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(In)visible encounters with indigeneity: a way towards decolonizing pedagogies in early childhood education

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ABSTRACT

Children's encounters with Indigeneity in public space might mislead educators into believing that young children are learning decolonizing pedagogies in educational spaces. Drawing on a critical place inquiry of young children's relationships with place, I examine how a regime of (in)visibility continues to prevent educators and children from engaging with decolonizing pedagogies. To account for regimes of (in)visibility in early childhood, I focus on tools of erasure (i.e. street naming and organization, maps, story time) and tools of illusory visibility (i.e. children's encounters with a local mural). While a settler colonial regime of (in)visibility does not erase Indigeneity completely, it obscures the damage that colonialism impinges on Indigenous communities to this day. An ongoing examination of practices in early childhood education can only move on to decolonizing pedagogies when education opens up space for imagining an Indigenous future paired with a sense of wonder and thinking otherwise among children and educators.

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Introduction: against erasure

Drawing on an urban ethnography conducted in the now settler colonial city of Vancouver, Canada, Baloy (2016) argues that **non-Indigenous assumptions about Indigenous alterity takes the form of spectacles and spectrality**. Indigeneity – understood as the identities of communities, nations, and groups with historical roots in pre-colonial societies – cannot be discussed without referring to the ongoing settler colonial project of erasure. Indigenous peoples' relationships with the land inhabited by their ancestors prior to colonization is central. Following Baloy's argument (2016), Indigeneity becomes a form of spectacle when Indigenous people's relationships to the land are portrayed only as part of their cultural identities. By reducing Indigenous relationships with the land to 'culture,' their demands for the restitution of their lands and self-determination are **erased**. Yet, as a response, Indigeneity counteracts these attempts at erasure by haunting us – settlers and non-Indigenous people – with questions about invisibility and injustice (Tuck and Ree 2016).

Based on Baloy's urban ethnography (2016), early childhood education (ECE) should inquire what children learn about Indigeneity when they circulate through the city. Through their daily walks, children and their educators encounter a myriad of places and events that they try to make sense of. In settler colonial countries like Canada, these **encounters are deeply intertwined with the legacies of colonialism** and with an ongoing settler colonial project of the erasure of Indigenous people from their lands. To mitigate the impacts of the settler colonial project in early childhood education, scholars and educators (Nxumalo 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2017, 2019; Pacini-

Ketchabaw and Taylor 2015) have engaged in unsettling and decolonizing agendas in early childhood education in two main directions. One aims to denaturalize early childhood education curriculum and pedagogies, while the other puts forward situated and embodied pedagogies to decolonize place in early childhood education (Nxumalo 2019).¹ This paper takes the first direction by denaturalizing the settler colonial conditions that attempt to erase Indigenous presence and unpacking how these conditions are produced, sustained, and constitutive of children's everyday lives.

In this paper, I examine how regimes of (in)visibility – through tools of erasure and of illusory visibility – operate through ECE. More specifically, I focus on pedagogies that render Indigeneity as spectacle – cultural but not political, visual but not sensorial, passive but not participatory (Baloy 2016). My goal is twofold: first, to identify those events that might wrongly suggest that ECE is already welcoming decolonizing pedagogies, and second, to explain how they operate. I argue that examining children's engagement with Indigeneity provides educators with insights about whether their pedagogies are pushing the boundaries towards resisting settler colonial conditions of erasure of Indigeneity in educational spaces. Ultimately, my intention is to uncover and denaturalize everyday practices and events that prevent children and educators from engaging with decolonizing pedagogies.

To illustrate how regimes of invisibility operate in early childhood education, I draw on a critical place inquiry of children's relationships with place in the current city of Vancouver. Tuck and McKenzie (2015) define critical place inquiry as a methodological approach that allows for critical responses and actions toward place-based issues such as settler colonialism. Developing a critical place inquiry allows me to examine regimes of (in)visibility and propose some actions towards decolonizing pedagogies.

