

# Troubling Authority and Material Bodies: Creating *Sympoietic* Pedagogies for Working with Children and Practitioners

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## Abstract

Discourses and relations of child/adult and early education are super-permeated with ideas and practices of authority and boundary-making. **In early years' practices, deeply important beliefs and assumptions** about who or what has authority and who or what should create the boundaries of everyday activity often go unquestioned. This produces different kinds of epistemic injustice in respect of children and those who work with them, as well as through the materialities of early childhood and training settings, including higher education. These systems of authority both express and produce wider patterns of living associated with the wider society, including democracies.

Posthumanism inspires questions about not only ways of knowing, but also about the privileging of dis/embodied knowing over feeling, intuiting, sensing, making, and moving. This paper thinks from the diffractive position that knowing is a direct material and moving engagement to explore possibilities for *sympoietic* pedagogies of enquiry-making-with (Haraway, 2016), and examines how these generate new ideas about early childhood practices and what professional knowledge might become. We illustrate this diffractive curriculum and pedagogy through an example from teacher education in South Africa to make important connections between authority, pedagogy, and an enlarged framework for democratic education; in this work, we explore *sympoietic* approaches to negotiation.

## Keywords

authority; democracy, diffraction; negotiation; *sympoiesis*; posthumanism

## Introduction

For those working and living with children, opening up dis/embodied <sup>1</sup> forms of knowing and moving beyond the linguistic can help to trouble dominant, authoritarian adult-centered forms of discipline and instrumentalist behavior management approaches. In the example of professional education explored in this paper, working alongside student teachers *sympoietically* creates an imag(e)inary of how they might share authority in their own future classroom by *experiencing* shared authority in their own teacher education, and not just exclusively by studying texts and abstract theories (*sympoiesis*, making-with, as coined by

Donna Haraway [2016], is discussed within the **paper**). **When we speak of “experience,” it is not** to propose that individuals *have* experience, but rather that subjects are constituted *through* experience, always in flux and in the process of becoming. Texts and theories are important too, **as we will show, when they are “taken apart”** and explored dynamically through transmodal movement and activity.

In the example of practice at the heart of this paper, student teachers at the University of **Cape Town engaged with “authority” and “boundaries” after observing a Philosophy with Children (P4C) session** in a university partnership school facilitated by one of the co-

authors (Karin).<sup>2</sup> Teacher educators had been experimenting with **“block teaching” and our paper thinks with/in data generated during one week’s teaching of the Childhood Studies component of the Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) Foundation phase.**<sup>3</sup> We **explore students’ concern with Karin’s “lack of control” over the children during this observation session, the noise of the children talking and moving around in the classroom.**

Supported by photographs of the students at work, their diffractive journals, visual essays, and pedagogical documentation, we show how Karin, as lecturer, responded by providing rhizomatic transmodal opportunities (Murriss, 2017) for the students to make-with and think-with the concepts **“traditional authority,” “anarchic authority,” and “shared authority,” that were embedded in an academic text (i.e., Michaud and Valitalo’s *Authority, Democracy and Philosophy*, 2017) chosen as a provocation after the students had raised their concern. This higher education program works with the community of enquiry pedagogy associated with Philosophy with Children with/in an emergent curriculum, inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education.**<sup>4</sup>

We begin this paper by asserting the significance of authority and disturbance often felt through enactments of authority in **educational settings. We “crack open” the concept in various ways, note differences in forms of authority associated with various educational approaches, including Philosophy with Children and Reggio Emilia, and we draw on one particular text chosen to enable student teachers to “dig up” different ideas and practices of authority in the classroom. We provide some background on the context and thinking that informed the emergent and transmodal teacher education approach taken by Karin and her colleagues on a PGCE course for early years’**

teachers in South Africa. The idea of *sympoietic* pedagogy is exemplified through images and **students’ writing. We draw this together through an enlarged framework for democratic education that can serve as a provocation for further exploration.**

### Authority

Working as adults with young children necessarily entails our ongoing engagement with concepts, affects, and experiences related to authority and boundary making. In becoming practitioners, it is not something we can choose to ignore; although it might sometimes be troublesome and the stuff of nightmares about **“losing control” over the children in our care.** We are all too conscious of the social expectations that a teacher should take charge, hold, and communicate this position of authority. How to establish and maintain personal authority is often at the forefront of concerns for novice practitioners in early childhood settings, just as learning the rules and boundaries of who is in charge, who can speak, who is credible, and what is allowed can feature strongly for young children attending those settings. We can say that enactments of authority epitomize the relationships and the educational possibilities that emerge. We argue that authority is a central and highly contested concept for working with young children and their families and communities, and we believe this should feature prominently in professional education and development. We speak of Authority, authority, and authorities; we refer not only to deeply held ideas about adults in **educational and social settings being “in charge” of children’s movements, interactions, and appetites, but also to ideas and practices about who can have epistemic credibility and what forms of knowing are legitimated. We want to take this discussion of authority well beyond issues of behavior management and control,**

however this is played out, and into ideas of emergent, *sympoietic*, democratic education. As we argue below, we seek connections between emergent curricula, *sympoietic* pedagogies, and an enlarged sense of what democratic education might become.

