Paying attention to more-than-human; thinking differently with fieldwork spaces

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On going conversations
...exploring student teachers’ responses to fieldwork experiences and creating spaces for geographical curriculum making
Becoming lost... moving away from the familiar
Becoming lost – embracing new ways of researching, writing and doing fieldwork

- Post human research practices in education (Taylor and Hughes, 2016)
- Post-qualitative work of Koro-Ljungberg (2016), St Pierre (2017) and Maclure (2013)
- Deleuze and Guattari (1988)
- Feminist eco-philosophers such as Val Plumwood (2013) and Deborah Bird Rose (2009)
Thinking differently with fieldwork

A relational approach that pays attention to the ‘interconnectedness of the human and more-than-human world’ (Taylor, 2011:432)

- Acknowledgement of different ways of knowing (Catling, 2019)

- Seeks to disrupt notions of fieldwork where primary children are situated in an inert and passive world waiting to be studied (Puttick et al, 2017:175).

- Shift geography focus from ‘a study of givens’ to consider ‘what it might be’ (Puttick et al. 2018:173)

- Inviting geographers to engage directly ‘bringing the world to life’ privileging subjective, embodied and personal responses in order to come to know fieldwork spaces (Phillips & Jones, 2012:190)
We need new ways of thinking, doing and being differently with the world...

- With the naming of the Anthropocene it is no longer possible to deny ‘the inextricable enmeshment of human and natural histories, fates and futures (Taylor, 2017:1449)

- This ‘acts like a storm on thought; it changes what really matters’ (Payne, 2016:169).

- A response is needed from geographical education?

- We need to see physical and human geographies as entangled.
What happens if we invite a wider cast of participants into our understandings of geographical fieldwork than prevailing approaches tend to promote?

What if we pay attention to the more-than-human elements within fieldwork spaces?
More-than-human geographies

- Complex term that situates geographers within the world, not outside it.

- Geographers enmeshed in a more-than-human world

- ‘Humans are always in composition with nonhumanity, never outside a sticky web of connections or an ecology of matter’ (Whatmore, 2006:603).

- An approach that values multiplicity, honours difference

A fieldwork space is composed of a multiplicity of more-than-human things in relationship:

plants, animals, rocks, weather materials, weather, atmospheres, imaginings, memories, dreams etc…
An interruption of existing practices and experimenting with new approaches

- *Shift from* places of human centrings to places of posthumanist profusion (Taylor, 2016a:6)

- *Shift from* questions of human knowing to questions of geographical knowing/ becoming/doing in relation to an assemblage of things within a lively world.

- *Shift from* humanist ethical concerns, where individuals are made responsible for their choices to geographers participating in a collective response-ability i.e. a ‘praxis of care and response’ (Haraway, 2016:105).

- *Shift from* knowing ‘about’ a place to knowing ‘with’ place.
‘To embrace mystery rather than assert mastery’
(Macfarlane, 2017: [online])

‘The more one learns of [the] intricate interplay of soil, altitude, weather, and the living tissue of plant and insect (an intricacy that has its astonishing moments as when the sundew and butterwort eat the insects), the more the mystery deepens’.
(Shepherd, 2011: 59)
A congregation of participants

Water, bog, plants, trees, ponies, alpacas, miniature people, brick, fire, paper, sticks, people, a Portuguese fireplace and ... and ...
Travelling around Minstead and the surrounding area
An invitation to roll -
Established readings of fieldwork encounters

- Agency would reside within the human individual.
- Hill is situated as a passive object to be studied, to be located on a map etc.
- Geographers have intent to engage with the hill predicting certain pathways of travel
- Recalling different hill encounters - the hill is known
Fieldwork story: An invitation to roll

Rolling... rolling... bumping... pausing... Rolling... Rolling... Rolling... Rolling... Stopping... Rolling... Rolling... Rolling... Rolling...

An invitation to roll

Screams of delight
Come on!
Laughter
Turn quickly to pain – ow!
A sudden realisation
Not the angle I was expecting
Oh my head!
Oh not rolling straight anymore
I was going to go the other way
It’s going in waves
Quite scary
I feel dreadful

iPad, bags, hill, grass, tussocks, bracken, trees, coats, bodies
The notion of intra-action (Barad, 2007)

co-construction of mutually constituted knowledge

• ‘In interaction independent entities are viewed as taking turns in affecting each other, which implies that these entities are taken to each have an apriori independent existence.

