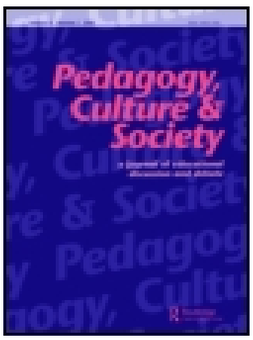
Modest witness(ing) and lively stories: paying attention to matters of concern in early childhood



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Modest witness(ing) and lively stories: paying attention to matters of concern in early childhood

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ABSTRACT

This article considers the role of early childhood education within these uncertain times of human induced climate change. It draws from feminism and environmental humanities to experiment with different ways of becoming-with the world. By bringing together Donna Haraway's figure of the Modest Witness and Deborah Bird Rose's notion of witnessing, the article rethinks what it means to 'observe' in terms of ethical response-ability and matters of concern. Data from a multisensory and multispecies ethnography are used to illuminate the observational practices that commonly take place in early childhood settings. The article concludes by employing 'lively stories' showing how modest witness(ing) reworks early childhood observations traditionally considered apolitical, distanced, and judgmental towards meaning making as a form of entanglements and open-ended dialogue. Modest witness(ing) attempts to put into practice initial ethical and political pedagogies that early childhood teachers can draw from and begin to address matters of concern in their own settings.

KEYWORDS

Early childhood; ethics; lively stories; modest witness; observations; witnessing

Introduction

In the field of early childhood education there has been a call for situating early childhood centres as places for ethical practice (Dahlberg and Moss 2005). Olsson (2009), Lenz Taguchi (2010), and others are putting to work Deleuze and Guattari's (1984, 1994, 2004) experimental ontology to open up and produce such ethical practices and possibilities with early childhood teachers. At the same time, the emerging field of environmental humanities has been discussing the ecological challenges that 'we' (humans, plants, animals, etc.) are facing, and that children will be inheriting, because of the changes in nature made by humans. These scholars are also concerned not just with ethics, but with broad questions of the environmental challenges facing all life (not just humans) on earth, and how we might rearticulate ourselves to be '… members of multispecies communities that emerge through the entanglements of agential beings' (Rose et al. 2012, 3). This paper brings together these two lines of inquiry about ethical practice and considers the role of early childhood education within these times of new challenges and opportunities posed by human-induced climate change. More specifically, we, the authors of this paper, are working with early childhood teachers in a multisensory and multispecies ethnography that is engaging with these 'big' ethical questions of planetary concern.

This paper draws from the project, 'Out and about' that we are conducting across two early years settings in Victoria, Australia. It entails us going 'out and about' with early childhood teachers and

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children while encountering the common worlds we share with significant others, including animals, plants, materials, and the colonial histories of these places. By drawing on Latour's (2004a, 2009) notion of 'common worlds', the project does not separate nature from culture, nor does it divide children and adults from nature. It takes an inclusive understanding of the world where past, present, and future lives are entangled. This project situates pedagogy within a relationality framework with the aim of opening up possibilities for creating new ethical practices in light of human induced changes in the environment. Thinking with a relationality framework pays attention to and takes an interest in the relational and co-shaping learning that occurs within the common worlds of children and the more-than-human (Barad 2007; Haraway 2008). It involves all kinds of intra-acting 'with' humans and significant others and as being part of the world. From this point of view, knowing is not about seeing, rather knowing is a matter of intra-acting (Barad 2007). Thinking with these concepts is not new (see www.commonworlds.net) and there is concern that all too often those who are interested in these relational ontologies are making '… everything being connected, without adequately addressing the complex structure of connectivity' (de Frietas 2016, 2). Whilst this paper does not address the complex structure of connectivity, it gestures towards the complexity and politics of these connections by bringing together feminism, environmental humanities and 'common world' pedagogies (see www.commonworlds.net; Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw 2015).

