Unsettling boundaries in making a space for research

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Abstract

In engaging in research we draw upon and develop meanings and concepts that help to frame what we do, how we do it and the meaning we make of it. In the process of framing, we exclude other possibilities from our research practices. To do research then is to engage in the fashioning of conceptual boundaries. This article explores the dilemmas of boundary-making in the context of a research project aimed at exploring the border literacy practices of students in UK further education, those boundary crossing practices which relate to the everyday and more formal demands of the curriculum. This discussion is related to wider debates in the social sciences on the significance of boundaries and borders and their powerful effects on identities and actions.

Unsettling boundaries in making a space for research

How do we language into being that which we want to represent? This is the question that guides the discussion that follows. In coming to research, what are the symbolic resources upon which we draw and can or should we take them for granted? These questions emerge from discussions among a team of researchers working on an UK Teaching and Learning Research Programme funded project, *Literacies for Learning in Further Education* (LfLFE). This project began in January 2004 and some of the early work has sought to conceptually clarify and develop the orientating theoretical position for our empirical work (Ivanic, *et al*., 2004). This positioning involves the uptake and mobilising of concepts already established within the domain of research. Through such uptakes, we might be said to be accepting both the concepts but also the boundaries between concepts that the very process of conceptualisation produces. A concept in many ways relies for its meaning on that which it excludes for it to come into being, a process of othering in order to fashion some sense of identity for the concept. This sets up a boundary between the concept and its other, the concept itself signifying a space of enclosure (Lankshear, *et al.,* 1996). On this reading, conceptualising is a form of boundary making. This is perhaps inevitable, for as Bowker and Star (2000, p. 1) suggest 'to classify is human'. In wanting to write about something, to describe, surmise and explain, we have to write what that something is – a book, a college, learning. However, we do need to be reflexive about this, for as Stronach and MacLure (1997) argue, drawing on Derrida, an opening is only possible because of the closures that make that opening possible.

This might seems somewhat esoteric as a start to an article. However, boundaries are central to our project and therefore our own understanding of boundary work in the discourses upon which we draw is significant. The project itself is examining the literacy demands of 32 courses in fifteen curriculum areas in four further education colleges in Scotland and England. It also seeks to explore the literacy practices in which students engage outwith their *formal* learning – we will return to the notion of the formal later. Literacy is identified as a significant factor affecting retention, progression and achievement in further education courses in the UK (Moser, 1999). The policy agendas of widening participation and social inclusion often position literacy as a key issue to be addressed (DfES, 2002). Much of that agenda focuses on basic skills and works with an individualised deficit model of literacy (DfES, 2003). The LfLFE project, drawing on New Literacy Studies (Barton and Hamilton, 1998, Barton, *et al.,* 2000, Gee, 2003), views literacy practices as socially situated. This work has demonstrated the rich variety of literacy practices in which people engage as part of their daily lives, but also that these are not always mobilised as resources within more formal education provision. It is part of a wider body of work that over the years has sought to explore the diversity of literacy practices in which children, young people and adults engage (e.g. Hull and Schulz, 2004 and Mahiri, 2004). The task of the LfLFE project is therefore not only to examine literacy demands and practices, but also to develop and research the impact of interventions that seek to mobilise what we have termed 'border literacies'. This involves identifying a border domain, or perhaps more accurately bordering a domain in which aspects of the everyday and formal literacy practices are co-emergent in supporting learning (Street, 2005). Thus our interest in boundaries. Here we are using domain as an arena of activity with fluid boundaries rather than the more container-like and bounded sense

often associated with concepts such as context, site or setting. A domain does not pre-exist activity but emerges through it.

Metaphors of boundaries and borders, of notions of the formal and vernacular, and of border-crossing abound in our project, as they do elsewhere in the social sciences and humanities (e.g. Tuomo-Grohn and Engestrom 2003). Indeed the attempts to write a decentred space has been to the fore in much social theory influenced by postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism and feminism. Margins, third spaces, boundary zones and in-between spaces have been conceptualised as ways of framing alternatives to the powerful discourses and discourses of power of the centre. However, there is a sense in which these concepts have been as much subject to the boundary-making of conceptualising practices, as they have challenged the boundaries themselves. Boundaries just keep cropping up and perhaps that is necessary (Muller, 2001), which pushes us to consider less whether or not there is boundary-marking and more the nature of the boundaries being fashioned and the framings entailed.

