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Research Article

Mudscapes as a method: Co-creating climate pedagogies through muddy play and more-than-human relations

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Abstract: Current Euro-Western, developmentalist early childhood education frameworks prioritize individual, future-oriented, and measurable outcomes, limiting the relational engagements necessary for effective climate pedagogy. In response, this paper introduces Mudscapes, a practice-based workshop designed to engage pre-service teachers and educators in embodied, sensory encounters with mud. Drawing on Lowenfeld's World Technique and Common Worlds pedagogies, this inquiry conceptualizes small-world muddy play as "worlding" - an ongoing relational becoming with human and more-than-human entities. Methodologically, this paper adopts an a/r/tographic and autotheoretical approach to reflect on facilitator practice, spatial curation, and material agency rather than human-subject empirical evaluations. Findings from autoethnographic journaling and spatial curation logs demonstrate how intentionally designing for uncertainty disrupts desires for control, cleanliness, and predetermined learning outcomes. By framing improvisation and material friction as core pedagogical practices, Mudscapes illustrates how practice-based educator workshops can cultivate the capacities required to navigate shared worlds in an era of climate crisis.

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Introduction

As climate change intensifies, early childhood education has been identified as an important site for building climate literacy, resilience and capacities for action (Spiteri, 2026). However, climate change education in the early years "is still undertheorised and nascent" (Spiteri, 2026), and teachertraining programs have not provided educators with the tools, theories, or practical guidance they need to teach climate change effectively. Instead, early childhood educators and pre-service teachers often rely on prior "funds of knowledge", such as romanticized or sanitized views of nature, to guide their environmental practice (Spiteri, 2023). Recognizing this gap, Spiteri (2026) argues that research must explore educators' perspectives on climate change and how their ecological understandings evolve. In response to this call, this paper introduces Mudscapes, a practice-based intervention designed to engage educators in messy, material encounters with the more-than-human world through an autotheoretical (Fournier, 2021) and a/r/tographic lens (Irwin, 2013). Grounded in my iterative practice, curricular framing, and material engagement as a designer and facilitator, this paper reflects on the pedagogical possibilities of workshop design and facilitation rather than on empirical participant evaluations.

In the simplest terms, a Mudscape is the meeting of soil, water, bodies, materials, weather, and pedagogy. This paper's conceptual framework bridges Common Worlds pedagogies (Common Worlds Research Collective, 2023; Taylor & Giugni, 2012) with Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld's (1950) World Technique to challenge traditional early childhood orientations. Early childhood education in Euro-Western contexts has long been dominated by developmental psychology. This framework positions the child as an isolated, exclusive meaning-maker, rendering it impossible to acknowledge the more-than-human relationships that implicate us in everyday worlds (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Blaise, 2023). This developmentalist logic reinforces a curriculum of separation, mirroring the human exceptionalism driving ecological collapse. Common Worlds pedagogies challenge this anthropocentric orientation by refusing to divide children, educators,

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and the environment into separate domains, attending instead to our entangled relations (Taylor et al., 2021). Nevertheless, as educators in today's classrooms are, for the most part, graduates of these traditional systems, they often find themselves, with the best of intentions, administering the very same vicious cycle that suppresses the relational and imaginative capacities we so desperately need to confront today's climate crisis. Diasio and Pawlowska (2017) highlight that institutional norms around hygiene shape what educators understand as appropriate care, conduct and professional practice. This suggests that educators' capacity to guide children toward more-than-human relationality is constrained not simply by individual intention, but by professional identities formed within systems that privilege order, control, and developmental progress. As Pacini-Ketchabaw and Nxumalo (2016) demonstrate, educators frequently work to maintain strict human/nonhuman and nature/culture boundaries, even as relational pedagogies call them to stay with messy multispecies entanglements.

The Mudscapes workshop was conceptualized as a "gathering place that would bring educators […] materials, and artistic processes together in an experimental interplay, producing particular encounters and events" (Kind, 2018, p. 5). The workshop centers direct sensory contact with mud as living organic matter. In doing so, Mudscapes invites educators to sit with messiness as a potential pedagogical orientation for navigating ecologically unstable futures, shifting relational accountability (Wilson, 2008) from an abstract concept into an embodied experience. Through this messy, tactile intervention, the workshop reimagines the educator's role not as a manager of standardized outcomes, but as a co-participant entangled within a complex, more-than-human world (Nelson et al., 2018). The workshop was not conducted as a formal research study. No identifying information was collected, and participants' creations were not analyzed as data. Participants retained ownership of their Mudscapes, and sharing was voluntary. This inquiry prioritized respect, autonomy, and non-extractive engagement.

