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In response to the rise in popularity of concepts of “design” in education research, pedagogy, and curriculum design, in this article we consider how the New London Group conceived of the role of student design practices as an outcome of pedagogy, as well as the parallel role of design in teaching practices. In this descriptive analysis, we foreground the function and presence of meta-language for the practices of students and teachers. We follow the parallels that are played out, in the pedagogical vision by New London, between students using a metalanguage to design texts and teachers using a metalanguage to design the contexts and experiences of students. We argue that although design is

oriented toward something usable— the object made or produced— desire and difference show up as the life in the process itself. We move from an outline of design into a discussion of the role of desire and difference in pedagogy, and especially within the teacher-student relationship. We sketch how desire and difference, as interpreted through Deleuze and Guattari and others answers different questions and provides different resources for understanding pedagogy. Taken up together, the registers of design, desire, and difference breathe more life into teacher practice and student practice as relational: the differences created in their contact zone offer a rich and productive image of pedagogy.

Design is a popular term in educational discourses these days. Discourses of design, as well as practices involving design, seem to be proliferating in teacher education, in school reform, in the development of after-school programming, in curriculum, and in thinking about the development of learning ecologies. Emerging

links between New Literacy Studies and the Learning Sciences also promote the centrality of design in our educational imagination, as perhaps have cross-currents of discourse between researching design practices (e.g., Kali, Goodyear, & Markauskaite, 2011) and design experiments as research (e.g., Cobb, Confrey, diSessa, Lehrer, & Schauble, 2003). In other dimensions of design discourse and practice, standardized testing movements have resonated with notions of curricular “backward design,” (Childre, Sands, & Pope, 2009, p. 7; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 13) where explicit and preferred outcomes are conceived as endpoints for the development of lessons, units, and year-long

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curricular guides (Childre, Sands, & Pope, 2009; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

In this article, we consider how pedagogy is imagined through design in the New London Group's "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures." We describe how the New London Group conceived of the role of student design practices as an outcome of pedagogy, as well as the parallel role of design in teaching practices. In this descriptive analysis, we foreground the function and presence of metalanguage for the practices of students and teachers. We follow the parallels that are played out, in the pedagogical vision by New London, between students using a metalanguage to design texts and teachers using a metalanguage to design the contexts and experiences of students.

Next, we argue that although design is oriented toward something usable—the object made or produced—desire and difference show up as the life in the process itself. Neither *object* nor *life* describe one another, capture one another, or stand in for one another, but exist rather as simultaneous orientations, registers, or forms of engagement that sometimes complement one another, sometimes challenge one another, and often pose different questions. Hence, we move from an outline of design (à la New London) into a discussion of the role of desire and difference in pedagogy, and especially within the teacher-student relationship. We sketch how desire and difference, as interpreted through Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987) and others (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Massumi, 2002), answers different questions and provides different resources for understanding pedagogy. Taken up together, the registers of design, desire, and difference breathe more life into teacher practice and student practice as relational: the differences created in their contact zone offer a richer and more productive image of pedagogy.

How Design is Described in Student Practice in "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies"

The goal of the New London Group's collaboration was to argue that the changing nature of

literacy and language with respect to new technologies, contemporary modes of global communication, the increased saliency of linguistic and cultural diversity, and the restructured workplace required a reconceptualization of "literacy" into "multiliteracies" (p. 63). Drawing heavily from a systemic functional linguistics perspective, the New London Group took as axiomatic that language systems (including literacies) represent not stable, static, objectively agreed upon rules-based systems, but rather sets of options for meaning making determined through the contextualized, cultural, and practical uses to which they are put. They understood language and literacies as adaptive and social, and expanded the idea of texts to include multiple ways of communicating and making meaning. Arguing for understanding these multiple modes of language as dynamic representational resources used by global citizens, the New London Group named as central goals of a multiliteracies pedagogy the development of students' abilities to respond effectively to linguistic and cultural differences including multiple languages, dialects, and modes; critically assess the various contexts within which they and others live and work; and draw effectively from contemporary resources to be active and deliberate designers of their social futures.

In organizing their vision of students' powerful uses of literacy practice for designing social futures, the New London group privileged work with *available designs* and *the redesigned*. This pedagogical commitment reflected New London Group's positing of practice as driven by a rational orientation toward the future. Students were imagined working to create texts (broadly understood) based on goals derived from their developing understanding of design. For example, as we explore in greater detail in the following, in "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies" (New London Group, 1996), the students (and teachers) might work to develop an understanding of design in relation to multimodalities, design grammars, and discourses.

