

2020

Lively Emu dialogues: Activating feminist common worlding pedagogies

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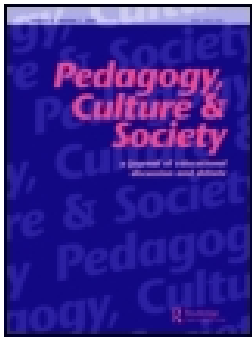
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10.1080/14681366.2020.1817137 Blaise, M., & Hamm, C. (2020). Lively Emu dialogues: activating feminist common worlding pedagogies. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2020.1817137>

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To cite this article: Mindy Blaise & Catherine Hamm (2020): Lively Emu dialogues: activating feminist common worlding pedagogies, *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, DOI: [10.1080/14681366.2020.1817137](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2020.1817137)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2020.1817137>



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Published online: 01 Sep 2020.



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Lively Emu dialogues: activating feminist common worlding pedagogies

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws from a series of Place-thought walks that the authors took at an open-range zoo. It practices a feminist common worlds multispecies ethics to challenge the systems that maintain nature-culture divisions in early childhood education. Postdevelopmental perspectives (i.e., feminist environmental humanities, multispecies studies, Indigenous studies) are brought into conversation with early childhood education to consider how *zoo-logics* maintain binaries and hierarchical thinking. Zoo-logics are related to developmental, colonial, and Western ways of reasoning and being in the world. Two feminist approaches to ethics, (re)situating and dialoguing, are discussed and show how they are necessary for undermining binaries and hierarchies that enable human exceptionalism, white privilege, and phallogocentrism. (Re)situating practices are presented through a lively dialogue based on Emu-human encounters at an open-range zoo. This paper argues that (re)situating and dialoguing pedagogies activate feminist common worldings. Worlding well requires a collective and relational multispecies ethics which are needed in these troubling times.

KEYWORDS

Common worldings; early childhood education; feminism; multispecies ethics; pedagogy; postdevelopmentalism

Learning at the zoo

It's mid-July and the morning is cold, wet, and windy when Mindy and I arrive at the zoo. We are here to observe a new early childhood playgroup practicum placement because of our interest in children's relations with animals. We are full of anticipation for this new zoo placement to begin. We have been imagining that there will be lots of opportunities for multispecies encounters to occur.

We find the playgroup in a fabricated 'African' hut. There are 8 pre-school aged children and their parents, preservice teachers, and a mentor teacher. Zoo-themed materials, such as animal puppets, puzzles, and books are placed out for children and parents to explore. Suddenly, something attracts the interest of a small group of children and they quickly set off down the stairs and out of the hut. Immediately they are retrieved by the teacher who then attempts to contain them inside the hut. She sits the children down and begins showing animal flash cards, encouraging them to identify each animal as she holds up the card. We hear the teacher say, 'Yes, you are right, this is a frog. Who can tell me where frogs live?'

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A few minutes later, children and their parents are invited to explore several pre-planned activities together. These included a zoo animal colouring sheet, playdough with animal-shaped cut-outs for children to use, a zoo-animal puzzle, and a physical jumping activity where children pretended to be hopping frogs.

Surprised, and a little disappointed that they never left the hut, together we wonder, 'Why aren't they engaging with animals? We are at a zoo!'

Introduction

In early childhood education, it is common for young children and their teachers to take excursions to local zoos. Although we are aware of the broader critiques of zoos as sites of cruel forms of domestication, zoos are also often perceived as educational places where children learn *about* wildlife, conservation, and preservation. Zoo education programmes often focus on the ways in which children can make an impact on global concerns of species extinction, climate crisis, and sustainability. For the most part, zoo education is based on developmental, top-down, and teacher-directed goals that are closely aligned with legislated formal curriculum (Moss and Esson 2013). These human development/al frameworks and progress discourses are part of a wider imperialist project made up of international institutions and universal practices set out to better the world. However, as two settler early childhood researchers, living and working in Australia, with strong commitments to reworking a colonial humanist ontology and foregrounding localised Aboriginal perspectives in early childhood teacher education, we naively assumed that this early childhood practicum at a zoo would be an exciting and interesting place for children to engage with place. As our initial encounter with the early childhood zoo practicum indicates, we quickly discovered that zoos are not always places where children are encouraged to learn *with* animals and plants, or in ways that engage with multispecies ethics (Hovarka 2019; Plumwood 2002; Rose 2011, 2017; Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw 2019; van Dooren 2014, 2019).