From November 2016 to June 2017, I carried out my fieldwork in a single, licensed group childcare centre in a culturally and ethnically diverse area in East Vancouver serving 25 children between 30 months to under 6 years old.² According to the Neighbourhood Community Profile (City of Vancouver 2012), the community surrounding the childcare centre has a large number of low-income households and a lower-than-average median household income compared to the rest of Vancouver. The community profile also indicates that a higher percentage of the population identifies as Indigenous, with 9.2% compared with a 1.2% Indigenous population in Vancouver as a whole. While the neighbourhood has been historically a more affordable place to live and has welcomed a considerable number of low-income families and individuals, in the last decade gentrification³ has changed the demographic makeup (e.g. family income, ethnicity, and language) of the area due to the high real estate prices in Vancouver (Kasman 2015; Ley and Dobson 2008; Statistics Canada 2016).

Before I continue with an overview, I would like to acknowledge that I am a settler and woman of colour in the lands of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations. As a researcher, I am committed to scrutinizing my own colonial ways of seeing. I grew up in Chile, a country colonized by the Spaniards, where I was schooled in the knowledge and in the language of the colonizer. My education as a researcher has not been much different. As a scholar interested in examining settler colonial pedagogies in early childhood education, I attempt to take responsibility for my 'imperial eyes' (Smith 2012). I have been asked whether a critique of settler colonialism really applies to the education of young children and I am convinced that the question itself originates from the intention to maintain the settler's status quo.

Although children have long been represented as vulnerable and incapable of encountering difficult knowledge, a number of scholars in childhood studies and early childhood education have demonstrated the opposite (Burman 2007; Cannella 1997; Garlen 2018; Jenks 2005; Kessler and Swadener 1992; Moss 2007; Smith 2014). As Millei and Kallio (2018) have argued, children are not only social but also political actors from birth. I examine the assumption of children's innocence against colonial ways of seeing that I have learned on my own. In doing so, my response to the

skeptics who question the validity and relevance of critiquing settler colonial practices in early childhood is this: when educators leave politics unattended in their pedagogies, we risk repeating inherited colonial narratives and practices. Baloy's (2016) call for engaging with Indigeneity in ways that are political invites us to think how early childhood education can work against regimes of invisibility.

By way of context, I begin by situating the need for decolonizing pedagogies in the Canadian province of British Columbia. To build my argument, I account for how regimes of (in)visibility function and how the pedagogical practices embedded in these regimes may counteract or erase decolonizing pedagogies in early childhood. I focus on three important pedagogical opportunities in ECE: neighbourhood walks, children's encounters with a mural, and story time. To unpack how regimes of (in)visibility work, first I consider taken-for-granted systems or technologies such as street naming, maps, and gentrification as tools of erasure. Second, I consider children's encounters with Indigeneity as illusory events of visibility that are best described as spectacles (Baloy 2016). Tools of erasure and tools of illusory visibility work together to explain how non-Indigenous assumptions of Indigeneity may prevent educators and children from engaging with pedagogies that uncover the legacy of settler colonialism. Drawing on these pedagogical practices, I suggest that while moving toward decolonizing pedagogies (Nxumalo 2019; Simpson 2014) is crucial, educators also need to identify the regimes of (in)visibility in which their pedagogies are embedded, to create the conditions for decolonizing to take place in early childhood education.

Before I turn to the next section, I would like to account for how I use the term decolonizing pedagogies. Tuck and Yang (2012) have insisted that 'decolonization' (as a noun) or 'decolonize' (as a verb) is not a metaphor for social justice demands or a synonym for decentering settler's perspectives. Tuck and Ree (2016, 647) insist that 'decolonization is not a metaphor' because at some point, we're going to have to talk about returning stolen land'. The language of decolonization, so often used to talk about 'decolonizing education or schools,' trivializes and weakens the core of the project of repatriation of Indigenous lands and life. While decolonizing the settler's mind and his relationship with the land is a first step to returning unceded lands, it is certainly not the only step nor the last. Their contention reminds me to be careful with the words I use to put forward my critique. To move away from metaphorical abstraction, scholars and educators need to start by acknowledging that the ultimate end is the restitution of stolen lands. I read the aims of decolonizing place in early childhood education as a lived curriculum that connects storytelling, place (Cajete 2017; Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy 2014), and Indigenous futurity for their sovereignty (Dillon 2012, 2016). Early childhood scholars and educators can engage with decolonizing pedagogies by learning from Indigenous stories and future imaginations of resistance, resurgence, and liberation (Simpson 2014).