Ultimately, this paper argues that muddy play can function as a generative site of climate pedagogy not by producing predetermined environmental knowledge or measurable learning outcomes, but by placing educators and pre-service teachers directly into unmediated, tactile encounters with mud. The workshop invites them to experience material agency firsthand, demonstrating that before they can foster more-than-human relationality in their classrooms, they themselves must linger in the discomfort, messiness, and uncertainty that climate pedagogy demands. Through a/r/tography and autotheory, I examine what the Mudscapes design makes visible about the pedagogical possibilities of relinquishing control, positioning the workshop as a situated exploration of curating climate-responsive pedagogical encounters.

Conceptual Framework

This inquiry brings together Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld's World Technique (1950) and Common Worlds pedagogies (Common Worlds Research Collective, 2023; Hodgins, 2019; Taylor, 2013; Taylor et al., 2021) to theorize Mudscapes as a material, embodied, and relational form of climate pedagogy.

Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld's World Technique (1950) provides a critical early anchor for theorizing sensory and material meaning-making in childhood. Inspired by H.G. Wells' *Floor Games,* which involved building scenes on the floor using objects, Lowenfeld developed her "apparatus". This was a metal tray filled with sand and miniature figurines (Carmichael, 1994, p. 302; Lowenfeld, 1950). This tool intentionally combined touch, sensation, and sight to create a sensory and haptic field for expression (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2016, pp. 13–15). Through material movement, arrangement and tactile manipulation of sand and objects, the child could externalize their internal conflicts, concepts, emotions, and experiences (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2016; Lowenfeld, 1950). In her 1939 seminal paper titled "*The World Pictures of Children*", Lowenfeld argued that children's thoughts, feelings, concepts, and memories are all linked and best expressed through play rather than the spoken word. Lowenfeld's (1950, 1969) work offers an essential bridge between historical and contemporary material pedagogies. For Mudscapes, this sets a precedent for treating material encounters as a serious site of meaning-making, and for attending to nonverbal and material forms of expression.

Common Worlds pedagogies extend this material focus by shifting attention from individualized

accounts toward situated relations among children, educators, materials and worlds (Taylor, 2013). Amid ongoing settler colonialism, capitalism and the climate crisis, Common Worlds pedagogies work to interrupt a human-centred understanding of the world (Hodgins, 2019). Fundamental to Common Worlds research is the idea that "common worlds" should not be thought of as a thing (noun), but rather as an activity or practice (verb), suggesting an ongoing, responsive, and active process (Taylor, 2017, p. 1455). Thus, climate pedagogy, in this framing, shifts the focus from what children are learning about to what they are "*learning with*". Learning *with* attends to possibilities for humans, as well as more-than-human and non-human others, to flourish. For example, when a child pours water into a pile of mud, they are learning with mud's porosity, and mud is teaching them about relations and collective entanglements (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Blaise, 2023). These perspectives collectively open space for emergent, co-constituted forms of climate pedagogy that cannot be accounted for by linear or hierarchical developmental models.

Applied to Mudscapes, Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld's World Technique (1950), by bringing natural, messy materials such as sand and water into the structured, indoor space of the therapeutic clinic, inadvertently demonstrated that rich, embodied engagements with natural materials need not be confined to outdoor spaces. Her work disrupted assumptions about where messy, expressive encounters belong. Building on this precedent, I argue that Lowenfeld's World Technique provokes a rethinking of spatial boundaries in early childhood education. It raises the question of why muddy play is so often limited to outdoors. Rather than presenting empirical findings, this inquiry is a reflective, practice-led inquiry. Framed through a/r/tography and autotheory, the paper positions the author as facilitator, participant, and researcher within the unfolding pedagogical event.

Method

This inquiry adopts a qualitative, practice-based design grounded in a/r/tography and autotheory. A/r/tography is a form of practice-based research within the arts and education that draws upon the professional practices and identities of artist, researcher, and teacher (a/r/t) (Irwin, 2013). It transforms the relationship between theory and practice by recognizing the liminal spaces between them where learning emerges through a generative, productive, artistic form of research-creation that takes place within the company of others (Kind, 2018, p. 8). Positioning myself at the intersection of artist, researcher and educator (a/r/t), I engage with the Mudscapes workshop as a generative site of self-inquiry rather than a human-subject research study. I utilize autotheory, an emerging practice in feminist theory that emphasizes engaging with theory through personal narrative, blending critical analysis with autobiography to challenge traditional boundaries between objective scholarship and subjective experience, thereby thinking "with" the event (Colombo, 2023). These improvisations are an intentional effort to avoid the exact misuse and diagnostic distortion Lowenfeld herself warned against (Hutton, 2004).