Early childhood education has a long history and tradition of conceptualising the individual child as separate and distinct from nature (Taylor 2013). This paper is situated in early childhood education and based on a common worlds framework (Taylor 2013, 2017). Common worlds is a term borrowed from Bruno Latour (2004) and in the field of early childhood education it recognises that children are part of many worlds, including animal worlds, and are not somehow separated from them. This framing draws widely from postdevelopmentalism, a perspective that comes from critical development studies (Escobar 1995; Klein and Morreo 2019) and has been useful for challenging the dominant Western model of developmental psychology that maintains the status quo and a dominant narrative of early childhood education. Like feminisms, postcolonialism, and other critical theories, a postdevelopmental perspective takes a critical stance towards established scientific discourses and challenges how these systems of power construct the 'Other'. Early childhood education has a long history with developmentalism (Burman 1994; Lubeck 1996; MacNaughton 2005) and it continues to dominate the field of early childhood education. One of the ways in which the dominant discourse of developmentalism affects early childhood education is through child development and how it universalises and normalises childhood and teaching. It promotes

a mechanistic and reductionist approach to teaching and learning that reduces complexity and engagement with alternative ways of understanding the world (Moss 2018; Lenz-Taguchi 2010; Pacini-Ketchabaw, et al. 2015). Alternative ways of understanding knowledge and knowledge making include feminist theories across environmental humanities, human geography, science and technology studies, and Indigenous studies. These perspectives are useful because they (re)situate (Plumwood 2002) contemporary childhoods within the hybrid concept of 'naturecultures' (Haraway 2008).

Working with 'natureculture childhoods' (Blaise and Rooney 2020) is a concept that understands children's experiences at zoos are enmeshed with the shared worlds of animals, plants, elements, and forces. Like other early childhood scholars thinking-with multispecies relations (i.e., see Cutter-Mackenzi-Knowles, Malone, and Barratt Hacking 2020 for a comprehensive overview), we also recognise that these are partially shared, non-innocent, uneven, and imperfect worlds. This paper draws from a series of walks that we (the authors of this paper) took together after observing ten early childhood practicum sessions at an Australian 'open-range' zoo. Different from urban zoos, open-range zoos have more 'natural' spaces and larger enclosures for the animals, allowing them room to roam. They also provide unique opportunities for multispecies encounters to occur because they usually include specific confined naturally planted areas where humans and animals find themselves together. It was these aspects that we found interesting and could envision how an open-range zoo might lend itself to providing young children with thought-provoking, meaningful, and ethical multispecies encounters.

The first part of the paper will share the context for our open-range zoo walks and the methods used to generate data. Second, we provide a brief overview of zoos as a colonial project and show how zoo-logics are part of this. Zoo-logics create and maintain binaries and hierarchies (i.e., human/non-human, man/woman, mind/body) and the power relations that perpetuate human exceptionalism, racism, and sexism in early childhood education. Because these logics are part of the 'colonial project' (Veracini 2010), they work to solidify the dominance of Western worldviews by silencing other ways of knowing. Third, because of these zoo-logics, we argue that re-imagining an early childhood open-range zoo placement requires postdevelopmental perspectives to understand the significance of place and multispecies encounters. Therefore, we detail two feminist approaches to ethics, (re)situating and dialoguing, that are necessary for undermining binaries and hierarchies that are solidified by zoo-logics. In order to put these ideas to work and envision a different kind of practicum experience, we took several walks at the open-range zoo. Based on these open-range zoo walks we then share a lively Emu dialogue that begins to activate multispecies ethics. We argue that a multispecies ethics, emerging from a long tradition of feminist ethics, are vital for developing a logic of connection, which creates '... possibilities for creative, reparative, collective world makings' (van Dooren 2019, 7).

Encountering the zoo playgroup

As our initial encounter with the zoo playgroup shows, children's authentic experiences with animals and place were limited. We were surprised to observe that the whole session was spent inside the 'African' hut, with children exploring puzzles, books and puppets, rather than actually engaging with the animals. Over the semester-long practicum, we were disappointed

to find that children were only provided with two experiences with animals, and they were carried out by a zoo educator. Neither the mentor teacher nor the preservice teachers were encouraged to expand on these zoo educator initiated animal experiences nor to develop educational experiences that might provide opportunities for multispecies interactions. Although we raised questions about the programme, it was clear that modifications to the content and practices were not possible. Overall, the playgroup experience was framed within the developmental and traditional paradigm of learning *about* animals and ecology, rather than attuning to the possibilities of children learning and becoming *with* multispecies worlds. Children, parents, and teachers were taking part in the powerful zoo-logics of learning about, rather than engaging with the diverse and lively multispecies worlds that we are all a part of. These experiences were dominated by colonial inheritances and worked to silence local, Kulin presences. Surprised and disappointed, we decided to spend time engaging directly with the zoo-logics and experimenting with activating concepts as pedagogy to re-imagine how an early childhood playgroup, situated in an open-range zoo could be otherwise. In using the term 'otherwise', we are inspired by feminist philosopher, Elizabeth Grosz (2012) who argues that thinking/doing with concepts generates possibilities 'to think differently, innovatively' (14).

