

Posthumanist explorations of emotions, language, and materialities in early childhood teaching: Stories from a diffractive research journey

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This presentation joins ongoing conversations about re-imagining educational research by stories from diffractive research journeying encompassing doctoral research, subsequent thinking, and future posthumanist research explorations. In these stories, posthumanist theories, postqualitative research, and diffraction together produce thinking that addresses entangled networks of relations among humans and other-than-humans. Posthumanist theories widen researcher gazes beyond centred views focused on self-contained human individuals. Postqualitative approaches explore research methods that creatively respond to what might be regarded as data, and to how participants and researchers are understood. Diffractive thinking notices differences and how they are produced. For example, when diverse theories encounter data, researchers diffractively seek multiple perceptions rather than synthesising or reducing findings. Posthumanist theories, postqualitative approaches, and diffractive thinking open educational research to innovative thinking, describing, and enacting teaching and learning.

I will share a series of stories from my experiences as a doctoral researcher and subsequently, as educational research in encounters became imagined and re-imagined in encounter with diverse concepts. The launching pad for this presentation is research set in Aotearoa New Zealand that explored emotions in early childhood teaching from posthumanist perspectives. Data was generated from focus group discussions among early childhood teachers, observations in an early childhood setting, and research conversations with four teachers. Data analysis employed two theoretical frameworks: sense and associated concepts from Deleuze's writing, and concepts of rhizomatic assemblage and affect from Deleuze and Guattari. Emergent stories describe emotions in early childhood teaching as produced in rhizomatic flows of affect. Emotions may be expressed in language and changes to bodies. But there is 'something else' to emotions where the concept of sense as hovering on the frontier between language and things can come into play.

A thesis, conference presentations, and publications gradually emerged from layers of thinking over six years of doctoral study. Grapplings with posthumanist concepts continually produce me and more diffractive research stories. Stories will be shared about how thinking about and with materialities sparked new ways of engaging with data from the doctoral research through explorations of wet wool felting. I tell stories of how explorations of Indigenous Māori perspectives have complicated my thinking about early childhood curriculum. The presentation (but not the stories) concludes with discussion of research in progress exploring 'what else?' and 'what next?' for re-imagining educational research by engaging with posthumanist and te ao Māori (Māori worldview) theories to explore bicultural curriculum enacted in an early childhood setting.