The Workshop as a Site of Inquiry

The 30-minute Mudscapes workshop was facilitated as an interactive indoor session and attended by a group of pre-service teachers and teaching faculty from a faculty of education. Held around two 10-person conference tables, the physical environment was curated around specific material and spatial parameters:

Reimagining the Sand Tray: Glass Fishbowl as a World-Making Site

In designing the workshop's material setup, I intentionally departed from Lowenfeld's (1950) rectangular-tray approach in favour of clear glass fishbowls (Figure 1). As an educator-researcher, I conceptualized the fishbowl as both a practical container and a bounded, visible microcosm-a world within a world. The round shape echoed the Earth's form, contrasting with the tray's rigid, clinical geometry, and reflected my intention to create a space that felt ecological, organic, and open to interpretations. Framed through Common Worlds pedagogies, I envisioned the fishbowl as a site of relational entanglement that recognizes the agency and presence of more-than-human actors (Taylor & Giugni, 2012). By curating mud, rocks, water, and figurines within this transparent vessel, my pedagogical intention was to prompt encounters with material agency and invite an attention to boundaries, perspectives, and spatial

"throwntogetherness" (Massey, 2005, as cited in Taylor & Giugni, 2012, p. 114).

Figure 1

Mudscapes Concept Rendering of Glass Fish Bowl as Microcosmic Container (Note: Author's pre-workshop fishbowl design concept created using Canva)



Reimagining the Cabinet of World Objects: The Curated Buffet

Lowenfeld's (2007) Cabinet of World Objects consisted of hundreds of miniatures organized in drawers, allowing children to privately and carefully select figures representing daily life or fantasy. She would typically have on hand living creatures, "phantasy" and folklore figures, scenery, transport, equipment, and miscellaneous objects (p. 5). Reimagining this setup through a Common Worlds framework, I staged a 12-foot buffet-style layout across two banquet tables (Figure 2) covered in a blue tablecloth—an homage to Lowenfeld's blue-painted trays (Lowenfeld, 2007). While Lowenfeld's drawers emphasized control and containment, the public buffet was designed to foster an atmosphere of abundance, interdependence, and a collective material encounter. The buffet comprised a wide array of natural elements (e.g., ferns, pine branches, sphagnum moss, acorns, river stones, wildflower seeds), craft supplies, and diverse animal and fantasy figurines (e.g., dinosaurs, insects, dragons, trees with faces). Notably, I intentionally excluded human figurines to make space for multispecies storytelling and imaginative entanglements that familiar anthropocentric configurations might otherwise overshadow.

Figure 2

The Buffet of Objects: Pre-Workshop Curatorial Layout



Note: Photographs captured by the author prior to the session to document the spatial setup and material curation of the buffet tables. This visual record documents the researcher's pedagogical design rather than participant engagement or data collection.

Reimagining the Sand: The Mud Bin

In Lowenfeld's World Technique, trays are typically half-filled with clean sand and accompanied by accessible tools and water, allowing the children to manipulate the sand's texture (Lowenfeld, 2007, p. 4). Reimagining this setup through an a/r/tographic lens, I intentionally introduced material uncertainty

into the space. A single sixty-litre plastic bin of mud was positioned centrally in the room on top of a wagon. The sheer volume of mud was deliberate. No other materials—neither gravel, rocks, nor decorative elements—competed visually or physically with the mud. I curated the mud as a central actor in the room rather than a passive backdrop (Taylor, 2013). More importantly, I did not place a scoop inside the mud bin. This intentional omission invited an encounter with ambiguity, prompting a consideration of how tools, bodies, and material affordances shape human relationships with the earth. As an artist-educator, I find that these negotiations reveal the kind of relational work that climate pedagogy demands.