Our immediate concern in the LfLFE project ties in with wider debates elsewhere therefore. In this article we intend to explore those ties and their implications for our notion of border literacies. The article will be in four parts. First, we will outline briefly the role research has in framing its own intellectual technologies and the boundary-marking this entails. Second, we will explore some of the debates in and around spatiality in the wider academic literature that engage with issues of boundaries and borders. Third, we will link these debates to some of the conceptual boundaries and binaries we have written into our project. This section will take a

slightly different form, as it is itself a form of boundary-crossing, representing an

asynchronous, computer-mediated discussion of the issues relevant to our project,

what we refer to as a form of *writalk* – a hybrid conversation in and through writing.

Although all members of the research team were reading the writalk as it developed,

to date it has been a dialogue between the authors of this article, which has then

informed work by other members of the team (Ivanic and Mannion, 2004, Ivanic, *et

al*., 2004, Edwards 2004). The writalk illustrates the struggles for meaning that earlier

in the article we have represented through more conventionally reviewing the

literature. Finally, we will outline how these issues are furthering the work of the

research project in which we are participating. The article is theoretically driven and

therefore does not explicitly address in detail the methodological and empirical

aspects of the project. It is the ways in which the literacy project provides us with a

context to explore the wider research issues of conceptualisation rather than the

project itself which is the focus of this article.


Boundary-marking

As constructivist discourse has taken hold, so there has been much attention given to

the material, discursive and rhetorical practices of research (MacLure, 2003, Edwards,

*et al,* 2004). Such positions have historical antecedents in the discussion of the

philosophy of the social as opposed to natural sciences (Montuschi, 2003). Within

such framings research can be located as 'an "intellectual technology", a way of

making visible and intelligible certain features of persons, their conducts, and their

relations with one another' (Rose, 1998, p.10-11). Thus, for instance, in education,

certain discourses position subjects in specific ways and provide the tools through

which those subjects are worked upon and encouraged to work upon themselves to

make them more productive – economically and socially. People are addressed as 'target groups', 'excluded', 'at risk' and even as 'learners'. It is argued that this is part of the 'administrative imperative to optimise the health, life and productivity of populations' (Tikly, 2003, p.163) associated with governmentality. If we take certain discourses of lifelong learning, for instance, the learning subject is often positioned in particular ways – autonomous, flexible, enterprising – designed to populate and order a learning society of a particular sort. This is signified in pedagogies that focus on the development of autonomy, self-direction, core and transferable skills, learning to learn, etc. A learning subject is one who adopts a learning approach to life as part of the care of their selves. Lifelong learning becomes one of the intellectual technologies through which social, economic and political practices are re-ordered – both commanded and organised (Edwards, 2002).

Research can therefore be explored for the mobilisations of certain concepts/subjects/disciplines to represent and order what is occurring. This involves boundary-marking, as certain concepts are mobilised rather than others, or perhaps more accurately they are mobilised through the process of othering. They are taken to be pre-existing in a social reality to be explored rather than fashioned through discursive and material practices and exercises of power, that is, boundary-marking. As Miller and Rose (1993, p. 80) point out in relation to the concept of the economy, 'before one can seek to manage a domain such as an economy it is first necessary to conceptualise a set of processes and relations as an economy which is amenable to management'. We can say the same about society and indeed education. In other words, while objects of research are 'an effect of stable arrays or networks of relations' (Law, 2002, p. 91), they are often treated as naturalistic objects, pre-existing

in the social world. If we accept this view, we follow Pels, *et al* (2002, p. 11) in their view that 'objects need symbolic framings, storylines and human spokespersons in order to acquire social lives; social relationships and practices in turn need to be materially grounded in order to gain spatial and temporal endurance'. In other words, they need ordering, part of which is provided through the circulation of research discourses: 'different modes of ordering produce certain forms of organisation. They produce certain material arrangements. They produce certain subject positions. And they produce certain forms of knowledge' (Law, 2001, p. 3). It is the material and symbolic practices of conceptualisation and categorisation – the making of boundaries – that enables certain concepts and categories to be deployed in research. This is as much the case in literacy research as in other arenas of educational research.

Research provides a range of intellectual technologies through which there is an attempt to represent and order phenomena.

> The government of a population, a national economy, an enterprise… or even oneself becomes possible only through discursive mechanisms that represent the domain to be governed as an intelligible field with its limits, characteristics whose component parts are linked together in some more or less systematic manner. (Miller and Rose, 1993, p. 80)

Research is as much embedded in these processes as it comments upon them, providing resources that attempt to represent and order social practices, while being subject to boundary-marking about what constitutes 'research'. To adopt certain intellectual technologies rather than others has effects, not least because 'every category creates a boundary (or, more dramatically, a wound) and hence a space for a specular/textual performance that can be claimed as territory whether "real" or

"imagined"' (Schostak, 2002, p. 153). What types of space might this boundary be? It is to some exploration of this issue that we now turn, to poke the wound.

