CHAPTER 5

Where the Children Are

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Polar bears are drowning. Children rage. And education is, so far, failing to provide a clear pathway out of our ongoing ecological and social crises. We need change—different thinking, different relationships, and different solutions. But where to turn? In this chapter we turn towards children, for two reasons. First, the "wonderment" with which they often seem to encounter the world. This wonderment can baffle us, but in this chapter, we ask, in what ways could the children be encountering and thinking

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differently—knowing the world in different ways? And in what ways might they be offering possibilities for pathways we are missing?

Second, we set out to consider children as qualified *beings* (James, 2011), and to see children as *citizens*, performing their citizenship in political, yet different ways (Grindheim, 2017). Looking at citizenship as an enacted process opens space for other contributions to citizenship—not only human. We do not suggest that children, as citizens, are responsible for the environmental acts of society. Rather, we think that their actions may contribute towards more equitable, relational and caring futures, and thus be worthy of note. In other words, they might be enacting examples of ecocitizenship (Heggen et al., 2019). We also see the ethical obligation in listening to the children's contributions. After all, it is their future.

This chapter begins with the premise that children are often positioned differently, perhaps less anthropocentrically, in the world, both ontologically and epistemologically. In some senses, their thinking is wild; it isn't corralled, regulated, or enculturated yet. By following their lead, we ask what might be revealed through their embodied experiences and emotional encounters with the world? We wonder, too, about the political and pedagogical implications of taking children seriously. How might this help educators wild their pedagogies, wild themselves, and provoke cultural change? (See also Chap. 2 in this book).

Writing as a Method

The methodological approach to this chapter might, at first glance, be described as a thought experiment offered through writing. We write to figure things out (Richardson, 2001). Our method, of presenting evidence in response to appearances and ambiguities in the world has a long history stretching back to the Renaissance philosopher Montaigne. Through his art of essaying, he wrote to complicate ideas, to undo easy explanations, and to seek new, if incomplete conclusions.

For Montaigne, the essay is a gathering of experiences, the sensuous and 'mute life' of the physical body, the concrete realities of material life. He refused positions that were not grounded in experience, in the flesh and blood of real life, and the comfortable answers of the status quo. For us, this original form of the essay is appealing. It offers space to explore a diversity of responses and theories and to explore a different explanatory space. It also requires us to not just intellectualize this discussion, a move

which has often historically been one of the steps towards anthropocentrism.

For Montaigne, appearances matter, and experiences are to be trusted (Bontea, 2008). But this raises questions of how, and how far? To understand these questions Montaigne often incorporates associations from his own work and that of others. For him, the essay attempts to connect seemingly random events, ideas, and explorations from different realms of experience. We take this approach here as we attempt to meet the children where they are.

In what follows we present two vignettes, or keyholes, of children engaging with their world. We each then offer some speculative responses and noted dissonances to these keyholes. Following Montaigne in our discussions, we gather experiences, ideas, and dissonances into new explanatory pathways that might, we hope, point towards more equitable and just ways of knowing and being in the world.

Keyholes

The two vignettes of children's play—seen as if looking through a keyhole—reveal glimpses of a day in the life of pre-schoolers. They describe everyday situations children seem to enjoy, and the pre-school teachers seem to value. Something intriguing seems to happen here, something that is difficult to decipher. Looking at children's contributions is not new in early childhood research, yet we question, how do these children viscerally encounter the world? How might these encounters be different from those who have already been fully 'educated' in their cultural context? And what might we learn from these encounters?

Naming the vignettes keyholes reminds us that we are only catching a small glimpse into the children's experiences, and even then, making assumptions in our interpretation. We acknowledge, too, that both vignette keyholes are situated in particular cultural settings. Although we do not always hear directly from the students in theses vignettes our attention was attracted, in part, by the mystery and wonder of things unsaid. Rather than a reflected reality, we are seeking available possibilities—a thought experiment through writing. By trying to meet these children where they are, we hope to gain some insight into their ways of encountering the world. We attempt to draw together our combined writing, and to take this discussion beyond the realms of early childhood.

