Reconfiguring the Natures of Childhood

Affrica Taylor

2013

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Introduction

... [C]hildren have a special affinity for the natural environment – an affinity that is connected to the child's development and his or her ways of knowing.

(Wilson, 2008)

If we really want our children to thrive we need to let their connection to nature nurture them.

(Warden, 2007, cited in Mindstretchers, 2012)

Childhood and nature seem like a perfect match. Young children are often declared to have a natural affinity or connection with nature, and in turn, Mother Nature is often deferred to as the exemplary guide and nurturer during the early childhood years. The very concepts of childhood and nature are imbricated in a myriad of ways. Sharing an entangled epistemological trajectory, their close relationship has been firmly cemented within the western popular imaginary as a reassuring fact of life. In fact, childhood and nature seem bound together as the essential and original raw materials of life itself – or at least the human chapter of it. What life-giving partnership could possess a more self-evidently 'good', 'natural' and 'normal' character and quality than childhood and nature? The compelling romance of this coupling is underpinned by the premise that childhood and nature constitute a predestined, wholesome and enduring match. Supported by the certitude and moral authority of its affiliation with nature, the naturalness of childhood is confidently reaffirmed on an everyday basis. It is a most seductive and reassuring partnership.

Against this tide of conventional wisdom, I set out to queer the relationship between childhood and nature – to deromanticize it, to render it less assuredly natural and normal and to reconfigure it as infinitely more dynamic and complex. Bruno Latour's provocative comment, 'We have no idea what things would look like if they had not always been engaged in the battle of naturalization' (Latour, 2004: 42), spurs me on to ponder how we might conceive of childhood differently, if its naturalization was not already signed, sealed and delivered by its

romantic coupling with a singular, or personified Nature (Williams, 1983: 221). How else might we think about childhood, if this relationship was not already demarcated and foreclosed – a done-deal between idealized perfect partners?

My purpose is not just to ridicule and discard the relationship between nature and childhood, but to hijack it from the Romantics, to politicize, reorient and reconfigure it as a lively and unforeclosed set of relations with a different set of political and ethical affordances. Despite the fact that I am setting out to denaturalize the conventional way of understanding the relationship between nature and childhood, I want to be clear from the outset that it is not my intention to jettison nature altogether, and redraw the boundaries around childhood as a purely social construct. In other words, I am not advocating a complete abandonment of nature in favour of an exclusively cultural under-standing of childhood. For me, the point of denaturalizing the more familiar, 'normal' and predictable couplings of childhood and nature is not simply to dismantle a fiction, but to clear a space for some queerer envisionings. These queer (as opposed to 'natural' and 'normal') envisionings of what counts as nature and childhood not only promise to be unexpected and lively, but, most significantly, have the potential to reveal a different kind of inclusive ethics for coexisting in more 'liveable worlds' (Haraway, 1994: 60).

What makes these envisionings queer is the very peculiarity of the assembled partners and the unpredictability of the circumstances in which they come together. If only we could think beyond the exclusive, monogamous and romantic union of childhood and singular Nature, all manner of interestingly variegated childhoods, natures and cultures could be rearticulated. This book is my attempt to turn the relationship between childhood and nature into a much more promiscuous, multifarious, generative and open-ended affair.

Strategic moves and guiding questions

To this end, I make two strategic moves. The first is a deconstructive one, to unravel some of the connective threads that have firmly sutured familiar tropes of nature and childhood from the Enlightenment to the present. These unravellings are guided by the question *What does nature do when coupled with childhood in this way?* Although I am by no means outside the discursive force field of 'natural childhood', this question helps me to better understand the seductive appeal of these naturalistic tropes by putting the spotlight on their effects and exploring their unintended consequences.

Throughout the book I am just as concerned with the task of troubling the naturalization of nature as I am in unravelling the effects of naturalized childhood. It is this double move that helps me to queer the sacrosanct union between singular Nature and childhood. Thankfully, I do not have to start from scratch. In my second strategic move, which is much more of a reconstructive one, I draw heavily upon the ground-breaking conceptual work that has already been undertaken to knock singular Nature off its capitalized pedestal – but

also to reclaim nature (or natures) in other forms. This involves many trans-disciplinary forays into science studies (especially Latour, 1993 and 2004; and Haraway, 1994, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d; 2004e, 2008a, 2011) and human geography (in particular Whatmore, 2002; Castree, 2001 and 2005; Massey, 1993, 2005; Hinchcliffe, 2005, 2007). Scholars from these disciplines specialize in interrogating nature, so there is much to be learnt from them. One of the key strategies I adopt in this book, and perhaps my most original contribution, is to bring reconceptualizations of nature from science studies and human geography into conversation with reconceptualizations of childhood. This fertile dialogue also supports the pursuit of my second question: *How might we do nature otherwise in early childhood studies?*

