

ARTICLE

Unearthing Forest Pedagogies: Autoethnographic Encounters within Critical Forest Studies

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Abstract

This article establishes forests as sentient pedagogical communities through four autoethnographic vignettes drawn from parent-child forest school encounters. Rather than presenting forest as co-teacher as a conceptual claim, this work animates these ideas through lived stories in which acorns, fungi, winds and fire participate in teaching alongside children, parents and educators. Grounded in Indigenous epistemologies that recognise land as first teacher, posthumanist notions of intra-action and ecofeminist ethics of care, this study develops Situated Forest Inquiry as a methodology of relational accountability between human and more-than-human worlds. The findings illustrate how forest pedagogies can redefine care, enact species interdependence, nurture multispecies kinship and deepen engagement with Indigenous knowledge, offering educators clear examples of how environmental education might be practiced differently.

Keywords: Autoethnography; critical forest studies; ecofeminism; indigenous epistemologies; posthumanism; pluriversal pedagogy

The morning is damp, the forest floor spongy beneath our boots. We gather in a small clearing framed by towering pines, their trunks darkened by the previous night's rain. The group falls quiet as the wind rises, sweeping through the canopy and bending branches into a slow, rhythmic sway. My young daughter tilts her head, listening intently. The forest is not silent: chickadees call sharply, droplets patter from needles to moss, the air itself seems alive with motion. Children and parents pause together, drawn into this shared listening.

These moments, at once fleeting and profound, unsettle familiar boundaries of classroom learning. There are no walls, no desks, no scripted lessons. The forest insists on its own tempo, demanding patience, attunement, humility. What emerges here are not activities designed by adults but invitations to notice, to dwell, to listen. Such encounters prompt us to reconsider what counts as teaching, what counts as care and who, ultimately, counts as teacher.

I enter these scenes as both mother and educator, roles that bring together tension and strength. As a science schoolteacher and university researcher, I am trained to notice ecological processes and to translate phenomena into curricular outcomes. As a mother, I am called into embodied, relational forms of care, steadying my toddler, wiping mud from her face, listening and tending to her needs. Autoethnography allows me to inhabit these tensions productively: to recognise that my own body, my child's body and the forest itself are all participants in pedagogy. This dual positioning is not a limitation but a way of seeing otherwise, where personal narrative becomes a site for theoretical and pedagogical insight.

Within formal school systems, environmental education has often been unevenly implemented. Global reviews suggest that while cognitive dimensions of environmental learning are relatively well represented, social-emotional and action-oriented dimensions remain comparatively weak (Glackin & King, 2020; UNESCO, 2019). It is against this backdrop that this paper asks how learning with forests, through embodied encounters of care, decay, listening and reciprocity, might reconfigure environmental education. Guided by the emerging field of Critical Forest Studies, the central question animating this work is: what might encounters within a community-based outdoor school teach us about forest pedagogies?

In this article, I argue that forest encounters reveal pluriversal pedagogies that braid together scientific literacy, emotional attunement and ethical relationality. The vignettes that follow (gathering acorns, listening to the forest, dwelling with decay and distributed care) show how forests actively shape learning. These encounters highlight that pedagogy is not simply delivered *in* forests but co-created *with* them. In doing so, I demonstrate that environmental education can be expanded through Critical Forest Studies to recognise forests as co-teachers whose lessons carry epistemological, ethical and ecological significance.

The vignettes in this article are drawn from my participation in a forest school programme for parents and children aged 0–4, located in Ottawa, Canada, on the unceded and unsundered lands of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation. At the time, I was on maternity leave from my role as a primary school science teacher, and my daughter was two years old. These weekly sessions became an important site of connection during early motherhood, offering opportunities to learn together in the forest. The landscape is characterised by mixed stands of century-old white pines, maples and oaks, interspersed with cedar groves and regenerating undergrowth of ferns, mosses and wildflowers. The programme brings together caregivers, children and educators to explore seasonal cycles of song, storytelling, play and survival skills. Sessions unfold with fluidity, guided not only by the educators but by the forest itself, whose rhythms and ecologies shape what is possible each day.