Decolonizing early childhood pedagogies

In 2019, the BC Ministry of Education released to the public the revamped BC Early Learning Framework (BC ELF) (BC Ministry of Education 2019). An important context for this pedagogical shift is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action (TRC 2015). The TRC is not only concerned with the welfare of Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) children, but also with building capacity among non-Indigenous people living in Canada to understand and respect Indigenous history, rights, knowledge, and spirituality (TRC's Call to Action 63.3). The new framework defines decolonization as the process of exposing the effects of colonization on Indigenous communities through a deep, ongoing examination of early childhood education pedagogical practices. The 2019 BC ELF seeks to transform BC early childhood education by acknowledging and recounting the history of these lands – comprising the territories of Indigenous people in what is now known as British Columbia – to interrupt the settler colonial project of the erasure of Indigenous people from their territories.

At the core of this decolonizing pedagogical project is a strong critique of an acritical multicultural approach that has simply portrayed Indigenous peoples as one of a myriad of ethnic and cultural minorities in Canada, ignoring their status as First Nations on these lands (St. Denis 2011). Early childhood scholarship in Canada has strongly criticized multicultural approaches as a settler strategy created by the Canadian government to erase the damaging impact of colonialism on Indigenous communities (e.g. Kummen 2016; Nxumalo 2012; Pacini-Ketchabaw and Bernhard 2012). Educating about colonialism entails teaching about the colonial dispossession of Indigenous peoples' lands and languages as well as the displacement of their families and cultures. As St. Denis (2011) has pointed out, a multicultural approach to diversity has failed to acknowledge a history of colonization and racism, resulting in the erasure of Indigenous history and knowledge through the celebration of the Canadian 'multicultural' society, which is largely symbolic rather than based on practice or policy.

Regimes of (in)visibility in settler colonial Vancouver

In settler colonial countries like Canada, the erasure of Indigeneity has been an ongoing strategy that has served to eliminate threats to the settler colonial project (Daigle 2019; St. Denis 2011). Perhaps one of the central aims of settlers has been what Batell-Lowman and Barker (2015, 26) call 'transcending colonialism,' or the ability of settlers to eliminate Indigenous peoples from their land so 'this new people – the settler society – becomes so deeply established that it is naturalized, normalized, unquestioned and unchallenged.' Through transcending colonialism, Indigenous people become the 'Other,' different and inferior, while the settler becomes the model to be emulated.

In the past, the places where Indigenous communities lived their everyday life, including their systems of education, work, leisure, and spirituality, were turned into settlements, and then cities, organized around the settlers' life and governance structures. Today, erasure attempts to persist in public as well as in educational spaces. In the case of education, as St. Denis (2011) has demonstrated, Indigenous knowledges and history are repeatedly considered as complementary, but rarely as a priority in the Canadian curriculum because under the multicultural regime, giving 'extra' attention to Indigenous history forecloses covering other histories as part of the curriculum.

The acknowledgement of Indigenous peoples through public artifacts, street art, and monuments may wrongly suggest that attempts to erase Indigeneity no longer exist. These overtures towards a sense of reconciliation can be explained by what Baloy (2016) calls 'regimes of (in)visibility.' While Indigeneity is acknowledged in public and institutional spaces, non-Indigenous people's relationships with Indigeneity continue to be one that is 'cultural not political, visual not otherwise sensorial, passively observed not participatory' (Baloy 2016, 209). For Baloy (2016), Indigeneity is treated as spectacle, when settlers celebrate Indigenous cultural manifestations but refuse to engage with their demands of self-determination and land restitution. While this type of engagement renders Indigeneity visible for non-Indigenous people, it continues to cover a history of colonization and its damaging impact on Indigenous communities. Indigenous people continue to refuse the conditions of erasure and do not cease to reclaim their lands, world views, and spirituality.

Grande (2018) has argued that the portrayal of Indigenous people as spectacles consolidates both the settler colonial state and whiteness as markers of superiority. When Indigeneity is turned into a spectacle, settlers seek to erase the myriad projects of Indigenous resistance and resurgence that expose settlers' wrongdoing; in the current Canadian context, settlers intend to move on with reconciliation without truth-telling. Following Grande's words, I refer to spectacularized Indigeneity as when narratives reify the homogenous 'Indian' and the Canadian society that puts itself in a position to reconcile. By unifying all Indigenous communities under one identity umbrella, settlers bypass their guilt and responsibility in truth-telling by using reconciliation as their way to build a promising future with Indigenous people where the order of things remain unchanged. Similarly,

Indigeneity is rendered as a spectacle when colonial violence is seen as an abomination of the past that has nothing to do with young children and early childhood education.

