

Maddening pre-service early childhood education and care through poetics: Dismantling epistemic injustice through mad autobiographical poetics

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Abstract

In this article, the author forwards the importance of mad autobiographical poetic writing to challenge and disrupt epistemic injustice within pre-service early childhood education and care. They explore their own mad autobiographical poetic writing as a queer, non-binary, mad early childhood educator and pre-service early childhood education and care faculty member, and argue that mad poetic writing can methodologically be used as a form of resistance to epistemic injustices and epistemological erasure in early childhood education and care. This article argues for the importance of autobiographical writing in early childhood education and care, and the necessity of centralizing early childhood educators' subjectivities and histories when addressing – and transforming – issues of equity, inclusion and belonging in early childhood education and care. The personal and intimate mad autobiographical poetic writing of this article – written by the author – focuses on how personal experience with madness as it pertains to working within pre-service early childhood education and care can challenge norms that govern and regulate madness. Ultimately, the author argues that transformation in early childhood education and care can take place by reflecting on experiences of mental and emotional distress, and considering poetic writings as starting places for imagining new futurities and a plurality of educator voices and perspectives.

Keywords

epistemic injustice, madness, mad studies, poetics, pre-service early childhood education and care

What is our diagnosis of the times? What is our image of the child, the educator, parent and school? How do we understand 'education' and 'care'? What is education for? What are the fundamental values of education? (Moss, 2016: 12)

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Introduction

I start out this article with these words by Moss (2016) because they bring about many questions regarding the current state of pre-service early childhood education and care (ECEC) and its connections to developmentalism, which I seek to address in this article, particularly through mad autobiographical poetic writing and theorizing. I aim to *madden* conceptions of pre-service ECEC teaching and pedagogy (Davies, 2022) by explicitly emphasizing personal poetic writing, which seeks to bring forward my experiences with madness and mental distress, as well as the ultimate *madness* of teaching and working in pre-service ECEC in higher education (Davies, 2022, 2023; Davies, Brewer, et al., 2022). Such poetic writing challenges positivist and developmentalist constructions of children, educators and pre-service education, and brings forward personal and autobiographical writing that centralizes educator subjectivity in pre-service ECEC (see also Bezaire and Johnston, 2022).

Here, I draw from Burman's (2012) connections between neo-liberal constructions of the child subject and the regulation of adult or parental figures. Neo-liberalism as a social and economic structure focused on individual improvement, self-responsibilization and self-regulation is intertwined with developmental psychology and notions of children's growth, specifically developmentalism's emphasis on normative ages and stages, and seemingly universalized patterns of growth, making considerations of the 'cracks' and 'fissures' in developmentalism's hegemony in ECEC highly important (Burman, 2012: 433). For example, as Burman (2012) explicates, the developmentalist emphasis on ideas of 'sensitive mothering' and social harmony in the second half of the 20th century informed the expectations of white, middle-class, cis-heteronormative mothering practices that would maintain the hegemony of the nuclear family, parental emotional regulation, self-regulation and middle-class cis-heteronormative values.

Teaching and working in pre-service ECEC can be emotionally exhausting, particularly given the focus on happiness, joy, and the onto-epistemological connections between educator subjectivity and children's development (Davies, 2022; Davies, Brewer, et al., 2022). As a faculty member who experiences ongoing chronic mental illness, I am tacitly aware that I am socially expected not to share my experiences with madness with my students. As well, given the emotionally demanding work of being an early years educator, if I were to be working directly in the field of ECEC as an early childhood educator, I would experience discrimination if I were to share my experiences with madness and emotional and mental distress with others (i.e. colleagues, supervisors and parents in particular). It is also important to acknowledge at the onset of writing this article that I am able to share the following experiences and poetry due to the privileges I experience as a white, cisgender-presenting (i.e. I identify as non-binary but am typically read as cisgender), upper-middle-class tenure-track faculty member. Despite the challenges I experience in pre-service ECEC, I can share my experiences, while many others cannot out of fear of potentially severe repercussions.

In this article, I engage with mad autobiographical poetic writing (Smith, 2018, 2020) as a form of critique of the dominant status quo in pre-service ECEC (Davies, 2022). I begin by describing some of my experiences teaching and learning in pre-service ECEC and child studies then move to outlining mad studies (LeFrançois et al., 2013) as a theoretical framework, with specific focus on the concept of *epistemic injustice* (Fricker, 2007) for this article. I then outline mad studies critiques of the hegemony of developmentalism in ECEC, describe my poetic methodology, and provide some autobiographical poetic writing. I finish with a discussion of some of the themes that are prominent in my mad autobiographical poetic writing. While I provide this outline for the sake of clarity for the reader, I strive not to confine my writing to positivist conventions, meaning that the reader is welcome to engage with only my poetic writing or any part of this piece that

seems relevant or intriguing (see also Davies, Karmiris et al., 2022). The subsequent subheadings and more traditional layout of the article are to ensure that my piece is accessible to the greatest level of readership. I realize that this entails ‘working within and against’ (Lather, 2012) dominant conventions at times.