Boundaries and border-crossings

In previous work (Edwards and Usher, 2000), one of us argued that the increased importance given to space and the increased use of spatial metaphors to help understand social practices could itself be best understood through a metaphor of (dis)location. This emerged from the attempt to occupy a space of movement, in a sense, a non-space in a closed and bounded sense, a space of engagement with deterritorialising and reterritorialising practices. This arose from trying to work beyond the binary of location and dislocation that has been to the fore in many conceptions of pedagogy and politics in certain parts of the globe. In these discussions politics, pedagogy, identity and place have been explored through the deployment of differing spatial metaphors, which either explicitly or implicitly challenge the notion of boundaries, particularly those boundaries experienced by the less powerful. The concept of (dis)location tries to locate the ground upon which we stand as a diaspora space, one which 'often invokes the imagery of trauma of separation and dislocation... But diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings' (Brah, 1996, p. 193). It is explorations of and in such spaces that have been important to social theory more generally and that provide resources through which to rethink our boundary-crossing, border literacy practices, embracing metaphors of the diasporic space and the fold which provide for more complex interactions and relationships.

In his influential study, Laclau (1990) used the term dislocation to characterise social formations with a plurality of centres that engender a condition of decentredness where

no fixed, essential identities can be produced. In this condition new and multiple identities emerge from a multiplicity of centres and locations. The openings engendered by dislocation allow for the possibilities of politics and for diverse actors to work together politically for progressive change. The latter is no longer obtained through the emancipation of the working class as the universal representative of humanity, but through the range of dislocated struggles of diverse social actors. However, significantly Laclau does not analyse dislocation spatially. Indeed, as Massey (1993) argues, Laclau works within a traditional distinction of space and time wherein the temporal frames politics against an inert background of space.

Others have deployed the concept of location rather than dislocation through which to examine social phenomena. Like other concepts, notions of location open a space within and about which its nature is discussed and contested. The politics of location has been critical to certain strands of feminist thinking, but implicitly has a wider and longer history and geography than that. It can be formulated in a number of different ways. For instance, it can be constructed as the place where one stands, a bounded space from which to defend one's territory/assert one's interests. Location here is the place of identity and security.

Politically and pedagogically, location is about the exercise of power, but not necessarily dominant power. It can be seen, for instance, in forms of national curricula and indeed the very notion of a *national* curriculum where the nation is invested with certain unitary and universal interests separate or distinct from those of others. This may be noticeable particularly in curricula which invest the nation with ethnic rather than civic or economic significance, but even within the latter, aspects of the

curriculum can be located in a narrow sense, as feminist and postcolonial critiques of many history curricula demonstrate. Here location and identity can be deployed within and against the play of dislocation and difference. Rutherford (1990) argues that conservative forces use notions of identity to set up firm boundaries between self and other and, in its neo-liberal economic form, construct otherness as the exotic to be consumed. Identity is secured through location and locating practices.

This bounded sense of location can be seen also in certain forms of religious fundamentalism and the forms of learning associated with them (Turner 1995). The very universality of the claims of certain religious organisations result from and in firm boundaries between the believer and non-believer. Necessarily people are located on either side of that boundary, although still able to cross it and be 'converted' or 'saved'. The fundamentalism in certain educational discourses could itself be seen to have such resonances of religiosity, not least the imagery of missions and crusades in English adult literacy policy.

Even in certain radical challenges to exercises of power, this bounded sense of location can play a role. Here being firm about the ground upon which one stands provides the foundations from which to challenge exercises of power. Thus, although radicalism is associated usually with mobility - the movement, etc. - it is largely a temporal conception of the latter at play. The spatial is the inert location of bounded identity wherein one stands and across which one moves. They are the arenas of self and social certainty from which struggle is organised. Here locations – and meanings - can become essentialised and, in a sense, an unproblematic space as a support against the challenges of the outside - 'the grounds on which struggles are defined are

permanent, fixed and universal' (Pile, 1997, p. 28). Certain forms of radical feminist separatism and aspects of feminist standpoint epistemology can be seen in this way, as can certain notions of (usually male) working class solidarity. Location is a defensible and defended, bounded space.

