10th International Conference on Research in TEACHING and EDUCATION

RTECONF

Paris, France

14 - 16 August 2025

From Trees to Webs: Creative Research with Rhizomatic Maps

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Abstract

Rhizomatic mapping is a dynamic, non-linear method of organizing knowledge that mirrors the complexity and interconnectedness of thought. This lecture will explore rhizomatic mapping as an alternative to conventional hierarchical models commonly used in research. Traditional approaches such as flowcharts and geometric diagrams often depend on binary logic, which can limit creative thinking, whereas rhizomatic mapping—drawing from Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy—embraces a non-hierarchical, interconnected structure. In this method, researchers arrange information from diverse sources on a physical or digital surface, forming meaningful relationships and connecting each element to all others it relates to, thereby generating a complex web of information. Particularly effective in design research, this approach enables the visualization of varied data, uncovers nuanced meanings, enhances information flexibility, and helps identify potential areas for design intervention. The lecture will reflect on my experience teaching this technique to MA Industrial Design students, who investigated everyday objects and synchronised their findings using rhizomatic mapping. Through this process, students expanded their research strategies, tracked peers' developments, and contributed valuable insights, fostering deeper inquiry and inspiring innovative design solutions.

Keywords: visualization; methodology; interconnectivity; innovation; design research.