Re-imagining how the early childhood playgroup could be otherwise required that we engage directly with Place (Tuck and McKenzie 2015), Kulin (Australian Indigenous territory) worldviews, and postdevelopmental perspectives in early childhood education (Blaise 2005; Blaise 2010). We did this by experimenting with a range of pedagogical practices that were activated by a postdevelopmental perspective and walking through the open-range zoo. Initially inspired by Anishanaabe scholar Vanessa Watts (2013), we worked with the concept of 'Place-thought', an Indigenous worldview that positions place as being 'alive and thinking' (21) as an intentional focus for walking. Following Tuck and McKenzie (2015) we capitalise P to indicate the agency of Place and understand that Place is much more than a geographical location, holding deep knowledges, histories, and traumas. Over a 6-month period, we took 10 weekly walks at the zoo, paying close attention to Kulin Country, attempting to push aside the dominant colonial inscriptions of Place. We did not walk with children, instead we developed a walking-talking practice that was affective, embodied, and emergent. These Place-thought zoo walks involved ongoing, unpredictable, and emerging practices. While walking and talking we utilised various methods, such as writing field notes, photographic documentation, and video recording to document our walks, talks, and experimental practices. We found ourselves jotting-down fleeting moments and encounters, unexpected sensations, and unformed wonderings with this particular Place. These moments and encounters then activated questions and research into Australia's attempt at the erasure of Indigenous narratives and non-innocent colonizing pasts and presents with this Place. A significant part of our practice involved talking with each other and speculating how these walks could inform a re-imagined practicum placement at an open-range zoo or more broadly with walks that teachers might take with young children around their local environments. As part of walking and talking we experimented with Place-thought and being 'called into connection' (Blaise, Hamm, and Iorio 2017; Rose 2013).

These were challenging walks because they required us to unlearn many developmental human-centric habits and practices that set out to know about the world, rather than being in, open to, and connected with more-than-human worlds. These connections

involved making links with Kulin pasts and presents, sharing experiences with our First Nations colleagues, and being open to what Place-thought zoo walks might open up. We were enacting new noticing practices that were bodily, sensorial, uncertain, and full of absences. We were not aimlessly wandering through the zoo, waiting for encounters with animals to happen. Instead, we were cultivating a political and holistic attitude towards and with Place. For example, we were learning *with* wet wind, curious Emu, scratching branches, and the ongoing colonial inheritances of this specific Place. In doing so, we were trying to experiment with how a playgroup at the zoo could be re-imagined and practiced otherwise. The field notes that we generated with our walking practices were crafted into 'lively stories' (van Dooren, 2014) with the intention of sharing them with the mentor and pre-service teachers to make visible ways they might engage with experimental pedagogies to create opportunities for multispecies connections to occur. Lively stories are central to our method, activating our walking and talking practices in ways that did not tell about our walks, but instead work to engage and connect readers with multispecies worlds, and the ethical and political accountabilities that are always present in those connections.

Zoo-logics

Zoos have a long history of being part of the colonial project. But this history was not something we initially engaged with nor did we anticipate its significance to our Place-thought zoo walks. The colonial project can be understood as the domination of one culture by another (see Veracini 2010). The practice of this control often involved re-making the land into that of the imaginary of the coloniser. One way to re-make the land was to order and control the 'natural' environment in various ways. Colonial practices included the collection of exotic animals for study and/or for entertainment value (Anderson 1995; Nygren and Ojalampi 2018). As animals were collected, they were displayed in terms of their hierarchy and importance to humans. For example, popular animals were kept in enclosures designed to enhance their attractiveness to visitors, while less popular animals were relegated to 'concrete pits and iron cages' (Anderson 1995, 14). Zoos were (and still are) designed to maximise human-animal interactions in ways that always place humans at the centre of the interaction in a controlled and segregated way (Anderson 1995; Nygren and Ojalampi 2018). It is this de/centring, un/controlling, and dis/connecting that became clearer to us while we were walking.

We find Kay Anderson's (1995) cultural critique of the practices employed in the Adelaide Zoo, located in South Australia helpful in understanding the taken-for-granted ways in which developmental, colonial, racial, and gender binaries and hierarchies are maintained in early childhood education, and specifically in Australian settler colonial society. Anderson describes zoos as places where humans have transformed 'open', 'natural' spaces into a cultural experience. Visiting zoos is so common, that rarely is the experience questioned for how it privileges and maintains rational thought and hierarchical thinking. This was certainly the case for us. Although we have both visited zoos as children, parents, and teachers, we never considered the significance of these zoo practices and how they criss-crossed into early childhood education. Anderson suggests that the process of developing space in this way can be described as zoo-logics. Zoo-logics are 'based on a logic and human desire for classification and control of the non-

human world' (1995, 4). In the context of this paper, we draw a connection between zoo-logics and developmental logics. For example, developmental logics works to classify, rank and, measure children through the frame of developmental milestones in a similar way that zoo-logics classifies and segregates animals based on hierarchies and perceived popularity and interest to humans (Anderson 1995).

We take up Anderson's notion of zoo-logics as a way to engage with the stories that zoos hold about the impact of colonisation and human boundary-making activities where 'humans engage in cultural self-definition against a variably constructed and opposed nature' (Anderson 1995, 3). For Anderson, zoos are spaces where humans are taking part in the cultural construction of what it means to be human, and in this case the human is being constructed away from and disconnected from nature. Noticing these current human boundary making and domesticating practices is our first step towards undermining the developmental, colonial, and Western logics that are at play at the zoo. It helps us to understand that zoos are not innocent nature spaces for children to 'just' learn about animals, but are actively part of the colonial project.