This essentialising can be seen in certain pedagogies of experience and voice as authentic expressions of identity, which in some spaces are constructed as a radical form of politics. Here identity is located within the person as a representative of a particular group, wherein the experience of the latter signifies a certain type of experience and authority upon which to speak. One is located as a member of a particular group. However, as Giroux (1993, p. 73) comments,

> the emphasis on the personal as the fundamental aspect of the political often results in highlighting the personal through a form of 'confessional' politics that all but forgets how the political is constituted in social and cultural forms outside of one's own experience.

To locate identity within an authentic experience expressed through voice can result in a denial of the conditions of possibility for particular experiences and the expression of those experiences. It involves a certain boundary-marking. Thus there is a need, for instance, to make a 'distinction between "Muslim woman" as a discursive category of "representation" and Muslim women as embodied, situated, historical subjects with varying and diverse personal or collective biographies and social orientations' (Brah, 1996, p. 131). The latter is important not only for pedagogies of experience within social movements, but also for learning and research more generally. It also picks up the way in which concepts deployed through intellectual technologies are mobilised and acted in and upon with material effects.

A politics of location then has been a central component in the politics of identity wherein interests are sometimes held to rest inherently in the bounded category of person one is - white, black, female, male, working class, gay, heterosexual, etc. Problems arise as the number of identities proliferate and as groups cohere around different dimensions of identity. Here it has become increasing problematic to exclude others in the assertion of a particular identity, a situation that has led to the problematisation of the politics of location as a bounded space, of which Laclau's argument above is an example. Location has to embrace difference and diversity rather than identity and unity. Here we find the attempts to conceptualise space without firm boundaries, to fashion fresh openings. This has not been without controversy, as for some the undermining of location and identity is itself a political strategy aimed at denying the possibilities for effective oppositional politics. As Hartsock asks (quoted in Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991, p. 79), 'why is it, exactly at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves... that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes "problematic"?' However, part of that questioning has come from within the 'silenced' and has resulted in the development of senses of location more resonant with a notion of diaspora space, neither inside nor outside, but both and…., the bordering domain wherein we might be able to mobilise certain hybridised literacies. Here then border literacies are not practices which exist at the pre-existing boundaries, but become the practices through which a domain comes into being.

The work of Mohanty (1992) has been influential in this respect, as there is the attempt to locate reflexively the politics of location, in other words to map experience

spatially and temporally. This involves moving from assumptions of shared locations - and practices to reinforce them e.g. conscious-raising groups - to examining the diverse locations of subjects. Here, while bounded senses of location can provide safe spaces, they can also deny differences.

> While the sameness of experience, oppression, culture, etc. may be adequate to construct this space, the moment we 'get ready to clean the house' this very sameness in community is exposed as having been built on a debilitating ossification of difference. (Mohanty, 1992, p. 85)

The re-locating of experience results in a politics of engagement rather than transcendence, a reterritorialisation through struggle, a place on the map and a remaking of territory and maps and mapping. Boundary marking starts to mean something different perhaps, as we seek to remake the territory of literacy and learning through the active fashioning of a border domain.

Mohanty's argument is important in opening up the notion of location as 'a space that is fragmented, multi-dimensional, contradictory, and provisional' (Blunt and Rose, 1994, p. 7), one that is made actively and relationally through connections rather than being an inert background. Here location is fashioned, not found, uncovered, nor pre-existing the practices that take place within it. Routes and not roots are a mark of territorialisation and rhizomic metaphors begin to emerge. Pedagogically this means that each location has to be examined for its possible conditions of existence, including categorisation. This is also the case for research practices. This process will itself contribute to the territorialisation of space-time in particular ways - the desire to find out in part resulting in particular forms of finding and findings, which takes us back to research as an intellectual technology of course and the reflexive engagement

with the closures that make research openings. The provisionality of this means that 'location is simultaneously about unity and difference, about definitions of who occupies the same or similar place and who does not' (Pile, 1997, p. 28). In similar ways, research can be seen to be about what is included and excluded, who participates in what and who does not, and the ways in which these mappings are inscribed and ascribed in the production of research and certain research performances.

The entry of difference into the notion of location begins to problematise the very notion of location itself as the latter is remapped as a space no longer of firm boundaries and identity, but a shifting ground within which the multi-dimensionality of identities, both individual and collective, come into play. Here '*cultural diversity* is the refusal of "fixity of meaning"' (Brah, 1996, p. 91). For Massey (1994, p. 168), as social relations exist in and across space,

> a 'place' is formed out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location. And the singularity on any individual place is formed in part out of the specificity of the interactions which occur at that location... and in part out of the fact that the meeting of those social relations at that location... will in turn produce new social affects.