In addressing this challenging question I turn to the work of Donna Haraway (1985, 1989, 1991, 1994, 1997, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d, 2004e, 2008a, 2008b, 2011), whose self-declared project of 'queering what counts as nature' (1994: 60) first inspired me to think that it might also be possible to queer the relationship between singular Nature and childhood. Through reading Haraway's extraordinary body of seriously playful, politically insightful and highly idiosyn-cratic work, I have come to appreciate that thinking differently about nature and what it means to be human – or to be a child in this case – is only half the game. Haraway's queer sensibility is not only evident in her ability to think outside of the box, but also in her predilection to strategically do, or perform, her scholarship in quite a different way. Consistent with her commitment to pursue alternative feminist methods, she seeks to move beyond 'the more "normal" rhetorics of systematic critical analysis', when it becomes clear that this form of analysis only serves to 'repeat and sustain our entrapment in the stories of the established disorders' (Haraway, 2004a: 47). It is the congruence between her message and her method that makes it so performatively and productively queer. For instance, her writings are replete with strategies for refusing essentialisms and messing up binary categories (such as the nature/culture binary, which is the prime concern of this book) without recourse to more conventional methods of systematic deconstruction.

One of Haraway's favourite queering strategies is to deliver feminist 'bag lady stories', assembling 'unexpected partners' and 'irreducible details' (2004b: 127) across the nature/technology/culture divide. Perhaps the most famous example is her boundary-blurring feminist cyborg figure (1985, 1991, 2004d), which is configured across the human/technological/bio-scientific/semiotic domains. Also defying her own categorization, Haraway insists that her work is neither 'realism', nor 'biological determinism', nor 'social constructionism', but a 'serious … effort to get elsewhere' (Haraway 2004c: 330). Her serious, but also very playful, efforts guide my attempts to reconstruct, reconfigure and rearticulate some alternative natures of childhood. They help me to take the possibilities of childhood and nature 'elsewhere', not only in terms of the ways we think about them but also through the ways that we 'do' them in our research and writing.

Working to denaturalize childhood: An overview

Challenges to the naturalist assumptions about childhood and the universalist premises that flow from it are not new to the academy, although it seems that they have had limited uptake outside of the academic domain. Spearheaded by childhood sociologists (Buckingham, 2000; Corsaro, 2005; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; James and Prout, 1990; Kehily, 2004; Jenks, 2005; Lee, 2001; Qvortrup, 1993; Wyness, 2008), clear delineations have been drawn between the state of human biological immaturity and the cultural interpretations of and social responses to this biology – which we call childhood. It is commonly conceded that while biology might be natural, there is nothing natural about our interpretations of and responses to this biology. The main game for sociologists is therefore to study how different understandings of childhood are produced or constructed (including within the academy), and/or to use empirical research to better understand how these constructions, in turn, shape the real-life experiences of children.

Within childhood studies – a field populated by sociologists and scholars from cognate disciplines – it is now axiomatic to refute the naturalization of childhood and to approach childhood as a social construct. In reflecting upon the changes in this field over the last couple of decades, Jenks (2005: 49) observes that it is as if childhood scholars have redoubled their efforts to 'transform the natural into the cultural'. There is no doubt that these intensified efforts to present childhood as above all a cultural or social construct (and at the same time to discount the significance of its nature or biology) are closely linked to the late twentieth-century cultural or linguistic turn. This paradigmatic shift, commonly referred to as post-structuralism, is characterized by a set of powerful new conceptual tools and methods that have given childhood scholars additional means for denaturalizing childhood. For instance, Michel Foucault's (1982, 1990) central and generative notion of 'discourse' as a linguistic practice that produces (rather than simply describes) social subjects and truth regimes has facilitated new insights about the technologies of power associated with social construction. This, in turn, has allowed scholars to redouble their efforts to debunk essentialist or truth claims about childhood (MacNaughton, 2005; Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007). Such truth claims are typically established and defended in the name of Nature, and nowhere is this more apparent than in relation to children's gendered behaviours. Inspired by Judith Butler's (1990 and 1993) extensions of Foucault's theories, post-structural feminist childhood scholars have been active in denaturalizing children's gendered behaviours by showing the ways in which they are performatively enacted and normalized by the heterosexual matrix (Blaise, 2005; Blaise and Taylor, 2012; Renold, 2005; Robinson, 2005; Taylor, 2008, 2010a, 2010b; Taylor, Blaise and Robinson, 2007; Taylor and Richardson, 2005a).

