



Research prACTivisms – a methodology for a-more-than-educational-academic knowledge production

Teresa Elkin Postila & Christine Eriksson

To cite this article: Teresa Elkin Postila & Christine Eriksson (02 Oct 2024): Research prACTivisms – a methodology for a-more-than-educational-academic knowledge production, Gender and Education, DOI: [10.1080/09540253.2024.2409894](https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2024.2409894)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2024.2409894>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 02 Oct 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 48





View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Research prACTivisms – a methodology for a-more-than-educational-academic knowledge production

Teresa Elkin Postila ^a and Christine Eriksson ^b

^aDepartment of Education, Mid Sweden University, Sundsvall and Östersund, Sweden; ^bDepartment of Child and Youth Studies, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

ABSTRACT

This article aims to problematize knowledge production as merely an academic researcher endeavour by investigating how research can invite preschool-aged children to activate knowledge *in situ*. Informed by Isabelle Stengers' theoretical framework, we developed the research methodology of Research prACTivisms through three propositions: activating an *ecology of practices*, engaging a *direct democracy*, and emerging *situation ethics and values* as means for change and transformations in continuous processes and activations. We argue that Research prACTivisms may produce and activate marginalized actors and knowledge in order to produce contemporary and situated political research practices and approaches.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 11 December 2023

Accepted 6 September 2024



KEYWORDS

Ecology of practices; research prACTivisms; preschool children; sustainable society; research practices

Introduction – the politics of knowledge

The philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers (2000; 2018) is critical of the scientific generalizations that propositions knowledge is transferable from one practice or situation to another. Stengers (2010; 2011b; 2015; 2018) calls for research methodologies that establish encounters between different practices as a means to elaborate upon how produced knowledge becomes useful and transformed when located in a specific situation or practice. Stengers (2018) stresses how this prerequisite requires the use of local societal connoisseurs who participate on their own terms with lived experiences, knowledges, and understanding of the questions and matters that are important here-and-now to engage in and with. In a longer perspective, this kind of research methodology, Stengers (2018) continues, actualizes a more sustainable knowledge production, where different practices partake in societal development by using, adapting, and transforming knowledge to fit their specific situation and enable research practices to be more closely connected to matters of concern formulated by social citizens other than researchers.

This article aims to consider knowledge production as not solely an academic/researcher knowledge endeavour by investigating how research can invite preschool

CONTACT Teresa Elkin Postila  teresa.elkinpostila@miun.se  Department of Education, Mid Sweden University, 83125 Östersund, Sweden

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

children to activate knowledge *in situ*. Regarding this line of thinking about knowledge production, we, two Swedish Early Childhood Education (ECE) researchers, have come to ponder the question of how to promote a research methodology which invites our society's youngest citizens – preschool-aged children¹—to partake in the public production of knowledge. This, we argue, demands something other than redoing/repeating/reproducing what has already been done in terms of research methods and methodologies for example within the discipline of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). This *other* way or rethinking of research methods and methodologies must, we argue, invite as well as act and respond to children's thinking, questioning, and enactments. This is an urgent and important matter when considering the production of knowledge of contemporary society; for example, about the ongoing climate emergency, is rarely produced with or by children (Wall 2010) even though children consist of almost a third of the world's population (UNICEF Data n.d).²

Situating the problem

The article draws on the results, experiences, and knowledge of the authors – Teresa Elkin Postila and Christine Eriksson – and their individual doctoral-thesis projects in ECEC situated within a Swedish preschool context at three different preschools carried out between the years 2016 and 2021 (Elkin Postila 2021) and the years 2014 and 2020 (Eriksson 2020). These projects aimed to: together with preschool children 3–5 years old, explore water as a more-than-human actor in various ways in order to explore, develop, and create methods and ways of encouraging preschool children's participation, emotional engagement, and knowledge of environmental issues (Elkin Postila 2021), and, together with children aged 1–3 years, develop a preschool practice that promotes children be present and take place in public spaces by displacing preschool practices from their institutional place into public spaces (Eriksson 2020). Common to these projects (Elkin Postila 2021; Eriksson 2020) is that they have considered the children partaking in the projects as local *connoisseurs*, with knowledge of their surroundings, formulating questions and enacting matters of concerns different from adult research knowledge, formulations, and enacting methods for knowledge production. The concept 'connoisseur' draws on Stengers' (2015; 2018) theorizing, and is elaborated on further on in the article in relation to the child as connoisseurs in research and society, as a means for a more sustainable knowledge production (Elkin Postila 2021; 2022; 2023). Consequently, the two doctoral thesis projects invited young children to partake in public knowledge production, hence making the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN n.d., Article 12) viable in practice and in theory in its statement that all children in society have the right to be part of public conversations and make their voices heard. In short, aligning with Stengers' (2018) call for research to take local connoisseurs into account when producing societal knowledge, we have invited children as right-holders and societal actors to partake in the public production of knowledge with concerns and questions that might differ somewhat from those of adults (cf. Wall 2010; 2017).

To partake in public conversation as a preschool-aged child presupposes three important aspects: firstly, children's opinions about what concerns them must *be listened to*; secondly, children's concerns must be *offered exchange* with other citizens to have a real

effect on society (Lundy 2007; Wall and Robinson 2022); and third, children have the right, in accordance with UNCRC (UN n.d.), to *express themselves* in and through their methods and mediums of choice. We reason that the third aspect is where ECEC and its practices offer viable and sustainable options for public conversation, due to its long tradition of offering non-, pre-, or emergently-verbal children art-based mediums and methods to express themselves (cf. Hickey-Moody, Florence, and Knight 2021; Palmer 2022; Ungerberg 2019). *Medium of choice* is particularly important if the child is non-, pre-, or emergently-verbal, for example, due to age, non-normative abilities, and a first language other than the majority language (Palmer 2022; Wall and Robinson 2022), in relation to the preposition of the child-as-connoisseur.