This is the diaspora space to which we have referred previously, which

> marks the intersectionality of contemporary conditions of transmigrancy of people, capital, commodities and culture. It addresses the realm where economic, cultural and political effects of crossing/transgressing different "borders" are experienced, where contemporary forms of transcultural identities  are constituted; and where belonging and otherness is appropriated

and contested... Here, politics of location, of being situated and positioned,

derive from a simultaneity of diasporisation and rootedness. (Brah, 1996, p.

242)

Reflexively 'occupying' this uncertain and in-between space

displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of

authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through

received wisdom... This process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something

different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of

meaning and representation. (Bhabha, 1990, p. 211)

For us, this is signified through the attempt to reconfigure the concept of boundaries

as boundary-making practices of both opening and closure, where the two are

enfolded within each other, complex, diasporian and hybrid. In a sense then, the

notion of (dis)location is used to deconstruct the binary between location and

dislocation, the former with an emphasis on place, the latter on movement.

Spatialising practices of the margin and in-between are opened here, but keeping them

open always already entails certain closures.

Such a turning is not without its ironies and difficulties, marked as it is by its own

boundary-making then, a binary between two senses of space. This location is itself

insecure and uncertain - intellectually tentative despite its range. It is not a singular or

single space, but one in a constant process of fashioning, and multiple in the sense

that it inscribes a notion of difference, engagement and negotiation rather than

transcendence. This suggests that while we might close/open certain spaces in our

conceptual boundary-marking, this does not constitute an ending; it is a working. We need then to probe this further to examine its significance for the LfLFE project.

Writalking literacy practices

Our project is on literacy practices and is itself suffused with a range of such practices, such as this article. In previous sections of this article, we have engaged in fairly conventional genres of educational research writing. In this section, however, we draw upon an asynchronous discussion between the two authors on the issue of trying to think about boundaries and border-crossings within the literature from which we have drawn for the project. The writalking – a conversation in writing – was begun by RE and took place over roughly a two week period. ZF responded to RE, writing her own comments into his text. RE then responded to ZF. We have labelled RE's responses to ZF as RE(2) to reflect the fact that this conversation did not involve turn-taking in the conventional sense understood in conversational analysis, but rather involved processes of building and disruption as we wrote into each other's virtual written space at different times. While it might be read as a conversation – linear, sequential turn-taking - it is important to remember that it is not in the conventional sense. We might even suggest that it should be approached as a form of 'stuttering' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003).

Other project members sat at their computer screens observing this exchange at various points in time, but not participating in this writalk. Their engagement involved talking with us about the text of our conversation rather than writalking themselves. The writalk therefore signifies only an aspect of the multi-modal forms of communication that have made this article possible. It is itself representing part of the

process of meaning-making in relation to the boundary marking of the authors and of the project team more widely.

*RE*: Inevitably at the start of this project, we are confronted by the challenge of the understandings we have and can make of existing conceptual fashionings. In the bid to ESRC we drew upon a number of existing frameworks, which we largely took for granted. With three years for this project, it is perhaps inevitable that those framings will be challenged by both the empirical data and our own theoretical development. It may be that we simply add to the body of existing knowledge and help to make the fashionings more robust. But we might also end up positing alternative ways of understanding the issues and engaging in practice. This is an attempt to begin a journey that might take us into different theoretical landscapes, through which alternative mappings and practices may become possible. We may of course decide that the theoretical spaces we have already mapped out are to remain our home. However, given the different disciplinary locations of the two teams – education and applied linguistics - our sense of home may be somewhat different.

*ZF*: I find this really useful – exploring different ways of mapping is an important part of the research.

*RE*: There are three overlapping bodies of theory that we can most immediately work with. They overlap but are also distinct. I shall map them broadly and without referencing, before pointing to something that they share, which has provoked this piece in the first place. The question I want to pose is: do our existing theoretical framings mislead us as to what we should focus on and the issues associated with it?