The keyholes are set in Norway, where it is common for pre-schools to hike in local nature areas. These areas are visited and revisited, and may be located just outside the fence, or within a couple of kilometres. Hikes to such areas also include opportunities for explorations. The children know these areas, they feel comfortable there, and often know what they wish to do. Our vignettes return you to May 2020 to an urban pre-school at the outskirts of the city centre. These children hike weekly in their nearby community.

First Keyhole: Excited by the (Seemingly) Unexciting

Early one morning, a group of toddlers start the day's hike. The goal is a small grove of trees with a little stream running through, a place the children seem to love. Just a few meters from the gates, in the middle of the asphalt, a boy stops next to a manhole cover. He looks down and walks decidedly towards some nearby rocks. He finds some rocks of the appropriate size and throws them down the manhole. The cover has both small and large holes, and not all rocks go through. There is a distinct "plop" when the rock hits water. He tries again, but this rock is too big for the holes in the cover, he finds another rock and throws that instead. He walks back and forth, finding new rocks, throwing them towards the cover, finding new rocks, and… After many repetitions, his teacher asks: "Shall we follow the others?" The hike continues for two or three meters. By the side of the street are some interesting slugs. The boy stops intrigued and observes them closely. Three days later the same group leaves the pre-school for another hike, and another boy stops by the manhole, and begins throwing strands of grass, small leaves and sticks.

Reflections from Marianne
In addition to the everydayness, what strikes me in this story is the way that play was started and lead by the boy, without interference, in a kind of free play. The children decide without adult interference what, and how, to explore. There is a multitude of dimensions evident in this small story. As adults, we tend to let our interests lead our insight; a physicist will see different learning outcomes from a musician when 'evaluating' this boy's learning. But the boy might gain many other things which we don't recognize. I am intrigued by how we don't realize or recognize what the children gains, and that we do not know why they do these activities. Maybe we try too hard to analyse an activity that is simply meant as playing, as having fun?

The child's activity resembles other educational activities with small children, as when using a sorting box. Yet, a sorting box does not provide the variety of sounds, smells, textures, qualities, weights, etc. as the things the children throw into the manhole. By repeating the activity in different conditions, the children experience differing things, changing some factors, but not others. By making a sorting box, we believe we can be confident the children have experimented with shapes; and perhaps, with colours. But the factors that change are limited. What are the consequences of this simplification and flattening of experience?

Reflections from Marcus
I am struck by my own initial response—to override the situation in some way. I might ask the child if they are ready to go or what they are doing. In doing so, I might manage the situation and move things along. In my own way, I am setting out pedagogically to think of how I might help or guide the child. I recognize also, that I could let the child continue to play. To experience the world on their own terms in a form of free play. I am challenged also to wonder, though, what is actually going on here for the child. How self-directed is it really? The child is not alone; they are engaged in and with the world around them. If I hold back my urge to consider human directed influences on play and coming to know the world, how might I reconsider the child's experience in the moment? Might it be that these rocks, spaces, textures, and sounds actively guide the child in the interactions? I have a sense, also, that by intruding into the experience I might also break the magic of this moment.

Reflections from Sean
One thing this story recalls is the way adults can create quick thought pathways, determining that which is noteworthy. My sense is that part of this is a quite helpful response to a world filled with stimuli. Otherwise, one might spend the time stopped short in front of our gates dropping rocks through a manhole while our ice cream melts for lack of attention. And yet, I wonder about what is lost in this split-second programming of what one attends to? And how we learn what to notice and what not to? How are these systems developed over time and what role do teachers and culture play in their development? In some ways the cultural norms of focusing on the hike, getting to the chosen destination, picking the key fragments of knowledge that will lead to the preferred outcome are not yet

part of this two-year-olds vernacular. Given that everything is unfamiliar, they are moving in a world where their attention is freely requested.

I am intrigued, also, by the idea of place-making tools. Vygotsky suggests, in his conversations about cognitive tools, that our birth cultures offer us tools that help us make sense of our world. Tools such as language and story allow us to frame our world and belong with our kith and kin. Yet the tools are not simply there for us to use and put down at will, they shape us as we use them. I wonder, given our long relationship with the natural world and particular places therein, if there might be another layer of tools being offered by the natural world, with similar effects? What if a child's focus on the spatial, the sensations of holding and dropping rocks, and his dedication to task are all part of the tools the world offers us, and which could shape us into ways of becoming place-bound?

