

Chapter 14

Becoming Entangled in SoTL and Research Through Supercomplexity: Looking Back, Forward, In, Out . . . and Shaking It About!

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors map various lines of flight that have informed their growing awareness of supercomplexity as a paradigm appropriate for the current epoch. Rather than concentrating on being researchers, the authors focus on how they are always becoming researchers and scholars of teaching and learning, in between, like a rhizome. Illustrative accounts of the authors’ research biographies are provided. They utilize a semi-fictional narrative, with images as a way to overlay fact-oriented research with fiction, in order to “play” with different ways of representing research and scholarship. In the final section of the chapter, a number of emergent concerns, challenges and possibilities are considered in relation to working with supercomplexity. These musings offer the authors, as rhizomatic researchers and scholars of teaching and learning with many conceptual tools and practices, a way to be open to new types of inquiry—a process that could be described as simultaneously knowing but not knowing.

INTRODUCTION

Metaphors pepper the landscape of teaching and of education research itself (for instance, Midgley, Trimmer, & Davies, 2013). The metaphor of the researcher as a mystery novelist, “detecting the paradigm,” is used in the research-focused forerunner to this text (Ling, 2017). As we are comfortable using metaphors in our work, we are here using the metaphor of a childhood dance, *The Hokey Pokey*, in the

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title and structure of this chapter to provide us with a way of exploring different steps involved in how we might design and undertake research and inquiry about teaching. We also figure, that as a consequence of thinking through the writing of this chapter, we would inevitably be re-framing our existing ideas about education research and scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and “shaking them all about”.

We are approaching this chapter as a predominantly reflexive task, mapping our own various lines of flight, as a way to process the emergence of our growing awareness of supercomplexity (for instance, in Barnett, 2000b) as a paradigm appropriate for the current epoch, which Bauman (2014) refers to as “liquid modernity.” For us, we see reflexivity as having moved beyond an awareness of the ways biography shapes research and concur with the notion that reflexivity is “a deconstructive exercise for locating the intersections of author, other, text, and world, and for penetrating the representational exercise itself” (Macbeth, 2001, p. 35). This type of entanglement is not too dissimilar to working as an educator in liquid times!

The “we” in this chapter have been collaborators for many years and in the next section draw on some of the projects in which we have worked together, as well as those in which we have pursued our own research trajectories. And rather than concentrating on *being* education researchers, in this chapter we explore how we are *always becoming* education researchers – and indeed, scholars – *in between*, like a rhizome. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) state:

unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any point and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature... it has neither a beginning nor end, but always in the middle (milieu) [original emphasis] from which it grows . . . it has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight (p. 21).

Using the rhizome metaphor offers us a way to visualize and describe how research and SoTL are messy, entangled, and far from being linear or clearly delineated. It conjures up an image of the multiple inter-relational connections that occur in transitory, haphazard or undetermined ways in the process of becoming a researcher or scholar. As “rhizome researchers” or scholars (Clarke & Parsons, 2013), we continue to use the rhizome metaphor in this chapter within and alongside the dance metaphor, with the latter providing section headings to guide our writing. As a first entryway we provide a brief and selective narrative of our respective biographies as educators and researchers. We then concentrate on a particular research project in which we were both involved as researchers in a P-9 school in Melbourne (Australia) because in terms of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) it became a “plateau” – an activity of heightened intensity that left an afterimage for us; something that could be revived or inserted into other activities.

We then turn our focus to our respective journeys, with one of us as researcher and the other as a research participant in a university-focused research project. At this point in the chapter, we introduce a semi-fictional narrative, which is a literary device used “when fiction[al] form is laid over a ‘fact-oriented’ research process” (Agar, 1990 quoted in Whiteman & Phillips, 2008, p. 294). Whiteman and Phillips consider that a semi-fictional approach can help to “reframe data and representational process through discursive play” (pp. 294-295), thereby providing a benefit for academic theorizing. “What is important,” they say, “is to weave together fragments of social ‘data’ with the creative license to make the theoretical insights of the researcher vivid and easily available to the reader” (Whiteman & Phillips, 2008, p. 296).

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