

Children:

Global Posthumanist Perspectives and Materialist Theories

Series Editors: Karen Malone · Marek Tesar · Sonja Arndt

Theresa Magdalen Giorza

Learning with Damaged Colonial Places

Posthumanist Pedagogies from a Joburg
Preschool

 Springer

Children: Global Posthumanist Perspectives and Materialist Theories

Series Editors

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This book series presents original and cutting edge knowledge for a growing field of scholarship about children. Its focus is on the interface of children being in the everyday spaces and places of contemporary childhoods, and how different theoretical approaches influence ways of knowing the future lives of children. The authors explore and analyse children's lived embodied everyday experiences and encounters with tangible objects and materials such as artefacts, toys, homes, landscapes, animals, food, and the broader intangible materiality of representational objects, such as popular culture, air, weather, bodies, relations, identities and sexualities. Monographs and edited collections in this series are attentive to the mundane everyday relationships, in-between 'what is' and 'what could be', with matters and materials. The series is unique because it challenges traditional western-centric views of children and childhood by drawing on a range of perspectives including Indigenous, Pacifica, Asian and those from the Global South. The book series is also unique as it provides a shift from developmental, social constructivists, structuralist approaches to understanding and theorising about childhood. These dominant paradigms will be challenged through a variety of post-positivist/postqualitative/posthumanist theories of being children and childhood.

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Theresa Magdalen Giorza

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University of the Witwatersrand
Johannesburg, South Africa

ISSN 2523-3408

ISSN 2523-3416 (electronic)

Children: Global Posthumanist Perspectives and Materialist Theories

ISBN 978-981-16-1420-0

ISBN 978-981-16-1421-7 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-1421-7>

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The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

For Botle Sphamandla and Alda

Foreword: Co-researching Post-age Learning in Damaged Colonial Johannesburg

Theresa Giorza's book is a deeply entangled political and personal story of unlearning privilege by becoming-with damaged colonial spaces. Staying with the complexity and the living contradictions of this position, first as "powerless child" and later "vulnerable woman in a violent society", Theresa's stories are filled with hope for the existence of other possible (educational) worlds. The picture of the geopolitical and environmental landscape of the place where Theresa now lives and works is bleak. Originally from Zimbabwe, she paints an honest picture of how her present home, South Africa, has struggled to rebuild a country scarred by centuries of colonial exploitation. Despite promises to the contrary by various governments, deep inequalities continue to worsen. The reasons for this, she explains, are varied and complex: the corporate ownership of mines, export of stocks and shares offshore, pervasive corruption, mismanagement, and a largely unskilled workforce due to the historical legacy of apartheid's intentionally inferior Bantu education system for black South Africans. The current educational system is also multi-tiered and inequitable: a government system largely for the poor, but with a smallish number of quality schools for the middle and upper middle classes, and an upmarket independent system for the rich. A large number of children do not attend school at all, and those who do and who sometimes live in poverty and attend school hungry are often victims of corporal punishment, sexual abuse or mental humiliation. Such inequality between the rich and the poor has severely worsened since the COVID-19 pandemic. The South African government do not provide education for children under the age of five and parents have to rely on private early childhood centres they can ill afford, run by under-qualified, underpaid staff. Theresa's research is in such a centre, a preschool offering a reasonable introductory education programme, but challenged by poverty and corruption. Can such a setting provide hope for children's futures? How can children themselves be welcomed as co-researchers into such colonial spaces? These questions drive the many narratives woven into this fascinating book. Theresa is well qualified and is in a unique position to perform this affirmative posthuman arts-based enquiry.

Theresa Giorza is a teacher-educator at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. The doctoral research this manuscript draws on has greatly benefited from her undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Fine Arts as well as Education.

Her art background performs a critical role in her investigations—a powerful trans-disciplinary blend of educational science and the creative arts. Her knowledge of contemporary art is important, not so much to teach art to children, but to approach the everyday with an artistic and philosophical attitude. As an inheritor of colonial white privilege, her own subjectivity is entangled with her writing, not only from her experiences as a teacher in a high school, a government official, a lecturer at university, an activist in the non-government sector, an artist/maker of things, a resident of the inner-city suburb where the research was situated but also, and especially, as an academic researcher. Theresa weaves an intricate analysis of the data, co-created with the children, grass, names, leaves, paper, gold mines, dust, pens, car thieves, early childhood education curriculum, fraud, Grade R policies, philosophical theories and so forth. These original diffractive analyses are competently assisted by a range of contemporary philosophers such as Karen Barad, Jane Bennett, Rosi Braidotti, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Donna Haraway, Achille Mbembe, Brian Massumi and Elisabeth Grosz, educational theorists including Loris Malaguzzi, Lev Vygotsky, Walter Kohan, David Kennedy and Joanna Haynes and Southern African educationalists Hassina Ebrahim, Leketi Makalela and Fikile Nxumalo.