Also associated with the cultural turn is Jacques Derrida's (1976) deconstructive method, which aims to destabilize the binary categories that support

modern western logic. Throughout modern western history, the apparent logic, or 'common sense' of these same binaries has been used to justify the subjugation of all manner of people deemed to be self-evidently or 'naturally' inferior – such as indigenous people, women, gays and lesbians. Deconstruction has assisted childhood scholars to take on the binary categories of childhood and adulthood (Buckingham, 2000; Lee, 2001) and the radical polarization of nature and culture, a foundational Enlightenment dualism that underpins so much categorical western thinking, including thinking about childhood (Lenz-Taguchi, 2010; Prout, 2005; Taylor, 2011).

The positioning of childhood within the polarized camps of nature or culture has been most popularly expressed within the long-standing 'nature/nurture' debates. Spurred on by the potential for socialization theory to explain (and by feminists' desires to redress) children's stereotypical gendered behaviour (Denzin, 1977), this debate reached its zenith in the 1970s and 1980s, but it still holds currency, both within and beyond the academy. Within this debate, disagreement pivots around the proportional influences of biology (nature) and socialization (nurture) upon the child. This is a zero-sum formula, most often expressed in terms of percentages. The actual categories of nature (biology) and culture (nurture) are not in dispute, let alone the concepts of childhood that they support. Even though the nature/nurture debate keeps us 'zig-zagging between the poles of culture and nature' (Wyness, 2008: 22), it does not reflect the conceptual polarization, or epistemological schism, that has spread within the academy post the cultural turn. For the last few decades, these deep-seated epistemological differences have been manifest in the disciplinary demarcations between the nature realists on the one hand and the social constructionists on the other. The nature realists are predominantly physical or behavioural scientists, seeking the biological/chemical/neurological determinants and 'hard facts' of childhood. The social constructionists are those social scientists who argue that we can only ever know childhood through our culturally produced discourses about it – including scientific discourses about the 'facts' of childhood.

This epistemological schism is most apparent in the field of early childhood education and care. This is because the theories of child growth and development and theories of learning that frame the field are informed by developmental psychology – a behavioural science with a nature realist orientation (for a notable exception, see Walkerdine, 1988). It is because developmental psychology, rather than sociology, is the foundational discipline of early childhood education and care, that this field is largely, but not exclusively, one that assumes a nature realist perspective. There have been significant internal challenges to this naturalistic perspective, spearheaded by those early childhood scholars who have engaged with post-structural theories. For instance, scholars such as Canella and Kincheloe (2002), Cannella and Soto (2010), Cannella and Viruru (2004), Dalhberg, Moss and Pence (1999), Dahlberg and Moss (2005), Hultqvist and Dahlberg (2001), O'Loughlin and Johnson (2010), Ryan and Grieshaber (2005) and Zornado (2001) not only insist that childhood is a discursive rather

than a natural construction, but also point to the dangerous political effects of its naturalization. In contesting naturalist assumptions about childhood, they call for reconceptualized (post-structural) understandings to inform new approaches to early years education, policy and care. The following provocative assertion by Kenneth Hultqvist and Gunilla Dahlberg (2001: 9) exemplifies the post-structuralist counter-naturalist argument: 'There is no natural or evolutionary child, only the historically produced discourses and power relations that constitute the child as an object and subject of knowledge, practice, and political intervention.' As an explicit rebuff to the naturalization of childhood, this statement also implicitly evokes the paradigmatic gulf that exists within the field of early childhood education and care – a gulf between the nature realists and the social constructionists.

Reproducing or redressing the schism?