These pedagogies are situated within a conceptual shift from 'matters of fact' to 'matters of concern' (Latour 2004b). Matters of fact relate to the idea that traditional early childhood practices of observation do not engage with complexity. From this perspective, children are observed in a 'clinical' way, positioned by the norms created from child development theories and the construct of the universal child. Matters of concern engage with the broader, relational contexts that children inhabit as integral parts of the universe (Barad 2007). The ethics of these contexts are attended to as a way to enact a different kind of early childhood pedagogy, or a 'common worlds pedagogy' (see www.commonworlds.net; Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw 2015).

In order to do this work, we first turn to Haraway's (1997) figure of the Modest Witness and Rose's (2004, 2013, 2015a, 2015b) notion of witnessing to become aware of what it means to 'observe' in terms of ethical response-ability (Haraway 2008) and matters of concern. Donna Haraway's notion of response-ability is always experienced in the company of significant others, and this takes into account animals, plants, atmospheres, materials, histories, forces, etc., and lies not within a set of universal principles, but in everyday practices and imaginative politics that rearticulate all kinds of relations. Response-ability is not about obligation or intentionality, neither is it something that can be planned. Instead, it is a responsiveness to something or a happening that cannot always be seen, but is always present.

Next, we draw from the 'Out and about' project to illuminate various observational practices that take place in early childhood settings. We show how these observational practices are responding to matters of fact and matters of concern. Finally, we conclude by reworking early childhood observations into 'lively stories' (van Dooren 2014) to show how modest witness(ing) is a move towards meaning making that is a form of entanglements and open-ended dialogue. Lively stories is our attempt at enacting ethical practices as pedagogy that teachers can draw from and begin to address matters of concern in their own settings.

Shifting from 'matters of fact' towards 'matters of concern'

When Dahlberg and Moss (2005) called for situating early childhood institutions as sites for ethical and political practice, they were offering an alternative vision to the over-regulated and over-controlled world that early childhood education has become. An important part of this work requires that many taken-for-granted practices are rethought and where teachers, children, and families become political actors rather than political objects (ibid., 14).

One of the ways that early childhood teachers can become political actors is by paying attention to 'matters of concern', rather than solely 'matters of fact' (Latour 2004b, 2005). Bruno Latour, a leading

Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholar, recommended a renewal and radical rethinking of empiricism. Latour was not advocating for scientists to dismiss or move away from matters of fact in their research. Instead, he was calling for scientists to invent a new set of scientific practices that could get closer to 'facts' and reality in profoundly different ways, and this includes focusing on matters of concern. Many of the traditional observational practices in early childhood education tend to focus on documenting matters of fact. For instance, observation checklists that teachers often use will list behaviours such as, 'talks with children', 'talks with adults', or ask if a child is able to 'hold a pencil', 'demonstrate a positive sense of self', or 'cooperates with her peers'. The teacher is only required to determine if a child does or does not exhibit these skills. These kinds of facts are considered to be context-less, abstract, and based on an individual child. Matters of concern, on the other hand, are situated, specific, and interdependent. Latour's (2004b) social critique encourages us to reconsider *what* teachers are paying attention to and *how* they are paying attention in their everyday work with children. In other words, it helps us to critically interrogate the politics of meaning making in early childhood education. One of the most common ways that early childhood teachers are paying attention to children and learning is through their observational practices.

In early childhood education, matters of fact about children are produced by teachers themselves. Many teaching standards, curricula and learning frameworks provide external norms in which early childhood teachers reinforce through their everyday practices, including observations. For example, reading is reduced to a list of skills observed like how fast or slow a child reads, if she or he can predict what will happen next, or if she or he self-corrects while reading a sentence. In addition, these traditional practices inscribe a particular kind of reasoning, and are grounded in a developmental logic. A logic that has been critiqued by several early childhood scholars for being Eurocentric, racist, sexist, classist, and colonialist (see Blaise 2014; Burman 2007; Grieshaber and Cannella 2001; Kessler and Swadener 1992; Lubeck 1998), and we would argue also based on human exceptionalism. As detached and scientific observers, early childhood teachers are paying attention to individual children, assessing them through prefabricated sets of universal standards and benchmarks, and comparing this child with that child. In doing so, these observational practices are producing matters of fact. In order for teachers to move from focusing primarily on and producing matters of fact towards thinking with matters of concern, a paradigm shift is required. We recognise this is an enormous task, but believe it is required for addressing the huge environmental concerns that have been brought on by humans.

