

## Slow and affective becoming-with in early childhood education as the initiation of cultivation

Alexandra Nordström, University of Helsinki, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Finland, [alexandra.nordstrom@helsinki.fi](mailto:alexandra.nordstrom@helsinki.fi), <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0606-979X>

Sara Sintonen, University of Turku, Faculty of Education, Finland, [sara.sintonen@utu.fi](mailto:sara.sintonen@utu.fi), <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1157-0116>

### Abstract

In this paper, we explore slow and affective becoming-with in early educational contexts as the initiation of cultivation. A slow approach advocates varied pace and rhythm, diverging from goal-driven approaches. Affective intensities, including feelings, bodies, and sensory elements challenge Western understandings of child and childhood. Our starting point for this reconsideration is the Finnish scholar J.A. Hollo's (1895-1967) educational thinking, emphasizing *Bildung* as a process and the initiation of cultivation. Exploring postqualitative and non-representational methodologies, we focus on the messy and mundane in-between in early childhood education. That is, altering how we perceive place by refocusing our gaze from a physical location to intricate, intertwining becoming-withs. By refocusing our gaze on the slow and affective here and now – by thinking, seeing, and feeling with Hollo – we aim to contribute to ongoing discussions on a post-developmental and post-neoliberal ECEC.

**Keywords:** J.A. Hollo, educational philosophies, postqualitative methodologies, speculative fabulations, slow, affective

## Introduction

In this paper, the authors, two educator-researchers, explore the possibility of slow and affective becoming-with in early educational contexts as the initiation of cultivation. By asking ‘*What if...?*’, following Haraway’s (2016) notion of ‘speculative fabulation’, we aspire to open up novel subjectivities, relationalities and perspectives. Speculative fabulation (Haraway, 2016, p 230) is “a mode of attention, a theory of history, and a practice of worlding”. It involves defamiliarizing and disrupting habitual ways of knowing through storytelling, while remaining compatible with scientific facts (see also Truman, 2018). Speculative fabulation helps imagine radically different futures by attending to the specificities of various situated knowledges and fostering more just futures. The ‘*What if...?*’-questions could therefore be regarded as the obstacle against which dominant discourses and figurations of children and education will be re-explored. Our aim is not to criticize current early childhood education and care (ECEC) pedagogies, practices, and research, but to direct the discussion towards a more holistic thinking of children and education where slow and affective approaches will be desirable, also from a methodological point of view.

We are inspired by Juho August Hollo (1885-1967), the Finnish education thinker, in our attempt to rethink the idea of educational foundations (the initiation of cultivation) of possibilities for the individuals “to become the person they truly are” (Taneli, 2012, p. 241). Although J.A. Hollo was not a posthuman thinker per se, his writings resonate with a slow and affective perspective. Hollo’s educational views have profoundly and in many ways influenced Finnish educational philosophical thinking and discussion (Taneli, 2022, p. 135), although Hollo’s educational thinking has been studied surprisingly little (Taneli, 2012, p. 15). As one explanation, Taneli sees the difficulty of Hollo’s texts: the literary, and philosophical texts do not open up at the first encounter. Hollo’s writing style is explained by his wide interest in literature and languages; in addition to his career as an education scholar, he was a remarkable translator, critic and author himself. In other words, Hollo’s educational conception was structured by the combination of philosophy, language and education (Uljens, 2007, p. 2).

Hollo’s educational thinking can be described with the term *Bildung* (Suoranta, 2000; Taneli, 2012), which Taneli (2012, p. 15) defines at the same time as the framework of initiation of cultivation. According to Hollo’s perception, *Bildung* does not mean to transfer cultural content or to socialize in a culture, but rather it is a process through which every generation has the possibility to grow into their full humane size and lead a good and happy life (Taneli 2012, p. 15) – to become one with the world. Our aim is to shift the focus to a notion of education centered on being and becoming (instead of linear knowledge and skills transmission and measurement of achievements, see Sintonen & Nordström, 2023). This prompts the following questions: What are the current and future possibilities for that? What if we focus on slowness and affectivity in early childhood education? What if we give children time to immerse and focus? What if we allow surprise and the unexpected to happen? There is an urgent need to ask these questions also in connection with methodologies. The weaving of theory and method referred to as onto-epistemology, prompts considerations for research methodologies. This integration also advocates for a close relationship between research and practice. For example, Rautio (2013, p. 395)

suggests that academics should seriously examine activities that children find inherently rewarding and dedicate significant time to.

We will be lining with Taylor's (2017, p. 422) idea of considering *posthuman Bildung* which "recognises the inseparability of knowing and being, the materiality of educative relations", and the urgent need to consider an ecology of ethical relations at the center of educational practice in early childhood education. As Taylor (2017) remarks, such a conceptualization situates *Bildung* not purely as an individual goal but as a process of and becoming-with ecologies and relationships, which also can be slow and affective.

In our thinking of the possibility of slow and affective becoming-with in early educational contexts, we also engage with posthuman philosophies to ponder slow and affective becoming-with as an initiation of cultivation. This is based on a figuration of the posthuman child as "bodymindmatter" (Murriss, 2016, p. 128), in a process of becoming with/in others and with/in the world (Murriss, 2020, p. 173). In Hollo's thinking, affect, imagination, and aesthetics are the key to educational orientation and cultivation aiming for empathy towards life, environment, and growth (Taneli, 2022, p. 139). Cultivation can be understood as an inclusive, ethico-onto-epistemological orientation for becoming-with, as posthumanist inquiry is based on a relational ontology. Following this line of thinking, new methodological perspectives will help us understand the slow and affective desirabilities and become-with.

