POSTGRADUATE BOUNDARY CROSSINGS?

E. JAYNE WHITE
whiteej@waikato.ac.nz
University of Waikato

ABSTRACT. This Special Issue: *Crossing Philosophical, Cultural and Geographic Boundaries in Educational Scholarship?: Postgraduate Experiences* arose out of an invited panel of postgraduate speakers at the 42nd Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia Conference, held 7–10 December 2012 in Chiayi, Taiwan. The wider conference theme of "Crossing Boundaries" generated lively discussions about what such encounters and experiences might mean in the broader sphere of education; while the postgraduate speakers were invited to address their personal experience of boundaries during doctoral study. The central thrust of this invitation was to consider the extent to which such boundaries could (or should) be crossed through post-graduate experiences, and to gain a deeper appreciation of what this might mean for scholars who venture – physically and/or philosophically – outside of familiar terrain. The papers that comprise this issue provide associated cross-cultural, cross-country and cross-philosophical narratives, reflections and interrogations of their experiences in this regard. In doing so the authors provide a rich landscape through which to consider boundary crossing as an opportunity to expand on knowledge and/or to appreciate ones own position through encounters with 'other'. Such crossings (or attempts to cross) presented significant challenges to these students, as they reveal in this issue. Their insights highlight the point that crossing philosophical, cultural and geographic boundaries is often a difficult relationship between all three, and, that there are costs involved. Such profoundly confronting experiences of crossing (or not crossing) are not necessarily bridges to be traversed as much as a means of confronting boundaries through which students might gain important insights – about themselves as persons of culture, scholars and members of a global society that is characterized by difference. This complex encounter – for all its pleasure and pain – is, evident through every paper in this issue, and sets the scene for important 21st century dialogues concerning diversity and difference in education.

Keywords: culture; geography; philosophy; post-graduate; boundary

1. Crossing Boundaries in Education

Boundaries are often thought of as barriers or other forms of restraint that prevent movement or progression. In education this is an important consideration indeed. Perhaps the most classic imagery that might be evoked in this regard is Plato's allegory of the cave. Here the cave acts as a boundary to enlightenment and creates a false world for its inhabitants. The barrier to deeper knowledge is not only in what can be learnt but manifest in the illusionary features of its containment, as well as the physical limitations of the cave itself. True knowledge lies beyond these limitations yet can be accessed if one is prepared to push through to new physical and psychological domains with the help of others who already possess this knowledge. This view of boundaries serves the purpose of representing a journey from unknown to known; illusion to reality; darkness to light; and instinct to knowledge. In the hands of rationalism and its followers, such a view also serves the purpose of prioritizing the latter over the former and forms the basis for a positioning of certain kinds of knowledge as superior to others. That such knowledge turns out to be a Western form of monologism is largely dismissed in such a proposition. When alternative perspectives are given status, these same barriers might also be seen as opportunities – to act as a threshold encounter and to suspend certainty about what constitutes valued knowledge, and what does not.

Thus, boundaries might also be considered as opportunities through alternative philosophical approaches. Kant's emphasis on transcendence creates a point of departure by suggesting a route to crossing boundaries. For Kant such boundaries are marked by moral principles (or imperatives) that can be relied upon to guide the way. Goethe is also committed to an examination of boundaries, suggesting an alternative pathway through engagement with nature. Yet Goethe's orientation is less on the crossing than the experience of encounter at the threshold – within a consideration of time and space. This emphasis was to form the basis of Bakhtin's notion of chronotopic threshold: "a boundary that may only be transgressed through lived experience, as a form of visual surplus that is derived in interaction with other" (White, 2013, p. 268). In this conceptualization, boundaries are *necessary* for people to experience their lives as distinct. Boundaries are now also *desirable* because they offer a means of encountering difference – beyond the domains of ones personal and immediate existence. Indeed Michael Peters (2012) suggests that the rise of globalization has generated such a requirement, as well as a thirst, for crossing geographical and cultural boundaries – one which heralds a promising new era of philosophical diversity and discovery.

In educational philosophy and in practice, boundaries have been variously treated in both ways. When seen as a barrier, boundaries become a means of isolation, division and 'othering'. They take place in terms of individuals but also cultures. Offering a critique of Hegel's 'politics of difference' Michael Peters (2012) suggests that the simplistic binary of oppressor and oppressed creates a false homogeneity, located in the past, which ignores the potential for different, encounter, sub-culture and creative movement.

