

Education never stands still—it moves, adapts, and transform in response to new realities, while reshaping society in turn. This collection explores some forces defining learning today: digital tools, intercultural dialogue, artistic expression, and the call for ecological responsibility. At its core, education remains a space for negotiation and reinvention.

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Vol. 2

**Cultures,
Practices,
and Change**

Organizers and partners



EDUCATING TO GENERATE NEW ECO-CENTRIC WOR(L)DS. PRECARIOUS SCAFFOLDING AND IMPERCEPTIBLE CRACKS

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To continue inhabiting and sustaining its presence on Earth, humankind needs to develop different words, conceptual frameworks, and concrete actions (henceforth referred to as, “wor(l)ds”), to navigate the complex ecosystem shaped by intricate interactions of multiple and agent elements, human and non-human. This is a crucial undertaking at both the individual and collective levels. Educators, in particular, bear the responsibility of contemplating and shaping educational experiences for potential and possible future Earth societies and subjectivities. In light of these considerations, what strategies might be employed, in the field of education, to rethink and enact sustainable and ecological ways of inhabiting the Earth? What changes might be encouraged to provide the well-being of human and nonhuman life on the planet? How might we shift from ego-centric to eco-centric thinking and acting? The paper will show how theories and research approaches that consider a sociomaterial and a non-anthropocentric dimension, challenge traditional ideas about research, education, and subjectivities, in the field of education. Furthermore, they facilitate the exploration of alternative avenues for educational researchers and professionals.

ecological crisis; education; ecocentrism; social justices.

INTRODUCTION

The ecological crisis and the increasingly evident social injustices spreading globally, which we have been witnessing for some time, accentuate the fact that we are still struggling to accept the everyday implications of living in a more-than-human world (Haraway, 2010). Despite this becoming increasingly evident and despite the fact that a number of studies and research projects have been undertaken with the intention of addressing this awareness, we find ourselves in what Haraway (2010) refers to as a “collective accident”, where

surviving humanism is the problem, in both senses. How can we together inherit these pastpresents; how can I, can we, stay with the trouble without the mad solace of yet another exterminism, another fix, perhaps in the tempting form of another right-to-life discourse, another return to amnesia, another disavowal of multispecies mortality and so vulnerable and irreducible responsibility not only for living and dying, but also for killing and breeding? (Haraway, 2010, 55).

For over two decades, scholars from diverse disciplines have observed a conceptual (Nail, 2021) and material-discursive (Barad, 2003) shift that challenges traditional frameworks. Specifically, it compels us to abandon notions of the world as comprised of ordered, separate substances, static essences, or objects over which humans maintain control. Instead, we inhabit uncertain realities—causal and yet non-deterministic outcomes shaped by ongoing and in motion processes, events, and transformations.

To sustain life on Earth—an extraordinarily complex and intricate ecosystem that results from open-ended intra-actions (Barad, 2007) among heterogeneous elements—different wor(l)ds, modes of research, thought, and action, in both professional and private contexts are not only necessary but urgent. This is particularly compelling for educators, who are called to design learning and educational experiences that can foresee possible future Earth societies and subjectivities. As researchers and practitioners, how can we reconceptualize and enact sustainable and ecological ways of inhabiting the Earth? What changes are necessary to ensure the well-being and prosperity of both human and nonhuman life? How can we address the crucial recognition that we are—and have always been—hybrids of natureculture (Haraway, 2003), bodymind, flashtechonology, sociomaterial and materspirit? Furthermore, how can we translate into actionable concepts the understanding that, like other animals and critters (Haraway, 2010), we are integral components of an eco-system rather than isolated participants in an ego-system? How do we transition from ego-centric to eco-centric ways of thinking and acting?

In this paper, I show how specific theories and research paradigms, notably new materialisms (Cole & Frost, 2010) and sociomaterial approaches such as Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2005; Fenwick & Edwards, 2019), along with the contributions of scholars such as Deleuze and Guattari, Braidotti, and Haraway, can facilitate this shift. These approaches, with their respective scaffolds, while maintaining their differences, encourage a reconfiguration of epistemological and methodological approaches to research, educational experiences, and subjectivities within the field of education. Through unusual wor(l)ds, conceptual tools, methodological attentions, and perspectives, educational subjectivities and practices are reinterpreted and enacted as heterogeneous, dynamic assemblages and associations. These are neither inert and static nor pre-existing; they are not merely a matter of human-to-human relations. Rather, they are the emergent outcomes of intra-actions among myriad human and non-human elements (Barad, 2003), resulting from how they combine and ally.