Theoretical and conceptual grounding

This article draws upon a theoretical scaffolding that braids together Indigenous epistemologies, critical posthumanism and feminist science studies situated within the emerging field of *Critical Forest Studies*, visually represented in Figure 1. This braiding resonates with Métissage, as described by Kelly (2016), a methodology of weaving diverse epistemologies while maintaining their integrity and holding tensions with care. In this framework, forests are not passive sites of education but living pedagogical communities that teach through entanglement, reciprocity and care. Braiding these theoretical traditions, without collapsing their differences, enacts a decolonial gesture that resists extractive and anthropocentric logics, positioning the forest as both subject and collaborator in the co-creation of knowledge.

Indigenous scholars have long emphasised that land is not inert backdrop but the first and most enduring teacher. Styres (2018) articulates this through the concept of land as “storied, sentient, and relational,” insisting that pedagogy begins in the recognition of land’s agency. Donald (2012) critiques the “colonial frontier logics” that sever land from pedagogy, while his more recent work (Donald, 2021) calls for a *wâhkôhtowin* imagination that situates education as an act of kinship. Similarly, Arnold et al. (2021) describe the Yuin ontology of oneness, where trees and people are inseparable relations, shaping identity and well-being through reciprocal encounters. Kimmerer (2013) echoes these insights in her articulation of the *honourable harvest*, where learning from plants requires gratitude, restraint and reciprocity. Together, these perspectives position forests as ethical and relational teachers, challenging environmental education frameworks that rely on extractive observation or stewardship logics. Building on these insights, Indigenous scholars foreground pedagogy as co-created with