Reflections from Bob

The curiosity and the intensity of the activity are interesting. The engagements seem silent. What could be going on? Is it purely sensuous, the plop and the physical manipulation of the stones and later, sticks and leaves? Is it even possible that there is something going on here that is outside of linguistic understanding? And if so, what would that mean? I am drawn to this line of questioning by my own interests in understanding and expanding the ways that learning, knowing and thinking can be perceived. There is something within our group's experiences, often working with learners outside of classroom settings, that drives this curiosity.

I am provoked by Jan Zwicky's work in lyric philosophy. It seems to arise from an interest in propositions that manifest themselves in the world, yet fall outside of logical structures of interpretation, or cannot be captured in words. Part of Zwicky's lyric philosophy is to embrace those understandings that arise suddenly and affect us as sensuous beings with bodies and emotions. If you are a musician, think about the wondrous performance that can occur when jamming is elevated to a perfect understanding amongst a group. Such experiences seem to suddenly announce themselves, not as a collection of logically linked parts; rather, they arrive in a moment as whole understandings. Zwicky calls these whole understandings gestalts. They are neither rational nor irrational; they are *arational* in that they elude adequate capture in words. Could it be that the manhole cover, the rocks, the plops, and the water were singing to the children in their own way?

Second Keyhole: A Squirrel Isn't Enough

Another day, a group of three- to five-year-olds hike from the pre-school. One of the teachers shares her story: While I watch children playing in the stream, some ask if we can go into the woods at the hiking site. They know they must bring an adult. The forest grows on a steep hill with its roots protruding from the ground in places. Several of the 5-year-old children, both girls and boys, want to go and I let them, as long as they stay within my field of view. They talk, and I can hear them looking for mushrooms and studying everything they find on and in the ground. They repeatedly ask if they can go further up. After a while, another teacher arrives to look after the children in the stream, and I can follow the children up the hill, allowing them to ascend further. I spot a squirrel looking for food in the trees and try to get the children's attention. They look up, but do not see the squirrel as they are more interested in something they have found. It takes me a few tries before I realize that only I find the squirrel exciting. The children are more interested in the ground. They dig with sticks and inspect various stones and plants. Suddenly someone shouts "I found a fungus in the ground!" He is clearly excited, and the other children gather around him. Everyone agrees that "yes, that's a fungus". I'm pretty sure it's not a fungus they've found, but do not object and wait to hear what they think. They ask if we can take it to the pre-school to find out what the fungus is, so I put it in my pocket. Back in the pre-school, the mysterious fungus was not prioritized, and it was forgotten. A week later, the children ask for the fungus, but it had unfortunately disappeared. We agreed that the next time we go to the same destination, we will go looking for a new one and take the time to investigate it better together.

Reflections from Marianne

In this keyhole, the children initiate and sustain the activities, fulfilling the adult criteria of play. As in the first story, play here seems to be filled with sensory aspects—the thrill, the engagement, perhaps the feeling of flow, of forgetting time and space, of simply "being". One thing that intrigues me in this vignette is the children's resistance. The children stray from the teacher. Observing children play in nature, I often see children straying away from the others, seemingly seeking room to investigate by themselves. In this example, the children collectively resist the teacher as she tries to direct their attention.

It was the children who initiated going to this part of the forest. Through the place, the mushrooms and the forest itself, the surroundings

contributed to the play. I am drawn, then, to the active role nature takes as a playmate. If children get these kinds of playful experiences again and again, will they lead to an intimate knowledge of nature? The statement that children playing in nature learn to know nature and will take care of it is both worn and disputed. Still, when children play with each other, they might become friends. Can looking at nature as a playmate refine aspects of the children's play? Can looking at the children's play in nature be seen as socialization into, and within, a more-than-human world? What would such a socialization be like?