The zoo troubled us in several ways. First, it was a weird place, infused with the impacts of colonisation; Kulin country overlaid firstly with a settler homestead and then a fabricated African savannah. These colonising practices have worked to conceal Kulin pastpresences of culture, belonging, and ceremony. Second, the zoo-logics of boundary making, classifying and, controlling the land generated uncomfortable, strange, and, intriguing encounters with Place. Third, it just did not make sense to us that children and teachers were not engaging with Place during a practicum at the zoo. Instead, zoo-themed play activities were the focus, filled with fact-based teacher-talk about animals. As a way to undermine the zoo-logics that enveloped us and to re-imagine this practicum experience otherwise, we experimented with activating feminist approaches to ethics, drawn from the work of groundbreaking feminist environmental humanities scholars, Val Plumwood (1939–2008) and Deborah Bird Rose (1946–2018).

Feminist approaches to ethics

Plumwood (1993, 2002) and Rose's (1992, 2004, 2011) pioneering feminist scholarship laid the groundwork for the emerging field of feminist environmental humanities. Plumwood outlines aspects of the 'Othering model of human-centeredness' (Plumwood 2002, 117) and shows how various Othering practices are obstructions to social justice. This logic of Othering prevents humans from forming ethical and responsive relationships with animal and plant worlds (Plumwood 2002). Plumwood provides a guide to how we might each generate contextually specific ethics across different places. This kind of feminist ethics is not based on standing safely outside the world thinking how to respond to the non-human world, nor does it take a moral stance trying to find a solution to the inequitable relations that exist in multiple forms. A feminist ethic undermines the notion of objective teaching practice, devoid of context or meaning making with complexity- much like traditional early childhood practices that position teachers to 'observe' the child from afar, rather than co-constructing learning with the child. Plumwood argues for being *in and with the world* to develop specific practices that decentre the human and connect humans with the world. This is then extended by attending closely to Place relations to create lively stories of multispecies encounters that provoke ethical and political

dialogues. According to Plumwood (2002), two outlooks that are required to create ethical multispecies relations include; ‘... stances of openness and attention’ (169).

Rose (1992, 2004, 2011) and others (i.e., van Dooren 2014, 2019; Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw 2019), take up these open and attentive stances and show how multispecies ethical relations are made. In addition, animal geographer, Hovarka (2017) raises questions about the implications of colonial, racial, and cultural forces at play through relational multispecies encounters. In particular, Hovarka’s (2019) scholarship reminds us that animals are shaped by the relational networks to which they belong. Networks that include human and more-than-human others ‘... acknowledges the interconnectedness, agency and inseparability of human and nonhuman lifeforms’ (Locke and Muenster 2015, in Hovarka 2019).

In our previous multispecies inquiries work (Blaise, Hamm, and Iorio 2017), we have drawn from Rose’s (2015) concept of *witnessing* to activate ethical practices as children encounter animal species while visiting a local park. For Rose, witnessing has three important elements; listening with attentiveness, being called into connection, and responding. Rose argues that witnessing generates possibilities for a ‘logic of connection’ (2015). We build and think-with a logic of connection in the encounters we had with Emu, a peculiar and culturally significant Australian bird. In addition, we activate the elements of witnessing in and through two feminist approaches; (re)situating and dialoguing.

(Re)situating and dialoguing pedagogies

(Re)situating and dialoguing are two ethical pedagogies that draw from feminist environmental humanities (i.e., Plumwood 1993, 2002; Rose 2004). First proposed by Plumwood (2002), (re)situating responds to the Western idea that humans are somehow above, outside of, or separate from the world. (Re)situating expands Haraway’s (1991) situated knowledges and attends to ‘... the rationalist hyper-separation of human identity from nature’ (Plumwood 2002, 8). However, (re)situating is not just about the human. This practice requires that humans are (re)situated in ecological terms *and* the non-human in ethical terms. (Re)situating humans and non-humans ecologically and ethically are interconnected and occur simultaneously. These interconnections require new understandings about ecology and ethics in early childhood settings that include taking ‘a relational standpoint; accompanying actions are situated, contingent, and often marked by uncertainty’ (Dahlberg and Moss 2005 in Pacini-Ketchabaw, et al. 2015, 174).