Reimagining Individualized Containment: Collective Improvisations

Lowenfeld's (1950) World Technique maintained strict individual containment with children working in isolation and leaving their trays at the clinic as therapeutic artifacts. In staging the Mudscapes workshop, my pedagogical design intentionally disrupted this clinical containment through a communal structure. The workshop began with a brief introduction to Dr. Lowenfeld's World Technique, Common World pedagogies, ecological entanglements, material agency, and imaginative co-creation. I then offered the prompt "create your world"(Homeyer & Sweeney, 2016, p. 54). The physical environment featured two adjacent conference tables intentionally designed to strike a balance between individual reflection and collaborative making. Specific resources, such as spray bottles, shovels, and water containers, were deliberately limited in quantity to encourage sharing and cooperation. The resource limitation was designed to provoke moments of negotiation, interruption, and collective decision-making, echoing the workshop's broader themes of relationality and interdependence. The workshop concluded with three open-ended questions designed to extend the inquiry into educational contexts: How can we make such experiences more visible or possible in formal educational settings? What are the potential challenges to this kind of pedagogical approach? How might we reimagine the role of parents in supporting these types of opportunities at school?

Finally, in direct contrast to Lowenfeld's (1950) clinical model, thermally insulated bags were provided so that each Mudscape could be taken home. Framed through Smith's (2021) lens of decolonizing ownership of research, refusal to retain, evaluate, or capture creations as academic property distributed knowledge and material responsibility back into daily life, shifting climate pedagogy from a one-time workshop to a lived, ongoing responsibility. All these design choices intentionally created possibilities for climate pedagogy to emerge through reciprocal relations.

Self-Inquiry Materials and Artifacts

This inquiry relies on a/r/tographic data generation (Irwin & Springgay, 2018; Springgay et al., 2005) and autotheoretical memory work to document the workshop as a site of self-inquiry. The generated materials consist of visual curation logs and autoethnographic journaling. Photographs captured before and after the session, documenting the material setup (e.g., the buffet table), support the analysis of spatial design and relational material agency. Post-workshop reflective notes captured immediate sensory impressions, tensions, and moments where theory materialized in practice.

Thinking *With* Mudscapes: An A/r/tographic Reflection

The analysis unfolded as a living inquiry, returning to moments in the workshop experience that revealed possibilities and tensions (Springgay et al., 2005). Rather than analyzing participant behaviours or creations, I attended to pedagogical moments that disrupted my own facilitator expectations, highlighted material agency, or prompted a re-examination of my pedagogical design. I returned to these moments through writing and theoretical engagement, moving between embodied recollection, the materiality of the workshop, and relevant scholarship. Aligning with climate pedagogy, this reflection foregrounds process, affect, and relational emergence over reductive, measurable outcomes (Morimoto et al., 2026).

Operating in the relational space between artist, researcher, and educator (a/r/t), my inquiry positions the Mudscapes workshop as a generative site of autotheoretical self-inquiry (Irwin, 2013). My

reflection is organized using three concepts adapted from Allan and Berry's stages of sandplay (Carmichael, 1994, p. 304): chaos, struggle, and resolution. These movements trace an anarchic evolution (Springgay et al., 2005), illustrating how my own understanding of the pedagogical possibilities of Mudscapes shifted through material encounters. The speculative worlds produced invited new ways of thinking about mud, play, language, creativity, agency, and climate pedagogy. As Winnicott (2016) asserts, "it is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult can be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers itself" (p.171).

Chaos: Navigating Uncertainty in Facilitation

At the outset, the open-ended nature of the invitation created an a/r/tographic opening, a moment of rupture marked by a palpable sense of uncertainty in the room. Sensing the stillness in the room, I picked up an empty glass bowl and non-verbally acted out layering gravel, then mud, without using any materials. By modelling first, I offered a tacit non-verbal invitation - showing rather than telling them how to start the encounter. I acted in the moment, allowing the living inquiry to unfold organically. Following this opening, the physical separation between the central buffet and the workspace introduced an immediate spatial and logistical decision into the process. I deliberately refrained from intervening to see how the physical layout guided movement. The initial atmosphere was one of spatial confusion, yet it was generative. What unfolded were bursts of improvisation.

Approaching the central mud bin presented an immediate material confrontation. Without pre-placed utensils, the setup invited varied tactile approaches—ranging from a search for mediating tools like shovels or bowls to direct, unmediated skin-to-mud contact. An unexpected moment of material improvisation occurred when a discarded coffee cup was used as a makeshift shovel in the mud bin. Serving as a lived, humorous pun on the phrase 'cup of mud', this moment demonstrated how everyday objects can be collectively improvised when prescriptive instructions are withheld (Kind, 2018). In this initial chaos, the relational work of meaning-making had begun. As an a/r/tographer, I reflected on how intentionally designing for uncertainty opens pathways for risk-taking and collaborative problem-solving, challenging the facilitator to relinquish rigid instructional control.

