

Multiple Literacies Theory
A Deleuzian Perspective

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CHAPTER 12. MLT AS A MINOR POSTSTRUCTURALISM OF EDUCATION

*Every revolution evaporates and leaves behind only the slime of a new
bureaucracy.
Franz Kafka*

INTRODUCTION

When one approaches contemporary literacy studies one might feel like Kafka tackling the bureaucratic structures of 20th century European civilization. Where should one start? How can one make sense of governmental interference in literacy and societal concerns that are manipulated by politicians in order to get more votes? This chapter proposes a synthesis of the mode of poststructuralism put forward by Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari (1986) in their *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, so that it is applicable to the qualitative analysis of educational data contained in MLT (Multiple Literacies Theory). This approach to using Deleuze & Guattari's method for literary analysis links power with language and action. The language of teachers and students in the many folds of the educational system of liberal democracies, gives insights into the structures and the relationships that they are speaking about. These perceptions are manifold, and they may be described with reference to the desires and fears of the occupants of the system and a minor poststructural philosophy. Philip Goodchild (1996) has described the minor philosophy of Deleuze & Guattari as possessing three characteristics:

- The concepts involved have crossed a threshold of absolute deterritorialization. This means that the relationships with language, meaning and implementation are fluid and interchangeable.
- Everything takes on a collective meaning.
- Power concerns that are inimical to articulation are henceforth reversed. This connects language with expression and subjectivity; in that when an individual talks through the spectrum of this philosophy, the desires that are portrayed are not personal (pp. 56-58).

Poststructuralism is in this context a guiding light that may help to reverse the dominance of instrumental reason, and allow for the very words and desires of the individuals caught up in the machinic processing of education to be drawn forth and live as links between the qualitative unconscious or the linguistic imaginary in education (MLT), and the general principles of control that act to regulate the system¹. This approach takes away the binding pressure to generalize or to quantify

or to find qualitative principles that may define limited or redundant aspects of the already reduced and educated self. In fact, this aspect of educational poststructuralism may be summarized in the typically Kafkan dictum "where one believed there was the law, there is in fact desire and desire alone," (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 49). It would seem to me that nothing could be closer to the point when trying to explain a multiple literacies theory for contemporary society. The language that we use and the conclusions that we draw have already been infected by the power structures that regulate and control us. It is not enough to flee from these forces, or to shelter in narrative structures of resistance or dissonance. One must analyze the desires that are manifest in educational provision and MLT from within. This is an intense and auto-critical journey, as the conditioning that goes into our language is deeply buried in the pedagogic applications and choices that have taken us from kindergarten subjects to university professors. One should actually become present day Kafkas and allow hidden desires to be produced in words that act to open up different types of communication that signify the machinic influences of education in language.

HOW MINOR IS THIS APPROACH?

In 2004, Zelia Gregoriou said that a minor philosophy of education is: "a philosophy that is not haunted by the big figures of philosophy's fathers, picks up ideas from [the] social sciences without anxiety about risking its identity, and connects these ideas in new encounters," (p. 234). One such encounter is with Kafka through the reading by Deleuze and Guattari (1986), and one may partake in this interaction without the risk of being dominated by any patriarchy. This is because Kafka and Deleuze & Guattari have meticulously cleared their writing of paternal influence, in fact it is one of their primary focuses in the *performativity of writing*, as the semantic field opened up for the reader is multidimensional and generative (Eco, 1984). This claim is backed up by Hayden's (1998) argument about Deleuze and Guattari's writing, in that it is primarily about difference – resemblance, identity and analogy are its secondary effects. This radically shifts our understanding about how 'minor' the minor is in the minor poststructuralism of education that I am proposing for MLT. MLT is properly aligned with everything that is creative, intense, chaotic and potentially misrepresented in the usual course of theorizing literacy (Greene, 1995). So being minor has little to do with being small, in fact it is better understood as a processing mechanism, that takes all the empirical elements under analysis, and synthesizes out everything that claims to be or tends towards majoritarianism.