We strongly believe this era, characterized by neoliberal values and polycrisis, is calling us to reconsider early childhood education and the posthuman child. According to Murriss (2020), the posthuman child is engaged in a continuous process of becoming, intertwined with others and the world around them. This perspective challenges the traditional dichotomy between child and adult, highlighting the complexity and interconnectedness of childhood. Slow and affective becoming-with, the concept that will assist us in our thinking both theoretically and methodologically, emphasizes strong and meaningful connections and deeper awareness, without rushing to cover curriculum content and pushing academic pressure. Embracing a holistic approach to education entails understanding a child's growth as a unique and unhurried unfolding, rather than a linear progression or process.

Further, we are methodologically thinking with visual images in our writing process. In this article, visual images are not used for complementing the text, but for thinking through and with, to create speculative fabulations. These images are created together with visual artist Emilia Erfving, and they are based on Hollo's educational philosophy. As mentioned, engaging with images also means thinking with them, and using them as co-thinkers. From our perspective, they enrich the way in which we make claims. Research has shown that images can add value to already existing methods by bringing new dimensions (e.g., Balmer, Griffiths & Dunn, 2015) and by adding insights into the everyday world (Barbour, 2014). In addition to those, we hope that the images will slow down the reading of the pages by inviting the reader to pause and linger on them, allowing new ideas to develop. Our slow thinking, writing together, and including images into the thinking-writing process, results in a multimodal composition that conveys content and evokes emotions

while also revealing underlying nuances: We consider this as a methodological process in and of itself, or describe the whole case as a dynamic process forming a methodological aspect within the process. The key idea is that if we are willing to consider the relationship between our shared educational and methodological thinking, this kind of dialogue enables us to be 'beyond-method/method-creative'.



*Image 1. What if education is the initiation of cultivation...? (Artist: Emilia Erfving)*

However, we are not attempting to create a new, readymade comprehensive approach, but broaden our perspective within this postqualitative inquiry. We can only facilitate our own examination into revealing a portion of the complexity of things that affect us. In general, posthuman thinking values life, believes in the significance of decentering the human, and views the world from a holistic and interconnected perspective. We are situated and embodied creatures who take responsibility for our own experiences and are open with others. Together we need to seek out the educational possibilities of slow and affective growing (e.g. Ulmer, 2017), and we invite educators to join us. We are motivated by a commitment to early childhood education responsive to a world that is unsustainable, fragmented and vulnerable.

### **Education as the initiation of cultivation**

Our inspiration for this article has been Hollo's perspectives on Finnish education, with a focus on

early childhood education. Hollo's thinking is both extensive and multidimensional; Hollo's educational philosophy might be used in modern early childhood education to enhance thinking and promote comprehensiveness. Hollo, a pioneer and significant individual in Finnish education research, has been characterized as a "great humanist" (e.g., Pautola, 1955, p. 5). Hollo was ahead of his time in emphasizing the ability to see educationally (Suoranta, 1996, p. 54). Besides that, according to researchers (Suoranta, 1996; Taneli, 2012), Hollo saw education as a connection of "natural force" for growth that requires the ability to see through educational obstacles. As *Bildung* has always been a flexible concept, a perspective to continuing revision in response to changing social and educational contexts (Taylor, 2017, p. 422), also Hollo has been flexible in his educational thinking. Although he was oriented to think of education as a way to become a human, he was also seeing the wider contexts and connections of human educational life, such as imagination and caring.

Hollo's perception of education was organic; the conception was structured by the combination of philosophy, language, and education (Uljens, 2007, p. 2). Taneli (2012, p. 38) characterizes the educational ideal influencing in the background as (neo)humanistic. According to Uljens (ibid.), Hollo saw the imagination of the language as an absolute, culturally given element and the visualization as the development of one's own thinking.

Hollo writes about the natural, yet inexplicable force of education, which on the other hand is also evidently present (Hollo, 1927, p. 18). He continues by stating that since growth is a force, it is educators' task to make room for it and remove any obstacles in its path. Hollo emphasizes that growth occurs naturally and requires the arrangement of increasingly favorable conditions (Hollo, 1927, p. 18). Taneli (2022, p. 135) states that Hollo's view is very Kantian, as, like Kant, he believes that a person can become human only through education. Hollo's view is in contrast to empirical education sciences, as he was critical towards positivism and experimental studies (Taneli, 2022, p. 135). Hollo was closer to philosophy than psychology, although he also considered psychology an important "aid", and at the same time emphasized that education cannot be reduced.

For Hollo, the areas of education as cultivation are as follows: intellectual, ethical, aesthetic, religious, and practical education. Hollo emphasizes that none of the areas of education should be dominant, but they should be in harmonious balance. Together, they can best promote students' diverse learning, growth, ethically sustainable good, and balanced life. (Hollo, 1927).

Hollo viewed imagination as the factor that binds together different areas of education, a kind of mortar that seamlessly connects the components. According to him, imagination, or fantasizing, is an intellectual activity. In Hollo's opinion, imagination is not mere daydreaming or forming images, but it is an intellectual activity based on emotions, through which many aspects of education can best emerge. (Taneli, 2022, p. 136-137). Taneli (2022, p. 142) emphasizes, echoing Hollo, how educational activities should always involve educational, caring content, as well as an element concerning the development of imagination and ethics.

Educational perception is inextricably linked to what the child understands and experiences during

childhood. According to Hollo's views, childhood has its own intrinsic value; it is not merely a preparation for the next stage of life. Western notions of childhood tend to view children as developmentally inferior to adults, perpetuating a binary logic that contrasts children with adults, where childhood is described as a stage-delineated process aimed at preparing children to become the adults they are expected to be (Bohlmann & Hickey-Moody, 2018; see also Lee, 2001). This perspective inherently positions children as incomplete, emphasizing their journey toward full adulthood. However, childhood is not merely a biological stage but also a social, cultural, and conceptual construct. Hollo wonders how "the lives of children and young people are desired to be made miniature replicas of adult life" (Hollo, 1985, p. 49). According to Hollo, the childlike mind can persist throughout all stages of life (Hollo 1985, p. 50). In this article, we consider cultivation as a shared, slow journey (e.g., Pink, 2008).