The aim of the article is therefore to consider how research inviting preschool children to activate knowledge requires a special focus on the conceptual methodology which considers knowledge production as not solely a task of academics and researchers. In the next section we will therefore account for how a feminist posthumanist understanding of knowledge can infuse thoughts on a research methodology that encompass child – researchers – preschool – research – practices to encounter a joint knowledge production.

Feminist posthumanist understanding of knowledge

Braidotti (2019b) has dedicated a book on the subject of posthuman knowledge and outlines how feminist posthumanist theories have focused on the production of knowledge in various ways. In order to meet the contemporary challenges of today's divergent society, Braidotti (2019b) promotes an interdisciplinary or even a *post-disciplinary* (48) way of thinking of the production of knowledge as emergent through collaboration between many human, non-human, or more-than-human actors. Colebrook (2017) suggests that education in society must be more than a discipline and one sole concern – a *more-than-educational science* as Cecilia Åsberg (2021) argues – which entails a broadening, deepening, and widening of the educational discipline as inclusive of more knowledge producers than researchers alone. In this article, we aim to consider educational knowledge production as not solely an academic/researcher knowledge endeavour by investigating how research can invite preschool children to activate knowledge *in situ*. Our focus in the upcoming part is hence on more-than-educational scientific knowledge production, which we present as three permeable and fluid propositions on knowledge production made by feminist posthuman theorists such as Barad (2007), Braidotti (2019a; 2019b), and Colebrook (2017). The three propositions which saturate our more-than-academic-researcher knowledge are the critique of the uneven power relations in the production of knowledge; the understanding of knowledge as a political act which promotes activism; and lastly, the notion that knowledge can never be found in *one* human person's subjectivity or individual but always emerges through a collective 'who'. We will also account for how feminist posthumanist educational researchers have methodologically connected these propositions. Inspired by Ringrose, Warfield, and Zarabadi (2019), we assemble previously published work on educational research methodologies to both confirm and query the feminist posthumanist takes on knowledge production(s). To do so, we will align with Ringrose, Warfield, and Zarabadi(2019) delineation of feminist posthumanist

methodology as infused by posthumanist feminism, feminist new materialisms, and feminist affect theories.

Critique of uneven power relations in contemporary knowledge production

The first feminist posthuman proposition begins in the feminist critique on how societal knowledge is unequally distributed and holds an inequity of power over knowledge. In contemporary societies, knowledge has become established as a capital of information, which is traded through positions, discourses, and practices for the sake of gaining a monopoly on the claims of the most valuable knowledge (Braidotti 2019b). In relation to this, Posthuman thinking can offer new ways of acting through transformative notions of embodied and embedded collective knowledge productions and encounters (Braidotti 2019a; 2019b; 2022). Knowledge production is – per se – always both a product of the world and in the world (Barad 2007; Haraway 2016). Thus, knowledge is both produced by human cultural and discursive practices and by the material devices, situations, and places in which and through which the knowledge production takes place. Furthermore, knowledge is also ethico-onto-epistemological (Barad 2007), where ethics, learning, and becoming cannot be separated, as they are intimately connected – entangled and dependent on the emerging situation. In this line of thinking, the researcher becomes decentred as the main knowledge producer in research (cf. Haraway 1988).

Feminist posthuman methodology critiques how the neoliberal commodification of knowledge in our contemporary society always excludes marginalized groups (Braidotti 2019a; 2019b). Therefore, Braidotti's (2019b) calls for ethical considerations about the production of and power relations within knowledge(s) in our contemporary society. The way society values the production and usage of knowledge highly impacts the organization of a scientific community (Braidotti 2019b).

Rosi Braidotti (2022, 68) urges everyone to '[...] keep some critical distance from the very institutions they have gained the power to enter, occupy, and sometimes even run.'. In relation to this, feminist posthuman researchers within educational disciplines have turned their gaze to the way research includes children in the production of knowledge and tries to resist opportunistic commodification through a methodology of relational and ethical practices (cf. Lenz Taguchi 2010). One way of enacting this *response-able* research methodology (Ivinson and Renold 2016; Renold and Ivinson 2019), in which children are participants in creating knowledge, is to invite artistic methods as a means of enabling children and young people to express their embedded and embodied knowledge on their living conditions (Ivinson and Renold 2022). For example, Renold's (2019) feminist-posthuman pARTicipatory methodology choreographs encounters with young people, educational practitioners, and politicians through teen girls' artistic activations in making skirts out of rulers, as they often are used by teenage boys to lift up the girls' skirts. These encounters between educational practitioners, politicians, teen girl's experiences, and ruler skirts activated and exposed knowledge about how sexual harassment has become a normalized everyday experience for teen girls in a post-industrial semi-rural Welsh town. Another example is Renold and Ringrose (2019) JARring methodology, which enables young people to affect decision-holders by placing messages on how gender affects their lives in jars. These examples display how research enables

teenage girls to partake in the production of knowledge about everyday living through enactments for change. Kayumova, McGuire, and Cardello (2019) also stress the need to bring in the ability to respond – response-ability – in educational practices rather than considering education as a means to empower children by only teaching them the dominant knowledge practices produced by researchers.

Knowledge production as activism

The second feminist humanist proposition we draw attention to is knowledge-production-as-resistance as a political act of knowledge, or activism as an ethical–political concept, co-constructed, empowering, and a necessity in contemporary time (Braidotti 2010). The personal is always political (Haraway 1988).