Entering teaching and learning in child studies and pre-service ECEC

When I start the semester in my course on inclusion and disability with pre-service ECEC students, I ask my students their opinions on the purpose of education and how to ensure inclusion for all students. I undoubtedly hear ideas around assisting children in ‘reaching their full potential’ and providing ‘high-quality’ education, which, as I have written about previously (Davies, 2022, 2023; Davies, Brewer et al., 2022), is highly connected to discriminatory ideas of ‘educator capability’. Being a ‘capable’ educator remains connected with constructions of children’s development, emotional regulation and self-regulation, and ages-and-stages theories that position normative or ‘typical’ development as the desired ‘outcome’ for children (Davies, Brewer et al., 2022). Even my own institution, University of Guelph, which is known for being a comprehensive institution in Canada with an emphasis on the hard sciences and scientific research, holds the motto, ‘Improve Life,’ which is taken for granted as a natural good without interrogation (Davies, 2023; Kelly and Rice, forthcoming). By ‘improving life,’ education and pre-service ECEC training are intertwined with scientized and positivist ideas of child development, which position normalcy – or white, middle-class, cis-heteronormative, able-bodied rationality – as ideal (Davies, Karmiris et al., 2022). The theories that I am asked to teach and disseminate within pre-service ECEC training are often violent towards my own subjectivity as a queer, mad, neurodivergent, non-binary scholar, activist and researcher.

Notions of ‘quality’ and ‘capability’ are steeped in neo-liberal values regarding standardization and assessment, and are highly connected to developmentalist constructions of children’s present and future. As a pre-service ECEC higher education faculty member, I am surrounded by conversations that elicit shivers up my spine regarding how children, education, educators and care are discussed through such developmentalist frames (Davies, 2022). Given that my current department and early childhood education program hold historical connections between the Eugenics Society of Canada and the developmentalist knowledges disseminated to our students (Kelly et al., 2021), I find teaching in pre-service ECEC quite *maddening* at times (Davies, 2022). Moreover, I experience myself and my history with madness as often incompatible with the current status quo in ECEC. As described by Varga (2011: 154), eugenics ideas were entrenched within developmental psychology and child studies theories in the early 20th century to ensure that children’s development was intervened in, regulated, studied and monitored, and that those described as ‘morons’ or identified with any form of mental or developmental ‘deficiency’ would not ‘slip by unnoticed’.

After completing my Master’s in Child Studies, I decided that I did not want to enter into the fields of elementary education or ECEC. I had struggled with my mental health throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies and, after becoming a certified teacher and early childhood educator through my graduate training, chose to continue onto doctoral studies in education and women’s and gender studies and sexual diversity studies. Upon finishing my Master’s in Child Studies, I came to conceptualize how the ‘psy sciences’ (Rose, 1998) informed our normative images of children, educators and education. I felt that my positionality as a queer, neurodivergent, non-binary, mentally ill student-teacher positioned me and my way of thinking/being/living outside of the developmental hegemonies of early years education. I had yet to encounter mad studies or critiques of psychiatry, which I was introduced to in my doctoral studies through a course that I

enrolled in with Dr Bonnie Burstow, a prominent anti-psychiatry scholar (Burstow et al., 2014), at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. However, I did know that my mind was certainly not considered ‘normal’, and I had trouble with the amount of emotional labour that I felt was required to perform the constantly happy and joyful early years and elementary educator when working with children (Davies, 2023). I also was tacitly aware that all my identities were ones that had been historically – and continue to be – constituted through biomedical psychiatric frameworks in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), which pathologize queerness, gender diversity, neurodiversity and madness (Dunn, 2018; Kuhl and Martino, 2018). Ultimately, I did not feel I belonged in ECEC.

Theoretical frameworks

Mad studies

Throughout this article, I work within mad studies (Beresford and Russo, 2021; LeFrançois et al., 2013), which is a field of study and theoretical framework that emphasizes the first-person experiences of individuals who encounter psychiatric violence and classification, with a sustained critique of the psy disciplines, such as psychiatry and psychology. Mad studies centralizes the voices and perspectives of people who identify as mad or with mad studies and politics, meaning individuals who experience violence through psychiatry – epistemically, epistemologically and ontologically – in disciplines and fields that predominately employ knowledges from the psy sciences, such as social work, early childhood education, nursing and education (Beresford, 2019).

Mad studies critiques developmentalist and psychological knowledges that position intervention – whether behavioural or pharmaceutical – as the ideal course of action and asks questions regarding the ethical implications of interventions and how such interventions aim to produce docility and limit creativity. Bruce (2017: 306) describes how ‘we might also imagine madness as a transgressive mode of motion within Reason’s oppressive domains; a trembling, swelling, bursting movement that disrupts Reason’s supposedly steady order and tidy borders’. Eales and Peers (2021: 165) cite Peers (2018) to theorize how poetry provides mad and disabled people with an opportunity for flourishing ‘in the face of that which would render our most basic needs undesirable, untenable, unreasonable, or “special”’. The false binary of reason–unreason follows mad people (Smith, 2018), whereby mad aesthetic and creative productions are often deemed ‘aesthetics of disruption’ (Kalathil and Jones, 2016: 184), which are potentially unwelcome in the neo-liberal ethos of higher education.