### **Speculating with a postqualitative and non-representational approach**

Inspired by Taylor's (2020) propositions concerning the reconceptualization of knowledge and Albin-Clark's (2023) speculating with posthuman praxis, this paper presents a postqualitative philosophical reflection rather than empirical work. There has been a growing demand for a wider array of methodological approaches in research, with scholars arguing that focusing on the mundane, unremarkable, and messy everyday lives is pivotal in the humanities and social sciences, especially in ECEC (Nordström, 2022; Hall & Holmes, 2020; Pahl & Rowsell, 2020; Rautio, 2013). Further, according to Rautio (2013), within certain research methodologies, there exists a risk of othering children, relegating them to a position of vulnerability or insignificance. This underscores the importance of critically assessing our approaches to ensure that children are not marginalized or overlooked in the research process. In this paper, we think with Haraway's (2016) notion of 'speculative fabulation', in approaching education as the initiation of cultivation. We suggest one way of doing this is by asking 'What if...' -questions in research processes. Hollo's view of imagination as an intellectual activity aligns with Haraway's speculative fabulation, highlighting the importance of ethical and caring dimensions of education. In this paper, we make our own research process visible by the use of visual images as a form of speculative fabulation.

Postqualitative methodologies are part of a paradigm shift beyond qualitative research, emphasizing dynamism, process-oriented inquiry, and situated knowledges beyond traditional notions of place (Haraway, 1988). Haraway's concept of 'situated knowledges' further highlights the subjective and situated nature of perception (Haraway, 1988). Researchers are urged to acknowledge their embodied, situated subjectivity and the contingent nature of their knowledge claims, thereby embracing the fluidity and contestability of knowledge production in contemporary contexts. Postqualitative methodologies may also leave researchers with more questions than answers (Flint et al., 2023; Gunnarsson & Bodén, 2021).

Emerging as contemporary forms of inquiry, postqualitative methodologies challenge the rigidity of fixed methods and linear approaches and embrace fluidity in the research process (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015; Koro-Ljungberg, 2016; St. Pierre, 2011). A postqualitative approach transcends conventional boundaries by acknowledging the entanglements between epistemology

and ontology, drawing upon relational and flat ontologies integrating theory and methodology within an onto-epistemological framework (Murriss, 2016; St. Pierre, 2021). Here, the inseparability of knowing and being is emphasized (Barad, 2007; Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010).

Central to postqualitative inquiry is the recognition of agentive entities and relational fields in a state of constant change and emergence (Wohlwend & Thiel, 2019). Within relational ontology, phenomena and objects do not exist in isolation but come into being through intra-action with other entities (Barad, 2003; Lin & Li, 2021). This ontology challenges the primacy of identity and instead emphasizes the in-between, relations, the becomings in intra-action (Murriss, 2021). In this ontological paradigm, phenomena take precedence over objects or things, underscoring the relational nature of reality (Barad, 2003).

A distinctive feature of postqualitative inquiry is its non-representational, onto-epistemological approach, which reimagines the relationships between humans and more-than-humans in various contexts (St. Pierre, 2011), such as in ECEC activities. Researchers are encouraged to explore the intricate details of phenomena and their entanglements (Haraway, 1988). This methodological approach enables novel ways of producing knowledge and facilitates a re-evaluation of educational practices and research methodologies. The non-representational methodological approach draws our attention to seemingly unremarkable moments which unfold in the everyday lives of children. In this paper, we draw on slow and affective becoming-with, focusing on the messy and mundane in-betweens in early childhood education, creating a meshwork of interwoven lines. That is, altering how we perceive place by refocusing our gaze from a physical location to intricate, intertwining becoming-withs.

A cautious critique of participatory methods suggests that children may not necessarily require adults to furnish them with specific equipment or designate specialized spaces and time for their participation (Rautio, 2013). Rather, a fundamental need emerges for adults to earnestly acknowledge the inherent value of the objects and activities encountered by children within their natural environments, whether they be toys or even seemingly mundane elements like stones (see e.g., Rautio, 2013), as well as to listen to and focus on the children in the here and now (see e.g., Lafton & Hauge, 2023). This resonates with Hollo's perception of education and the intrinsic value of childhood.

Embracing and engaging in messy methodologies, as advocated by various scholars (e.g., Fenwick et al., 2015; Kuby, 2014; Pink, 2015; Rautio, 2013), invites us to delve into and join the unpredictable and spontaneous actions of children. For instance, by following children as they engage in activities such as writing, drawing, speaking, jumping, and shouting without predetermined objectives, we create space for genuine exploration and participation (Rautio, 2013). This inclusive approach encourages researchers to actively immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of children's experiences and expressions. And, as Rautio (2013, p. 403) suggested, to *join in* these actions.



*Image 2. What if education is the initiation of cultivation...? (Artist: Emilia Erfving)*

### **The urgency of slowing down in ECEC**

From a historical viewpoint, linear time represents a predetermined and normative approach to our perception and comprehension of time. In Western society, time unfolds in a singular, unidirectional manner: forward. Reflecting on the past merely serves to illustrate the progression forward, our acquired knowledge, and the changes that have ensued. Sociologist Rosa (2024) introduces the concept pair of social acceleration and deceleration to discuss the accelerated temporal processes characteristic of late modern society. Rosa's critique of modernity is based on a series of studies examining the altered temporal frameworks within it.