Kafka did something similar as he wrote about the realities and desires that beset him. His is not to deliberately take a weak position on phenomena, or to aggrandize the psychology of sickness, but it is a sophisticated schema for writing about life and power. Contemporary educational research uses various techniques and strategies taken from social inquiry and theory (Peters & Burbules, 2004). For

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example, narrative inquiry has been put forward as a research methodology to tell the stories of those in the education system, and to consequently make schools more wholly pluralistic and sensitive to individual concerns (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Yet the stories that are told invariably reflect the desires and realities of the researchers. Therefore the conundrum for narrative inquiry is how to produce research output that fully reflects and articulates the lives of the researcher whilst separating these stories from the objectives of the study.

Critical discourse analysis would seem to be a more promising educational research methodology, in that the language games that are played out in educational institutions may be fully understood by looking at the way language carries markers of domination and submission (Fairclough, 1992; Janks, 1997). This methodology has been used in educational research and takes its poststructural heritage from the work of Michel Foucault, and has been explicated in education by James Marshall (1996). Taking Deleuze and Guattari's minor literature as a basis for MLT to analyze power in education goes one step further in that it specifically addresses the writing style of the research and theory that is generated. Narrative inquiry and critical discourse analysis may be reduced to mimetic gestures and hollow reproduction of institutional power related phenomena through machinic application of their principles. Narrative inquiry has the focus of telling stories about people and schools, critical discourse analysis analyses injustice and issues of inequity. MLT as a minor poststructuralism of education does not have a moral pivot in stories, or disadvantaged groups caught up in the machine processes of industrialized democratic education. MLT is a matter of processing educational phenomena and writing about what is experienced through the lens of somebody fully open to the creative possibilities of language, and not merely reproducing what is seen, heard or felt. As Zelia Gregoriou (2004) has put it: "Erasing the subject of enunciation, facilitating the erosion of universals and allowing anonymous assemblages of voices, acts, affects and bodily habits [allows us] to invoke a new sensibility, philosophers of education become bilingual or multilingual in their own philosophical idiom," (p. 248).

KAFKA AND EDUCATION

So what is one exactly looking at when using this minor poststructuralism of education for MLT? It seems to me that it has a lot to do with the otherness and alienation that the education system produces – yet without reproducing this otherness in terms of strengthening the power relations that have created it. In a way it is a matter of celebrating otherness, and using the authorial perspective of an educational researcher as a methodology that creates difference. One way of doing this is to write the narratives that appear in education from the perspective of an outsider. These minor narratives are interwoven into classrooms in one form or another through the discourses of the children and the teachers and researchers and the media where social concerns about education circulate freely with little

authorship. In their minor literature, Deleuze & Guattari (1986) examined the role of the production of Yiddish with respect to Czech and German through the writing of Kafka. They found that it is a language where, "minor utilizations will carry you away," (p. 25). Something similar has been happening in education systems through the relationships that have developed with respect to the organizing principles that have dominated the teacher-student relationships and that have been mandated by government. It is not enough to represent this production of otherness – Deleuze and Guattari (1984) demand that we follow these processes, and in fact insert ourselves as Kafkaesque figures in education to produce MLT.

This is certainly a creative move and one that fits in with previous poststructural approaches to education. For example, Bronwyn Davies (2004) has focused on otherness as a means to examining the forces of transgression present in educational practice. She is interested in the "transgressive possibilities to be found in oneself as an embodied subject," (p. 66), and these are played out through subjectification, deconstruction and syncope. Subjectification involves the normative processes of becoming a subject such as those present in schools and universities, deconstruction critically analyses and unpacks these processes, and syncope is when time stops and the processes of subjectification and deconstruction shed insight into the ways in which we are being molded through education. Davies (2004) considers that this poststructural approach will get at the unconscious forces that run through education, and that have been taboo to rational inquiry in the past. MLT as a minor poststructuralism of education has a similar aim, yet concentrates the powers of the analyst on their writing skills, in order to enable the multiplicities present in the unconscious to be carried forth and to emerge for the reader. Perhaps the frustrating point about using Deleuze & Guattari's (1986) minor literature for MLT is that it does not give us a new systemization to adhere to. Even though Davies (2004) stresses the fact that her approach is fluid and holistic; by concentrating on specific subjects, she signals an inevitable end in educational psychology, which she is at the same time at pains to resist. Transgression in Kafka is found spread out across systems and in collective enunciation of worries and fears, blocks and frustrations. It is here that we must deal with the lingering influence of Oedipus in education to disavow its influence in MLT.