*ZF*: Surely this is one of the strengths of approaching the project from different perspectives – both theoretical and experiential. For me, these email discussions offer ways to start reflecting on our framings – but I would argue that there is still value in mapping from our perspective now, even if we recognise it as a limited and potentially flawed viewpoint. A chronological cartography might provide changing landscapes as well as changing notions of how to map (I am thinking about the exhibition on maps that took place at the British Library several years ago – whilst we might not share the same geographical notions of the Elizabethans who fill their maps with sea creatures and mermaids, we can still gain something from looking upon them; and we might know that India won't be reached by sailing West, but it is interesting to reflect upon why people thought it might be). This links with June and Greg's notion of concept mapping with students [these are colleagues also participating in the research project – see Ivanic and Mannion, 2004] – should we also be doing this with staff and through our own field notes? Recording where we are 'at' now and what views are possible from this perspective as a means of providing a historic starting point to our voyage.

*RE(2)*: I agree with you here. I do not see mapping as a static practice – there is a certain nomadism possible, which means in mapping the journey we also make what we find and vice versa. But maps involve limits also, so maybe we shouldn't worry about them, as long as we are reflexive about what they may be. The notion that limits reflect a flaw is also interesting, as it suggests the flawless is limitless, not something I think is possible. It is not so much whether we are flawed I think I am pointing to, as what our limits may be and even can be.

*RE*: I think the notion of border literacy practices opens up a different focus but we have yet to theorise it satisfactorily. The three theoretical framings we can draw upon emerge from applied linguistics, education and cultural psychology. Each frames a distinction respectively between vernacular and formal literacies, between informal and formal learning and between everyday and scientific knowledge.

*ZF*: From an educational perspective, I am not sure about this – much of the literature on FE that I am familiar with (for example, Coffield in *Differing Visions of a Learning Society*, 2000) is critical of such binary distinctions. They seek to unmake these distinctions – perhaps the distinctions are emergent from policy thinking rather than from educational theory.

*RE(2)*: I agree there are many who attempt to challenge such binary distinctions, but they remain powerful in parts of the practitioner and research community as well as the policy community. To move means mobilising a whole different discourse, which is not easy.

*RE*: Literacy, learning and knowledge are located within a specific set of binaries. From an educational perspective and in a lot of the discourse around these issues, the formal is associated with established provision of education in the public sector (although the picture is more complex than this). The aim becomes one of either enabling the vernacular/informal/everyday to be mobilised to scaffold people into the formal and/or changing the formal/scientific to value more of what people do outside educational institutions. This is perhaps what we are referring to in the bid when we

outline a two-way approach. What this focus on educational institutions does is tend to ignore if you like the formality of many of the practices in which we engage outwith education, e.g. in workplaces, churches, etc.

*ZF*: Again I am not sure – this doesn't reflect my reading on educational theory – perhaps it would be worth doing a literature review on this. There is substantial educational literature on workplace learning, which I am only relatively familiar with.

*RE(2)*: There is much literature on learning outwith educational institutions, but tends to be subsumed within existing binaries in the main. A lot of workplace learning is considered non-formal or informal because it is not within education institutions.

*RE*: My worry is that in starting with those binaries, a whole discourse is produced as a result that sends us down particular pathways, looking at certain things in certain ways. As a result we may misconceive the educational issue and, perhaps more importantly, we may frame issues in educational terms when more appropriately they should be framed in other ways. This latter point arises from Bernstein's long ago comment that education cannot cure the ills of society. In my view the lifelong learning policy discourse tends towards positioning education and more specifically learning as precisely such a cure-all.

*ZF*: I agree that this is an assumption in the policy discourse.

*RE(2)*: I think it is also the case among a lot of radical educators who over-emphasise what can be achieved through education.

*RE*: With the above theories, there is a tendency for a slippage from framing literacy/learning/knowledge as practices regardless of place to framing them as spatially located practices in particular ways i.e. of setting particular boundaries rather than others. As a result we end up with discourses and practices about the inside and outside, with metaphors of scaffolding and border crossing, discourses of parity of esteem and practices such as attempts at the accreditation of prior experiential learning. (As an aside the screeds written on experiential learning seem to me to be intellectually incoherent, as what learning is not experiential in some shape or form. But experiential learning itself helps to mark a spatial boundary.) Whole industries are produced in this way.

How does this come about? I think here we have to think a la Lakoff and Johnson in terms of the deeply embedded spatial metaphors through which we make sense of the world and what I want to call 'boundary thinking'. Others might want to frame it as issues of structure and agency, but a lot of the thinking around those metaphors strike me as fairly ungenerative. I think it is this boundary thinking that tends to influence the above debates and moves a focus on practices to spatially located practices. The issue for me is whether the distinctions between the vernacular/formal, informal/formal, everyday/scientific pre-exist the boundary that marks their differences or whether they emerge through the very fashioning of the boundary/distinction. Billett has argued that the informal/formal learning debate is a waste of time and that either people are learning or they are not. Hodkinson, *et al* have argued somewhat differently that attributes (and they are particular about their use of

that term) of formality and informality can be found in all learning situations. This attempts to reshape our understanding of the distinction rather than do away with it.