Struggle: Material Resistance and Pedagogical Discomfort

During the world-making process, material friction emerged as a primary pedagogical force. For instance, attempting to maneuver fine wooden chopsticks within the curved geometry of the glass bowl transformed simple positioning into a complex negotiation of dexterity, friction, and material resistance. I considered how the tools themselves resisted human control, forcing a rethinking of the design or abandonment of the idea of "perfectly placing" figurines in the mud. The mud, too, asserted its vibrant agency (Bennett, 2010). Noticing how variations in moisture levels are perceived reveals a common human tendency to view material agency as an inconvenience rather than as a reciprocal dialogue. When soil absorbs water, it changes state. Metaphorically, this reflects broader anthropocentric relationships with the environment, in which humans alter the climate or the land and then complain when it no longer conforms to human convenience, without acknowledging our own role in the change. I interpreted these moments as creating conditions in which improvisation, uncertainty, and staying with discomfort (Haraway, 2016) become core pedagogical practices.

The buffet layout functioned as a site of active movement and material negotiation. Rigid pine branches that resisted breaking offered a vivid demonstration of vibrant matter (Bennett, 2010), compelling design choices that adapted to the branch's natural integrity rather than bending nature to human will. Similarly, the inevitable blurring of the layers of gravel, soil, and water illustrated the fundamental unpredictability of material interactions, embodying interdependence (Kimmerer, 2013). The open-table buffet format shifted decision-making from an isolated, internal process to a shared encounter about material availability, inclusion, and aesthetics. Curating a buffet that combined synthetic figurines with natural elements revealed a strong aesthetic and pedagogical preference for raw botanical and geological materials over manufactured toys.

The willingness to completely submerge or discard an initial layout to start anew highlighted the iterative, process-oriented nature of world-making, where destruction and revision are integral to creativity. I came to understand this willingness to start again as an instance of playful reorientation. It was at this time that I noticed another layer of struggle, this time with the environment itself. Facilitating in a dimly lit conference room brought the workshop's environmental conditions into sharp focus, highlighting how ambiance affects multisensory engagement and material interaction. I became aware of how the physical environment can either hinder or support multisensory engagement. I began to wonder whether the lack of natural light in the setting had hindered interactions with the materials. What would the outcome have been if we had natural sunlight bouncing off the glass bowls of the Mudscapes? Would the sunlight have brought a different energy or sense of connection to the activity? Through these struggles, I witnessed both visible and invisible negotiations with tools, materials, the space, and one another. These moments reminded me that, for myself and others, growth often emerges through such embodied, messy negotiations. Even my own role was a negotiation: as someone who is very verbally dependent, it was a struggle for me to be fully present without uttering a word. I struggled to stay fully present and attuned.

A compelling conceptual struggle emerged around the act of naming these worlds. Following Deleuze and Guattari, naming does not originate from individual beings but from a collective subject (Somerville & Powell, 2019). Haraway (2016) argues that naming is a powerful tool that can shape our understanding of the world and ourselves, bringing things into being. Titles assigned to Mudscapes, such as 'Lost Woods' or 'A World of Pure Imagination', serve as conceptual markers illustrating how language and material world-making intersect. In contrast, leaving a Mudscape untitled acted as a refusal to prematurely fix meaning, preserving openness to the unknown. In both cases, the act of naming or not naming functioned as an invitation to reflect on how language mediates ecological relationships.

Resolution: Dissolving the Traditional Facilitator Role

As the session ended, the atmosphere shifted toward collective reflection. The fluid movement between tables, informal sharing, and documentation of completed worlds demonstrated how shared material engagement can generate relational intimacy across a short professional development timeframe. The sudden end of the workshop highlighted the persistent tension between sensory, process-oriented exploration and institutional time constraints. As a facilitator, I found that navigating the collective impulse to continue sharing, talking, and playing with the Mudscapes revealed how deeply professional practice is often bound by schedules and containment. Observing the room, I recognized that my intended role as the primary "teacher" had dissolved: the act of creating the Mudscapes was the true teacher. In that moment, I experienced firsthand how a/r/tography values process and relationality over product and how autotheory positions the researcher's learning alongside the inquiry site. Also, by providing the opportunity for creations to be transported home rather than retained as research artifacts, the material responsibility was distributed back into everyday lives, producing a reverberation (Springgay et al., 2005) and shifting climate pedagogy from a single, isolated workshop to a lived commitment beyond the institution.