In South Africa, a highly participatory notion of democratic citizenship has been forged by the anti-apartheid struggle (Enslin, 2003), and this **was laid down in the country's human rights-based Constitution and national school curricula since 2005**. Participation requires an approach to democracy that is not limited to acquisition of socioeconomic goods, but aims to develop the democratic habits of mind and skills **that are characteristic of a “thick” or participatory notion of democracy** (Sheppard et al., 2011). But what does this mean? Sheppard et al. (2011) argue that these dispositions are developed through conceptual investigations (analysis of abstract concepts), an appreciation of the experiential and social context, epistemic independence (thinking and learning for oneself), and engagement in discussions about controversial issues. Hence it is argued that schools (and therefore the institutions that educate teachers) need to make room for people to strengthen their ability to reason and to participate through deliberation in democratic processes. This reason is related to humanist notions of individual agency and autonomy.

**The “community of enquiry” pedagogy** of P4C also tends to be theorized as a unique approach that creates educational environments **involving students' direct democratic participation**, emphasizing listening to students in contexts that are meaningful to them (Gregory et al., 2017). The community of enquiry is a dialogical approach that draws on communication, interaction, reflection, and **negotiation. It rests on people's tendency toward autonomy**, that is, self-regulation and self-organization. It raises demanding questions

about adults' claims to authority, particularly in the light of the moral foundations of disciplinary traditions in schools. Authoritarian forms of **teaching (with a capital “A”) rely in the main on deference to external Authority**, rather than independent critical thought. This contrasts with authoritarians (Law, 2006)—teachers in authority—whose authority resides not with individuals but with the process of reflective dialogue (Haynes & Murriss 2011). So, a teacher may insist on neat appearance and arriving on time in class, but still encourage her learners to think independently.

Feminist philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2010) also argues that a democracy is sustainable only if non-authoritarian pedagogies (she explicitly mentions the community of enquiry pedagogy and P4C) become woven into mainstream education. She claims that it helps people to think for themselves, to develop the imagination, and to develop independent thinking and innovation; it also counters peer pressure and authority. A culture of individual dissent, she argues, is necessary to prevent atrocities and violence; Nussbaum further notes that mutual respect for reason is essential to the peaceful resolution of conflict resulting from differences.

It is worth pressing the pause button and wondering about the way in which authority and democratic practice is theorized so far. The emphasis on reasoning is striking, as is the **reliance on “disembodied headwork” (people as brains on sticks)**. It is as though communication has lost its body and is separate from the human and nonhuman bodies that carry it (Hayles, 1999). We question the privileging of dis/embodyed knowing over feeling, intuiting, sensing, making, and moving in the notion of democracy mobilized so far. We wonder about what and who is excluded in these accounts of democratic practice and how democracy is limited and constrained when it rests on the

**privileging of the “fully human” individualized rational authority.**

So why is P4C particularly helpful as a pedagogy to explore issues of authority in the (university) classroom? Authority involves not only relationships between people, but also between people and certain academic practices or entire movements such as P4C. It provokes helpful dissonance and disturbance about the *who* and *what* of knowledge production and what counts as an authority.

#### Philosophy with/for Children, Teachers, and Adults working with Children

Although P4C pedagogy has its roots in Deweyan educational philosophy and there are many resemblances between practitioners in terms of methods of conducting enquiry, we find varying interpretations and practices of **authority. So, for example, in the “original” P4C program, created by Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp, the purposely written novels retain a degree of Authority through their fidelity to the history of western philosophy, and there are detailed guidance materials for teachers. Other practitioners have been creative with the model and introduced a range of different materials to provoke enquiry. They have also extended the community of enquiry process through drama, art, or outdoor activities; some are more *laissez-faire* and led by **children’s interests in their approach to facilitation.****

We ourselves are each, and together, steeped in Philosophy with Children theory and practice and part of the P4C movement (Gregory et al., 2017; Haynes, 2018). In our research in this field, authority has featured in different ways, for example through the promotion of picture books as the milieu for philosophical enquiry (Murriss, 1992; Murriss & Haynes, 2001). In this context of making enquiry through **certain works of children’s literature—** with all

their ambiguities, adult-child relations, and concepts of naughtiness—wildness, neglect, conformity, and disobedience feature strongly in both narrative and imagery, and create provocative spaces to revisit assumptions about childhood, adulthood, and adult-child relations (Haynes & Murriss, 2012; Murriss, 2016). Conversations with educators about the suitability of particular texts for working with young children have informed our thinking about the importance of deep engagement with questions of authority in child and education studies (Haynes & Murriss, 2008, 2012). Equally, in the P4C movement, we occasionally find ourselves prone to disobedience, resisting the authority of a particular method of conducting P4C, questioning the propriety of academic philosophy, and wanting to play instead with **modelling the “right way” to philosophize; perhaps being too radical/naughty in terms of our position on children’s epistemic authority.** We have tended to push at the boundaries of **“P4C as usual” through our position on children’s philosophizing and philosophical capacities** (Haynes, 2008, 2015; Murriss, 2016; Murriss & Haynes, 2018), the intermingling of P4C with other pedagogies (Murriss, 2017), and we have suggested that the disequilibrium that P4C can provoke for educators is a truly valuable space for professional development (Haynes & Murriss, 2011). More recently, we have challenged the idea of the teacher as facilitator and proposed the mode of difficultator (Haynes & Kohan, 2018) to maintain the radical openness of the practice. There is an intense focus throughout our work on this negotiation of authority and what it means to share it, and, more recently, not only sharing with other humans but also with the more-than-human and vibrant matter (Haynes & Murriss, 2018). For us, this constitutes the territory of P4C as a creative pedagogy and one that is always under review, always becoming, always generating new