When we took our Place-thought zoo walks, we experimented with different kinds of practices that might activate the concept of (re)situating, practices that were impartial, speculative, specific and uncertain. For example, being open and attentive to the ways that we are entangled in more-than-human ecologies; animals, grasslands, rain, and the colonial inheritances in the land. In the field of early childhood education these kinds of noticing, that do not focus specifically on the child, are rarely valued (Blaise, Hamm, and Iorio 2017) as they do not centre on guiding children’s development along a linear, pre-determined pathway. Loris Malaguzzi referred to this style of practice as ‘prophetic’ pedagogy which he defines as ‘contemplates everything and prophesies everything, sees everything to the point that it is capable of giving you recipes ...objectives by objectives ...so humiliating of teachers’ ingenuity, a complete humiliation for children’s ingenuity and potential’ (Cagliari et al. 2016, 421). (Re)situating the human in ecological

terms recognises that humans are not separate from nature. Rather, they are always already part of naturecultures, and yet are not the main players. (Re)situating the non-human in ethical terms involves overcoming the assumption that the non-human world is devoid of meanings, values, and ethics. This requires us to pay attention to animals and their relations, and to notice how animals share landscapes, habitats, ecosystems, and worlds (Hovarka 2019).

A feminist approach to ethics generates pedagogical possibilities for undermining and unsettling the zoo-logics that dominate traditional educational practices at the zoo. Thinking-with concepts as pedagogy makes room for purposeful but uncertain ways to respond to our 'always unfolding ethical obligations' (Land et al. 2020, 6). Central to the notion of activating concepts as pedagogy are pedagogical intentions. Pedagogical intentions are conceptually purposeful, yet generate unpredictable, impartial, imperfect practices that leave room for engaging with complexity in everyday moments. Our walking-with practices were grounded in the concept of Place-thought and we worked to attend to the agency of Place and Place relations as we walked. This required us to be open and attentive to the ways that we are already in relation with multispecies ecologies rather than walking with pre-determined educational goals.

Pedagogically this means that rather than naming a plant or an animal that a child shows interest in, a teacher might instead highlight the plant or animal relations (with water, with wind, with land, with histories). For example, imagine that you are walking along a trail with a small group of children on a windy day and you hear rustling. Instead of abruptly stopping and telling everyone to listen, and asking, 'I wonder what is making this noise?', as the teacher, you might consider slowing down, and without saying a word, walk off the trail. Then, and still without talking, you sit down, next to long grasses, and listen. You listen with your ears, with your nose, with your skin, with your tongue. Even though children might be asking, 'What are we doing?' You remain silent. After a few moments, you might say aloud, 'Kangaroo grass has been here for thousands of years, through many rainy and dry seasons. Kangaroo grass and wind might be dancing together. Can you hear them dancing? Can you smell them dancing?' This kind of attentiveness, one that does not solely single out and categorise an animal or a plant, as this kind of species or that, is about noticing how animals and plants are connected with one another, with weather, and with us. This is a move towards paying attention to how we are connected with Place, rather than separated from it.

In addition to (re)situating, another vital ethical practice is dialoguing (Rose 2004, 2015). According to Rose, 'Dialogue is a method for opening conversations so that they are inclusive and responsive' (2015, 128). Dialoguing involves making and expanding relations. If we are serious about changing the effects of human inequalities, such as racism and sexism, we must attend to dialoguing. Rose (2004) originally used dialogue to promote conversations between settler and Indigenous people in Australia. Land (2015) problematises dialogue and collaboration between settler and Indigenous people with a reminder that the goal of 'dialogue across difference is not to presuppose either understanding or reconciliation; nor is ... [it] to reach a convergence of meanings' (128). Within a multispecies ethic, dialoguing is not about humans talking to animals, or animals talking to humans. A multispecies ethical dialogue is holistic, sensorial, embodied, affective, and does not set out to 'know'. It requires being open to 'new ways of understanding and acting' (Rose 2011, 3), even if these feel unfamiliar. It involves listening,

connecting, and responding; in ways that do not rely on Cartesian dualisms and boundary making practices. Listening is not necessarily with auditory processes. It is sensorial and with affect. Because dualisms and boundary makings rely on monologue, dialogue is a practice that can offer new connections.

Rose (2004, 2015) explains that monologue often happens because of the unequal power relations between human and more-than-human others, separated by binary logics. From this perspective, one side of the binary is a site of action and presence, and the other side is passive and absent. This becomes a site of power, because one side marginalises and dismisses the other. In most cases, it is the human side that marginalises and dismisses the other non-human worlds of animals and plants. Rose (2004, 2015) discusses how this binary logic promotes monologue, because the 'Other', passive side, never gets to speak back. Dialogue is simply not possible within this developmental, colonial, and Western logic, because this is based on the idea that only humans have agency. For Rose (2004, 2015), and other feminist environmental humanities scholars, the common worlds we are part of are lively, multiple, agentic, dynamic, and unequal. As humans we need to be open and attentive to these worlds, including animal and plant worlds. And yet, there will always be slippages. That is, how do we humans notice and appreciate the more-than-human world respectfully and in ways that do not always slip into colonising the other? Dialoguing, according to Rose is 'a method for opening conversations so that they are inclusive and responsive' (2015, 128). Dialoguing *is* relational ethics in practice.

