

Occupational Travellers and Researchers as Educational Border Crossers: Methods for Researching with Australian and British Fairground People

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Introduction

At its most generative and transformative, education research might be claimed to yield enduring and significant changes in understandings between researchers and research participants alike. Such changes evoke genuine and lasting learning on the part of all research stakeholders, thereby challenging simultaneously the notions of researchers as impartial and objective observers, and of research participants as passive donors to the researchers' interests without receiving much if anything in return.

A specific instance of these kinds of life-changing developments in researcher–research participant relationships builds on the work of occupational Travellers such as circus and fairground or show communities that requires them to cross geographical borders regularly, which in turn generates challenges and opportunities for educating their children against the backdrop of complex interactions with state education systems. Similarly, education scholars researching with occupational Travellers cross axiological, epistemological and ontological borders in striving to research ethically and reciprocally with the research participants in spaces that mainstream cultures position as being on the margins of educational provision, thereby engaging in their own distinctive forms of educational and occupational mobility.

This chapter explores and evaluates the methods deployed by the authors in conducting and publishing research with members of the Australian and British fairground communities over several years. These methods centre on issues of rapport, reciprocity and representation, and they include intercultural communication, nuanced vocality and co-authorship where possible as particular strategies of communicating and articulating the voices of learners and educators with whom the authors and their fellow researchers have conducted research within this particular educational margin.

Conceptually the discussion is framed by an updating of Giroux's (2005) provocation around border crossings. Giroux's work emphasised the multiple ways in which scholars change and shift their trajectories as they engage with variously constituted sites of power and sources of authority. This chapter's updating directed Giroux's provocative ideas towards understanding how those ideas might "work" specifically in the distinctive contexts of occupational Travellers' work and learning, which in turn animated a reimagining of Travellers and researchers alike as educational border crossers.

The chapter is divided into the following four sections:

- Background information about occupational Travellers and their educational experiences.
- The chapter's conceptual framework updating Giroux's (2005) notion of border crossings.
- Occupational Travellers and the researchers who work with them understood as educational border crossers.
- The authors' and their fellow researchers' strategies for researching ethically and reciprocally within this particular educational margin.

Occupational Travellers and their Educational Experiences

In this chapter, we use the term "occupational Travellers" to refer to communities whose paid work requires them to move physical locations and to traverse intervening territories with diverse patterns of mobility for varying periods of time. We employ the capital "T" with "Travellers" to denote the status of some of these communities as ethnic minorities such as

English and Irish Travellers (see also Kenny & Danaher, 2009). Various descriptors – some with neutral valence, and others with negative valence assigned by the dominant culture – are applied to these communities, including “itinerant”, “migrant”, “mobile” and “nomadic”.

The kinds of work conducted by occupational Travellers also vary widely (see also Danaher, 2019b). One significant category of such work (while displaying considerable internal diversity) is associated with the nomadic pastoralists who travel with, and care for, different species of animals (Commission on Nomadic Peoples, 2008; Salzman, 2004). Examples of nomadic pastoralists range from cattle herders in Nigeria (Adeoye, 2019) to sea nomads in Indonesia (Dyer, 2016) to transhumant pastoralists in western India (Dyer, 2008).

Another strand of occupationally mobile communities is centred on the seasonal workers who travel and work – sometimes as individuals and sometimes in groups of varying sizes – to provide the manual and semi-automated labour that is vital to particular agricultural industries. A major manifestation of this strand is the migrant workers who move from Central and South America to pick fruit and provide other labour on farms in the United States of America (Holmes, 2013; Loza, 2016). Likewise, there are equivalent mobile communities providing this labour in Australia (Henderson, 2005), Canada (Hennebry, McLaughlin, & Preibisch, 2016), Lebanon (Habib, Mikati, Hojeij, El Asmar, Chaaya, & Zurayk, 2016) and the Mediterranean (Corrado, de Castro, & Perrotta, 2017).

A different grouping of occupationally mobile communities – and the specific category with whom we are concerned in this chapter – is focused on the owners and workers who provide itinerant forms of entertainment. These entertainment types range from carnivals (Batty, Desyllas, & Duxbury, 2003) to circuses (Natt, Aguiar, & de Pádua Carrieri, 2019) to fairgrounds and showgrounds (Walker, 2015) to travelling shows (Abbott & Seroff, 2007). Within these occupational clusters, groups exhibit considerable diversity. For instance, two distinct types of circuses are those with and without animals (Toulmin, 2018). With regard to fairgrounds and showgrounds, they vary widely in terms of longevity and size (Trowell, 2017), and also of the meanings that they evoke among the people who visit them (Kyle & Chick, 2007). Fairgrounds and showgrounds also exhibit international variability in relation to business models, cultural histories and social structures, ranging for example from Italian attractionists (Gobbo, 2015) to Venezuelan *parques de atracciones* (Anteliz, Danaher, & Danaher, 2001; Anteliz & Danaher, 2000).