In relation to the task of education, Ivinson and Renold (2022) stress how the world’s environmental troubles need to begin in a lived experience of the climate emergency rather than informing children of the right answers in classrooms. Furthermore, they argue that the problem is that research and education as a whole claim control over knowledge through theoretical and disconnected educational classrooms (Ivinson and Renold 2022). Through what Ivinson and Renold (2022) call *emplaced activism* (iterative methodology), they co-produce knowledge together with young people living in Wales in their explorations of marginal, exploited, and forgotten post-industrial places. Research thus functions as an *intra-activism* (Renold and Ringrose 2019) which empowers knowledge as potent enactments of living life – it enables marginalized groups to *act* on injustices. Significant for these explorations were that they were conducted with and through young people’s deep experiential, affective, and embodied knowledge in and about the troubles of living in these settings. As a means of communicating their feelings, memories, and troubles, the young people express themselves through and with different artistic materials (Ivinson and Renold 2022). Furthermore, these micro-activist moments send important messages about environmental troubles, inserting a shift from an environmental education that informs young people and turning towards an environmental education that draws attention to young peoples’ emplaced activism through their relational, affective, and embodied knowing, which is deeply connected to their sense of place and holds the potential to actualize other ideas (Ivinson and Renold 2022).

Knowledge production and the collective who

The third and last feminist posthumanist proposition we outline below is the collective who, which recognizes not only the researcher as the knowledge producer but also *other* actors – human and more-than-humans. The feminist posthuman theoretical framework applies to a multi-disciplinary field of knowledge of feminist criticism of science and technology, proven alternative ways of looking at and conducting research (Åsberg and Lykke 2010). The knowledge of education can be elaborated on together to resist power hierarchies and monopolistic knowledge claims (Colebrook 2017). The posthumanist feminist point made here is to pay attention to and enable a collective who (Braidotti 2019a). The posthumanist subject, in this case – the who – can never be found in one separate entity or identity but are always conditioned and emerge through human and non-human relations (Braidotti 2019a; 2019b). Political research activism emerges through

posthumanist elaborations of knowledge production through the collective who in which the more-than-human, humans of all ages, sexes, and of all material – discursive disciplines and practices partake.

On the matter of the collective who, Alyssa D. Niccolini and Ringrose (2019, 7) discuss the need for emergent research methodologies as a way of escaping the binaries of '[...] researchers/researched, theory/practice and theorizing/activism', which often supports and withholds the hierarchical positions and claims of knowledge production. Niccolini and Ringrose's (2019) emergent methodologies align with the post-qualitative inquiry as they attempt to contradict the more traditionally qualitative research predefined steps of an empirical phase where researchers engage in the practice in focus and the analytical phase in which the researcher tries to understand the empirical (cf. St. Pierre 2016). *Emergent methodologies* activate empirical realities through entangling theory rather than through analysing empirical data through the lens of theory. Emergent methods in a feminist posthumanist mode oppose the idea of creating models of research methods a priori, as they are counteractive to creating equal possibilities for experimenting in new modes of knowledge (Niccolini and Ringrose 2019). This asserts a shift into what Barad (2007) denotes as an ethico-onto-epistemology, where the relations between the production of knowledge and the creation of reality are immanently intertwined through what the feminist techno-scientist (FTS) Haraway (1988) calls *mobile positionings*, as they draw attention to how knowledge always emerges through bodily and spatial positions in and within situated positions in our activations of knowledge-reality-productions. Consequently, we are never solely a researcher, layperson, educator, child, woman, etc. (Mol 2021). Our position changes depending on what situations we enter and engage in and with.

In summary – feminist posthuman knowledge production

In the above we have outlined three permeable and fluid propositions on feminist knowledge production by drawing from feminist posthuman theorists like Barad (2007), Braiddotti (2019a; 2019b), Colebrook (2017), and Haraway (1988) as well as by accounting for posthumanist educational researchers concerned with childhood and education such as Ivinson and Renold (2022), Kayumova, McGuire, and Cardello (2019), Niccolini and Ringrose (2019), Renold (2019), Renold and Ringrose (2019), and St. Pierre (2016), and their methodological connections to these propositions. Jointly, these researchers' acknowledgement that (a) methods and research aims emerge in processes with others; (b) the feminist posthuman methodologies attempt to escape binaries of theory *and* practice *and* activism through collaborative encounters with human-nonhuman-more than human actors; and (c) knowledge and reality are entwined and therefore new modes of knowledge can become *activated*. However, none of the above educational research practices have invited our youngest citizens – preschool-aged children – to enter the knowledge production assemblage which, with support from both Haraway (1988) and Stengers (2023), will potentially change both the focus on concerns and the directions of methods that are engaged.

In the upcoming section, we activate the above *three* propositions together with Stengers (2010; 2011a; 2011b; 2015; 2018; 2023) extensive theorizing and empirical examples from our individual doctoral thesis projects (Elkin Postila 2021; Eriksson 2020). We will

unfold how preschool-aged children's situated knowledge and praxes collaborate with other societal actors, knowledges, and praxes in different situations. In doing so we outline how ours enabled us to conceptualize an iterative inclusive methodology, which we will delineate as 'PrACTivisms', and which include young children as connoisseurs.

The methodology of prACTivisms

In relation to society's youngest there is little research which draws from the above-outlined propositions; to which our individual ethico-onto-epistemological doctoral-thesis projects (Elkin Postila 2022; Eriksson 2020) constitute, to our understanding, exceptions. This lack clarifies a special concern regarding what methods and methodologies would grant such democratic encounters and equal discussions in which young children collaborate as connoisseurs to produce knowledge production as not solely an academic/researcher knowledge endeavour in contemporary society. Rather, with reference to Ivinson and Renold (2022), we must start in the direct, felt, informal and lived experiences of social community participation rather than in formalized knowledge that is abstracted from society into a classroom.

