

An Exploration of the Influential Relations between Young Children, Adults and Natural Environments.

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(PAPER – presentation inclusive of audio-visual material for participant engagement).

Abstract:

There is a contemporary identified problem in the child and nature relationship due to barriers associated with urbanisation. Children's access to nature spaces is now often dependent on adults and this research has sought to explore the relational opportunities these circumstances hold. A pertinent contemporary research focus is identified in the impact of nature on family systems, and a suggested question is whether "children's playfulness and curiosity influence what their caretakers notice and feel" (Chawla, 2015, p446). This research has sought to explore this contemporary issue through a foregrounding of Froebelian pedagogy, through which these relations might be considered in mutually beneficial terms. This is expressed according to the idea that

“Play truly recognised and rightly fostered, unites the germinating life of the child attentively with the ripe life of experiences of the adult and thus fosters the one through the other”

(Froebel, cited by Liebschner, 1992, p24).

Froebelian pedagogy is underpinned by a logic of holism. This is expressed through two central principles: the law of unity which positions every child in relation to family, community, nature, culture and society (The Froebel Trust, 2019), and the law of opposites through which there is sought the connections between them. This might therefore be considered as a vision of the whole as the good and the beautiful, and activism as a process of seeking integration. The child and adult relationship is a challenge to perception within this, as outlined in the suggestion that

“We call it childish because we do not understand it, because we have not eyes to see, nor ears to hear, and, still less, feeling to feel with the child; we are dull, therefore the child's life seems dull to us”

(Froebel, 1885, p73)

According to this, contemporary circumstances might be considered as an opportunity for integration, by enlivening adult perception through a re-experiencing of the world with the child.

This research has explored these relations through sensory ethnography (Pink, 2015), which is underpinned by a conceptual framework of place, perception, knowing, memory and imagination. Places are understood as the ‘entanglements’ of all of life trajectories moving through them (Ingold, 2008), within which human perception operates as knowing, memory and imagination. Digital media is explored as a new route to sensory knowledge within this and has been explored in this research through use of child-worn go-pros on family trips to nature sites. This footage has offered a basis for adult reflections on “children’s unique perspectives of being-in-the-world” (Burbank, 2018, p323), and findings have been considered in relation to the Evolution of Consciousness (Gebser, 1949) as a vocabulary to talk about “difficult-to-acknowledge aspects of children’s experience of the natural world” (Chawla, 2002, loc. 2606). This has illuminated children’s sensory, exploratory and storied relations, and you will be invited to join the ongoing movement of this ethnographic place and share in this experience too.

Question: What can different lenses of gender, sexuality, culture and politics bring to our research?

Keywords: Holism, Self, Sensory Ethnography, Children.

References:

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