Shifting a paradigm is not easy as it entails leaving behind cause-and-effect linear thinking and predetermined and contained reasoning. A different kind of logic is needed for teachers to think with and invent new practices. Therefore, we begin this gigantic task by exploring the important work of feminist scholars, Donna Haraway (1988, 1997) and Deborah Bird Rose (2004, 2013, 2015a, 2015b) to gain insights into how we might go about overhauling traditional observational practices in early childhood education to make room for matters of concern to emerge.

Donna Haraway's Modest Witness figure

Donna Haraway's figure of the Modest Witness (1997) politicises traditional observational practices commonly used in early childhood and helps us to imagine new ways of seeing and being in the field. Haraway is renowned for the ways in which she works with figures, such as OncoMouse™, companion species, the cyborg, and the Modest Witness grounding them in details of lived reality (Schneider 2005). Haraway is challenging us to open ourselves up to thinking with these figures and complexity. And, it is with her figure of the Modest Witness that we take inspiration.

Haraway (1997) uses the Modest Witness figure from the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century to imagine a much needed different kind of '… "*mutated* modest witness" who could help bring better technoscience and better worlds into being' (Schneider 2005, 91). With the figure of the Modest Witness she interrogates the 'objective' scientist and how scientific knowledge has been constructed through the experimental method. The experimental method is a way of investigating the world through careful observations and measurements to establish cause-and-effect relationships. Since this way of

exploring the world is how early childhood teachers often observe children and learning, it is useful to consider the history and politics of these practices.

Haraway examines the experimental method of Robert Boyle (1627–1691), through the historical work conducted by Shapin and Schaffer (1985). In their book, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life*, Shapin and Schaffer examined the experimental way of life by investigating how the philosopher, chemist, physicist and inventor Robert Boyle worked during the seventeenth century. Boyle's experimental way of life involved taking one of his inventions, such as the hydraulic air pump, setting it up in his laboratory, and then inviting a group of his peers to see, hear, and record how it worked. Those who witnessed the experiment then created a report through a style of writing that is stripped back, unadorned, clear, and concise. This kind of reporting allowed just the observable facts to shine through the documentation. Shapin and Schaffer's historical work shows how common scientific practices, or the experimental way of life, established boundaries and protocols that define what counts as objective and scientific knowledge today.

However, Haraway (1997), with her feminist sensibilities, shows how this experimental way of life was built on a particular kind of modest witnessing that was open only to certain kinds of people, namely wealthy, white English gentlemen. She troubles Shapin and Schaffer's (1985) analysis because they failed to critically examine how gender, race, social class, and nationality were central to how science, and 'facts' have been constituted. For Haraway, these differences are not 'things' that are separate from the construction of science and knowledge, but considers them as being constituted *within* these experimental practices and this inheritance is still at work today. By using the Modest Witness figure from this seventeenth century experimental way of life, she is questioning the self-invisibility and transparency of certain kinds of bodies (we might call this 'objectivity'), and in this case the English, upper-class, male modest witness body.

In addition to showing how certain kinds of bodies mattered in knowledge making practices, Haraway (1997) also investigates the long and gendered history of modesty. In doing so, she explains how there are two kinds of modesty; a modesty that makes you disappear and one that enhances your credibility. Historically, female modesty has been about being reserved, staying out of the way, and not making trouble. For women, these kinds of modest qualities produce them as invisible or unimportant. On the other hand, masculine modesty is related to gentility, refinement, and sophistication. Rather than making men invisible, masculine modesty positions them as credible. The gendered history of modesty resonates with the historical traditions that the care and education of young children has always been considered 'women's work' and carried out by 'good' and moral women, and that the majority of the early childhood workforce, despite government efforts to attract more male workers, is made up of women (Cameron, Moss, and Owen 1999; Van Laere et al. 2014).