Theresa's research offers a fresh perspective on the current decolonisation debate which is often restrictively reduced to identity politics. Inspired by Karen Barad's agential realism, she disrupts unilinear notions of time and progress. Resisting the use of concepts that point at prescribed end points, such as transformation and liberation, she tempts the reader to stay with the complexities and find ways to (not)belong and to be (dis)connected. She suggests we should leave the future to itself and to stay with the trouble. With reference to Donna Haraway, she says she can offer only 'small gestures of hope that will contaminate, compound, and compost into a hot and generative catalyst that can bubble from below'. Adopting the diffractive methodology, she creates decolonising insights that demand a relational ontology, epistemology, aesthetics and ethics for education on a damaged planet. Decolonising public spaces involves not only changing ownership and inherited entitlements but also the need to include ethical and political discussions about the deep institutionalised inequalities between children and adults. These injustices that have enabled narrow human-centred education also sustain the kind of learning that privileges culture over nature, adult over child and human over non-human. Children have been historically excluded and dismissed as not being fully human, fellow citizens or co-producers of knowledge. Theresa wonders how adult humans can open up educational spaces that pay care-full attention to these marks of erasure, division and exclusion. How can response-able knowledge be generated that includes wilder and less predictable encounters between people of all ages while including more-than-human participants? While answering this key question, Theresa takes us on a fascinating journey of dislodging well-established habits and ingrained beliefs about 'child', 'teacher' and 'land'. She engages the reader in the minutest details that profoundly matter in her postdevelopmental account of the collaborative learning of a group of five-year-olds in an inner-city Johannesburg preschool.

The book provides you as a reader considerable cause for hope by showing practical ways in which we can live with/in, and research, a world of difference(s).

Through careful and detailed analyses of examples, the book explores how children can be included in the decisions that affect learning—not as discrete individual entities but always already entangled and intricately connected with other human and non-human be(com)ings. The diffractive engagement with the political nature of the seemingly mundane and every day is really striking. By following children’s own interests and the respectful inclusion of children’s artwork, and by documenting their learning, Theresa exemplifies what it means to listen to children. After all, children are ready and willing participants in learning as a worlding process. Inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach to teaching and learning, Theresa regards the environment as a ‘third teacher’ in the way it plays an active role in research creation. Reggio Emilia is intricately related to Philosophy with Children (P4C), and Theresa’s research practices demonstrate how the commitment of these democratic pedagogies to collaborative learning expresses a deep respect for children’s intelligence and capability, even in resource-constrained environments. Her diffractive engagement with Reggio Emilia and P4C brings to the ‘rough and uneven ground’ of preschool practice the art of noticing the more-than-human dimension of relational educational encounters.

The stories in the book are powerful assemblages of image and text. The book is sprinkled with examples—many visual—that will easily resonate with the reader because of their everyday-ness, like the names we are given and how they work as material-discursive agents as part of the very same world we inhabit. These frozen images are agentic, in the sense that the video recordings from which they emerged mediate access to data. They are also agentic in the way Theresa performs them in a process of re-turning that makes the reader re-consider children’s capabilities and what it means to listen to a young co-learner. Staying with what is important to a five-year-old, she points out that names in their myriad ‘doings’ are central to the life of a preschooler. The powerful practice of naming is haunted by slavery and colonial acquisition, but it is from one of the young African children in the study that the importance of naming emerges.

Theresa’s writing is poignant and profound, honest but also modest. She manages to make you think and to do research differently without moralising or pointing the finger. On the contrary, she very movingly expresses her vulnerabilities as researcher-woman, for example, in the Tausa tree diffraction (Fig. 7.6). She is not a researcher who ‘parachuted’ into this working class, mostly black community, to ‘collect’ her data. Living in the same community herself, the stories she tells are profound, deeply political, brutally honest, realistic and compassionate. She paints a down-to-earth picture without sentimentality or romanticising what it is like to live and work in the preschool. The reality of doing research in countries where there is extreme poverty might be familiar to researchers in the South, but is a profound revelation for academics working in the North where there are little or no such deep inequalities. One example was her losing her fieldwork notebook when thieves broke into her locked parked car and stole her backpack. There is no space here for moralising and claims of innocence that only testify to one’s own white privilege. She clearly cares deeply for the children and adults she lives and works with in this community. As a reader, you get swept away into the educational complexities of teaching through the narratives of someone completely embedded and embodied in warts-and-all Jozi—a

city people either love or love to hate. Childhood research from the South is rare. But research situated in the South by a researcher from the South that renders black children living in severe poverty capable by paying attention to the tiny intricate details that matter is a unique addition to this book series. The book gives tremendous cause for hope during these extraordinary times of a pandemic that is sweeping the world, and deepening the inequalities between the poor and the rich made worse by the digital divide. Theresa provides a compelling exploration into possible pedagogies with/in damaged colonial places.