The article draws attention to what needs to be methodologically accounted for to make this possible and how could this practically be organized and activated. We will through our research projects, elaborate on the posthuman feminist methodology which intends to invite children to activate *a direct knowledge production* in situations (Eriksson 2019, 2020) as *connoisseurs* of their own practices, environments, and lives, activate knowledge and ways of doing life in multiple ways, together with research practitioners (Elkin Postila 2021; 2022; 2023). Below, we active an iterative methodology – prACTivisms – informed by Stengers' theoretical framework and her call for the development of posthumanist feminist emergent research methodologies, fairness of knowledge productions, and participation in research.³ In the following text we will present three mobile methodological positionings (cf. Haraway 1988) that activate what we will elaborate as *the methodology of prACTivisms: practicing an ecology of practices, activating a direct democracy, and emerging situation ethics and values*. Thus, these methodological positionings are stable and generalizable but mobile, as they need to be adapted and translated to the considered specific situation.

Practicing an ecology of practices

One mobile methodological positioning the importance of inviting preschool children to activate knowledge *in situ* is the reconsideration of practices as emerging *with* and *through* each other. Stengers (2010; 2011b) stress an *ecology of practices to activate what-if encounters* in a particular situation. Stengers (2011a) argues that the need for differentiation as a shared matter of concern. A shared matter of concern, according to Stengers (2011a), does not seek consensus of what is at scope but accumulates differentiated knowledge about what something can be or work as. The encounters are activations of potential outcomes or encounters of *what if?* Hence, it is impossible to, in advance, calculate what activations different encounters will contribute to (Haraway 2016).

Stengers (2011a) conceptualization of an *ecology of practices* marks the relational heterogeneity in which we come to make things intelligible and outlines that what we know or come to know are deeply connected to the cultures, disciplines, methods, thoughts, materials, and discourses we use to come to know something. Thinking with an ecology of practices asserts how the production of knowledge is always situated and rooted in a specific time and place. The practice of knowledge production is therefore never a singular independent practice but always emerges in multiple interconnected coordinations of practice. In this sense, an ecology of practices are assemblage that recognizes divergences and dissensus as a potential for pondering the multiple modes of observing, experiencing, seeing, and understanding a shared matter of concern (Stengers 2023, 5). It infuses the importance of knowledge *as* change and *for* continuous change.

Teresa's (Elkin Postila 2021) and Christine's (Eriksson 2020) different projects have the following in common; both of us installed ourselves as researchers in existing and ongoing preschool practices. Our research methods and practices intervened in preschool children's ways of enacting preschool and preschool practices, and vice versa. This definition of 'practice' draws from the posthuman assumption that practices are activated in relational interactions between people and other actors, regardless of whether they are educational practices such as preschool practices or research practices (Lenz Taguchi 2010). Aligning with Mol (2021), this would emphasize how the definition of what a practice is always is always dependent on the situation in which it becomes used. Each practice has various disciplinary, cultural, and discursive praxes within it, which greatly affect the ways and methods we use to produce knowledge and reality. Place and time can also be understood as central aspects of practices, as we have different temporal practices at different places. As Haraway (2016) and Stengers (2010; 2011b; 2015) tell us, the different practices encountered in our projects activated curiosity, wonder, and made it possible for our different practices and methods to present themselves to each other (Elkin Postila 2021; Eriksson 2020), and make themselves comprehensible to each other (Elkin Postila 2021). For example, in Teresa's (Elkin Postila 2023) project, the preschool children talk about sand with water engineers. Their conversations were about sand but from different perspectives – the children's sandpit-perspective in conversations with the engineers' scientific geological – technological perspective. Our different research processes involved letting ourselves and our thesis projects be part of the various preschools' multiple practices' rhythms, routines, and pulses (Eriksson 2020). In Christine's project, this was for instance exposed when the 1–3-year-old preschool toddlers sang the rock version of *Ba Ba Black Sheep*, adding a 'Yeah!' after every sentence, into an underground garage in a public street. The resonance of the garage enhanced the clarity and brightness of the children's voices. However, after a while, a young man in a studded leather jacket, long hair, and piercings on his ears and nose came to sing along with the children and added a very strong and deep 'Yeah!' The children glared at the man silently, but then suddenly also started singing with bass notes (Eriksson and Sand 2018). There are different singing practice engagements, but there are also resonance practices where more-than-human tones and rhythms affect the singing and create a new public singing contact zones (Eriksson 2024).

In this sense, education becomes more than a task to educate children, as it involves children activating other what-if encounters *with* other practices. Knowledge is activated through encounters of and through different practices and actors and the practices

abilities to respond – education, research, and knowledge production become intimately intertwined. Stengers (2023) stresses the importance of sharing knowledge and that encounters can activate the imagination and new ways of acting and living our contemporary lives. Thinking of an ecology of practices as producing knowledge endorses a research methodology that balances preschool children’s knowledge practices with researcher/academic knowledge production practices through centring the *encounters* of practices. Furthermore, knowledge becomes a way to praxis in the in-situ life rather than a theory *about* pre-schoolers’ lives.

Activating a direct democracy

Stengers (2015; 2018) states that it is high time for research to directly engage in society together with other practices in order to activate knowledge in situations through encounters between practices. Stengers (2015, 129) writes:

And to do that, it would have been necessary not to make the grand break between “those who believe” and “those who know” prevail, and to recognize the healers as those whom it was a matter of learning from and with.

On this account, we live in a world of dissensus, and research has a responsibility to activate differentiation as the potential for multiple knowledge to co-exist. Eriksson (2019; 2024) displaces the research task to *curate a context* for the preschool practice to enable preschool toddlers (1–3 years old) to activate public spaces by displacing their everyday preschool routines, rhythms, and activities. When Christine and 6 toddlers enter the Brunkeberg tunnel, a 261-metre pedestrian and bicycle tunnel in the central of Stockholm, the toddlers start playing the game they love playing at the preschool yard: they ask Christine to chase them by saying ‘*Stin, you can’t catch us!*’ The game makes the children run zigzags between the strolling pensioners and the rushing businessmen with their briefcases. All the people around are moving, stepping aside or stopping to let us pass. A businessman responds to the children’s running by starting to zigzag between the toddlers saying into his phone ‘*Excuse me, there is a little cue here in the tunnel, I will have to call you up!*’ (Eriksson 2024).