Reflections from Marcus

This keyhole raises my desire to redirect attention. If the intent of the educator is to direct attention towards the world in a way that engages and guides children's learning—why might I, and presumably the educator in the vignette, feel a compelling urge to control attention? The child's attention is already held in the moment, with a seeming sense of fullness of engagement with/in the world. What might be missed in redirecting the children's attention? Although I might have a positive intent, it might also limit the experience of knowing the world through direct encounter, in ways that defy calculated, logical, and conceptual understanding. Ways we might consider *child-like*. I am often left to wonder at the quality of attentiveness paid by children to natural things. In these descriptions, it is seemingly the stones, sticks, or fungus that, at least in part capture the attention and guide the encounter.

Reflections from Sean

This keyhole has me thinking about the assumed scarcity of time and about how that plays a role. We see it in the desire to move the child along from something that appears to provide limited educative return on to "the good stuff." In the disappearance of the dug-up object, 'of limited curricular value', although this is framed as forgotten, it is clearly remembered by the children. Again, my sense is that the adult is shaped by a set of cultural norms related to how learning works, to what is being learned, and to the "important signposts" for learning.

This leads me into wondering about the "stuff" of knowing. That thinking, idea generating, and learning is built out of stuff (rather the way good soil is built out of compost) and that part of what is happening in both these stories is, in fact, "stuffing". There might not be obvious learnings attributable to this digging in the forest seeking mushrooms, but

there is a gathering of experience, encountering, testing, and exploring that can be part of the "stuff" of other encounters. That can be built upon, flexed, added to and that at this age, and maybe all ages, the more the merrier. Perhaps it is an error to impose a linear concept of learning and valuation to encounters. Who knows, maybe this encounter with dirt and life or holes might be helping to position the child in the world in important ways.

Reflections from Bob

It is interesting to notice how seemingly normal it is for these children to go outside of the school grounds. The children know what is happening, they know how to conduct themselves, and they have a sense of what they wish to do. But they also appear to have an enormous capacity for spontaneity. They are interestingly attentive, in ways that appear less contaminated by other aspects of culture. I can't help imagining that conversations with older children and teens could include jokes, singing popular songs, and conversations about cultural phenomena and artefacts. But then, would these older students be so distracted if excursions like this had continued to be part of their everyday experiences throughout their schooling? Or, might it be that the desperate move to belong to the human peer group arises because there is no underlying sense of belonging to a place in the larger world?

The children do not seem interested in the squirrel. Is it hard for them to see the squirrel? Or is it because they have already found something interesting—and see the squirrel as a distraction? Or is it the intimacy and physical engagement, the digging with sticks, that captures their attention? Whatever the answers, it does appear that the children were determined to engage with their environment differently, in a sensuous, embodied way. Perhaps interesting parts of play are the experiences gained, the gathering of stuff, and maybe even responses to the agency of the place itself that happen when the adults urge to control the activities is loosened.

Resonances and Dissonances

Some resonances and dissonances run through our reflections, as we are all struck by the children's sensuous and spontaneous engagement with their perhaps agentic, surroundings. Likewise, we problematize the adult urge to look for clear and obvious aims the children gain in these situations. This makes us wonder; what is lost if the teachers with their

pedagogical and cultural tools had redirected the attention, created thought pathways, flattened and simplified these multidimensional situations? To be clear, however, we are not claiming that teachers should not interact pedagogically with their students. Accepting children as different learners also means accepting that it is the responsibility of adults to meet children's contributions, to be present and to follow their lead, but also to protect the children, and to guide the children. Rather, we explore what children might give us—or what is won—if we loosen our urge to control their learning and if we listen to them, if we seek to meet the children where they are.

A Wonder/Wander

In our own Montaigne-esque style, we have gathered responses to these vignettes—an aggregation of associations. We have attempted to capture some of the vividness of possibilities that children might have with and in the more-than-human world, while acknowledging the enigmatic nature of how these experiences appear to each of us. It is now time, in the tradition of the essayist, to explore these interpretations.

Montaigne was somewhat unusual in Western history in that he was directly involved in the public political life of his society and very privileged, yet at the same time, perhaps because of his upbringing, he was deeply concerned with everyday life and embroiled in examining and critiquing 'the system'. His essays are, thus, more than just a description of a lived life; they also search for ways in which lives are worth living. They are a sweet spot in humanism that is more generous with conceptions of proof, such that they can reach more fully into the experiences of life, beyond the limits of rigorous science and accepted cultural rules of thought (see e.g., Bontea, 2008).