In early childhood education, it's common for adults and children to constantly transition from one activity or place to another, often driven by planned activities, spatial arrangements, or efforts to avoid simultaneous events between groups (such as taking turns during outdoor play). This constant movement and preparation for the next thing can create a sense of haste and urgency. Hence, time is of significance in early childhood education (cf. da Rosa Ribeiro et al., 2023). In response to the increasing pressure to make use of the time in the "right" and "productive" way, Clark (2022) amongst others (e.g., Ulmer, 2017) advocates slow pedagogies and slow knowledge, also urging us to slow down in ECEC. Further, Clark (2022) highlights the necessity for alternative approaches in ECEC to counteract the prevailing emphasis on testing and measuring. She underscores creating an environment conducive to the "unhurried child" and the importance of less rushed educators as well as slowing down also in teacher training and research. Slowing down might cultivate an environment that nurtures the imagination and care emphasized by Hollo. Furthermore, this discussion also involves decentering chronological time and disrupting linear



framings of time, as a child's growth has little to do with our Western conception of time (e.g., Sintonen & Nordström, 2023). A slow approach also addresses the broader implications of neoliberalism in ECEC, challenging the focus on efficiency and standardization in favor of more holistic and inclusive educational practices. Further, space, time, and materiality (both matter and meaning) cannot be separated but are mutually constitutive, as Barad (2003, 2007) describes. Temporality thus does not need to be chronological and evenly distributed but can be fleeting and indeterminate. Temporality is not static but dynamic and constantly in motion, and can therefore become agentic, meaning it can set something in motion or cause something to happen (Barad, 2003, 2007).

For example, Lafton and Hauge (2023) have examined how early childhood pedagogues can activate their ability to listen to and focus on the children present here and now, and to what extent a concept such as "pedagogy of the moment" has a place in today's ECEC. They write:

*"In a rhythmic time, where the various expressions are equivalent, the bodily expressions of children and adults will have equal significance with the linguistic explanations of what is happening. However, it can be challenging for the educator to attune to the rhythmic time."* (Lafton & Hauge, 2023, our translation).

In conclusion, the intertwined relationship between space, time, and materiality, as elucidated by Barad, highlights the dynamic nature of temporality, emphasizing its potential for agency and its departure from traditional chronological constructs, a notion echoed in Lafton and Hauge's (2023) exploration of the educator's challenge to synchronize with the rhythmic time of children in early childhood education settings. Hollo underlined that growth takes time and cannot be hurried or forced. Hollo was also ahead of many others in his thinking by emphasizing the connection between human and nature (Taneli, 2022, p. 137, 141).

### **Attuning to affective intensities and rhythms in ECEC**

Affective intensities, encompassing feelings, sensations, and bodily experiences, play a central role in slow and affective pedagogies (see e.g., Albuquerque & Pischetola, 2022; Kuby & Rowsell, 2021; Nordström, 2023). Following Vannini's (2015, pp 8-9) description of affect as:

*"a pull and a push, an intensity of feeling, a sensation, a passion, an atmosphere, an urge, a mood, a drive—all of the above and none of the above in particular. Affect is embodied but not coterminous with the body."*

We attend to affect as a notion that shares conceptual space with socially and culturally situated emotions, feelings, atmospheres, and moods (Kuby, 2014; Leander & Ehret, 2019).

Rather than focusing solely on cognitive development or academic achievement, affective pedagogies emphasize the importance of emotional well-being and relational connections as a part of education. Affective intensities transcend categories, weaving connections between

entities and ideas, revealing unexpected and surprising combinations. These intensities are perceived as dynamic actions, actively shaped in relation with others, embracing the unpredictable (Kuby, 2014). Materialized through encounters among bodies, this force facilitates engagement with various entities, objects, or networks, enabling participation in semiotic, material, and social dynamics (Albuquerque & Pischetola, 2022; Hickey-Moody, 2013).

Affective pedagogies foreground the role of emotions and affective experiences in learning. Drawing on Deleuze's theories of affect, affective pedagogies view learning as a relational practice that occurs within and outside traditional educational settings. Hickey-Moody (2009) delves into Deleuze's and Deleuze and Guattari's theories of affect, suggesting that affect's materiality can be viewed as a posthuman pedagogy. *Affectus*, defined as the materiality of change, occurs through "affecting bodies" and is considered a relational practice through which knowledge is produced (Hickey-Moody, 2009). The study of affect recognizes and addresses the interconnectedness between humans and more-than-humans. Presenting the pedagogies within this affective realm poses challenges for researchers, as they encapsulate shared experiences that unfold in moments. While these experiences may not be universally felt in the same manner, they do offer a slowing down and, significantly, involve human and more-than-human entanglements (Kuby & Rowsell, 2021; Nordström, 2023). Highlighting the interconnectedness, tangible presence, and dynamic expression of affects, underscores the capacity of bodies to engage, unite, acquire knowledge, and undergo change through encounters (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

This understanding challenges conventional notions of pedagogy by emphasizing affect's posthuman nature, grounded in relations and responses to the world. *Affectus* is depicted as a rhythmic trace of the world incorporated into body-becoming, bridging corporeal forms with more-than-human forces. Creative mediums like literature, sound, and dance evoke affective responses and generate *affectus*, serving as posthuman pedagogies. Therefore, affective intensities disrupt traditional notions of childhood and education, inviting educators to reconsider their approaches to teaching and curriculum design.

