

TRANSCRIPT

Podcast Episode: Tasting climate change in early childhood teacher education

taste (n.) from the modern French t.t “a small portion given” / “faculty or sense by which the flavour of a thing is discerned” / “aesthetic judgment, of discerning and appreciating”

taste as an active noun / deciding, choosing, changing, arranging

Hello, my name is Alex Berry. I will be your host in this short podcast titled, *Tasting climate change in early childhood teacher education*. This episode was recorded on Treaty 7 territory, on the lands of the Blackfoot confederacy, the Tsuut’ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda. These lands are also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta (Districts 5 and 6).

Today’s episode offers snapshot into an online place-based course called *EDUC 472: Sensing a Changed Climate in Early Childhood*. This course is committed to re-imagining colonial projections of the 5 senses in early childhood education, but more on that in a minute.

I’ll offer listeners a quick introduction to this experimental arts-based course, its aims, desires, and pedagogical orientations, and then ill invite you into one of the experiments that students took up in the course: an experiment for *tasting* climate change.

This episode is accompanied by a bundle of readings, videos, links, and the instructions for the experiment. These materials are intended as companions for this short talk. I invite you to take a look, and perhaps try out the experiment yourself! All you’ll need is a pen and paper, a toaster, and a piece of bread.

Thanks for joining me today. Let’s get into it!

*What is the role of an early childhood educator, in times of ecological uncertainty?
What does it mean to cultivate a sense of changing climates?*

These are questions early childhood education students at Capilano University have grappling with in a course called *Sensing a Changed Climate in Early Childhood*. The first section of this episode offers a brief introduction to the aims, desires and pedagogical orientations guiding this course. The class is a collaboration between Capilano University’s Centre for Research in Childhood Studies and UBC Okanagan’s [FEELed Lab](#). The FEELed Lab, directed by Astrida Neimanis, is a collaborative and interdisciplinary feminist environmental humanities field lab that explores climate experiences through feminist, anticolonial, antiracist, queer and crip perspectives. The name of the lab is a play on the words *field* and *feel*, as it values feeling as a

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legitimate way of knowing. Through collaborations with the Lab, the course has generated a really exciting space for us to knot early childhood pedagogies with the feminist environmental humanities, hopefully toward new ways of feeling uneven, everyday climate realities in the early years.

Centering the FEELed Lab's commitment to climate and social justice as deeply entangled pursuits, together with early childhood education students we've been attuning to how *particular* bodies sense and feel climate change in *particular* places. In response to the expansive overwhelm of climate catastrophe discourse in so-called British Columbia, the course uses small, artistic experiments to question the 'common sense' ways we think children experience nature. In collaboration grad students, researchers, artists, and community-members the course is curated around a series of collaborative 'micro'-workshops, invited speakers, and low stakes on-the-ground experiments for 'uncommoning' the senses. The students have selected a place of study that they return to, again and again, each class. They revisit and re-encounter this place, through different artistic processes and experimentations generously offered to us by guest speakers arriving from multiple disciplines and with different perspectives.

The ideas and experiments that make up this course are inspired by pedagogical propositions offered by the [Climate Action Childhood Network](#), or CAN, and their research-creation exhibition called, [Disorienting early childhood: micro-interruptions for alternative climate futures](#). Through a series of participatory installations, CAN's exhibit attempts to destabilize early childhood education's persistent reliance on visual ways of knowing, and a dependency on developmental psychology's '5 senses' (as autonomous, intrinsic, and divided).

Many early childhood scholars, including Affrica Taylor, Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Mindy Blaise (2015) and the [Common Worlds Research Collective](#) have problematized colonial images of children with magnifying glasses in hand setting out to discover the wild unknown. While others, such as Cristina Delgado Vintimilla (2014), have pointed to the troubling sense of neoliberal 'freedom' in children's free-play and sensorial fun getting messy outdoors. In these instances, 'the senses' are figured within colonial and capitalist logics of separation, extraction, and instrumentality. Together with early childhood education students, our class has been trying to re-imagine the senses for times of pressing environmental precarity. Through artistic and embodied methods, we are exploring how early childhood pedagogies might approach human sensoria *not* as 'intact', but rather as impure, porous and intercorporeal with other humans, water, air, earth, animals, atmospheres, toxins, and more.