possibilities. We propose a kind of *sympoietic* “negotiation of authority” in what we could playfully call a “P4C plus” approach.

There are many layers to authority and **teachers’ roles are embedded in larger** systems of accountability, as well as social expectations regarding the nature of their role and how it is performed. In this paper we are particularly playing with, playing up, and playing down *authorities*, deeply exploring the relationality of the concept of authority embodied through contexts and action, from the diffractive position that knowing is a direct material and moving engagement to explore possibilities for *sympoietic* pedagogies of enquiry-making-with (Haraway, 2016).

### *Sympoietic Practices of Enquiring-making-with*

**Donna Haraway’s (2016, p.176 fn13)** distinction between seeing human animals as *autopoietic* systems or as *sympoietic* systems is particularly helpful for theorizing and practicing dis/embodied, relational, and emergent early years work. In autopoiesis, humans are “**organizationally closed,**” “**autonomous units,**” centrally controlled via agency or will, orientated **around growth and development with “evolution between systems,”** and are “**predictable.**” It is not difficult to see how the subjectivity assumed by many P4C proponents, including Martha Nussbaum, is that of an *autopoietic* system. The individualized human that is presupposed before s/he interacts with others, thinks, feels, and reasons as an autonomous, organizationally closed system with a body that is centrally controlled via agency or will.

By contrast, *sympoietic* systems are **unbounded “complex amorphous entities,”** have “**distributed control**” with an “**evolution within systems,**” and are “**unpredictable.**” To cite Haraway (2016):

*Sympoiesis* is a simple word; it means “**making-with**”. **Nothing makes itself;** nothing is really *autopoietic* or self-organizing. In the words of the Inupiat computer “**world game,**” **earthlings are never alone.** That is the radical implication of *sympoiesis*. *Sympoiesis* is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company (p. 58).

The Google.doc folder created with/in an emergent PGCE program that informs this paper has made it possible for Karin to enact an emergent curriculum that transverses the **disciplines (“undisciplining” them) using** diffractive *sympoietic* pedagogies that trouble the Nature/Culture dichotomy, because the latter presupposes individualized existence of subjects and objects. *Sympoiesis* not only displaces *autopoiesis*, but also enlarges it as a “**carrier bag for ongoingness, a yoke for becoming-with**” (Haraway, 2016, p.125).

**Karen Barad’s notions of diffraction and** quantum entanglement go even further than that. Drawing on Quantum Field Theory (QFT), **she argues that the “intra-action” is always there** (and at the same time *not* there), even when bodies are not close physically. This forms **the idea that knowledge is neither “embodied,” nor “disembodied,” but is “dis/embodied.”** The “/” **indicates the relational ontology that** underpins the way we understand *sympoietic* pedagogies as always disrupting or queering<sup>5</sup> **the “cutting into two, the “dichotomies,”** and binary logic of the Cartesian cuts of humanist knowledge production. In the latter, bodies are either human or nonhuman, male or female, alive or dead, etc. (cf. Haynes & Murriss, 2019). We are either in control of the classroom or not; in authority or not. *Sympoietic* knowledge **production is always a “cutting-together apart”** in one move (Barad, 2014), whereby more complex relational elements are given credit as playing their own part in knowledge production;

and this includes nonhuman bodies, such as clay, paper, and plastic figurines. This complexity includes understanding how space, time, and matter are also threaded through one another *sympoietically*. Human and nonhuman bodies do not move between Newtonian points **in space and time, but are always “on the move”** in relation. *Symposium*, Haraway (2016) explains, **“is a simple word; it means ‘making-with’” (p.58). As Karin is remembering what happened during the course, and talking with Joanna on Skype, she/they is/are also part of the phenomenon and entangled “observers”: “being-with,” “making-with,” “thinking-with” as a “sympoietic system.”**

The posthuman ontology of a *sympoietic* system disrupts the Nature/Culture binary on which modern (higher) education has been built. It reconfigures learning as a relational material-discursive worlding process in-between human **and nonhuman bodies. Such a “body” can be human, but also nonhuman like paint (Figure 1) or clay (Figures 2, 3, 4) or the fabric-with-the light table (Figures 5, 6, 7). These were the materials the students worked-with to express their emerging ideas. So what was it that led to it?**

In the exemplification of teaching and learning in a PGCE class that features in this **paper, the students’ responses to observing their lecturer/tutor’s practice of philosophy with children in an early years’ classroom seem to suggest that some “troubling” of authority was/is** taking place. The lecturer/tutor (Karin), staying with the disturbance this provoked, invited a series of diffractive engagements with materials, bodies, spaces, and an academic text. The example illustrates how the concept of authority returns, expands, and reverberates throughout their course and the open-philosophical, responsive, and emergent nature of the teaching approach adopted.

