The figuration of the posthuman child

Therese Lindgren

To cite this article: Therese Lindgren (2019): The figuration of the posthuman child, Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, DOI: 10.1080/01596306.2019.1576589

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2019.1576589

© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Published online: 07 Feb 2019.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 276

View related articles

View Crossmark data
The figuration of the posthuman child

Therese Lindgren

Education and Society: Children, Youth and Society, Malmö University, Malmö, Sweden

ABSTRACT

In a time when the pursuit of quality is high on the Swedish ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) policy agenda, teachers’ responsibilities for evaluating educational practice, based on documentation of individual children’s development and learning, is emphasised. To aid teachers in this work, the Swedish National Agency of Education published a support material promoting ‘pedagogical documentation’ as a tool and a method for documentation and evaluation, framed within posthumanist theory. From the posthumanist point of view offered in the support material, the traditional Western educational ideal is claimed to fall short of comprehending the transdisciplinary nature and relational complexity of learning as well as the interdependency between the child and the world. In this article, both conditions enabling a posthumanist reconfiguration of the preschool child, as well as the ways in which the child is brought into being as ‘posthuman’ through policy, research and practice, is examined.

KEYWORDS

Early childhood education; documentation; ECEC policy; figuration; posthumanism; the material turn

Introduction

A group of teachers gather in front of the projector in a conference room at a preschool located in the suburb of a larger city in the Swedish south. They meet to discuss documentations, mainly consisting of short video sequences and digital photographs, from ongoing educational projects with the children. As guidelines for their discussions and analysis of the documentation, the teachers have chosen two main questions: ‘what are the children doing with the material’ and ‘what is the material doing with the children?’ One of the teachers from the preschool’s toddler classes shows a video clip of five children (aged 1–3 years) drawing with crayons on a projected image, portraying a pair of dinosaurs, on a large paper sheet on the floor. Two of the teachers comment:

Teacher 1: It is a way to communicate with the picture. We had it on the smart board before. They [the children] have been given crayons to interact with the picture. This is another way to interact, where everyone gets to be involved.

Teacher 2: Yes, and it is their way of getting a relation: What is it that I have in front of me? … Can I stand on it? How can I get my body to relate to it [the picture]?
In the teacher’s interpretative comments, the children are described as communicating with an object (the picture) by using crayons as interactive tools of sorts. In other words, the children are figured as using the crayons, not as a way, for example, to communicate their ideas about the picture to other human subjects, but as tools to communicate and interact with the picture. By relating to the picture in various physical ways, the children are furthermore described as creating embodied understandings of the phenomena presented to them. Through the guiding questions chosen by the teachers, the mutual ability to affect, and to be affected, is suggested to be shared by both children and materials.

This introductory excerpt derives from a previous study (Lindgren, 2015) where I followed a group of teachers during their reflective meetings on documentations for about a year. The documentation method used by the teachers is called ‘pedagogical documentation’,¹ and is strongly associated with the so-called Reggio Emilia-inspired philosophical approach to early education.² In the observed teacher’s discussions and interpretations of documentations, overall few examples of communication and interactions between the children, and between the children and the teachers, were given. Instead, the focus was on what was happening between the children and their material surroundings. In the perspective of a Swedish preschool tradition³ emphasizing the importance of interpersonal interaction for the child’s identity and knowledge construction, this may seem strange. Why the focus on children’s relations with materiality in the teachers’ interpretations of documentations? As it later came to my knowledge, the teachers at the studied preschool had been introduced to a ‘posthumanist’ theoretical perspective while working with pedagogical documentation, through their professional development. In other words, the teachers were encouraged to draw on a posthumanist theoretical framework while interpreting documentations of children and educational practice. However, this theoretical reorientation towards posthumanist thought did not appear out of the blue, but was suggested by the Swedish National Agency of Education. Through the new Education Act (SFS, 2010, p. 800) and a revised curriculum for the Swedish preschool (Lpfö 98/10), teachers’ responsibility to evaluate and develop pedagogical practice based on documentation of children’s development and learning is strongly emphasised. To aid teachers in this work, the Swedish National Agency of Education published a support material⁴ (Skolverket, 2012) promoting pedagogical documentation as a method for documenting and evaluating educational practice. Breaking with a hegemonic postmodern (social) constructionist theoretical approach, previously associated with the Swedish adaption of Reggio Emilia educational philosophy and the work with pedagogical documentation, the tool is in the support material placed within the framework of a so-called postconstructionist theory.⁵ However, the term commonly used in both research and literature concerning pedagogical documentation, drawing on the same theoretical concepts and foundations, is ‘posthumanism’ – and therefore, the term used in this article. The initiative for a posthumanist understanding of early education and the preschool child raises questions concerning the meaning and aim of theoretical intervention through research and policy, and of its consequences. The configuration of the child as a certain kind of being, in and across discourses and practices, affects not only the educational practice and the physical reality children are in, but also how children perceive and make themselves known as children in child bodies. Scrutinizing the significance of the child in the adult theoretical reconfigurations of, e.g. education, is therefore of importance.