THE GREAT OEDIPUS IN EDUCATION

Educational theory has found a recent home in the multi-faceted tenets of constructivism (Murphy, 1997). This is a learning theory, and as such directs the philosophical outlook towards the student. Yet at the same time, the question of the teacher is left in the balance – he or she becomes a facilitator, guide or significant other to the focus of the activity that is on how to improve the efficiency of learning. MLT as a minor poststructuralism of education is also concerned with learning, and indeed recent theorists of education such as Inna Semetsky (2003a, 2003b) have found synchronicities and parallels between the work of John Dewey and Gilles Deleuze. The point of using Deleuze & Guattari's minor literature (1986) to underwrite poststructuralism is that this constructivist paradigm does not

emerge in the same way as would be the case if we take the whole of Deleuze's *oeuvre* as reference material for the argument. Deleuze (1995) stressed the workings of the unconscious throughout his philosophical life, and used it to redevelop subjective relationships with words, images and thought. When he wrote in conjunction with Félix Guattari, the emphasis was much more on unlocking the effects of multifarious desire and placing them into the social field (Colebrook, 2002). The specific philosophical problems concerned with education and becoming – that Dewey and Deleuze have similar answers to with respect to understanding habit, identity and change (Dewey, 1998); dissolve in the conjoint writing of Deleuze and Guattari (1984), as desire takes us on a perilous journey into the “body-without-organs” (pp. 9–16).

This is a type of limit-thought. This limit may well be facilitated through constructivism; yet the reality that is created is an alternate one, guided and driven by libidinal and imaginary powers. The purpose of such concentrated and intensive energy is to break the yoke of Oedipus. Oedipal mechanisms are locatable everywhere in education and by degrees in educational theory. These markers tie the activities and conceptual designs of education to processes of domestication, familiarization and repetition (Moore, 2000). Feminist philosophers such as Luce Irigaray (1985) have identified this activity with phallic representation; and she has suggested new writing styles that lead these power processes of control into a dance. Deleuze and Guattari's (1986) minor literature focuses on how Kafka had created a writing machine that spread Oedipal influence out onto a plane that his characters inhabited. One can do the same in education with MLT. Educational systems and strategies and schools and teachers can be connected through writing about them in lateral and unexpected ways so that desire may become manifest and the unconscious can be seen to work in a productive manner through reading. I would like to suggest that this methodology is preferential to allowing Oedipus to enter through the back-door, and to remain in place by not attending to the role of the teacher through over-coding the learner.

Kafka also took this attitude to writing; and it is what gives his work an unsettling and haunted quality. Deleuze and Guattari (1986) contend that the psychological approach to reading Kafka is “deformed” (p. 76) in that it denies laughter and political shuddering. We must read Kafka with escape routes in mind, and we are escaping from the influence of Oedipus at every turn. The particular linguistic and figurative transformations that we find in Kafka are signals of choices and turnings in a labyrinth, and this maze is the desiring-mind of the writer. It is important to note that this type of minor literature is not made up of metaphor (Bogue, 1989, p. 110), but constitutes a machine, with interconnected mechanisms that work together to drive the programme. Likewise, MLT and educational theory may work on their own terms to unpick and unravel the forces of ‘interiorisation’ that may cause fractures from within. For example, calls to make policy or deal with teacher training issues (Beckett, Agashae & Oliver, 2002) that may be raised through MLT research, are resolved through the tenets of a minor poststructuralism as power directives that simultaneously sit in the imagination as desirable outcome to the activity of writing about education. One of the most pressing issues of the writing

of a minor poststructuralism of education as MLT is the role of the teacher in contemporary society.