The multimodal design processes in "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies" and, presumably, in multimodal analysis, are based on the

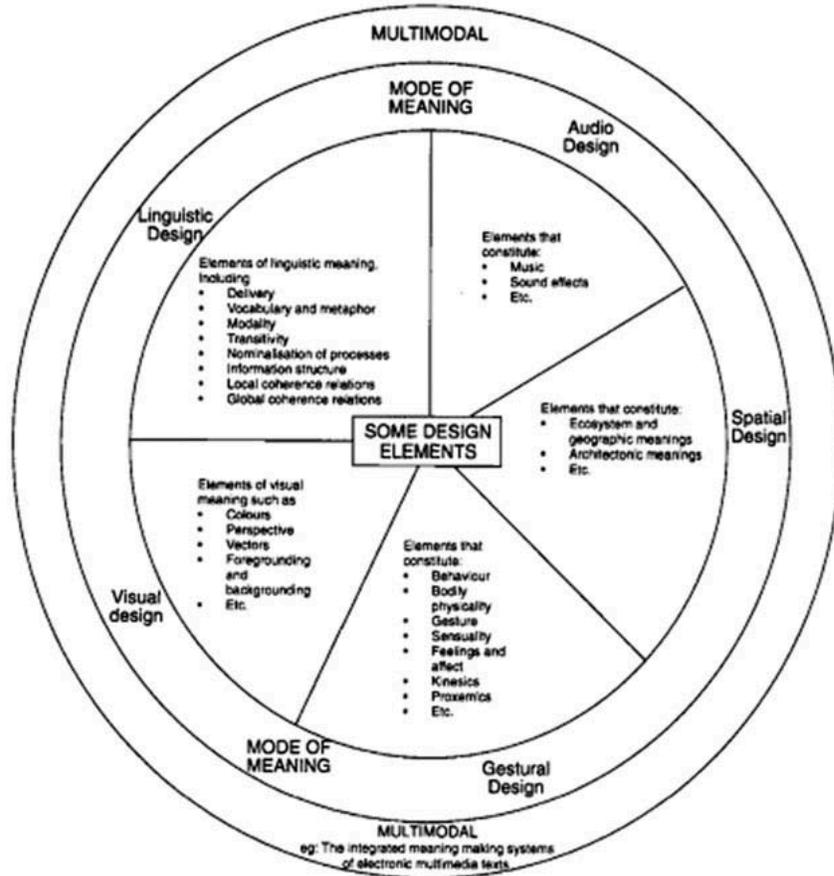


Figure 1. Metalanguages and Design Elements of Different Modes of Meaning from the New London Group

learning of functional grammars or “metalanguages” that “describe and explain patterns of meaning” (New London Group, 1996, p. 78) in six major areas: “linguistic design,” “visual design,” “audio design,” “gestural design,” “spatial design,” and, an area that builds connections among the others, “multimodal design.” The notion of grammar proposed within each area—“a specialized language that describes patterns of representation”—is intended to be associated with “productive and innovative potential” and not merely a categorization of “mechanical skills” (pp. 78–79). Linguistic design is considered as a model of a proposed metalanguage, exemplified with a “highly selective checklist of features of texts,” including vocabulary,

metaphor, transitivity, nominalization, coherence relations, and others.

A diagram (Figure 1) from “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies” (New London Group, 1996) provides an overview of the proposed functional grammars, representative elements, and their relations in multimodal design. The model bears resemblance to another such model, created by Halliday in 1978, which situated linguistics relative to “the map of knowledge” (Figure 2; Halliday, 1978, p. 11). Both models place language or semiotic elements and structures at the center of a world-making project, which move through scales of abstraction to larger systems of knowledge (Halliday, 1978) or meanings in the world (New London Group, 1996). Moreover, both models put language at the center