(Re)situating and dialoguing promotes a logic of connection. This logic is necessary for producing postdevelopmental pedagogies that are anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-sexist as it undermines the hyper-separation of nature and culture, woman and man, black and white, child and adult. A logic of connection, rather than one of separation, can underpin how early childhood educators understand and use these categories to describe our past and how they inform our present. Bringing together (re)situating and dialoguing activates pedagogical practices that are situated, based on an openness to the world, and are attentive to promoting connectivity across these hyper-separated divides between humans and non-humans. In the following section, we present a lively Emu dialogue framed around elements of witnessing; listening with attentiveness, being called into connection, and responding. The dialogue shows how (re)situating the human in ecological terms and the non-human in ethical terms are interconnected, complex, and happening as we walk with Place, at an Australian open-range zoo.

Another way in which we are promoting a logic of connection is through our lively stories with Emu. Instead of telling stories about our walks, we create stories that are informed by the more-than-human sociality of Place in an attempt to connect readers with the world. As a reviewer for this paper noted, this guides our ethics in writing for a human audience. Writing in this way does not come easy, especially when we have been taught to tell linear stories, with beginnings and endings, or stories that are intended to 'represent' exactly what we saw or heard. The field of early childhood education does not make this any easier, as teachers are expected to tell developmental stories about individual children, focusing on discrete skills, making comparisons to predetermined milestones or stages, and almost always devoid of context. Mindy Blaise (2016) has experimented with performative styles of writing as a postdevelopmental practice that opens up meanings of childhood that sit outside of the universal, decontextualised, and

always learning and developing child. More recently, we drew inspiration from Anishinabekwe scientist Robyn Wall Kimmerer's (2013) Indigenous wisdom and scientific knowledge about plants and Rose's (2017) lively flowering gum tree and flying fox stories for teaching us about the grammar of animacy that helped us shape a moving and non-linear narrative of multispecies relations to challenge human exceptionalism (Blaise and Hamm 2019). Here, we continue with this practice and through these lively Emu dialogues we experiment with activating our pedagogical intentions of being open and attentive.

Witnessing lively Emu dialogues

Listening with attentiveness

Leaves of a small bush rustle, Kangaroo and Wallaby grass brush against skins. Without hesitating bodies quickly tense. Damp, earthy, and grassy smells move through the air. Turning, looking towards the ground, trying to find that rustling, knowing it can't possibly be a snake, but slightly worried that it could be. You just never know.

Every little movement, sound, or feeling captivates. Bodies are alive, alert, on edge.

Again, more rustlings. Movements in the grass. Or is it near a bush? Behind a rock? Maybe it's just wind? Looking closely, but seeing nothing. This place seems barren and dull. Something is here, with us, but what? Snake, lizard, rabbit, bandicoot, koala, zoo ranger? What could it be? We notice a plucked plant, lying limp on the ground. Wondering how this might have happened, something shimmers in the distance, catching our attention. Are those feathers? It's Emu! She's huge... bigger and much larger than we imagined. Look at those sharp claws... those sturdy, yet elegant legs... and her long neck. She's big. Much, much bigger than us.

We wait... ..and wonder, 'Is she looking at us?'

Being called into connection

Emu turns her strange body around, and while picking up one of her legs, three sharp claws glisten with dew. She stares in our direction before abruptly running off with a bouncy, swaying motion, through the long Indigenous grasses that are being replanted to this colonised landscape on this volcanic plain. Her long legs making a 'whooshing' sound with grass as she moves.

Emu is bold, strong, and curious. We wonder how Emu's ancestors roamed Kulin country before it was remade in the colonial imaginary with fences, buildings and animals from the northern hemisphere? We wonder how Emu and these Australian grasslands are linked. During Gulig (Orchid Season), the season of nesting birds, Emu spends time and energy nest building and egg-laying. Or, throughout Biderap (Dry Season), when the grasslands are dry, Emu is probably running through grass, covering long distances. During Biderup we wonder what Emu eats. Vegetables and fruit must be scarce. Maybe she might need to eat a few insects. We consider how seasons bring together different kinds of Emu and grassland relations and how this generates relations with Place. Later, we come to a river, and hear water trickling over rocks. This land holds deep connection to Kulin people. It is an important

meeting place by the river for three clan groups; the Wadda Wurrung, Wurundjeri-Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung peoples. Emu is entangled in all the histories of this Place and with us.

Responding

Emu is so close. Steadily she moves towards us, but then stops, and is standing still. We wait for her next move. Could she be looking at us? It is exciting and a little bit nervy. Then, moving ever so slowly, she passes by, locating herself behind us. We are unable to see her, so we waitand wait There is deep silence and calmness. Then, something brushes against the back of us. We resist turning. Cool wind touches us. We feel Wallaby grass moving with wind as grasses brush our legs. The seed heads on top of the smooth and slender stems have the slightest and softest pink tinge. The leaves are grey-green to dark green and a bit hairy. We begin to notice the variety of grasses nearby, each one full of soft greys, greens, and yellows. We did not expect to see such colours and textures. How did we miss this? Finally, turning, there is Emu. Is she watching us, watching grasses, or something else? Emu bends down, pecking at grasses. She looks towards the East and quickly struts off. Without talking, we nervously turn away, quietly making our way towards the exit. Eager to get out, we push the heavy metal gate and leave the open-range area.