PLEASURE IN TEACHING

This move to unpack MLT with respect to teachers is within the realm of schizoanalysis (Bogue, 1989). Teachers have been placed in a position that is beset from every side by contradictory and competing terms. It is as if everyone wants a slice of his or her being. The media and government are on the lookout for any sexual activity in schools involving teachers. University authorities are keen to know how well the students are judging their lecturers. Bookstores are stocked with tales of best practice and 'how to' manuals for educators. One could say that the once singular and joyous activity of teaching has sprung a leak – and this leakage has led to the replacement of events in experience with social intervention. How does MLT as a minor poststructuralism of education that I am drawing out in this chapter deal with this situation?

Bogue (1989) describes Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis as a method for linking linguistic and social subversions. In the case of Kafka, the writer has invented plots and streams of action that are unnerving enunciations of desires gone astray and missing their marks. Oedipus would want to reconnect these feed mechanisms, so that desire and action are linked once again, and functional and equitable systems are present in the minds of the reader and social audience – such as the King getting his just rewards for incest. Contrariwise, schizoanalysis allows for disjunctions to remain in tact, and as such it is a creative strategy to emphasize escape routes from entrapment. In terms of the focus on the teachers, ways of working with text such as the pedagogy of critical dissonance (Cochran-Smith, 2003) do resonate with the principles of schizoanalysis. Yet Deleuze and Guattari's (1984, 1986, 1988) project has a wider scope than creating a buffer zone around the social constructions in the classroom and teacher education through rational and reflective critique. Their idea is to utilize all the forces present in the learning arena, and to create an intensive experimental field where any possibility may become apparent.

This is a dangerous idea for curriculum planners and school administrators. I have argued elsewhere that teaching philosophy and literature suffers from systematic bureaucratic interference (Cole, 2005), and this is often due to the lingering influence of Hegelian idealism and his conception of civil society. My solution is to go back to the ideas of Baruch Spinoza, where desire and rationality are still fully connected and the dialectics of negation do not intercede with the aim of driving us to universals (Wood, 1998). Deleuze has used Spinoza as a basis for his philosophy throughout his career, and in the analysis of Kafka it resolves itself in the force of the continuous or the "assemblage" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 85). This is where desires come together and the connective devices of enunciation make gears to speed the reader through the writing. Such machinery can be translated to the teacher's subjectivity and the intervening forces that could potentially be interpreted as interruptions to quality teaching and learning. Using

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MLT as a minor poststructuralism of education shapes interruptions to teaching and learning into motivational factors with respect to pedagogy. For example, the complex problem of understanding how contemporary media shapes subjectivity is a reason to study structuralism, poststructuralism and literary texts such as *Survivor* (Palahniuk, 1999). This is the rational side of teaching according to MLT as a minor poststructuralism of education, and echoes Erica McWilliam's (1999) work on pedagogical pleasures, or Eugene Holland's understanding of the force of the group (1998). Yet one must also apply the notion of MLT as a minor poststructuralism of education to the learner in order to figure out the implications for being part of collective educative experiences.