Treating Indigeneity as a spectacle has become deeply engrained in the everyday pedagogies and narratives in early childhood education in settler colonial societies like in Canada (Nxumalo 2016b; Pacini-Ketchabaw and Taylor 2015). Early childhood education may contemplate Indigenous identities, spirituality, and language through what Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013) have called the 'curriculum of replacement.' Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013) unpack how settler colonialism works hand in hand with curriculum studies to marginalize and erase knowledge that challenges the dominant canon. A curriculum of replacement alludes to a set of practices that 'vanish Indigenous peoples and replace them with settlers, who see themselves as the rightful claimants to land, and indeed, as indigenous' (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez 2013, 73).

Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013) offer the case of curriculum studies to account for how a curriculum of replacement works. The work of non-white and Indigenous scholars and their contributions to the field are often replaced by the work of white settler scholars. For example, the authors demonstrate through an examination of citation practices that the founding names of curriculum studies seem to be white settler scholars and the contributions of non-white and non-settler academics continue to be relegated to the margin. Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013) warn that a curriculum of replacement may involve strategies that help the settler to learn how to perform as the 'Other,' rather than to replace it. As a settler colonial strategy, replacement assures settler futurity, continuing the structures that continue to benefit the settler colonial project of comfort, innocence, and heroism (Tuck and Ree 2016).

Early childhood education has its own examples of curriculum of replacement. The case of the New Brunswick's Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework in Canada is illustrative. The working group responsible for elaborating such a framework commissioned Andrea Bear Nicholas (2008), a Maliseet scholar from Tobique Nation, to review it and offer recommendations. Bear Nicholas concluded that despite the attempts of the working group to acknowledge Indigeneity, the curriculum guidelines reinforced a monocultural ideology by omitting Indigenous language revitalization. Bear Nicholas (2008) strongly critiqued it as an attempt to welcome Indigenous cultures in early childhood education without unsettling the established order of things.

As Baloy (2016) argues, spectacles operate alongside spectrality. Bear Nicholas's critique made visible what the curriculum guidelines did not – the erasure of Indigenous languages within a framework of purported cultural sensitivity. Her critique also reminds us that settler good will is not enough. Spectrality recenters Indigenous responses to colonial violence by haunting settlers as a form of decolonizing their minds (Tuck and Ree 2016). Haunting opens a path for Indigenous imagination and futurity to proliferate as acts of justice (Morrill 2017) by first acknowledging that the settler project is built on disappearance.

Children's (in)visible encounters with indigeneity

In this section, I examine the pedagogical practices embedded in settler colonial regimes of (in)visibility and how they work through children's everyday experiences in their childcare centre in Vancouver. During my fieldwork, I spent around 12–15 h a week observing and participating in children's routines such as storytime, outdoor play, and neighbourhood walks. To document children's practices, I drew on ethnographic observations and field notes about children, which I supplemented with casual conversations with children and educators. For my fieldwork and analysis, I put to work a critical place inquiry lens (Tuck and McKenzie 2015) which is described at the beginning of this article. I oriented myself ethically to remain accountable for each of my methodological decisions through my research process by remaining aware of the colonial influences in knowledge production in these research tools. I focus on the following four vignettes because they repeatedly emerge throughout my stay in the centre and offer questions to speculate upon apparent absences and silences. Ultimately, these vignettes speak to how regimes of (in)visibility take place in ECE.

These vignettes are neighbourhood walks, encounters with a mural, mapping places in the city, and untold stories.

Children's walks in the neighbourhood

As children and their educators are getting ready to go for their daily walk, they cross the back gate and start to walk slowly through the neighbourhood. Their square-shaped walk follows the structure of the streets and roads built as a means for settlers to circulate and carry out their social and economic life. This settlement, which is now known as East Vancouver, displaced the Salish Coast peoples who lived in the area before 1850 (Walker 1999). The names of these streets represent one small piece of the settler-colonial project of appropriation of Indigenous lands where settlers drew boundaries, changed the use of the land, and honoured settlers' stories by naming the streets after them. Children walk down colonized streets now turned into an industrial and commercial area, treating the land first as an empty place, and then as a source of economic value to be privately owned and exploited for the benefit of settlers. These uses of the land co-exist with the materiality of the neighbourhood that reminds the pedestrians of a haunting Indigenous presence expressed through street art, social housing, and a school whose population has largely been Indigenous.