More recently, some of those who have been schooled in the social constructionist side of the divide are expressing a growing discomfort with this schism. Most notably, Alan Prout (2005), in his book *The Future of Childhood*, offers a challenge to the social constructionist position that he himself spent decades promoting (James and Prout, 1990; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). To explain this challenge, he picks up on the argument that Bruno Latour (1993) puts forward in *We Have Never Been Modern* (see Prout, 2005: 40–3). In this groundbreaking work, Latour argues that modernity is both a paradoxical and a delusional intellectual project. This is because on the one hand, it works hard to purify and maintain an epistemological and ontological separation between nature and culture (through disciplinary schisms similar to those discussed above). On the other hand, it uses its scientific knowledge and technological inventions to meddle with the natural world, thereby facilitating the proliferation of mediated and thus hybridized 'nature-culture' entities and effects. Human-induced climate change is perhaps the ultimate example of a nature-culture effect. In other words, modernity is working at odds with itself – insisting on pure categories while creating new hybrid ones. Prout points out that by insisting that childhood is an entirely discursive production, social constructionists risk unwittingly contributing to this flawed modernist project. In other words, if they claim childhood to be semiotically autonomous, they are turning it into a purely cultural phenomenon. If this is the case, it is not only nature realists who are engaged in what Latour (1993: 10–11) calls 'the work of purification'. As Prout (2005: 56) puts it, social constructionism now 'stands in danger of becoming merely a reverse discourse, declaring "society" where previously had been written "nature"'.

The future of childhood studies, according to Prout, lies in doing something different. He is not calling for scholars to discard insights about the discursive construction of childhood and default to accepting its realist definitions, but rather to pursue ways of studying childhood that do not require

mutually exclusive choices between the assumed-to-be-purely-natural or the assumed-to-be-purely-cultural. Borrowing Latour's (1993: 11) hybridized (as opposed to pure and differentiated) notion of 'nature-culture', Prout proposes that 'the future of childhood studies rests on ways of treating childhood as a "nature-culture"... [O]nly by understanding the ways in which childhood is constructed by the heterogeneous elements of culture and nature, which in any case cannot be easily separated, will it be possible to take the field forward' (1993: 44).

Prout is not the only childhood scholar to declare the perpetuation of the nature/culture divide to be futile. Inspired by the work of the material feminists (see Alaimo and Hekman, 2008), and in particular the work of Karen Barad (2003 and 2007), Hillevi Lenz-Taguchi (2010) also warns against the constructionist propensity to privilege the discursive and dismiss the significance of 'matter'. She proposes an 'intra-active pedagogy', based on Barad's insistence that matter (or nature) and meaning (or culture) are not separate but 'mutually implicated' and 'mutually articulated' through the 'dynamics of intra-action' between the 'material and the discursive' (Barad, 2007: 152, cited in Lenz-Taguchi, 2010: 5). As Lenz-Taguchi elaborates, this kind of thinking represents a clear departure from the existing 'either-or' and 'both-and' responses to the discursive/material divide (2010: 28–9). Unlike these existing approaches, her intra-active pedagogy does not entail choosing between nature and culture or privileging one over the other. It does not attempt to reduce nature to culture or culture to nature – as both hyper-constructionist accounts and biological essentialist accounts tend to do. Nor does it formulate the proportional influence of nature and culture – as in the nature/nurture debate. Following Barad, Lenz-Taguchi (2010: 29) keeps her focus on the 'in-between of intra-activities' – on what goes on between the discursive and the material. This is where the generative action is – and where, she surmises, real learning takes place.

Concerns, motivations and aspirations

My overview of the reinvigorated efforts by scholars to denaturalize childhood by engaging with the discursive analytics of the cultural turn highlights some of the unintended consequences of this move. Most significantly, it highlights the paradoxical correlation between the increasing sophistication of this denaturalization project and the intensification of the nature/culture divide. This is most clearly played out within the field of early childhood education. One of the unfortunate side effects of reproducing this division, which concerns Prout and Lenz-Taguchi as well as me, is that if childhood is reduced to nothing more than a human concept, this also implies that the only real action is human meaning making. The world itself, beyond the meaning that humans attribute to it, is more or less abandoned, rendered inert and/or easily malleable, and left to the nature realists to interpret, as before. This is a highly unsatisfactory situation – and a stand-off that I aim to tackle in this book.

Having made this brave assertion, I am the first to admit my trepidation. A potential web of tangled contradictions faces anyone who attempts to deconstruct the nature/culture divide and at the same time refuses to abandon this world that we so problematically refer to as 'nature'. Not the least of these challenges is the fact that no western subject can entirely step outside of the categorical divides that structure western thought. However, as Derrida (2005 (1978): 358–9) notes, we can resist the truth-value of these structuring dualisms, and we can reappropriate categories, such as 'nature', as useful tools. I hope the reader can forgive any clumsiness as I undertake the ambitious and fraught process of refuting the familiar idealized and singularized Nature that issues from the nature/culture divide, while reclaiming and embracing a motley collection of less familiar and non-innocent on-the-ground natures. Despite some apprehension, I am spurred on by Haraway and Harvey's (1995) encouragement not to shy away from this daunting task, and I am very grateful for their acknowledgement that it is both 'terribly important to overcome these divides' and at the same time 'terribly hard to find a language to do so' (1995: 515).

