

Mapping Posthuman Methodological Innovation in the Study of Learning

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Abstract: With an increasing interest in posthumanist approaches to learning, this workshop seeks to gather methodological innovation based on these approaches. While there has been some exploration on how researchers are using and defining posthumanist methodological approaches and methods the time is right to move towards a deeper examination of particular methodological decisions and innovation. The present workshop will create a space for researchers at different stages of their careers to map posthumanist methodological innovations and how they drive the analysis of complex educational relationships across matter and people.

Workshop organizers' background

The conference organizers have research backgrounds at the intersection of learning sciences, digital cultures, literacy, education, and arts education along with experience across humanist and posthumanist perspectives. *Dr. Anna Keune* is an Assistant Professor of Learning Sciences at the Technical University of Munich and has co-facilitated international workshops related to materials and STEM learning. *Dr. Paulina Ruiz-Cabello* is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Bristol and has facilitated workshops with education stakeholders in Latin America and the UK on learning spaces and digital youth culture using a relational perspective. *Dr. Kylie Pepler* is a Professor of Learning Sciences at the University of California, Irvine. She conducted several NSF-funded workshops on making and materiality of learning and has been a summer workshop faculty for the annual Design-Based Implementation Research Methods workshop. *Dr. Kerry Chappell* is an Associate Professor at University of Exeter and an Adjunct Associate Professor at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences. She is a co-lead for the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Creativities Special Interest Group (SIG). She also leads the Creativity and Emergent Educational Futures Network at UoE which regularly hosts posthuman and new materialist methodology seminars. *Dr. Jennifer Rowsell* is Professor of Literacies and Social Innovation at the University of Bristol. She is a co-convenor of the UKLA Everyday Literacies SIG which runs workshops and seminars around expanding literacy into transdisciplinary perspectives, like posthumanism.

Relationship to similar events conducted in the past

Keune, Pepler, and Rowsell facilitated a pre-conference workshop on the topic of “Posthumanist Perspectives on Learning” at the international conference on Computer Supported Collaborative Learning 2019. Moreover, together with Ruiz-Cabello, all three facilitated the ISLS 2021 pre-conference workshop “Advancing Posthuman Methodological Approaches in the Study of Learning”. Both workshops brought new international members to ISLS. A 2020 special issue of the British Journal of Educational Technology resulted from the discussions held in the workshop in 2019 (Pepler et al., 2020) and a call for papers for a special issue has been published in the Digital Culture and Education Journal on “Advancing posthuman methodologies in the study of teaching and learning” in December 2021. This prior work led to a shared understanding of the need a) to map methodological innovations for studying learning across a range of posthumanist orientations and b) to synthesize the contributions that these efforts can make to studying learning. Similar needs were identified within the BERA Creativities SIG, co-led by Chappell, in a recent one-day seminar considering and contrasting quantitative, qualitative and post-qualitative approaches to researching creativity in education. Chappell joined the trajectory of work as co-editor of the Digital Culture and Education Journal special issue with expertise in methodological and theoretical affordances of posthuman approaches to researching creativity in education, which is featured in the journal of Qualitative Inquiry (Chappell, in 2021). Chappell will connect emergent questions from the BERA Creativities SIG to the ongoing ISLS developments.

Intended audience and number of participants

The intended audience of the workshop are learning sciences and CSCL researchers interested in relational, socio-material, and/or posthumanist perspectives. We seek to involve researchers who have developed methodological

innovations for the study of learning based on posthumanist perspectives and those interested in contributing to a shared map of such innovations. We invite international participants across academic levels and sectors, inclusive of graduate students, university faculty, and educational practitioners. We expect a maximum of 30 and a minimum of five (5) participants.

Duration and format of event including required facilities and equipment

The workshop will be a half day online event. Participants will need digital devices to create visual maps with free collaborative tool. No special facilities are required beyond a conversational space and an online platform.

Description of the event

Theme and goals

The workshop aims to contribute to a mapping of posthumanist methodological innovations for the study of learning and to advance understanding of how these approaches can contribute to studying learning across contexts. Such approaches may include new technological advances for capturing movement of sound, heat cameras, and other machine-readable data points that can be translated across senses, as well as embodied practices which directly engage humans and other-than-humans with senses and materiality. A particular goal of the workshop is to collaboratively create a visual map of existing approaches and how they interlink and advance understanding of learning. Additionally, the proposed workshop will be a continuation and extension of our prior events, a connector between ISLS and BERA researchers working in this area, and a dissemination activity of the Digital Culture and Education Journal special issue.

Theoretical background and relevance to field and conference

Posthumanism proposes an onto-epistemo-ethical approach of social life and, therefore, of learning and knowledge production that decenters the human. The human is seen as a constitutive part of inextricable relational entanglements of human and other-than-human entities, such as objects, bodies and affects, mutually shaping and responding to each other (e.g., Ivinson & Renold, 2013; Thiel, 2015; Wargo, 2017). Thus, posthumanist approaches can present an additional approach to define, capture, and analyze the complexities across matter and people during learning events and processes.