### **Slow and affective becoming-with**

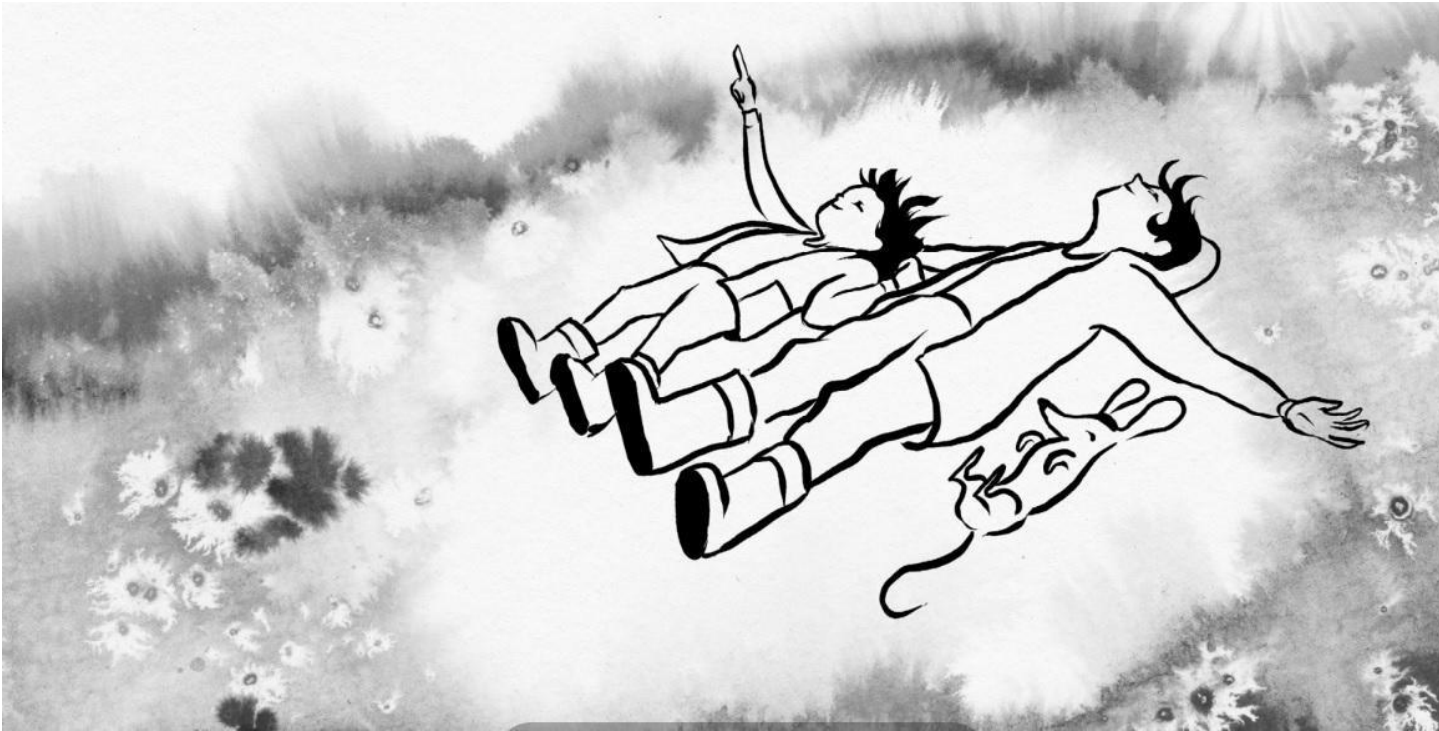
Following Haraway (2008, p 244) "becoming is always becoming with, in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake", emphasizing that becoming-with is rooted in connection and relation rather than in distinction and separation. Becoming should not be thought of as an individual's concern or obligation. Following Hollo's ideas, cultivation happens but cannot be controlled. However, favorable conditions can be created for it to occur.

Slow and affective approaches challenge linear framings of time and disrupt conventional understandings of teaching and learning. By attending to the rhythms of children's lives and embracing the messiness and unpredictability, researchers can shift away from prescriptive curriculum models and standardized assessments toward a more flexible and adaptive approach to education. To truly value the spontaneous and seemingly aimless and mundane aspects, as well as the affective intensities in children's lives we must release our fixation on long-term

assessment, evaluation, and control over learning outcomes (see also Kuby, 2014; Rautio, 2013). Rosa (Lijster et al., 2019) speaks of our contemporary immersion in attention economies, dominated by a sense of ever-increasing pace, and that our present appears increasingly flexible and fillable to the brim. Rosa argues that to understand modernization – how bodies, ideas, art, and capital are set in motion in the late modern capitalist social system – we must relate to both acceleration and deceleration. However, deceleration is not an antidote to an era governed by acceleration – instead, Rosa contends, pockets of what he calls 'resonance' are required. These pockets, where we experience depth and connection, can arise in both accelerated and decelerated contexts (Lijster et al., 2019; Rosa, 2019). That is, simply slowing down (deceleration) is not enough on its own; attending to the affective dimension is necessary.

There is no need to abandon linear time, but for slow and affective becoming-with there is a need to understand how immersed we are in it. In ECEC, while simultaneously planning activities, transitions and schedules (dependent on linear time), there may be made room for slowing down. This requires a certain orientation, specifically understanding the process of becoming-with in unhurried contexts that are not confined to clock-time or calendar-time. This also requires familiarity, the possibility to get acquainted with and to know the child. This is in line with Ulmer's (2017, p. 207-208) idea of slowness offering an embodied ontological approach with more-than-human animating through research and possibly fostering healthy, sustainable, productive, balanced, meaningful, and slower approaches to inquiry. Unhurriedness and non-mandatory action provide new opportunities for shared world explorations and self-orientation, as well as empathy and sympathy. Unhurriedness and non-mandatoryness also promote collaborative imagination, which can be fed by using language, non-linguistic, and cultural resources such as poems and stories, feelings, and imaginary worlds. The most essential aspect of the work is being with the children. (Sintonen, 2020; 2022).

Slow and affective becoming-with offers compelling alternatives to conventional educational approaches, challenging the dominant Western understanding of childhood and advocating for a more holistic and inclusive approach to teaching and learning. By integrating these approaches, educators can create transformative learning experiences that attend to affects, relationality, and embodiedness in educational contexts.



