EDITORIAL

Education in a Posthuman Age

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This Special Issue of Education in the North – Education in a Posthuman Age – comes at a timely moment in the evolution of posthuman thinking in education. The global environmental crisis and the struggles experienced by people around the world to meet basic needs, calls for greater alignment of socio-environmental problems with the theories and practices of education. For those readers who may be unfamiliar with the field of post-humanist thinking, we turn to Karin Murris (2016, p. xi) for an introduction:

> "all earth dwellers are mutually entangled and always becoming, always intra-acting with everything else […]. There is no prior existence of individuals with properties, competencies, a voice, agency, etc. Individuals materialise and come into being through relationships; and so does meaning".

Taking a radical departure from conventional ideas of humans and nature, the post-humanist focus is on relationships of interdependency between all 'earth dwellers' that is, humans, other living species and nonhumans (including materials and machines). In this view, what is commonly referred to as 'nature', cannot be reduced to mere objects of study, or something 'out there', detached from those who study it. In a similar way, the Earth, as the Planet hosting all forms of life and matter is not construed as an inert physical space, but it comes into being as a process of ongoing material and energy transformations.

It is important to underline the use of the infinitive when referring to knowledge and what is to be known in post-human terms. Referring to an extract from Biesta (2017), the post-human stance aligns with a rejection of Plato's conceptions of a 'privileged culture' according to which knowledge is set out as independent of culture and context. Instead, it embraces a position of total immanence whereby all our abilities and capacities to make meaning are embedded in our history (biological, biographical and cultural) and in our language. Such conditions may be problematic – as discussed by Biesta - for it

precludes the practical possibility of communicating with one another in the absence of objective criteria and terms of reference. Arguably, it is a position which could lead to the relativism of 'anything goes'.

However, it is in this rejection of relativism that post-humanist thought seeks to flourish. As argued by Murris (2016), the dualist structure of our everyday, scientific and philosophical discourses has had and still has a profound influence on people's claims to truth. In the dualistic view, language is supposed to be 'describing' a reality, as something which can exist as separate and disembodied from the experience of the speaker. While such use of language has given rise to the celebrated body of scientific knowledge which has supported industrial and economic developments since the times of the Enlightenment, it is also important to recognise that the act of 'naming' exists on the back of a much more complex set of meanings.

Referring to the seminal work of Lakoff and Johnson (1999), 'Philosophy in the flesh', Murris makes an argument for the amplification of meaning stemming from the centrality of the body. Lakoff and Johnson convincingly argued for a continuity between physical experiences and the system of thoughts, actions and values that we come to acquire/elaborate. From this premise, knowledge is not only separated from values and context, but it is fundamentally embodied. Knowledge exists by virtue of the fact that we are ourselves bodies, and through the body we experience both place and time.

On the surface, there doesn't seem much in this formulation of knowledge that is of surprise to educators. It is well known that the ability of children to learn is connected to stages of physical development as the child acquires greater abilities to manipulate objects and to coordinate its movements, thus affording him/her greater sensory exposure to the environment.

What is new in posthumanist thinking however is the rejection of a stage-like approach to learning, and the assumption of a body which 'matures' in stages according to which educators can plan interventions and make predictions as their outcomes. As Murris (2016) continues:

> "... thoughts are not created 'in' mind-space, but are created in the relational and dynamic process of interaction itself, thereby offering a philosophical justification for interactive, dialogical and democratic pedagogies" (p.5).

In this view, any attempt to reduce the use of language to preconceived meanings is always and inevitably a choice aimed at reducing the complexity of body-language experiences. Central to post-humanist thinking is a critique of the 'anthropocentric gaze', understood as a way of looking at the world from a perspective which raises humans above everything else, thus reducing our world to a social world 'consisting only of humans and neglecting all other non-human forces that are at play' (Hultman and Lenz-Taguchi, 2010, p.526). By virtue of this vision, feminist studies and post-colonial theorists have identified and 'anthropocentric gaze' with the patriarchal and colonial views, which have denied legitimacy to the knowledge of those who have had close experiences with the natural world; for

example women and indigenous populations whose livelihoods have depended on the caring and being cared for by the non-human world. So, if the anthropocentric gaze widens the gap between humans and nature, the hierarchy of power which underpins it, widens the gap between knowers and what is to be known; experts and non-experts; oppressor and oppressed.

The call is upon educators to question and trouble the assumptions permeating our social world, in order to re-imagine the purposes of education as an equitable and pluralistic endeavour.