Pedagogical practices and possibilities

In this section we activate being open and attentive, making and expanding relations, and feminist common worlding as pedagogical practices and possibilities. By experimenting with Place, Emu, grass, and wind relations we generate pedagogical intentions that foreground dialoguing and (re)situating.

Being open and attentive

Walking-with Place engaged us in being open and attentive to bodies, senses, and, absences. In order to re-think the early childhood playgroup otherwise first requires that children and teachers leave the African hut and zoo-themed activities behind and walk-with Place. Walking-with Place might entail teachers and children stopping, listening and, noticing, with all of their senses. It will require the teacher to let go of knowing all about this Place and being open to the ways that Place might provoke unplanned, unpredictable learning opportunities. This might be hard because teachers often feel inclined to teach children about things, (i.e. plants and animals), activating traditional 'teacher talk' that is a mainstay of educational programs. It is not easy to walk slowly, to linger, to notice, to wait, to not know. While walking, we tried letting ourselves go, even if it was for the slightest of moments. Attempting to hold back, rather than immediately jumping to conclusions and falling into familiar fact-finding practices that gratify our human centric desires to know what is making *this* noise or *that* movement is hard to do. Maybe doing the playgroup otherwise won't be walking as we know it. Maybe it will involve children sitting, off the path, with eyes closed, and listening with their fingertips, skin, and ears. Maybe this will morph into 'listening with relations'. Maybe these relations will include Emu, Wallaby grass, dampness, wind,

rocks, and Kulin pastpresences. Pastpresent is an important concept for this work and can be understood as acknowledging that the present always holds traces, connections, and entanglements with the past (King 2004). Maybe traces of Emu, through her scent, the plants she pulls and picks at, her tracks, or her scat will play a part in expanding imaginative connections. Maybe listening with relations takes time and practice, involving not one, but several Place-thought walks. Place-thought walks will require a different kind of noticing from teachers. For instance, when noticing how a rustle in the bushes captures a child's attention, instead of asking the child, 'What do you think made that noise?', the teacher might slow down and use her own body to encourage children to pause, stay still, close their eyes, and listen with their bodies. Maybe the focus will shift from trying to find out what the noise is, towards being connected with Place.

Although Place-thought walks were our central pedagogical intention, zoo-logics were alive and present during our encounters with Emu and difficult to undermine. So many boundaries exist and there were many we did not realise. For instance, metal gates and fences, clear walking paths edged with plantings, ropes, and rocks were designed to keep us focused and directed to a predetermined end point. There were small moments when we tried to 'go off track' however they were difficult to sustain, because the lure of staying on the trail proved overpowering. These boundaries make being open and attentive to the world difficult. Our over-reliance on sight to 'know' and desires to find out what exactly is moving quickly derails our attempts at being open sensorially to the unknown and the unpredictable. Even the ways in which we point towards a bush or lean closer to 'know more' sets up a division between us and everything else. Our curiosity and eagerness to understand this Place quickly slides into a monologue, where we relentlessly question and wonder with ourselves and in doing so close down opportunities for dialoguing *with* to occur.

Just as we learned that waiting is important and holding ourselves back from rushing in, teachers and children can do this too. Waiting and noticing, rather than telling and explaining, become practices that can underpin pedagogical intentions of being open and attentive to the ways in which we are entangled with Emu's ecology. For teachers and zoo education, this could mean shifting from practices of the 'teachable moment' where children are informed about Emu facts towards waiting and noticing relations. This requires engaging with Place and more-than-human others differently.

Being open and attentive also includes engaging with Emu beyond the boundary-making practices of fences, landscaping, and contained bodies. The wire fence is intended to keep predators like feral cats out, but in a funny-strange way it safely separates Emu from us, until we open the gate, entering and exiting the open-range zoo, and undermining the boundary. Both the human-created boundaries of the fence and placing Emu within this 'open' fenced-in space make (re)situating and dialoguing practices difficult. We are part of the zoo, and yet we are not. Our curiosity and desire to know are no more than a monologue. Although we notice Emu's strong legs, at that moment we fail to appreciate what Emu can do or all the relations Emu has with land, plants, and the world. It is so easy to slip into colonising practices that distance us from the world.

Making and expanding relations

Building from the practice of being open and attentive, our attempts to resist human-centric monologue include practices that make and expand relational networks. For example, we worked to engage with speculative, impartial, unpredictable relations with wind, grass, Emu and Kulin pastpresences. Dialoguing with Emu and Place is already happening, but it takes us weeks of walking and talking to notice this. Damp wind, moving grass or water running over rocks are examples of dialoguing worlds. The intentionally created pathways and landscaped hills force our bodies along particular routes, making it difficult to pay attention to all the dialogues happening.

Our encounters with Emu open us up to consider how Emu is part of an ecological world that entails multiple relations with land, other animals, and weather. We also wonder if Emu is trying to expand her relations; with us and the world. This speculation is vital because it (re)situates Emu in ethical terms and considers her life as active, full of meaning and values, and that she is part of animal hierarchies. Our noticings of Emu's size, markings, and movements, is an attempt to firm up connections with Emu, rather than repeatedly separating ourselves from her and the world.

