

Environmental Education



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There is a phenomenon occurring at public spaces in Auckland, like at the threshold of this forest walkway, children are encountering these two signs. The signs tell a tale of two introduced predators (possums and dogs) that touch the forest with neither permitted to live there. Possums, dogs and children occupy this space and grapple with one another, alongside the native flora and fauna which requires protection and kaitiakitanga from humans. This knotting together of species led to the wonderings:

- How are the response-abilities between possums, dogs and children being produced and affected in Aotearoa New Zealand?
- What is happening in possum, dog, child worlds?
- How is this tripartite of entangled animals in a process of being and becoming?



What we learned so far



Possums and dogs are being represented to children through environmental education programs, via government agencies and private businesses, mechanised through the neoliberal models of innovation and competition. In primary schools they are learning about pest control, trapping/hunting, extinction discourse, endemic species, working dogs, data analysis and Western scientific knowledge with Mātauranga Māori

Methods

To understand possum, dog, child worlds we assembled interdisciplinary conversations between critical childhood studies and the post-human, post-anthropocentric convergence, all situated within this space where these endemic positions manifest. Cartography was reimaged as a fluctuating, situated methodology to navigate through the countless layers of theories, educational policies and damaged colonial histories, in line with Donna Haraway's method of compost writing to compose and decompose the significant markers.

Possums are described as an aggressive threat to Aotearoa New Zealand's taonga, identity, economy and primary industries. They are introduced/unwanted invaders, invasive, disease ridden, and the most damaging pest/predator (along with rats and stoats) that needs to be removed. They are the enemy in a war.

Why this research is important

There is very limited research on animal-child relations, particularly in this situated space where these phenomena are unfolding. Little is known on the socio-emotional development and psychological implications for children experiencing these environmental education programs with underlying military narratives. These interspecies relations are guiding their process of being and becoming with others and themselves, yet it is an underdeveloped field of study. Deeper understandings are needed, thus the next step is research in the field - in four Auckland primary schools - with children, possums and dogs.

Conservation dogs are children's ally in this militarised discourse and indispensable in the ongoing struggle. These companion workers are described as *good dogs*, tasked with being "the centrepiece of a marketing campaign with the modest goal of saving the country" (CDNZ, 2018).

In this rhetoric **children** are the heroes vital to the removal process; they are the future of Aotearoa and need to be invested for the long-term plans of predator free 2050 to succeed. Their roles are trapper of pests and kaitiakitanga of nature. They are being pushed and pulled between disrespectful anti-possum histories and practices, with contemporary discourses of removing pests with respect. In amongst heavy discussions amid animal activist groups against killing in education and initiatives designed specifically to address wildlife endangerment endemic to Aotearoa. Recently an annual school hunt was cancelled after the school received personal attacks via email and on social media, which sent a ripple of emotions through the school and community.

References

Braidotti, Rosi. *Posthuman Knowledge*. Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA, USA : Polity Press, 2019; Cutter-Mackenzie, Amy, Malone, Karen, and Barratt-Hacking, Elisabeth. *Research Handbook on Childhoodnature : Assemblages of Childhood and Nature Research*, 2019; Haraway, Donna. "It Matters What Stories Tell Stories; It Matters Whose Stories Tell Stories." *Auto/biography Studies* 34, no. 3 (2019): 565-75; Potts, Annie, Armstrong, Philip, Brown, Deidre, and ProQuest. *A New Zealand Book of Beasts : Animals in Our Culture, History and Everyday Life*. 2013.

POSSUM, DOG, CHILD WORLDS

Environmental Education for Sustainability-Mahere Rautaki: Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2021
Conservation Dogs New Zealand 2018
Predator free 2050
Te Mana o te Taiaro: Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020