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**Becoming-with response-ability: How does diffracting posthuman ontologies with multi-modal sensory ethnography spark a multiplying femifesta/manifesta of noticing, attentiveness and doings in relation to mundane politics and more-than-human pedagogies of response-ability?**

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# **Becoming-with response-ability: How does diffracting posthuman ontologies with multi-modal sensory ethnography spark a multiplying femifesta/manifesta of noticing, attentiveness and doings in relation to mundane politics and more-than-human pedagogies of response-ability?**

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## **Abstract**

Our collective, sensorial, cartographic storytelling of becoming-response-able traces our noticing, attentiveness and doings with everyday materialities. We take four objects as a provocation for knowledge-ing with sensorial ethnographic assemblages that includes spaghetti, carpet, a toilet stall and a pair of binoculars. Through diffracting ideas of multimodality with posthuman ontologies, we experiment with sensory more-than-human intra-activities. We share our embodied encounters and experiments with materiality and the discourses that shape it through the lens of mundane politics. We hope to offer alternative ways of thinking with and doing research in educational contexts and explore how these sensory thinking-doing-feelings have repositioned our attentiveness and future orientation to a multiplying femifesta/manifesta of everyday noticing, doings and becoming-with pedagogies of response-ability.

## **Noticing Response-abilities**

In our educational world, we find ourselves troubled by assessment-driven schooling shaped by intensifying accountability agendas that ripple back to the teachers and practitioners we educate in universities. We also worry about the children in those schools inheriting precarious and unequal futures and what responsibilities are entwined that can rally action to these complex agendas. Rather than feeling responsible, we look to notions of response-ability, where the focus shifts to the capacity and ability to respond (Barad, 2007; Bozalek et al, 2018). For us, being response-able involves broadening the gaze from the human at the centre of the enquiry and instead attending to human, non-human and more-than-human relational ontologies that challenge the separateness of knowing about the world and being in the world (Barad, 2007 p. 185). Hence, pedagogies are entangled, multiple and dynamic and so the frames of Feminist Posthuman and New Materialism theories (FPHNM) make sense to us (Strom et al. 2020 p. 2). In order to become aware of ideas of relational entanglements and material multiplicities, we take heart from Carol Taylor (2020) who counsels us to notice, slow down and listen with care and attention to the world with and around us.

As a lively coming-together of four early career researchers (Jo, Liz, Louise, Julie) working in education faculties across three UK universities, we find that the concept of a 'pedagogy of response-ability' (Bozalek et al, 2018 p. 97) inspires us as a call to action to help make sense of putting theories to work.

To begin, we tell a short story of why finding a 'pedagogy of response-ability' felt such an important breakthrough:

*We came together through a glorious haphazard happenstance, messaging each other online about how to bring complex theories to life, asking questions like;*

*What does that idea mean?*

*And okay, but what do we do with it?*

*We read many theories that seemed to stay in theoretical and philosophical spaces. Yet we wanted to move from the stasis of reading and writing to actually putting ideas to work.*

*When we stumbled upon the theory of a 'pedagogy of response-ability' we knew it felt right. In our online chat one evening, once the idea got a foothold, our thinking lit up. I mean really blew up, with flurries of excited emojis and affirmative messages. It resonated.*

*The idea of a pedagogy of response-ability grew from the South African university context with its complicated political history of apartheid and inequality. There are two main ideas that we found we could work with. Firstly, **attentiveness**, that means creating embodied spaces that are open and alert to human and more-than-human others, to learn from and with each other. After the attentiveness comes action ...this was the crucial bit for us. So, the second idea of taking **responsibility** means we have to do things, to respond and become aware of our shared sense of social justice. It is not just being accountable though, and more about a becoming-with, of making each other capable with more-than-human relations.*

*So, for us, pedagogies of response-ability involve wondering about teaching practices that account for entanglements between teaching and learning, learning together, making each other capable in relation to the matter and timespaces we find ourselves in.*

*In short, we found we need to*

*Attend*

*Respond*

*Become-with (and it involves more than people).*

To illuminate our coming to pedagogies of response-ability, our récit takes up a multi-modal sensorial ethnographic research creation with the human and more-than-human world (Carlyle, 2020). Like Newfield (2018), we are experimenting with diffracting ideas of multimodality through FPHNM theories. Diffraction is drawn from the world of physics and describes the actions of light or water waves as they encounter obstacles. Thinking diffractively is a generative

and creative approach that looks for differences and patterns that evolve when ideas are ‘read through each other’ (Barad, 2007 p. 74).

Through our assemblages with more-than-human matters of spaghetti, carpet, a toilet and binoculars, our embodied encounters led to individual becomings that have provided the mainstay for our collective becoming-pedagogically response-able. Here we take up Deleuzo-Guattarian (1987) ontology of becoming wherein our relationships with materialities have led to a different way of being in this world. With photography and video bricolages that pay attention to what we see, hear and feel (figure 1) we share how we sensed the potentialities for pedagogical response-abilities through sites of mundane politics (Millei and Kallio, 2018). Then, we examine our feeling-sensing-thinking-doing in attentiveness and response-ability to the small materialities of educational life. Next, we muse on sense-making with multimodal ethnographical work (Pink, 2015) and what diffracting with relational ontologies in becoming response-able feels like. Finally, inspired by Hickey-Moody (2016), we commit to a multiplying femifesta/manifesta and what doings unfurl from that becoming.