Another more *direct democracy* emerges which infuses a direct participation in public spaces which, through their bodily activations, creates different direct re-ACTions. Also, the toddler bodies become re-ACTivated in differentiated ways. Bodily communication offers wordless responses. A direct democracy is created through encounters of differentiation when children spend their time in and with public places. It demands both children and adults to adapt and acknowledge different values of how to use and be in public spaces.

In this article, we want to have another take on what is urgently drawn attention to by society’s marginalized groups – the very youngest in Swedish preschool; 1–3-year-old activating public spaces through direct bodily engagements (Eriksson 2020). The 3–5-year-old’s environmental concerns in relation to water emerged in direct here-and-now moments with engineers (Elkin Postila 2021) and where water became a method for what-if encounters (Elkin Postila 2019). The question regarding who participates in what becomes central. We shift from the child as a co-researcher toward the child as connoisseur (Stengers 2015; 2018). This displaces the child from participating in public

conversations on adult turns, through adults' methods and methodology, following an adult logic, which Wall (2010; 2017) argues will not create a more child-friendly society, towards a child participating on their own turns, with their questions and knowledge about local matters of concern. Consequently, we argue that the child-as-connoisseur in research and other societal engagements may activate more sustainable societies and knowledge production when including knowledge from different practices. Furthermore, we address the need for research(ers) to directly engage in societal matters.

When Stengers (2023) addresses the production of knowledge, she terms it '*making sense in common*' to address how the production of knowledge has an activist ambition that is never objective and generalizable, but always situated and adapted to fit a specific situation. There is no common sense – it *comes to existence* through encounters with different practices activating life in different ways and with different ideas of what sense (i.e. knowledge) is. Thus, rather than thinking of knowledge as superior expert guidance on how to act in life, the production of knowledge must be understood as a collective activating of life through different values, methods, and practices. Knowledge is therefore filled with hesitation – which is not the same as distrust, as Stengers (2023) emphasizes. Rather, it concerns a hesitation as to what common sense actually can be when encountered by different modes of engagement (Stengers 2023, 6). It holds the potential to activate different and multiple modes of living in divergence. In Elkin Postila's (2021) and Eriksson's (2020) different projects, the child is a connoisseur with situated knowledge about place, time, phenomena, engaging, inquiries, questions, and matters of concern. The child, in these two projects, emerges as a political actor, as Haraway (1988) tells us that the personal is political. Hence, the child emerges as a societal activist, an actor who acts here-and-now, in relation to what matters there-and-then – direct democracy, as Eriksson (2024) writes. In relation to a research methodology that aims to invite preschool children to partake in the production of knowledge, we have here outlined how it is important to think of knowledge as a democratic act – where knowledge is activated through direct in-situ enactments in an ecology of practices.

Emerging situation ethics and values

If the production of knowledge is positioned as emerging through encounters of an ecology of practices and promotes ways to act in situations it becomes important to emphasize how the mobile positionings of knowledge connect with values.

In the introduction, we outlined how knowledge has become the most valuable commodity in our society. However, children's sense of knowing and activating knowledge is rarely valued. They are, with few exceptions, exclusively absent in contemporary societal urgent matters (Wall 2010; 2017). One such response to this kind of discussion is to involve children as co-researchers – or rather as connoisseurs, as we would argue. A connoisseur becomes and engages in the production of knowledge through their situated knowledge, questions, and concerns. The concept of connoisseurs draws on Stengers' (2015; 2018) theorizing of the concept and has been elaborated on by Elkin Postila (2021; 2022; 2023) in relation to the child as connoisseurs in research and society, as a means for more sustainable knowledge production.

Haraway (1988) urges the importance of thinking of situated knowledge as a political act. Knowledge is never neutral or generalizable. Whitehead pays attention to the value of

knowledge (from Stengers 2023). Whitehead tells us ‘[...] all value is located in actuality and all actuality is temporal [...]’ (Cobb 2015, 23). In the ecology of practices, divergent values are potentially activated simultaneously (Stengers 2010), where science becomes a collective and divergent practice and process (Stengers 1997). In intervening in each other’s practices, sometimes other and sometimes new relations and activities were produced which were valued and engaged in differently and had different meanings for different individuals (Stengers 2010). Thus, Stengers (2023) accentuates how the production of knowledge must concern the experimentation of speculation rather than producing stable and generic knowledge.

For example, when Christine (Eriksson 2020) and the 1–3-year-old children experimented on how to take place in a long public walking and bicycle tunnel in the central of Stockholm, Christine put up notes on the sliding doors into the tunnel saying ‘Ongoing research – there are children in the tunnel’ to give notice to pedestrians and bikers to slow down and be cautious. At one time a couple of old ladies came up to us and asked Christine ‘How are you researching the children?’ Christine quickly answered that ‘We – the toddlers and I – are researching the tunnel’. The ladies then turned to the toddlers and asked: ‘How are you researching the tunnel?’ Stengers (2011a) accentuates the value of differentiated knowledge and calls for questioning what constitutes *valuable* knowledge and what constitutes *valued* knowledge. Yet, who is to determine what knowledge is valuable and who is to activate valued knowledge?