In this article, I investigate two main interrelated issues. The first concerns the conditions, enabling a posthumanist reconfiguration of the preschool child. The second
involves the ways in which the child is brought into being as ‘posthuman’ through research and policy, using Swedish ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) as an example. Here I employ Castañeda’s (2003) theoretical concept ‘figuration’ as an analytical tool for examining both how a concept (like the posthuman child) is given a certain form through a variety of practices and the particular versions of the world that this figuration actualizes. Accordingly, I do not examine posthumanist theory per se, but how the theory is used within the ECEC field in order to say something about the preschool child. Although set within a Swedish ECEC context, the subject is of international interest since the Swedish example reflects a wider posthumanist theoretical movement in educational research6 and in the international ECEC field.7

**Figuration as an analytical concept**

According to Castañeda (2003), description is akin to a form of ontological politics since ‘it makes a claim to the real’ (p. 142). In other words, while drawing on certain versions of the world based on certain categorizations of ideas and beliefs (discourses), description purports to reflect reality. What is claimed to be real, and the assemblages of discourses constructing this ‘reality’, shape our understanding of what matters and what is deemed important and right. In turn, we are affected and governed by this understanding (Davies, 2016). I understand the constituent power of description as discourse ‘in action’. However, discourses change and so does what is regarded as acceptable in the context of the commonly perceived reality. In educational settings, deliberative interventions can be made through the realization of political reforms in order to alter the order of discourse.8 This is done through, for example, teacher education, skill development initiatives on behalf of governmental authorities, and local municipal investments. The introduction of posthumanist theory, through professional development (e.g. lectures and workshops) at the aforementioned preschool (Lindgren, 2015), is an example of such an initiative. To help me understand how the posthuman child is brought into existence, I draw upon Castañeda’s use of the concept ‘figuration’. Castañeda uses ‘figuration’ as a tool to describe the appearance of the child in and across discourses and as a way to unpack the knowledge, means and practices that are built into the child as figure. Figurations are not fixed or definitive, but demonstrate temporary stabilizations of nodes and interconnections. Here, ‘the child’ is understood as a category of existence (Castañeda, 2003), that is, a particular form of existence made possible through discourses and practices which constitute children as subjects and objects of knowledge and political intervention (Hultqvist & Dahlberg, 2001). Figurations are furthermore understood to be constitutive in the making of knowledge and categories and can therefore be studied in terms of their uses – what particular figures ‘body forth’ as generative force. Castañeda (2003) explains that –

… figuration provides a way of accounting for the means through which the child is brought into being as figure, as well as the bodies and worlds this figure generates through a plurality of forms. (pp. 3–4)

