

Fraternal Academic Mobility Itineraries Down Under: Autoethnographies, Ecologies of Practice and Professional Learning by Three Australian University Lecturers

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Paper presented at the international bilingual academic mobility conference,
University of Turku, Turku, Finland,
23 September 2006

Abstract

Deploying the principles of autoethnography, this paper reflects on the authors' respective and shared itineraries as mobile academics in two Australian non-metropolitan universities. These itineraries traverse the two universities and within one of them two campuses, differently configured faculties and divisions, several disciplines and paradigms and the multiple roles of academics.

Abstract(Continued)

Conceptually the paper is framed and informed by the notion of ecologies of practice. This notion highlights the commonalities and divergences evident among system and institution-level policies, campus and faculty practices and academics' own subjectivities. It provides therefore a useful theoretical lens for analysing the professional learning being carried out by the authors in their mobilities across and within the two universities – focused specifically on their work as teleological decision-makers, double agents and transformative researchers – as well as for making explicit both the potential of and the limitations on that learning.

Overview of presentation

- The autoethnographic model
- Ecologies of practice
- Three fraternal itineraries
- Implications for understanding contemporary academic mobility
- Focused discussion

The Autoethnographic Model

- “Autoethnography is a genre of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context” (Holt, 2003, n.p.)
- “...autoethnography confronts dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim, through self-reflective response, representational spaces that have marginalised those of us at the borders” (Tierney, 1998, p. 66; cited in Holt, 2003, n.p.)
- Important to acknowledge Buzard’s (2003) critique (outdated essentialism or identity politics; not clear how one acquires knowledge of one’s own culture; metaphors for conceptualising cultures and how one relates to them have become confused)

Ecologies of Practice

- ...what we came to label 'ecologies of practice'...comprised the accumulation of individual and collective experiences of teaching or nursing through which people laid claim to being 'professional' – personal experience in the classroom/clinic/ward, commonly held staff beliefs and institutional policies based upon these, commitment to 'child-centred' or 'care-centred' ideologies, convictions about what constituted 'good practice', and soon. (Stronach et al. 2002 : 122)

Ecologies of Practice (Continued)

- “...the most influential aspect of ecologies of practice seemed to be the *crucible of classroom experience*” (Stronach et al. 2002 :124; *emphasis in original*)
- “The collision of ‘economy’ and ‘ecology’...should not in itself be seen as a morally coded encounter between ‘economy’ and ‘ecology’ (bad; audit culture; deprofessionalizing; impositional, etc.) and ‘ecology’ (good; professional; solidary; voluntarist, etc.)” (124)
- “It was a theory of ‘tension’ that was needed rather than some reductive formula that would identify what was ‘really’ going on” (125)

Three Fraternal Itineraries

- Prior careers as high school educators (including teaching history and French in Queensland government and Victorian independent schools in Australia and teaching English in a Japanese private school)
- Honours, Masters and Doctoral theses completed in Australian history and historiography, Australian literature, Australian Traveller education, British social anthropology, Japanese environmental politics and Japanese language learning
- Teaching undergraduate and postgraduate courses in communication, education, geography, history, Japanese and language
- Working at different times on two non-metropolitan campuses of Central Queensland University, with one author recently having moved to another non-metropolitan university

Three Fraternal Itineraries (Continued)

- Within Central Queensland University, working at different times in the Division of Teaching and Learning Services and the Faculties of Arts, Health and Sciences, Arts, Humanities and Education, Education and Creative Arts and Informatics and Communication
- Publishing individually and in collaboration with one another and/or with other researchers in the fields of Australian historiography, cultural studies, educational research ethics and politics, environmental history and politics, lifelong learning, Japanese language learning, rural education and Traveller education
- Conducting and publishing research within and across the paradigmatic boundaries of positivism, interpretivism, critical theory and poststructuralism.

Three Fraternal Itineraries (Continued)

- The shifting landscape of Australian higher education:
 - tension between “the business case” for education and “the liberal tradition” of education (Bailey, 1999)
 - “steering between state and market” (Danaher, Gale & Erben, 2000, p. 55)
 - academics being urged to promote ‘student-centred learning’ while ‘doing more with less’ and ‘protecting the bottom line’
 - terrain in which mobile academics work is unstable and unpredictable, subject to sudden changes in the composition of the substructure

Three Fraternal Itineraries (Continued)