Importantly, Gorman and LeFrançois (2017) note the importance of critical race analytics in mad studies and the necessity of staying critically attuned to ensure that mad studies does not get co-opted or mainstreamed by white supremacist, anti-Black, exclusionary logics that attempt to incorporate mad studies into mainstream, neo-liberal, capitalist logics of inclusion. Bruce (2017) theorizes how modern Enlightenment notions of Reason are entrenched in anti-Black and sanist logics that systemically subjugate Black and mad individuals. Bruce notes how

Reason signifies a hegemonic, Eurocentric, Enlightenment-rooted episteme of transcendental objectivism that is too-often entangled – from those very roots – with antiblack, misogynist, colonialist, and other pernicious ideologies. As such, Reason is often pretext for the systematic subjugation of persons deemed unreasonable or mad. (Bruce, 2017: 304)

The Enlightenment – the Age of ‘Reason’ – frames much of education and early years understandings of children and ‘development’, which are situated within notions of children as incomplete

beings who grow through stages and ages, and scientized ideas of measuring and assessment (Davies, Brewer et al., 2022; Davies, Watson, et al., 2022; Burman, 2012, 2016; Mac Naughton, 2005). Such scientific practices, which began to be employed with young children through the emergence of developmental psychology and child studies – fields that preceded but still informed ECEC – were disproportionately used on racialized, disabled and Indigenous children to separate them from their families, and were also taught in pre-service ECEC and child studies programs in eugenics courses (Kelly et al., 2021; Varga, 2011, 2020). It is necessary for pre-service ECEC to grapple with these histories and epistemological legacies, and conceptualize how modernist notions of Reason propagated in pre-service programs promote anti-Black and sanist logics.

Mad studies (Beresford and Russo, 2021; LeFrançois et al., 2013) encompasses both community-based activism focused on psychiatric survivors and service users' critiques of psychiatry and cultural productions and theoretical frameworks that critique the dominance of psy sciences (e.g. psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis) by promoting ways of thinking outside and beyond dominant psychologized epistemologies. Beresford (2021: 1) describes how mad studies offers 'a real prospect of effective opposition to the marginalisation and oppression of people experiencing madness and distress' and 'an opportunity' for crafting new ways of knowing, living and being. Madness is societally constructed through medicalized and biologized ideas of mental disease, despite there being contention regarding the biological nature of mental illness (Harrington, 2019; LeFrançois, 2020; Maté, 2022). Madness and mad thoughts, feelings and behaviours have been historically – and are still currently – associated with illness, immorality and the societal segregation of those who are deemed mad or identify with their madness (Gomory and Dunleavy, 2017). As Thorneycroft (2020: n.p.) describes, mad is not just a noun or identity term, but also a verb – 'to identify, unearth, disrupt, and subvert' sanism. Sanism – or the stigmatization, exclusion, discreditation and devaluation of individuals who are diagnosed with mental illness or perceived to be mentally ill (Leblanc and Kinsella, 2016; Poole et al., 2012) – is omnipresent in ECEC as a discipline (Davies, 2022, 2023; Davies, Brewer et al., 2022), especially pre-service ECEC and mandated developmentalist accreditation standards (Davies, 2022; Davies, Brewer et al., 2022). By identifying as 'mad' while teaching pre-service ECEC, I am carving out space for madness and mad histories, experiences and knowledges in a field that continues predominantly to disseminate developmentalism and its hegemonic logics to pre-service students (Davies, 2022; Davies, Brewer et al., 2022).

Epistemic injustice: a necessary conversation in pre-service ECEC

LeFrançois (2020: 180) describes epistemic injustice, drawing from Fricker (2007), as 'the notion that some people are seen as knowledge holders and knowledge producers whereas others are not', which 'reproduce[s] social inequalities and a strict hierarchy of privilege, power and white (male able-bodied) supremacy'. Developmentalist epistemologies, typically considered foundational in ECEC, child and youth care, education and social work, rely on the psy sciences and reinforce epistemic injustice by constructing both children and mad people – including children who are deemed mad or mentally ill – as unknowing, incomplete and irrational (Coppock, 2020; LeFrançois, 2020; Mills and LeFrançois, 2018). Mad educators are often discredited in their interpretations of the world, being seen as potentially incompetent, incapable or incapacitated, and are therefore left all but erased in ECEC or forced to regulate and contain any visible significations of madness (Davies, 2022; Davies, Brewer et al., 2022).

In their writing on child development, Farley and Dyer (2022: 12–13) describe how 'taking the expressive representational worlds of childhood seriously can help to unpattern ourselves from tendencies to hollow out the child of their complex responses to social relationships and emotional

conflict'. Similarly, mad people's stories and narratives are continually challenged, interrogated and disbelieved, thereby denying them the ability to have complex, messy and open relationships with their own madness and emotional conflict, which can prevent new and different ways of conceptualizing the world from being heard and perpetuate epistemic injustice. Developmental theories ultimately seek to epistemologically and ontologically reinforce normalcy as the dominant status quo while challenging interpretations of the world that do not fit within positivist ideas of progress and development (Burman, 2016; LeFrançois, 2020). Mad people are often stereotypically constructed as creative and aesthetic thinkers (Silvia and Kaufman, 2010). Aesthetic and creative productions whereby mad people can express their truth are in alignment with Souto-Manning's (2022: 226) call for 'the urgent abolishment of damage-centered portrayals of any young children, families, or communities' in ECEC teacher education, and can allow multiple truths, stories and narratives to exist in ECEC (Davies, Watson et al., 2022).