Figuration can, in other words, be used as an analytical tool to both examine how a concept (like the posthuman child) is given a certain form through a variety of practices and the particular versions of the world that this figuration brings into being.
In her work, Castaneda (2001, 2003) examines how children are made as historically and culturally specific figures, through and across a diversity of fields such as developmental science, cognitive neuroscience, and poststructuralist and feminist theories of the subject. In the latter, the child is figured as the adult’s ontological origin, as a not-yet subject and resource in the re-theorization of the subject as oppositional force against the hegemonic order of things. Following Castañeda, Burman (2013) traces the figure of ‘child’ emerging in western culture as a resource for legitimizing ‘the truth’ of psychoanalysis. In this example, the child is brought into being as a personification of subjectivity; the adult’s origin, memories, pastness and true self. By describing the figuration in terms of its relationships to the material and discursive world, the practices within which the figuration occurs, and the power associated with these practices, can be located – not only within specific discursive domains, but in time and space. This process of analysis opens up ways to understand ‘how and why the child as figure has been made a resource for wider cultural projects’ (Castañeda, 2003, p. 2).

In the next section of the article, I offer a brief historical overview of the Swedish context in which the posthuman child occurs, that is, in relation to the development of a Reggio Emilia-inspired approach to early education and the work with pedagogical documentation. In order to account for the means through which the child is brought into being as posthuman, I then examine how certain posthumanist inspired ideas and starting points are used in policy and ECEC research in order to create ‘new’ knowledge about the child. The materials drawn upon in my analysis are the support material (Skolverket, 2012), published by the Swedish Agency of Education, and the main theoretical sources referred to in the same support material.

**On how children became posthuman**

As I have already mentioned, pedagogical documentation functions as a method for working with posthumanist theory in both ECEC research and educational practice. Through the mentioned support material (Skolverket, 2012), the tool has been crucial for the proliferation of posthumanist theory in Swedish preschool practice. The term ‘pedagogical documentation’ was coined by the Swedish professor Gunilla Dahlberg in the mid-80s, but finds its origin in the municipal nurseries and preschools in the province of Reggio Emilia, Italy. In the aftermath of the Second World War, Loris Malaguzzi founded the Reggio Emilia philosophical approach to education based on strong democratic ideals and a belief in the child’s innate curiosity, capacity to create meaning and thirst for knowledge. In the critique of the hegemonic developmental psychological perspective on the child, raised in for example the sociology of childhood and critical pedagogy movements in the 1980s, the Reggio Emilia philosophical approach to early education was recognized in a Swedish context (Dahlberg & Elfström, 2014). In the beginning of the 1990s a collaborative research and development project between a number of preschools, the teacher education and the Reggio Emilia institute in Stockholm, titled Pedagogy in a changing world (‘Pedagogik i en föränderlig omvärld’), was initiated (Elfström, 2013). In the project different theoretical approaches to a Reggio Emilia-inspired pedagogy and the work with pedagogical documentation were explored. Challenging the developmentalist view on the child, associated with a rationalization and economization of childhood, the participants aimed at bridging the gap between dualisms such as body and mind,
feeling and thought, nature and culture, etc. The theoretical work done within the framework of the project has had a significant impact on both the interpretation and adaption of the Reggio Emilia philosophical approach and research concerning pedagogical documentation. Here, Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence’s (1999/2009) internationally influential book Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Postmodern Perspectives, should be mentioned. In this book, the Reggio Emilia-inspired approach to education, and the work with pedagogical documentation, is framed within a social constructionist postmodern theoretical perspective. Through this theoretical lens, childhood is explained as a contextually dependent social construction. The subject is regarded as decentered and pluralistic, and consequently there cannot be a universal nor natural child. The figuration of the child emerging through this theoretical interpretation of the Reggio Emilia philosophical approach, portrays an active, competent and resilient child, equal to the adult in the co-construction of culture and knowledge. By using pedagogical documentation as a visualizing tool, and locus for reflection, the authors claim that not only dominant discourses and conceptions about children can be brought into light through the documentation, but that the tool offers opportunities for teachers to deliberately use theory in the interpretation of documentations.