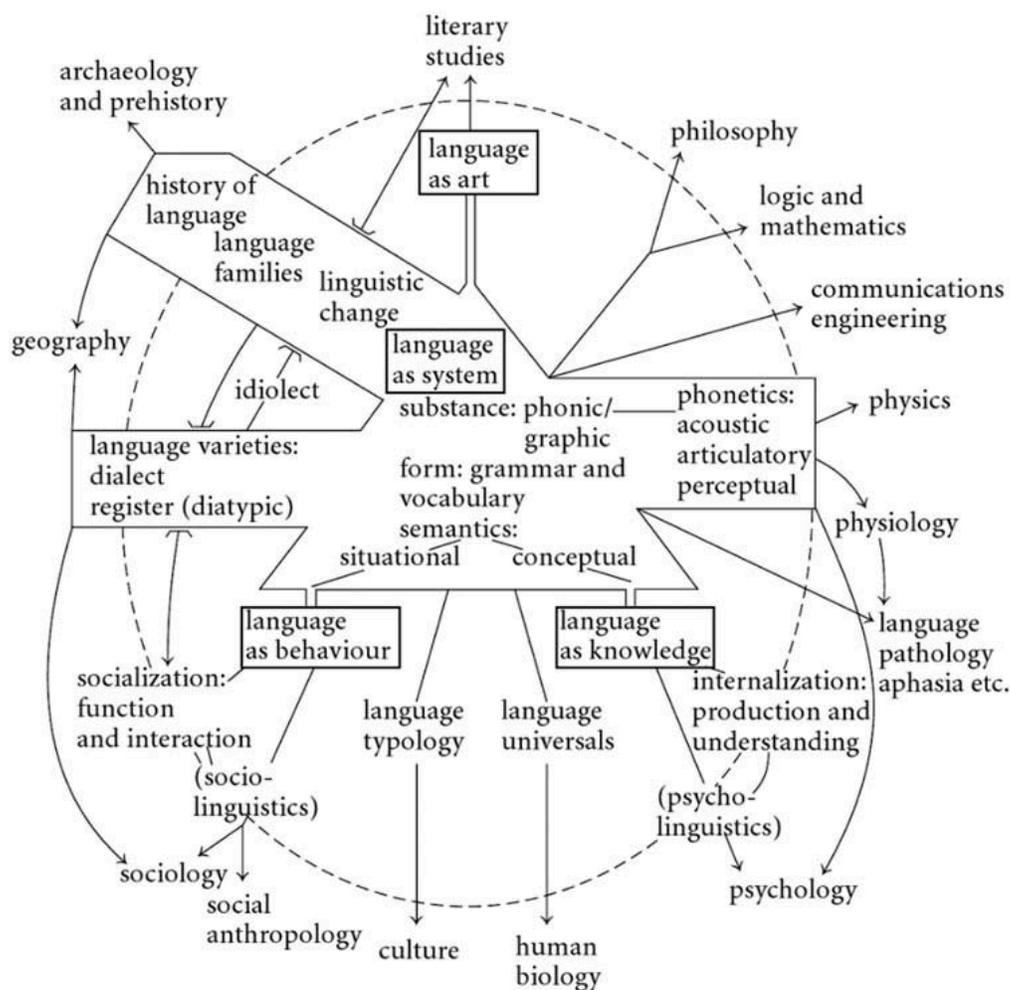


Figure 2. Halliday's centralist model of Interdisciplinarity.

of education, language “as it impinges on the teacher as a creator of social man [*sic*]” (Halliday, 1978, p. 9), or in the case of “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies,” expanded semiotic grammars defining the “what” of pedagogy.

The attention to design grammar in “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies” (New London Group, 1996) is closely linked to the New London Group’s model of change or innovation. This vision involves supporting students’ development of powerful multiliteracies that contribute to a more hopeful and equitable social futures. As we have written elsewhere, social change is enacted through discursive change where

“existing configurations” are “disarticulated” and “new configurations” are “articulated” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 223, cited in Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 30), allowing for the creation or reclaiming of new languages of representation through intertextuality and hybridity.

The textual practices of youth are understood as discursive self-fashioning, the design and redesign of one’s present and future. Hybridity and intertextuality also become the working model of the changing (textual) social subject, fashioned through the relationships of an “order of discourse” that is articulated and hybridized with other such orders – “Each discourse involves producing and reproducing and

transforming different kinds of people” (New London Group, 1996, p. 74). Therefore, in understanding children and youth not just as consumers but also as producers or designers, design grammars become key in prompting new possibilities for design.