As a result of this gendered history of modesty, Haraway refigures her Modest Witness with a feminist modesty 'which is about a kind of immersion in the world of technoscience where you ask a hard intersection of questions about race, class, gender, sex, with the goal of making a difference in the real, "material-semiotic" world' (1997, 159). Feminist modest witnessing is a form of response-ability because it is about '… seeing; attesting; standing publicly accountable for, and psychically vulnerable to, one's visions and representations' (ibid., 155). It can also be considered as a type of an open-ended dialogue, one that is situated, engaged, and partial. This kind of response-ability is a practice that requires a particular style of critical thinking that is not about standing in judgement (Braidotti 2006) or about producing matters of fact. In early childhood education, where the dominant developmental discourse relies on and encourages a judgemental logic, this will be hard for teachers to shake. Therefore, Haraway's feminist analysis of how matters of fact about the hydraulic pump were established is useful when considering *what* matters of fact are established in early childhood education and *how* Haraway's Modest Witness can play a part towards focusing on matters of concern.

Deborah Bird Rose's witnessing

Like Haraway, Deborah Bird Rose's (2004, 2013, 2015a) feminist and ecological scholarship about witnessing helps us to consider the ethical and political potential of common material practices that are employed in early childhood settings. Rose's concept of witnessing is grounded in a logic of connection (2015a) influenced by over 25 years of working and learning with Australian Aboriginal communities. Therefore, when Rose discusses witnessing it is related to place, and like Haraway's refigured Modest Witness, it is active, engaging, and connected to response-ability. For Rose, witnessing has three important elements including listening with attentiveness, being called into connection, and responding.

Listening

Listening with attentiveness is about taking the first step in witnessing and it occurs in the present, not in some far-off abstract future (Rose 2004). From her Australian Aboriginal teachers in the Victoria River region of the Northern Territory of Australia, Rose learned and developed the practice of listening with attentiveness by paying attention to the more-than-human, or what she calls 'creature communities' (Rose 2013, 99). With these creature communities, Rose shows how being called into connection is also a part of witnessing.

Connecting

Being called into connection makes room for the more-than-human (i.e., plants and animals) to be active in meaning making practices. It requires us to question the assumption that the active voice is always the human speaking voice. Considering the active attention of the more-than-human means that they (plants and animals) are paying attention to what is going on in their world, including what we, humans, might be doing. Being called into connection recognises that human and non-human relations are always already happening. More often than not, human exceptionalism gets in the way of noticing these relationships and the agency of the more-than-human. Being called into question implies that non-humans are co-shaping knowledge with humans, and therefore humans are not sitting safely on the outside making judgements.

Responding

The third element of Rose's witnessing includes responding. Responding requires us to be open, to be called into connection, and then to act. Responding is about crossing the great human and non-human divide that Latour (2004a, 2009) writes about, and it occurs through connection (Rose 2015a).

In order to understand the shift in thinking and practice that is required to move towards ethical and political pedagogies in these uncertain environmental times, the next section briefly discusses some of the historical traditions of how early childhood teachers pay attention to matters of fact by observing children's learning and development. We then show some ways in which early childhood teachers are shifting towards paying attention to matters of concern.

Paying attention in early childhood education

The field of early childhood education has a long history and tradition of paying attention to matters of fact through child observations. Over time, these observations have changed and this section briefly examines traditional child observations and other forms of observation, often referred to as pedagogical documentation and pedagogical narrations. We discuss the purpose of each and how relationality is understood and practiced in each. First, we present a context-less traditional, individual child observation. Second, we provide an example of a pedagogical documentation that shows how the teacher is always already entangled in complex relations with children and their meaning making. Thirdly, we

present a pedagogical narration that shows how a teacher engages in a deeper level of complexity and critical awareness by raising political and ethical questions related to meaning making contexts. Lastly, we offer a lively story that gestures towards a radically different way of observing in early childhood education. The lively story shows how teachers might engage with the multiple entanglements that are always a part of the common world they share with more-than-human others. In thinking with lively stories, we are able to pay attention to the ethics and politics of these encounters.