Figure 1: Sensorial assemblages of embodied encounters with spaghetti, carpet, a toilet and binoculars

## ***Jo-spaghetti-time-labour***

*Five sticky plastic bags of cold coloured spaghetti lie on a teacher's kitchen countertop. Photographed late one evening, I imagine the anticipation of the playful learning for three and four-year-old children the following day, of her adding the children's dynamic responses to her documentation.*

*I re-turn to images like this to think about teachers' documentation practices but this time I pause to notice. My eyes imagine her kitchen, with pans boiling, bottles of food colouring on hand and lunch boxes normally used for family life. I know these images were taken in the evening and the slip-sliding between the boundaries of personal and professional liminalities troubles me.*

*Is mundane politics here, in timespaces of boiling spaghetti entangling and becoming-with abilities to respond? When teachers routinely work late, what affects linger through tired emotions and emotional labours? How is a workforce of mainly women continually rupturing their personal-professional boundaries, using monies from their own purses, making play spaghetti in their kitchen? It is not enough to attend, to notice, but I know it is where it starts. Next comes what I can do with the attentiveness, how it can become-with my pedagogical practices. This is where the pedagogies of responsibilities come to life, and I can sense it now.*

*As a teacher-educator I have response-ability to young teachers to notice discourses swirling in materialities and open up other-than possibilities.*

*So, what might I do?*

*Well, firstly I can open up a dialogue and weave these efforts to become attentive with my colleagues and students. Together we become capable and seek to find the myriad of possible responses.*

*Why not make the spaghetti with the children in class time?*

*Could the same thing happen using school resources rather than with personal funds?*

*Within this, I need to pause and look at my personal and professional blurring. In the evenings, I need to stop and become aware of my hands and body making and doing things in my personal timespaces.*

*There is my pushback- to notice and sense these acts that assume how it is: 'I'm a teacher, I work late, I pay for things, I steal my family timespaces.' Well, let's kick back against that one.*

### **Liz-toiletstall-vulnerability-power**

*Alice, a young trainee, shared the difficulties she experienced in her first early years setting. Working within a small playroom, Alice felt things were going well until, that is, she became pregnant. To her shock, she faced judgement from the two older women she worked alongside, who used their position not to support but to exercise control, even to the point of delaying permission for Alice to go to the toilet. Things culminated when Alice overheard them speaking about her through the toilet door in the staff toilets. Either the women did not know Alice was in the toilet, or they did not care. Alice didn't know which. What she did know was that it was time to leave.*

*Staff toilets occupy liminal spaces, being part of the work environment yet also considered private, a place for bodily functions, but also where people take time-out, a moment of calm in a busy day. They are also places of bodily vulnerability.*

*How often have we sat enthroned, only to lurch forward as an insecure lock gives way to a (however gentle) questing hand, as others test to see if the space is free? How, as women, we are acutely aware of a presence in the next cubicle or standing outside the door. We have been trained since childhood to silence our bodies, to detach ourselves from our bodily functions, making them seem unclean, embarrassing. Public toilets, including staff toilets, are places where we make ourselves smaller, invisible. However, here Alice felt emboldened. In this situation, the door did not act as a fixed, solid boundary. The sounds, words, the spaces in which this event occurred, became entangled with the human, their histories, bodies, emotions and created an affect which created new potentialities. Alice now had information which helped her make a clear decision, aided by the materiality of the cubicle door which acted to diffract a relationship not initially apparent.*

*Attesting to materialities which affect human, non-human and more-than-human intra-actions reveals much that may remain hidden from us in our daily lives. It can show how mundane spaces and actions can disrupt and affect in ways that are easily overlooked. Power is yielded and resisted in small, innocuous acts. It can show us what is really going on.*

### **Louise-binoculars-memories-nature**

*I love/d my grandad and spending time with him. He had an enormous influence on my love of the outdoors. He encouraged me to notice, to take time to wonder, to think and to listen to the world around me.*

*I remember being given the honour of carrying his huge binoculars when I was about 7 or 8 years old. He would spot something in the distance and get me to peer through those massive lenses. One night we spotted some birds, hearing their distinctive 'pee-wit' call. Grandad taught me they were plovers, another name being peewits because of their call. The following week in school we were asked about plovers, I was the only one who knew they were also known as peewits. I remember ringing grandad up after school to tell him - I was so proud and so was he.*

*Those memories seem so small but mean so much.*



*My own relationship with the outdoors is entangled with memories of childhood experiences such as these. Personal memories are one of the many affective forces within assemblages that contribute to our becoming. My own becoming-with the outdoors is entangled and intertwined with memories such as these with grandad.*