Children and educators go down the street at a slow pace, greeting those grown-ups who stare and smile at them, waving or saying 'hi.' Sometimes children are led inside a store, where they are allowed to look at the products and objects displayed on the counters and shelves. Occasionally, I had random chats with the children during my trips with them, but I mostly stayed quiet, observing how children engaged with our surroundings. Educators took the time to talk to them, and from time to time, point out a blossoming tree, a garbage truck, or a particular building. A highlight of their neighbourhood walks was catching a glimpse of what children and educators called the *choo choo train*. One of the educators had a specially trained ear to know when the train was coming. In those circumstances, the educators encouraged the children to rush toward the bridge under which the train passed by. Together, we quietly waited to watch and wave to the train until it disappeared on the horizon.

Encounter with a mural

Through the fence that separated the childcare from the outside, children could see a colourful mural painted on the school's exterior wall that portrays a big bear by the sea under a brilliant sun.⁴ Early in my fieldwork, I wondered whether the teachers had used the mural as a pedagogical opportunity to learn something about their neighbourhood and the value that street art had to offer (e.g. Cooper and Sandlin 2020; Johnston 2016; MacGill 2016).⁵ One teacher told me that the mural had been there for more than 20 years, but she did not especially recall anybody having talked to the children about it. Over my eight months of field work, neighbourhood walks opened opportunities for children to encounter blossoming trees, garbage trucks, and the children's favourite choo choo train. Unlike the train and other objects that were regularly brought to the children's attention, it struck me that the mural mostly remained as a backdrop to the children's neighbourhood walks.

The teacher introduced me to the school principal to learn more about the mural. The mural was painted as part of a larger revitalization project that aimed to create a safer space for students and the wider community (Mackhoul 2003). The revitalization project began with two large-scale murals inside the school, along with both a garden and a Longhouse in the central area where the school and the childcare centre were located. According to the artist who headed up the painting of the mural, it represents the history of the area where the school was built.

After a few weeks of talking with the teachers about the mural, one teacher, Tricia, stopped in front of it, drawing the children's attention. She asked them, for example, whether they had ever paid attention to the mural and what they saw. While the children and the teachers engaged in an animated conversation about the animals they identified in the mural, Tricia told me she recalled

the time when the school community painted the mural. Once they finished, the then principal invited the childcare's staff and children to the launch. On that occasion, she learned that the mural represented the story of the river that passed through the area before urbanization, history that the other educators did not know.

Mapping places in the city

Tricia has been working in the Centre for more than 20 years. Through our conversations, I noted how invaluable her knowledge was about the changes that the neighbourhood has gone through over time. She usually brought up interesting stories about other places in the city in ways that were meaningful for the children and her colleagues. In one of the weeks in which she was leading story time, she brought in a map of Vancouver. Every day of the week, she used the map to figuratively travel with the children to other neighbourhoods. She used the map to speak about the history of those neighbourhoods and how they now look. Children and the teachers related to the stories of those neighbourhoods sharing their own anecdotes about those places. The four female educators in the centre were first- or second-generation immigrants whose experiences of belonging to a new place animated the conversations that the map brought up in story time.

During that week, children drew their own map with Tricia and with me to represent the routes they moved through with their parents or caregivers every day. I provided them with a large piece of paper and asked them to draw their ways to and back to the childcare centre as I was recording their stories. I learned a little bit about who walked or drove them to the childcare. Some children commuted by car, while others took public transit. Their stories fostered my curiosity about the places that children encounter every day. Most importantly, I was intrigued about what places continue to be more prevalent for children. Children's memories may not only be the result of their individual capacity and interest, but their collective engagement with those moments that adults – educators and families – privileged in their attention in the centre.

Untold stories

I have repeatedly heard among educators that they are afraid to make mistakes when talking about Indigenous people. Mary, who was a substitute teacher in the childcare centre, shared with me an unfortunate experience with the misrepresentation of Indigenous people. As part of her practicum, she went to the library to borrow books to read to children during story time. Halloween was approaching, so she chose to read *Clifford's Halloween* to the children. The book portrays Clifford, a dog, who had a Native American costume for the occasion. She was drawn to the book series because children enjoyed it, but she acknowledged that she did not give much thought about the content of the book. After reading the book, one colleague advised her not to read that book again. In the words of her colleague, the book did more harm than good since it was based on racist stereotypes. Mary recalled feeling ashamed for not anticipating her mistake but appreciated the advice. Since then, she said she has felt unprepared to respectfully introduce Indigenous content in her story telling.

