

Original Research

Putting Rhizomes to Work: (E)merging Methodologies

Marg Sellers

Whitireia Community Polytechnic

Eileen Honan

The University of Queensland

Abstract

In this paper, we explore an approach to rhizomatic methodology. We map the connections and disconnections between and across pathways involved in writing a rhizomatic text that is non-linear and self-consciously part of the research method. Using rhizomatic thought, we analyse discourses operating within the data following Deleuzian lines of flight that connect and link disparate forms of data. (E)merging readings enable an interconnecting analysis of the process of making videos with children, with their artworks and with the video transcripts. Also, as disconnections become visible they illuminate the impossibility of establishing some kind of formulaic methodology that would neatly answer Buchanan's question of "how does it work?" Like Alvermann (2000, p. 125), we attempt to avoid "concretizing" a process that is "open and connectable in all its dimensions" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 12) and offer this paper as one particular and specific reading of the contributions that Deleuzian theories can make to educational research methods.

Key Words: Rhizomatic thought; methodology; Deleuze; Guattari; children's video making

Introducing Ideas

My intent, in short, is to extract from Deleuze's project an apparatus of social critique built on a utopian impulse. Its insistent question is "how does it work?" (Buchanan, 2000, p. 8)

This paper is a contribution to a growing body of work that applies Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical work (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) to educational research (see for example, Semetsky, 2004). We are interested in the application of rhizomatic thought to educational research and in performing rhizomatic methodologies with/in our own research.

In what follows, we attempt to present, in a rhizomatic fashion, our thoughts on developing Deleuzian methods for educational research. These include:

- An approach to writing that is partial and tentative, that transgresses generic boundaries, and allows the inclusion of the researchers' voice(s).
- Understanding that discourses operate within a text in rhizomatic ways, that they are not linear, or separate; any text includes a myriad of discursive systems, which are connected to and across each other. A rhizomatic discourse analysis follows the

lines of flight that connect these different systems in order to provide accounts of (e)merging (mis)readings.

- Data collected for educational research, while appearing to be disparate, can be analysed rhizomatically to find connections between writing, artworks and video, for example. This kind of analysis allows (e)merging readings of connections between and across and within various data.

We begin this representation by following a line of flight through the rhizome that explores some of the figurations used by Deleuze and by us in our writing.

Rhizomatic Figurations

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) introduce the figuration of a rhizome to explore multiplicities in thinking and in writing. While they are careful not to engage in constructing the type of binary thinking they are attempting to disrupt, rhizomes are compared and contrasted (but not opposed to) the arboreal metaphors that are often taken up in linear and modernist expressions of thought. Rhizomatic thinking and writing involves making ceaseless and ongoing connections:

Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be...
A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, social sciences, and social struggles. (p. 7)

Mapping these connections can involve following 'lines of flight', another figuration used by Deleuze and Guattari. "There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines" (p. 9). In our own writing, following lines of flight means being open to making connections between quite different thoughts, ideas, pieces of data, discursive moments. These connections assemble as 'plateaus' – "we call a 'plateau' any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome" (p. 24). Without conventionally linear beginnings and/or endings, a network of interconnections forms – an amassing of middles amidst an array of multidirectional movement.

This kind of rhizomatic thinking and the forming of plateaus by following lines of flight through/across/within various assemblages of middles is very difficult to portray in a linear text such as this paper. Indeed Deleuze and Guattari draw attention themselves to these difficulties in their introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*. Thus, we begin our attempts to explore what rhizomatics mean for educational research methods through a reflexive plateau on the acts of attempting to write rhizomatically – both in this paper, and in our separate research work. One of the first decisions we had to make in our representations here was around the use of the first person, the 'I' that connotes individual authorship. We take our lead here from Deleuze and Guattari themselves who point out the 'we' of their writing partnership also indicates the multiplicity of subject positions taken up by each author at any one moment. So while each of us wrote different parts of this paper, we refer to 'we' in our thinking and writing.

