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# Post-approaches to education and the arts: Putting theories to work in arts educational practices

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Figure 1. (Un)folding the content of the special issue

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Putting post-approaches to work in research on education and the arts motivated the creation of this special issue. Based on highlighted topics from the included articles, the word cloud moves with the conceptual and theoretical frameworks and the investigated arts educational practices of the articles (Figure 1). This special issue explores how post-approaches to education and the arts emphasize learning, teaching, and knowledge-production in the arts as performative processes of becoming in-between humans and other materialities in a more-than-human world. Moreover, the articles included in the special issue reveal that such an endeavor calls for new ways of doing research through post-qualitative and practice-led research methodologies.

### **Doing learning, teaching, and research differently**

Research influenced by an ontological turn moving beyond representational assumptions has increased within the fields of education and the arts. Theoretical and philosophical approaches that problematize language as representational, researchers as disconnected, and research methods as prescriptive are discussed in several different frameworks, for example, posthumanisms (Braidotti, 2013; Wolfe, 2013), new materialisms (Coole & Frost, 2010; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012), agential realism (Barad, 2007), material feminism (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008), relational materialism (Bodén et al., 2019), a philosophy of immanence (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013), socio-material perspectives (Fenwick et al., 2011), actor-network theory (Latour, 2005; Law 1999), post-actor-network theory (Mol, 2002), and non-representational theory (Thrift, 2008). In this special issue, we have gathered these diverse, but related, frameworks through the concept of *post-approaches*, by which we mean performative views on knowledge and research. Nevertheless, this ontological turn is rooted in the West, whereas Indigenous philosophies already lean on an entangled view on the world (Malone & Moore, 2019; Nxumalo & Murriss, 2021).

Educational scholars thinking with these theories and philosophies have argued that education has for too long focused only on epistemology (Kuby et al., 2019). A turn to ontology directs attention to materiality and challenges representationalism, making us understand educational worlds as always in-becoming through human and more-than-human entanglements (Zembylas, 2017). In this perspective, learning, teaching, and research are thus constantly engaged in *producing* multiple realities and possibilities. The arts echo this premise as they permeate the generation of various ways of be(com)ing with/in the world (Rosiek, 2018). Moreover, the boundaries between, for example, human/nonhuman, matter/discourse, subject/object, theory/practice, and mind/body are challenged and re-thought in terms of how they cannot be separated from each other (Barad, 2007). Thus, post-approaches shift the focus from essences and beings to dynamic doings and becomings and what these can set in motion. As such, be(com)ing/knowing are entangled, which Barad (2007) describes with the notion of onto-epistemology.

Research putting such perspectives to work breaks away from previous human-centered understandings of education and knowledge as created mainly through verbal language and calls for radically re-thinking learning and teaching (Bayley, 2018; Lenz Taguchi, 2012; Ringrose et al., 2019; Snaza et al., 2014). A premise for post-approaches is that a human-centered logic cannot account for all entanglements that matter in learning and teaching, especially in practices where humans engage with the arts in various ways. The arts are material and embodied, and their practices are produced by multiple humans and materialities (Bolt, 2013). Furthermore, in this special issue, the understanding of learning and teaching in the arts moves beyond perceiving knowledge being transferred from teacher to students. Instead, it emphasizes artful, vivid, dynamic, unpredictable, and affective processes of co-learning and co-creation (e.g., Mreiwed et al., 2020; T. P. Østern et al., 2019; A.-L. Østern & Knudsen, 2019; Sameshima et al., 2019; Wiebe et al., 2007). Thus, knowledge-production is constantly performed anew.

Accordingly, central to this understanding is that learning and teaching become processes of creating something new, which is permeated by a performative understanding (T. P. Østern et al., 2019). It challenges temporal perspectives on learning and teaching, as it can be understood as emergent and open phenomena, constantly in-becoming between humans and materialities with neither beginning nor end (Plauborg, 2018). Furthermore, we perceive the arts to inspire and fuel the use of the structural possibilities of the arts – such as design, visual arts, composition, choreography, and dramaturgy – to create educational practices (e.g., Bakke et al., 2021; Irwin, 2013; A.-L. Østern, 2014; T. P. Østern, 2019). Since educational practices always imply a certain form, which can be understood as a design, composition, or choreography, we recognize that the forms of teaching – specifically the “how” of teaching – are never neutral, irrelevant, or innocent (Bodén et al., 2021; T. P. Østern et al., 2019; Ulmer et al., 2020). For example, the challenging of the boundaries between human/nonhuman and matter/discourse extends notions of political agency (Zembylas, 2017), and therefore, thinking with post-approaches to education and the arts recognizes learning and teaching as political and ethical endeavors.