Montaigne's essays were not the polished perfectly formed arguments that we aim for today. Rather, they were explorations, wanderings with ideas, with the "what ifs" of open-ended discussion. For in French, "essay" is exactly that, a try, an attempt, an adventure for writer as well as reader. It is in that spirit that we respond to these vignettes and reflections, these witnessing's of young children's interactions, prioritizations, engagements, play-ins with the world "under open skies". In this chapter, we seek *to follow the children's lead and ask; What if the children have other, less anthropocentric, knowledges? And what if we were to support these other knowledges in education?*

What If the Children Have Other Knowledges?

The first *what if* we are proposing is an epistemological adventure, a wandering with knowledge. We have each been struck by seeming dissonances between the adults' suggestions and the children's priorities. On the one hand, adults can tend to be immersed in an epistemology that is progress-based, linear, fragmentable, ordered, and transferable, whereas children may appear to be *resisting* adult agendas for potentially indeterminable but intriguing reasons. We wonder why, as Jan Zwicky considers: "are we so deeply susceptible to the charms of epistemological security? Partly because as a species we enjoy the exercise of power for its own sake; we have a penchant for controlling things." (Zwicky, 2019, p. 95). It is a loosening of control, then, that intrigues us.

A Gestalt of Knowing

Meeting the children where they are opens challenging possibilities. We wonder if there may be learning experiences that fall outside of linguistic and a particularly rationalized and logical knowing. We wonder about gestalts of knowing that appear as intact wholes, rather than built from component parts. The children's activities in these examples, together with their teachers' responses, may be showing us that some of their most engaging learning is difficult to predict, plan, or control. This leads us to wonder: What if there are other forms of knowledge outside of the ones prioritized by mainstream educational systems.

Perhaps the most disturbing possibility is that this form of knowledge might crumble and decay under analysis. That is, when we disrupt children's play, or ask seemingly harmless questions like 'what are you doing?' Our logic-oriented inquiries might undermine the learning itself. Zwicky remind us that our inclination towards logical "rules of thought" are aimed to "secure against prejudice, superstition, and whim" (2019, p. 95). These aims are in a tension with any underlying proclivity to accept unexamined gestalts, in this case the capacity of children to wonder at phenomena presented by manhole covers and mushrooms.

Zwicky asserts an over reliance on "rules of thought", and that these alone, may deprive us of thinking's most significant dimension:

> The first and fundamental aim of thinking is to understand, to discern the lineaments of reality. The correction of mistakes accompanies this

> discernment; it is not achieved by shackling thought to ensure that mistakes are never made.
>
> There is no series of steps we can implement to precipitate gestalts in all audiences. Real thinking does not always occur in words; it can decay under analysis; its processes are not always reportable. This means that real thinking is in some sense wild: it cannot be corralled or regulated. But it is also the only access humans have to the experience of insight, to moral and mathematical beauty, to ontological vision. (Zwicky, 2019, p. 95)

This is risky business for educators. We are challenged to ask what is lost when thinking is reduced to just thinking in words, to relying on a particular form of rational logic alone, to see the world only when reduced to its constituent parts through analysis. How might we throw light on alternatives that increase capacity for thinking with and in the world? Here we return to the proposition laid out near the beginning of this chapter: is it reasonable or insightful, to deprive learners, young and old, of access to forms of understanding. How might we throw light on alternatives open to them, to increase their capacity for thinking with and being in the world? And we wonder if wilding capacities for thinking can enrich educational possibilities for understanding, and herein lies an enormous challenge. Yet, in Zwicky's words, "Where the danger lies, there too lies meaningful life" (2019, p. 95). And we wonder if bringing such child-like, holistic, and connected knowing into practice, to balance more dominant, linear, individualized, fragmented, anthropocentric, and separating ways of knowing, can be a pathway towards doing things differently, towards being differently in the world. Could this be an important piece of building the kinds of relationships that might allow all beings to better flourish, to respond to crises of alienation, extinction, anxiety, and loss of biodiversity?