In the province of British Columbia, early childhood educators must complete at least a basic ECE training programme from a recognized institution (BC government [n.d.](#)). Once they graduate, they apply for a certificate by demonstrating their successful programme completion, along with 500 h of work experience under the supervision of a Canadian-certified early childhood educator. Mary's pre-service education did not include any course requirements focused on Indigenous topics, since she was not enrolled in the Indigenous stream. She recalled having a few classes where non-Indigenous instructors covered Indigenous content but realized that was not enough for her preparation as an educator.

Illusory visibility and tools of erasure

Having visited the previous four vignettes, now I turn to how regimes of in(visibility) work in early childhood. At this point, I would like to remind the reader that I do so with caution. Spending time only criticizing settler colonial pedagogies risks perpetuating the colonial gaze by preventing educators from engaging with Indigenous brilliance through the education of young children. My argument is that when educators and scholars become more sensitive to the working of settler colonial narratives and practices, possibilities for learning from Indigenous imagining emerge. By unpacking these four vignettes, my intention is to open up opportunities for ongoing engagement with decolonizing pedagogies and Indigenous future imaginations.

I situate this analysis in the context of an increasing gentrification that has pushed Indigenous people away from this neighborhood in Vancouver. While children heard stories about their favourite attractions such as blossoming trees and the choo choo train, they did not hear stories of, and coming from, Indigenous people. The material presence of Indigeneity through street art, social housing for Indigenous communities, and a school with a high population of Indigenous students seemed to show the pervasive contradiction of acknowledging Indigenous presence and displacing them once more from their lands.

The invisibility of the neighbourhood's street naming practices, the city's grid model, and the way educators use maps is not surprising for a number of reasons. One is the fact that urban planning systems are not usually used as pedagogical devices in early childhood education. Although recent scholarship (e.g. Nichols and Dobson 2018) suggests that the city offers pedagogical opportunities, my observations suggest that the educators faced a number of challenges in exploring those opportunities while walking the neighbourhood. In addition to their limited time to plan fresh activities for the children, the pre-service education and professional development available to them focused mainly on children's development and developmentally appropriate practices. Early childhood scholars have long argued how restrictive these professional development streams may be for drawing on decolonizing pedagogies (Pacini-Ketchabaw and Taylor 2015; Nxumalo 2017; 2019). Child development perspectives may misguide educators as they consider the complex and political stories underlying street naming, or how the city's spatial organization might be developmentally out of children's understanding. Decolonizing pedagogies start from a different assumption instead – that children are social and political actors prepared for dealing with more difficult knowledge (Millei and Kallio 2018). As long as professional development opportunities offer educators limited tools to examine how their pedagogical practice may reinforce settler colonial regimes of (in)visibility, they will continue to struggle with the challenges that prevent them from challenging those colonial structures.

Tricia's and the children's stories – not only during story time but throughout my fieldwork – suggest that tools such as maps most often work as colonial instruments of erasure. Children's practices of mapping places in the city reflect the absence of Indigenous stories in their narratives. While the map provided children and educators with a story of diversity and belonging, it excluded Indigenous presence by omission. The lack of acknowledgement of Indigenous territories as children were mapping the city begs the question: What are the stories most privileged in early childhood education, and what are the stories most neglected or unattended?

Children's encounters with the mural come to complicate and add a new layer of interpretation to regimes of (in)visibility. As the conversations among children and educators unfolded, Indigenous people were situated as people of and from the past. While children and educators were prompted to talk about the past of Indigenous peoples who previously occupied these lands, the knowledge about the place we were standing on did not come from Indigenous testimonies, but rather from our non-Indigenous assumptions of Indigenous alterity. It was easier to speculate about their past traditions (e.g. relationships with sacred animals) but it was not that easy to talk about land dispossession or cultural assimilation as political issues that are currently affecting Indigenous communities. As the school principal and mural artist referenced, the mural was created to

respond to widespread and damaging stereotypes about Indigenous youth. However, the sole representation of Indigeneity through street art does not guarantee the reaffirmation of Indigenous presence in public space (Mawani 2004). Yet, it is important to note that whereas the mural was part of a larger project of cultural revitalization, the school's intention of counteracting the stereotypes affecting Indigenous youth was a highly political one.