The contemporary challenge, even in education, is not to imagine an entirely new world but to cultivate novel ways of existing within this one—ways that transform human relationships with themselves, other living beings, and the planet into forms that are not only life-sustaining but also life-enhancing (Plotkin, 2021). Achieving this requires a willingness to “stay with the trouble” (Haraway, 2010) in a non-ideological yet radical manner (Braidotti, 2019), and to foreground the sociomaterial entanglements that constitute educational experiences. This involves learning to

navigate through “imperceptible cracks rather than meaningful cuts” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2017, 65, translation modified) and replacing the comfortable and stagnant notions of “progress” with “precarious and pragmatic scaffolding” (Ibid), that can open possibilities.

1. MAKING ODDKIN: FROM DICHOTOMY TO CONNECTION – PASSING THROUGH CONTEMPORARIES’ AMBIVALENCE.

As scholars and professionals in the field of education, it is urgent that we begin to shift from ego-centric to eco-centric modes of thinking and acting. This is of particular importance for those who remain unresponsive or struggle to acknowledge that we *are living* in a technologically and globally mediated and rapidly changing world (Rosi Braidotti, 2019, 153). In this sense, the Earth is one that has always been “infected” (Haraway, 2013) and “haunted” (Barad, 2010) by a multitude of “Other” beings that co-exist alongside and with humans.

We find ourselves living on Earth in, confused, unclear and troubled times (Haraway, 2019, 13, translation modified). In these times of tremendous convulsive transformations (that are still creating exclusion and marginalization) *Anthropos* are susceptible to the allure of utopian aspirations for a more promising high-tech future, yet simultaneously confronted with the grim prospect of upcoming catastrophes (Braidotti, 2019). This ambivalence, if taken as a dichotomy, is likely to structure not only our thinking, but also the words we use to refer to and create reality, and thus the worlds we inhabit.

Braidotti identifies this ambivalence in the “conflict between the urgency of finding innovative and alternative models of political-ethical responsibility and the immobility and self-interest of neo-conservative ideology” (Braidotti, 2019, 153, translation modified). In such instances, we are likely either to stand idly by, convinced of our powerlessness, or to believe that we have exhausted all possible courses of action without success. This contradiction, whether unintentional or conscious, can also lead scholars and professionals to engage in thought patterns that oscillate between euphoria and paranoia.

We need an unusual and novel way of thinking, speaking, observing, and acting if we wish to begin transforming a reality in which, as Braidotti (2019, 119, translation modified) has observed “the consumerist and socially dominant belief in the new coexists with the total social rejection of radical change and radical transformations”. The question then becomes: how do we transition from this socially dominant belief to radical change and transformation? And why should we undertake this transition?

The answer to the latter question is twofold. Firstly, by moving beyond binary and dichotomized patterns of thought, we might start paying attention to the connections and relationships—what Haraway (2016) calls *Oddkin*—that, as human beings, we have always shared with other human and nonhuman creatures living on this very planet. Secondly, it is imperative to abandon traditional logic, which have historically perpetuated unequal and violent circumstances. By welcoming

different logics, we might initiate transformations that promote the well-being and prosperity of both human and nonhuman life on the Earth we inhabit. Moreover, these transformations would allow us to recognize that we have always been, and continue to be, parts of a larger ecosystem.

In order to begin addressing the question of how we move toward radical transformations—that is to say, how we may move away from a dichotomous way of thinking and acting and instead form alliances and kinship with other species, companion species (Haraway, 2016)—we need to reposition ourselves. This realignment requires: (a) a radical change in the Western scientific paradigms to which we have become so accustomed that we have “naturalized” them, rendering ourselves unable to see them clearly or perceive their effects; (b) re-figuring how we conceptualize and engage with subjectivity. Specifically, we must shift our ways of thinking, training, and creating subjectivities from an ego-centric to an eco-centric perspective.

How, then, can we, as scholars and professionals in the field of education, enact points (a) and (b) to rethink and implement sustainable and ecological ways of inhabiting the Earth, conducting research, and educating?

2. MAKE DIFFERENCE: INVENT, CREATE AND EXPERIMENT UNUSUAL WOR(L)DS

To start addressing these questions, I will also examine the concept of words-worlds – wor(l)ds.

A possible pathway is the one suggested by the theoretical physicist and philosopher Karen Barad (2003) through her theory of *Agential realism*. A fascinating and complex framework in which words and things, discourse and matter, subject and object are not juxtaposed and related due to a dualistic epistemological framework, but rather they are intra-active. Intra-actions are causally constraining nondeterministic enactments through which matter-in-the-process-of-becoming is sedimented out and enfolded in further materializations. Barad (2003, 818) insight that “‘concepts’ (which are actual physical arrangements) and ‘things’ do not have determinate boundaries, properties, or meanings apart from their mutual ‘intra-actions’”. This means that words and worlds/concepts and things, they are not defined by a fixed or pregiven notions but they are “phenomena” and “material-discursive practices” “through which boundaries are constructed” (ibid, 818).