Discussion

Throughout the Mudscapes workshop, the traditional boundaries between facilitator, participant, and witness blurred—the essence of a/r/tography. The intimate workshop design created a generative environment for organic pedagogical dialogue and deep engagement with the materials. Approaching the experience without rigid expectations allowed for a process of "reworlding" (Haraway & Wolfe, 2016). Ultimately, the workshop demonstrated that a permissive, material-rich indoor environment can quickly bridge interpersonal distance among educator-peers while holding space for spontaneous, risk-tolerant creative expression (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2016). In a Mudscapes model, the educator does not deliver a fully prescriptive lesson or direct children toward a fixed, predetermined outcome. Instead, educators act as co-creators who balance open-ended exploration with intentional, dialogic practice (Land et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2021).

The emergence of the "mobile mud bin" (a plastic bin mounted inside a wagon) was an unexpected practical innovation for bringing messy, nature-connected play into indoor settings. Rather than relying on specialized outdoor locations, Mudscapes offers an accessible, structured, yet open-ended practice suitable for both indoor and outdoor settings (Prins et al., 2022). By using materials such as soil, water, figurines, and seeds, early childhood settings with limited access to natural spaces can bring material-rich learning directly into the classroom (Ardoin & Bowers, 2020). Offering wildflower seeds in the material buffet extended these encounters beyond the immediate workshop, evoking Haraway's (2016) concept of "becoming-*with*" by introducing the potential for future ecological growth. By designing the Mudscapes as takeaway artifacts, the boundary between the temporal site of creation and everyday spaces was disrupted. Framed within Common World's pedagogies, these portable creations serve as an invitation for future relational encounters (Taylor et al., 2021).

Future Research and Limitations

Mudscapes expands Lowenfeld's World Technique, moving beyond individualized psychological analysis into a collective, ecological pedagogy. By decentering anthropocentric narratives, Mudscapes enabled co-creating with materials and figurines rather than simply manipulating them as passive objects. However, to fully evaluate Mudscapes as a transformative climate pedagogy, future research must address key empirical limitations. Specifically, a longitudinal study with appropriate ethics approval is recommended to track whether observed gains, such as empathy towards more-than-human entities or improved group dynamics, are sustained over time. Also, research comparing open-ended material encounters against traditional, outcome-driven environmental activities can help clarify the distinct impact of practice-based climate pedagogy on young children and educators.

For Mudscapes to transition from a conceptual intervention to a practical prototype, institutional support is essential. Studies on arts-based inquiry and a/r/tography indicate that educators develop pedagogical confidence, reflective capacity, and a shared professional vocabulary when learning is practice-embedded and collaborative (Brooke et al., 2025). As a result, policy frameworks should embed such practice-based, experiential encounters into ongoing professional development and pre-service curricula to ensure that educators are equipped not only with theoretical frameworks, but with the lived confidence to integrate climate-responsive, relational pedagogies into everyday classroom environments.

Conclusion

Where schools and traditional research view mud and mess as something to avoid, manage or sanitize (Mycock, 2019), Common Worlds reframes mess as a generative site of multispecies relation rather than mere sensory play (Nelson et al., 2018; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015). Research on mud, dirt, and soil shows that these materials resist, stick, stain, reorganize bodies and collaborations, and can cultivate ecological responsiveness and attunement to more-than-human worlds (Zhu, 2026). In line with this, the Mudscapes workshop demonstrates how small-world play can be transformed into a rigorous site of relational, ecological pedagogy, supporting Tsing's (2019) assertion that "by careful attention to landscapes as sites of coordination, it becomes possible to construct a new kind of ecological history in which non-humans as well as humans build worlds" (p. 240). As an innovative methodological approach, Mudscapes offers a structured yet open-ended tool for professional and personal learning that cultivates ecological sensibilities and expands the scope of environmental education beyond traditional, sanitized, child-centred pedagogies. As Pacini-Ketchabaw and Nxumalo (2016) remind us, common worlds are mutually constituted, and our lives are entangled; therefore, we must learn how to navigate these multispecies relations. Mudscapes challenges the human/non-human and nature/culture divides, highlighting the difference between using mud as a sensory tool and being in relation with the earth - precisely why it is a viable methodological model for rethinking climate pedagogy in an era of ecological precarity.

Declarations

Authors' Declarations

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