VITAL LEARNING

The analysis of learning using MLT as a minor poststructuralism of education is caught in the double bind that Kafka brilliantly brings to life in his writing. This bind is when we speak about our learning experiences we also automatically assume that we will be understood. Yet language is full of stutters and modes of communication that may scramble the intended meaning of the learner. To complicate matters more, contemporary society has invented many new ways to communicate such as SMS messaging or the multimodality of the Internet; which makes it even more likely that learning experiences will remain misunderstood. The system of teaching and learning that society recognizes depends critically on communication. Shannon & Weaver (1949) argued that the primary concern of communication is to reproduce a message sent from one place to another as faithfully as possible. This model of communication came to dominate the development of telecommunication systems – with the simple transmitter-recipient relationship working as paradigmatic within the construction of telephone information networks. Complexity theory (Waldrop, 1993; Lewin, 1993) has suggested new ways of understanding communication in the context of information being transmitted and received through intricate, changing networks. Kafka sketched out parallel networks eighty years previously, and had written down a connection between events and the blocks and breakouts that happen due to these events – in many ways he was working to understand changes in the relationships between memory, power and articulation (Le Goff, 1992) that is also useful for MLT. Robert O'Toole (2005) has laid out this movement in terms of transversalism:

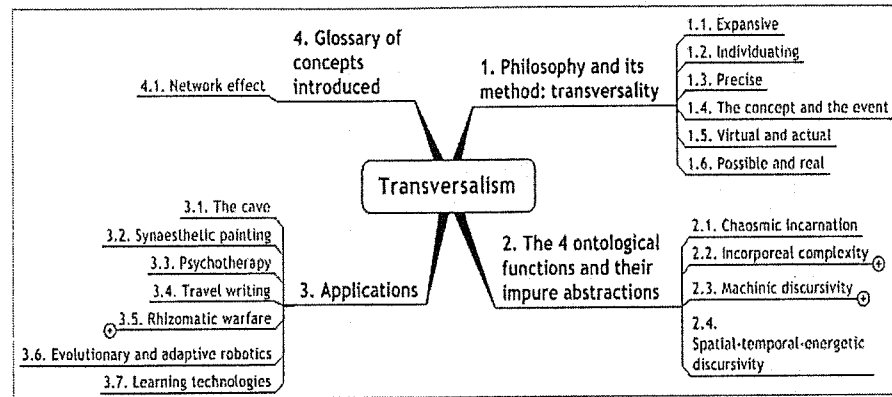


Figure 1. O'Toole's Transversalism (2005)

The contemporary learner is caught in the networks of power and memory that are represented above by transversalism (Figure 1). Poststructuralism is in this context the process of mapping out the networks through which we learn and our articulation of these processes, even though they may be constantly shifting. With the development of computers (Moravec, 1988) it is possible to calculate the complexity of learning communication networks. These networks should include factors such as: feedback, recursive functioning, digital oscillation and paradox (Wilden, 1972). MLT as a minor poststructuralism of education uses Kafka to make nodes of intersection between learning behaviors and subsequent new realities – where the imagination of the learner may be powered through the intensity of the situation and express the ways in which they learn. It could be said that the modeling, remodeling, deconstruction and simulation of learning is now creating the dimension in which learning technologies sit. In other words, this minor poststructuralism of education recognizes the immanent processes (Deleuze, & Guattari, 1988) in learning and the consequent transition to digital and mediated curricula that is happening in schools in post-industrial contexts. This is in order to emphasize the vitality of learning in the present.

THE MACHINE UNVEILED

So what are we learning about today by applying MLT? The minor poststructuralism of Deleuze & Guattari (1986) is a machine. Parallel to the discipline of Artificial Life (McCarthy, 2004), one begins in the analysis and writing about educational problems at the bottom with a population of virtual players and their local interactions – the particular educational ecosystem emerges from these dynamics. The basic assumption for this to work is that the systematic properties arise from the interactions between component parts. If the educational theorist were to follow the opposite process, and dissect the whole into its parts and try to

understand how the system works, they would lose the emergent properties that come about due to local interactions. MLT as a minor poststructuralism could also be seen as an extension to the processes of mapping social capital in and around education, which mobilizes the work of Bourdieu (1977) to understand power. As such, MLT functions as a cultural application of social capital analysis and as a synthetic way of working in which everything about a given whole is modeled as a historically emergent result of local social capital interactions.