*Image 3. What if education is the initiation of cultivation...? (Artist: Emilia Erfving)*

### **From separate methods towards more holistic thinking**

Our methodological contribution is two-fold as we connect our shared experience to the process of exploring the possibility of slow and affective becoming-with in early educational contexts as the initiation of cultivation. Slow research, slow pedagogy and educational growth are not separate phenomena. If we are willing to understand the meaning of responding to each other (Rosa, 2019) in a relation with becoming-with (Haraway, 2008), the outcome will be the holistic, methodological coalescence leading to the question: why separate the methodology of research from the methods of education and pedagogical practice, especially in the slow and affective context? This kind of methodological perspective is advocated to avoid closure and embrace the complexity of open-ended processes, as highlighted by MacLure (2006 in Rautio, 2013) and Mazzei and McCoy (2010 in Rautio, 2013). These perspectives encourage ways of thinking and being that foster novel and endless possibilities.

The process of writing this paper, which has also included some obstacles and blocks, demonstrated to us what it means to be stuck with linear time. We were oriented towards the deadline and did not trust the process of becoming-with as a way of cultivation: we followed the line of time instead of the line of thinking. Although we said in the introduction that cultivation can be understood as an inclusive, ethico-onto-epistemological orientation for becoming-with, we were not successful in following this in our own way of thinking and writing. However, by reading more, discussing, contemplating, questioning, allowing ideas to simmer, and allowing a chance to intervene, we were able to recover a mutual state in which we managed to respond to each other without rushing. Hollo acted as one of the reminders here.

Hollo understood education as a natural power for growth, and the path needs to be cleared of obstacles. He also emphasized the ability to think in an educational manner (Suoranta 1996; Taneli 2012). Hollo himself thought that “many former educational ideals, narrow-religious and national educational ideals above all, should finally be examined thoroughly, or else they will not meet the criteria aiming to decrease humane conflicts” (1985, p. 124). Like J.A. Hollo, we now understand that education and growth take their own time regardless of the time we intensely monitor to meet the deadline and achieve other targets. Teaching with children, or thinking with a research colleague, cannot happen without also considering the autonomy of growth.

One of the unique characteristics of early childhood education teaching is the opportunity for imaginative experiencing and sharing these experiences with children (Sintonen, 2020). Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of Hollo's ideas is the demand inherent in play towards the educator, especially in terms of functionality: it is more natural for adults to immerse themselves in, dedicate themselves to, and exhibit tireless enthusiasm for activities (Hollo, 1959, p. 80–81), but play is also, in many ways, educational for adults (Taneli 2012, p. 245). According to Hollo, functionality is one of the strongest bonds between the one being educated and the educator (Hollo, 1959, p. 81).

Knowing and being are depicted as inseparable, characterized by qualities such as unpredictability, unintentionality, fluidity, and irreproducibility. This resonates with some ideas presented by Burnett and Merchant (2020), even in the context of literacy but we claim applicable to research, emphasizing the importance of sensitizing ourselves to possibilities, aiding in understanding both past occurrences and potential future developments. They advocate for continuous questioning, thorough examination, and recognition of the multiplicity of meanings and possibilities inherent in every situation. It involves continually asking questions, slowing down and carefully pondering details, and acknowledging the various interpretations and potential outcomes that are always present. Moreover, their view suggests a broad, reflective, and imaginative approach to research practice. Given that researchers (and their materials) are active participants in events, intervention and experimentation are as vital as observation and description (Burnett & Merchant, 2020).

## Discussion

In this paper, we have explored the educational and methodological potential of slow and affective becoming-with in early educational contexts as the initiation of cultivation. We allowed ourselves to reach beyond-method and to be method-creative. Drawing inspiration from posthuman philosophies and J.A. Hollo's educational philosophy, we advocate for a holistic approach that prioritizes strong connections and deeper awareness. We emphasized the need for early childhood methodological reconsiderations towards a posthuman child, fostering empathy, curiosity, and a deeper understanding of children's growth as a unique and unhurried process. Further, we focused on what slow and affective becoming-with *does* rather than what it *means*.

It is apparent that conceptions and perceptions of childhood and early childhood education influence interpretations and methodological choices. At the same time, it is worth considering whether there is anything in early childhood education that has maintained over time. For example, J.A. Hollo views such endurance as a solid and non-mandatory conception of education, children, and childhood, as well as educational autonomy. Inspired by the Finnish scholar J.A. Hollo's educational philosophy, we advocate for a varied pace and rhythm in early childhood education. Rejecting the pressure to meet predetermined goals or developmental milestones, slow and affective becoming-with prioritize unhurriedness, the possibility to be as one is, here and now. This approach aligns with the idea of education as the initiation of cultivation, emphasizing the holistic development of children's intellectual, ethical, and aesthetic capacities. Hence, we explore how we as educators can think *with* Hollo's idea that education is the initiation of cultivation. We need to broaden our approaches and methods to fully engage with everyday life and all of its affective intensity (Back, 2007; Hall & Holmes, 2020; Nordström, 2023).

Our suggestion of slow and affective becoming-with as the initiation of cultivation is hardly apolitical in its rejection of notions of rationality, measurability and developmental discourses. The Western conception of childhood perpetuates a dualistic view that distinguishes between the complete, fully developed adult and the incomplete, developing child (Bohlmann & Hickey-Moody, 2018; Lee, 2001). In contrast, Murriss's (2016) conceptualization of the posthuman child as constantly becoming-with their environment offers a new lens through which to understand childhood. By engaging in speculative fabulations and asking "*What if...?*" researchers can become more aware of the figurations of childhood they bring into educational and scientific practices (e.g., Murriss, 2016; Nordström, 2023) – and figuration in this case also meant thinking with visualizations.

We gently question the simplistic idea that "children are the future," encouraging a deeper exploration of the complexities involved and emphasizing that children and their future cannot bear the crises we have caused. Instead of viewing children as passive recipients of adult care, the idea of becoming-with a child suggests a dynamic and reciprocal relationship where adults, children, and the more-than-human world coexist and co-create the future together (e.g. *posthuman Bildung*, Taylor, 2017). Researchers can explore the complex entanglements between children, society, and the environment by adopting a posthuman approach to childhood. Children are viewed as simultaneously and complexly both nature and culture (Rautio, 2013). This framework encourages a shift away from linear models of development toward a more nuanced understanding of children's lived experiences.