Souto-Manning's (2022) call can be considered in relationship with both the mandated accredited developmental knowledges that pre-service ECEC programs – and overarching ministries and accrediting bodies – ask instructors and faculty members to disseminate to students and how mad faculty members and instructors are thereby asked to disseminate knowledges that can be harmful to their way of being and erase their subjectivity. This is deeply complicated for pre-service ECEC faculty members and instructors who hold complex relationships with developmental psychology, which does not theorize madness apart from ideas of violence or distress. The very idea that any early childhood educators or, moreover, faculty members might identify as mad can seem *mad-denying* and an impossibility to many (Davies, 2022). Yet we do exist (Bellows, 2016). LeBlanc and Kinsella describe how epistemic injustice is related to efforts to discredit, disprove or silence people's inner knowledge, knowing and experiences:

If it is our ability to know that makes us distinctively human, as has been suggested, it is no wonder that the 'powerful' have historically undermined, insulted, or otherwise wronged the 'powerless' in this capacity, as a means for denouncing their humanity. (Leblanc and Kinsella, 2016: 61)

It is inherently assumed that pre-service ECEC educators would not – or do not – identify as mad or with the mad community, and that if educators held experiences with madness, they would not share such experiences with their students or view their madness as a potentially different way of knowing and existing in the world. Madness is considered almost an impossibility for early childhood educators (Davies, 2022, 2023; Davies, Brewer et al., 2022).

As described by Davies (2022) and Davies, Brewer et al. (2022), pre-service ECEC constrains the types of experiences and knowledges that are deemed allowable to be brought into the pre-service ECEC classroom, which usually means that knowledge formations and theories that are not developmentalist are excluded from pre-service classrooms (Davies, Karmiris et al., 2022). Despite pre-service ECEC students receiving a strong foundational knowledge in child development – typically through a pragmatist approach – there is a need to ensure that students are exposed to a multiplicity of knowledges, which they can imagine within their professional practices (Gibson et al., 2018). Such emphases in pre-service ECEC programs often entails a focus on knowledge that is deemed 'applied' or 'useful' for professional practice, with a discrediting of knowledge that is 'too theoretical' or considered unrealistic for professional practice (Davies, Watson et al., 2022), including poetry, art and the humanities.

Where I am currently located and teach, work, and live in Ontario, Canada, early years pedagogical documents – such as *How Does Learning Happen?* – through ideas of 'belonging' as one of the four foundations of ECEC professional practice (Ontario Ministry of Education,

2014). While belonging is a central tenet of ECEC in Ontario, mad identity, community and knowledges are left invisibilized and unthought of in the ECEC documentation that guides the field, with madness only constructed through stigma and pathology, and educators' mental health left all but unmentioned (Davies, 2022, 2023; Davies, Brewer et al., 2022). As such, epistemic injustice is perpetuated through both *testimonial* injustice and *hermeneutical* injustice (Fricker, 2007), which refer to, respectively, an experience when an individual is seen as not credible in their sharing of experience or knowledge due to prejudices on the part of the listener, and the wronging of groups of people through the prohibition of access to 'interpretive resources' and knowledges to understand their social experiences due to systemic discrimination (Fricker, 2007; Leblanc and Kinsella, 2016).

Mad people – in particular, mad early childhood educators – clearly experience both forms of epistemic injustice as they are not provided with access to mad studies frameworks or theories in their pre-service training – even only being taught knowledges that are incommensurable with mad studies through mandated accreditation standards (Ontario Ministry of College and Universities, 2018) – and are often pushed out of ECEC or encouraged not to work with children due to stereotypes that they might be 'dangerous' or 'incapable' of working with children (Davies, 2022; Davies, Brewer et al., 2022). *How Does Learning Happen?* defines belonging as 'a sense of connectedness to others, an individual's experiences of being valued, of forming relationships with others and making contributions as part of a group, a community, the natural world' (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014: 7). Moreover, early years programs are expected to 'cultivate authentic, caring relationships and connections to create a sense of belonging among and between children, adults, and the world around them' (13). I argue (and have argued) that this sense of belonging is limited for mad early childhood educators and that pre-service training programs, themselves, participate in the exclusion and disenfranchisement of mad early childhood educators through the exclusion of madness and mad subjectivities (Davies, 2022, 2023; Davies, Brewer et al., 2022). As described by Watson (2022), within 'inclusive' early childhood classrooms, diagnostic categories are deployed to map behaviours onto predetermined fixed categories, which reproduces the binaries between 'normal' and 'abnormal'. In this sense, as described by Watson (2022: 453), "[“normal” children] “know” their place and what room they belong in. They see themselves as more mature as they do not show unbridled emotions such as screaming in the classroom'. I extend this to educators – whether in the pre-service ECEC classroom or early years settings – who exhibit and express emotions and behaviours that mark them as 'abnormal', 'strange' or potentially even 'mad'.

Critiquing ECEC through poetics: writing and theorizing madness into ECEC

As someone who teaches pre-service ECEC students at the university level, I often wonder what I can offer my students due to both my youth (I am considered 'inexperienced' in terms of professional practice by my colleagues at times, perhaps due to my young age) and the fact that my educational background and training in my PhD was in cultural studies and critical theory, not developmental psychology or ECEC specifically. Despite the dominant critiques of developmentalism in ECEC – and my even guest-editing a special issue of a prominent ECEC journal regarding disrupting developmentalism in pre-service ECEC (Davies, Karmiris et al., 2022) – developmental psychology and ages-and-stages approaches that promote fixed ideas of children's psychological and cognitive growth are still considered the most 'applied' and 'relevant' forms of knowledge for pre-service ECEC students to engage with (Gibson, 2013; Krieg, 2010; Land and Frankowski, 2022). Such forms of often

technocratic knowledge can limit the imagination of pre-service students and how they conceptualize both educators and the children in their care (Davies, Brewer et al., 2022). Following Dyer (2019: 2), bringing in new conceptualizations of childhood – and educators, I would add – advocates for new kinds of ‘sociality that can evince new affective ties and ethical interactions between children and adults’. Such forms of sociality and new ways of imagining children and educators in pre-service ECEC can be cultivated through mad aesthetic interventions, including poetry.