> At the heart of the politics of difference is a critique of the Enlightenment demands that we examine how these boundaries are socially constructed, and how they are maintained and policed. It suggests that we must learn how these boundaries are manipulated and represented in the service of political end. (p. 10)

Such movement generates new ways of thinking into and about the world. But it also calls for a critical analysis of the location of privileged and, conversely, silenced discourses in the 21st century educational landscape. Notions such as 'multi-culturalism' are called into question for their potential to generate a universal everyone, or "all" by normalizing 'other' at the cost of exclusion or, equally, the cost of inclusion (Jahng & Lee, 2012). Chin-Chueh Wang (2012) positions post-colonial theory as an antidote to the colonization of 'other' in the context of Taiwanese culture under Japanese governorship, suggesting the importance of boundary encounters as *destabilizing opportunities* for opposing dominance and colonization of 'other'. Herein lie the opportunities and potential for another kind of boundary crossing.

In educational theories of boundary crossing there is already an implied danger of colonization in one form or another when encounters are un-balanced in terms of their location within the wider landscape. Such efforts are evident in power relationships that exist within learning environments that are characterized by universal (largely Western) standards for practice and learning. In such cases there is an identified need to suspend boundaries as a means of retaining identities that reside outside of that locale. In this respect it may be helpful, indeed necessary, to retain ones status as stranger or impenetrable 'other' in some respect. In this way boundaries may be used as barriers or even smoke-screens to draw the colonizing eye away from its centrality as an act of *preservation, defiance or resistance.*

Whatever their status, boundaries are no longer possible to ignore on the educational agenda. It is in their treatment through lived experience with 'other' (ideas, people, culture, ethnicity or geography) – rather than their existence as a discrete phenomenon – that the contention lies. For this reason an issue that explores the experience of 'boundary crossing' from diverse philosophical, cultural and geographic positions is not only timely

but, I would argue, a necessary agenda for the contemporary educational landscape. That it focuses on the insights of post-graduate students who reside on such boundaries, is particularly poignant in this regard.

2. Organization of This Issue

The papers that comprise this issue examine boundaries as opportunities, portals, provocations and/or painful barriers to deeper philosophical thought across several cultural and philosophical spaces of encounter. Each, in its own way, creates interesting and creative approaches to the experience of boundary crossing when put to work in the post-graduate, educational arena of the twenty-first century. In this sense each paper responds to the concerns of Manathunga, Catherine, Pitt, Rachael, Cox, Laura, Boreham, Paul, Mellick, George and Lant, Paul (2012) who suggest that post-graduate preparation for academic work involves encounters with boundaries that are largely over-looked or ignored despite their significant presence in academic work. The authors in this issue bring these significant boundaries into the light of day and, in doing so, start an important conversation about what it means to be a scholar in the past, present and future of educational philosophy and its location in a world that is increasingly characterized by encounters with difference as a source of provocation.

Seeing boundaries as a necessary, albeit risky, encounter for indigenous Maori is a concept that is quickly introduced by Carl Mika in his account of 18th century poet and philosopher Novalis' as the "dead white male" who informed his thinking as a doctoral scholar. In crossing philosophical boundaries between a Maori metaphysical standpoint and the German romanticist poetry of Novalis Carl explores the considerable risk versus the tantalisation of such an encounter. This is not done without considerable regard for the colonisation history of engagement for indigenous Maori New Zealanders and the correspondent hierarchy of 'white male' ideas. Such ideas may not only fix the indigenous writer to individual approaches to philosophy, argues Carl, but will inevitably leave an (often invisible) mark upon thought. Yet, in such risk Carl also views the encounter as an opportunity for provocation. Here Novalis provides Carl with a means of embracing creative and emotional thought whilst reacting with other ways of being. Carl depicts a corresponding sensation of freedom to encounter the indigenous poetically, in a fragmentary, anti-rationalist way while maintaining a cautionary skepticism about the effects of this encounter. Thus the boundary is less to be crossed than to be encountered carefully and with a great deal of reserve.