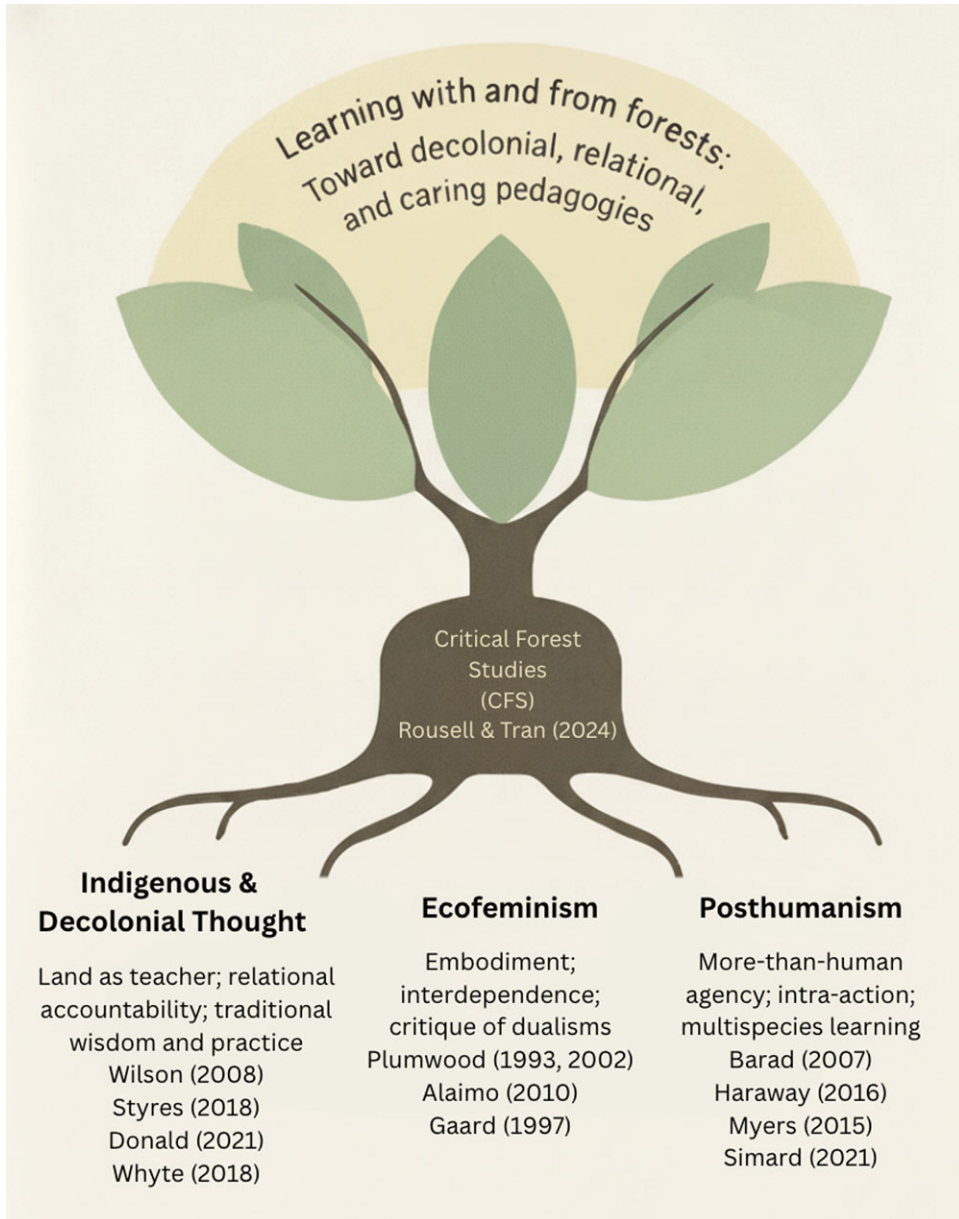


Figure 1. Conceptual framework: learning with and from forests through decolonial, relational, and caring pedagogies.

forests. Country et al. (2016) describe *co-becoming*, a process in which people and places bring each other into being through everyday practices of dwelling and storytelling. Their more recent work on *songsprals* (Country et al., 2022) emphasises how land, sound and kinship intra-act to continually bring Country into existence. Poelina et al. (2022) extend this into a philosophy of *regeneration time*, a cyclical understanding of planetary well-being where death, renewal and relation are inseparable. Elder Rick Bailey and coauthors (Hill et al., 2022) likewise document how Indigenous pedagogies emerge in reciprocal encounters with salmon and rivers, demonstrating that multispecies kinship is itself a form of curriculum.

Posthumanist theory extends these insights by challenging the human exceptionalism that underpins much of education, – or the myth of human supremacy (Jensen, 2016). Barad's (2007) concept of *intra-action* insists that entities do not pre-exist their relations but are constituted through them. Haraway (2016) similarly urges us to *stay with the trouble*, recognising that humans and non-humans co-become through messy entanglements rather than linear progress. Myers (2015a) contributes to this conversation with her notion of *vegetal sensoria*, where plants are understood as perceptive beings that invite us into multispecies forms of attention. This reorientation toward more-than-human sensoria challenges environmental education practices that frame nature as object of study, emphasising instead pedagogy as co-constituted with plants, fungi and animals.

Posthumanist thinking has also been enriched by the so-called fungal turn. Tsing (2015) documents how mushrooms teach us to notice life emerging in ruins, unsettling capitalist and colonial assumptions of progress. Sheldrake (2020) deepens this by describing fungi as “architects of ecosystems,” whose work of decomposition sustains new life. Simard (2021) demonstrates how “mother trees” communicate and share resources through fungal networks, findings corroborated by Beiler et al. (2010), who mapped the mycorrhizal architecture linking kin seedlings in the “wood-wide web.” Hunter (2023) extends this into the notion of a “fungal grid,” highlighting distributed intelligence and resilience. These insights challenge linear pedagogical models, inviting humility and recognition of decay as a teacher.