I started writing poetry as a means of seeking non-psychological therapy to work through the deeply seated feelings of non-belonging and erasure that I was experiencing in my workplace while teaching in pre-service ECEC. Land and Frankowski critically ask:

What is at risk, or what failures might arise, if an experience with children is planned or described without the validation of developmental appropriateness, and instead might find moments that question and notice developmental discourse? What previously lost or forgotten artefacts or citations (aesthetic or otherwise) might help us to think about engaging? (Land and Frankowski, 2022: 462)

Land and Frankowski’s (2022) evocation around the politics of citations in ECEC provides an entryway into considering the lack of mad studies writing, theorizing and activism in ECEC – in particular, in pre-service ECEC. Why are mad scholars and writers not cited and acknowledged in pre-service ECEC? Where and when is madness present in pre-service ECEC, even when it is only considered undesirable or as the lack of joy and happiness? As a mad pre-service ECEC scholar, mad poetic writing became a way to write madness ‘into existence’ (Hoskin, 2021: 6) in pre-service teaching, writing and researching in a world where developmentalism seeks the eradication of and intervention into madness. Instead of conceptualizing madness as a rupture (Snyder et al., 2019) into new forms of thinking, being, imagining and living in pre-service ECEC (Davies, 2022), madness can only be currently considered in course content and pedagogies through research into ‘mental illness’ rates in children and considerations of attachment relationships between early childhood educators and children. Such research continues to place considerable pressures on early childhood educators to perform unrealistic amounts of maternal care and only imagines madness or experiences with mental difference or distress as a tragedy or potential for harm (Davies, 2022; Davies, Brewer et al., 2022). Important critiques of developmentalism in ECEC have emerged from queer studies (Janmohamed, 2010) and Dis/Crit studies (Love and Hancock, 2022), yet the theorizing of madness in ECEC remains limited. However, mad studies scholars are present in many helping professions, including education (Snyder et al., 2019), social work (Poole et al., 2012) and occupational therapy (LeBlanc-Omstead and Kinsella, 2018).

The mad academic, poet, writer and activist phil Smith (2018: 156) delineates how ‘if we want to describe the world, we need – we must – reflect [in] poollike mirror that complex/messy/multiple/constructed/ideological nature in our stow reez’. What stories about madness does ECEC promote? Where, if at all, is there room for mad belonging? Mad poetry and poetics entail holding space for mad knowledges; refusing urges to interpret mad stories through dominant epistemologies (such as developmentalism); and continual questioning, challenging and disruption (Smith, 2018, 2020). Mad poetics and mad writing seek to write madness and mad subjectivities into existence in places, spaces and disciplines that seek the erasure and discreditation of mad knowledges, testimonies and stories, which can be ultimately defined as epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007).

Methods and methodologies

Mad methodologies

Mad methodologies are methodological approaches that refuse positivist and Enlightenment-informed logics of proceduralism, rationality and order (LeFrançois and Voronka, 2022). LeFrançois and Voronka (2022), in conversation with Bruce (2017), delineate a ‘mad methodology’ based on an ‘ethics of unruliness’ informed by mad studies, critical disability studies, and transnational feminist, post-colonial and critical race theorizing. LeFrançois and Voronka (2022: 106) call for a ‘maddening of research’ and ‘maddening ethics’, which entails focusing on activist and subversive knowledges and methodologies that can critique the neo-liberal capitalist and extractive ethos of higher education and academia. As such, a maddening methodology involves approaches and methods that are typically erased, discredited and othered by positivist notions of research and ‘science’.

Bruce notes how a mad methodology

listens for ghosts, madpeople, outcasts, and disembodied voices that trespass, like stowaways, in modernity; it perceives the expressive potential in the so-called rants and raves of madpeople; it is poised to find message within messiness and philosophy within ‘pathology’; and it respects the peculiar vantage points of those who are askew. (Bruce, 2017: 306)

Listening for such ‘ghosts’ and ‘outcasts’ is the crucial component of mad methodologies since mad approaches listen for the voices of those who are typically excluded due to being deemed irrational or whose experiences and interpretations are considered nonsensical (Bruce, 2017; Leblanc and Kinsella, 2016; LeFrançois et al., 2016). Mad methodologies do not try to ‘make sense’ of mad people’s experiences through rationalist approaches or methodologies informed by positivism but instead honour mad people’s narratives and experiences as they are (Smith, 2018). As such, mad methodologies are affective and in the first person, and focus on writing, speaking, sharing and disseminating knowledge and creations that are deemed excludable by the typical positivist conventions of the academy.

Mad poetics

Mad poetics draws from mad studies, epistemologies and cultural productions to focus on the first-person experiences of mad people, critiquing institutions that produce mad subjectivity through pathology, such as education, medicine, psychiatry and social work. Mad poetic and cultural productions, as described by Eales and Peers (2021), aim to create relationalities and kinships amongst mad people, and emphasize the lived realities of how mad people create caring relations within and amongst each other in spite of a neo-liberal capitalist society that deems them ‘sick’ or ‘dependents’. Smith’s work on mad poetics notes how

maaaaaad stud tease is, in paternated, about madness (the socially constructed state of being crazy, or nuts).