After the breakthrough of the Reggio Emilia-inspired approach to early education in Sweden, teachers, committees and parliament ministers have made pilgrimage to Reggio Emilia. By its critics, the rising influence of the Reggio Emilia philosophy has been compared to a ‘revival movement’ (Pramling Samuelsson, 2011). The comparison may not be completely unjust, since the metaphor ‘somersault’ is often used to describe the change in thought relating to teacher’s transitions to a Reggio Emilia-inspired philosophical approach to education (Åberg & Lenz Taguchi, 2005). The metaphor portrays a kind of awakening, relating to the approach’s emancipatory educational project. By its advocates, the Reggio Emilia approach is claimed to reach beyond quality measurements, evaluations and school preparation in an attempt to get a hold of life itself and the world as it could be, if we only ‘listened’ and paid attention to what is going on in children’s relation- and meaning-making processes (Rinaldi, 2006). Here, the child figures as the key to the dawn of a more democratic, equal and just world.

The (re)turn of materiality

In the Reggio Emilia philosophy, the physical environment is referred to as the ‘third teacher’, which indicates the importance of materiality for children’s development and learning. Carlina Rinaldi (Malaguzzi’s successor and former Director of the municipal infant-toddler centers and preschools of Reggio Emilia) stresses that physical objects are not only to be regarded as something that children use and handle, but that the objects also respond to children’s actions (Dahlberg & Elfström, 2014). Accordingly, ideas about the agency of materiality can be found within the Reggio Emilia discourse even before the breakthrough of posthumanist theory. In the Swedish ECEC field, the theoretical works of Brian Massumi, Emmanuel Levinas, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida and Karen Barad have inspired the continuous theoretical development of the Reggio Emilia-inspired philosophical approach. In Lenz Taguchi’s ‘Going beyond the theory/practice divide in early childhood education: introducing an intra-active pedagogy’ and the support material (Skolverket, 2012), published by the Swedish National Agency of
Education, pedagogical documentation is presented as method for working with posthumanist theory and the agency of materiality in educational practice. Here, the focus on interpersonal interaction and the constitutive power of language found in the (social) constructionist approach, previously associated with the Swedish adaption of the Reggio Emilia philosophy and the work with pedagogical documentation is challenged. Instead, an understanding of the world is called for, where the force and impact of non-human subjects and material objects on children’s subjectification and knowledge construction are taken into consideration (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, 2012; Skolverket, 2012).

The work with developing methodologies for posthumanist theory within the ECEC field is described as a search for a language that enables researchers, as well as teachers, to work in ways that go beyond a binary divide between theory and practice. That is, a language that acknowledges the ‘intertwined discursive and material reality of pedagogical practices’ (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 3). By re-evaluating our knowledge, Lenz Taguchi (2010; 2012) argues, we can go beyond taken for granted truths about children’s development and learning and challenge dominant binaries associated with a humanist worldview. Such binaries are explained to support problematic thinking that has permeated western philosophy since Plato and experienced a resurgence in the Enlightenment era through the notion of the cogito, the famous Cartesian cut between mind/body, intellect/emotion and nature/culture and the Kantian notion of the free rational subject. Allegedly, this cut locks us into a binary either-or thinking, which greatly reduces our ability to fully understand and describe the relational complexity of the world.

While working with ‘high theory’ (e.g. Foucauldian power productions, feminist post-structural subjectivity theories and the self-critique of the latter) and the critical and feminist pedagogies developed since the late 1980s, Swedish scholars with an growing interest in posthumanist theories,15 aimed to bridge the gap between higher education practices and practices in preschools. It is this attempt ‘to put theory to work in relation to the materiality of pedagogical practices’ (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 17) that prompted the interest for new material feminisms and the work of feminist physicist, Karen Barad.