Ecofeminist and feminist science studies further deepen this reorientation by foregrounding embodiment, care and the undoing of binaries. Alaimo (2010) introduces the concept of *transcorporeality*, insisting that human bodies are never discrete but always porous, enmeshed with the flows of material environments. Plumwood (1993, 2002) critiques the dualisms of nature/culture, male/female and reason/emotion that undergird ecological destruction, advocating instead for ecological continuity and relational ethics. Willey (2016) situates care as both feminist and ecological, while Whyte and Cuomo (2016) emphasise Indigenous/feminist *ethics of care* as practices of reciprocal responsibility. More recent ecofeminist contributions expand these frameworks: Maryse (2024) explores the tensions between motherhood and Mother Earth as fertile spaces of resistance, and Siegel (2024) proposes *intraconnectivism* to move beyond entrenched binaries in environmental education.

Critical Forest Studies provides the integrative lens through which these theoretical strands converge. In this article, I contribute to the pedagogical strand of CFS by situating forests as co-teachers whose lessons emerge in everyday encounters. The theoretical braid outlined above enables me to analyse forest vignettes not as anecdotes but as pedagogical events that hold together scientific literacy, affective attunement and ethical relationality. CFS offers a framework for recognising these pluriversal pedagogies, affirming that to learn with forests is to be entangled in cycles of kinship, temporality and care.

Methodology: autoethnography as situated forest inquiry

This inquiry is grounded in autoethnography, a methodology that situates the researcher's lived experience as a site of cultural, relational and theoretical insight. Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe autoethnography as a practice of storytelling that is both personal and analytic, weaving intimate narrative with broader theoretical and ethical concerns. Holman Jones (2005) emphasises its reflexive dimension, where writing becomes a method of inquiry that makes visible the entanglements of self, community and world. Within outdoor and environmental education, Humberstone and Nicol (2019) argue that autoethnography is particularly valuable for “exploring human and non-human interactions in the outdoors” (p. 113), since it refuses the dualism between observer and observed. They note that such methodologies, underpinned by phenomenological perspectives, provide unique ways of tracing how meaning is generated in

multispecies contexts (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007). In this sense, my vignettes are not simply memories but methodological enactments: narrative sites where forest encounters become pedagogical events.

In this study I approach autoethnography through situated forest inquiry, a methodological stance that treats the forest as co-teacher and co-researcher. Rather than using the forest as a backdrop, inquiry emerges through embodied, relational and multispecies encounters that shape interpretation and meaning making (Riley et al., 2024). Recent multispecies ethnography in forest education demonstrates how non-human beings participate in pedagogical and research processes (Boileau, 2022), while contemplative forest fieldwork emphasises attentiveness and relational accountability within more-than-human worlds (Persson et al., 2022). In this sense, forest encounters do not simply inform the research; they actively constitute the conditions through which pedagogical insights become possible.

Central to this approach is the recognition of my dual role as mother and educator. I did not “enter” the forest as a detached researcher; I came as a parent carrying a toddler, as an educator learning alongside other families and as a researcher attentive to how these positionalities shaped what I could notice and narrate. Autoethnography allows me to acknowledge this tension as both strength and limitation. As Alaimo (2010) reminds us, bodies are never separate from their environments but always porous and entangled; my maternal body is implicated in the pedagogies I describe, whether through carrying, feeding, or listening. Rather than bracket out these embodied roles, I treat them as integral to the inquiry. Through this reflexivity I acknowledge that the pedagogical insights offered in the vignettes emerge not from neutral observation but from my lived perceptions as a mother and educator in the forest.

Indigenous research frameworks emphasise that methodology is not merely a matter of technique but of responsibility. Wilson (2008) argues that research must be accountable to relationships with human participants, with community and with land itself. Styres (2018, p. 47) extends this to environmental education, insisting that “land is a sentient, storied presence” to whom researchers are responsible. In this article, relational accountability means writing with humility, acknowledging that I speak as a settler scholar and mother learning in lands shaped by Indigenous knowledges. It means recognising that the pedagogical insights I narrate are not mine alone but co-created with children, parents, educators, trees, fungi and soil. Following Donald (2021), I understand this writing as an enactment of ethical relationality, where storytelling becomes a way of honouring the kinship responsibilities that arise in forest encounters.

