

Entangled Women: Markmakers, Worldmakers

Candace Gallagher



'To make a mark or trace a single line upon a surface immediately transforms that surface, energizes its neutrality; the graphic imposition turns the actual flatness of the ground into virtual space, translates its material reality into the fiction of imagination' (Rosand 2002, p.1).

Figure 1. Rosand quote from Kantrowitz, 2012, p.1 (screen shot of Kantrowitz's sketch).

I pick up my journal, carefully opening to the invitation of the next empty page. I breath in the journal's smell. The sound of the spine releasing stirs my thoughts. I run my hand along the middle, exhaling, anticipating. Each caress is a call, and ideas begin to move; they begin finding their way from heart to hand. I pick up my pencil. Not just any pencil, one that has been weighted against all others before even entering this space; not too sharp nor dull, not too heavy nor light, it's my baby bear pencil—it's just right. My mind is a swirl, entangled with thoughts, theories, questions, and reflections. To anchor the whirlwinds of my mind, I turn to markmaking to connect and remake, form and reform new worlds (Stornaiuolo, 2015). As I think with my marks, the pages transform, opening to the "visible form to ideas or perceptions that would

otherwise be hidden inside [my] brain and body” (Kantrowitz, 2012, p. 1).

This paper explores the beginnings of my continuous journey as I think about my identity as an early childhood educator, with assumptions and labels surrounding that title, resisting the wallbuilding professional and leadership hierarchies. Key to my thinking and decentering of the commonly used labels in early childhood of ‘leader’ and ‘professional’ are the human and more-than-human encounters within my journal, within my art, and around the table. As with many beginnings before, markmaking is my starting point; “emergent in a relational field, as space in which *non*-human forces are equally at play and work as constitutive factors in [educators’] learning and becomings” (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 527). Interactions occur not only between humans, but also between the more-than-human (Mustola, 2018); as Karen Barad (2007) suggests “[e]xistence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not pre-exist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating” (p. ix). I needed to look beyond the anthropocentric gaze of humans, above all other matter in reality, and instead look to more-than-human forces as an anchor to hold tight to as I set out to examine the entanglements of what be/coming an early childhood educator means for me.

To help reconcile the entanglements of my thinking, I sketch, freeing space in my mind for reflection and openness to other possibilities “[b]ecause sketches are visible they can be inspected and re-inspected, considered and reconsidered” (Tversky & Suwa, 2009, p. 76). I feel freedom to play and compose with each flick and glide of the line, mixing words and marks.

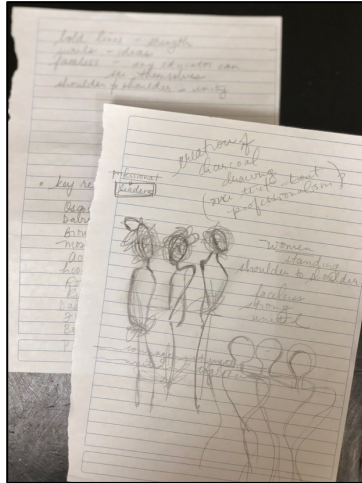


Figure 2. First sketches in journals, November 2018 (author’s photograph).

Long before the presentation at the 2019 Atlantic Education Graduate Student Conference (AEGSC), these sketches came to be/me as I began asking myself what be/coming an early childhood educator means and what worlds early childhood educators could create and live within. Over time those answers have transformed as I continue to read, have discussions with children, families, and colleagues, reflect, and, think critically about early childhood education in ways that redefine my relational responsibilities. As I reflect, I have created multiple sketches, through a variety of mark-making materials and papers, each helping to create deeper understanding. The earlier sketches support later sketches, through a repetition of mark making and tracing, oftentimes reworking and redrawing. Each piece entangled with others, supporting my interpretations, identities, and stories (Tversky & Suwa, 2009).

The most recent sketch hangs on my office wall, a grounding inspiration for times when my self-doubt is deafening. I look up to

the women standing in the sketch, seeing mentors, colleagues, friends—known and unknown. I wonder of their untold stories and of the different ways we connect. As Lee writes “humans find themselves in the midst of an open-ended swirl of extensions and supplements, changing their powers and characteristics as they pass through different assemblages” (as cited in Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 531), assemblages as collections of encounters that emerge through each new encounter in their continuous process of becoming. Educators, just as the more-than-human, emerge through and as part of their entanglements with each other because “there is ‘no-independent, self-contained existence’ in the world” (Barad, as cited in Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 531). This piece was a beacon for my contribution, *Early childhood educator leadership: An entanglement of encounters*, to the 2019 AEGSC.