Various streams of posthumanist approaches contribute to the learning sciences, including physics (Barad, 2003), material culture studies (e.g., Ingold, 2012), cultural studies (e.g., Behar, 2016), the arts (e.g., Braidotti, 2013), and literacy studies (e.g., Snaza, 2019). This change in the “research scene” (Sheridan et al., 2020, p.3) of what and who becomes part of the study of learning, has radical implications for theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of learning. Some exploration on how researchers are using and defining posthumanist methods (Ulmer, 2017), identified aspects across posthuman research: situated and partial; material, embodied, and transcorporeal; interconnected, relational, and transversal; processual; and affirmative. Within this prolific evolving research paradigm, methodological innovation becomes about redefining the object of study as human/more-than-human entanglements, the positionality and body of the researcher as performative and entangled as well in data collection, and the emergent nature of data and participants’ agency (St. Pierre, 2011; Mazzei, 2013; Koro-Ljunberg, 2015; deFreitas, 2017).

One example of this is Ehret et al.’s (2016) analysis of teenagers’ making of a digital book trailer in school. Drawing on a posthuman framework (Barad, 2007; Leander & Boldt, 2013; Ingold, 2015), the authors defined the key moments of the trailer production as *meshworks* of body-world-text-activity. The employed *intra*-action analysis becomes a methodological innovation as the authors looked for “felt focal moments” (p. 355) across the data (videos, audios, field notes, artifacts, interviews, digital copies of the trailer), which involve tracing visible affections, body movements, sounds, use of artifacts, to name some, and how they relate to each other to produce ideas and decisions about the book trailer.

The proposed workshop is looking to begin to visually map methodological innovations, such as *meshworks* described above, and to begin to consider their role for the study of learning with relevance to the learning sciences and CSCLE scholarship. While there has been some exploration on how researchers are using and defining posthuman methods (e.g., Ulmer, 2017), we claim the time is right to move towards a deeper examination of particular empirical methodological decisions and researchers’ trajectories of innovation. This work promises to advance understanding of the various posthuman approaches at play, the combination of methods that tends to be a common trait in this paradigm, and how methodology is understood and developed among researchers. The collaborative mapping process facilitated by the workshop will allow the discussion and

identification of limitations across posthuman research, which needs further exploration (Ulmer, 2017; Gerrard et al., 2017).

Outline of planned activities

Asynchronous workshop preparation: reading and cutting through theory that inform posthumanist methods. This will get workshop participants attuned to a shared set of orientations. Provocative questions will encourage participants to think beyond tool innovations and invite participants to include their own theoretical cuts.

Synchronous workshop participation (120 minutes): Mapping posthumanist methodological innovations

- Welcome (10 minutes): Organizers welcome attendees and provide an overview of the workshop goals and activities. Participants introduce themselves.
- Provocations (20 minutes): Organizers and presenter participants (selected prior to workshop) will share a set of examples of posthumanist methodological innovations to serve as provocations for small group discussion.
- Mapping activity (20 minutes): We will break into small groups to react to the provocation by discussing and visually documenting their discussion. We will collect these visualizations on a Miro (or a similar online collaborative tool).
- Shared mapping (30 minutes): In the large group, small groups present their visual maps and we will collectively decide how to combine visualization toward one shared map of posthumanist methodological innovations.
- Small groups (20 minutes): In small groups, participants will talk about their reactions to the joint map and start drafting possible contributions of posthumanist methodological innovations.
- Wrap-up discussion (20 minutes): In the large group, small groups present their reactions toward posthumanist methodological innovations for the study of learning. Collectively, we discuss next steps and challenges in the field. and organizers conclude the workshop by introducing the ongoing Digital Culture and Education Special Issue with an invitation to contribute submissions for peer-review.

Expected outcomes and contributions

The workshop will contribute to a fuller understanding of what posthumanist methodological innovations for the study of learning are, how they relate, and how they contribute to the study of learning. Concretely, the workshop will result in visualizations that map posthumanist methodological innovations and their contributions. The workshop will present an opportunity to continue to advance the network of posthumanist scholars within the ISLS community and across ISLS and BERA.

Participation requirements and solicitation plan

Mirroring the participation of prior events, we will ask interested participants to apply in two capacities: 1) to present and 2) to participate. We expect that the participating group will reflect a range of educational fields, sectors, and levels, including early career and later career scholars. Additionally, we aim to solicit participation across a range of experiences with posthumanist methodological innovations, including scholars who are skeptical about these approaches.

Participant solicitation

We will solicit participants for the workshop through personal social media channels (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) and the ISLS Facebook page. Additionally, we will reach out to our network of scholars and graduate students who are working on post-humanist approaches to learning within and beyond learning sciences, including prior pre-conference workshop participants, those who mentioned in interest in participating, and contributors to the special issue on related topics.

Draft call for participation

We invite leading and emergent scholars in the Learning Sciences, Educational Research, and beyond who are interested in and/or are working on posthumanist methodological innovations in the study of learning. In this workshop, participants will collaboratively and visually map posthumanist methodological innovations and work toward capturing the utility of these approaches to the study of learning. Participants are invited to join to present or to comment. We aim to bring together a diverse international group of scholars whose interests and experiences range across a range of post-humanist contexts, including those skeptical to these perspectives.

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