Writing a Rhizomatic Text – This Text

The logistics of bringing together a text that meets academic requirements and has the possibility of making sense to readers is forever 'steering' us in the 'direction' of producing a 'linear' text – an 'ordered' 'progression' of 'theoretical ideas' and 'practical applications' that 'leads' to a 'coherent' 'conclusion'. All of these concepts are potentially problematic to rhizomatic thinking as it works to overcome binary polarisations, to go beyond dichotomous

thought and linear thinking, instead working towards/producing points of intersection, overlaps, convergences, twisting and weaving through infinite folds and surfaces (Deleuze, 1993).

Trying to work within sections, by default, bounds our thinking and writing – any kind of segmentation creates boundaries, albeit blurred – as asides are forever appearing and we want to create a horizontal text as we “attempt a nomadic journey, to...travel in the thinking that writing produces...” (St.Pierre, 2000, p. 258). A text that continuously appears in new spaces is fragmented and does not have to explain how it got there. But, how to produce a text, particularly when two of us are working together – as each and every, separate and together – that is workable and readable when we are enmeshed, albeit unwillingly, in conventional linear ways of writing, which expect we will trace a straight path from beginning to end, and which inevitably permeate our thinking and understanding?

Linear constrictions, of sections, chapters, pages, headings and footnotes, impact on us as we attempt to write rhizomatically/nomadically for research purposes. We therefore follow various pathways through educational rhizomes in order to produce writing that is rhizomatic, in that it transgresses generic boundaries, is partial and tentative, but that will also be accepted within the educational community. Although, in this paper, data sighted/cited are from Marg’s research, we have worked rhizomatically, each writing separately but at the same time, adding bits that enabled a smooth flow into/through the collaborative writing. As each of us worked with the other’s words, any power(full)ness that emerged, simultaneously belonged to, and was disrupted by us both. In places we are no longer sure (or have concern about) whose writing we are reading – rhizomatics-in-action enacting rhizome.

Thinking rhizomatically also allows for a certain kind of discursive analysis of re-presented data. A rhizo-textual analysis (Honan, 2004) depends on understanding that discourses operate within texts in rhizomatic ways – that is they are not linear, or separate. Understanding also, that what emerges from within such an analysis may be far removed from the intention(s) of the gathering of that data. We now discuss these forms of analysis.

Rhizomatic Discourse Analysis

A rhizomatic discourse analysis follows the lines of flight that always/already connect different systems in order to provide accounts of (e)merging (mis)readings. Many accounts of discourse analysis lead researchers to believe that discursive systems operate alongside each other within any text. We believe that discourses operate within texts in a rhizomatic fashion, intersecting and parting, over and under lapping. A rhizo-textual analysis involves mapping these discursive lines, following pathways, identifying the intersections and connections, finding the moments where the assemblages of discourses merge to make plausible and reason(able) sense to the reader, remembering that any one discursive pathway does not render another (im)plausible. St.Pierre (2000) explains this Deleuzian approach as going beyond being a palimpsest that relentlessly overwrites (p. 261), rather lines of flight are always in the middle, in flux, “disrupt[ing] dualisms with complementarity” (p. 279). Each discourse interweaves and interconnects with others forming a discursive map.

A rhizo-textual analysis not only draws out and makes visible discourses operating within and across various texts, but it also focuses our attention on the discourses that we ourselves as researchers engage with in talking, reading, writing and re-presenting our data. This is especially important in our research with young children. We are aware not only of the inclusion of our voice, but of enabling the voices of the children involved in the research to become audible. However, ensuring this happens is not straightforward. Because of the

discourses at play, entering the children's world as (co)researcher is problematic. While discursive plateaus of children, childhood(s) and curriculum emerge as open and connectable maps, they are inevitably affected by various hierarchical tracings of power(full-ness). Thus, plugging such (arboreal) tracings of power back into the (rhizomatic) map of children, their childhoods and curriculum is significant to growing the rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; (Deleuze, 1988).

The discourses we analyse here are those operating within an early childhood setting in New Zealand. The data is drawn from Marg's doctoral research wherein she is exploring links among young children's understandings of curriculum (what learning is important to them and why) and Deleuzian philosophical concepts – in this paper, we work with rhizomatic figurations of mapping. The discourses of childhood, children and curriculum operating within this particular space inform and work alongside (not above/over) others, that each is a plateau to be moved across horizontally. Childhood is both a period in which children live their lives and also a part of society; and while childhood is a temporary period for children, it remains a form in society. Also, while childhood is exposed to the same societal forces as adulthood, children themselves create their childhoods (Corsaro, 1997). Children are thus inseparable from their childhoods as they grow through them – 'through' in the sense of 'by means of' and as 'passage'. As becoming-children their childhoods evolve around them and they (can) become power-full players in their childhoods and "influential actors" (p. 54) in adult society.