Knowing with/in the World

> Imagination is understood to be a quality of mind in settler culture. In Haudenosaunee/Mohawk tradition, the same quality is understood to be animal and spiritual helpers manifesting their presence in one's life … [The settler conception of] imagination dominates where fear of the unknown, uncertainty of memory, and placelessness thrive. (Sheridan & Longboat, 2006, p. 365)

Sheridan and Longboat add a compelling piece to our gathering of ideas. First, there is the suggestion that the settlers' western epistemological concepts of knowing, thinking, and imagining are not the sole purview of the isolated human mind; that this way of thinking of the imagination is in fact deeply extractive, colonial, and anthropocentric; and that there are other conceptions out there. Epistemology is culturally framed and there are different ways understanding and, by extension, encountering knowing. Second, there are threads that reach from this assertion back into our own reflections. They connect with our concerns about culturally specific and adult learning agendas which may be "settling" into the lives and minds of small children. Sheridan and Longboat point to beings who understand themselves as part of a larger community of knowing and being—beings who are receptive to gifts being proffered by their "animal and spiritual helpers" and by rocks, fungi, slugs, and places.

There are also links here to Zwicky's positioning of a different kind of knowing emphasizing holistic, non-linear, differently reasoned, and languaged forms. Such relational forms might be understood if they were gifts from other knowers. And in time, through play, encounters in "flesh and blood", diversities of time spent in place, these gifts might lead to an 'old-growthing' of minds. A knowing needed for this uncertain world:

> Haudenosaunee minds are composed not just of visible ecological domains but also by numinous qualities of those domains that, allowed to mature, emerge, and encompass the old growth of their traditional territory. Old growth minds and cultures mature, emerge, and encompass the old growth of their traditional territory. Haudenosaunee minds are congruent with their traditional territories but more important, Haudenosaunee *are required* to accomplish that symmetry in accomplishing their authenticity. (Sheridan & Longboat, 2006, p. 366)

Bildung with/in the World

A third conversation that resonates with this more relational, non-languaged, less anthropocentric, non-analytical way of knowing is the concept of *Bildung*. The act of Bildung occurs when our skills are coupled with a reflexivity around what we are doing, and why, in encounters with *someone*. In the reflective sense, Bildung is thought of as both a critical exploration of one's being in the world, how one relates to oneself and the surrounding world, and as a transgression of existing order (Paulsen,

2021). There are many interpretations of the word, but in general, it represents the fulfilment of human potential. In a simplified version, it has been framed as "what is left after we have forgotten everything we learned" (Ellen Key, in Steinsholt & Dobson, 2011, p. 7).

Bildung has no beginning or end. It is part of all life, not only education, and not only with children and young people. It is neither linear nor compartmentalizable in the ways of more conventional Western education; as such, it stands as an alternative to an understanding of an uncoupled analytical world (Jensen, 2000). It allows us to think of learning in ways that acknowledge what we previously called the "stuffing" in learning. Bildung implies that we exist in the world, that we are not just something in spirit. This leads us to children's sensual and phenomenological meetings with nature. In the same way that we are not free when meeting other humans, we are not free when meeting nature. Perhaps the keyhole vignettes suggest that in the children's explorational, relational, and complex play, nature takes the form of an active 'someone' during formative encounters. The concept of Bildung is often framed as cultural formation. But what if we think of Bildung not as a cultural formation, but as a natural-cultural formation? What are the possibilities for this *someone*, or *something*, who supports the development of our reflexivity to be inclusive of a more-than-human world?

What If We Were to Support This Different/Other Knowledges in Education?

Our second wandering/wondering *what if* asks what education becomes if the different knowledges we point to exist. How might they be supported? How might this other kind of knowing be sustained, nourished, and given space to develop and flourish? Might meeting students where they are provoke further consideration of alternative non-languaged, embodied, and relational ways of knowing?