This poststructural approach to literacy (MLT) prioritizes creativity and expressivity as emergent educational properties that should be incorporated into the way the system is run. In a similar case, Tony Fry (1990) has characterized the activity of understanding the shifts in contemporary art as a "chrono-political nexus" (p. 164). This phrase describes the historical co-existence of multiple social, economic and political tendencies and the cultural perceptions that form around these forces. In education, these shifts tend to coalesce around elections or funding priorities where exterior influences strike to the heart of classroom activity. There is an inseparable mixture of actual, virtual, immanent and materially affective fictions present in the classroom. MLT as a minor poststructuralism of education helps to unlock this entanglement. This deconstruction could be paralleled to Jameson's (1991) *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. In this book, postmodernism was characterized by its fundamental object – and that is the world space of international capital. This space includes multi-dimensional singularities, where instantaneous communication crosses over in the formation and reinvention of contemporary culture (Stoer & Magalhães, 2004). Thus, the impact of globalization defines and distributes transformational meanings – such as the universal appeal of education. Minor poststructuralists of education must aesthetically 'cut and paste' from the ionosphere of signs, symbols, narratives and myths that fill up our educational writing frame – and in the process education's universal appeal can transmute depending upon particular relationships with global capital. In corollary, using Kafka's writing strategies to understand the power influences in contemporary education and to construct MLT includes an emphasis in the shift of educational mores from a humanist pedagogy to a consumer-led interactivity – where every concept or proposition that we use has a relationship with capital.

This shift in educational thinking also results in the designation of complex structures as underpinning the social order and a change from mechanistic explanation to organic rendition contained in, for example, MLT. Michel Maffesoli (1996) has pointed to the need for an "expansive imagination" (p. 33) that will help to understand the death of the historical in learning due to global capital's influence in terms of efficiency and performance and the political mono-valence of corporate interference in education. According to Maffesoli (1996) these repressive structures can also represent an opportunity for re-investing the natural matrix. This is the transition in perspective from an all pervasive economy due to globalization, to a generalized ecology. Or in terms borrowed from the Frankfurt School (Adorno, 1994) the change of angle that MLT as a minor poststructuralism suggests is from nature as object (*Gegenstand*) to nature as partner (*Gegenspieler*). Social vitalism and the articulation of education using the Kafkan writing methodology bubbles

with activity with which most teachers and educational researchers will readily concur. For example: *the near, the insignificant, secrets and taboos* that might escape macroscopic educational analysis, are reintroduced into the frame through MLT and Deleuze & Guattari's (1986) approach. Communication at this level tends to be the "secret behavior of the group, hidden from the outside," (Simmel, 1976, p. 281) – it also guarantees the continued existence of the phylum or the plane of existence that exhibits continuity because it is impossible to break up. In a similar way to the *machinic phylum* of Deleuze & Guattari (1988) a minor poststructuralism is matter in movement, flux and variation. This type of writing is a conveyor of singularities and traits of expression. Kafkaesque minor post-structuralists of education have to become nomads as they follow the qualia of educational data and empirical evidence through their MLT work.

CONCLUSION

The educational theorist, Patti Lather (1994) has imagined a *transgressive validity checklist* that directly complements MLT as a minor poststructuralism of education that has been described in this chapter. This checklist summarizes some of the characteristics of educational writing and research that would appeal both to Kafka and Deleuze & Guattari:

Rhizomatic Validity

- Unsettles from within, taps underground.
- Generates new locally determined norms of understanding; proliferates open-ended and context-sensitive criteria; works against re-inscription of some new regime, or some new system.
- Supplements and exceeds the stable and the permanent (play).
- Works against constraints of authority via relay, multiple openings, networks, complex problems.
- Puts conventional discursive procedures under erasure; breaches congealed discourses, critical as well as dominant (p. 52).