## Emergent Teacher Education Curriculum

Karin is the convener of a one-year Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) Foundation phase. <sup>6</sup> She conceptualized and co-designed the curriculum of this teacher education program at the University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa.

This paper draws on events that occurred while experimenting with so-called **“block teaching.” Instead of teaching three hours a week over a period of seventeen weeks, they worked across four courses in blocks of intensive one-week teaching. Each morning over a whole week, the students engaged with only one of the courses. This enables deep immersion in the subject and disrupts the usual fragmentation and disjointedness of current approaches to curriculum construction. The students are all graduates, have opted to teach younger children, and are expecting to be engaged in early years’ pedagogies. The design of the course aims to encourage students to learn through and become immersed *in* those very approaches, rather than only learn *about* them, and also recognizes the many adjustments this might involve, hence the opportunities to provide different ways of sharing any concerns that are provoked, as explained in the description that follows. We acknowledge that learning is often troubling, and such “troubles” may well remain hidden from the tutors’ view.**

**We give a flavor of one of Karin’s weeks** of block teaching Childhood Studies. In close collaboration with another lecturer who teaches **Life Skills and Special Studies, the students’ learning is made visible through pedagogical documentation in a shared Google.doc folder (audio- and video-tapes, photos, field notes, lesson preparation, our comments, etc.). This way of working is inspired by Philosophy for Children (P4C) and the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education (see in particular, Murriss et al., 2018). This pedagogical work**

involves wondering about the established meanings of concepts through philosophical questioning and provoking projects by taking the concepts that emerge in philosophical enquiries further through pedagogical documentation; in **this case the concept of “authority” (Murriss, 2016, 2017).**

Central to the forward movement of *progettazione*<sup>7</sup> and the creation of new understandings of concepts is the *transmodal* (Murriss, 2017) switching of *one hundred languages* (and a thousand more) to project forward as part of a process of intra-action in between human and nonhuman bodies (which is different from self-expression). The famous **Reggio Emilia metaphor of “the hundred languages” comes from a poem written by Loris Malaguzzi (Edwards, 1995).** A powerful critique of the privileging of the dominant two languages in (higher) education, reading and writing, the metaphor refers at one (practical) level to the introduction of material-discursive tools for meaning-making in schools, such as visual arts, physical movement, video, digital cameras, augmented realities, and computers. At a symbolic level, the hundred languages are, as **Carlina Rinaldi (2006) puts it, a “metaphor for crediting children and adults with a hundred, a thousand creative and communicative potentials” (p. 175).**

A willingness to be open to surprises and the unexpected is key, and below we explore an example of how *progettazione* can work in teacher education. Provoked by students collaborative exploration of the Michaud/Valitalo (2017) academic text in a philosophical enquiry, the students expressed **their ideas in rotating “stations,” building on each other’s ideas diffractively and taking them** into new directions through the transmodal opportunities that had been chosen carefully on the basis of the content of the text.

This folder was shared with Joanna as part of the collaborative writing of this paper. Quotes, images, and ideas woven through this **file are the data source for Karin’s and Joanna’s** diffractive engagement. Connections between **the carefully chosen “languages” by the educator** (Murriss, 2017) help to move an enquiry forward *horizontally*, not *vertically*.

**Karin and Joanna’s re-**turning to the documentation is a kind of *listening*. The annotated visualization of selected events in class brings *energies* and *forces* to the *progettazione* that open up new possibilities (Olsson, 2009, p. 41). The conceptual focus is the key to a dynamic, evolving, rhizomatic curriculum and the three different ways of thinking about authority kept e/merging, **resisting students’ specific and repeated requests** to be told how to maintain control in the classroom and manage discipline.

**Students’ anxiety about their first** teaching practice was palpable, and the following needs to be understood in the context of a school outing where Karin had facilitated a few P4C **“modelling” sessions with Grade 1, 3, and 5 children in one of the university’s** partnership schools. After the outing, the students had raised questions and made comments about what they had perceived as the lack of discipline in the classroom, with too **much movement of children’s bodies, noise** made by children who were talking, and by Karin using a text some thought was too difficult for young children: *The Little Prince* (1945/1994) by Antoine de St Exupery.

Listening to their concerns and knowing they were anxious about their first teaching practicum a few weeks after these classroom observations, Karin browsed through some P4C texts for some ideas about how to explore with the students the concerns they had raised. She had not set the readings in advance, but selected them when they connected to the many



enquiries they had in class as well as the concepts that were generated by the students themselves. Karin had tried to reassure the students on several occasions by saying that building respectful relationships in the classroom and being genuinely interested in their ideas will soon turn a classroom into a place where teachers do not have to be authoritarian. However, she felt that the apparatus used to measure how true her statements were, depended on what was familiar to the students, and her reassurances somehow seemed to make little difference for most of them. Karin explained to Joanna that it almost felt as if they were even more anxious because this lecturer was obviously so different from them.