Whereas much research in this field has been theoretical and conceptual, this special issue is interested in practices and turns attention to what might be produced in arts educational practices. Particularly, conducting research at the intersection of arts and post-approaches in education enables and requires paying attention to and exploring the entangled relationships in-between the different participants in a more-than-human world. Recently, there has been an explosive number of ways of doing qualitative research differently, referring to concepts such as *post-qualitative inquiry* (e.g., Gunnarsson & Bodén, 2021; Le Grange, 2018; St. Pierre, 2019) and/or *performative research* (Arlander, 2018; Bolt, 2016; Haseman, 2006; T. P. Østern et al., 2021). Such research implies an onto-epistemological shift, perceives research-creation as always in-becoming, and embraces the researcher’s bodyminded engagement with/in the research practice. Philosophies and theories have productive roles in

such research, where researchers plug in with them in research practices and research materials. In the process of plugging in, researchers connect theory to research materials and philosophical concepts, reading them through each other and putting them to work (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). When starting the work with this special issue, we recognized a need to address this further in various practices focusing on education and the arts. This is a joint contribution of all articles included in the special issue.

### **A multiplicity of philosophies, theories, and concepts**

A multitude of philosophies, theories, and concepts can fall under the concept of post-approaches as they move beyond anthropocentric, representational world views to account for relationality, performativity, and materiality. Post-approaches and similar concepts have been used within research networks<sup>1</sup> and research literature to point toward the re-thinking of ontological premises (e.g., Kuby, 2017; Tesar, 2021). Other umbrella terms that have been circling are post-disciplinary (Lenz Taguchi, 2012), post-theories (Kuby & Gutshall Rucker, 2019), post-foundational (Kuby, 2016), post-philosophies,<sup>2</sup> relational ontology (Thiele, 2016), and more-than-human ontologies (Kuby et al., 2019).

Within various post-approaches, a multitude of concepts and neologisms are used. However, as stated by Murriss et al. (2022), it is not about what a concept is but rather “how people *use* these concepts in a variety of situated contexts, and with how these concepts *work* within the situated contexts of their material-discursive conditions” (p. xx). The many concepts and neologisms can cause confusion when first encountering these philosophical movements. Due to this somewhat conceptual confusion explicated above, we argue for the importance of being explicit about what theories are put to work. We also stress the importance of being ethically responsible for the theories and concepts with which we work. Indeed, through explicating the theoretical approaches put to work to cut together-apart the research practices and materials, the articles included in this special issue present new insights into various arts educational practices. Accordingly, the articles provide examples of how diffractively reading different theories through each other and research materials indeed becomes productive.

The conceptual complexity within post-approaches also slightly complicates the conceptual frameworks’ translation to other languages, for example, the Scandinavian languages. In Swedish, we use the broad concept of *postperspektiv*, but other concepts are not always as easily translated. Scholars in Scandinavia have made efforts to translate various theories and concepts into Swedish (e.g., Åsberg et al., 2012; Gunnarsson

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the network *Post-approaches to Education* in the Nordic Educational Research Association: <https://neranetwork22.wordpress.com>

<sup>2</sup> The webinar series *Post philosophies and the doing of inquiry* was hosted by Vivianne Bozalek and Candace Kuby in 2020–2021.

& Bodén, 2021; Lenz Taguchi, 2012), Norwegian (e.g., T. P. Østern et al., 2019), and Danish (e.g., Juelskjær, 2019). These translations offer valuable synergy effects due to the similarities in the Scandinavian languages. As researchers based in Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, and Norway), we argue for the importance of developing a language for doing research with post-approaches in Nordic languages. This is done in some articles in the special issue. Still, we write this editorial in English to reach beyond our first languages and communicate with a wider audience. Moreover, we also recognize the challenges of translating theories and concepts, as translations often are performative; they create something new, something different. Developing ways to talk about research with post-approaches in the Nordic region is especially crucial to reach beyond academia and promote research-pedagogy dialogues.