In Teresa’s (Elkin Postila 2021) project, the preschool children’s method – talking, singing, and listening with water gushing or drizzling through the out-of-sight water infrastructure – reminded the partaking adult water engineers about their method of listening to water before opening manhole covers. The children’s method and knowledge, as connoisseurs, about listening to water were at the same time other and yet similar to the adults. The children’s methods and the adults’ methods made themselves comprehensible to each other as well as reminded each other of the different methods and different disciplines value, acknowledging each other’s situated knowledge (Elkin Postila 2021). Remaining with the speculation on what constitutes valuable and valued methods for activating knowledge is an ethical aspect as it requires the ability to respond and to enable each other to respond. The children enabled the water engineers to respond to their suggestions and vice versa. Accordingly, speculative what-if encounters are essential, as they are situated.

By putting posthuman and feminist entanglements to work to elaborate on how we as adults and scholars can do and think to activates *situation ethics* (Stengers 2010, 2011b). *Situation ethics* draws attention to which values the using and producing of knowledge in specific situations are put at work, and where multiple practices participate (Stengers 2010; 2011b). Moreover, Whitehead (2020) argues that ‘varying itself requires discipline it has to be kept in some relation to some facts of this epoch.’ Hence, ethics emerge in situation; through and with encounters.

Stengers (2018) argues that the production of knowledge about and in education ought not only be performed by scientific research and scholars, but *in relation* between different knowledge producers. Part of what emerges through and in meetings with other practices is also the importance of negotiating what is considered important and urgent to explore and how the urgent common matter of concern should be explored and with which methods. Stengers (2010; 2011b) writes that in valuing both

one's own and others' practices, opportunities are produced for credible meaning-making and reality-making which can be jointly evaluated.

This requires, as Whitehead (2020) tells us, that curiosity and imagining things have the potential to produce change. However, it does not, per se, mean that things will change (Cobb 2015). Science, Whitehead argues, has been developed under the impulse of speculative reason and the desire for explanatory knowledge, and there is a speculative element in all thought and that should be acknowledged and carefully constrained (Cobb 2015, 9). Speculation is central for knowledge and requires humans or non-humans to respond in relation to each other (Stengers 2023). This asserts a more sustainable knowledge production as it does not hierarchize knowledge producers and consumers.

PrACTivisms in conclusion

This paper's aim was to consider knowledge production as not solely an academic/research knowledge endeavour by investigating how research can invite preschool children to activate knowledge *in situ*. This article has drawn from feminist posthuman theories to ask for a methodology in which research operates in the gap between research and society; a gap in which preschool children can also engage in producing societal knowledge. We presented three mobile methodological positionings to elaborate the methodology of PrACTivisms; *practicing* an ecology of practices, *activating* a direct democracy, and *emerging* situation ethics and values.

We have endorsed a research methodology that amplifies the *practicing* of encounters as a production of knowledge. In this sense we promote prACTiving as to complement and strengthen the pARTicipating methods elaborated by Ivinson and Renold (2016) and Renold and Ivinson (2019). To invite children into the production of knowledge does not mean they will participate in research but rather to engage in enactments of knowledge through embodied and embedded practices; i.e. engaging in an *ecology of practices*.

The article has further delineated how knowledge can be activated and activates situations through an ecology of practices. This might invite preschool children to promote change and speculation as knowledge and aligns with Renold (2018) understanding of research activism as a political means for change and transformations in continuous processes and activations. We align with the need for these activist engagements when we outline the methodology of research prACTivisms, but more detailed and explicitly point out *how* differentiated relations can emerge through an ecology of practices, as practices have different ways and methods to produce knowledge and reality. Emplaced activism (Ivinson and Renold 2022) and intra-activism (Renold and Ringrose 2019) empower young people as actors of change, and the methodology of prACTivisms enforces the importance of emphasizing the here-and-now situated ethics of knowledge. Young children value somewhat different methods and different concerns than, for example, researchers or water engineers do. This affects the situation there and then to alert common sense as differentiated through an ecology of practices (cf. Lenz Taguchi and Elkin Postila 2023; Lenz Taguchi and Eriksson 2021). We have signified the importance of knowledge as valuable, of value, and as constructing value through Whitehead's reasoning of situation ethics. This infuses knowledge as enacting a direct democracy – here-and-now – where different values infuse each other with hesitation and new imaginations on what can be and become. PrACTivisms is a form of emergent methodology elaborated by Niccolini

and Ringrose (2019), and it expands the methodology to embrace research knowledge as directly changing situations together with other practices. The emergent methodology aims to escape the binaries of researchers and informants by addressing how methods emerge in situations. However, prACTivisms invite a multiplicity of emerging methods simultaneously as different practices enact and denote different methods to activate knowledge and to be activated by others. In this sense, there is no collective emerging singular Method (with a capital 'M') but multiple everchanging and adaptable methods influencing each other. This methodological position attempts to resist making children participants in research knowledge production and more willingly tries to move towards a post-disciplinary knowledge production (Braidotti 2019b) focusing on encounters for change.

The methodology of prACTivisms thus imposes a-more-than-researcher/academic knowledge on education, as it does not claim knowledge *about* the children by inviting children to participate in research. Instead, it invites children into an ecology of practices where hesitation can produce new modes of knowledge that resonate with speculation and a continuous flowing change of situations. This might loosen the academic grip of an objective and general expert knowledge production (Stengers 2023) and create a collective exploration of the collective who (Braidotti 2019b). Here, research, children and other practices are not understood as a collective *united* we – but rather a collective we that interconnects with and disturbs each other's common knowledge (cf. Stengers 2023). It becomes a political act of knowing something together without the necessity of being in agreement – the shared embodied and embedded experiences offer multiple ways to act and to practice divergent ways of living simultaneously.