Mad studies reclaims

declaims

enflames

madness is an identitooty. (Smith, 2018: 156)

Mad poetics specifically addresses the erasure and subjugation of mad knowledges and aesthetic, literary and cultural productions, and how mad people experience systemic discredit due to *epistemic injustice* (Smith, 2018). Mad poetics is an autobiographical, relational form of writing that draws attention to the forms of epistemic injustices and silencing that mad people experience, particularly within professions, fields, disciplines and experiences that seek to disenfranchise and eradicate mad knowledge (Smith, 2018, 2020). Mad poetry is autobiographical in nature and written in the first person, wavering between the binaries of fact–fiction, true–false and real–imagined, which reflects its post-structural onto-epistemology (Smith, 2018, 2020). It is not that the experiences being described are not ‘real’ but that the limits of realist onto-epistemologies and ideas of ‘truth’ do not constrain mad poetics – mad poetry critiques the present and imagines new futurities (Smith, 2018, 2020). As Smith writes:

What we know
depends on
who does the knowing.
Because Mad people are crazy
they are by definition
unreliable knowers.
Their knowledge is literally unknown
meaningless
outside of knowledge
nonsense
at least to those holding to the dominating psy-complex
ideology of sanism. (Smith, 2018: 371)

Methods

While writing my mad poetry (Smith, 2018, 2020), I drew from course materials that I have used throughout my years teaching in pre-service ECEC, including, but not limited to, textbooks for my class on disability and inclusion and provincial documents used in Ontario (where I am located) that guide early years curricula and professional practice, including the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), as well as specific memories and experiences from when I was teaching diagnostic categories to students that I myself occupy (Davies, 2022). Stylistically, I drew from and employed Smith’s (2018, 2020) phonetic approach to poetic writing, methodologically drawing inspiration from his work and

writing. As such, my methodology explicitly *is* poetic writing where I write about feeling erased or invisibilized in my own social location as a queer, non-binary, neurodivergent, mad scholar. As someone who has been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), clinical depression, obsessive compulsive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder, I use my poetry to challenge the predominance of biomedicalized understandings of diverse behaviours, feelings and thoughts that are often deemed *mad*. I focus on experiences of erasure in my own subjectivity and the tensions between my inner thoughts and what I have been mandated to teach due to pre-service ECEC accreditation and standards (Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 2018), as well as a positivist departmental climate that often regulates and surveils my teaching.

As such, these poems emphasize experiences of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) in pre-service ECEC through both the erasure and objectification of children and educators who might experience madness within accredited course materials *and* how sanism is embedded in the erasure of mad knowledges, subjectivities and experiences in pre-service ECEC. Such stories, experiences and (re)tellings refuse to be written in, as Smith (2018: 12-13) describes, ‘traditional research forms’ and ‘kept changing from those into other things, things they themselves wanted to be’. These poems were constructed from months of reflecting, thinking and (re)telling of my own experiences, struggles and erasures in pre-service ECEC (see also Davies, 2022). There is no formal order to these poems and while I try to render them as intelligible as possible for the reader, they do not confine themselves to traditional academic writing conventions and merely present themselves as singular episodes, (re)presentations and (re)tellings. I often draw from textbooks that are commonly assigned in pre-service classes and (re)purpose and (re)interpret phrases from the texts for my own poetic purposes. When using text directly in my poetic writing, I use quotation marks, and when paraphrasing a text through my own perspective, I cite as such. Many of these poems, including the one about Lindsey, a case study of a girl with ADHD, stem from my own teachings and an assigned course text.

Results; or, whatever you want to call it

first day jitters

i will start by introducing myself

myself.

myself.

my.

self.

let’s talk about Lindsey. (Edmunds and Edmunds, 2018)

feelings. fearfulness. apprehension. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

obsessive.

compulsive.

disorder.

attention.

madness cannot be controlled.

reggggg-ew-late-ed.

open up your books.

page 174.

cognitive behavioural therapy. (Edmunds and Edmunds, 2018)

we can learn cbt.

disprove those irrational thoughts.

you can do it.

kids can do it.

cbt is for everyone!

buuuuuuuuuut my miiiiiiiiiiiiind.

madness can't be controlled.

contaaaaaaainnnnnned.

what was i talking about?

let's get back on track.

page 174!!!!!!

let's help Lindsey.

how do we know what her thoughts are?

i-r-r-a-t-i-o-n-a-l

Lindsey. (adapted from Edmunds and Edmunds, 2018: 148)

area of concern: impulse control.

area of concern: social interactions.

area of concern: knowledge of her adhd.

a----deeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee---/h/--deeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee.

recurrent thoughts.

dysfunctional beliefs. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

when i walk in the room

madness walks in with me, too.

let's talk about Lindsey.

Lindsey was prescribed Ritalin.

methylphenidate.

upon diagnosis.

her doctor.

monitors.

her medications.

and then prescribed Concerta.

instead. (adapted from Edmunds and Edmunds, 2018: 157)

i'm sorry, everyone.

what page were we on?

i forgot to take my Ritalin.

i can't focus.

belonging.

longing.

longing to be heard.