It is in the work of distinguishing, of boundary marking, that is the issue I am worrying at. The distinctions I have outlined play an important role, as they identify the other through which they can themselves be named. This is deeply ambiguous as it both provides a basis for marking something other than the formal as valuable but also reinforces the formal as something other that is more worthwhile – why else do we want more and more people to become 'educated'? This is where I wonder at the extent to which we as educators can influence, as the issues of culture and values, while identified as crucial, are not as amenable to change, especially through research.

Much of the above draws loosely upon strands of theory that seek to focus attention on the boundaries, margins, borderlands, third space, etc. But, and this is a big but, as soon as we start to name such places, we immediately open up another space with other sets of distinctions/boundaries. We proliferate boundary thinking rather than move beyond it – and we may not be able to of course! This is what I think Bhabha is referring to when he talks of in-between spaces. This is a space that is a non-space. There is an obvious sense in which we cannot think/write without distinctions/boundaries but reflexively we need to consider the work we are doing inscribing certain distinctions/boundaries.

*ZF*: I think that this is an important consideration from research design, through analysis, to writing up the research.

*RE(2)*: Yes, I agree but reflexivity and the writing of research for different audiences raises all sorts of challenges.

*RE*: For instance, I think there is something of the exotic in some of the research that brings out the vernacular/informal/everyday. In this sense, it is no surprise in a sense that ethnography is the preferred methodology, given its roots in/routes from anthropology. So rather than use the above discussion to come to some conclusion on the need for 'slippery thinking', although this does appeal, I suppose I am folding myself in the relatively warm blanket of an analytical reflexivity, but with the proviso of wanting to try and think about distinctions without boundaries and to focus on the boundary making at play in our own research discourses.

*ZF*: I'm not quite sure that I understand this bit – how do you think about distinctions without boundaries? If the terms that we use aren't mutually exclusive, then are we creating boundaries behind them? Surely we are able to talk about difference at one level (e.g. in someone's hair colour; in writing on a computer rather than with a pencil) without implying difference at every level (e.g. the children might be of the same age and at the same school; the writing might be a response to the same assignment, or even be the same assignment at different stages). If we are accumulating examples and looking for similarities and differences (our own form of concept mapping?) then are we developing boundaries? Or are we talking purely theoretically rather than empirically here? Then how do we address the boundaries that we might be making around our philosophical thinking and our use of data?

*RE(2)*: I will come back to this latter, as you have prompted all sorts of thinking through the questions, for which thanks. The issue may not be about boundaries as problematic as such, but the criteria/basis upon which difference is marked. For instance, I don't have a problem with exclusion if the grounds are clearly articulated and fair, but some of the discourse is simply about overcoming exclusion, in which case the concept of inclusion would become meaningless – if we are all included, what is excluded that defines us as included?

*RE*: This seems to draw the discussion to a close, but in the spirit of Samuel Beckett, wonderfully drawn upon by Foucault in his inaugural lecture in 1972, 'I must go on….' (and courtesy of Kathy's PhD thesis!) [Kathy is a colleague at the University of Stirling]. This is because there is another set of boundary markings that I want to place a question over. In *Local Literacies* David and Mary write of vernacular literacy practices in different domains [David is a Director of the LfLFE project]. At one level I am convinced this will provide a very helpful analytical framework for us insofar as we add domains such as workplace and FE to those of family, home, neighbourhood and community (I am working from memory so apologies if I have left anything out). In itself this points to a deconstruction of the boundary between the vernacular and formal as spatially located outside and inside educational institutions – how many of us would recall spending a lot of time 'informally learning' in canteens, bars and bedrooms… This is the advantage of framing literacies/learning/knowing (not knowledge) as practices of course. It is when we have to start framing them within values, power and location that some practices are more equal than others.

