



Tonya Rooney - Weather Talk transcript

Mon, 11/9 10:10AM 19:04

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

weather, talk, children, climate change, work, entangled, guess, research, thinking, interested, question, rain, tanya, walking, dust storms, living, happening, humans, dust, research project

SPEAKERS

Tonya Rooney, Cassie Phoenix



Cassie Phoenix 00:03

So it's really great today to welcome Dr. Tonya Rooney, to the weather talk podcast series. Tanya is in the School of Education at the Australian Catholic University in Australia. And she's based in Canberra. So Tonya, thank you very much for joining us today.



Tonya Rooney 00:19

Well, thank you so much. It's wonderful to be here.



Cassie Phoenix 00:22

I wanted to start at the start where we always have this entry question. And I wonder if you could tell me about your research and how were the features within it?



Tonya Rooney 00:34

Yeah, well, I'm sure I'm, I'm even I'm based in a school education. I'm actually a philosopher by training. So I've always been interested in philosophies of childhood and thinking about how children experience the world and relate to the world and the environment. And I've looked at questions such as children's relations with technologies in place and time. And so at the moment, my current research focus is thinking about how children experience climate change, I guess, in the sort of contemporary era we live in.

And so this is where my work with the weather comes in. In that context. I've been thinking quite a bit about questions such as, what does it mean for children growing up in a time of climate change? How might they come to sort of get that there might be a connection between what humans do humans activity and climate change and the sort of questions like that, and it seems such a big thing and so, so such a big scale of thing to deal with. And so it was from here that I sort of turned to thinking about the weather. And so I guess I'm interested in looking at Children's relationship with the weather. And the aim of doing that is to inform some new thinking about, particularly perhaps environmental education, but also more broadly, in terms of thinking about how children might grow up in a time of climate change. And so this work with the weather has been reflected in my last two research projects since 2016. Yeah,

C Cassie Phoenix 02:07

I mean, this question usually ends up answering the next couple that I have as well, which is, you know, what led you to the topic? And what is why do you think it's important? Obviously, it's, of course, climate change is important. And I know, there's so much excellent research being done in Australia around that topic. Was there a particular thing that brought you into this area? Or was it just going on all around you and seemed an obvious path to choose?

T Tonya Rooney 02:37

Um, well, actually, this is quite a good question. Because there was a specific moment when I sort of decided this would be interesting to think about, which sort of seems odd, because, you know, we sort of think about weather all the time. Like, we always talk about weather all the time, and ask about the weather. But I'm on one particular day, I was riding my bike through the rain. And I was just really struck on this day about how, by how sensory and bodily, the whole experience was of riding my bike through the weather. Obviously, that wasn't really a new thing, because we sort of feel that all the time, I think we know that. Weather makes a difference to what we do, and how we travel alone, or, you know, perhaps what we wear each day, sometimes our memories are really infused with weather of a particular time, like weather is quite a powerful thing in that sense. But in any case, on this particular day, I suddenly became perhaps I've been thinking about children and climate change, I just suddenly became really aware that I wanted to think about whether more as a sort of player or actor, if you like, in the whole thing of what it is I was thinking about, rather than just something sort of surrounding all the stuff that was happening. So I wanted to think about it more directly in my research with children. And I was really became really aware that weather seems so infused in sort of the time and the space of our experience. And as I was thinking about it, I couldn't even work out how to

separate out the weather from time or space or whatever is happening it, it was so entangled in it, it wasn't just that it was some, you know, strange sort of thing hanging there, it was actually really deeply entangled in an eye. So I started thinking about that. And I thought, well, wavy weather is a useful way of grappling with these sort of really entangled relationships between children climate change, and all of the other things that were happening, and that we're trying to make sense of. So I mean, we all know that weather is important. And so I guess, what's hard is? So come back to your question, I guess of why it's important. It can be really hard, I think, to ask questions about something that's just there all the time. And we talk about all the time. So it can be hard to actually try and think differently about it because we just so used to thinking about whether in a certain way, it's so ingrained in our conversations. So I guess just even for that reason, it seems important to think a little bit more deliberately about the weather and to see what might happen. Yes. So it was from this point that I embarked on these research projects. One of which I undertook with a colleague of Affrika Taylor, and we called walking with wildlife involved with the times, which was a really fun title, which basically involves walking around with groups of preschool children, and really thinking about the weather, and the wildlife and other things. And, and how, what it meant to be doing that in these wild weather or climate change times. Yeah, I can talk more about that later.