### **Contributions to the special issue**

To our delight, the call for papers for this special issue engaged many scholars. Initially, we received 14 articles, whereof seven were developed and accepted for publication. The seven articles cover various educational contexts and present innovative and creative ways of exploring learning and teaching in, for example, dance, music, and visual art. The articles touch upon transdisciplinary approaches and multi-professional collaboration as well as extend learning and teaching in the arts beyond classrooms and across time in a lifelong perspective.

The article *Becoming musical performance artists – Challenging organisational norms and traditional Municipal Arts School structures* by Cecilia Ferm Almqvist and Linn Hentschel focuses on how traditionally structured municipal arts schools can be challenged by border-crossing arts educational work, exemplified by a musical theatre project. Based on posthuman theories and actor-network theoretical analysis, intra-actions are explored involving adolescents with intellectual disabilities, musical theatre students, artists/pedagogues, and more-than-human and discursive actors. The study shows that individuals, groups of human actors, material-digital and discursive actors intra-acted and created possibilities for the becoming of musical theatre artists. The intra-active processes are illustrated by four chosen entanglements concerning manuscript writing, theatre activities, music making, and performances. When it comes to organizational issues, the project's non-traditional forms of employments, working hours, and flexibility could be viewed as something that make the stated intra-actions, entanglements, and becomings possible.

In *I nærkamp med Notefienden: skam, myndiggjøring og performativ læring* [In close combat with the note enemy: shame, empowerment, and performative learning], Kristin Solli Schøien, Bjørn-Terje Bandlien, and Anna-Lena Østern explore how experiences of shame, vulnerability, and obstacles encountered through experiences with piano pedagogical practice in early childhood still are active in an innovative artistic expressive process. The study is framed within arts educational teacher education, revealing note reading difficulty as a “blind spot” in music educational research. The creative

process is analyzed using Barad's (2007) agential realism, resulting in three diffractions highlighting the agency of *the note enemy* when composing, recording, and performing the music. A metalanguage, using metrics of the lyrics, sounding narratives, and evocative visualizations, is developed. Performance writing makes the article become a collage, where music, video clips, musical scores, and narrative vignettes are linked together in a common metatext by the authors.

In *Strange encounters in times of distancing: Sustaining dialogue through integrating language and dance in primary education*, Kaisa Korpinen and Eeva Anttila explore an embodied pedagogical practice in early language instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors have used performative writing to shape the experiences and reflections of a multi-professional team into a narrative. Based on embodied, enactive, and socio-material approaches, they explore the practice of embodied language learning in messy relations that include bugs, viruses, and other living and non-living beings. Through the focus on the exceptional circumstances, the article highlights that even invisible materiality has an effect on how human beings communicate. The performative narrative that the article presents unpacks the pedagogical practices that made it possible to sustain dialogue in a transformed school reality.

The article *At lære med tilblivelser af grafisk notation i musik som iterativ intra-aktion* [To learn with becomings of graphic notation in music as iterative intra-action] by Laura Toxværd investigates a professional jazz trio as an educational practice in which human and non-human materialities intra-act in the becomings of a graphic notation over 1.5 years. In the analysis, music is not a work of art that defines what is to be learnt, but is understood as iterative intra-action that does something with participants and the world while they learn. With a performative research approach and Barad's (2003, 2007) theory of posthumanist performativity and agential realism, this study aims to be a contribution to the ability to learn and sense in iterative intra-actions together with music's inexhaustible possibilities for becomings.

In "*Can I go into the artwork?*" *Material-relational situations with abstract art*, Heidi Kukkonen investigates museum educational situations with abstract art from a new materialist perspective. How does learning happen when 5–7-year-old children visit an exhibition with a focus on senses and experimentation? Kukkonen studies the encounters as material-relational situations, a concept she forms from von Hantelmann's (2014) and Page's (2018, 2020) writings. "Aesthetic-intuitive order" takes place in the artmaking, and a child and an adult relate differently to the agential "teaching matter". The situations indicate how "making sense" of the world is not only done in verbal and logical ways but also by experimenting with bodies and senses with teaching matter.