Browsing through *The Routledge International Handbook of Philosophy for Children* (Gregory et al., 2017), Karin was struck by one article in particular, and she recalled Joanna talking about it very positively as she had been the editor of that particular section of the Handbook. Also remembering their shared **enjoyment of the authors' presentation of these ideas** at a P4C conference in Vancouver, Karin read the chapter with great interest. This choice turned out to be very fruitful.

#### Tradition, Anarchic, and Shared Authority

In their chapter, Olivier Michaud and Riku Valitalo set out to explore the pedagogical complexity of shared authority in the context of the association of P4C with democratic education. We have already explained our choice for and interest in Philosophy with Children and its underlying educational and social philosophy. As mentioned before, we have theorized and practiced this pedagogy and philosophy extensively. Here it is important to explain that Michaud and Valitalo (the authors of the academic text students were invited to work

with) are concerned with the question of what form of authority is implied in this practice. Since P4C is indicative of the role of philosophy in democratizing the classroom, it provides a very helpful means to understand what kind of educational authority is implied and how it might differ from other forms of authority that operate in educational settings. At the same time it opens up generative possibilities to discuss authority with student teachers per se at a particular poignant moment in their training.

Michaud and Valitalo refer to three main educational models of authority or forms of power. They refer to the wider debate about how democratic principles should structure education and which forms of authority can be reconciled with principles of individual autonomy and equality. They identify three main positions: *traditional*, *anarchic*, and *shared authority* models.

The traditional model, associated with Plato, emphasizes the teacher's **position of being** an authority as a bearer of sanctioned knowledge **to be passed on and the students' position as** not-yet-adults. The anarchic position, after Jean **Jacques Rousseau, suggests that "for a good education to exist it has to be without authority [...] in which students learn in a context of freedom" (2017, p.28). This is a radically** student-centered model. Thirdly, the shared responsibility model, associated with John **Dewey (2017), which "involves being able to grasp how authority in the traditional and anarchic models are, at one and the same time, both right and wrong" (p.29, emphasis in original).** Michaud and Valitalo call this the shared authority model, where authority becomes inherently more complex as the teacher enters into multiple forms of negotiation and their associated relations.



Table 1  
*Account of models of authority in the classroom  
 after Michaud and Valitalo*

Model of authority	Characteristics
Traditional	After Plato, teacher is source and authorized bearer of knowledge and student looks up to teacher.
Anarchic	After Rousseau, teacher follows <b>students' lead in their</b> pursuit of learning in a context of freedom.
Shared	After Dewey, responsibility for learning is shared between teacher and students in this complex relational model and teacher aims to make experience educative. Negotiation is critical.

It is the relational and material form and **shape of these “negotiations” of authority that** occupy us in this paper. What does democratic education look like? We explore some of the complexity of negotiations of authority in the model of shared responsibility through a worked example of teacher education and in order to further re-conceptualize authority in ways that might be useful for practitioners and those who work with them in professional training contexts.

### “We Don’t Need No Eju-kay-shon” - Anarchic Authority

The three different concepts lend themselves well for using three rotating “stations”— **common practice in the early years’** classroom. Karin had prepared the space as follows. She had carefully planned a different modality for each station.

There was a light table in the corner of the room and on a table a variety of fabrics, glue, paper, and scissors were inviting the students to explore the ideas using their hundred languages. A few printouts of the chapter had also been made available, so that students could cut and paste and engage with the paper as they saw fit. The materials chosen had an internal connection to the concepts themselves. The light table—with opportunities to use complex and intricate layers of connections and disturbances, light effects, and shadows—seemed a good choice for shared authority.

For traditional authority, the use of clay presented itself. Much of this process was intuitive, and Karin still struggles to articulate the reasons for it. It sort of seemed obvious at the time.

For anarchic authority, the students were invited to make group posters with large felt tip pens/fabric/glue/paper/other materials outside the classroom in a large, bright, communal space where they could work on the floor. The activity of being able (and allowed) to move their bodies more freely and use large brush strokes and bold colors seemed to connect with the concept of anarchic authority. Sitting next to the students on the floor, Karin listened to them as they were creating their posters, **making notes. She wrote down Athray’s** comments about how free she was feeling during **the activity: “Painting and making a mess on** these sheets of paper felt satisfying, fun, and at the same time relaxing. This was the first time I

was able to let go, and do as I pleased on an **academic piece of work.**"

For each of the stations, they had been asked how child was positioned in each of these approaches to authority. Jumping ahead of their final exam (a transmodal installation) at the end of the year, the overall question hovering over the teaching was how (if at all) their ideas about child and childhood were shifting during the year. Constantly consulting photographs of the students at work, reading their diffractive journals (Murriss, 2016), their visual essays, and the shared pedagogical documentation helped Karin to ask further questions and continue the enquiry. Throughout the year, they kept referring back to **"shared authority"** in particular, thereby clearly showing the lasting **impression of the morning's work, much more** so than if they had been reading the text only. In fact, getting students not just to read texts, but study texts is a real struggle.