• ‘In intra-action... interdependent entities are taken to co-emerge through simultaneous activity to come into being as of certain kind because of their encounter.’ (Rautio, 2014: 462)
An invitation to roll-
new materialist readings
of fieldwork encounters

• The hill is vibrant

• ‘Fieldwork space can be seen as ‘a meeting place’ (Cresswell, 2008) or ‘a place of negotiation... between different elements’ which might be ‘persons, technologies, discourses, materialities’ (Fors, Bäckström & Pink, 2013:174).

• In the hill-geographer encounter agency resides neither in the human or the hill but is located in the ‘space in-between’ (Rautio,2013:396).

• Shifts the focus from what a hill is to what the hill-geographer does in relationship in ‘a flow of entangled bodies (Haraway,2008:26)
Encounters always disturb

(Deleuze & Guattari, [1988]/2013)

• Hill/ geographer encounter disrupted habitual ways of being and acting in the world (O’Sullivan 2006:1).

• More-than-humans can surprise us. They are open to affect and to being affected.

• The hill had the capacity to ... impede the courses and wills of the geographer leading to a shift in power- a change of thinking –a movement of ideas about the liveliness of materials within fieldwork spaces.
• Offer an opportunity to take a different view of the world

• Explorative, uncertain, surprising and tentative engagements in relation with the natural world that promise new ways of connecting through feeling, moving and thinking.
Emergent practices...

- Linger on the edge of the not-yet (St Pierre, 2019:3)
- in a ‘chaotic place of unknowing’ (Somerville, 2008).
- Improvised in the moment.
- Live with uncertainty
- Ethics is at the heart of this practice
- Trust that something will happen...and it usually does.
Stories: assemblages of emergent voices, materials, things and writings that take thinking forward in unexpected ways...

• ‘It matters what stories tell stories...it matters what thoughts think thoughts...it matters what worlds world worlds.’ (Haraway, 2016:12)

• Stories revealed through:
  - images & words
  - commentary
  - connections
  - questions
Place is a convergence of the more-than-human/human – ‘a simultaneity of stories so far’

(Massey, 2005:9)
Invitations everywhere...

Experimenting by paying attention to more-than-human practices...

...to think with fire and darkness

To spend time within a more-than-human community

To be playful...
An invitation to collage….

Emerging maps …

Collages as more-than human profusions
Lyrical responses to fieldwork spaces...

I sat ...just listened
As darkness fell
Reacquainting with an old half memory
As I accepted the invitation to
Unfurl into the shadows

I sat...just watched
A length of material on a pole
Weave patterns as the wind reached under and around it
fluttering, vibrating like waves
Oscillations with frequencies
I learnt a lot about the wind
in that moment
by sitting, waiting and observing

I felt excited and alive,
My senses were tingling...
• Being in the midst of things

• ‘Submersing ourselves, descending rather than transcending' in order to dwell within and as ‘part of a dynamic, intra-active, emergent, material world’.

(Alaimo, 2011:283)
Being-with bog

Have we invited ourselves to do this? Does the place want us to hurt it?
What is geographical fieldwork?

What is geographical fieldwork?
What were we doing today?
Was it fieldwork?
What does it mean?
Why do we do it as geographers?
Or with children?
What are we trying to achieve?

Whose agenda is it?
Who’s leading this?
Who’s determining it?
What does the place know?
What might we learn from the more-than-human?
Why geographical fieldwork?
Implications for Geography Educators

• Educators need to be mindful of ‘[human’s] propensity to colonise places with our own intentions, desires and rationalisations. (Wattchow & Brown, 2011:193

• Knowing the more-than-human is limitless and we inevitably make political decisions about where to place our attention.

• Educators mediate more-than-human relations making them the gatekeepers of relational moments fieldwork spaces.

• This requires pedagogical experiments to direct attention, guide noticing, embrace the mystery and uncertainty of emergent fieldwork.

• Geography educators must try to model a ‘contagious attitude of attentiveness’ (Matthews, 1992b:326).
Conclusion

• A different way of coming to know the world that might transform its practitioners and participants.

• It offers practical strategies for an exciting, dynamic, joyful, geography that seeks ‘to turn up the colour and tune in’ to the more-than-human by nurturing ‘a child-like enthusiasm’ with the world (Geoghegan & Woodyer, 2014:219).

• This relational fieldwork creates temporary assemblages which are constantly changing and moving. Productive moments within these place assemblages enabled diverse repertoires of geography practices to emerge.
Reading List


• Catling, S. (2019) Reflecting on knowledge in primary geography: Some further thoughts, a little less tentative this time...Charney Manor Primary Geography Conference, February 22nd to 24th, 2019


• St Pierre, E. (2019) Post Qualitative Inquiry in an Ontology of Immanence. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 25(1) 3-16