How Design is Depicted in Teacher Practice in “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies”

The goals of education in “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies” are understood in relation to securing a more just future through helping to ensure that all students gain the skills and dispositions that will help ensure future access to desired wealth, power and status symbols. Schooling, in this vision, “provides students the opportunity to develop skills for access to new forms of work through learning the new language of work” (New London Group, 1996, p. 66). At the same time, it does not uncritically reproduce the injustices of identity-based opportunities but supports students in developing the knowledge and dispositions necessary to “the capacity to speak up, to negotiate, and to be able to engage critically with the conditions of their ... lives” (p. 67).

In the section entitled “The ‘How’ of a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies,” the New London authors recognize a potential mismatch between learning, such as language learning, which they characterize as intrinsic to the student, and learning which represents the goals of education but is not necessarily a goal of any given student. Student interests therefore provide the starting point for working toward a “Critical Framing” of what is and what could be (pp. 86–87) and ultimately toward “Transformed Practice in which students transfer and re-create Designs of meaning from one context to another” (p. 83). Teachers are assigned the task of representing the contemporary world of diverse subjectivities, languages, discourses, and registers (p. 72), supporting students in the required development of the metalanguages specific to each in order to provide them the potential for access to both cultural and sub-cultural discourse communities. While students are seen as agentic in taking Available Designs and redesigning them for their own purposes, the teacher is often

the critical voice of difference needed to take students beyond their own limited visions and interests.

For example, New London’s implied teacher, as rational guide and questioner, might draw from this pedagogy of design key questions related to a student’s use of textual resources: What does the student make use of from her “toolkit for working on semiotic activities” (1996, p. 77)? How robust does her toolkit appear to be in terms of visual design? In terms of pedagogy, how might he be led to forms of “reflective generalization” (p. 86) concerning visual design grammar? Such questions allow a teacher to assess what the student already knows either implicitly or explicitly and supports focused teaching to provide the student with access to insider’s design language and practices that could lead to more powerful, thoughtful and intentional design skills and use.

Another question might concern how a student’s relative mastery of visual design and its key elements relate to his mastery of key elements of other modes of design, including “multimodal design.” What other textual material (e.g., popular culture) does the student borrow from? This latter question makes evident the production of new designs, discourses, and textual affordances in the movement from media type to media type. Rather than simply lamenting the successful commercialization of a narrative that is of great interest to youth, a New London approach by a teacher may focus on how flexible and successful the student might be in recognizing and making effective use of the textual forms of these various modalities in gaining access to multiple discourse communities that are of interest to her. Moreover, discursively speaking, the teacher’s inquiries may lead to questions about how gender and sexuality, social class, racialized identity, global politics and economics, and kid culture (to name just a few) are represented in a text and how they come into play a student’s own identifications, contexts, and experiences. One possible pedagogical outcome of such an analysis would be to work to heighten the students’ critical awareness of how these types of texts function in the reproduction or disruption of dominant discourses.

Teacher practices of Critical Framing and Overt Instruction, as suggested in our questions above,

are occasions during which the role of the teacher using a pedagogy of design becomes most evident. In “Situated Practice,” where teachers “must consider the affective and sociocultural needs of all learners” (p. 85), the teacher’s practice with or alongside the student is all but absent. Rather, the teacher only becomes visible and active as a designing agent, drawn to the idea of “difference” in the students (e.g., their sociocultural needs as entry point). Overt Instruction includes teacher interventions that make explicit what students are learning and doing to bring the students to conscious control over that practice (pp. 84–85).

Having moved through phases of Overt Instruction and Critical Framing, students finally must engage in Transformed Practice. Here, students need to be able to demonstrate their capacity to “design and carry out, in a reflective manner, new practices embedded in their own goals and values” (p. 87) that make clear what they learned through overt instruction and critical framing. This description and expectation frames student learning as developing a metalanguage, something that is executed and demonstrated through discourse, in modes, in language, in grammar, through various visible and audible forms of text or speech that can be traced back to what is taught and known, to what can be spoken (in one form or another) and recognized. As we will argue in what follows, teaching is likewise framed as a metalanguage.

