Can humans devise and deliver a posthuman pedagogy?

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Philosophical posthumanism urges us to embrace the concept of decentring the human or, in educational terms, the decentring of the child, the teacher, and the human/non-human divide, in an effort to ensure new generations not only understand the need to maintain planetary systems but are encouraged to adopt the lifestyles and skills to maintain those systems now and into the future.

But is it possible for a human to design and deliver a posthuman pedagogy? This not only raises questions about whether robust ethical human/nonhuman encounters can be integrated into teaching practice but also needs us to understand how we might evaluate the success, or otherwise, of such educational practices by asking ourselves how the outcomes might be assessed.

With reference to two posthuman methodologies, as applied to Early Years settings, firstly Taylor’s (2013) common worlds, as framed by Latour’s Actor Network Theory and the notion of assemblages and, secondly, Lenz Taguichi’s (2010) intra-active methodology based on the onto-epistemological theory of Barad (2007), this paper will explore the practice of posthuman education in Environmental Education (EE).

The questions will be extrapolated through the practices of the Manchester Environmental Education Network (MEEN), a small environmental education charity working in England’s inner city schools, and will focus on research undertaken in 2017 on a project called ‘Workshops for Wildlife’. This paper will use the ethnographic accounts and examples of teaching practice drawn from the project through highlighting the importance of material encounters, storied encounters and the use of disruptors.

Not only will this research extend the work of Taylor and Lenz Taguichi from Early Years into a primary school setting but it will also evidence the decentring of the human as a viable pedagogical goal in teaching practice through the examination of its delivery and through discussion of the extent to which it might improve human/nonhuman pedagogical relations.

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