Initiating this work together has required destabilizing what anthropologists such as Natasha Myers (2018) have called '[colonial sensors](#)', the 'automatic' and 'prefabricated' sensory registers that habituate the *everyday*. Joe Dumit (2014), who thinks with feminist science and technology scholar Donna Haraway, points to the violences of common sense that the everyday conspires – daily habits, routines, and their consequential modes of perception function to make tolerable practically anything. As Dumit suggests, "hovering about, haunting all sides of our everyday worlds are other stories, other accounts, other connections that we may suspect, yet that paralyze us sometimes due to their enormity" (p. 346). This course is a response to this violence, a refusal of 'common sense' and its banalities in early childhood education. It attempts to stage a series of small occasions for 'reinvigorating sensoria' that might open up other possible ways of tuning-in

to the conditions of our times, for waking up new and urgent connections (Dumit, 2014; Haraway, 2016), and for gesturing to more collective sensibilities.

In the next half of this episode, I'll share with you one of these occasions – an experiment in tasting. In our course, we've called it an 'Iterative Toast Tasting'. Together, students considered how big, overwhelming problems in BC, like wildfire, might be felt and understood through something so intimately personal, something *so* everyday – like flavour. We've been curious about what it means to craft a taste for climate change, and we put this curiosity to work in an experiment that (we hope) might help us to sense minor shifts in flavour.

I invite you to take a look on this episode's page, where you can find detailed instructions for this Iterative Toast Tasting experiment. It involves an ongoing toasting (and tasting) of a piece of bread.

Before beginning your tasting experiment, do a bit of research:

What is carbon?

How does carbon function?

Then, using one piece of bread, you will toast and then *taste* over a series of 6 (or more) iterations – moving slowly from raw bread to burnt charcoaled toast. Upon each iteration, you will taste, swallow or spit, a sample of the toast, and collect connoisseured tasting notes as you move along. The posted instructions include specific prompts to consider in your tasting, and in your (written, drawn or danced) tasting notes. You can find more details in the prompts posted on the episode's page.

As you delve into the experiment, it feels really important to underscore, firstly, that the lived violences of wildfires and their uneven consequences are not trivial. This experiment does not intend to overlook the lived effects of wildfire, or the collective labour that communities are activating in response. Indigenous communities in BC's northern and interior regions are already leading the way in crucial prevention and recuperation projects. See the links on this episode's page about the important work happening at [Enowkin Centre](#) in Penticton, and [Sncewips Heritage Museum](#) at Westbank First Nation. An intention of the small experiments in this course, is to find a way, together, in thinking/feeling/acting through the overwhelm of climate emergencies, the dissonance of disaster rhetoric, and to try and create spaces for engaging with the contradictions and complexities of these challenges. We're trying to do this with a sense of playfulness and possibility so that we can stay with this work during very difficult times.

Secondly, following feminist environmental humanities scholars, we aren't interested in grand techno fixes or solutions to climate challenges. Our responses to climate emergencies such as wildfire are much more modest; they're situated in the mundaneness of our *everyday*. For instance, were curious about how the dailiness of our lives with children are textured by values and assumptions that privilege particular ways of being in the world over others. Feminist scholars Jennifer Hamilton, Tessa Zettel and Astrida Neimanis (2021) help us in thinking about this dailiness. A child's presence in the room, their food, their movements, their sweat, the mud on their boots, and the air in their lungs, is different from someone else's. This difference is political because it's exercised and flows within systems of power. In so-called British Columbia, children are living the consequences of a changing climate in multiple ways. Wildfire, floods,

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mudslides, access to fresh food, pandemics – children live these events differently. Embedding our attention, as educators, in this dailiness and difference asks us to consider climate events as deeply personal, and also part of a collective concern. A concern that may be shared, but that’s lived out in very distinct and diverging ways (de la Cadena, 2019). We’ve been exploring how this concern, and the possibility for responding pedagogically to children’s dailiness and differences, are overlooked through the rescue of techno solutions.

Thirdly, this experiment is not intended as an activity to do with children. Rather, we propose it as an antecedent to pedagogical work with children – an invitation for educators to begin shifting their own sensorial dispositions.

Before you delve into the experiment, I’d like to offer some of the thinking and inspirations behind this ‘Iterative Toast-Tasting’.

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The proposition for this Iterative Toast-Tasting comes from Lindsay Kelley who is an Associate Professor in the School of Art and Design at Australian National University, and her open-access book called ‘After eating: Metabolizing the Arts’. It is also impossible for us to think of the ethical and political contingencies of eating together in early childhood education, without acknowledging CAN’s [food pedagogies](#) created by Cristina Delgado Vintimilla, Lisa-Marie Gagliardi and Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw.