Lindsey has 'significant difficulties with her schooling' (Edmunds and Edmunds, 2018: 176)

significant.

difficulties.

difficulties are significant.

are they significant?

is Lindsey significant?

tests.

norm referenced. (Edmunds and Edmunds, 2018: 49)

performance.

performance tests!

what do we do with this? (Edmunds and Edmunds, 2018: 74)

p-o-s-t-m-o-d-e-r-n-i-s-m

a challenge to science! (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2018: 74)

buuuuuuuuuuuuuut wait!

there's no answers!! (adapted from Edmunds & Edmunds, 2018: 74)

we cannot keep doing the same.

positivists say:

'This approach diminishes the importance of positivist concepts

such as assessment and testing,

direct instruction,

and classroom or behaviour management

and, as a result,

student teachers are not properly trained in

these areas' (Edmunds and Edmunds, 2018: 74)

i am supposed to tell you

how to manage

students

like me.

does my knowledge count?

is mad knowledge important

to you?

this is the hill.

i wasn't supposed to climb.

i was told i wouldn't be here.

that damn hill.

climb

to

supposed

wasn't

i

hill

the

fu*k

that

hill

also

please

pleaseeee

pleaseeeeee.

listen to me.

they is me.

i am **they**.

i exist

remember.

my.

pronouns.

sensitivity. (adapted from Gestwicki and Bertrand, 2015: 84)

a good ECE [early childhood educator] has

sensitivity to children's worries, interests, and passions (Gestwicki and Bertrand, 2015)

p—a—s—s—i—o—n—s

make a *g—o—o—d e—d—u—c—a—t—o—r*

a 'good ECE.' (Langford, 2007)

this is a *quality* ECE.

sensitivity.

just not the kind of sensitivity that is:

rejection sensitivity.

mood disturbances.

social impairment.

pathological sensitivity.

perceived interpersonal rejection. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

a—f—f—e—c—t—i—v—e l—a—b—i—l—i—t—y (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

no, no, no, no.

educators. (adapted from Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014: 7)

(not) competent. (in)competent. (in)capable.

here comes that hill.

bringing 'diverse, social, cultural, and linguistic perspectives' (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014: 7).

just not mad.

it would be mad to be a mad educator.

mad, mad, mad.

educators 'take responsibility'.

educators 'integrate knowledge from ...

theory, research, their own experience

their own understanding of

individual children'. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014: 7)

just not mad children.

mad educators.

mad experiences.

but here i am

standing in front of you teaching

i exist

madness exists.

Discussion: maddening pre-service ECEC through mad poetics

These poems call for pre-service ECEC faculty members, practitioners and pedagogists to engage with what Leblanc and Kinsella (2016: 74) describe as 'alien knowledge' or knowledge that is deemed *mad* in light of current neo-liberal notions of 'professional practice', 'belonging', 'community' and 'care'. In Ontario, 'belonging' is commonly constructed through notions of 'listening' to diverse families' perspectives, 'inviting their perspectives and providing opportunities for families to participate in meaningful ways' (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014: 18), yet mad knowledges, perspectives and theories are not acknowledged or considered 'valid' or intelligible in pre-service ECEC (Davies, 2022). Moreover, belonging is focused on children's and families' sense of belonging, but educators' own sense of belonging is not centralized in provincial documents. These mad poems refuse the normative, developmentalist forces that seek the erasure, invisibilization and

subjugation of madness, and force mad pre-service educators to silence their subjectivities and experiences and not share their madness in their pre-service teaching.

As a mad, queer, non-binary pre-service early childhood educator, I experience feelings of existing through a double life. I must present myself as a professionalized early childhood educator who cares about child development and issues pertaining to 'quality' ECEC and curricula through one aspect of my life and then read, research and write about madness, queerness and gender expansiveness in my non-teaching subjectivity. Such forms of split consciousness have haunted my teaching and pedagogy – particularly as a junior pre-tenure faculty member – as I have felt constrained and surveilled by the supposedly mandated pre-service curricula and accreditation standards that ensure my undergraduate students become Registered Early Childhood Educators on graduation (Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 2018).

Silin (2020: 55) theorizes how, in the context of queer educators, self-reflection is 'an especially relevant project for LGBTQ+ teachers who have often chosen or been forced to live in the closet and to communicate their queer wisdom in subtle and indirect ways'. As Silin explicates, both early childhood education and queerness are constituted through ideas of temporality, since queerness is often thought to potentially not have any future (Edelman, 2004) while early childhood educators are caught up in notions of fostering children's development and observing children's own growth and play (Silin, 2020: 58). Similar to queerness, within the world of ECEC, madness is constructed only through pathology or as having no future whatsoever, with the children and educators who might be deemed mad only suitable for exclusion from early learning settings.

As someone who has been diagnosed with ADHD, whenever I teach my students about Lindsey and her case study in my textbook, I usually describe my own experiences with ADHD. I share how I still often forget to take my medication and, if I do not take my Ritalin, I will experience headaches and distress throughout the day, which also interferes with my ability to focus. I challenge students' assumptions that medication is always the best route while also still ensuring that students understand that, for me as a faculty member, living with my ADHD can be difficult and does not fit within the traditional expectations of higher education faculty members and professors. There are days when focusing and staying on task can be a true challenge and, as a student, I found busy classroom environments overwhelming due to how distracted my brain already was. I sometimes even mention how I would make jokes with the children in my care in practicum about how forgetful I always was; however, depending on which educator was supervising me, my ADHD and perceived forgetfulness were received in different ways or potentially even seen as a detriment in my placements.