C

Cassie Phoenix 05:47

I've enjoyed your papers around kind of weather wandering. So that that was one of the first papers that I read around this, and it was kind of like writing down your name, Tonya Rooney, I'd really like to connect with her [laughs]. So it's also nice that we're out here today talking about it, that's great. But I mean, certainly talk about that and any other sort of concepts and theories that you've drawn on along the way. I agree at that sort of switching sort of weather talk at its most mundane level up into a kind of research project is something, I mean, I'm finding that difficult. So yeah, I'm really interested to hear your thoughts on that as well.

T

Tonya Rooney 06:26

I mean, I think, I guess, yeah, you don't come to these, I mean, these ideas, they sort of come to out of a whole conversations, and all sorts of other things that don't really come out of nowhere. And I had been just before I was thinking, by the way, I had been reading some of Tim Ingold's work, and I find his work on the weather particularly interesting. And I guess, after I was thinking about this, and doing research on a, I read one of his works, and I found it quite affirming, where he talked about how people often undertake research, they talk about the weather, and they put it in this sort of methodology is sort of part of the conditions of the day, and it's there, and it sits there, but they don't necessarily

do anything with it in terms of actually the focus of the research. And so that was sort of quite an affirming approach, which I thought did sort of align with how I was thinking about, I guess, trying to foreground the weather a bit more and what I was working with and the other sort of concepts are worked with, that were quite important for me were people who were writing about weather and how it was really deeply connected in with body and place and that sort of thing. And so, some of the people are particularly influenced by was the work by Astrida Nemanis on, she wrote some work on weather, writing and weather bodies, which is really interesting. And I also enjoyed reading Philip Vannini's work on weather in place, I found that writing particularly evocative, and those types of writings really make me think about those connections between weather and our bodies, or when we breathe in air with freezing and weather and how there's not really that separation between humans and weather that we so often think about. So I guess those are some of the key ideas that I've really taken into my work to think about how do we break down those sort of artificial boundaries between humans and weather, and sort of started start to think about how we might be all a bit more, you know, not the same, but sort of partly some insane, entangled matter in some way or another. Those are some of the things I've been trying to continue with. And in my research,



Cassie Phoenix 08:43

And is there anything that's particularly surprised you along the way as you've been delving into this work or developing your own projects?



Tonya Rooney 08:53

Yeah, so with my own projects, which I probably described as like a, I think we talked about them sort of being walked by there's sort of like a walking ethnography. So we go on these walks with children, their preschool children, usually a couple of educators will come along, and myself and our other researcher might be there. And so that we have fairly open ended walk, it's a fairly a way of walking, we're we're trying to follow what the children are interested in, we're not sort of directing the walk. And so I guess one of the things that I found challenging is that, um, so we're doing a project and we call the research project, and we say it's about the weather. But I try very hard in the work with children not to be explicit that we're doing research about the weather, because I'm more interested in observing and noticing the ways that the children interact with the world and the environment or the animals or the water or whatever. And trying to think about how the children are engaging in sort of, I guess, weather type related phenomena, and often realising that most of these things have sort of weather something. So because of that approach, what I find quite challenging is how to break down that thinking so that you're not always thinking about the weather, as just sun and wind and rain and sort of elements,

things that we're, you know, walking through or talking to the children about that, I find it really hard to pull back from that, and instead, have a look of what they're doing when they interact with the dirt in the water and, and try and recognise in that what sort of connections or relations there might be to, I guess, points of connection with the weather, you know, so like, for example, one on one particular lesson, I know, they had been learning about the drought on a particular week or something like that. And we didn't talk about the drought, it was something that we went out walking. And the next thing that children all down on the ground, and they've got the hands and they're sort of rubbing their hands through the dirt and scrabbling through the dirt and dust and making dust. And this is really interesting to notice just how close they got to that and the types of ways they interacted with it, and what they did with it, and the sort of things they said about here and making dust storms and things like this. And, and so I was really interested in capturing those types of relations through what the children did with something like dust and creating dust storms. When it wasn't what we'd set out, we haven't we haven't talked to the children about doing so. But it's really challenging to not frame your research with these sort of weather ideas, and then to try and still notice that, and I'll still find that really hard actually. Yeah, in the research, I think we're just so accustomed to talking about the weather, you know, so I mean, actually don't think it's much different with us adults with children off when they go to school, you know, they have a sort of little weather chart in the morning with the calendar, and they go, it's going to be Tuesday, and it's going to be whatever, the first of something, and then, and it's going to be sunny or cloudy today, and we have those little pictures. And that's how children connect with the weather of the day, which is sort of cool in one sense. But at the same sense, it's not always deeply connected in with some of the nuances of the weather might be happening outside. Mm hmm. And in the same way, you know, we just get our phones, we might pick it up in the morning. And look, we go What's it going to be today, and we look at the little sun or the cloud or rain, you know, we still connecting our thinking about the weather with these rather, you know, really quite powerful communication tools. But in some ways, really, I stick into a few features. So just, I guess I just think we we have a language for talking about the weather. Even though there's so much we can say somehow still get brought down into those few little things. And it's hard to keep pulling it out into a much richer type of language.