The experiment also engages with Centre for Genomic Gastronomy’s project called [Wildfire Loaf](#), led by Zack Denfeld and Cathrine Kramer. In their words, the Wildfire Loaf project asks, “How do wildfires affect the smell, taste, and texture of bread?”. The Centre’s research thinks across ‘microbial and planetary’ scales of climate change effects, like wildfire, through the creation of ‘sour dough’ starters. These starters have been touched by smoke, simulating the taste of wheat that has been grown in areas affected by wildfire. Their research is interesting to us, as educators, because it brings together the sciences and humanities toward new ways engaging with problems like climate change, problems that may feel too overwhelming, or for some, too distant to engage with. The Wildfire Loaf project makes direct connections between a changing world and our daily lives. In the context of their work, this connection is carefully tended to through the making and tasting of sour dough bread.

The Centre for Genomic Gastronomy also has some really interesting work with meringue and smog – where researchers, artists, chefs, farmers, and community members have been making meringue in smog-filled cities as a way of ‘harvesting’ and tasting polluted air that’s physically held in whipped eggs. These experiments create poetic, felt, and even playful ways of engaging with devastating climate catastrophes like air quality. If you’re interested, you can find a link to their work in the bundle of companion materials included in this episode’s page. Our class spent some time listening to the Centre’s performative lecture, *Planetary Indigestion* – this lecture

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really provoked us. Some of us listened to it during the experiment, or while cooking. As one student suggested, ideas were tasted as we cooked and chewed. In the lecture and the following conversation, Rob Dunn, Professor of Active Ecology at North Carolina State University, explains a key undercurrent and desire of their sourdough starters research project. As he suggests, “the idea that there is flavour, from the wildfires globally stemming from climate change and the burning of fossil fuels, sneaking into our daily lives, even in what we taste – the flavours we taste – raises up this bigger question about our relationship with ‘nature’”. This co-contamination from fire to land, to wheat, to bread, and to the human mouth complicates prevailing imaginaries of nature as intact or separate from humans, an imaginary all-too-common in early childhood education (Berry, Vintimilla, & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2020).

With Natalie Zajac, and colleagues, Dunn speaks to the permeability between the air, yeast, and bodies, and even how smoke travels through pours. The conversation draws attention to how the physical microbes that make bodies reflect our exposures (or lack of exposures) – they physiologically make and story our own bodies. There is a real intimacy in that – an intimacy that may be overlooked in other more common or dominant ways of studying and responding to climate dilemmas solely through the (Capital ‘S’) Sciences. Their conversation also gestures to how the arts might enable us to consider how global tragedies make their way into what we experience on a daily basis – our everyday. This is particularly provocative for educators, as we think about what it might mean to create different sensitives and expanded sensoria for inheriting climate dilemmas with young children, and for remaking an *everyday* that enables us to think and feel them.

The Iterative Toast-Tasting is an experiment in cultivating (in very small and playful ways) a *taste* for a changing climate and the flavours this might propose. *How might flavor become an avenue for thinking through a changing climate? How might the effects of climate changes (for instance, wildfire) show up in daily life?* Circling back to Joe Dumit’s interruption of the common sense body and the dangerous tolerability of the everyday – I wonder, how taste might be caught up in this ‘tolerability’? What does it do to taste carbon, on burnt toast, and how is this minor tasting tangled up with the real violences of wildfire in certain places and upon certain bodies? This matters, and is something I hope we can lean into together, however imperfectly.

As I had mentioned earlier in this episode, our course engages with some of the pedagogical propositions of the CAN exhibit. Specifically, we take up their proposition: Through what educational experiences might we interrupt developmental archives of early childhood education’s sensory palate? Like CAN, our tasting experiment finds inspiration from Isabel Stengers’ (2018) conceptualization of ‘the connoisseur’. As my CAN colleagues and I have written elsewhere (Berry et al., 2022), we’re curious about what the dispositions of a connoisseur might do to role of the educator in current times – as “one who savours an idea, swishes it around in their mouth, and dwells with contradictory flavours, not despite but because of an instinct to spit”. Like the CAN exhibit, this experiment, too, tries to pay attention to the (un)palatableness

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of certain climate experiences and the feltness of subsequent flavors (Berry et al., 2022). Thinking through Stengers' (2018) image of the connoisseur in our tastings, we might reconsider ourselves "unprotected against doubt" (p. 8) and implicated within the experiments and processes we are trying out together. In this sense, we aren't tasting or experimenting from the position of a neutral outsider, or observer. We are bringing ourselves intimately into this work, in ways that attune to what is happening within and beyond us.