Figure 3. Entangled women, charcoal and ink, January 2019 (author’s photograph).

Entangled women represent a sisterhood of ~~women~~ and their entanglements of mind, body, and spirit. *Entangled women* represent early childhood educators as worldmakers (Goodman, 1978) engaging through reflection and an openness to other possibilities; through the (re)living, (re)creating, and (re)making of new worlds from our existing (Goodman, 1978; Nicolopoulou, 1997; Stornaiuolo, 2015). When I look to *Entangled women*, I see myself there, standing with mentors, colleagues, and friends; I see *we*.

Instead of trying to fit early childhood educators into a socially constructed notion of professionalism, deeply engrained in an educational hierarchy as the term professional avoids considering many critical socio-political inequalities for early childhood educators. The term professional does not acknowledge the inequities of material, financial, educational, and supportive resources that exist between early childhood educators in child care, public school, and postsecondary school (Moss, 2006; Osgood, 2004; Rose, 2012). I look to the *Entangled women* of what *can be*; we have shifted, are brave and have risen to the challenge of critically reflecting upon the ways in which early childhood educators are positioned and how we seek to construct our identities (Brown, 2017; Osgood, 2006). *Entangled women* have embraced a role in worldmaking, forging relationships that focus on the well-being of ourselves, children, families, and colleagues while making worlds that are less cruel to so many people not equally located (Eyre, 2010).

A conception of worldmaking as a relational entanglement calls to enact a response-ability (Barad, 2012; Haraway, 2015; Lather, 2016) where agency is an enactment, and responsibility is about mutual ethical responses to power imbalances. Mutual responses to power imbalances require the ability to reflect, a commitment to questioning and debate, a capacity to value

complexities, and the courage to create and enact—openings and possibilities. When response-ability is shared, and each of us comes to the table ready to not just listen but to hear, to receive and contribute (Ahmed, 2017; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Davies, 2014; hooks, 2000) worldmaking flourishes.

Table
Our table
so much more than a piece of furniture
more than a round flat surface
holding our things
laptops
books
articles
an overflowing basket of
pens, pencils, scraps of paper and
communal gum
food
snacks and nibbles
lunch
no matter how busy, we seek each
other and lunch
coffee cups, copious cups.

Table,
holds
laughter
tears
discussion
debate
talk
chit-chat

idle and intense.

Table,
round with
ruckus
desires
curiosities
challenges
discomforts-
a seed planting discomfort
nurturing growth.

Table,
holds
fear and failure
wrapped tightly in love, generosity, and compassion
I speak to the table
when I can't speak to you
the grains of the wood hold my gaze
when I can't hold yours
the table holds my weight, my burdens
when I can't.

Table,
a space for me
all of me
a space for others who treasure
who grasp and will guard the sacredness of the table
hold the wonder and ethics of the table
Table
Our table.

(Candace Gallagher, 2020)

Coming to the recognition and appreciation of the entanglements of early childhood worldmaking was a difficult journey and can be daring to maintain as it pushes the government standardized thinking and story of neoliberalism which provides a “nurturant environment for the spread of [quality and high returns and markets] that dominate early childhood education today ... is profoundly economist, recasting everyone as economic actors ... [and] treat education as a commodity” (Moss, 2014, p. 67). This belief of high-quality measures misses what children actually can do, overlooking “in a fixation with narrowly prescribed and predetermined outcomes” (Moss, 2014, p. 22). In New Brunswick, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, for example, subscribes to this notion of quality and high returns through their administration of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and licensing inspections which are quality measurement tools of early childhood settings (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2014). This system of regulation has been created where educators are observed, assessed, and bombarded with expectations to conform or risk being judged as inadequate and unprofessional (Cannella, 2002) as inspection results are posted on public domains. Early childhood educators have to stand side by side as we foster and cultivate a counter-discourse to the notion of professionalism and the early childhood educator as professional and move focus to be one which disrupts the all too common move to position early childhood educators as “other” (Grumet, 1988; Jones & Osgood, 2007) and consider us as “less than” (Berger, 2017) in order to make space for a greater sense of worth, pride, and confidence (Ahmed, 2017; Berger, 2017; hooks, 2000).

