

# Abstract for Symposium at NNRME conference 2023

*Mari Ystanes Fjeldstad, Synnøve Kvile, Runa Hestad Jenssen*

## Diffraction stories: feminist new materialist and posthuman perspectives on doing music education research

What possibilities for doing music education research and education differently might emerge in the intersection of feminist new materialist and posthuman theories and storytelling (Barad 2007; Braidotti 2022; Haraway 2016)? This is the question we, three female PhD students from three different institutions in Norway, pose in this symposium.

Mari Ystanes Fjeldstad is violin teacher in Oslo kulturskole and PhD student at the Norwegian Academy of Music. Her project investigates the mess and matter of violin lessons. Synnøve Kvile is a music educator at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences and is currently doing a PhD study on 8–10-year-old children's everyday relations to music both in- and outside school. Runa Hestad Jenssen is situated at Nord University. In her PhD study 'Voicing dialogues', she explores kaleidoscopic notions of voice through performative autoethnography, and aims to find more polyphonic and porous ways of viewing voice.

Our common theoretical interest and our interest in storytelling has led us into dialogues of how these emerging perspectives might transform us as researchers, teachers and performers within music education. Although our research projects differ, we share embodied experiences of doing music education research that moves beyond the dominant humanist and qualitative paradigm.

As a starting point in our symposium, we share three stories from our three educational contexts - schools of music and performing arts, primary schools, and higher music education and performance studies. From there, we explore with our respondent Sidsel Karlsen how we and the embodied knowledge we offer are becoming with the theories we think with. We also invite the audience to engage in dialogue with us in exploring what feminist new materialist and posthuman theories have to offer in a Nordic music education context.

Through our dialog, we offer the potential for exploring the boundary-making practices of music education and we move the boundaries for how knowledge might be created. This

might create possibilities for different and multiple practices and perspectives in music education. After the symposium, we invite to a continued dialogue aiming to build a network for feminist new materialist and posthuman music education research.

#### [Abstract, Mari Ystanes Fjeldstad](#)

Research related to Norwegian schools of music and performing arts (SMPA) is predominantly focused on adults and words. There are numerous analyses of the curriculum framework, of interviews with leaders and teachers, and of surveys administered to leaders, teachers, and parents. Aiming to move towards music education research that also pays attention to children and matter, and that investigates the entanglements and doings of music education practices, I propose diffractive readings of stories through feminist new materialist and posthuman theories. Diffractive readings are readings attuned to differences; how they emerge and how they matter. In this presentation, I read a story from a violin lesson through agential realism. The story concerns a student struggling to play left hand pizzicato and a teacher demonstrating the technique on the child's violin. The story is not a representation of what happened, nor is it the subject of an analysis. Rather, it is a story to be told and re-told, read and re-read, through theories to generate new and complex insights of the entanglements of the student, the teacher, the violin, the string, the sheet music, and a number of other human and nonhuman agencies.

The research practice of reading stories through feminist new materialist and posthuman theories holds the potential of expanding our understanding of the teaching, learning, and knowing done in music education practices. I argue that rather than conceptualizing to know how to play as the trait of an individual human, we could conceptualize it as knots of knowing-in-being. This is a move decentring the words and adults of SMPA and towards an interest in the entanglements of the children and matter that also take part in these practices.

#### [Abstract, Synnøve Kvile](#)

What does it mean to investigate music through the perspective of Karen Barad's (2007) ethico-onto-epistemology called *agential realism*? Through this presentation, I will discuss how the research methodology of doing classroom observations of a 4<sup>th</sup> grade's ordinary school days connects to how music *becomes* in my research. At an ontological level, I ask how music comes into existence in the classroom and consequently in the research I write and