We draw on the CAN exhibit's orientation to relational sensoria to think beyond the bounded neoliberal consuming individual. With CAN, in putting the image of the connoisseur to work, our tasting experience is an invitation that does not "seek to satiate but rather to chew slowly and stir a hunger toward dispositions that resist the quick consumption of too-singular stories" (p. 81). As we work up an appetite for experiencing a changing climate otherwise through our Iterative Toasting Tasting – I borrow from Sara Ahmed (2010), and invite you to think about the ways in which we differentially affect, and are affected, by what comes near (this is the difference of lived experience that we touched on earlier). In this breath, it matters that many who take up this tasting experiment are able to choose it.

As you taste, pay attention to the bodied experience and particularities of the situation that inform the act (or art!) of tasting. How is tasting, and its consequential flavours, distinct to particular bodies, and perhaps places? What does each iteration make taste-able? With CAN, "For whom, and under what conditions, does it become palatable?" (Berry et al., 2022, p. 82)?

How does a connoisseur come to savour what they are already eating yet may be able to ignore? It is in this destabilizing manner of tasting that we attempt to make perceptible what separates thinking from the lived consequences of climate catastrophe, or, as Stengers (2015) articulates, the prefabricated categories of common "sense" that continue to produce amnesia. (Berry et al, 2022, p. 86)

As we think with the poetic and metaphoric potential of an Iterative Toast-Tasting – how do we remain attentive to transcendent romanticism or attempts at emancipatory escape through the sensational (Berry et al., 2022)? Is this experiment more than only a metaphor? What does attending to the poetics of this experience *do*? Are difficulties revealed? What are their flavours? Perhaps cultivating a just 'palate' for climate disaster requires, an attentive venturing into what Stengers (2015) describes not as "a friendly world, but an unhealthy milieu" (p. 104), one that is perceptive of, and vulnerable to, the differential pain of a mutual poisoning (Berry et al., 2022).

With each iteration, or toasting, you will be removing water from your piece of bread and leaving behind carbon. *How does each iteration taste? What is the flavour? How is it felt? How does it transform?*

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Finally, as you move through the tasting experiment, be sure to *slow down*. Perhaps, I'll leave you with some inspiration from Lindsey's Kelley's (2023) response to a quote by Ann Marie Mol (2021). Mol writes, "I walk through the world, when I eat, it is the world that walks through me." (p. 49). Kelley responds, "When worlds move through bodies, bodies struggle to be extractive or exceptional." (p. XXXVI).

Thank you for listening and being with me here. If you'd like to write to me about any of these ideas or our pedagogical processes, you can reach me at alexandra.berry@ucalgary.ca

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A transcript of this episode and its bundle of companion materials are available on the episode's page.

Thanks again. Until next time!

BUNDLE OF COMPANION MATERIALS

[Enowkin Centre](#) (Penticton)

[Sncewips Heritage Musuem](#) (Westbank First Nation, Kelowna)

The Centre for Genomic Gastronomy

[Wildfire Loaf](#)

[Planetary Indigestion: The air is alive – Wheat bread wildfire](#)

Rethinking nature pedagogies

Common Worlds Research Collective - [Learning to become with the world: Education for future survival](#)

Climate Action Childhood Network (CAN) - <https://climateactionchildhood.net/>

CAN Exhibit - [Disorientating the early childhood sensorium: Micro-interruptions for alternative climate futures](#)

Early childhood food pedagogies

Khattar, R., Gagliardi, L-M., & Simon, M. (2019, September 11). *Whose lives are grievable in the capitalist logics of the Anthropocene [Microblog]*. Common Worlds Research Collective. <http://commonworlds.net/whose-lives-are-grievable-in-the-capitalist-logics-ofthe-anthropocene/>

Vintimilla, C.D., Gagliardi, L-M, & Pacini-Ketchabaw, V. (2020). *Climate Action Childhood Network's Food Pedagogies Statement*. Retrieved from: <https://foodpedagogies.climateactionchildhood.net>

For further thinking around carbon

Kandos School of Cultural Adaptation (KSCA) - [The biochar project: falling in love with carbon](#)

Aviva Reed - [Transforming carbon](#)

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The idea of an 'iterative toast tasting' is borrowed from Lindsey Kelley.

Some elements of this podcast have been previously published in the Journal of Childhood Studies in a paper titled, [Dis/orientating the Early Childhood Sensorium: A Palate Making Menu for Public Pedagogy](#), co-authored with Jo Pollitt, Narda Nelson, Denise Hodgins and Vanessa Wintoneak.

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