Play as Encounter

When we observe children playing, we can attribute a sense of freedom or wildness to their actions. In a school setting for example, we might describe the moment as involving 'student-directed' activity (or *free play*), along a continuum with more adult-directed activities (*guided play* or *teacher play*

e.g.). But what if we consider student-directed play as a relational encounter with/in the world, that it is not solely the child that makes decisions? What if the child's play with materials, animals, sounds and shadows, for example, are viewed primarily as encounters, as formative exchanges amongst humans and myriad relational beings? In other words, what if this play is not simply child-centred, or even human-centred, but is a learning encounter with the world and its ways of knowing? In considering the possibility that material objects might guide a child's experience, Rautio (2013) suggests:

> To appreciate also the momentary and the seemingly unguided in children's everyday lives … we would have to embrace the thought that teachers—those who invite, guide, support and steer us—can also be other than human beings. Tiny black inanimate pebbles can invite us into interaction by virtue of existing, guide the nature of this interaction by virtue of their physical form, support our activity through lending themselves to be investigated and engaged with. (p. 402)

What if, in other words, there is a way of knowing the world that is not just driven by human subjects? What if the children know the world as a place that asks questions, actively engages, and demands attention? What if it is not just the children directing their own attention but a world that seeks them out and requests it of them? Thought of this way knowledge, and ways of knowing, might be supported in different ways.

Paying Attention/Orienting to the World

It is, perhaps, not by chance that the two keyhole examples we have chosen are set out of doors. There is an everydayness about the descriptions, but also an attentiveness in the descriptions which we might easily take for granted. Such attentiveness is commonly observed in play outside. What is it with such engagements that draw in young children in this way? It is not to suggest that such attentiveness does not occur in a multitude of contexts, including indoors with man-made objects, but children can often appear intensely engaged with natural objects/settings. Might there be something in it when James (2009) suggests that because 'natural things have not been designed to fulfil any human purpose and so there typically seems to be more to them than can be comprehended in instrumentalist or functionalist terms… so natural things can invite attention' (p. 108)? In

this way, time spent in settings not designed for humans might offer opportunities to attend to the world in ways that places us directly within the world through attentive engagement. Such engagements can include both paying careful attention, and also being reciprocally open to the intrusions of the world.

Merleau-Ponty (1968) describes such experiences as potentially involving a paradox of being both the 'seer' and the 'seen'. This shared encounter of coming to know the world in this way troubles individualism, isolation, and anthropocentrism. It places us directly in an expanded more-than-human world. Merleau-Ponty describes the reversibility of such perceptions (seeing and being seen, touching and being touched) with an example of touching the world while realizing that we are touched by the world at the same time. There is a profound and inescapable *openness* to the world; it intrudes into us and we intrude into it: 'the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen' (p. 139). Merleau-Ponty argues that the simultaneous intertwining of the two perceptions is at the heart of being in the world.

Wildness and Education

At the heart of this chapter has been the idea of control—an idea arguably deeply entwined with narratives of the Anthropocene. Responses to the keyholes involve a recognition of the desire to exert an analytical and deliberate control. In loosening our desire to control situations, what might be gained? Throughout this chapter, and inspired by the keyholes, we suggest that an enlarged range of epistemological possibilities for learning with the wildness of the world might enable alternative knowledges. We have turned to the children as the starting point for this chapter; yet we are also suggesting that such alternative possibilities for knowledge must be broadly available within education beyond early childhood. This assertion rests on the premise that current overriding concerns with analytical, calculative, and fragmentable knowledge is failing us. Such knowledge is valuable, but it is not complete and alone it appears to lead to serious injustices. If we are to work with students in becoming caring and compassionate humans within a more-than-human world, then we must deliberately offer a broader range of experiences that allow us to be differently in the world. It is perhaps, in part at least, through meeting the children where they are that we gain inspiration and insight into these possibilities.

In conclusion, we return to Montaigne's conviction that we should trust our perceptions of experiences; but how far should this trust reach? The emergent convergence in our thinking provides a triangulation of sorts. Yet, it is certainly not strongly enough to satisfy traditional notions of scholarship. Perhaps a better measure lies in the readers' responses to, and recognition of, our wanderings. Do they strike you as familiar? Do they reflect shared insights that you feel? In short, do they resonate? For now, we assert, that there is verisimilitude in resonance.

If we hold that at least one important aspect of play is the releasing of control over our actions, constrained by adult supervision, curricula, cultural expectations, and in this case, scholarly expectations, then this research is playful. And this the writing is too. There is risk in this playfulness, but in it, there are also rich possibilities for meaningful futures.

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