The “data” for this article consists of embodied memories, affective responses and narrative reconstructions of moments in forest school and everyday encounters with trees. These are not raw observations, but storied accounts shaped through reflection, writing and theoretical braiding. Richardson (2000) reminds us that writing itself is a method of inquiry: through the act of composing vignettes, new insights emerge and theory is generated in relation to lived experience. Humberstone et al. (2019) call this methodological pluralism: the weaving together of memory, theory and embodied encounter to make sense of more-than-human relations. In this study, I intentionally braided story with scholarly literature, not as an afterthought but as a way of enacting what Country et al. (2022) call *relational creativity*. Each vignette is therefore both narrative and analysis, both personal memory and theoretical insight.

Autoethnography in this context carries ethical considerations. As a settler scholar engaging with Indigenous epistemologies, I remain vigilant against appropriation. My intent is not to speak for Indigenous knowledge but to position myself as a learner accountable to it, citing Indigenous scholars and knowledge keepers with care and humility. Ethical approval for this project was obtained from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa¹. The data used constitute secondary use of materials collected through my participation in a parent–child forest school programme, with consent obtained from the forest school organisation and the educators

¹Ethics file number S-10-25-12210.

involved, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. As a mother, I am particularly attentive to the ethics of narrating my child's experiences; while her gestures and words appear in the vignettes, I hold responsibility for how they are represented, ensuring respect for her dignity, privacy and agency.

Autoethnographic narratives: forest encounters

Gathering acorns

It is late September, the second week of our forest school programme. We begin as always with a song for the forest, followed by a circle of gratitude. Parents, educators and children gather around, each voice naming something they are thankful for: the crisp air, the squirrels, the community. My daughter clutches an acorn tightly, whispering "*merci arbre*" as her contribution.

That day, the older children had been gathering acorns, cracking them open with rocks to reach the nut. The toddlers, eager to join, imitated their movements. Some acorns split open to reveal plump seeds, while others crumbled, hollow or damaged. The educator explained how oaks produce two kinds of seeds: viable acorns capable of germination and unviable ones shed early. Oaks sometimes "abort" weaker seeds to focus resources on those most likely to thrive. I was struck by the intelligence of this tree, this strategy of discernment.

As a science educator, I thought of Simard's (2021) research on "mother trees"; how they nurture certain seedlings through underground networks, even directing carbon preferentially to kin. Beiler et al. (2010) described this networked architecture as the "wood-wide web," fungi weaving trees into vast systems of care and exchange. This ecological perspective revealed the oak as strategic, adaptive and resilient.

Yet the encounter also carried another frame. An Indigenous educator described making acorn flour, emphasising the importance of taking only what is needed and offering gratitude. Kimmerer (2013) calls this the *honourable harvest*: never take the first, never take the last, ask permission, give thanks and use everything you take. Arnold et al. (2021) situate such practices within the Yuin ontology of oneness, where people and trees are inseparable relations. Country et al. (2016) describe this as *co-becoming*: the acorns teach, we listen and together we shape each other's futures.

In that moment, pluriversal pedagogies came alive. The acorns carried multiple truths: scientific, ecological, Indigenous and relational. My daughter's delight in smashing acorns was not trivial but pedagogical, an embodied reminder that the forest assemblage teaches in plural ways. The oak did not merely provide resources; it acted as co-teacher, guiding us toward lessons in reciprocity, survival and humility.

Listening to the forest

It is a cool morning. The group disperses into a small grove of pines for "sit spot" time. Parents are asked to stay still, children encouraged to listen with their whole bodies. The educator reminds us: "It takes twenty minutes for the forest to forget we are here."

At first, my toddler fidgets. She picks at pine needles, tosses small cones. Gradually she settles, crouching low, watching chickadees dart from branch to branch. The wind shifts, pressing through the canopy, carrying scents of damp soil and resin. For long moments, we do not speak. The forest begins to resume its rhythms.

