscape of early childhood, reflecting these broader international changes around early childhood education and issues. Our ministry of education has recently released a number of policy documents articulating a very definite view of children, families, and educators:

We view children as competent, capable of complex thinking, curious, and rich in potential. They grow up in families with diverse social, cultural, and linguistic perspectives. Every child should feel that he or she belongs, is a valuable contributor to his or her surroundings, and deserves the opportunity to succeed. When we recognize children as capable and curious, we are more likely to deliver programs and services that value and build on their strengths and abilities. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 6)

Aligned with this articulated view of the child, a complex view of the educator as “competent and capable, curious, and rich in experience” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 7) is being explored. Interrogating impoverished views of early childhood educators’ work is not without challenges (see e.g., Fenesh, Sumsion, & Shephard, 2010; Khattar & Callaghan, 2015).

[Cumming’s paper](#) grapples with ways to consider complex relationships amongst Australian educators’ work environments and their experiences, as an entryway for thinking differently about workforce sustainability.

Increasingly there is a real interest in pedagogical documentation--a practice that engages teachers in recording, examining, interpreting, and sharing children’s actions, comments, conversation and work. This reflective practice may involve a range of data collection means including transcription of conversations, photographs, audio and video recording as well as the collection of student work samples and other artefacts. Unlike common practices where teacher gather such data to seek evidence of specific learning, correct answers and understanding or progress toward learning expectations, pedagogical documentation invites teachers instead to adopt an open stance. Through pedagogical documentation teachers seek to uncover, or “make visible” (Rinaldi, 2001) the genuine interests, theories and ideas of their students, and by extension, to reveal their own thinking about children’s learning. Teachers analyse and reflect on their recorded observations both individually and with others and revisit it frequently. Children’s ideas and theories are valued for more than their content and are understood as integral to the development of curriculum that is responsive to and grounded in an intent to make visible children’s complex thinking. [Stannard’s vignette](#) takes us inside this reflective, iterative process as she works to make meaning of one child’s actions.

Such a complex view of the child, the family and the educator is both refreshingly appealing and also necessary. There is a real need now for new language and vocabulary to trouble complacent and compliant ways of seeing the work of early childhood education, and to push libratory middles that might evoke and invoke transformation.

Both of us intuitively saw connections between the vocabulary and concerns of complexity and those of early childhood education. We did not know, but we wanted to find out what would happen when we set out to invite both scholars and teachers of early childhood education to submit papers for this special issue. What we did know was that the connection between the two fields – complexity and early childhood – has perhaps not been investigated deeply but believing that complexity theory has much to offer early childhood education and that early childhood education might just provide an opportunity to understand complexity in new and fresh ways, we sent the call out through regular channels and also to various early childhood networks in Canada, England, the United States and Australia. The call went out inviting submissions which could explore *“ways Complexity Theory invites possible lenses with which to generatively investigate Early Childhood landscapes and portraits, and ways Early Childhood*

practices can offer up living and authentic expressions of complexity in education". Our call asked for contributions from researchers and practitioners and those who responded represented a range of people interested in early childhood education and its complexities.

We received offerings from academic researchers, an early childhood educator and a parent researcher. Some were grounded firmly in theory, but others were not. And those that were not so grounded offered a voice from the field - directly from the field - not one selected, reflected and edited by a researcher or theorist. After asking those voices to join the discussion how could we refuse? What arrived in our inboxes at once surprised, pleased and challenged us, and our own complex task of finding the relationships amongst the articles began.

Excited and pleased to see such an assemblage of voices and stances, we recognized a missing piece. As much as every paper recognized and honoured the voice of the child, they were all interpretations of it. And so [we invited one more piece](#).

As the papers came together the connections, the unexplored dialogues among the papers, began to emerge for us and brought new questions, new ways of approaching this special edition. We hoped—and think found (metaphorically of course)— some order for free (Kauffman, 1993).

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Acknowledgments

Where relevant these should be provided at the end of the paper. If the paper has formerly been presented at a conference then this should also be acknowledged in this area. Palatino Linotype 9.5 point, and fully justified – no indent.

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Randa Khattar is associate head of school at Charles Sturt University, Burlington Campus, Ontario, Canada, and currently teaches in both the graduate and undergraduate programmes in the School of Teacher Education. She is attracted to the “liberating constraints” offered up by emergentist complexity and relational perspectives, and she is currently researching in the areas of ethical leadership, sustainability, and attentive listening pedagogies.

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