The Parallel of Student Practice and Teacher Practice as Informed by Metalanguage

In Transformed Practice, the tie to the teacher’s task of planning curriculum and assessment is made clear: “Such learning processes, such a pedagogy, needs to be continually reformulated on the basis of these assessments” (1996, p. 87). In other words, the New London Group suggests a relationship between the metalanguage and teachers or teaching. They describe this metalanguage – an educationally accessible functional grammar – as a treatment to be applied to teachers by curriculum experts through providing a pedagogy that offers support for a

“sophisticated critical analysis of language and other semiotic systems” that at the same time does not make “unrealistic demands on teachers.” They argue “teachers must be motivated to work on and work with the meta-language.” To be sure, they go on to stipulate that the idea of metalanguage itself should be “quite flexible and open ended. It should be seen as a tool kit for working on semiotic activities, not a formalism to be applied to them.” Apparently cautioning readers assumed to be education researchers or policy makers who are accustomed to prescribing pedagogy to curriculum, they emphasize flexibility and clarify that “[t]he metalanguage is not to impose rules, to set standards of correctness, or to privilege certain discourses in order to empower students” (p. 77).

Through the course of the argument in “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies,” teaching becomes first and foremost about the development of metalanguages, however flexible, first applied to teachers and then to students. Students and teachers are seen purposeful or goal-driven rather than unpredictable, multi-purposed, energetic, spontaneous, or experimental. At the same time, the pedagogy – in this case, the metalanguage – takes precedence over what else might happen in teaching and learning or in the relationship between teachers and learners. To be clear, we are not saying that this is necessarily a mistake or something to always be avoided. It is as good an understanding of what is worth teaching as any, and indeed far better than many. Nevertheless, while we recognize the importance of teachers having tools to guide curriculum and pedagogy, we are interested in the “what else” of teaching, and in this case, in the life of desire in the classroom.

The Present Absence Of Difference and Desire in the Design-Based Pedagogy of New London

To explain what we have in mind when we talk about desire, it is necessary to turn to the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari (1983) described humans as “desiring machines” because humans are, above all else, producing and being produced. For Deleuze and

Guattari, desire is an undifferentiated drive without object, a flow or a productive energy that is subsequently organized either through its appropriation into social desires and expressions or that produces something unexpected and new.

Desire not only does not have an object; it also does not have a subject. That is, humans do not stand alone but are constantly reconstituted by entering into assemblages – relations and flows with other objects, ideas, elements, materials, drawn from the milieu in which they exist. These are all characterized as “machines”, meaning that on their own, they have no meaning, purpose, or function. Everything is always “plugged in” to assemblages through the eternal flow of time, movement and other material and non-material intra-actions (Barad, 2007). Assemblages are dynamic, assembling and reassembling and reassembling again.

Difference is key to Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualization of desire. Life – the constant movement of and through assemblages – produces difference. “[D]esire is production and life itself a desiring flow towards ever-proliferating differences ... a pre-personal and pre-individual germinal influx of intensity” (Fancy, 2010, p. 161). At one level, “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies” is a document that is primarily about difference, that is, how students learn to think about and work in a world that is increasingly defined by diverse identities and languages. This is, however, a very different conceptualization of difference than what is found in Deleuze and Guattari. The New London Group draws its perspective on difference from cultural studies, saturated in particular notions of identity and subjectivity. Deleuze and Guattari challenged this privileged idea of difference as being about identity – differences among identities – in favor of that which is emergent or immanent about desiring machines. Difference cannot be subordinated to identity. Difference is about the difference in intensity as produced through the formation and deformation and reformation of assemblages. Difference is about virtuality, about what could happen that is unplanned, undesigned. Difference

provides force, momentum, life. In other words, difference is proliferation.

Massumi (2002) named it this way:

Participation precedes recognition. The separate, recognizable speakable identities of subject and object involved in an event come into definition only retrospectively. Only after the event has run its course can it be contextualized as a particular case of a certain class of happening. ... Subject and object are embedded in a situation-relation that cannot be determined in advance. As long as the event is ongoing, the outcome is open to amendment (p. 231).

What Massumi (2002) described is something that is quite different than design, and indeed is different than curriculum and pedagogy. As Mozere (2014) explained it, difference is that which empowers students’ “forces of life” (p. 102), which enables them to increase the power and intensity of their specific being and that may happen through or against or in spite of the teacher’s agenda (Boldt, Lewis, & Leander, 2015). In other words, relations of difference ignite desire, propel movement, prepare the ground upon which illumination may or may not occur. It is possibility, what may happen next because the next moment always brings something new.