In a tiny corner of the group poster on anarchic authority, one student makes some striking remarks about the size of the human bodies in the context of anarchic authority (Figure 1):

The teacher was added as the last feature in this model, and was a small figure painted in grey colours that almost blended into the background, in order to show her lack of prominence in the situation. In addition to **this, the word "FREEDOM" was painted on the student's shirt to represent the carefree** way a student feels in a system where they are their own authority. Other phrases such as **"you can imagine" were pasted from a magazine onto his shirt to represent the concept present behind this model of authority in which a student no longer feels stifled in learning, due to a looming presence of authority.**

Figure 1

*The small figure of the gray teacher blended into the background: "We don't need no eju-kay-shon."*



Another group had made several handprints using bold colors covering the entire poster. One student wrote:

An anarchist approach to authority places the child in a position where there are no constraints to the degree of freedom they have in the school and classroom. The child will retain ownership over what they learn and there is freedom in the pedagogical relationship with the teacher. This means that the child fulfils an active role in the construction of knowledge, and this knowledge is based on the holistic development of the child. Therefore, the child is uniquely positioned so that all aspects of their learning capabilities are considered and that they understand and have a desire to be in the classroom.

Their poster shows the idea of anarchic authority as having no boundaries. The paint goes off the sides of the paper showing that the artwork on the page is not restricted to just the page:

There is no coherent picture in the artwork that can be made out to be something naturalistic, geometric or realistic. This

represents the idea that there is no one person in authority. No one authority figure can be clearly defined in the anarchist position. The haphazard lines and scribbles represent the child's opportunity to explore their own autonomy and ideas. They do not need to follow exact guidelines and can create things that might not make sense to others but do make sense to themselves.

### Traditional Authority

Figure 2

*Gandalf, a Teacher Exercising Traditional Authority from the Top*



The narrative character of Gandalf from Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* appealed to quite a few students as they intra-acted with clay, a copy of the text, newspaper, each other, etc.:

In both sculptures (Figures 2 and 4), Gandalf symbolizes leaders in general and for the purpose of this exercise, the Gandalf figure represents a teacher who is exercising traditional authority. Gandalf is standing on the top of the summit and the sheep are blindly following him. The sheep are symbolic of students who follow a teacher without knowing the purpose of what they are following or why they are following them. Traditional authority may produce this type of "sheep and leader" mentality as students are not given the authority to question the teacher in order to gain a better understanding but merely do as they say. And just as the sheep are striving to reach the top unknowingly, it is evident in classrooms that often traditional authority produces an atmosphere in which children are working to please the teacher and not to obtain knowledge.

Figure 3

*Clay students elevate the teacher by means of knowledge texts*



The idea of traditional authority is emphasized in the second sculpture (Figure 3) through the clay figure by elevating the teacher using a newspaper. One student explains:

The newspaper print may be seen to represent knowledge or textbooks. And the image as a whole powerfully depicts how traditional authority can result in students who merely use textbooks and work to please the teacher. The students are not reading the newspaper to reproduce and understand the knowledge but using it in the best way they can to elevate and please the teacher. This is not the type of environment that should be created in schools and it is this type of environment that defeats the very purpose of schools - to learn.

In the next sculpture (see Figure 4), the students express “Authority over” through scale, glasses, hands, a table, and uniform rows, strikingly presented on a newspaper showing monetary value—children as consumers of the knowledge industry.

Figure 4  
*“Authority over” expressed through scale, glasses, hands, a table, and uniform rows*



In the feedback session, one student explained:

The idea of the teacher being in authority over the students was represented through a more traditional set up of a classroom where the teacher is at the front of the class facing all of the students, who are in rows. We exaggerated the size of the teacher and added details of glasses and hands present on the hips. The students, in contrast, were just figures made from three small balls of clay. Although both teacher and students were both essentially made from three balls of clay, the difference was shown through the size of the balls and the detail added to the figures. This was to show how both teacher and students are of the substance, yet possess varying degrees of authority within the classroom setting. The detail of a table was added in front of the teacher, in order to show the divide present between teacher and students. The detail on the teacher, and the lack thereof on the students, also represented the way children are unformed in school, unlike the teacher, and through the process of schooling become shaped into who they will eventually be. This emphasises the large role a teacher in this form of authority has over their students in this form of authority.

Another student expressed how it had reminded her of her own experiences of schooling:

This is the type of experience that formed the basis of my own schooling. During class, I had to adopt a submissive role, as the teacher was perceived as the root of all knowledge who could not be challenged. The onus was therefore on the students to apologize during conflict situations, regardless of whether the teacher was in the wrong or not. I found this unequal division of power to be unfair and imbalanced.