While teachers invited the children to engage with the mural with excitement and interest, the brevity of their encounter and the lack of continuity about the context of the mural missed a pedagogical opportunity. Over time, more sensorial engagements with the mural might allow children and educators to explore the history of that place. Baloy (2016) challenges us to think about public art not as a cultural manifestation, but rather a political one that changes the framework for Indigenous-non-Indigenous relationships. There is much work for non-Indigenous educators to do come to understand the power of an embodied pedagogy that connects head, heart, and spirit (Archibald 2008) and instill curiosity and wonder. Teachers and children can connect with the mural through all their senses. For example, what does it feel for children to imagine that a river was running long ago in the exact place where they are standing? How does it look like for the children to learn from stories about the water, the sun, the animals, and human relationships with place? What lessons do the human-animal relationships represented in the mural offer to children and teachers?

The mural, as with any other piece of street art that is based on Indigenous knowledges, provides an opportunity to learn from Indigenous people themselves. Their teachings have been rooted in storytelling, ceremony, and rituals that form the core of their pedagogy (Archibald 2008; Archibald et al. 2019; Regan 2010) and, as such, allow children and adults to engage not only visually but also sensorially. Embodied pedagogies produce other ways of knowing in which the rational/affective binary dissolves. As such, it has also the potential to shift non-Indigenous people's assumptions of Indigenous alterity toward a more active engagement with their political demands of sovereignty and land restitution.

Opportunities for pedagogical collaborations with Indigenous educators are increasingly becoming more accessible for non-Indigenous educators in the province of British Columbia. The stated intention of the 2019 British Columbia Early Learning Framework to decolonize early childhood curriculum and pedagogies opens up such opportunities for learning and pedagogical reflection. Yet, as I mentioned earlier, whereas pre-service and in-service education continue only focusing on developmentally appropriate practice, educators are still challenged to implement and reflect on a pedagogical framework that is sensitive to the settler colonial narratives and practices that still operate in early childhood education. As happened with Mary, the substitute teacher, many educators may be hesitant to implement pedagogical innovations for fear of making mistakes.

On the other hand, educators who are keen to incorporate Indigenous knowledges in their early childhood classrooms may continue employing tools of erasure such as totem transfer practices. 'Totem poles are monuments created by First Nations of the Pacific Northwest to represent and commemorate ancestry, histories, people, or events' (Indigenous Foundations n.d.). Hunt (2018) describes totem transfer as a form of consuming and adopting Indigenous knowledge by removing the Indigenous people from the process of knowledge production. When educators and children engage in totem transfer pedagogies, it creates the illusion of visible Indigeneity while preserving 'business as usual' within the liberal multicultural narratives of settler futurity. To support early childhood educators in their intention to decolonize their pedagogies, opportunities for pre-service and in-service education around Indigenous education need to be expanded.

While educators and children have so much to learn from Indigenous Elders and community members, this work should be the result of relationships built over time. The cultural turn toward decolonizing education has increased the need for bringing Indigenous guest speakers to schools to educate children and teachers about Indigenous culture and traditions. At times, Indigenous people become overwhelmed by this need, especially when they receive little acknowledgement and compensation for their knowledge. Likewise, it is crucial to recognize that Indigenous teachers are not

responsible for educating non-Indigenous educators about their history and present lives. Opening up spaces for decolonizing pedagogies requires that the educational system provide the conditions for all teachers to be held accountable in their intention to learn about Indigenous histories, knowledges, and pedagogies. Knowledge should bring action toward changes in the curriculum and pedagogies to counter the perpetuation of settler colonial narratives and practices towards the erasure of Indigeneity. For that to happen, pre-service and in-service education needs to provide the conditions for collective self-education among non-Indigenous educators.

As educators and scholars identify the working of regimes of invisibility in early childhood education, the project is incomplete if it remains only a critique. Certainly, becoming more sensitive to the tools of erasure and illusory visibility would help educators to interrupt pedagogical practices that assure the continuity of settler futurity (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez 2013). However, if scholars and educators commit to a more political, participatory, and sensorial engagement with Indigeneity, then they may find pedagogical possibilities for other knowledges to come and be visible in early childhood. To make those pedagogical possibilities real, it may be necessary for scholars and educators to take inspiration beyond their disciplinary boundaries and consider how others have worked against settler colonial strategies to erase Indigenous presence.