Traditional child observation: climbing rocks

> 10:00–10:30 am. 12 children, 3 educators, and 2 researchers went out and about to Stony Creek.
>
> Observation
>
> Child A: (17 months) Begins to climb the rock wall. She places her left hand onto the wall and then pushes off with her right leg. She moves independently up the rock wall, alternating her hands and feet in a crawling motion.
>
> Analysis
>
> Child A appeared to climb the rock wall with confidence. Her gross motor skills are well developed for her age.
>
> Further developmental opportunities
>
> Provide a challenging obstacle course for her to further develop her gross motor skills.

'Climbing rocks' is an example of a traditional observation of children's play; an approach that can be traced back to 1883 and the work of G. Stanley Hall's Child Study Movement (Davidson and Benjamin 1987; Weber 1984). The Child Study Movement was the initial attempt to study children through psychology. The observation methods defined through the child study movement (and often used in early childhood teaching) are seen as a set of technical skills that teachers must acquire in order to conduct 'valid' observations and operate under '… the assumption that an objective, external truth can be recorded and represented accurately' (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. 2015, 123). This directly connects traditional observations to the field of developmental psychology, and in particular, the developmental standards that grounds much of practice (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence 2007). Developmental standards focus on a series of steps that are presented as matters of fact and ensure adherence to the image of a 'normal' child and privileging 'context-free linear progressions of children's development' (Nicholson et al. 2015, 193). These matters of fact result in teachers making judgements as they sort, rank, and measure children and their learning. For instance, the teacher who conducted the 'Climbing rocks' observation might begin comparing this girl's gross motor skills and development with the other children in the room. In doing so, the child will be considered as either to be developing 'normally' or not. These traditional observations are closely related to the experimental method that Haraway interrogates and like the seventeenth century Modest Witness, the teacher is documenting what she sees and does so in a clear, concise, and objective style of writing. The teacher observes from a distance and there is no room for doubt within these matters of facts.

*Pedagogical documentation: exploring bark (Figure **1**)*

> Jackie approached the Bark Studio cautiously, hanging back, letting the other children go first. After most of the other children had begun to engage with the bark, Jackie sat down in a space, a little away from me. She looked around, noticing what other children were doing as her fingers slowly moved in the small pieces of tan bark. I became curious about what Jackie was thinking. Was Jackie thinking about how she might use the bark? Did she need to feel the bark in order to move towards creating? What is the relationship between Jackie and the bark?
>
> Jackie experiments with the different ways she might relate to the bark. Jackie picked up a small, curled piece of bark and began to move it around in her hands. She poked her fingers in the cylindrical space that had been created by the curled bark. Jackie cleared some space at her feet and then laid each piece of bark out in a line. Her relationship is moving and changing – first tactile, next in the negative space, and then in a linear sense.
>
> Jackie moved to select the largest piece of bark and then began to thread the other pieces through the cracks in the bark, bringing the pieces of the bark back together, attempting

Figure 1. Exploring bark in the Bark Studio. Source: Author's photo.

to make the bark whole. She put some pieces in and then took them out again, intent on finding ways for them to fit firmly together. After threading a number of pieces of bark together, Jackie smiled and held her bark sculpture out to me.

Originating in the municipal infant toddler centres and preschools in Reggio Emilia, Italy, pedagogical documentation has been used as a tool in which practice is made visible and then becomes the subject of interpretation and evaluation (Rinaldi 2006). This practice of documentation creates visible records through a range of methods such as video, audio recording, writing, and drawing depicting 'the nature of learning processes and strategies used by each child' and 'enables reading, revisiting, and assessment' that contributes to a collaborative 'knowledge-building process' (Rinaldi 2006, 68). While this description discusses the concrete practice of documentation, it should be noted that the roots of pedagogical documentation are political, challenging the fascist discourse prevalent in Italy following the World War II by promoting '… tolerance and respect, experiential learning, relationships and a myriad of ways to discover the world' (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. 2015, 122).