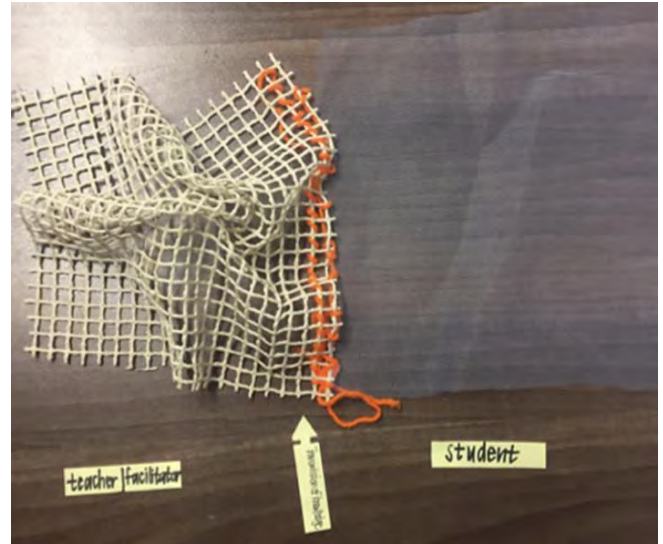


### Shared Authority

One student explains that shared authority “does not disregard the teacher and in fact sees the teacher as having a role to play but is also of the view that education starts from the learner’s interests. We can say then that the authority is shared and as represented by the image we can see that there is equal participation by both the learner and the teacher” (see Figure 5):

At our second station we explored shared authority, in which there was a sharing of authority and knowledge between the teacher and student and the teacher is seen more as a facilitator. The media that were used for this were scraps of fabric, wool and other various scrap materials. Our group showed this concept of shared authority using two different square pieces of material and a piece of orange wool. The one square represented the student and the other square represented the teacher. The orange string that connected the two was a representation of the transmission of knowledge being shared between the two that holds them together. One of the squares was left slightly larger than the other and more orange wool was woven into this piece. This was because this represented the teacher and would visually show how both student and teacher are not equal, but the teacher is a facilitator and thus does possess more of the knowledge and skill to guide the student. We also worked with different dimensions in this model by making the student lay completely flat in 2D and the teacher be slightly raised in a 3D position. This was done in order to show the differences present in the authority, yet still a sharing and common thread between the two.

Figure 5  
Connecting teacher and students with a “common thread” in 2D and 3D



There certainly seemed to be consensus about their preference:

With the image below, we see [again] the integration of material in symbolising the symbiotic relationship of the shared authority classroom. The intrigue of this picture though is the inclusion of the mesh at the bottom that for me symbolises the scaffolding provided in this type of relationship. Its placement indicated that this is an important aspect of this authority type, a building block of sorts. It is as if the teacher provides that support base for the learner to grow and learn their independence and individuality, before eventually coming together with the teacher to form a combined front. It is the woven round shape of the top that I feel encapsulates this authority type completely, that once the teacher and the learners come together and negotiate their shared authority. They then weave together into this one cohesive circular shape that has no top or bottom, instead all fronts of it are

equal. Just as a circle is equal at any given point in its circumference.

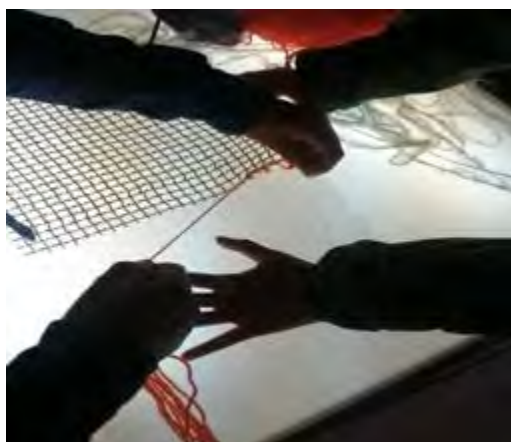
Figure 6  
*Sympoietic relationality*



The orange string as seen in the image, represents knowledge while the grid material on the left represents the teacher and the mesh material represents the learner. Here it is clear that we are seeing an example of shared authority. The knowledge is intertwined between the two materials and is able to connect them. From this we see how shared authority is an equal relationship between teacher and student with neither being seen as more authoritative than the other. In P4C classes we are able to clearly see shared authority in practice with the teacher playing the role of a facilitator while acknowledging and encouraging students to state their thoughts and opinions. The knowledge or string in this case, that we all hold helps us grow and contribute towards **each other's personal growth in a positive** way. In a shared authority setting, there is respect shown towards everyone and necessary skills are learnt such as respecting others opinions and patience.

Connections started to increasingly become apparent between the activity and **Karin's P4C demonstration lesson:**

I observed, for instance, at the P4C session at [...] School that while the facilitator allowed for the exploration of ideas by the students, she also used her power in the classroom to



steer the students' thinking in the direction of the specific questions that she asked.