It is my schooling in human geography that motivates and supports me to take on the nature/culture divide in early childhood studies, to queer the romantic coupling of nature and childhood, and to retain an active sense of the world that we tend to reduce to singular Nature within childhood studies. As I mentioned earlier, human geography has long addressed the fraught question of nature and human relationships to it, and the various articulations of nature within the nature/culture divide. It seems to me that the project of denaturalizing childhood can only gain by taking on these insights about nature.

For although much critical attention has been paid to denaturalizing and reconceptualizing childhood within childhood studies, little or no attention has been paid to denaturalizing and reconceptualizing nature. Despite its long-standing cameo role in early childhood education, nature, to date, has remained a relatively taken-for-granted concept in the project of denaturalizing childhood. I argue that this omission, in turn, is accentuating the nature/culture schism in early childhood education. As a 'go-between' between the human geographies of nature and childhood studies, I take on the precarious double role of (singular) Nature critic and advocate for queerly reconfigured natures within the bigger project of denaturalizing and reconceptualizing childhood.

These dual roles need further explanation. My nature critic role is driven by my abiding distrust of unitary and valorized discourses of nature. By this I am referring to those discourses that sanctimoniously uphold an unspecified singular notion of Nature as an indisputable cover-all explanation or rationalization. I am well aware of how this nature has been and still is deployed to 'naturalize' and 'normalize' associated terms, such as race, gender and sexuality, in order to justify the unequal valuing of human lives, political exclusions and to claim the moral high-ground. This effect is intensified when the additional associative term of childhood is added to the mix, and nature is evoked as the moral authority to regulate children's gender and sexuality (Taylor, 2007, 2008,

2010a, 2010b). I readily agree with Latour's (2004) claim that for too long now, a singular and generic notion of Nature, or what he also refers to as 'mononaturalism', has performed a similar function to the old unmarked category of Man. The main difference is that while Man has now been thoroughly critiqued and differentiated (in terms of gender, human diversity, multiculturalism, etc.) Nature has not (2004: 48–9). The continuing uncritiqued deployment of capital N nature acts as a political foil. In this form, Nature functions as the final word – it reduces politically contentious 'matters of concern', to use Latour's words, to indisputable 'matters of fact' (2004: 51).

Despite the best efforts of some childhood scholars to denaturalize childhood, a sentimental attachment to a singularly virtuous and thus valorized nature is still widespread in the field of early childhood education. Although it might appear that this is a benign attachment, I think it needs challenging. I realize that I risk offending by being a critic of valorized nature, but it is not my intention to be a cynical spoiler or to ridicule those who seem to be 'sucked in'. Rather, I intend to look closely at what this romantic coupling or conflation of childhood and nature actually does and to unravel some of its tightly-knotted imbrications and unintended consequences. Typically the work of deconstruction ends when the structuring relationship between key concepts and their epistemological and ontological effects have been exposed. However, this is the moment when I shift into my second role, as an advocate for queerer understandings of nature and of childhood.

In this role, I set out to reclaim nature from the Romantics and to reconfigure its relationship with childhood through a series of enacted naturecultures (Law, 2004). I am aware that the ways in which we know nature determines what it *does* (Hinchcliffe, 2007), including what it does to childhood. For this reason, I argue that the field of early childhood education can only benefit from knowing this relationship differently. In place of the sentimental attachment to the romantic coupling of childhood with capital N Nature, I offer a grounded, ethically and politically attuned and queer reconfiguration of the relationships between diverse children and their diverse or 'multinatural' worlds (Latour, 2004). Following Haraway's lead, I offer these reconstructed or reconfigured otherwise childhoods and natures in the hope of cohabiting in more inclusive and 'liveable worlds' (Haraway, 1994: 60).

Structure of the book

This book is divided into two parts that reflect these deconstructive and reconstructive moves. Each part has three chapters.

The first part – 'The Seduction of Nature' – offers a genealogy of the western Romantic couplings of capital N Nature and childhood from the Enlightenment to the present. Taking a geo-historical perspective, the chapters in this section pay attention to the circumstances and conditions in which the singular notion of Nature was initially produced and attached to the notion of childhood, and

subsequently reproduced in different times and places. They consider how and why this conflation of Nature and childhood has had such an enduring and seductive appeal and address the question of what Nature does when coupled with childhood.