In conclusion, prACTivism tries to deconstruct and reconstruct the societal organization of divided disciplines and practices which have difficulties meeting since they work on different and simultaneous scales – disciplines, practices, methods, ages and so forth. In this article, we have elaborated on how feminist posthuman methodology prACTivisms can contribute by delineating how an ecology of practices can rethink both the task of science and education in society and expand knowledge beyond the educational disciplinary boundaries by inviting children to produce knowledge as a means of activating more sustainable knowledge. In doing so we urge you to situate these methodological suggestions into your research practice, matters of concern, and encounters, as well as to consider *Who is to produce knowledge about education? Who is to raise questions on what education can be? and Who is to educate and who is to be educated?* Thus, prACTivisms infuse a more-than-early childhood educational-practice *and* a more-than-academic-research-practice where various practices can speculate on (its owns) aspirations, directions, and purposes through embedded and embodied encounters.

Notes

1. Swedish preschool offers education and care for children between the ages of one and six (Swedish National Agency of Education n.d.).
2. "The Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a 'child' as a person below the age of 18, unless the relevant laws recognize an earlier age of majority" (UN, n.d.). <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/children>.
3. Stengers is deeply inspired by the philosopher Alfred N. Whitehead.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the many connoisseurs of various ages and forms who have contributed to this article with their practices and methods, which force us to think and do other than the conventional. We would also like to take the opportunity to thank the reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Teresa Elkin Postila is a senior lecturer at the Department of Education at Mid Sweden University, Sweden. She holds a PhD in Early Childhood Education and Care. Her research interest involves environmental issues and climate change related to feminist posthumanist and new materialist theory and methodology.

Christine Eriksson is a senior lecturer at the Department of Child and Youth Studies at Stockholm University, Sweden. She has a PhD in Early Childhood Education and Care. Christine's special research interest focuses on children's participation in research practices and in societal public spaces.

ORCID

Teresa Elkin Postila  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5172-7571>

Christine Eriksson  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1390-4431>

References

- Åsberg, C. 2021. *Opponent Speech, Teresa Elkin Postila's Dissertation*. November 12. Stockholm, Sweden: Stockholm University.
- Åsberg, C., and N. Lykke. 2010. "Feminist Technoscience Studies." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 17 (4): 299–305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506810377692>.
- Barad, K. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham and London: Duke university press.
- Braidotti, R. 2010. "On Putting the Active Back into Activism." *New Formations* 68 (68): 42–57. <https://doi.org/10.3898/newf.68.03.2009>.
- Braidotti, R. 2019a. "Knowledge Production in Posthuman Times." <https://mediatedenvironments.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/rosi-braidotti-knowledge-production-in-posthuman-times.pdf> [2023-11-09].
- Braidotti, R. 2019b. *Posthuman Knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Braidotti, R. 2022. *Posthuman Feminism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Cobb, J. B., Jr. 2015. *Whitehead Word Book, a Glossary with Alphabetical Index to Technical Terms in Process and Reality*. Anoka: Process Century Press.
- Colebrook, C. 2017. "What is this Thing Called Education?" *Qualitative Inquiry* 23 (9): 649–655. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417725357>.
- Elkin Postila, T. 2019. "Water as Method: Explorations of Locally Situated Environmental Issues Together with Preschool Children." *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* 35 (3): 222–229. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ae.2019.27>.
- Elkin Postila, T. 2021. ""(O)ändligt vatten. En studie om hur förskolebarn som kännare engageras i samhälleliga miljöfrågor." [(In)Finite Water. A Study of How Preschool Children as Connoisseurs

- Engage in Social Environmental Issues.].” PhD. diss. Stockholm University, Sweden. <https://su.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1598557/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.
- Elkin Postila, T. 2022. “Stories of Water: Preschool Children’s Engagement with Water Purification.” *Cultural Studies of Science Education* 17 (2): 277–299. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11422-021-10075-3>.
- Elkin Postila, T. 2023. “An Ecology of Practices – The Hydrosocial Cycle as a Matter of Concern in Preschool Children’s Explorations.” *Nordisk Barnehageforskning. Nordic Early Childhood Education Research* 20 (4): 25–42.
- Eriksson, C. 2019. “The Art of Displacement – Curating a Preschool Context in a Public Transport System.” *Children’s Geographies* 18 (4): 450–462. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2019.1668913>.
- Eriksson, C. 2020. “A Preschool that Brings Children into Public Spaces: Onto-Epistemological Research Methods of Vocal Strolls, Metaphors, Mappings and Preschool Displacements.” PhD. diss. Stockholm University, Sweden. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1374649/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.
- Eriksson, C. 2024. “Att kuratera en kontext för en förskolepraktik i offentliga rum – en annan direkt demokrati uppstår”. [To Curate Context for a Preschool Practice in Public Spaces – Another Direct Democracy Emerges].” *Nordisk Barnehageforskning. Nordic Early Childhood Education Research* 21 (3): 79–99. <https://doi.org/10.23865/nbf.v21.495>.
- Eriksson, C., and M. Sand. 2018. “Belonging in Transience: Vocal Mapping for a Commuting Preschool Practice.” *Emotion, Space and Society* 29:1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2018.07.002>.
- Haraway, D. 1988. “Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.” *Feminist Studies* 14 (3): 575–599. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>.
- Haraway, D. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.
- Hickey-Moody, A., E. Florence, and L. Knight. 2021. *Childhood, Citizenship, and the Anthropocene: Posthuman Publics and Civics*. London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Iverson, G., and E. Renold. 2016. “Girls, Camera, (In)tra>Action: Mapping Posthuman Possibilities in a Diffractive Analysis of Camera-Girl Assemblages in Research on Gender, Corporeality and Place.” In *Posthuman Research Practices in Education*, edited by C. A. Taylor, and C. Hughes, 168–185. London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Iverson, G., and E. Renold. 2022. “Emplaced Activism: What-if Environmental Education Attuned to Young People’s Entanglements with Post-Industrial Landscapes?” *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* 38 (3–4): 415–430. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ae.2022.41>.
- Kayumova, S., C. J. McGuire, and S. Cardello. 2019. “From Empowerment to Response-Ability: Rethinking Socio-Spatial, Environmental Justice, and Nature-Culture Binaries in the Context of STEM Education.” *Cultural Studies of Science Education* 14 (1): 205–229. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11422-018-9861-5>.
- Lenz Taguchi, H. 2010. *Going beyond the Theory/Practice Divide in Early Childhood Education: Introducing an Intra-Active Pedagogy*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Lenz Taguchi, H., and T. Elkin Postila. 2023. “Multiple Storying of Crisis and Hope: Feminist new Materialism as an Emergent Ethico-Onto-Epistemology of Multiple Messmates as Different Scales.” In *Postfoundational Approaches to Qualitative Inquiry*, edited by L. A. Mazzei, and A. Y. Jackson, 226–242. London and New York: Routledge.
- Lenz Taguchi, H., and C. Eriksson. 2021. “Posthumanism/New Materialism: The Child, Childhood and Education.” In *The SAGE Handbook of Global Childhoods*, edited by N. J. Yelland, L. Peters, N. Fairchild, M. Tesar, and M. S. Pérez, 165–177. London: Sage Publications.
- Lundy, L. 2007. “Voice’ is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.” *British Educational Research Journal* 33 (6): 927–942. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920701657033>.
- Mol, A. 2021. *Eating in Theory*. Durham: Duke University Press. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezp.sub.su.se/lib/sub/reader.action?docID=6499999>.
- Niccolini, A. D., and J. Ringrose. 2019. “Feminist Posthumanism.” In *Sage Research Methods Foundations*, edited by P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, A. Cernat, J.W. Sakshaug, and R.A. Williams. SAGE Research Methods Foundations. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036807161>.

