Making a Shift from Problems to Possibilities through a Posthumanist Concept of Assemblage

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In the posthumanist turn, Erica Colmenares's work is both timely and significant given the proliferation of education research focusing on the presence of nonhuman force and interactions with nonhumans (specifically in the field of child education and curriculum studies).[1] Drawing on posthumanist approaches, Colmenares not only demonstrates the presence of nonhuman or more-than-human forces or actors, but also calls attention to its potentiality in teacher education.[2] What I mean by the "posthumanist turn," however, is not necessarily an epistemological shift in the field of teacher education research as a whole. It is often difficult to decenter ourselves from anthropocentricism. Moving away from the human-centered tendency that categorizes the world into subjects (human, active, organic) and objects (nonhuman, passive, inert),[3] we find that interaction with nonhuman realm is inevitable; we must acknowledge the presence of nonhuman power or forces in order to make sense of who we are,[4] how we live, how the world works, and what counts as human.[5] Given the historical context of education, where much emphasis has been placed on human (for example, teacher and student) rationality, ability, and performance in relation to academic outcomes, and unequal power relations between multiple binaries—reason vs. emotion, theory vs. practice, teacher vs. student, high-achiever vs. under-achiever and so forth—Colmenares's posthumanist approach to a "stuck" moment or "stuckness" in teacher education provides a hopeful direction for education and research.[6]

Beginning with her own "stuck" moment, Colmenares comes to a promising conclusion by making a shift from a common problem in teacher education—traditional/common understanding(s) of "stuckness" or "stuck" moment, to possibilities. Defining student teachers' experiences or feelings of "uncertainty, frustration, and despair" in terms of affect,[7] she explores how stuck moments are often framed within theory-practice binary in teacher education,

a discourse of theory-practice gap, which often work against student teachers, teacher educators, and teacher education program, and is part of the dominant logic of representation in education.[8] Critiquing the simplistic and problematic portrayals of the stuckness (with)in the logic of representation, she proposes how a "logic of assemblage" can serve as an alternative tool to veer us toward different understandings of stuckness. Specifically, she illuminates stuck moments as "mobile, ephemeral becomings" where "human *and* nonhumans" are in the "process in formation" and "always in a state of emergence."[9] By challenging the problematic logic of representation, she argues that a logic of assemblage makes a shift in focus on stuckness—from "a thing that student teachers need to overcome" to "sites of potentiality" that expands what a student teacher can *do*.

Although it is quite clear that Colmenares looks to "possibility" by highlighting the nonhuman (or posthumanist) aspect of stuckness through "logic of assemblage," I wonder about using a word other than "logic" for the concept of assemblage, especially since it seems to ironically invoke a new dualism between a logic of representation and a logic of assemblage. After all, in all dictionaries, the word, logic is often defined as something to do with (human) rationality or a job related to validity or judgement (or interestingly, also a system or operation of a computer or machine). Additionally, as a philosophical term, logic seems to function as a guide for how we ought to think or reason. As for the concept to assemblage, technically, Deleuze and Guattari "never formalized it as theory per se" while referring it as to the "general logic of assemblage."[10] In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari describe "assemblages [that] go beyond any system of semiology, linguistics, or logic."[11] This might seem trivial. However, her choice of "a logic of assemblage," is seemingly contradictory, yet it also evokes the paradoxical language tendencies of Deleuze, in particular, Deleuze and Guattari's attention to and creation of new meanings made through the concept of deterritorialization.[12]

Relying heavily on paradox, Deleuze explains, "it is language which fixes the limits" or boundaries, "but it is language as well which transcends the limits."[13] Additionally, the Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts are characterized by their creation of a new language through deterritorialization.[14] While getting

away from the "territory" that a given word or concept occupies, the (movement of) deterritorialization disrupts stable, familiar, or sedentary meanings or interpretations. Defamiliarizing our ways of thinking, Deleuze and Guattari's novel ways of using language and concepts push us to understand our world differently. Seen in this light, Colmenares's work deterritorializes stuckness from the familiar (yet problematic) territory (of representation) while dissipating hierarchical binaries—humans vs. nonhumans, teacher vs. student, rationality vs. emotion, theory vs. practice etc.—in a dynamic of assemblage where the rhizome works with a principle of *and*, instead of the arborescent hierarchy of *or*. In particular, given the nature of deterritorialization,[15] along with the concept of assemblage, her work points to a significant shift to approaches previously unthought-of from and beyond the given territory of teacher education.