### Students Returning to This Event at the End of the Year

What certainly has been significant is how towards the end of the year and after they had had their two teaching practicums, many **returned to Karin's teaching demonstration** at the start of the year, the value of P4C and the difference the course had made in their final essay:

I had my concerns about P4C and how **children would respond to that**...In the beginning of the year, as a class we went to [...] school to observe a philosophy for children (P4C) lesson. In my diffractive **journal I wrote "Upon entering the grade one class I had doubts in my mind whether the grade one's would be able to come up with questions all by themselves without the help of their teacher.**

I can remember being taken aback during the outing to [the school] to watch a P4C lesson that learners were actively changing and shifting the course of the discussion. Initially, I saw this as learners derailing the class as they went off-topic and seemed disruptive. However, upon reflection I could see the value of learners being active participants in a class, rather than passive receivers of knowledge. A quote from my visual essay on authority reflects this change **in view, "each element brings an important position and viewpoint in a classroom which should be equally respected and included in guiding the class". This was an active shift in what I had learnt during my own childhood and during my teaching practical I had to be very aware of how I enacted authority in the classroom. In this way, my own makeup was shaped by the influencing factors of my childhood which had to be unlearned in order to make room for a shared authority approach.**

...shared authority was also reflected in the P4C session at the [...] school. The knowledge that the children brought to the class was honoured in the sense that they were provided opportunities to engage in the discussion through a process of drawing, formulating questions and then democratically voting for the question they preferred to discuss. Their advice was valued, and each child could express with freedom what they desired to contribute to the inquiry.

### Some Final Threads

In this paper, we have insisted that authority is central to our understanding and living of adult-child relations and how these are enacted in educational settings, including higher education. Through our discussion and through the example, we wanted to engage with and communicate ideas in ways that could be meaningful for practitioners. We are hopeful that these ways of working with student teachers and professionals, inspired by the political and educational movements of P4C and Reggio Emilia, can also prove to be liberating and pragmatic, inasmuch as experiences of cooperating to air difficulties, disagree, imagine, create, and solve problems of everyday life in classrooms can become part of the wider project of creating and sustaining democratic communities of learning that include the more-than-human, *sympoietically*.

There is a need for time and space in the education of practitioners to realize the significance of authority and boundary-making at the heart of educational relationships and spaces, and that these relationships and spaces are not predetermined and fixed, but rather need to be continuously questioned, disturbed, re-configured and re-negotiated. *Sympoietic* pedagogies that allow for the material and affective dimensions of knowledge and power to emerge provide not only opportunities for students to question how they have come to be constituted as subjects and what they themselves



have often experienced in their own schooling or upbringing, but also to grow in confidence and skill to anticipate and embrace the work of boundary-making and sharing responsibility that is inherent in education. They might help students to stay with the difficulties and make sense of their own avoidant (too permissive) or authoritarian (too controlling) behaviors with children and to imagine spacious and creative relationships of reciprocity.

We want to argue that imagining and creating such negotiating relationships in education contexts, for children and adults, serves to make education more democratic through establishing diverse approaches to negotiation out of the habitual way of doing things, negotiating with each other, beyond words. *Negotiation* is also through movement and action, with/in the space, with/in the material and with/in the texts. This is in contrast with participatory models of education that focus mostly on individual agency and voice, where separate add-on systems for participation mimic given modes of decision-making in the public domain, while spaces and relations of authority in teaching and learning can remain unchanged. The table below offers a framework for consideration of authority and an enlarged notion of democratic education and education for democratic living.

Table 2  
*Emergent sympoetic authorities - learning with/in - creating authority with/in*

Model of authority	Characteristics
Authority	Teachers are responsible for <b>students' behavior and achievement</b> – students follow the teacher and knowledge is imparted or delivered. Schools help to maintain the

	political status quo— this model upholds existing democratic systems.
authority	Students have responsibility for their behavior and learning— teachers follow the students and knowledge is co-constructed. Individual freedom and autonomy is encouraged and schools uphold these principles of democracy.
authorities	There are multiple sources of authority (including teacher, students, and texts) and learning assumes that authorities are newly negotiated and produced through episodes of learning; sharing response-ability is both implicit (ongoing, cumulative, atmospheric) and explicit (arrangement of space, diverse practices and materials). Age is not a factor (learning with/in is collaborative, exploratory, playful) disagreement is; uncertainty is naturalized; transmodal expression is naturalized.

*Sympoetic* democracy is an unfolding, unfinished and open-ended project, collapsing Nature/Culture binaries, always becoming and also concerned with the more-than-human human. Everyday experience matters. The world matters.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank in particular the students of the PGCE Foundation Phase of 2019 at the University of Cape Town for their powerful material-discursive engagement with the text we discussed and the course as a whole. Moreover, we would like to thank Rose-Anne Reynolds, the lecturer in the PGCE whom Karin works closely with.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See below for an explanation of the use of “/” in “dis/embodyed” and the difference it makes ethically, ontologically, and epistemologically.

<sup>2</sup> At the start of the academic year, all students sign an ethics form—approved by the School of Education ethics committee. They have an as part of the program their work with/in materials, deepens understanding and is an essential part of the curriculum-in-the-making.

<sup>3</sup> The Foundation Phase in South Africa refers to the teaching of 5- to 9-year olds (Grade R-Grade 3).

<sup>4</sup> For another example of Karin’s rhizomatic Reggio Emilia inspired work with her students (and in this particular case, written in collaboration with colleagues), see: Murriss, Reynolds, and Peers, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Queering is an un-doing of identity.

<sup>6</sup> The Foundation phase in South Africa covers the 5–9 age range.

<sup>7</sup> According to Carla Rinaldi (2006), *progettazione* cannot really be translated. It is a strategy, a daily practice of observation-

interpretation-documentation—an emergent curriculum developed by the preschools in the city of Reggio Emilia, Northern Italy.

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