The timing of this book is perfect, considering the international trend of pouring more funds into the early childhood sector. The book is not only informative about early years provision in a country like South Africa, but the reader will also find it resonates with their own context as the challenges to offer alternatives to developmental approaches to early years education are increasingly on the global agenda. The book contains philosophical speculations as well as very practical curriculum suggestions that will not cost money, but simply require imagination and determination. Distinguishing teaching from learning, Theresa suggests, would be a good start because it enables us to notice the inseparability of our daily intimate experiences from our wider geopolitical and historical realities. This proposal is a refreshing change in the current educational climate and makes a powerful contribution to post-developmental and post-age discourses. It should speak to the community of early childhood educators who are concerned about an over-regulated and standardised approach to measuring children's performances in the early years.

Theresa's book is indeed, as she says herself, an "unfinished story" and "continues beyond the pages of this book as do the lives of all protagonists who continue their journeys of loving, learning and becoming". It leaves us desiring more by this author to help guide us along these urgent journeys into indeterminate futures.

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Acknowledgements

This book is the product of many connections, events, questions and shared ideas. Many thanks are in order. To Karen Malone for her inspiring scholarship and generosity. To her, and her fellow editors on this series, Sonja Arndt and Marek Tesar, for giving me the opportunity to write this book. The research that sparked the project off was inspired and carried along by on-going collaborations with Karin Murriss, initially as my Ph.D. supervisor and then as leader of the Decolonising Childhood Discourses research project, together with Viv Bozalek. Thank you—this work would not/could not have happened without you. The Decolonising Childhood Discourses project has provided a thinking and writing space over the past few years and drawn in a host of zoom/skype/WhatsApp companions. Thank you, Joanne Peers, Rose-Anne Reynolds, Anya Morris, Veronica Mitchell, Susie Taylor-Alston, Lynn Chambers, Nora Ramsden and Norma Rudolph and the other thirty people on the expanding group, for the intra-actions. Thinking in creative, critical, collaborative and caring ways makes a difference (I thank Feminist slow scholarship and the Community of Philosophical Enquiry for that).

The initial research towards this writing was made possible through funding by the National Research Foundation and the Andrew Mellon Foundation. Thank you for the opportunity. And thank you to Ulla Lind and Fikile Nxumalo for insightful critique of earlier iterations of this work. I am grateful to Claire Bènit-Gbaffou for sharing pre-publication research writing and for enjoyable intra-disciplinary conversations. Thanks to all my research participants and their families who will recognise themselves in the stories. Thank you for trusting my judgment.

The Mimosa school and AREA families: Heather Barclay, Judith Browne, Marion Drew, Sheila Drew, Tessa Browne, Lucy Thornton, and Professor Phillip Harrison also Lindi Bell of Smallworld—some of you have read drafts or engaged with presentations on my work and your responses have mattered. All of you have fed my thinking and feeling about early childhood matters and urban childhoods. Thanks to my homies at CDP, Makers Valley and Changemaker Children—Simon Sizwe Mayson, Deyana Thomas, Shamielah Smith and Lassie Ndalela. I am inspired by your work and commitment and hope I have added to the energetic flows that enable you to do what you do even better. To the team at #ArtMyJozi—thank you for letting me include your story. I owe gratitude to my colleagues at the School of

Education at the University of the Witwatersrand especially Kate Earle, Colwyn Martin, Nick Lebopa, Geeta Motilal and Kerryn Dixon. The whole team in the Division have made it possible for me to take the time generously funded by our Faculty of Humanities research committee to focus on writing this book for three months. Thank you, colleagues, and thank you to the committee. Viv Linington and Lorayne Excell, I am deeply grateful that you agreed to step in for this period. Moyra Keane, thank you for your inspiring writing retreats and responsive reading. Thabisile Levin, Alda Makama, Stephen Marais, Rochelle Mawona, Thobeka Mabaso, your help and support was invaluable in different ways. My ‘coven’ in Johannesburg and my Harare/Cape Town Madzimai, thank you for keeping me moderately sane and putting up with my absences and silences. My in-house editor, layout coach, politics and urban planning touchstone, Maurice Smithers, is the steady and steadying force behind the scenes, and companion through the rough and the smooth.

Sections of the text have appeared elsewhere in similar form: Chap. 6 has appeared as a journal article: Videography as Refrain: Diffracting with Forward, Backward and Stop in a Preschool Outing. *Video Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 4(1), 116–137. Thank you to the editors of the special edition for permission to include this published material. Sections of Chaps. 1 and 9 form part of a collaborative paper written with Laura Brooks, Rurhandzu Khosa, Minenhle Maphumulo and Simon Sizwe Mayson for the South African Cities Network (SACN), entitled: How cities can ease spatial inequalities in early childhood development and enhance collective well-being.