Morrill (2017) argues that native feminist intellectuals and activists have long embraced Indigenous future imaginations to work against erasure, replacement, and dislocation. To ground their imaginations and futures, Indigenous feminists have drawn on storytelling as a source of knowledge and teaching. Storytelling has instilled the practices of collective memory, thereby offering new generations a historical record of their culture and identity as well as a form of blueprint for their future. In this sense, imagining reality otherwise means challenging time and space through storytelling, where tradition and fiction instill a sense of wonder of the possible (Dillon 2016).

Centering Indigenous future imaginations through storytelling, including Indigenous science fiction (Dillon 2012, 2016; Hunt 2018; Morrill 2017), may contribute to acknowledging Indigenous peoples' past and present and, more importantly, their future. Early childhood education may engage with Indigenous futurity through storytelling that goes beyond the representation of Indigenous people as spectacle or as remnants of the past by bringing the present imagination and desires of Indigenous people for their nations and the world to light.

Concluding thoughts: towards Indigenous future imaginations

Inspired by Baloy's (2016) urban ethnography, I examined settler colonial regimes of (in)visibility embedded in early childhood pedagogies. Children's engagements with Indigeneity through their neighbourhood walks and the stories they learn about these places speak to the complexities that learning in urban centres like Vancouver posits for children and educators. As some unattended pedagogies continue to reinforce settler colonial tools of erasure (such as street naming and organization, maps, and gentrification) and tools of illusory visibility (engaging Indigeneity only as a cultural phenomenon), their ongoing examination by educators and children offers opportunities for decolonizing futures. But critique is never enough. To resist treating decolonization as a metaphor (Tuck and Yang 2012), early childhood education needs to engage with pedagogies that offer an alternate vision to counter the status quo of land as a colonized place (Cajete 2017; Simpson 2014) and embrace it as a source of intellectual, spiritual, and emotional knowledge (Greenwood and Lindsay 2019). Indigenous imaginations challenge early childhood education to shift their pedagogies away from regimes of (in)visibility and work toward decolonizing children's places.

Notes

1. I acknowledge that affirmative frameworks such as the 2019 British Columbia Early Learning Framework (ELF) offer new understandings of curriculum and pedagogical practices in ECE. In tune with the BC ELF, a number of ECE scholars, researchers, and practitioners in Canada have embarked on projects that aim to

decolonize pedagogies and practices and create opportunities for such an endeavor. For example, the Early Childhood Education Network of 32 educators runs an expanded professional development project that supports EC educators through their communities and in partnership with post-secondary institutions and the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society. Pedagogical initiatives like this one offer educators a space to reflect on, imagine otherwise, and propose decolonizing pedagogies.

2. My study was conducted with ethics approval from the University of British Columbia, Canada). The names that I use throughout this article to refer to children, educators, and the neighbourhood streets are all pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.
3. Gentrification has also operated as a mechanism to displace Indigenous communities from the neighbourhood. In the last decade, the levels of poverty among the students attending the elementary school near the childcare centre has pushed low-income families, including those with Indigenous backgrounds, out of the area (Kasman 2015; Ley and Dobson 2008). According to the 2016 Census, the neighbourhood has become less diverse (Statistics Canada 2016). As a result, the demographics of the childcare centre have also changed. According to the childcare centre's director, the socio-economic status of the families of the centre has also changed over the years. Many of the families had to move out of the area primarily because of the higher rents.
4. The specific details about the mural have been changed to ensure anonymity of the centre.
5. My interest in street art came not only from academic literature, but also from my earlier experience in community engagement projects in Chile. Before immigrating to Canada, I lived and worked in Valparaíso, Chile, a city that displays murals everywhere. As part of my job, I supported community projects led by children, youth, and popular educators. I used to walk with them through their neighbourhoods to get inspired by what their places had to offer. Some of those initiatives focused on their neighbourhoods and culminated in community projects that either investigated the history of those murals or even organized them to paint one. Many of the adults who supported these projects, including some mural artists, referred to the political and social legacy of street art in Chile as the reason they became involved. Among their pedagogical value, these projects strengthened children's experiences of working with community members across generations and socio-cultural backgrounds.

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