As Marg's research is contextual to early childhood education in New Zealand, we are cognisant of curriculum being viewed as: "the sum total of the experiences, activities and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children's learning and development" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 10). In children's everyday experience, curriculum may be understood as, "investigation and exploration, walks and puddles and cuddles, books and blankets and anything that is part of the child's day, play and routines" (Rouse, 1990, cited in Anning, Cullen, & Flear, 2004, p. 59). Rhizomatically, curriculum becomes every situation, event, person, artefact happened upon during children's learning journeys as well as the journeying itself and the territory negotiated.

By working rhizomatically our intention is to attempt to de/re/territorialize (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 381) various aspects of power-full relationships and interactions towards enhancing young children's learning. This means paying critical attention to what voices we hear and how we hear them. We are aware of the limiting affect of the (hand-held) video camera's lens used during the data collection. While it enables a focus on particular activity, in the process illuminating the intensity of the activity and the interactions in/at play, inevitably there are frustrating moments of invisible happenings off the screen.

The technique of panning in order to capture images of all the children working in a particular space can mean that significant exchanges among some children are not captured on the actual videotape. For example, while recording conversational contributions, which seem to have meaning to the (rhizo)analysis, without seeing who was speaking, who was there but not speaking, what they were doing, where their attention was directed, limits the meaningfulness of that particular fragment of data. The video camera thus enables and frustrates the task of a power-full re-presentation of children's voiced understandings.

It is indeed a messy process (Hargreaves, 1996; Law, 2003). Also, even in theorising about power relationships, we presume to speak for children, despite wanting to learn from and with them and despite promoting them as becoming-articulators of their own expert understandings. The voices of children are integral to this research, not only for producing

and analysing data, but also as a plateau which speaks of their understandings of curriculum and what that means for their learning. However, de/re/territorialising children's understandings and introducing the becoming-child, is a struggle. This becomes even more of a struggle when we begin to produce readings of the data collected, as we attempt to deterritorialise children's understandings through our interpretations of their actions, words, and drawings. Along the next line of flight of this paper we explore these (e)merging readings of data.

(E)merging Readings of Data

In responding to the question, "how does it work?", we are aware that in the process of problematising methodology, curriculum also becomes problematic as we explore young children's understandings of the importance of the what, how and why of their learning experiences. We are mindful of not speaking for the children who, in various moments, participated as co-producers of the data. Rather, what we provide here is just one (e)merging reading of moments in these children's learning experiences.

Children themselves are like rhizomes within early childhood centres that provide smooth spaces (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 474-500) for them to work and play in, uninterrupted and unhurried – where they have the space within the setting, and time within the programme, to go about their learning in their own way supported by adults who believe in children's powerfull-ness (see Endnote 1) to enact optimal learning situations. Within the kindergarten in which this data was co-produced, the children performed rhizomatically as they flowed through the spaces of the setting, through the programme and with/in relationships they encountered. As they flow through the territory of the physical environment, they follow lines of flight conversationally and within their game (see Endnote 2), they explore various folds and surfaces (physical and imaginative) that they happen upon, they slip in and out of discursive spaces. In this attempt to re-present this play, we focus on one particular aspect of the rhizomatic space: three girls engaging in mapping, both in the figurative sense in relation to the learning spaces they are territorialising as well as in the literal sense as they make maps and then use them to negotiate the territory of the game and the play space.

These girls flowed nomadically through smooth spaces, re/de/territorialising spaces that they needed to occupy for their game to work. It was like Deleuze and Guattari's (1987, p. 23) description: there was "a flow of children; a flow of walking with pauses, straggling and forward rushes... a collective assemblage...one inside the other...plugged into an immense outside that is a multiplicity." This multiplicity or plateau involved forty other children, several adults, the physical surroundings, resources at hand, the uninterrupted space of the programme. We see these three children "space themselves out and disperse...jostle together and coexist... begin to dance" as the game grows (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 23-4). There was continuous ebbing and flowing of ideas and energy, as the tracing was continually plugged into the map.