In addition to transforming educational practices, slow and affective becoming-with has broader implications for reimagining the relationships between humans and the world around them. Becoming-with offers an opportunity to experience and sense otherwise. By embracing the affective intensities and attending to human and non-human entanglements, educators can find a new non-linear unhurriedness of doing. Ultimately, slow and affective becoming-with invites educators to rethink the purpose and potential of education and its research.

## References

- Albin-Clark, J. (2023). Documenting data-ghosts: Visualising non-human life and death through what is undocumented in early childhood education. *Journal of Posthumanism*, 3(1), 59–71. <https://doi.org/10.33182/joph.v3i1.2851>
- Albuquerque, P., & Pischetola, M. (2022). Affect as future-making pedagogy: A post-qualitative inquiry in Brazilian primary schools. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 0(0), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2022.2046142>
- Back, L. (2007). *The Art of Listening*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Balmer, C., Griffiths, F., & Dunn, J. (2015). A review of the issues and challenges involved in using participant-produced photographs in nursing research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 71, 1726–1737. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.12627>
- Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter. *Signs*, 40(1), 801–831. <https://doi.org/10.1086/345321>
- Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv12101zq>
- Barbour, B. (2014). *Introducing qualitative research: A student's guide* (2nd ed.). London, England: Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526485045>
- Berger, I., & Argent, A. (2020). Life as a pedagogical concept. In W. O. Kohan & B. Webe (Eds.), *Thinking, childhood, and time: Contemporary perspectives on the politics of education* (pp. 195–207, Vol. 195). <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2018.1460318>
- Bohlmann, B., & Hickey-Moody, A. (Eds.). (2018). *Deleuze and children*. Edinburgh University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474423618>
- Burnett, C., & Merchant, G. (2020). Literacy-as-event: Accounting for relationality in literacy research. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, 41(1), 45–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2018.1460318>
- Clark, A. (2022). *Slow knowledge and the unhurried child: time for slow pedagogies in early childhood education*. Taylor & Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003051626>
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), 322.
- Fenwick, T., Edwards, R., & Sawchuk, P. (2015). *Emerging approaches to educational research: Tracing the socio-material*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203817582>
- Flint, M. A., Eaton, P. W., & Smithers, L. E. (2023). (Navigating-Circling-Un/Doing)~ Post-Qualitative Inquiry: A Collective Biography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 29(6), 686–697. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004221126699>
- Gunnarsson, K., & Bodén, L. (2021). *Introduktion till postkvalitativ metodologi*. [Introduction to Post-Qualitative Methodology]. Stockholm University Press. <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbh>
- Hall, S. M., & Holmes, H. (2020). *Mundane Methods*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526152732>
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies* 14: 575–599. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>
- Haraway, D. (2008). *When species meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Haraway, D. (2016). Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene. In *Staying with the Trouble*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11cw25q>
- Hickey-Moody, A. (2009). Little war machines: Posthuman pedagogy and its media. *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 1(3), 273–280. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jlc.0.0024>
- Hickey-Moody, A. (2013). Affect as method: Feelings, aesthetics and affective pedagogy. *Deleuze and Research Methodologies*, 79–95.

- Hollo, J. A. (1927). *Kasvatuksen maailma. Ynnä muita tutkielmia*. [The World of Education. And Other Essays]. Porvoo: WSOY.
- Hollo, J. A. (1959). *Kasvatuksen teoria: Johdantoa yleiseen kasvatustoppiin*. [Theory of Education. Introduction to general educational theory]. 5. painos. Porvoo: WSOY.
- Hollo, J. A. (1985). *Sielun vaellus: Päiväkirjan merkintöjä 1918–1967*. [Wandering soul: Diary entries 1918-1967]. Ed. I. Hollo, Porvoo: WSOY.
- Hultman, K., & Lenz Taguchi, H. (2010). Challenging anthropocentric analysis of visual data: A relational materialist methodological approach to educational research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 23(5): 525–542.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2010.500628>
- Koro-Ljungberg, M. (2016). *Reconceptualizing qualitative research : methodologies without methodology*. SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071802793>
- Koro-Ljungberg, M., Carlson, D., Tesar, M., & Anderson, K. (2015). Methodology brut: Philosophy, Ecstatic Thinking, and Some Other (Unfinished) Things. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 21(7), 612–619.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414555070>
- Kuby, C. R. (2014). Understanding emotions as situated, embodied, and fissured: Thinking with theory to create an analytical tool. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 27(10), 1285–1311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2013.834390>
- Kuby, C. R., & Rowsell, J. (2021). Magic(al)ing in a time of COVID-19: Becoming literacies and new inquiry practices. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 0(0), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2021.1966826>
- Lafton, T., & Hauge, H. (2023). Har «øyeblikkets pedagogikk» fortsatt en plass i barnehagen?. [Are there room for «pedagogy-of-the-moment» in todays kindergarten?]. *Nordisk barnehageforskning*, 19(4), 86–102. <https://doi.org/10.23865/nbf.v19.247>
- Lather, P. & St. Pierre, E. (2013). Post-qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 629–633. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2013.788752>
- Leander, K., & Ehret, C. (2019). *Affect in literacy learning and teaching: Pedagogies, politics and coming to Know*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351256766>
- Lee, N. (2001). *Childhood and society: Growing up in an age of uncertainty*. Open University Press.
- Lijster, T., Celikates, R., & Rosa, H. (2019). Beyond the echo-chamber: an interview with Hartmut Rosa on resonance and alienation. *Krisis| Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*, 39(1), 64–78. <https://doi.org/10.21827/krisis.39.1.37365>
- MacLure, M. (2006). The bone in the throat: Some uncertain thoughts on baroque method. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 19(6), 729–745.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390600975958>
- MacLure, M. (2013). Researching without representation? Language and materiality in post-qualitative methodology. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 658–667. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2013.788755>
- Mazzei, L. A., & McCoy, K. (2010). Thinking with Deleuze in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 23(5), 503–509.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2010.500634>
- Murris, K. (2016). *The Posthuman Child*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315718002>
- Murris, K. (2020). Posthuman child: De(con)structing western notions of child agency. In W. O. Kohan & B. Weber (Eds.), *Thinking, childhood, and time: Contemporary perspectives on the politics of education* (pp. 161–178). Lexington Books.
- Murris, K. (Ed.). (2021). *Navigating the postqualitative, new materialist and critical posthumanist terrain across disciplines: An introductory guide* (1st ed.). Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003041177>