Reiko Muroi also asks serious questions concerning the philosophical experience of boundary crossing. She poses the most difficult question concerning the relationship between philosophical wisdom and practical

knowledge, and then proceeds to collapse the perceived boundaries that exist between the two. With French translator Antoine Berman and Japanese historian Naokai Sakai, Reiko draws on translation theory to suggest that such boundaries do not exist of their own accord – they only appear once they are translated. Her argument outlines the initial practice of translating Western literature into Japanese text by using imported Chinese and Dutch vocabulary, before going on to present an ever more complex encounter when such translations are subsequently applied to philosophy of education by Japanese scholars. When this application is shared in the Japanese classroom, where at first glance the boundary encounter might exist, the student applies these translations to their learning into practice. Reiko suggests that, at this point, there is less of a boundary crossing than one of mutual translation – between text, scholar, student and, of course, language and culture. She concludes by suggesting that the boundaries are negotiated in and between diverse contexts and, as such, are in constant negotiation and re-negotiation rather than a one-off event at any moment in time.

Marek Tesar resurrects the scaffold that Reiko has just dismantled in his approach of boundary crossings as a childhood encounter. Bringing the Czechoslavakian philosopher and playwright Vaclav Havel to bear on the subject, Marek traverses some of the most painful encounters of all – in spaces where politics and power dominate the landscape and voices are silenced. The difficulties of crossing boundaries of discourse in an historical era of totalitarianism and associated subjugation are explored in terms of complex childhood subjectivities spanning extreme obedience to risky resistance or rebellion. The embodiment of these ideas in the life and work of Havel provides Marek with a means of entering this complex terrain. Havel's experience of crossing public and private boundaries in a political era characterized by subjugation and risk is employed as a means of interpreting childhood encounters during this same period. With the aid of Foucault, Marek draws a cautionary eye towards dominant discourses that silence other, in particular, children, within such regimes. Without caution, he argues, necessary boundaries that create resistance or rebellion are eliminated and there is no encounter beyond obedience and submission. His argument echoes the skepticism of Carl Mika based on a history of colonization or, in the case of Marek, totalitarianism where one boundary usurps another.

The strong presence of boundaries as a means of identity are considered by Yun-Shiuan (Viola) Chen who takes an intercultural approach to the topic by exploring the complex discourses at work within a series of Taiwan initiations in postgraduate education. Through Faircloughs critical discourse framework Viola argues that the discourses between the Taiwanese government initiatives and international contexts (a relationship that exists to advance Taiwan's intercultural relationships globally) seek to transcend boundaries

while at the same time expose the complex power relationships that exist. Tensions for the Taiwanese government are revealed through an examination of the political, economic and cultural differences that exist between countries working together in this intercultural way. Viola conveys the strong orientation to a kind of interculturalism that surpasses state boundaries inherent in these relationships that seek to bring commonality, whilst highlighting the significant tensions. These lie between a quest for 'authentic Chinese culture' while at the same time retaining a distinctness that Viola articulates as a unique hybrid for creativity. The paradoxes of such boundary breaking potential are explored in an era where Taiwan strives for authentic interculturalism as a route to an asserted stance on the world stage.

Jina Bhang also interrogates this complexity but, this time, from her own personal experience as a post-doctoral scholar attending a New York classroom on philosophy. Reflecting on this lived 'crossing' Jina summons Derrida to her aid in an examination of her 'self' and 'other'. The associated notion of 'differance' conveys an experience of the multiple barriers that Jina faces during her classroom experience with other students, staff and language. These are encountered with great difficulty – not merely as a result of her physical, embodied difference as 'Asian', but also in the many internal and ethical conflicts she faces as 'conversational encounters'. Her insights offer a rich portal to the complex experience for international students who come into the dominant culture of the Western classroom – philosophically, culturally, physically and emotionally. There are multiple boundaries here to be encountered but they are seldom (if ever) crossed.

To conclude Richard Heraud addresses a further, and final, tension in the theorization of crossing boundaries as an educational scholar. Highlighting the relationship between the private life of a scholar and his work as an academic in relationship with text, Richard invites Foucault into the conversation once more. Here Richard presents the paradox for the scholar who, in order to function in the academy, abstracts their relationship with the self in order to do the work of critique. In doing so, Richard explains, the student at once deviates epistemologically from their theoretical influences – to the point that they cease to recognize this deviation or their own culpability in the act of their own critique. This problematic, according to Richard lies at the heart of the problem of being philosophical in the context of critical inquiry and, as such, can only be revealed through a treatment of critique as the work of a critical actor. The ambiguous stance that this situation produces seems to be less of a boundary crossing than a threshold for further and deeper thought. While such an incommensurable encounter opens the potential for a quest for truth, Richard posits that the role associated with being a scholar as one that is fraught with challenge when what counts as scholarship insists upon greater certainty. He suggests

that it is the orientation towards certainty that leads the scholar to struggle in their claim for political subjectivity, since in order to be successful he has been required to accept the very boundaries that turn him away from an engagement with the problematic that presumes the relevance of including the their life in their work.