Finally, our lively stories, which were created from our affective, embodied, and emerging walking and talking practice, involved pulling together fieldnotes, photographic documentation, audio and video recordings, library research, and consultations with Aboriginal colleagues and friends and were written to connect readers with Place. Re-imagining the playgroup otherwise would also entail removing assignments that required pre-service teachers to write case studies about children's learning at the zoo and instead invite them to create lively stories with children, parents, and Place. Over time, the teacher might find out different kinds of stories about the Place they are visiting and integrate them into her practice. These might be ecological stories, Aboriginal stories, archaeological stories, water stories, and settler stories, about the Place they are visiting. While taking time to sit and be with Place a teacher might then begin a discussion that leads to creating a lively story that focuses on connections with Place. Again, these stories would not be about the place or the child and what she learns; but rather they would focus on Place relations and connections.

Feminist common worlding

Feminist common worlding occurs through multispecies ethics. Thom van Dooren (2019) claims, 'A multispecies ethics is one that takes seriously the fact that all life occurs within fundamental and constitutive relationships with other kinds of beings, living and not' (7). The moment when we are swept up and transformed by the native grasses is just one worlding possibility. (Re)situating ourselves in ecological terms requires new noticing practices that are bodily, sensorial, and full of absences. Rather than relying on rational thought, Mindy felt wind, sensed *something*, and attuned to grasses. As a result, mind/body and human/non-human boundaries were undermined. Part of worldmaking entails learning how to simply not know everything and realising that absences are meaningful and part of worlds.

(Re)situating Emu in ethical terms also recognises that her world is agentic, alive, and full of meanings. Encounters with Emu show how she has action and presence. For

a moment, the usual human-animal boundary where the animal is assumed to be inactive, especially at a zoo, has shifted. However, Rose (2015) cautions that this shift often remains stuck in binary thought because one side has power and the other does not. It is not until Emu moves quietly behind us, that transformation happens and briefly binaries are undermined. From a multispecies ethics perspective, worlding is not exclusively a human affair, Emu had an important part to play in our attunements to wind, grasses, and pastpresences. It is also possible that we are learning together with Emu, while making new connections. The grasses activated a connection with the pastpresences of Place, undermining the colonial inheritances that dominate the landscape. It is within this moment when we move beyond the colonial imaginary that situates 'nice and pretty' places as being green, luscious, and regimented.

More than just a day at the zoo: worlding well

In this paper we have set out to show that by bringing postdevelopmental perspectives to the zoo we are able to engage with feminist common worldings that trouble zoo-logics. Attending to multispecies relations requires both a paradigm and pedagogical shift from learning *about* the world to being *in* and *with* the world. This pedagogical shift is important for the field of early childhood education, and children's multispecies relations. Although *Lively Emu dialogues* are small, specific, everyday encounters, they are significant because they activate new relations through (re)situating and dialoguing practices. These practices can also occur in everyday child-animal encounters that are always happening in ordinary moments in early childhood settings. For instance, Magpies might be in the outdoor area watching children eat their morning tea; Black Swans and Silver Gulls greet children on their daily walks to the river; Heron is part of children's weekly walks with Creek. What teachers notice and how they attend to these noticing is important because their connections and responses matter.

Since (re)situating and dialoguing undermines Othering practices, they play an important part towards challenging binary and dualistic thinking that sets out to maintain inequitable gender, race, age, and other kinds of relations. (Re)situating and dialoguing in the field of early childhood education is hard work because of the relentless ways in which developmentalism continues to separate out the individual child from nature, categorise the educated child, and locate the learning child to specific stages and milestones. Although making such a shift is difficult, it is important because it is the '... first step towards overcoming the humanities worldview that defines the human without reference to the living world' (Rose 2015, 3).

Zoos are common places for teachers to bring children and they offer many possibilities for multispecies relations to occur. These opportunities for human-animal encounters from a multispecies ethics perspective are tentative, uncertain, modest and completely in the moment. They cannot be planned for and their outcomes are unpredictable. Therefore, how teachers might respond and relate, in more open ways, with intentions, and through speculation enacts a new kind of ethics. Situating pedagogy in a feminist common worlds multispecies ethics offers an alternative to traditional zoo education, beyond scripting the zoo as an innocent space to engage with nature and animals. A feminist common world multispecies ethical practice recognises the world as alive and full of '... diverse forms of mindful, agentic, and purposeful

existence' of other species, such as Emu (van Dooren 2019, 7). These practices require us to hesitate and activate a more open attitude to the worlds we are part of. Probably the most difficult lesson to learn is that worlding well is *never* finished and that it refuses a singular correct answer. Put simply, worlding well is more than just a day at the zoo.

Acknowledgments

This paper was written with Kulin and Whadjuk Country*. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge the ongoing and deep connections of, and care of the Land that Indigenous people have sustained for many thousands of years.

*Indigenous territories.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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