*Noticing the world around us underpins my practice as a teacher-educator. It is through these memories that I am led into attending, and being response-able to those who share our world: humans, non-humans and more-than-humans. They lead me to support and help my student teachers to attune themselves not only to what is happening in the classroom but to go beyond their four classroom walls, extending their noticing of the world around them, to extend their teaching spaces to value and think-with the natural world as part of the learning experiences they provide for their children.*

### ***Julie-carpet-sound-affect-school(ready)***

*As I sit on the reading mat, Creek, a two-year-old child is affected by a book. His attempt to think-with and make-with the words, pages, sounds and mind is shushed, not once but three times. Each iteration of the shush sound is sensed and felt by the children and me, but the last utterance gains momentum and movement. As the shush sounds pass from the practitioner's lips, they become a body with force that affects the bodies that dwell on the carpet. As the sound becomes a corporeal body it yields the potential to 'affect and be affected' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987 p x), the children and I track the sounds through the air. By the time the sound-body reaches Creek it now speaks-otherwise –*

*this is not how learning happens! This is not how knowledge is constructed. This is not how reading time works'.*

*As I reflect upon the words scribbled intensely in my research journal I notice the indentations, the marks left upon the page by the weight of the felt and enactment of sensations-arm-hand-pen-ink-paper courtship.*

*The sound-body affect continued beyond this event. It seeped through Creek and the boundary of the human body, affecting the carpet and its fibres. The carpet-body is both smooth and striated but it's becoming-otherwise for me - a site for activism. (Re)sensing this event shifts the response-ability of doing school-readiness differently, to notice the more-than-human agencies. Let them speak and free ourselves to talk back! If we see voice as a more-than human concern then we can (re)think classroom practices and turn to notice the everyday actions that are ripe for new movements in our thinking, to go beyond the dogmatic and striated practices we come to unwillingly, and sometimes unknowingly, enforce. Let the voices of these everyday moments and the more-than-human matter create new stories of learning towards one that is more fluid and porous. We need to (re)define what it is to be school ready beyond the neoliberal rhetoric to engage with the curiosities and wonders of the world and the spaces and places they share with us.*

*In my call to see things differently, especially the importance of more-than-human matter and the doing of school readiness, I am mindful to read this event diffractively through the other*

*narratives. I am left with the percolating thoughts that perhaps this event was enmeshed and affected by family time stolen from the practitioner, a haunting and lingering memory of a loved one that swaddled their practice or perhaps other hidden intra-actions that disrupt and become overlooked.*

### **Sensing Response-abilities**

Our cartographies circle back to the mundane materialities and small intra-activities of everyday life in universities, schools and nurseries. Millei and Kallio (2018) posit that everyday politics unfold by what is *sensed* as important and *felt* as uncomfortable:

The common denominator is that political agency springs from contextual experiences with matters that appear particularly important to those involved, and is often connected with challenging and uncomfortable situations that invite people to act for or against something. (p. 33)

When we shift focus to mundane matterings, we are affected by the material-discourses of teachers working late, students othered from nature and vulnerable in spatialities, and two-year-old bodies silenced. Discomfort bubbles up through multimodal assemblages of spaghetti-binocular-toilet-carpet materialities and provokes shared 'attentiveness, responsibility, curiosity, and rendering each other capable' in our becoming-with response-able pedagogies. (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017 p. 62).

### **Doing Response-abilities: A femifesta/manifesta**

But what can we *do*? Foregrounding posthuman perspectives and socially just pedagogies (Braidotti et al, 2018, p. xxiv) means 'the answer can only be ethical'. Enacting pedagogies of response-ability entails both *attentiveness and responsibility* according to Bozalek et al (2018).

So, what are we attentive to and responsible for?

### **Being attentive to what is**

Discomforting

Lacking

Silencing

Marginalising

## **Being responsible for**

Normalising overwork

Caring for the non-human and more-than-human

Two-year-old bodies

Student mentorship

Working collaboratively with sensorial ethnographies has brought us to this. Calls to action, such as a femifesta/manifesta (Hickey-Moody, 2016) inspire us to build doings that are affirmative, ethical, dynamic and multiplying.

We end our récits with a posthuman exemplification of Pink's (2015) call to orient sensory ethnography towards future action and change where we have found it fruitful to diffract multimodality with relational ontologies (Newfield, 2018) in collective becoming.

So, we conclude by not-concluding and instead we unfold and unfurl sensory material-discursive entanglements into our future doings of becoming-with response-ability.

With attentiveness and response-ability to those human and more-than-human entangled with our pedagogies we present our posthuman feminista/manifesta:

*We will cherish timespaces with and away from the professional*

*We will protect and be with our more-than-human kin*

*We will be affected by the non-verbal two-year-old body*

*We will mentor our students with ethical care*

## **But we need you to join us.**

We invite you, dear readers, as you entangle with our world, words, images and sounds that you might embrace your own sense and entanglements to become-otherwise, imagine your affirmative posthuman pedagogical and personal response-abilities that multiply and add to ours. We use (and and and) to imagine your contributions.

And...

And...

And...

And...

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