- Palmer, A. 2022. "Lyssnande-berättande med barn i förskolan: Att möta framtidens sociala, etiska och politiska utmaningar ihop med förskolebarn. [Listening-storytelling with children in pre-school. Encountering the social, ethical, and political challenges of the future together with pre-school children.]" *Nordisk Barnehageforskning. Nordic Early Childhood Education Research* 19 (4): 10–28. <https://doi.org/10.23865/nbf.v19.392>.
- Renold, E. J. 2018. "Feel What I Feel': Making da(r)ta with Teen Girls for Creative Activisms on How Sexual Violence Matters." *Journal of Gender Studies* 27 (1): 37–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2017.1296352>.
- Renold, E. 2019. "Ruler-Skirt Risings: Being Crafty with How Gender and Sexuality Education Research-Activisms can Come to Matter." In *Up-lifting Gender & Sexuality Study in Education & Research*, edited by T. Jones, L. Coll, and Y. Taylor, 115–140. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Renold, E., and G. Ivinson. 2019. "Anticipating the More-than: Working with Prehension in Artful Interventions with Young People in a Post-Industrial Community." *Futures* 112:102428. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2019.05.006>.
- Renold, E. J., and J. Ringrose. 2019. "JARring: Making Phematerialist Research Practices Matter." *MAI: Feminism & Visual Culture* 4. <https://maifeminism.com/introducing-phematerialism-feminist-posthuman-and-new-materialist-research-methodologies-in-education/>.
- Ringrose, J., K. Warfield, and S. Zarabadi. 2019. "Introducing Feminist Posthumanism/New Materialism & Educational Research: Response-able Theory-Practice-Methodology." In *Feminist Posthumanisms, New Materialisms and Education*, edited by J. Ringrose, K. Warfield, and S. Zarabadi. Routledge.
- Stengers, I. 1997. *Power and Invention – Situating Science*. Translated by P. Bains. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Stengers, I. 2000. *The Invention of Modern Science*. Translated by D. W. Smith. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Stengers, I. 2010. *Cosmopolitics I*. Translated by R. Bononno. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Stengers, I. 2011a. "Comparison as a Matter of Concern." *Common Knowledge* 17 (1): 48–63. <https://doi.org/10.1215/0961754X-2010-035>.
- Stengers, I. 2011b. *Cosmopolitics II*. Translated by R. Bononno. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Stengers, I. 2015. In *Catastrophic Times. Resisting the Coming Barbarism*. Translated by A. Goffey. Lüneburg: Open Humanities Press.
- Stengers, I. 2018. *Another Science is Possible. A Manifesto for Slow Science*. Translated by S. Muecke. Cambridge and Medford: Polity Press.
- Stengers, I. 2023. *Making Sense in Common. A Reading of Whitehead in Times of Collapse*. Translated by T. Lamarre. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- St. Pierre, E. A. 2016. "Rethinking the Empirical in the Posthuman." In *Posthuman Research Practices in Education*, edited by C. A. Taylor, and C. Hughes, 26–36. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Swedish National Agency of Education. n.d. Preschool and Other Educational Activities. Accessed June 3, 2024. <https://utbildningsguiden.skolverket.se/languages/english-engelska#2>.
- Ungerberg, K. 2019. "Flytande inflytande: affektiva relationer mellan barn och miljö i förskolan. [Fluent Influence: Affective Relations Between Children and the Milieu in Preschool]." PhD. diss. Karlstad University, Sweden. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1297988/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.
- UNICEF data. n.d. How many children are there in the world. Accessed May 13, 2024. <https://data.unicef.org/how-many/how-many-children-under-18-are-in-the-world/>.
- UN. n.d. Children. Accessed May 13, 2024. <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/children>.
- Wall, J. 2010. *Ethics in Light of Childhood*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Wall, J. 2017. *Children's Rights: Today's Global Challenge*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Wall, K., and C. Robinson. 2022. "Look Who's Talking: Eliciting the Voice of Children from Birth to Seven." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 30 (1): 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2022.2026276>.
- Whitehead, A. N. 2020. *The Function of Reason*. Narrator: A.A. Anderson. [audiobook]. Saga Egmont (First published 1929).