Libby proclaims: "We better be strong girls."

Lee objects strongly: "No!" Alice says nothing.

Libby shouts: "We can be strong girls now...and...WE...CAN...DO...IT!" punching her arms in the air. Then, "We have to have maps to see where to go."

Despite Lee's earlier objection, they all run inside to the drawing table.

Their use of mapping is intriguing and demonstrates a tacit understanding of rhizome. Emerging here, and continuing throughout their game, there is continuous moving through virtual/possible, actualising/realising (Deleuze, 1993) mapped spaces, through the map of the imaginary game; through deciding they needed to create a real map; through mapping the next part of their game; through consulting their drawn maps; and so on...they flow rhizomatically through a Deleuzian middle, negotiating virtual and possible spaces of the game and of their childhoods. Mapping becomes a way of affirming the roles they each play and exploring their relationships with each other, of confirming the next movement through the informally improvised script of their game, of working out which part of the playground they will flow into next, of exploring their understandings of the physical and social context(s) they are playing with/in and how this might relate to the outside world. (Re)turning to the game:

They draw similar maps – Libby selects yellow paper for them all, and the others eventually follow her choice of a felt pen. Alice was the last to choose and while Alice was choosing the colour to write her name, Lee says, “[...]you have to do it in girlish colours.”

The power relations enacted within this rhizome of (the) play interact in rhizomatic forms, in that the forces of power cannot be ascribed to any one person, or set in any essentialised form. As Deleuze (1988) reminds us:

Power has no essence; it is simply operational. It is not an attribute but a relation: the power-relation is the set of possible relations between forces which pass through the dominated forces no less than the dominating. (p. 27)

We map here the moments in which power is enacted in the process of mapping and playing. At one moment, Libby is in charge, as she takes up a leadership position. Lee had earlier objected strongly to becoming strong girls, but other than a loud “No!” in response to Libby’s idea, there is no lasting indication of challenging the leadership. Within the rhizomatic flowing that eases contributions from everyone, Lee seems happy to accept Libby’s decision. While Libby exhibits her powerfull-ness as leader; Lee claims powerfull-ness in that moment by choosing not to resist, instead following the line of flight – creating a map – which Libby declared as their next action. Lee’s powerfull-ness comes to the fore again as she gives instructions, explicitly to Alice, implicitly to Libby, as to the colours to use. Lee also brings the powerfull-ness of becoming-girl into (the) play. Now, more about (the) mapping...

Libby: “Now we can draw a map.” As she begins drawing she says, “Ok! Now!” which seems to be a signal for Lee and Alice to watch, which they do. Libby draws a stick figure in the centre bottom of her page. Lee then makes a partially inaudible comment, inquiring of Libby about “[...] what you did.” Libby indicates the legs first. Without further instruction, Lee replicates Libby’s figure in the bottom corner of her page. Alice has watched as well and by now is drawing a more detailed figure that takes up most of her page (positioned as portrait whereas Libby and Lee’s is landscape).

Libby continues as leader with Lee her ardent follower. Alice, the quietest of the three now enacts her powerfull-ness. The orientation of her paper suggests she was less intent on doing things exactly as Libby dictated, while her drawing – a large person, with round body, detailed facial expression and hair – is considerably different from the stick figures that

Libby and Lee are drawing. She demonstrates powerfull-ness in both not following Libby's lead exactly and in not being overt about doing it her own way. Although she does not claim a leadership role in this moment, she is also not operating as conventional follower, thus de-stratifying (adult?) understandings of leadership. In the process of using their powerfull-ness in ways that are not destructive to the others or to the game, all three are mapping (as Deleuzian figuration and within their actual drawings) their understandings of being children within childhoods.

Libby meanwhile is drawing a line, leading from her person, a line which wiggles and zig-zags and loosely follows the edge of her page. As she draws, she explains, "You need to do [...] in here so we know where to go...we go through the prickly grass...by the tree..." She joins another line to the first, indicating the prickly grass with zigzags along the top of her page and the tree by a thinner zigzag in the top right corner. The line then loops back onto the initial line around the page. Lee draws a line surrounding her person, a 'pathway' with less detail and without explanation. Alice meanwhile has discarded her first drawing and is drawing another figure in black, again large and detailed. The lines around the edge of her person are a series of disjointed squiggles.