This checklist is not the simple shifting of power from one group to another, but it is the introduction to dispensing with many of the obstacles that hinder engendering an educational discourse which follows and interprets the unstable flows of matter that are produced by teaching and learning in the contemporary context. MLT as a minor poststructuralism of education is where "things take on speed" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 58). The researcher and writer will find that he or she is often in the process of learning and changing as much as the objects of their inquiry. Through these processes, a space is opened up which Cornel West (1991) has termed as "epistemic anti-foundationalism" (p. 22). These anti-foundational conditions of possibility set up the micro-events of which Deleuze & Guattari (1983) have spoken – they draw lines of flight, supple fluxes, points of rupture and adjacency (Said, 1975). Perhaps a Kantian horizon may be fixed in the impossibility

of a pure MLT as a minor poststructuralism of education – yet the disjunctive functionality of hetero-tropism tends not to prioritize the unthinkable, the invisible or the unrepresentable as it produces a positive local thesis based on material principles and interwoven narratives.

Goodchild (1996) has defined education as “a process of incorporation into the dominant reality, so that whatever face one may have, one is forced to think like a majoritarian, even if one has a grievance against the majority,” (p. 110). Kafka stands out as someone who went against the majoritarian way of living – and as a singular writer his approach is a minor perspective from which to build MLT. Deleuze & Guattari’s (1986) representation of his work is part of a separate project that resonates within their other collaborative writing as an articulation of literary theory. Using the work of Deleuze & Guattari for the purposes of literacy theory is clearly full of contradictions and yet:

[t]his coexistence of two states of movement, two states of desire, two states of law, doesn’t signify hesitation but rather an immanent experimentation that will open up all the polyvocal elements of desire, in the absence of any transcendental criteria. Contact and continuity are themselves an active and continuous line of escape (p. 61).

NOTES

- ¹ *An example of MLT as a minor poststructuralism of education*
“The classroom is full of holes”

This phrase was said to me by a deputy headmistress at a state school in the Midlands of the UK. I had been working there for several weeks as a relief teacher, and it is fair to say that the school was a tough environment in which to operate. It was located in an inner city neighborhood, serving a multicultural population. The senior teacher, as she said those words at the door of my classroom, simultaneously peering at the students and counting those present; meant to draw my attention to the fact that there were notable absentees. Yet the phrase that she used had a greater resonance than this to me. She did not know that I was writing a doctoral thesis about student technological literacy learning, and reading a great deal of background theoretical material about poststructuralism and education. The holes then expanded and placed themselves in my unconscious as creative signifiers relating to the influence of power on this educational context. A lot of relief teaching is about keeping the students busy in a classroom, and not out on the street where they could potentially get up to mischief. So the holes were also connected to the absences in the sense that these students were possibly engaging in all kinds of uncontrolled behavior. The holes are portals to imagining what these behaviors might entail. They also resonate with darkness as the demographic representation was primarily derived from non-white ethnic backgrounds. Education is often associated with light, reason and order. The opposite supposedly tends towards a murky mess of chaos and irrationality. As I turned towards the students and the senior administrator of the school left the area, these thoughts crowded my consciousness, and I tried to see the situation from their perspective. Many of them were from non-English speaking families and diverse cultural backgrounds. Yet the academic activities in school were reduced to primarily working in English and prioritizing the skills of reading and writing. I progressively realized that the fundamental educational problem at hand wasn’t a question of who had turned up or not, but of how to adjust the curriculum and pedagogy to suit the members of this community. This took the holes out of the picture as a major worry for my

contact hours. I spoke with the children and examined what their real learning needs amounted to. We focused on oral and sharing experiences, several loved to write and of course I encouraged this. Most however wanted to talk, and they used a brilliant blend of English and their home language. After several weeks of working with them the holes started to diminish and absentees began to drift back because they had learnt from their friends that there were worthwhile experiences to be had at school. This process had nothing to do with checking boxes or inspecting the environment for holes, but it had everything to do with building positive relationships and using what was at hand to make the situation better. Of course this is a perilous journey, fraught with ups and downs - and you never really stop moving; yet I would like to say that I had the brief opportunity to make a set of holes into a whole...

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