In yet another effort to re-conceptualize early childhood education, Barad’s theoretical concepts are translated into ECEC research and practice through the design of a so-called intra-active pedagogy.16 The ‘intra-active’ pedagogy is explained as not only taking what is happening between human subjects into consideration, but what is happening between humans and non-humans/objects.17 The emphasis on the importance and agency of matter, ‘how matter matters’ (Barad, 2007), recurs in the aforementioned support material:

How is it possible to understand children’s learning and development by paying attention to the myriad of relationships going on between children, materials and environments in preschool? What emerges is that the children constantly seem to be preoccupied with establishing relationships with their environment, as well with other people, with books, pens, paints, clay, water and paper. Light, sound, cold, heat, rain and sunshine are also involved in learning. Things like leaves, sticks, and sand, do something with the children, making them want to look carefully at, feel and explore. (Skolverket, 2012, p. 27, my translation)

Apparently, there has been a ‘blindness toward the question of how educational practice is affected by materials’ (Sørensen, 2009, p. 2). Reaching beyond the scope of early education, the posthumanist influenced ideas presented so far correspond to what
broadly has been explained as a ‘material turn’ in the humanities and social sciences. The material turn can be viewed as an answer to, and opposition against, what Rorty (1992) termed ‘the linguistic turn’ in the beginning of the twentieth century when language is claimed to have been assigned a superior position in Western philosophy, leaving ‘reality’ to be explicitly known through discursive construction (meaning) in language. Lenz Taguchi (2010) and Hultman (2011) argue at the material turn builds on the linguistic one, but that the material turn challenges the sovereign constitutive power of language by asking what role non-human subjects and materiality play in the co-construction of reality and knowledge. In the context of ECEC the material turn, as already discussed, is expressed as an increased focus on the agency of materiality and the emphasis on the relational complexity between the child and the world.

Against the backdrop of the alleged material turn, not only the superior position of language is being questioned, but also the unique and ontologically superior position of the human mind. This challenges the presumption that humans stand above all other species (as a sort of human chauvinism) and have specific values, rights and privileges based on the fact of being counted as human (Åsberg, 2010; Hultman, 2011; Lenz Taguchi, 2010, 2012). On a global level, Lenz Taguchi (2010; 2012) as well as Australian and American ECEC researchers Taylor, Pacini-Ketchabaw, and Blaise (2012), argue that the vast exploitation of both human and natural resources, resulting in ecological, political and economic crisis, calls for a reconfiguration of the subject. That is, a reconfiguration brought on by the insight about the interdependent and entangled relationships between humans and ‘the more-than-human world’. Translated into ECEC practice, Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010) propose a challenge of the anthropocentric gaze in teachers’ analysis of pedagogical documentations. While trying to overcome the habit of seeing humans/children as a center of attention in interpretations of documentations, teachers are encouraged to challenge the anthropocentric notion of human superiority through so-called horizontal readings of documentations. Examples of such readings are also given in the aforementioned support material (Skolverket, 2012). The concept ‘horizontal’ refers to a ‘flattened’ and non-hierarchical view on children’s relationships with other humans and the ‘more-than-human world’. In the support material (Skolverket, 2012), this view is explained in the way that –

… the human and the social do not have a higher value than what is going on in the relationships between the human and the environment. All relationships are regarded as significant for human existence. (p. 31, my translation)

Drawing on knowledge from areas such as physics, biology and brain research, the interdependent relationship between the subject and the world is further elaborated:

The body is constantly establishing new relationships with the environment: with air particles, heat, cold, rain, snow, smells and the objects used in everyday life – with computers, bicycles, tools and mobile phones. It is sometimes difficult to draw a line between what belongs to the body and what are considered external influences. The subject is dependent on the environment in order to exist. (Skolverket, 2012, p. 26, my translation)

If ‘the subject is dependent on the environment in order to exist’ (Skolverket, 2012), there can be no fully independent or autonomous subject. Inspired by Barad’s theories of the relationally entangled nature of existence, Lenz Taguchi (2010) argues that the
subject, as well as ‘things’, ‘emerge through, and as a part of, their entangled intra-actions with everything else’ (p. 41). Therefore, neither humans nor things pre-exist their inter-actions with the world (Barad, 2007). ‘We are nothing until we are connected to something else, even if it is simply the breathing of oxygen’ (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 41). Building on this line of thought, Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010) describe the child ‘as emergent in a relational field, where non-human forces are equally at play in constituting children’s becomings’ (p. 525). Positioned within a flat ontology, the child figures as the embodiment of flexibility and transformation through its multiple becomings with the world. By acknowledging the interdependent relationship between the child and the world, the subject is to be reinvented beyond humanist thought, allegedly leading to a more sustainable future.