- The shifting landscape of Australian higher education (continued):
 - Marginson's (2002) elaboration of core features of the enterprise university
 - The 'bottom line' of the Enterprise University is not profit, nor is it teaching and research, nor is it public or community service. It is the competitive position of the institution, grounded in its relative prestige and resources, *as an end in itself*. This is not wholly an 'entrepreneurial university', or one entirely powered by 'academic capitalism'...though those...factors undeniably play a part in sustaining and driving aspects of the enterprise. The term 'Enterprise University' captures the spirit of proactive networked engagement, under-pinned by self-referencing identity, which characterises the new kind of non-profit institution in all of its academic, executive and administrative operations. (Marginson, 2002, n.p.; *emphasis in original*)

Three Fraternal Itineraries (Continued)

- Academic mobility and ateleological decision-makers:
 - teleological decision-making is top-down, purpose driven, goal oriented and formalised
 - ateleological decision-making is bottom-up, organic, holistic and informal (Introna, 1996)
 - direct link between economies of performance influenced by the enterprise university and teleological decision-making
 - bureaucratized and hierarchised decision-making frequently ineffective and inefficient

Three Fraternal Itineraries (Continued)

- Academic mobility and teleological decision-makers (continued):
 - teleological decision-making disrupts that hierarchy (e.g., moving site to social setting)
 - encouraging students to look beyond number of hours devoted to study to learning as a holistic process
 - accompanying undergraduate students to Japan and Republic of Korea (disruption of familiar cultural rules and codes of conduct, situated and contingent meaning-making *in situ*)

Three Fraternal Itineraries (Continued)

- Academic mobility and double agents:
 - While the role of double agents involves a covert and resistive practice to assist their students to escape the debilitating effects of dominant discourses and disciplinary practices, double vision refers to the environments in which the tensions between dominant and resistive forces are able to be articulated at an official level. Within certain sites configured as marginal within the field of education, agents are relatively free of the gaze of dominant disciplinary forces and are therefore able to articulate a resistive practice within their official pedagogy that provides an impetus to empowering and transformative teaching and learning techniques. (Danaher, Coombes, Simpson, Harreveld & Danaher, 2002, p. 14)

Three Fraternal Itineraries (Continued)

- Academic mobility and double agents (continued):
 - preparatory program helps to transform worldviews and values of variously marginalised students (effective at promoting academic mobility in an institutional space attuned to a teleological decision-making and in mobilising moves from double agent to double vision)
 - graduate entry and postgraduate courses (e.g., using concept of double agents with pre-service teachers, a few of whom found that it helped them to clarify and make meaning from situations during their professional attachments)

Three Fraternal Itineraries (Continued)

- Academic mobility and transformative researchers:
 - Transformative research is a systematic enquiry into the real conditions which create oppression or hinder self-determination. It produces reflective knowledge which helps people to identify their situation and in doing so, to change such [a] situation for the better. In this regard, transformative research plays the important role of supporting the reflective process that promotes positive change. (Anyanwu, 1998, p.45)

Three Fraternal Itineraries (Continued)

- Academic mobility and transformative researchers (continued):
 - researching Japanese whaling (interviews and discussions with multiple stakeholders, researcher's own view gained depth, his research contributed to the stakeholders' reflections and actions, his publications contribute to understanding what "positive change" might look like in this context)
 - researching with Australian circus and fairground people (focus on marginalisation associated with their occupational mobility, interest in interrogating "the real conditions which create oppression or hinder self-determination")

Three Fraternal Itineraries (Continued)

- Academic mobility and transformative researchers (continued):
 - by engaging in potentially transformative research, authors are enacting ecologies of practice directed also at promoting their own professional learning
 - their academic mobility is enhanced by developing trust, rapport and empathy with the research participants
 - reinforces logic underpinning links among a teleological decision-making, double agents and transformative research

Implications for Understanding Contemporary Academic Mobility

- Autoethnography and ecologies of practice are useful methodological and conceptual resources for analysing the words and actions of academic mobility actors
- The centrality of agency (capacity to engage with the forces of social structure [Giddens, 1984]) in academic mobility
- The influence of facilitative and/or inhibiting forces and conditions that shape current academic work

Conclusion

- What emerges from this account of three fraternal itineraries is that academic mobility in contemporary Australian higher education is dynamic, unpredictable and unstable, enacted in a state of flux and on a terrain of heightened complexity and diversity. Whether such mobility is to be enabling and strengthening, rather than debilitating and dysfunctional, to individuals and institutions alike depends on the capacity and willingness of those individuals and institutions to grasp and fulfil the opportunities for professional learning that exist currently and potentially – including by means of conducting autoethnographies and enacting ecologies of practice.

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Thankyou forparticipating!

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Focused Discussion

- What other methodological resources are useful in researching academic mobility?
- How do ecologies of practice resonate with and/or diverge from other conceptual resources in researching academic mobility?
- How effective, equitable and/or ethical might a teleological decision-making, being a double agent and transformative research be in promoting academic mobility and professional learning in different contexts?