As an educator, silence unsettles me. I am used to leading, guiding, explaining. Yet here, learning is not about explanation but about waiting, listening, attuning. Myers (2015b) calls this cultivating *vegetal sensoria* – an embodied openness to the perceptual worlds of plants. Around me, the pines exhale a resinous scent that mingles with the damp soil; I notice how the chickadees' movements mirror the subtle sway of pine needles in the wind. The cones scattered at my feet are

more than classroom materials – they are gestures of offering, each one holding the memory of seasons past and the promise of regeneration. Kneeling beside my daughter, I feel the forest breathing with us, our inhalations and exhalations folded into the photosynthetic rhythm of the trees. Barad's (2007) notion of *intra-action* helps me recognise that I am not a separate observer but entangled in these exchanges of breath, touch and attention. Donald's (2021) wāhkôhtowin imagination further grounds this moment as kinship pedagogy – learning with, not about, the living beings that sustain us. In this silence, I come to understand that teaching begins when I yield to the more-than-human presences that are already teaching.

I notice how my daughter's small body seems rooted, quiet, listening. For her, this is not an exercise in patience but an instinctive immersion. For me, it is an unlearning: to accept slowness, to let the forest set the tempo of pedagogy. Sitting still, I realised that teaching could mean stepping back, letting birds and wind take up the role of instructor. The lesson was not mine to deliver but ours to receive.

Dwelling with decay

On a wander through goldenrods and asters, my daughter toddles behind me, fascinated by the small creatures along the trail. Suddenly, another child notices a carcass on the forest floor: small, mouse-like and half decomposed. The group gathers. Instead of recoiling, the educator kneels, sings a song of thanks and invites us to hold a small funeral.

We do not look up answers on our phones. Instead, children speculate: "Was it a mouse?" "A vole?" They count toes, examine fur, peer with curiosity. Parents are reminded to wonder alongside their children, resisting the urge to rush toward answers. We leave the carcass with respect, reminded that it, too, teaches.

Nearby, fungi grow on fallen logs. Green elf cups stain wood a bluish hue. "Look," the educator says, "the forest is recycling." We talk of decomposition; of the way fungi turn death into nourishment. Sheldrake (2020) describes fungi as "architects of ecosystems," their hyphae weaving decay into new life. Simard (2021) explains how fungal networks sustain growth, while Tsing (2015) insists we notice how life persists in ruins. Poelina et al. (2022) frame this as *regeneration time*, cycles of death and renewal that sustain planetary well-being.

Plumwood (2002) argues that death should not be feared as negation but understood as continuity within ecological systems. In this moment, pedagogy emerged from the humility of decay. The children gathered around the fallen log, tracing the delicate white threads of mycelium spreading through its bark. They learned that death is not an end but a transformation, a necessary process through which life persists. Oliveira et al. (2023) similarly show how engaging with death in educational contexts can open opportunities for ethical reflection, empathy and ecological literacy. By encountering decomposition not as something to avoid but to attend to, the children witnessed the forest's own curriculum of renewal. As teachers, we are often taught to protect children from discomfort, yet these moments reveal that grief and wonder coexist in learning. Oliveira et al. (2023) and Reis's work on Death of an Elementary Classroom Pet remind us that loss, when approached with care, can cultivate respect for interdependence and impermanence. Within the framework of Critical Forest Studies (Rousell & Tran, 2024), such encounters become more than ecological lessons, they are ethical events in which relational accountability extends to the decomposing and the decomposed. To witness decay, then, is to participate in the ongoing story of the forest: to learn with the more-than-human world in its cycles of dying and becoming.

Distributed care

It is a cold, wet autumn morning. We gather in one of our usual spots, surrounded by century-old pines. Today, we are learning to build a fire; a life skill many parents had never been taught. The educator asks: "What does fire need?" We call out the elements: heat, fuel, oxygen. Children and

parents scatter, searching for twigs and branches, bringing back a jumble of combustibles to test. Together we learn which will ignite, which will smoulder, which will burn steady. Soon, the fire is crackling, warming our chilled hands.

Then comes a surprise: the Indigenous educator tells us that the children will leave with another guide for their own activity, while the parents remain at the fire. It is the first time we separate from our children in forest school. My chest tightens with anxiety as I watch my daughter walk away, small boots disappearing between the trees. Yet the fire holds me here. Around it, we are given carving knives and branches carefully selected by our guide. Slowly, deliberately, we sketch and etch, carving spoons out of wood.