- Nordström, A. (2022). Reimagining joy as a performative force in early childhood education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 25(1), 80-92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14639491221089332>
- Nordström, A. (2023). *Joy in young children's literacy practices in early childhood education*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Helsinki]. Helsinki Studies in Education 155. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-51-8862-5>
- Pautola, L. (1955). Professori J. A. Hollo. 70-vuotias. Esipuhe. [Professor J. A. Hollo. 70 years. Preface]. In *Juhlakirja professori J. A. Hollon 70-vuotispäiväksi 17.1.1955*. Eripainos Kasvatusopillisesta aikakauskirjasta 1/1955. Helsinki: Suomen kasvatusopillinen yhdistys, 5–7.
- Pink, S. (2008). An urban tour: The sensory sociality of ethnographic place-making. *Ethnography*, 9(2), 175–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138108089467>
- Pink, S. (2015). *Doing sensory ethnography*. Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473917057>
- Rautio, P. (2013). Children who carry stones in their pockets: On autotelic material practices in everyday life. *Children's Geographies*, 11(4), 394–408. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2013.812278>
- Rosa, H. (2019). *Resonance: A sociology of our relationship to the world*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Rosa, H. (2024). Acceleration, Alienation, Education, and Being in and to the World. In Gorur, R., Landri, P., & Normand, R. (Eds.), *Rethinking Sociological Critique in Contemporary Education*. (pp. 185–198). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003279457-15>
- da Rosa Ribeiro, C., Millei, Z., Hohti, R., Kohan, W., Leite, C. D. P., Rudolph, N., Kvale Sørensen, I., Szymborska, K., Tammi, T., & Tesar, M. (2023). Childhoods and Time: A Collective Exploration. *Journal of Childhood Studies*, 133–147. <https://doi.org/10.18357/jcs202320719>
- Sintonen, S. (2020). "Et ne tietää, et toi on hyvä ihminen". Varhaiskasvatuksen opettajuus J. A. Hollon hengessä. [Early childhood education teachership in the spirit of J.A. Hollo]. *Kasvatus* 51(2), 168-179.
- Sintonen, S. (2022). Eloisa ja erityiseksi tekeminen antroposeenin ajan kasvatuksen haasteena. [Vivid and making special in the education of anthropocene]. *Kasvatus & Aika*, 16(3), 85-99. <https://doi.org/10.33350/ka.111656>
- Sintonen, S., & Nordström, A. (2023). Posthuman Babies: Reconceptualizing a Baby's First Year. In M. Sakr, J. Rowsell, & K. Sherbine (Eds.), *Postdevelopmental Approaches to Pedagogical Observation in Childhood* (1 red.). (Postdevelopmental Approaches to Childhood). Bloomsbury Academic. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350369672.0015>
- St. Pierre, E. (2011). Post qualitative research: The critique and the coming after. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Inquiry* (pp. 611–635). CA Sage, Los Angeles.
- St. Pierre, E. A. (2021). Why Post Qualitative Inquiry? *Qualitative Inquiry*, 27(2), 163–166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800420931142>
- Suoranta, J. (1996). Juho A. Hollon neljä elämää. [The four lives of Juho A. Hollo] Niin & näin 2/1996. <https://suoranta.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/jahollo.pdf>
- Suoranta, J. (2000). *Kasvatuksellisesti näkeväksi: Sivistyksellinen kasvatusajattelu tässä ajassa*. [Towards an Educationally Insightful Perspective: Educational Thinking in Contemporary Times]. Tampere: Tampere University Press.
- Taneli, M. (2012). *Kasvatus on kasvamaan saattamista: Kasvatusfilosofinen tutkimus J. A. Hollon sivistyskasvatusajattelusta*. [Education is the cultivation of growth. A philosophical study of J.A. Hollo's educational thinking]. Turun yliopiston julkaisu C 351.
- Taneli, M. (2022). J.A. Hollon sivistyskasvatusajattelu on yhä ajankohtaista. [J.A. Hollo's idea on

bildung is still relevant]. *Suomen kasvatuksen ja koulutuksen historian vuosikirja 59*, 134–145.

Taylor, C. A. (2017). Is a posthumanist Bildung possible? Reclaiming the promise of Bildung for contemporary higher education. *Higher Education*, 74(3), 419–435.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-9994-y>

Taylor, C. (2020). Knowledge matters: Five propositions concerning the reconceptualisation of knowledge in feminist new materialist, posthumanist and postqualitative approaches. In K. Murris. (Ed.), *Navigating the post qualitative, new materialist and critical posthumanist terrain across disciplines: An introductory guide* (pp. 22–43). Routledge.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003041177-2>

Uljens, M. (2007). J. A. Hollo – pluralistisen yleisen kasvatustieteen edustaja.

<http://www.vasa.abo.fi/users/muljens/pdf/hollo.pdf>

Ulmer, J. B. (2017). Writing slow ontology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 23(3), 201–211.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800416643994>

Vannini, P. (2015). *Non-representational methodologies*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315883540>