Their maps now indicate the pathway they intend to negotiate as strong girls. Libby explains her pathway as she draws it, communicating verbally to the others how she is thinking their exploration will proceed. She creates a pathway with no beginning or ending, indicating they will process through a middle. Just as this game did not 'begin' as being one about strong girls (the strong girl theme emerged through playing mums and dads) it appears there is no explicitly planned terminus either. Lee's simpler pathway is similarly positioned on her paper while Alice's is again (power-fully) different. The map Alice has created is dominated by the large, carefully detailed figure, surrounded by several unconnected wiggles. That her pathway does not form a complete circle around the page and the figure is of no concern to any of them. What seems important is the indication of various spaces that they will pass through. - perhaps lines of flight to be followed. More experiences of powerfull-ness come to the fore, as well as further understandings of mapping (within) their childhoods and how these relate to their playing out their discursive understandings of becoming child/ren.

They each write their name on their map. Then they spend several minutes conversing about the similarities and differences in the spelling of their names. They have each folded their maps by now and because of the different paper orientations, Libby and Lee make a lengthwise fold while Alice folds hers crosswise. Lee notices the difference and points this out: "She did a long one." Libby responds, "That's ok. She's fine...C'mon, let's go...to save the world outside."

At this point, the discursive understandings of curriculum, in conventional terms, become visible as they share their understandings about literacy, both reading and writing. This also involves affirmation of each other's abilities to form the various letters and affirmation of each other as children with/in childhoods, foregrounding their social learning experiences (of curriculum). Some maths learning appears also as Lee notices the different shapes created by the different folds. While they enjoy the interchange about their literacy and maths skills and knowledge, Libby is mindful of ensuring all are included as successful performers of their understandings – she is ensuring they are each affirmed as individuals and using her leadership skills to make their rhizomatic game work.

Once outside Libby pauses, pointing to her map, “Start there and y’ go all the way round...We need to go to the playground...it said playground.” They twist and weave through the playground, pausing to play on various pieces of equipment, to interact with other children and with me, to seat themselves on a large log. Libby does the map-reading: “Our map says to go to um to go to...”; “Treasure...the treasure is here...see the little x here”; “Hey...hey, wanna go to the pool? If you want to go to the pool, that’s OK.” They continue to negotiate the outdoor equipment – over, under, through, across, balancing, jumping...

And so they continue mapping their play(ing), flowing through the middle space of their game, a flow of walking~running~skipping~jumping, pausing~rushing, together~an assemblage, with/in a multiplicity. As they danced through their game, they played out the discourses of child/ren, their childhoods and curriculum with power-full affects appearing in various folds and surfaces, twisting and weaving through all.

Concluding Thoughts

In this paper we have presented some of our re-presentations of Deleuzian methodologies used in our educational research as we worked with/in rhizomatic ways, negotiating rhizomatic(ally) territories of children’s play – discursively and following their actual (mapped) lines of flight. In particular, mapping (in a Deleuzian sense) has been foregrounded by bringing together ‘disparate’ scholarly discourses with the children’s mapping – as they mapped their play and played out their map(s) – and with enactments of collective and individual powerfullness intertwined.

While we are careful not to engage in any kind of concretising, we do believe that there are signposts along the pathways through a research rhizome that may be useful for educationists interested in using Deleuze and Guattari’s work. One of these signposts is that associated with the writing of a rhizomatic text. In the writing of this paper, and in our writing in other forums, we work reflexively to avoid linear or structuralist metaphors or figurations. Each word or phrase is thoughtfully produced as it is our contention that thinking rhizomatically and writing rhizomatically are inextricably entwined. As the children flowed through, across, with/in physical and imaginary spaces of their game and their learning, so we can allow our writing to flow as we record the negotiation of their living territory and our discursive one(s). The ‘we’ of our writing, the collaborative map-making become plateaus of/for negotiation.