Pedagogical documentation acknowledges that the teacher does not stand outside of the everyday experiences in the classroom, rather she is always and already entangled with many layers of complexity. This complexity is illustrated as the teacher actively reads her notes collected during the experience and then interprets them. For example, in 'Exploring bark', the teacher is part of the story and spends time interpreting the photo and notes, making her uncertainty about Jackie's thinking visible. The teacher interprets Jackie's actions as 'moving and changing'. The teacher observes and then describes how Jackie touches the bark, recognises the negative space within the curled bark, separates the bark into pieces, and then joins the bark pieces to create something new. The relationship between Jackie and her teacher is critical to pedagogical documentation as both child and teacher are constructing knowledge. That is, Jackie is getting to know the bark while touching and manipulating it; her teacher is making meaning of the bark as well as developing a complex understanding of Jackie by noticing how she experiments and engages with the bark. There is no single truth in understanding the child or moment within the classroom. Rather, pedagogical documentation makes space for a teacher to think, question, and interpret as well as engage with multiple meanings.

Figure 2. Making connections in the Bark Studio. Source: Author's photo.

Pedagogical narrations: making connections (Figure 2)

> Jackie approaches the Bark Studio cautiously and I wonder why she is hanging back, letting the other children go first. Most of the other children begin to pick up pieces of bark and play with each other. Jackie cautiously sits down beside me. She doesn't seem interested in playing with the other children. I sense that she might be uncomfortable or unsure. Jackie hasn't been to the Bark Studio before, perhaps she is more interested in getting to know the place. She picks up a small, curled piece of bark and begins to move it around in her hands. She looks up at the tree canopy, smiling and rubbing the bark on her hand. Is she making a connection between the bark and the tree?
>
> Jackie stands up and moves towards the trunk of the tree. She holds the bark up to the trunk, then presses it into the trunk. She is trying to make it stick to the tree trunk. I then ask, 'What are you thinking about that bark?' Instead of answering, she turns and ask me, 'Where did it come from?' As a teacher, I could have taken advantage of this 'teachable' moment by launching into a scientific explanation of the trees – giving all the facts.
>
> In this moment, I paused, thinking about how I am now comfortable with not always having answers or feeling the need to respond to children with the 'facts'. What if I talk to Jackie about the place where the Bark Studio sits? How might my image of the child be made visible if Jackie and I walk together and wonder about the trees? I might wonder out loud, 'How long have the trees been in this place? Who might have walked in this place before us?'

In response to the often romanticised versions of pedagogical documentation (documentation practices sans the integral political component) sometimes implemented in early childhood teaching, Pacini-Ketchabaw and colleagues (2015) have developed pedagogical narrations as a way of critically reflecting on practice and engaging in what they call 'political pedagogical documentation' (122). Pedagogical narrations are another way to make children's learning visible and like pedagogical documentation can be done through anecdotal observations, collecting children's work, audio and video recordings, photos, and ideas documented by children or teachers. Pedagogical narrations are used by teachers as a tool to support critical awareness. Not only does 'Making connections' show how the teacher, child, and tree are entangled, but the teacher is right there and an engaged participant in the meaning making. Most importantly, the teacher does not have the answers. Instead, she exposes what she does not know and how she is thinking. After writing a pedagogical narration, it would be shared with a team of teachers and as a critical community, they would raise more questions and hopefully come up with

some possible, but not certain, ways to respond. These critical questioning practices are underpinned by paying attention to the discourses that MacNaughton (2003) writes '… shape what is seen, said, and done – as well as what is hidden or marginalised'. (as cited in Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. 2015, 30).