Drawing on the characteristics of rhizome as connection, heterogeneity, and multiplicities, Colmenares illuminates how "a logic of assemblage works." According to Deleuze and Guattari, the nature of assemblage is that, "there is no essence of particular multiplicities which can remain unaffected by encounter with others."[16] That is, "an assemblage is precisely [this] increase in the dimension of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections" or encounters others.[17] Along with this connective, expanding, and changing nature of assemblage, we can imagine that a (set of) assemblage(s) of teacher education program are nested within (larger) sets of assemblages of curriculum, which are again situated within the assemblages of the educational system, a system with constantly shifting boundaries. Following the nature of deterritorialization and assemblage, Colmenares's work explores how defamiliarization of stuckness could work as an encounter that impacts or disturbs the essence of dominating teacher education discourses that constitute a dominant set of assemblage(s).[18] In fact, the boundary of questions made possible is expanded, as are the potential assemblages. How can education research in a given (set) of assemblages act as heterogeneous or exterior elements that bring about changes in expanding, moving, or changing assemblages? What changes could this (posthumanist) logic of assemblage bring about for different approaches to teaching, learning, and researching, while also challenging the existing atmosphere

of academic/school systems where distinctions between social/natural science are clear, and where subject boundaries seem to be impermeable.

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1 Hillevi Lenz Taguchi and Christine Eriksson, "Posthumanism/New Materialism: The Child, Childhood, and Education," in *The SAGE Handbook of Global Childhoods*, eds. Nicola J. Yelland et al., vol. 1 (London: SAGE, 2021), 165-177.

2 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010)

3 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*; Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, "The Posts Continue: Becoming," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 26, no. 6 (2013): 646-657.

4 Nathan Snaza and John A. Weaver, "Introduction," in *Posthumanism and Educational Research*, ed. Nathan Snaza and John A. Weaver (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1-14.

5 Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, vol. 2. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).

6 In fact, the author of the paper does not explicitly designate her article or her approach to the article as posthumanist. Nor does she use the term "posthumanist." However, not only does the scope of the discussion on "stuckness" in her paper clearly exceed human-centrism or –exceptionalism, it also focuses on the presence, or work, of nonhumans. In this sense, I understand her work as posthumanist.

7 Bessie P. Dernikos et al., *Mapping the Affective Turn in Education: Theory, Research, and Pedagogies* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

8 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, vol. 2, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

9 Erica Colmenares, "Exploring Student Teachers' "Stuckness": Assembling an Alternative to the Logic of Representation in Teacher Education," *Philosophy of Education* 78, no. 4 (same issue).

10 Nail Thomas, "What is an Assemblage?," *SubStance* 46, no.1 (2017): 21-37.

11 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 148.

12 Gilles Deleuze, *The Logics of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (London: The Athlone Press,

1990).

13 Deleuze, *The Logics of Sense*, 2-3.

14 Alecia Youngblood Jackson and Lisa A. Mazzei, *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research: Viewing Data Across Multiple Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

1515 Deterritorialization does not necessarily mean mere changes in physical locations of a territory or geographical displacement. Rather, this immanent change *in*volves expansion of and/or changes in a given territory through an "internal dynamic." The expansion is not a literal, spatial increase or evolution, but *in*volution where molecular transformation and expansion is possible through multiple and lateral connections. Paul Patton, "Deterritorialization + Politics," in *The Deleuze Dictionary,* ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 74.

16 Jon Roffe, "Multiplicity," in *The Deleuze Dictionary,* ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 176-177.

17 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 8.

18 Jessica Ringrose and Emma Renold, "F** k rape!" Exploring Affective Intensities in a Feminist Research Assemblage," *Qualitative Inquiry* 20, no. 6 (2014): 772-780.