In this moment, care circulates in unexpected ways. My child is cared for by peers, educators and the forest, while I am held in the warmth of fire and community. The carving demands focus and patience, teaching me that self-care is not indulgence but necessity. Alaimo's (2010) *transcorporeality* reminds us that our bodies are porous and enmeshed with environments, here, breath mingles with smoke, hands with wood, care with fire. Plumwood (2002) critiques the dualisms that confine care to mothers, insisting instead on ecological continuity. Whyte et al. (2016) describe care as reciprocal responsibility; the forest cared for us even as we carved gifts from its branches.

Around the fire, mothers and fathers carved slowly, awkwardly, reverently, while the forest itself parented our children. Care became distributed: fire warming, educators guiding, forest embracing, parents learning to trust.

This vignette reframes motherhood and care. It is not only about holding on but also about letting go, trusting others, both human and more-than-human, to share the work of care. In this moment, environmental education is not confined to the curriculum on survival skills but expands into a pedagogy of interdependence. It becomes a practice of showing that care is sustained collectively: through fire, community and the patient carving of new tools for living.

Discussion

The encounters described in this study suggest that forest pedagogies fundamentally expand how care is understood and enacted in educational settings. Rather than reinforcing familiar hierarchies in which adults, especially mothers, are positioned as central protectors and managers of children, the forest environment disperses care across human and more-than-human actors. Moments of shared fire-building, hand-carving tools, or simply sitting in stillness reveal that care is not an individual task but a relational atmosphere shaped by materials, elements and beings working together. This aligns with Rousell and Tran's (2024) articulation of *immanent care*, a pedagogy that arises from situated attentiveness to more-than-human relations. In the forest school context, care becomes ecological: warmth comes from fire, safety from collective attentiveness and learning from the land itself. These encounters disrupt the idea that educators must orchestrate every aspect of learning and instead position care as an emergent, multispecies process in which adults and children participate rather than lead. In this sense, forest pedagogy teaches that caring with the world is as vital as caring for one another.

The study also reveals how forest pedagogies cultivate a lived understanding of interdependence within ecological systems. Participants encounter interdependence not through scientific explanation but through sensorial involvement with decomposition, growth, sound, weather and soil. The forest's processes, acorns cracking open or failing, fungi transforming bodies into nourishment, winds shifting the pace of group movement, make palpable the shared conditions necessary for life to continue. Scholars like Latour (2005) argue that ecological awareness emerges through recognising the networks of relations that bind beings together; in the forest school, this awareness is generated through embodied encounters that reveal how lives are entangled materially and affectively. Interdependence here is not an abstract principle but a daily

reality: breathing with the trees, slowing one's movements to match the forest's rhythms and witnessing renewal emerge from decay. Forest pedagogies thus teach learners to sense themselves as participants in ongoing ecological exchanges, deepening their understanding of how life persists through constant interaction.

These encounters further illustrate how forest pedagogies support the unlearning of human-centred assumptions and nurture kinship with more-than-human beings. Children's gestures of gratitude toward trees, their imitation of older peers and their willingness to sit quietly until the forest "returns" to itself all reflect practices of kin-making, what Haraway (2016) calls forming alliances across species to imagine new futures. Through such moments, learners move away from viewing the forest as backdrop or resource and instead experience themselves as co-inhabitants in a shared world. This kinship is not metaphorical; it arises from noticing similarities in needs, rhythms, vulnerabilities and responses between humans, plants and animals. By cultivating this form of relational imagination, forest pedagogies help dismantle entrenched binaries between human and nature, inviting learners to recognise the forest as a community of beings with whom they learn and grow. The forest thus becomes a site where preconceived notions of hierarchy, control and separateness can be gently unsettled.