There is a need to draw out the moments when educators have crossed lines on behalf of children, families, and colleagues,

moments educators speak against the injustices and violence we bear witness to:

It seems to me that the real political task in society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked so that one can fight them. (Foucault, 1974, p. 171 as cited in Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, p. 143)

As early childhood educators share their stories of crossing these metaphorical lines with each other, moments of listening can provoke other questions and discussions about our craft as each educator brings their own experiences, conversations, and inquiries to the forefront.

A community of support and encouragement can be developed and strengthened among early childhood educators through these shared stories (Berger, 2017); “We must learn to be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness” (Delpit, 1988, p. 297). When early childhood educators find tables at which to sit and be with others—a place where we feel and give love—those tables grow and we grow; “I want a house with a crowded table / And a place by the fire for everyone” (Carlile, Hemby, & McKenna, 2019, track 4). The table *becomes with* the educators as the educators *becomes with* the table (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010).

Even though the discomfort of sharing vulnerable stories can feel dangerous and agonizing, it is in these moments I see the *Entangled women* stand, embracing, hopeful, and knowing that transformative possibilities are born at this juncture;

Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope,

empathy, accountability, and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual loves, vulnerability is the path. (Brown, 2012, p. 34)

As an entanglement of ~~women~~, we move together as collective cultivators of communities of courage, building the strength to stand up for what we believe and “to be accountable both in word and deed” (hooks, 2000, p. 92). As worldmakers, our community is one built on a love ethic where early childhood educators “utilize all dimensions of love—care, commitment, trust, responsibility, respect, and knowledge” (hooks, 2000, p. 94). We courageously share our stories, have difficult conversations, question ourselves and each other, ask for support and guidance, and negotiate conflict as a valuable place for learning that engages with minds and not behaviour; “The foundation of courage is vulnerability – the ability to navigate uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure” (Brown, 2017, p. 144).

Entangled women, for me, makes “visible the unpredictably, creativity, and messiness of the lived experience in the classroom as a vibrant context for experimentation, rather than an attempt to mask or conceal them” (Berger, 2015, p. 138). When educators shift beyond professionalism (Moss, 2010), a term which often silences, impoverishes, and narrows debates on the broader goals of early childhood education such as democracy, diversity, and ecological survival (Khattar & Callaghan, 2015, p. 5) and instead lean towards embodying the role of worldmaking, we make space for new stories and new ways of being by naming our worlds, giving voice to our stories, our experiences, and the knowledges carried (Stornaiuolo, 2015). The ~~women~~ in this sketch have moved closer to answering the questions of how to bring the provocative and difficult conversations within thrown together communities (Comber, 2015) to a space where the diverse, sometimes conflicting points of view of children, colleagues, and families are explored reimaged

pedagogical understandings and the potential to learn and grow alongside each other is deepened (Berger, 2017).

“Entangled women” is of strong, bonded, vulnerable, ~~women~~. “Entangled women” are early childhood educators. I drew these ~~women~~ faceless intentionally, with the hope any educator would be able to see themselves within. The bold lines represent the embodied values of questions and the identity of the individual. The unitedness of arms represents trust, strength, and persistence required to share our provocative stories as we build communities with love, generosity, and empathy to disrupt neoliberal narratives dominating early childhood education (Acevedo, 2018; Jones & Osgood, 2007). This is difficult and courageous learning. The white space of the sketch offers a breathing space for women to rest their eyes and wonder how they already participate and/or can join worldmaking conversations.

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not so much a place, or a finite group of people but a way of mattering, a way of engaging with the world and of re-configuring that world as a place where self and others matter, and make a difference, to each other and with each other. (Murriss, 2016, p. 28)

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ⁱ The majority of early childhood educators are women; “education was constructed as ‘women’s work’ because domesticity, self-sacrifice, and submissiveness are to be expected from women” (Cannella, 2002, p. 153). Here, I need to note, I place the word women under erasure (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), because of the patriarchal society we live in, the category “women” encloses in a way I do not intend it to with the potential to exclude people who identify as non-binary or trans women.