

Editorial

By ANNA-LENA KEMPE & STAFFAN SELANDER, *Stockholm University, Sweden*

A system of knowledge representation, especially when used in educational settings, both configures the understanding of the phenomenon being represented and designs the communicative setting, in terms of patterns of interaction and assessment practices. The “fixedness” of materialised representations imposes a particular recognised reading path, and a voice of authority defines and delimits the characteristics of the phenomena.

In a school context, the learner in the past (but not only then) was often obliged to copy the representations and, as precise as possible, show the teacher that he or she had followed the instructions. The teachers, on the other hand, had to perform the role of a gatekeeper in order to protect norms conveyed in the textbooks and assess students’ achievements according to those norms. What the learner was supposed to do with this fixed knowledge in new settings outside the school, the university or the church was seldom addressed. Learners were left alone then with the process of transformation and re-interpretation of the ‘given’.

In the past decades, the strong expansion of digital media has opened up many new arenas for communication and meaning-making in society. Many competing forms of representations in different communicative modes and media challenge the voice of fixed authorities and fixed meanings. Learning as an institutionalised activity has to a fairly large extent changed from copying and remembering knowledge, conveyed in forms of written words, into transforming and designing multi-modal representations. Students also interact with peers on the Internet and with (educational/serious) games designed to promote learning. These processes are analysed in very interesting ways by Julia B Jensen in her article *Working with arts in nurse education* and by Thorkhild Hanghøj in *Clashing and emerging genres: The interplay of knowledge forms in educational gaming*. The authors show that the changing of forms of representations in educational settings has epistemological as well as ontological consequences for the learners. In the article *A multimodal model for musical meaning-making – designs for learning in choir*, Ragnhild Sandberg Jurström focuses choir conductors’ use of different resources in their

musical meaning-making and performance in relation to the conditions for learning that were designed.

Recent technological developments have made it possible to record human actions and interactions and to capture both sound and moving image. It is now possible to analyse (in detail) time-based modes, like gestures or gaze for example, in a way that was not possible before the video recorder became an affordable device employed in research. When there are multiple forms of representations at disposal, the focus on instrumental aspects of teaching and learning – at least partly – decline and new perspectives and questions emerge. For example: How does the staging and design of various settings for learning shape what can be taught and learnt? What about the agency of the sign-maker? What is understood as a sign of learning, and according to which norms and with what standards should the teacher assess student's learning?

In this issue, Fredrik Lindstrand, interviews Carey Jewitt, professor in Learning and Technology at London Knowledge Lab, Institute of Education. She offers us a broad overview and a deeper understanding of the development of the field of social semiotics and of the different philosophical as well as methodological takes on the analysis of multimodal sign-making. The field reaches from micro level studies of day-to-day interactional practices and individual's sign making to analysis based on an institutional level in various social settings. However, Carey Jewitt also stresses the importance of moving on from a very detailed description of many different modes – one at a time – to a more coherent understanding of multimodal ensembles and how people make use of them in different social practices.

This finally brings back the discussion of how representations are produced and what we claim are to be seen as knowledge. Verbal language, or any other mode for representation, cannot map the world perfectly. Every representation shadows other possible understandings. Social research is not so much about producing everlasting generalised claims about 'reality,' but to design new and creative representations based on clear and systematic methodologies, and transparent argumentations possible to critique by the readers.

Anna-Lena Kempe & Staffan Selander