Cassie Phoenix 12:56

Yeah, I'm thinking as you're talking there. And I don't know if this is the same for you, but no early weather forecasting on the television, you'd have the man with this sort of magnets, the different weather icons sticking them around the country. And you're right, I think those weather icons have become the tools, which we use to now speak about is overcast, drizzly rain, that sort of thing here, just as the children you've been interacting with talk about drought and dust as you were speaking there. I'm you know, I'm imagining

children around here kind of going crazy over the mud and the puddles. Yeah, that's the rain brings the excitement of being able to get in and splash in the mud. Yes. And I'm always struck at how that changes over time. I mean, from my experience, children are really keen to get outdoors, whatever the weather conditions are, and it's often the adults or the policies within the school setting kind of wet play and keeping people inside sort of setting up those storylines of certain weather conditions to be something that you should protect yourself from and avoid. And that's kind of interesting. That's great. I mean, you've also talked about some of the challenges there. What, what for you then, I mean, I'm interested in this idea of living well with weather and so I've been asking everyone I've spoken to what, from their perspective, does living well with weather mean? So I'm interested in your thoughts on that, too?

T

Tonya Rooney 14:26

Yeah, I think there's a couple of things to say. I mean, I really think that thing you said about children, how they really like to be outside in weather. And you can see that often, you know, they just really do enjoy being outside in any weather and somehow we seem to get a bit more, feel a bit more discomfort. But there is something about just being in, being with weather that I think is extremely powerful way of just living with whether and I guess that that idea or that people started writing about, you know, not just living in ways where we try and think that we can somehow lock the weather out and live in highly regulated places where it's not part of it, and pretend that's somehow possible, I think, you know, it's not that we shouldn't be in places that are, that are comfortable and conditioned or hated when we need it. It's about our way of thinking about it, that we shouldn't perhaps think that, that we're doing that because it means that, you know, we can somehow escape from the weather or something. So, I mean, I guess I think of weather is something more than even though weather sort of, always journeying with us, and part of our experience and all that sort of thing, we often see things through the weather, I think weather's more than just sort of a, you know, friendly travel companion that we sort of accommodate or adapt to, or just to put on our raincoat for, I think it's more than that. I guess, particularly thinking about my work with the focus on climate change, I sort of begin to realise it's really nothing neutral about our relationship with weather. I mean, I think it is, even though the other elements are there, and they change and everything, and they make up our experience of weather, they also somehow deeply connected in to the wider patterns of climate change. And so although not all humans are equally implicated in all the sort of devastating impacts of climate change that we see unfolding with wild or more unpredictable weather, there is still an entanglement or connection or relationship between human activity and climate, and the weather patterns that follow that I sort of feel we can't ignore. So I guess I feel that living well with weather is about recognising somehow, rather, that there's some kind of need to respond or

perhaps ethical or some kind of responsibility on our part about the living world. And I don't really know what that looks like. But I guess it's just something I'm interested in thinking about. I mean, it might mean enjoying walking with the weather, as it is, and perhaps thinking that doesn't always make sense to blame the weather for things because I know, that just doesn't really make sense. It could be, you know, blaming ourselves, I guess, as well. But also, I think what it means living well with weather is also to ask what it means for other creatures and plants and land to live with well with weather, so that it's not just us as humans living well with weather, but what does it mean for all other sort of, you know, living things to, to live together? Well, with weather, I sort of feel like that's something not to lose sight of. We're not sort of just in the weather world. on our own. We're sort of in all together, and in all the weather challenges together. So those are some of the things I think I know, I really don't know what it means. But I think it's actually a really interesting question. And those are some of the things that first come to mind as things I guess to think with while I'm thinking about it, but yeah, no question.



Cassie Phoenix 18:02

Those are great points. And of course, at the moment, what I have the luxury of is I'm I'm hearing the different responses to this question and when I put it in the guiding questions, part of me was thinking this might get a little repetitive. But actually what I'm finding, so far, at least, you know, it's bringing such different responses from from different people working in different spaces in this area, which is fascinating to me as well. I think he brought some great points to the table there and also, having the focus on children is really interesting. I've enjoyed your work so much so far. I'm looking forward to reading more of it in the future. And I deeply appreciate you actually taking the time to have the conversation as well and contributing to the weather talk series. So thank you so much, and I look forward to keeping in touch.



Tonya Rooney 18:51

Well, thank you very much. It's been really good. And I'll continue to learn from all the reading that everyone else is doing about weather and from the children I'm walking with. So yes, thank you.



19:01

Thank you. Thank you, Tonya. Bye