**The child as theoretical resource**

The figuration of the posthuman child emerging in the realization of the material turn in Swedish ECEC research and policy, through, e.g. the aforementioned support material (Skolverket, 2012), figures as a site wherein to overcome the traditional western anthropocentric and dualistic worldview. The child is in the posthumanist inspired ECEC discourse ‘figured as a site of possibility and potential’ (Castañeda, 2003, p. 168), a site wherein which to realize an alternative form of ‘being’. As posthuman figuration the child, therefore, becomes a theoretical resource and space for the re-theorization of the human subject.

The posthumanist movement within Swedish ECEC is, as well as the postmodern social constructionist interpretation of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, portrayed as a ‘counter-discourse’ to humanist and modernist thought. Proponents from both sides join forces in the pursuit of reconceptualising ECEC through challenging the dominance of the developmentalist view on the child. However, there seems to be an inherent tension in the fact that the child is being ‘freed’ from dominant discourses within ECEC, such as developmentalism and its psychological, reductionist and universal understanding of the child, at the same time as the child becomes the site for the theoretical realization of the posthuman. The child is being ‘freed’ and assigned to another reality and existence – a new ontology – at the same time. Castaneda (2001) explains the function of the child as a theoretical resource in the way that the theorist, in order to be able to break ‘theory free to imagine worlds beyond the normative limits of that which is already given’, must occupy ‘an alternative state of existence from that of the subject, must become other-than subject’ and that this ‘other form of existence is the condition of being a child’ (p. 33).

The child embodies a sort of subjective ‘freedom’ and openness based on the simple fact of being new in the world: a freedom that perhaps could be contained if the child is understood and treated on the basis of a perception of reality where binary categorizations have dissolved. The realization of the relational interdependence between the child and the world harbors a hope for an alternative view on reality, contradicting humanist categorization and thought. However, the release from hierarchical categorization, offered within a flat ontology, does not come without a price. If we make no distinction between different types of subjects, organism and matter, basic ideological assumptions such as, e.g. individual rights (based on the association of a specific category of existence) is put out of play. That is the very foundation for critical perspectives on early childhood education such as the Reggio Emilia philosophy. This calls for a critical discussion about the meaning of posthumanist theory in ECEC policy and preschool practice.
Concluding thoughts

As an interdisciplinary field, great opportunities for philosophical experimentation and challenge can be found in ECEC research. In this article, I have studied the emergence of posthumanist theory in early educational research and policy, using Sweden as an example. In doing so, I aimed to analyze when and how the child is brought into being as posthuman in and between these fields and practices (Castaneda, 2001). Here, I described the elaboration of certain theoretical interests within the Swedish ECEC research field and the development of the tool pedagogical documentation, which has come to play a key role in the elaboration of methodological approaches to ECEC research and practice building on posthumanist theory (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Lenz Taguchi, 2010, 2011, 2012). The developmental discourse that dominated the ECEC field in Sweden during the greater part of the twentieth century (and which still dominates the field on a global level) has in recent decades been challenged by a more pluralistic and decentered understanding of children, their development and learning (Hultqvist, 1997). Part of this, what some scholars refer to as a paradigmatic shift, is due to a growing interest in the sociology of childhood and critical pedagogies within the field, which maps onto the figuration of the ‘competent child’ as a social actor in its own right. Both the postmodern social constructionist and posthumanist movements coalesce with this shift, while at the same time portraying developmental psychology as the common theoretical antagonist. In a common battle against the developmentalist view on the child and the rationalization and economization of childhood, both movements aim at overcoming the so-called Cartesian cut between theory/practice, body/mind and nature/culture, etc., albeit in diametrically different ways.