Chapter 1 – 'Rousseau's Legacy: Figuring Nature's Child' – focuses upon the earliest dissemination of idealized notions of Nature and childhood in the western world. It starts by providing a detailed examination of Rousseau's seminal eighteenth-century ideas about nature, childhood and education. It deconstructs Rousseau's rhetorical strategies and the structuring logic he used to conflate Nature and childhood and to produce the prototypical figure of Nature's Child. The chapter concludes by looking at the ways in which Rousseau's Nature's Child figure has been reproduced by nineteenth-century European Romantic writers and artists and by the Transcendentalists in North America.

Chapter 2 – 'Representing Nature's Child' – picks up on Rousseau's legacy and traces it through twentieth-century popular culture representations. Focusing upon the ways in which Rousseau's generic Nature's Child figure has been adapted in different geo-historical contexts, it deconstructs four very different Romantic children's texts: two Disney nature animation feature films featuring US nature; and two well-known Australian children's nature books which have been made into feature films. The deconstruction foregrounds the ways in which the structuring logic of the nature/culture divide has secured the continuity of the Nature's Child figure in each of these texts. It also highlights the specific ways in which the Nature's Child figure has been transmitted in modified form in different historical and geographical circumstances and contexts, thus ensuring its continuing relevance to widespread adult and child audiences.

Chapter 3 – 'Educating Nature's Child' – traces the various ways in which European early childhood educators have drawn upon Rousseau's Nature's Child figure to inform curriculum and pedagogical design from Fröebel's original German kindergarten through to the establishment of contemporary Nature Kindergartens. It deconstructs the ways in which Rousseau's idea of Nature as Teacher has been variously interpreted and permeated these early childhood education initiatives. It also considers the impact of recent calls to prevent the demise of children's first-hand experiences of nature, and how these have been taken up in a revival of natural outdoor education within early childhood.

The second part – 'Reconfiguring the Natures of Childhood' – takes a reconstructive turn. The chapters in this part draw upon contemporary trans-disciplinary reconfigurations of natures to guide reconceptualizations of the relationship between situated childhoods and natures. Following the lead of these trans-disciplinary interventions, chapters in this section deliberately set out to mess up the categorical divisions between nature and culture in order to queer the natures of childhood and to reconfigure them as enmeshed natureculture common worlds. They enact, or perform, some queerly reconfigured childhood natureculture common worlds, which bear no resemblance to Rousseau's purist and singular Nature's Child figure that was the subject of the first section of this book.

Chapter 4 – 'Assembling Common Worlds' – constructs a new conceptual framework for simultaneously reconfiguring the natures and cultures of childhood. It surveys trans-disciplinary nature retheorizations that have been produced through conversations between human geographers, science and technology studies scholars, feminist eco-philosophers and indigenous peoples. It draws upon these retheorizations to suggest that reconfigured natures of childhood can be productively engaged as inclusive common worlds, composed of all manner of assembled entities: material and discursive; living and inert; human and more-than-human.

Chapter 5 – 'Enacting Common Worlds' – uses the common worlds conceptual framework assembled in the previous chapter to enact some reconfigured natures of childhood. Drawing upon Haraway's queer methods, it performatively addresses the question 'How might we do natures otherwise in early childhood?' It enacts some child–animal relations that are specific to two distinctively Australian common worlds. The first of these offers a window into the contemporary indigenous Mparntwe world of desert child–animal relations. The second relates to predominantly east-coast post-colonial white settler, immigrant child–animal relations. Both of these enactments attend to the ways in which contemporary Australian children and animals inherit and coinhabit messy and mixed-up post-colonial worlds. The ethical and political dilemmas and challenges that are thrown up within these messy and non-innocent common worlds are featured in these enactments.

The Conclusion – 'Towards Common Worlds Pedagogies' – reflects upon the difficulties and rewards of making the shift from idealized Nature's Child to messy common worlds childhoods. It surveys the pedagogical possibilities of reconfigured early childhood common worlds – envisioning these natureculture worlds as an opportunity for learning *with* others and as a way to practise an expanded and worldly form of inclusion. It explains how and why common worlds pedagogies are relevant to the real-world challenges facing twenty-first-century children. As an alternative to child-centredness and an exclusive focus upon the needs of the individual child, it urges early childhood educators to attend to children's relations with others when designing inclusive, ethical and relevant common worlds pedagogies.