Another signpost along our journey through an exploration of rhizomatic research indicates different understandings of the interactions among discursive systems within any rhizome. Discourses do not operate as straight lines through a text: rather, they (e)merge, connect, and cross over each other. Libby, Lee and Alice depicted various aspects of the game they were playing out, simultaneously planned and (e)merging as in tracing and mapping – they were putting the tracing back on the map. Unperturbed by the evolving complexity, through their map-making and their enacted mapping, they (simply) showed pathways and spaces that were/to be negotiated in the course of their game; they also described characters as they were evolving, talking them(selves) into be(com)ing. Their powerfull-ness became apparent through and within the uninterrupted and unhurried nature of their spaces, as they planned and negotiated their game/play/work/learning/curriculum development, as they loudly announced their strong girl status to the world, as they supported each other while claiming individual spaces of powerfull-ness.

Similarly, we, as (rhizo)analysts, can map (the) discursive journeys through a text, and such mapping can illuminate the moments of convergence, when connections allow reason(able) readings of contradictory and conflicting discourses. On the surface, the prospect of linking in any meaningful way children's drawings or play with philosophical understandings seems unlikely. However, what appeared in the making of the video and in the subsequent transcript is that young children unaware of Deleuzian figurations or rhizomatic methodologies, enact complex understandings of these concepts. They created maps as a way of collectively planning how their game was to proceed and identifying the territory to be negotiated. In drawing the maps, as the maps evolved, they followed lines of flight in their thinking as they made personal connections with the territory they would negotiate and with each other's maps and ideas expressed through/with/in them. And other lines of flight appeared later as they followed the pathways of their mapping, as they enacted their powerfull-ness – collaboratively, collectively, individually – as new ideas (e)merged, such as a mark on the paper, an 'x' that suddenly became 'treasure' and a 'pool' that had not been mentioned before. As they flowed through their mapping, they paused literally (to rest on the log and to swing from the bars) and figuratively on plateaus to contemplate the progress of their learning.

For us, working rhizomatically, this provides a generative and transformative approach to discourse analysis, perhaps replacing that kind of analysis that has previously focused on the deconstruction rather than the transformative possibilities that are produced through a reconstruction. For example, engaging with transformative possibilities with/in children's map/ping(s) enables linkages between adult understandings of children's learning experiences and young children's expressed understandings of their curriculum, played out through their games. In the video-ed moments described here, this involves understandings about how to decide what spaces of learning they are going to de/re/territorialise and how they enact powerfull-ness. The children's (e)merging readings of what is important to their learning in any particular moment (can) become ours through reading re-generatively.

Still another signpost in our rhizomatic journey is a multiplicity of signs that suggest a variety of paths that can be taken in the interpretation of data. Reading, analysing, interpreting particular fragments of data is a highly personal and individual task, even in deciding which fragments to read alongside others, such as children's maps alongside Deleuzian mapping, and as we become aware that the intent of the analysis remains open to responding to (e)merging connections. We have described the complexity of attempting to interpret data that involves young children's voices, voices that we want to make audible while at the same time acknowledging our part in silencing them. These rhizomatic interpretations of data can only produce (e)merging readings, following poststructuralist understandings of the impossibility of forming generalisable findings, not only from any particular educational context, but also from any particular reading of that context.

While these signposts indicate various directions, and allow educational researchers to follow a myriad of paths through Deleuze and Guattari's work, they may also provide some guidance to those who are interested in exploring what it means to work in rhizomatic ways within educational research. We offer these signposts as guiding possibilities for negotiating rhizomatic spaces. We hope that others will join us in our journeying as we continue to explore what it means to attempt to answer the question, "how does it work?"

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Endnotes

1. We use 'powerfull-ness' as a way of problematising conventional notions of 'powerfulness' and 'empowerment'.
2. In this text, to ease our conversation, 'games' mean situations of imaginative play, dramatic play and informal, improvised, enacted storytelling that flow from the collective imagination of the children.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Marg Sellers is Programme Leader, Teaching and Educational Studies Centre of Learning, Whitireia Community Polytechnic, Porirua, New Zealand. She is currently a PhD candidate with the The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, researching Deleuzian philosophical concepts alongside young children's understandings of curriculum and emerging educational research methodologies.

Dr Eileen Honan is Senior Lecturer in English and Literacy Education at The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia. Her research interests include working with teachers to critically analyse and reflect on their literacy pedagogies in order to disrupt theory/practice divisions and the development of new educational research methodologies using Deleuzian figurations.