In a traditional Swedish preschool discourse, the child is depicted as a multisensory learner. The young child, whose intellect is not yet seen as separated from bodily experiences, is often portrayed as physically and emotionally involved with the world. The posthumanist understanding of the child responds to this figuration of the preschool child and places it in a philosophical and theoretical context. Pictured as a certain category of existence, harboring an inherent capacity for transformation and multiple potential becomings, the child seems to be regarded as especially suitable for the posthuman condition. In posthumanist inspired ECEC research and policy, the child figures as a site of possibility and potential. That is, the site wherein the human subject is to be reinvented as relationally interdependent –possibly enabling the making of a more sustainable world. The encounter between posthumanist theory and the ECEC field gives rise to several important and interesting questions about the relationship between theory as analytical perspective and as guidance for educational practice. Not least, it calls on teachers as well as researchers to consider how the child is brought into to being as figure in ‘the (adult) making of worlds’ (Castañeda, 2003, p. 1).

Notes

1. Pedagogical documentation is explained as both a process and content, where the content refers to the actual physical documentation while the process aims to make that content function as a basis for interpretation and analysis. The focus of the documentation is outlined as children’s learning strategies and processes in relation to environment and affordances in pedagogical practice (e.g. Skolverket, 2005, 2008, 2012).
2. The Reggio Emilia philosophical approach to education has gained a worldwide recognition and is known for its strong democratic values based on keywords such as ‘exploration’, ‘cooperation’ and ‘solidarity’. The pedagogical approach is rooted in a humanistic attitude to life with a strong belief in the child’s competence and inherent ability to explore and create meaning (together with others) in the world (Dahlberg et al., 1999/2009).


4. This support material was distributed to all preschools in Sweden.

5. What is especially interesting is the fact that a theoretical statement has been made by a governmental authority which can (in a Swedish ECEC context at least) be considered quite unique. Not least in the context of the internationally dominant developmentalist discourse, as well as an increased focus on quality, measurable outcome and comparison through organizations such as the OECD (which has gained a great influence on Swedish ECEC).

6. See, e.g., Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2015; Snaza & Weaver, 2014; Snaza et al., 2014; Sørensen, 2009; Spanos, 1993.

7. See, e.g., the research networks The Common World Research Collective (http://commonworlds.net/) and Decolonising Early Childhood Discourses (https://www.decolonizingchildhood.org/).

8. The totality of discursive practices of an institution (Fairclough, 2010, p. 96).


10. Dahlberg is known for having challenged traditional concepts of childhood (formed by developmental psychology) and knowledge by applying social constructionist, postmodernist and post structural theories in ECEC.

11. E.g., Michel Foucault, Nikolas Rose and Valerie Walkerdine.

12. Rinaldi (2006), the former director of the preschools of Reggio Emilia, regards the need to be listened to and to listen to others as fundamental for the identity of the human being, starting from the moment of the birth.


16. The use of the concept ‘intra-action’ is described as referring to a shift in attention from interpersonal relationships to ‘intra-active’ relationships between humans, non-human subjects and materiality (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, 2012).

17. The work with reframing Barad’s theoretical framework in ECEC has not only contributed to making posthumanist thought a part of the official Swedish ECEC discourse, but has also had a significant influence on the theory development in the field internationally. See, e.g., Bone & Blaise, 2015; Clark, Pacini-Ketchabaw, & Hodgins, 2014; Murris, 2016; Osgood & Giugni, 2015; Rossholt, 2012.

18. On the whole, some scholars argue, far from everyone (e.g. women, racialized, disabled) has ever had this privilege in the light of the history of Western humanism’s justification of colonialism, slavery and objectification (Snaza et al., 2014).

19. ‘An ontology is flat if it makes no distinction between types of things that exist but treats all equally’ (Bogost, 2012, p. 17).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

Therese Lindgren https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5212-3350
References


Åsberg, C. (2010). Vi har aldrig varit människor. [We have never been humans.]. ARENA, 1, 35–37.


