Could a network of posthuman methodologies be applied to Environmental Education research to help evidence behaviour change?

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Environmental Education (EE) was devised to encourage changes in human behaviour and understanding with the intent of creating an increasingly sustainable existence and, to justify EE activity, funding and validity, recording behavioural change has been a key undertaking of EE related research. However, in the light of posthumanism and the need to revise human/non-human relations, it is necessary to ask which posthuman methodological practices are best capable of demonstrating behaviour change.

Latour’s Actor Network Theory is useful because it re-sets the level between human/non-human agency by incorporating nonhumans into systems of activity, much as an ecologist describes an ecosystem. Similarly, Barad’s agential realism is a useful methodology for examining EE as it enables the researcher to cut a framework and mark each material intra-action, garnering evidence of agency for each moment as it burgeons from the ‘dense seed’ of possibilities.

Both methodologies are powerful re-framing tools with pragmatic theoretical bases however, both systems have a flatness when it comes to demonstrating change: we know change happens, it is perhaps our most significant constant yet its documentation is an extraordinarily difficult task.

This paper will explore whether these methodologies, without compromising the premises on which they are based, can be utilised to describe change. To achieve this the methodologies will be reconfigured and amalgamated with the introduction of a 3D version of ANT which will help unpick the enfolded historicity held within each instance of agency as described by agential realism.

These methodological concepts will be applied through the EE practice of the Manchester Environmental Education Network, a small charity with years of experience trying to demonstrate the value of its work to funders wanting evidence of behaviour change. The analysis is based on ethnographic and interview data collected in 2017 that includes intra-actions with 100 pupils from four primary and one high school.

By recording agential marks through the material-discourse of behaviour change this research offers a new entangled, methodological ‘network’ which can assist in capturing changes generated through EE practice.

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