A phenomenon is a dynamic relationality that is locally determinate in its matter and meaning [...] through specific causal intra-actions. Outside of a particular intra-actions “words” and “things” are indeterminate. Hence the notion of materiality and discursivity must be reworked in a way that acknowledges their mutual entailment. (ibid, 820)

Barad’s theory can help us to shift the focus from linguistic concepts to discursive practice (Barad, 2003, 807) and drawing on an agential realist approach help us to understand the relationship between discursive practices and material phenomena. Precisely following Barad’s relational ontology, we can overcome our

representationalist fixation on “words” and “things” and the problematic of their relationality, advocating instead a causal relationship between specific exclusionary practices embodied as specific material configurations of the world (i.e., discursive practice, / (con)figurations rather than “words”) and specific material phenomena (i.e., relations rather than “things”) (ibid, 814).

Barad’s agential realism offers a powerful framework to reimagine the interplay between discourse and materiality, word and worlds, moving beyond dualistic paradigms that have traditionally shaped epistemological and ontological thinking in the educational field.

By focusing on intra-actions rather than interactions, this approach emphasizes the co-constitution of meaning and matter within specific phenomena challenging the fixity of boundaries between concepts and things. Such a perspective not only re-frames our understanding of material-discursive practices but also provides critical insights into how knowledge production, education, and research can be reoriented toward more dynamic, relational, and entangled approaches, making a difference and crafting unusual wor(l)ds.

Through this approach we can also re-think the embodied subjectivities not as “human individual-individualities” or human subjects preexist as such: “‘Humans’ are neither pure cause or pure effect but part of the world in its open-end becoming (ibid, 821)”.

As researchers and professionals in education, we are call contributing to the construction of words-worlds or *wor(l)ds*, with a narrative intent free of definitional ambition, one that does not aim to produce a standard story to represent everyone, generalizing topics and problems. The emphasis lies not simply on recognizing the significance of material factors alongside discursive ones; instead the focus is on the conjoined material-discursive nature of constraints, conditions, and practices (ibid, 823).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exploration of Barad’s agential realism and the broader frameworks of new materialisms and sociomaterial approaches highlights the need to transcend dichotomous thinking and adopt more integrated, dynamic perspectives. By recognizing the intra-active entanglements of matter and meaning, concepts and things, words and worlds, we open pathways for reimagining educational practices, research methodologies, and subjectivities in ways that reflect the complexity and interconnectedness of the world we inhabit. This shift urges us to embrace eco-centric paradigms that foster life-sustaining and life-enhancing practices, challenging entrenched binaries and static notions of existence. It also calls for seeking “an order that the multiplicity really does” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2021, p. 62, translation modified). This is not about inventing or introducing new definitions through the usual “meaningful cuts” (Ibid., 65, translation modified), which

ultimately reinforce linguistic and power hierarchies¹. Instead, it is about beginning to spread and weave together—to “*become with*” and make kinship (Haraway, 2016), to cartograph (Braidotti, 2017)—a nomadic geography of relationships, composed of assemblages of phrases fragments, hypotheses, doubts, songs, exercises, films, open questions, excerpts of definitions, perspectives, dreams, desires, uncertainties, fears, textures, intensities, bacteria, plants, and so on. It is about learning to weave relationships differently, through pragmatic and precarious scaffolding (Deleuze & Guattari, 2021) that can evoke atmospheres, draft a novel way of questioning, inspire reflection, broaden perspectives, and effect change.

This is not about restoring a totality, for example, new humanity, potentially unified under the banner of shared suffering and fear, only to perpetuate, in fact reproduce, the same discriminatory patterns inherited from certain anthropocentric and patriarchal humanism. Such an approach would merely serve to perpetuate the very problem it seeks to address, namely the continued perpetuation of exclusion and discrimination. Instead, it is about learning to become-other, to diversify and disperse, and to affirm existence through the concatenation of singularities.

Ultimately, the task is not only to think and act differently but also to craft “unusual wor(l)”ds that cultivate differences, transformative and relational ways of being within the intricate web of multispecies and material-discursive entanglements that define our subjectivities and our shared reality. As researchers and educators, we are compelled to consider how we can make a positive/affirmative difference in life, in our job. In this regard, Deleuze (1998) suggests that we should invent, create, and experiment. One potential avenue for exploring uncertain and experiential wor(l)ds is to stop to be concerned about finding solutions, and instead start creating problems in which something novel can be created.

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¹ The philosopher and Professor of Philosophy Miguel De Beistegui observed (2019,19) no matter how formal and scientific – is that they introduce structures of power, and turn a phenomenon – an ‘assemblage’ – that is essentially fluid and collective into a fixed order and a sedentary hierarchy.

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