Taken together, these thoughtful papers offer considerable challenge for scholars at all levels. They summon new and re-visioned philosophical perspectives to the educational experience of boundaries, barriers and opportunities in postgraduate experience. They invite the reader to speculate on the extent to which boundaries are ever crossed, whether or not they can or ought to be, and the ethical, political, economic and cultural contexts that give rise (or fall) to their potentiality. Clearly there are many more boundaries to consider in postgraduate spaces – while the feminist gaze, for example, is absent from our view in this issue it should not be dismissed as an essential means of encountering boundaries of subjectification and privilege that are alive and well in this domain. The extent to which boundaries are constructed, appropriated, imposed and demolished through scholarly engagement with 'other' is increasingly on the agenda for student research in education, as learners move between what were once physical, cultural and philosophical silos into the contemporary global experience. The papers in this issue suggest that the risks in such encounters, though not outweighed by the opportunities, are considerable. These are salutary messages for those who meet learners in educational encounters, and a recognition that people, politics and cultures are deeply connected and confronted by the perceived or real barriers that exist through every experience of scholarship. I, for one, am heartened by the keen attention these scholars give to the experience of boundary crossing as more than mere knowledge transmission. Instead, each in his or her own way, posit the boundary encounter as a subjective act of transformation and/or resistance with potential for alteration and change – both are very much needed in the academy today.

REFERENCES

Holquist, M. (2009), "The Role of Chronotope in Dialog," in *Proceedings from the Second International Interdisciplinary Conference on Perspective and Limits of Dialogism in Mikhail Bakhtin*, Stockholm University, Sweden, June 3–5.

Jahng, K. E., and Lee, S. J. (2012), "Transforming Multicultural Education in South Korea," paper presented to *the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia (PESA) Conference*, Chiayi, December.

Manathunga, Catherine, Pitt, Rachael, Cox, Laura, Boreham, Paul, Mellick, George and Lant, Paul (2012), "Evaluating Industry-based Doctoral Research Programs: Perspectives and Outcomes of Australian Cooperative Research Centre Graduates," *Studies in Higher Education* 37(7): 843–858.

Peters, M. (2012), "Western Models of Intercultural Philosophy," paper presented to *the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia (PESA) Conference*, Chiayi, December.

Steinby, L. (2013), "Bakhtinian Concept of Chronotope: The Viewpoint of the Acting Subject," in L. Steinby and T. Klapuri (eds.), *Bakhtin and His Others: (Inter)subjectivity, Chronotope, Dialogism*. Anthem Press: London-New York, 105–124.

Steiner, R. (1985), *Goethe's World View*. W. Lindeman (tr.). The Mercury Press: Dornach, http://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA006/English/MP1985/GA006_ index. html

Wang, Chin-Chueh (2012), "Some Perspectives on Post-colonialism: An Analytic Study of Colony Education in Taiwan During Japanese Governing Period," paper presented to *the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia (PESA) Conference*, Chiayi, December.

White, E. J. (2013), "Circles, Borders and Chronotope: Education at the Boundary?" *Knowledge Cultures* 1(2): 264–294.

Jayne White has a long-standing interest in education, spanning over thirty years as an early years teacher, teacher educator and, latterly, as an academic. As Senior Lecturer, Associate of the Centre for Global Studies, and a member of the Early Years Research Centre at University of Waikato, Jayne's work focuses on the complex processes and practices of meaning making in contemporary 'open' societies. At the heart of her practice lies a strong emphasis on dialogic pedagogy, and the ways in which teachers can engage within complex learning relationships – regardless of the age of the learner. To this end, Jayne explores philosophical ideas and their potential contribution to pedagogy. She has co-edited two books, co-edited a special issue of *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, written numerous journal articles across a variety of scholarly journals and is currently in the process of sole-authoring a book with Routledge. Coupled with her roles as Associate Editor of *International Journal of Early Childhood* and *International Journal of Dialogic Pedagogy* Jayne is an experienced writer and editor. As a member of Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia (PESA) Executive, Jayne was responsible for the postgraduate portfolio at the Chiayi Conference and supported students to share their work with the scholarly community in that forum. This special issue is a result of that advocacy.