The article *Compositionism and digital music composition education* by Jonas Asplund explores the sociomaterial relational activities within digital music composition education via the posthumanist concepts compositionism and assemblage. In a nonlinear and non-reductivist understanding of educational activities, the study engages with actor-network theory and its onto-epistemological manifest as compositionism.



The explorations find impetus from posthumanist thinking and post-qualitative inquiry through the concepts intra-action and becoming-with. Four Year 9 classes in a Swedish compulsory school took part in the composing activity and the research intervention. Sociomaterial transcriptions of the recorded lessons were transformed into assemblage compositions, which bring the hybridity of digital music composition outcomes in learning activities to the fore.

The article *Doing arts-based master's thesis supervision/writing in teacher education: A new materialist approach to supervision* by Sofia Jusslin and Gunilla Eklund explores entangled supervision/thesis writing processes to produce an understanding of arts-based educational master's thesis supervision in teacher education. An underlying rationale is that doing arts-based educational master's theses can be valuable for student teachers' future teaching practices. The study started in a speculative middle in a student-supervisor relationship and understands supervision as doings and becomings through a new materialist approach. The study discusses how different doings in the supervision/thesis writing processes focused on the master's thesis project but extended its boundaries, drawing on the past concerning previous experiences and knowledges, becoming fueled by present mutual interests, and affecting the student teachers' future teaching practices.

With this special issue, we sought to create a forum for research that develops and expands post-approaches to education and the arts. This forum is first and foremost made possible by the contributions by the authors, but also by the generous and constructive peer-reviewers that have been engaged in the double-blind peer-review processes. We are grateful for the reviewers' thinking-together-with the authors in this special issue. Moving forward, this forum keeps moving and living as readers start their diffractive reading of it. As you read the articles, we invite you to think *with* the post-approaches put to work in the arts educational practices explored in them. Our hope is that the content of the special issue will be of interest to researchers working with or being curious about *post-approaches to education and the arts* and that the special issue will be performative on their further co-creation of this research field.

### **The guest editors**

**Sofia Jusslin** (Ed.D.) is University Lecturer and Postdoctoral Researcher in Swedish and Literature Education at Åbo Akademi University, Finland, and Visiting Researcher at The Center for Educational Research and Academic Development in the Arts (CERADA) at University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland. Her research interests include literacy education, academic writing, dance integration, embodied learning, as well as arts-based approaches to teaching literacy, literature, and language. Jusslin currently conducts research within the research projects *Embodied Language Learning through the Arts* (2021–2024) and *Poetry! Performative Perspectives on Poetry Education* (2020–2024).



**Linnea Bodén** (Ph.D.) is Senior Lecturer in Child and Youth Studies at Stockholm University, Sweden. Inspired by posthumanist perspectives and post-qualitative inquiry, Bodén has a specific interest in entangling theoretical explorations and empirical engagements in educational research. Questions concerning ethics are often the focus. As the leader of the research project *Children in research. Investigating preschool children's experiences as participants in randomized control trials* (2019–2022), she currently investigates children's perspectives on research and on being part of a research project. Through a multi-theoretical perspective, the project explores questions on ethics, participation, and engagements.

**Lena O Magnusson** holds a PhD in Research in Arts Education from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden and works as a Researcher and Senior Lecturer in Visual Arts at the University of Gävle, Sweden. In her research, Magnusson has primarily explored visual arts, ethics, children's perspective, and how posthuman perspectives and concepts can be developed and plugged into research with young children in early childhood education. Her current research project, *Digital movements* (2019–2022), involves, among other things, the entanglement of digital technology and arts education, following children's affective relations with literacy, mathematics, and science in the atelier of the Swedish preschool.

**Tone Pernille Østern**, with a Doctor of Arts in Dance from the Theatre Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki, is Professor in Arts Education with a focus on Dance at NTNU Norwegian University of Science and Technology. She is active as Artist/Researcher/Teacher, with a special interest in socially engaged art, norm-critical and norm-creative artistic and educational practices, choreographic processes, performative research, and bodily learning. She is Program Leader of a Master of Education (NTNU) and Editor-in-Chief of *Dance Articulated*. She is partner in the Arts Council Norway commissioned research project *Available artistry? A knowledge project about artists with disabilities* (2021–2023).

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