Massumi (2002) went on to say:

The being that preceded cognition is always actively engaged in a defining actualization of potential. It is a being in becoming. As such, it carries a certain vagueness. The vagueness is the way in which potential presents itself in the unfolding of experience. (p. 232)

In “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies” and in the many iterations of design that have cropped up in its wake, we are concerned that teachers and students are most idealized – or at least recognized – when they are unproblematically rational, unified and driven in a clearly goal-directed way. Teachers seem to have a general idea of where students need to end up, even if they don’t know the particular content of that product. Students are understood as in need of the intervention of design. Interests and experiences are the excuse for teaching, but if untransformed or not

submitted to a design process they are not, as Mozere (2014) would have it, reflective of a form of learning that is about life in itself.

Designing and Difference-Making

As a matter of pedagogy, why might this matter? What difference might desire and difference contribute to the world of a well-designed curriculum? Massumi argued that in the assemblic creation of difference, “Belonging-togetherness takes ontological precedence over discreteness of components and subject-object separation” (p. 231). In “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies” (New London Group, 1996), the priority that is given to the development of a metalanguage threatens to subsume the genuine relationships of “belonging-togetherness.” The mastery of metalanguages by teachers—the internalization of languages for teaching as well as for design—is transported outward to the student as a way of scaffolding expertise toward a predicted future. In the relationship to the student, the teacher is static, already known and knowing, while the student continues to matter primarily an object to be transformed along a preferred pathway.

What Deleuze and Guattari presented is the possibility that those things in the classroom that are created in the constantly emerging and changing assemblage of the classroom might be a source of transformation for all. This is a kind of “belonging-togetherness” that attends to the enlivening presence of a personal desire that is driven by difference, the new and unexpected, undesigned potential or virtuality. It is, they argue, what might happen next that brings life into things. We worry that the teacher who is preoccupied with metalanguages, design, and an understanding of criticality or transformation that is known ahead of time will primarily be listening for openings to lead the student to a satisfactory endpoint in the teacher’s imagination. This fails to be a true relationship because the ontological reality of the student fails to outweigh what exists in the mind of the teacher. The nonrelationship carries the constant danger of alienation and of failing to tune in to those things that might, to repeat Mozere’s (2014) formulation, be happening in or in spite of or indifferently to the curriculum, that which is increasing

the power and intensity of students’ specific being. These things are, we argue, as deeply important for arming our students with a sense of weight and purpose in the world as anything that happens through learning metalanguages.

In our analysis and critique of “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies” (New London Group, 1996), we point out what is produced and what is elided in the document and suggest an alternative reading of pedagogy, which produces and elides its own possibilities. Although we believe that the understandings generated by a “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies” and the work that followed are of value, these values are also limited to particular dimensions of what is real; they are accurate within certain spheres. Of course, the same is true of our own analysis. Our goal, then, is not to overturn “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies” but to mark its limitations and to bring different considerations into play—to consider how metalanguage, like any language, is lived out in relationships of desire and difference.

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Additional Resources

1. **Hagood, M.** A rhizomatic cartography of adolescents, popular culture, and constructions of Self. In K. M. Leander and M. Sheehy (Ed.), *Spatializing literacy research and practice*. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 143-160.

Hagood develops two contrastive case studies to show how adolescents make use of popular culture in constituting their subjectivities. Hagood illuminates the value of Deleuze-Guattarian rhizoanalysis, as a form of spatial mapping, for understanding how adolescents can use pop culture to cast remarkably different relationships to a powerful form of identification (in this case, Christianity).

2. **Kaustuv, R.** *Teachers in nomadic spaces*. (2003). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Kaustuv develops an extended case study in which he relates the process of becoming a teacher in an urban school to Deleuze’s philosophy. Kaustuv builds a case for the productive power of difference in new teacher experimentation that allows release

from a Platonic hold on curriculum as recovery and representation.

3. **Leafgren, S.** (2009). *Reuben’s fall: A rhizomatic analysis of disobedience in kindergarten*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Leafgren’s study of children’s disobedience in kindergarten offers multiple ways teachers might consider and respond to children’s acts. As an example of Deleuzo-Guattarian inspired research, she understands the assemblic or emergent nature of unfolding events to require a non-linear and non-causally determined analysis.

4. **Sherbine, K. and Boldt, G.** (2013). *Becoming intense*. In F. McArdle and G. Boldt, (Editors), *Young children, pedagogy, and the arts: Ways of seeing*. New York, NY: Routledge, 73-88.

This chapter offers an accessible, Deleuzo-Guattarian analysis of a second grade classroom in which the teacher’s vision of teaching and learning changed as she paid close attention to the children’s passion for the online, multiplayer game, *Poptropica* (<http://www.poptropica.com/>).