We believe that pedagogical documentation begins to make a shift away from matters of facts by making visible the meaning making of the teacher and the child. Pedagogical narrations provide the opportunity for teachers to make an even bigger paradigm shift from focusing solely on matters of facts to including matters of concern because they put the teacher in the midst of teaching, they require her to grapple with tricky classroom moments, and they help shake the notion of a certain and knowable truth within a critical learning community. We appreciate the ways in which pedagogical documentations and narrations value critical questioning, but we note the reliance on the human within both practices. Although 'Making connections' includes the teacher, child, and place, it is human-centric because the teacher is still primarily concerned with the child. It is important to note that we are not proposing that teachers should be disinterested in children's learning and development. Rather, if a paradigm shift is ever going to occur, then it is necessary for radical changes in thinking. Shifting the focus from children to the more-than-human is a strategy intended to help teachers make this paradigm shift. We believe that attending to the more-than-human will help us to understand how 'we' are entangled with all sorts of forces, elements, and species beyond just the child. For us, we are interested in inventing observational practices that do more than simply represent, document, or narrate. We want to communicate and acknowledge the liveliness of the world and believe that van Dooren's (2014) 'lively stories' are useful for going deeper into creature communities.

Lively stories

We find van Dooren's (2014) notion of 'lively stories' productive as a method of paying attention to matters of concern in complex and ethical ways to human and more-than-human encounters. This moves our thinking beyond just bringing the teacher and the child together and raising critical questions, to documenting the multiple entanglements that we are a part of in the common world of creature communities. van Dooren writes, 'Stories are a part of the world, and so they participate in it's becoming' (9). By telling lively stories of encounters, a space is created not just to view other species by their scientific Latin names, but also for getting to know them. Some of the ways that we might go about getting to know them include paying attention to their own particular biographies, their various socialities (Tsing 2013), and their specific more-than-human agencies (Whatmore 2013). It is this getting to know the more-than-human that makes them more than just part of the backdrop. It is a strategy that makes room for relationality, or the ways in which humans and more-than-humans are integral parts of the universe (Barad 2007). We believe that producing lively stories is a political practice because they neither reduce teaching to a set of technical practices nor do they take reality away from teaching and learning (Latour 2004b). Instead they are making different kinds of reality and engaging with complexity. This means that creating lively stories are not innocent practices because teachers are deciding which realities to help make, and which realities to make more or less real (Law and Urry 2004).

Lively stories bring together both Haraway's (1997) Modest Witness and Rose's (2004, 2013, 2015a) witnessing and require teachers to be ethically involved. They also produce an *engaged* account of happenings, or modest witness(ing). They are engaged by bringing together the material and discursive, the past and the present, the teacher and the child, the human and the more-than-human in ways that allow for a kind of 'knowing more [that] draws [readers] into new kinds of relationships and as a result, new accountabilities to others' (van Dooren 2014, 9). It is important to remember that these stories are non-innocent and partial (Haraway 1988, 1997) because it is impossible to know everything. Knowing everything and then trying to control it is a quality of human exceptionalism that we are attempting to resist.

For us, and the teachers we are working with, encouraging a practice of modest witness(ing) that focusses on more-than-human relations, rather than children, is a radical change in thinking and doing. Thinking with Rose's ideas about witnessing encourages teachers to open themselves up to being

Figure 3. Blue-winged Flower Wasp. Source: Author's photo.

called into connection by the more-than-human they encounter and then figuring out what it might mean to actively respond. This is a strategy intended to help teachers make the paradigm shift that is necessary for moving away from a focus on matters of fact towards matters of concern. Lively stories not only document modest witness(ing) but they have the potential to call readers (and in our case teachers) into connection and setting into motion response-ability. For Rose (2013), responding begins to actualize the connection and the commitment with significant otherness.

The last example that we present is our attempt to produce our own modest witness(ing) through a lively story about encountering the Blue-winged Flower Wasp while going 'out and about' with early childhood teachers and children. Our lively story brings the more-than-human into focus and creates a space for understanding who the wasp is '… and who we are, and how it is that we all become together' (van Dooren 2014, 4).