This Special Issue offers a time-bound insight into some of these issues across a variety of settings and contexts. We are very pleased to be able to bring together contributions from wide-ranging global contexts, including: Sweden, Italy, Canada, Iceland and Australia. Drawing on the insights of posthumanist thought, we seek to interrogate the role that educational systems play in the entanglements of local practices and global policies; what opportunities are provided to students to develop talents and creativities which reflect their local experiences and identities? And finally, how is education positioned in relation to the non-human world?

The Special Issue opens with Kathleen Vaughn's reflections on her own practice and the complex nexus of teaching, researching and art-making. In her article titled 'Teaching and Learning with Canadian Art Students in North Iceland: Towards the Posthuman', Vaughn articulates some of the ethical dimensions, tensions and contradictions that arise for her as she attempts to align her practices with the posthuman values she embodies. She surfaces these tensions through a written case study approach, which, in the words of Steedman (1986), 'enters the present into the past' and in doing so supports Vaughn's own emergent reflections and questions that arise as a result of moving 'beyond the human'.

The arts offer a strong thread between Vaughn's article and the second contribution in this Special Issue: 'How to embed performative Theatre of the Oppressed in Higher Education systems'. Through this piece, Alessandra Romano reveals the relational materialist lenses posthumanism offers within the context of taking 'Theatre of the Oppressed' (TO) approach to professional learning. By harnessing posthuman thinking, Romano moves beyond the already rich, embodied space created through TO to embrace temporal, provisional and affective forms of knowing created through such a methodology, with a view to creating a 'revolutionary praxis' which brings implicit and unquestioned beliefs, values and assumptions to the fore. In bringing the value of 'embodied epistemic performative practice methods' (Romano) to the fore in terms of addressing inequalities, Romano calls for a move away from abstract, cognitively-situated and disembodied forms of learning.

In their paper, Jakob Billmayer, Disa Bergnehr and Märtha Pastorek Gripson, 'study how the child is conceptualized' in the new Swedish pre-school curriculum Lpfö 18, in relation to learning and care. In their article titled: 'A Becoming, Humanist Child: An analysis of Learning and Care in the Swedish Curriculum for the Preschool (Lpfö 18), the authors harness the insights of posthumanism in childhood studies to provide the analytical leverage to illuminate how children are being configured within this

highly influential document in the Swedish preschool sector. Through the two phases of their analysis, among other conclusions, they argue that this curricular document is limiting in terms of the way in which it positions children as passive receivers of education, which primarily involves them being 'taught' in a uni-directional fashion.

The final journal article moves beyond the 'here and now' of current policy developments, in order to look forward, tracing an unfolding 'meditative exploration' enacted by William Boyd and Louise Horstmanshof. In their article titled: 'A meditation on what a post-human education might look like: "Touching something beyond myself and my time", the authors invite the readership to partake in poetry and narrative openings. Boyd and Horstmanshof share the questions that arise as they 'map the unfamiliar' and discuss the challenges of a post-human education of the future.

A feature article by Camilla Bech Blomgreen, titled: 'Conducting Research with Pedagogues: A Case Study Conceptualizing the Playground as an Informal Learning Environment' follows. This feature article reports on Bloomgreen's research, which explores the interpretative possibilities of outdoor spaces in a Danish kindergarten, when viewed from a 'spatial' perspective.

The book review section of this issue has been carefully curated to bring perspectives on some of the latest titles stemming from posthumanism, including: Towards a posthuman theory of educational relationality, by Simon Ceder (reviewed by Chris Mackie); Posthumanism and Higher Education: Reimagining Pedagogy, Practice and Research, edited by Carol A. Taylor and Annouchka Bayley (reviewed by Velda McCune); Posthumanism and Literacy Education: Knowing/Becoming/Doing Literacies, edited by Candace R. Kuby, Karen Spector and Jaye Johnson Thiel (reviewed by Beth Cross).

These reviews are neatly complemented by a review of Sustainability for Whom? The Politics of Imagining Environmental Change in Education, by Hanna Sjögren (reviewed by Cathy Francis) which points to the wider quest of whether educational thinking and practice is actually preparing us to live in a world of turmoil and transformation. All of the reviewers have brought their unique insights into these texts to the fore to create a rich and varied review section that gives a real sense of the dynamism and boundary-pushing taking place within education currently as we move more fully into this post-human age.

Kirsten Darling-Mcquistan, Donald Gray and Laura Colucci-Gray (Special issue editors)

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