My thanks go to the following photographers for their kind permission to incorporate their images into my writing: Gideon Mendel for this Inner-city Park from 1985; Georges Senga for Footprint, from 2009 and William Matlala, for Cleaners marching for higher wages, from 1994. Thank you also to The Trinity Session & #ArtMyJozzi Documentary Crew as well as Deyana Thomas and Lassie Ndalela of CDP and Changemaker Children for the images included in Chap. 9.

Surely thanks must also go to the authors of all the referenced material put to work in this book. Karen Barad, Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing stand out as inspiring motivators for thinking-with and finding ways to live (and die) in more response-able ways. The struggles continue...

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Chapter 1

Setting off



One ventures from home on the thread of a tune
Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 363

Abstract This book is an account of a piece of educational research carried out with a group of five-year-olds and their teacher in 2015 in an inner-city preschool in Johannesburg. In the five years since then, many things have changed, and notably, the unavoidable reality of climate change and the planetary crisis have become increasingly pressing but also eerily reminiscent of older stories of extinction, calamity, devastation and loss. The author's awareness of these calamities, both cosmic and human-made, grew through her engagement with this research and its connection with her focus on childhood percolated through as the data came into being.

If you fly over Johannesburg you will not easily locate its edges. To the north it is creeping towards neighbouring Pretoria, and to the south it is heading towards the Vaal river and its nest of tiny towns. It is already merged with Ekurhuleni to the east and Krugersdorp to the west. Almost one megacity, this conglomeration of human habitation has a combined population of well over 13 million people. For the first time in the history of the planet, more than half of the world's population now live in cities. More than a quarter of South Africans live in the tiny province of Gauteng in which Johannesburg is located. Joburg is both a high-rise, urban, industrial hub and a sprawling slum, drawing migrants from both within and without South Africa's borders. It is a meeting place of difference and different stories. One story is that urbanisation is a triumph for people gaining access to better services and a more comfortable way of life. Another is that this 'modern' electrified and fast-food lifestyle is in fact a very real threat to our continued survival as a species. Yet another story is the one that tells of ingenious escapes, the crossing of crocodile infested rivers and the forging of papers. What sense do we make of this multiplicity of worlds that are all part of one? So many stories and all entangled.

With an increased urban population come a population of urban children. This book is an account of a piece of educational research I carried out with a group of five-year-olds and their teacher in 2015 in an inner-city preschool in Johannesburg. In the five years since then, many things have changed, and notably, the unavoidable reality of climate change and the planetary crisis have become increasingly pressing but also eerily reminiscent of older stories of extinction, calamity, devastation and loss. My own awareness of these calamities, both cosmic and human-made, grew through my engagement with this research. How it connects with my focus on childhood percolated through as the data came into being.

Starting out from my home in art and arts education I had recently begun to explore the life skills curriculum in early years education. A ‘subject’ that includes everything ‘other’ than literacy instruction and mathematics, life skills is the ‘life’ of the curriculum, offering opportunities for exploration, enquiry and experimentation. This is where the arts are incorporated together with science, social science, physical education and ‘personal and social wellbeing’. The curriculum document for Foundation Phase (6–9-year-olds) states that life skills is a ‘cross cutting subject that should support and strengthen the teaching of other core Foundation Phase subjects namely Languages (Home and First Additional) and Mathematics’ (Department of Basic Education 2011, p. 8).¹ I went about finding what children bring to their learning as thinkers working as they do at this age at the threshold of oracy and other-than-linguistic forms of expression, communication and knowledge-making. After a small pilot study, I knew that a research practice built on words alone would not do justice to the kind of knowledge-making I saw happening. Children responded in multi-modal and multi-sensory ways to the daily encounters they had with the people, things, creatures and events in their learning spaces. I moved from a practice of ethnographic writing to a more active ‘making of data’ through documenting (events, things, art, objects made by children, conversations), photographing and video-recording.

1.1 Creating Research

A move away from language-based research methodologies characterises a growing body of arts-based education research and early childhood research in particular (Kind 2013; Springgay and Rotas 2015; Truman and Springgay 2015; Knight 2016; Kuby 2017). My own interest in artful and emergent curricula in early years contexts and the search for appropriate ways to research them introduced me to a community of ‘post-qualitative’ researchers whose work crosses boundaries between disciplines (the sciences and the arts) and between research, pedagogy and philosophy. Creativity, chance, imagination and perplexity are recognised as central to

¹In an apparent undermining of the cross cutting potential of the subject, time allocations are prescribed: Life skills is allocated 6 h per week for Grade R to 2 and covers the areas framed as: beginning knowledge; creative arts ; physical education and personal and social wellbeing. Language learning is given 10 h per week and mathematics 7 h.