Finally, encounters within the forest school offer significant opportunities for non-Indigenous educators to engage more deeply with principles found in Indigenous land-based knowledge. While the study does not attempt to replicate Indigenous pedagogies, it does show how practices such as expressing gratitude, attending closely to land's teachings and participating in cycles of renewal can help settlers appreciate values that have long been marginalised within Western schooling. Tuck and McKenzie (2015) argue that meaningful environmental education requires confronting colonial relationships to land rather than simply incorporating cultural elements superficially. In the forest school, everyday activities, such as acknowledging the gifts offered by acorns, respecting the work of decomposition, or recognising the forest as an active teacher, create openings for educators to reconsider their ethical responsibilities to place. These encounters support a shift from stewardship framed as management toward a deeper orientation of humility, attentiveness and accountability. Forest pedagogies thus offer a pathway for reconnecting with forms of ecological responsibility that have been eroded through settler colonialism, while also honoring the deep relational teachings that Indigenous knowledge systems have long upheld.

Taken together, these insights show that forest pedagogies are not techniques but relationships, ways of noticing, participating and becoming that emerge through multispecies encounters. They teach that education in the forest is grounded in care that exceeds the human, in interdependence woven through ecological processes, in kinship that reshapes our sense of self and in land-based ethics that invite deeper connection to place. In these community-based settings, pedagogy is not delivered but lived, unfolding through the forest's rhythms and calls. Forest pedagogies thus expand what it means to learn, to teach and to live well within the more-than-human world.

Conclusions

Through autoethnographic vignettes, I have shown how forest pedagogies emerge not through planned lessons or predefined learning outcomes but through moments of care, interdependence, kin-making and land-based ethical awareness. By braiding Indigenous epistemologies, posthumanist plant and fungal studies and ecofeminist science studies, I have demonstrated how pluriversal approaches to environmental education resist reduction to a single epistemic frame. These forest encounters affirm that environmental learning can merge scientific literacy with ethical relationality and affective attunement with ecological humility. In doing so, this work contributes to the Critical Forest Studies conversation by bringing forward a situated, embodied, maternal-educator voice that grounds theory in lived practice.

The implications of this inquiry reach beyond personal narrative. For educators, forest pedagogies invite a reimagining of curriculum as a living, co-responsive process, one that shifts from outcome-driven lessons toward attentiveness to place, where pedagogy emerges through listening, noticing and being unsettled. For parents and communities, these stories reveal that caregiving is not an individual act but can be a distributed responsibility shared among humans, trees, fungi and elements.

This research demonstrates how autoethnography, framed as a *Situated Forest Inquiry*, can contribute to Critical Forest Studies. By attending to my identities as both mother and educator, I acknowledge the entanglement of my positionality with the pedagogical encounters I narrate. Through *Situated Forest Inquiry*, the forest itself becomes co-researcher and co-teacher, actively shaping the conditions of inquiry and interpretation. This approach deepens CFS's commitment to decolonising ways of knowing by grounding research in multispecies reciprocity and everyday pedagogical encounters rather than in abstract critique. It reorients scholarship from studying forests as subjects to engaging them as collaborators, sites of sentient pedagogy that teach through care, decay and regeneration. In doing so, the research contributes a framework for understanding how educators can translate the ethics of reciprocity and relational accountability into concrete pedagogical design: offering gratitude before taking, listening before explaining and dwelling with ambiguity rather than resolving it (Nxumalo, 2019; Donald, 2021; Country et al., 2022).

Returning to the guiding question, *what might encounters within a community-based outdoor school teach us about forest pedagogies?*, these narratives suggest that such learning is made possible through ethical attunement to the forest's sentient ecologies. Forests are not merely sites of recreation or resources for extraction; they are teachers, healers and resisters. The oak reminds us of discernment, choosing which seeds to carry forward. The wind teaches patience, requiring us to wait for its rhythms. The fungi remind us that life thrives through decomposition, that endings are beginnings. The forest shares the labour of care, extending support beyond human arms. Together, these encounters gesture toward a pedagogy that is humble, reciprocal and deeply relational. As we face planetary crises of climate and extinction, such teachings are urgent. To walk into a forest is to enter a classroom of incalculable depth, one that has been teaching for millennia, if only we are willing to listen.

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