**Significant others: How other animals matter in children’s everyday life**


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A growing understanding of other than human entities as integral to human lives has recently emerged in social sciences, including childhood studies. The grounds for the interest in our nonhuman allies, or ‘companion species’ (Haraway, e.g. 2016) can be found in the complex problems and the troubled state of our polluted planet as well as technoscientific blurrings of what has been believed to be distinctively human body and cognition. This symposium addresses the ‘animal turn’ of social sciences by presenting research belonging to a project on child-animal relations in Finland (the AniMate project).

Studies of child–animal relations from the viewpoint of children, the animals and their shared everyday lives are extremely few. Instead, the majority of existing studies highlight how animals can be useful for children: for their development, responsibility, caring, companionship, security, comfort, amusement. The questions that have profound implications on education and society are virtually unexplored; namely how human–animal relations are discussed in schools, how do students and teachers handle the ensuing ethical conflicts and, moreover, how animals matter to children beyond pedagogical or didactic partners. The presentations of this symposium deal with the following questions: What kinds of animal relations are significant to children? How do these relations form and are sustained by children and the animals as part of their everyday lives?

The symposium is based on the AniMate project’s early theoretical and empirical engagements in four schools located across Finland. The studies address topics and concepts such as species, more-than-human ethics, care, and the status of children and companion species in families. Methodologically, they draw on multispecies ethnography which focuses on human–animal co-existence in terms of not only what the individuals are (biologically) but what they do (biosocially). Both children and animals are considered not as beings but as becomings creating themselves together through action and interaction (Kirksey & Helmreich 2010, Ingold 2013). Thus, the research presented emphasizes, in various ways, entangled biosociality and situates child–animal relations in context that is not idealized but complex, controversial and sometimes difficult.

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