25

However, I have wandered. What concerns me is the boundary marking that the notion of domains does. I know we can use the proviso that we are separating the domains out for analytical purposes but that they are entwined, but I think this is one of those convenient cop outs in which researchers engage. We need to be able to frame how those domains are related or even try to think in terms other than separate domains, because the boundaries we inscribe or reinscribe from previous work are not without effects. So, for instance, we might draw upon aspects of complexity theory and the notion of nested hierarchies of contexts, but I am not convinced that moves us on. It changes the shaping of the relationship but there may still be considered to be boundaries between contexts and we might need to consider the text that is being conned. I am attracted by some of the ideas from complexity theory however, as co-emergence might be useful in thinking about the ways on which boundaries and concepts/objects are not in a relationship of cause and effect, but, well…. co-emerge. And then there is the sociology of translation and actor-network theory wherein the very notion of boundaries is problematic and problematised. But I need to give more thought to that too…

Where does this take us? To be honest I am unsure. I have been worrying around this issue for a couple of weeks and decided to put fingers to keyboard as a way of helping me work out my thinking. Pragmatically, we cannot but make distinctions/boundaries in order to do this research, but I think it is important that we are clear upon what pragmatic grounds we are making judgements and with what effects. Boundary thinking of the sort that we encounter through the conceptual framings we have drawn upon works in all sorts of ways – metaphorical, conceptual, material. Boundaries are imbued with value and power. They can be either crossed and/or deconstructed.

Where education and educational research is located in relation to all this is a mute point. A key question inevitably is what practices are valued and how. And so we come back to where we started perhaps. Maybe we should just kick away the ladder as Wittgenstein suggested and get on with it….. I fear I may embody the trouble of having a philosopher doing empirical research!

And so….

What then can we take from the above? What openings/closings are or can be at play? We are reaching the end of this particular article, a boundary in itself which points towards a closure. Yet even as we have represented our struggle for meaning, through literature and writalking, the closure we are about to undertake does not represent the open-endedness of the discussions which have continued in other fora and forms in the ongoing fashioning of the concepts we draw upon in this project (see Ivanic, *et al*., 2004 and Ivanic and Mannion, 2004). We made mention earlier of this article as an exploration of an aspect of the orientating theory in the LfLFE project. Theory itself suggests something that is bounded, as, for instance, in bodies of knowledge. Perhaps it is better to talk of theorising as an ongoing activity, which we have been trying to illustrate in this text, but which has also gone on beyond the production of this text. Theorising is a constant practice of assembling, of open/closing, unsettling/settling, of drawing upon the arena of literacy studies and the wider social sciences. Indeed, above ZF points to the project working with limited and potentially flawed viewpoints. It is that which has led us both to further conceptualise the notion of border literacies, while also recognising that there is no end of the horizon, no edge to the earth of theorising.

From different sources, we have attempted to relate how *central* the issue of boundary making and marking is to research practices in general, but also in the literacy project to which we are contributing. This in turn both reflects and is reflected in wider debates in a range of disciplines on the nature of borders and the im/possibilities for border crossing. We are ourselves attempting to fashion a border domain in which hybrid – everyday and formal – literacy practices can co-emerge, an in-between space perhaps, which can never be finally closed and might take different forms in different curriculum areas. This in itself challenges more conventional notions of transfer and even boundary-crossing (see Tuomi-Grohn and Engestrom, 2003) as ways of framing the possibilities of literacy practices from the everyday being resources for learning in the formal curriculum. Our discussion has highlighted the importance of the fashioning of boundaries to our project and the questions of power and identity embedded therein. Are we wounded? Yes, but not mortally.

Can we be categorical about the categories upon which we draw when our very acts of communication involve some categorising practices? Whether we like it or not boundaries keep cropping up if we are to communicate about something. To theorise the boundary enables a reflexive engagement in the work we are doing, the intellectual technologies to which we are contributing and the fashionings and assemblages in which we are engaged. It also perhaps enables us to conceive of border literacies as less border-crossers, transferring from one context to another but as bordering practices through which different domains of activity are engendered. In other words, the research team are reframing the notion of border literacies, which was originally derived theoretically from the work on New Literacy Studies, by drawing upon the debates in the wider social sciences on issues of spatiality and

categorisation as well as that to be found elsewhere in literacy research (e.g. Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, Kress, 2003 and Street, 2005). Such bordering practices may be more ambiguous and complex, capable of relationally being networked into a range of practices that we might want to designate learning, which is itself perhaps as unbounded a concept as we have, about which many stories are told. Concepts and boundaries co-emerge through the practices in which we engage in conducting research. It is not a question of escaping this process, which is illusory, but of bringing forth the basis for the particular wounds we inflict and living with the aporias that involves. Which particular boundaries provide productive ro(o/u)tes to follow in the LfLFE project awaits further work, not least the interaction with the empirical data on student and staff practices, which we are currently collecting.

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