present. The existence of music relates to the epistemology of how music makes itself intelligible, or how music can be known *as* music. Ethically, by questioning the existence and knowledge of music, I also address how music is entangled in material-discursive practices and what such practices are doing. By discussing how the becoming of music is entangled to the human and non-human materials it emerges through, I raise the issue of responsibility. How are sounds produced, perceived, listened to and responded to? The various qualities of sounds matter, as stated in previous research on children's music-making practices (Campbell 2010, Vestad 2013). By investigating how boundary-making practices are entangled with the becoming of music in a Norwegian primary school classroom, I also address the process of how children become pupils. While terms like 'children' and 'pupil' might imply that there are universal ways of being a child, a posthuman perspective would expect a plurality of childhoods becoming through various intra-actions (Murriss 2016, 2020). The (re)search for music in Norwegian 4<sup>th</sup> grade pupils' ordinary school days showed that the becoming of music is entangled with the becoming of pupils, and I discuss this in relation to western material-discursive practices of teaching and learning (Malone et al 2020).

#### Abstract, Runa Hestad Jenssen

“Theory is not about showing how ‘smart’ you are or showing off ‘look at all this serious theory I have’. It can be playful, and it can be, hold on...FUN!” I am not sure if it was my ‘PhD mind’ going crazy, spending too many hours reading, or desperately seeking the perfect theoretical landscape and structure to use in my PhD where I explore notions of voice, but I found myself talking with theory. Theory was something that stopped me in my tracks. Theory made me listen. To stories, to concepts, to life, surroundings.

When someone would ask me what kind of theories and existing literature I was using in my PhD study, I very often started to tell stories. Stories that connected the theory I was reading into my daily practice. In this way I started to converse with what I was reading, and theory became a part of my research process, allowing me to move, voice, live and breathe with my research. I even start to ask “Can theory be felt?” How can theory help me sense the landscape I am navigating for my work? And what theories are vital for exploring voice – what theories enable me to have a ‘tuned listening’, where I can linger with theory, dive deeper, and make theory my own?

Exploring kaleidoscopic notions of voice, by engaging in a methodology of performative autoethnography, and leaning into theories of performativity, gender, embodiment, and feminist new materialism, enabled me to discover new perspectives of voice. Who is given a voice? Who is not? What does this tell me about what voices we listen to, who we include in vocal pedagogy, in music education – and broadly what does this negotiation or understanding of voice mean for the way we learn, teach, and research voice in music education?

Basically, I deal with the idea of voice in an experienced way. Through this inside-out process of exploring voice, I discovered the voices of Others and I started to critically question the cultures and contexts I experienced.

Reading and analysing my material through feminist new materialism, with Nomadic theory (Braidotti, 2011) as core, I see new entrances for engaging with voices. Embracing embodied knowledge as the foundation, I aim to find a space where a multiplicity of voices can voice, in vocal pedagogy, music education, and academia.

## References

- Barad, K. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Braidotti, R. 2011. *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (Gender and Culture (Paperback)). Columbia University Press.
- Braidotti, R. 2022. *Posthuman Feminism*. Polity Press.
- Campbell, P.S. 2010. *Songs in their Heads: Music and its Meaning in Children's Lives*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Haraway, D. 2016. *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chtulucene*. Duke University Press.
- Malone, K., M. Tesar & S. Arndt. 2020. *Theorising Posthuman Childhood Studies*. Singapore: Springer.
- Murris, K. 2016. *The Posthuman Child: Educational transformation through philosophy with picture books*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Murris, K. 2020. "Posthuman Child and the Diffractive Teacher: Decolonizing the Nature/Culture Binary." In *Research Handbook on Childhoodnature*. Springer

*International Handbooks of Education*, edited by A. Cutter-Mackenzie, K. Malone, E. Barratt Hacking, 31-55. Cham: Springer.

Vestad, I. L. 2013. *Barns bruk av fonogrammer: Om konstituering av musikalsk mening i barnekulturelt perspektiv* [Children's use of phonograms: On the constitution of musical meaning in a child-cultural perspective]. PhD diss., University of Oslo.