*A lively story about the Blue-winged Flower Wasp (Scolia soror) (Figure **3**)*

The Southern Hemisphere day is warm and sunny. The water in Stony Creek moves gently, quietly bouncing along the sandy banks, where the Pobblebonk frogs can be heard but not seen as they hide amongst the grass and plants that grow on the banks of the creek. The creek is on the traditional lands of the the Marin Balluk Clan of the Kulin Nation. For the Marin Balluk people, the creek is a place of food, trade, and ceremony. This country is part of the larger Volcanic plain that extends from the central north to the southwest of Victoria and is characterised by grasslands and flowering plants that grow close to the ground. It is Iuk Eel season and at the edge of the creek Manna Gums burst into soft, pink buds, and flowers bloom on the grasslands.

The Blue-winged Flower Wasp has been drinking nectar and pollinating flowers for centuries on Marin Balluk country. The nectar from the flowers fuel her large wings and powerful digging legs, that are jointed, hairy and have tiny claws. Since colonization the blue flower wasp has become increasingly entangled with humans. Her habitat has changed – the grasslands have been overlaid with manicured lawn, tennis courts and a bike track. She can no longer feed from the flowers that bloom close to the ground. She needs to look elsewhere for sustenance.

A group of excited children run towards the rocks, intent on climbing. Suddenly, a child stops very still and shouts, 'Look out, don't step on it'. The group of children stop, for the briefest moment. With their child bodies towering

over the wasp, they quickly continue their play. I wonder where she lives, why she isn't flying, and if she is hurt. She is crawling amongst the bark chips, that were once from the Manna Gum trees that grew alongside the creek. She moves her wings up and down slowly, but her small insect body stays close to the ground as she makes her way between the large volcanic rocks that have been placed beneath a stand of gum trees.

She moves slowly and painstakingly across the bark. I look up and realize that she has covered a lot of distance for such a small insect body. It takes me a moment to locate her tiny body again. I worry and wonder, 'Is she gone?' 'Has she flown away?' Suddenly, a movement, a glimmer, catches my eye. Aagh, iridescent blue-purple wings! She is beautiful. She is still moving, steadily along the bark and is alone, but seems determined in her purpose. She has a shiny, black, segmented abdomen and her short antennae move slowly back-and-forth. I wonder if she is looking for a live beetle grub to lay her eggs in, so that when her eggs hatch they will have a food source? Perhaps it is this task, this female labour that has her so determined to continue her arduous journey across the bark.

Suddenly out of nowhere, a boy comes running over, with a twig in one hand. I quickly put my arms up and shout, 'Hey, stop …. Look. There.' I point towards the Blue-winged Flower Wasp. The boy lifts his leg, squeezing both hands into tight fists, one gripping a twig, and says, 'I don't like bugs!' Before I realize what is happening, he stamps his foot forcefully down onto the ground, making a loud noise. I jump up, trying to protect the wasp. The boy stands there, looking down at the wasp and then starts poking at it with the twig, while shouting, 'I … don't … like …. Bugs ….'

Called into connection and responding

We return now to Rose's (2013) ideas of being called into connection and responding because this actualizes the connection with and response-ability for human-wasp relations. The wasp, and her labour, called us into connection. She did something to Mindy. The wasp moved Mindy as she followed her under the trees, across the mulch, and around the volcanic rock. Mindy was called into connection as she closely followed the wasp moving her small body amongst curious, running, screaming, and poking humans, and then attempted to protect her from harm. It is ironic that the young toddler, who as a child has little power in his daily life, in that moment had the desire and power to kill the Blue-winged Flower Wasp. In that moment Mindy was faced with several ethical and political response-abilities. We purposefully leave the story unfinished and unresolved. We hope to engage teachers in open-ended dialogues and as a reminder that lively stories are non-innocent (Haraway 2008).

We end not with facts about what to do next, but instead advocate about the response-ability early childhood should have towards matters of concern and propose the use of lively stories to show how modest witness(ing) can rework early childhood observations into ethical, political and entangled forms of open-ended dialogue. Lively stories have the potential to activate initial ethical and political pedagogies that teachers can draw from and begin to address matters of concern in the common worlds we all share.

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