Still, sharing these examples from my own personal life – when I do share them with pre-service students – forwards the idea not only that I require medical or pharmaceutical intervention, but also that I am potentially *unstable*. As Leblanc and Kinsella (2016: 64) note, '[s]anist stereotyping fosters a negative perception of Mad persons as delusional, emotionally unstable, unpredictable, untruthful, untrustworthy, lacking all capacity for "rational" thought, and invariably dangerous to oneself or others'. As noted by Leblanc and Kinsella (2016), sanist stereotypes are a component of epistemic injustice and, as I have described in other work (Davies, 2022, 2023; Davies, Brewer et al., 2022; Davies, Watson et al., 2022), sanist ideas *haunt* pre-service ECEC training and the field widely. For example, ECEC is entrenched in 'mother-blaming' discourses that both position children's madness as a product of parental inadequacies – in particular, those of mothers – and deem madness in children strictly a biomedical phenomenon (Bellows, 2016; LeFrançois, 2020). Early childhood educators' subjectivity is still constituted through gendered discourses that position the mother figure as the ideal educator figure while encouraging educators to ensure they establish 'secure' attachments with children (Davies, Brewer et al., 2022). Moreover, pre-service ECEC is informed by gendered norms that propagate normative images of early childhood educators' subjectivity (Davies, 2022; Davies, Brewer et al., 2022; Langford, 2007), and pre-service ECEC

students experience stress that they do not belong in the field or might be unconfident in their placements (Weatherby-Fell et al., 2019). With belonging being an important component of pre-service ECEC, and developmentalism and knowledge of children's development being identified as important for pre-service ECEC students (Langford, 2008), madness might be considered an *impediment* to belonging in ECEC as a field and pre-service ECEC (Davies, 2022, 2023; Davies, Brewer et al., 2022; Davies, Watson et al., 2022). Do students and teachers who do not conform to developmentalist teachings and research belong in pre-service ECEC? Is there space for people who hold alternative perspectives to the hegemony of developmentalism in pre-service ECEC?

Cosantino (2021) n.p. theorizes in their mad poetic writing how madness is framed through notions of cure that are described through temporality:

The thing though about the past is that it *haunts*,
it demands to be known, and refuses to be ignored. (Cosantino, 2021, n.p.)

Madness also 'demands to be known and refuses to be ignored' (Cosantino, 2021, n.p.), despite the increasing demands for early intervention and questions by accrediting governing bodies regarding whether educators can practise the profession 'safely' or have any mental health diagnoses (Davies, 2022, 2023; Davies, Brewer et al., 2022). Fenech and King's (2022: 77) research into early childhood teachers' perspectives on the necessity of early childhood teacher registration with an accrediting body illustrates how such processes attempt 'to construct a new type of [early childhood teacher] professional whose practice is oriented and accountable to a set of externally determined standards'. For many who believe in the necessity of standardizing such accreditation processes as well as neo-liberal ideas of early childhood quality, accountability or standards, mad studies, or mad poetry, might seem completely unintelligible or unnecessary for pre-service students. However, my hope is that, by reading and engaging with this article, new ways of imagining pre-service ECEC can take place that acknowledge the perspectives, thoughts, feelings and experiences of mad early childhood educators and ECEC educators in higher education, who are often forced to teach or absorb knowledges that can only construct their madness as medicalized pathology and their subjectivities as excludable. With developmentalism still constituting the terms of belonging in ECEC (Davies, Karmiris, et al., 2022) – particularly in pre-service programs – and employing knowledge of children's 'development' being considered a necessity for all future educators, madness and mad studies are outside the boundaries of inclusion in ECEC, if even considered at all.

(In) conclusion: (not) conclusion

Smith (2018: 16–17) notes how '[d]ifferent words, spoken by Others, cannot be heard or spoken at all'. My mad poetics has attempted to carve out a space for subjectivity, madness, lived experience, and a new language and vernacular in pre-service ECEC to critique the neo-liberal, biomedicalized, developmentalist paradigms that dominate current pre-service higher education ECEC programs. I argue that current pre-service ECEC programs, particularly through their complete lack of awareness of or engagement with mad studies, perpetuate a form of *epistemic injustice* (Fricker, 2007) that leaves pre-service ECEC educators (and their students) with only pathological explanations for madness from the psy disciplines, which perpetuates the stigmatization and exclusion of mad early childhood educators (Davies, 2022; Davies, Brewer et al., 2022; Davies, Watson et al., 2022). Yet my mad autobiographical poetic writing speaks back to developmentalist ideas of belonging and (re)constitutes belonging by (re)packaging phrases from the very texts that I feel pressured to disseminate to my pre-service students, which deem madness unimaginable in pre-service ECEC (Davies, 2022, 2023; Davies, Brewer et al., 2022). As Souto-Manning (2022: 217)

astutely points out: ‘under the guise of neutrality, belonging serves as a tool for inclusion and exclusion’. If belonging entails feeling at ‘home’, sharing ideas, knowledges and practices, and notions of acceptance (Souto-Manning, 2022), there is important work to be done in pre-service ECEC to disrupt the erasure of mad subjectivities, knowledges and futurities. My hope is that my work here with mad poetics is the beginning of such an endeavour. To return to Moss’s (2016: 12) words, perhaps ‘prescribing’ the ‘diagnosis’ of ECEC ‘of our times’ is not so easy a task. However, it might begin with (re)thinking the *who* and *what* in ECEC that is in need of diagnosing.

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