Building on the reference above to some “Travellers” as identified ethnic communities, occupational mobility exhibits a complex connection with particular Indigenous communities that engaged traditionally in particular kinds of mobility. Sometimes these types of residential mobility have been related to cultural practices, sometimes to occupational needs and sometimes to both. National and continental examples of these communities include Indigenous Australians (Danaher, 2012), Roma in continental Europe (Yildiz & De Genova, 2018), First Nations peoples in Canada (Snyder & Wilson, 2015) and in the United States of America (Cresswell, 2008), as well as globally (Aikau & Cornthassel, 2014), and Gypsy Travellers in Great Britain (Marcus, 2019; McCaffery, 2009).

Against the backdrop of these highly differentiated lives of diverse communities of occupational Travellers, the educational experiences of those communities were generally characterised by a fundamental disjuncture between formal schooling on the one hand and the distinctive rhythms and routines of occupational mobility on the other hand (see also Danaher, 2019b; Levinson & Hooley, 2014). This disjuncture resulted from the former’s requirement of fixed and place-dependent attendance, whether at a school or at home studying via distance or online education, which was contrasted with the latter’s being predicated on regular, albeit diverse, forms of physical movement around geographical areas of varying size. This contrast was distilled succinctly by Evans (1998), specifically with

reference to Australian show children, but more widely in relation to the children of occupationally mobile families in many parts of the world:

Contemporary societies and their attendant bureaucracies and services assume that people have a place, an address where they can be contacted, monitored and “served”. Usually children go to the local school and their registration and attendance are monitored to ensure that they receive their rightful amount of schooling. Show children occupy or traverse a territory rather than a place....Children are expected to be at school during school hours. How can they do this if their parents and homes move, sometimes hundreds of kilometres every couple of weeks? (p. xii)

Again specifically for the Australian show people, but also again in some ways representatively of other occupationally mobile communities, before a specialised program for them was created by the Brisbane School of Distance Education (Danaher, 1998a), their children’s schooling options were stark, as synthesised by the second-named author (Danaher, 2001):

- ...sending their children to local schools along the show circuits
- sending their children to boarding schools
- not sending their children to local or boarding schools but instead teaching them correspondence lessons on the show circuits
- coming off the show circuits and finding alternative employment for the duration of their children’s education so that the children could attend local schools
- remaining on the show circuits and sending their children to live with relatives and attend local schools
- not sending their children to school at all. (p. 255)

The diversity of the different forms of occupational mobility noted above was paralleled by an equivalent diversity in the schooling systems available to these occupationally mobile communities. For instance, Kenny (1997) was for many years the Principal of a specialist school located in Dublin for Irish Travellers. In England, the Traveller Education Support Services provided support for mainstream classroom teachers to work with itinerant children, and also organised distance education packs for the children when they stopped travelling during the winter months (Danaher, Coombes, & Kiddle, 2007). In Australia, the show people moved from receiving distance education from the Brisbane School of Distance Education (Danaher, 1998a) to establishing their own Queensland School for Travelling Show Children (Danaher, Moriarty, & Danaher, 2006), which was subsequently closed and replaced by the current National School for Travelling Show Children, with mobile classrooms that accompany the families as they move around their established itineraries (McKinney, 2018). By contrast, even though they were neglected, boarding schools were set up to accommodate the children of generally poor nomadic herder families in Mongolia (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2005).

Despite the commitment of children and their families, and the conscientiousness of the teachers, involved in these different forms of schooling provision, and the examples of authentic pedagogical innovations evident in many instances of this provision notwithstanding (Henderson & Danaher, 2012), overall the educational experiences of occupational Travellers are marred by the fundamental disjuncture elaborated above between their distinctive lifestyles and the very different requirements of location-based education systems. This crucial point was articulated poignantly by Dyer (2006):

To make their way in the contemporary world, nomadic groups are finding that their indigenous modes of education are no longer adequate. All over the world, this has stimulated a search for external educational inputs to support the process of adaptation, both within and beyond pastoralism or hunter-gathering. Yet much of the history of nomadic and formal education reflects an incompatibility between the aspirations of

service users and the services that are provided, and underlines the often doubtful relevance of formal education to their lives. Success stories are few and far between, yet the need is often strongly felt. (p. 1)

Border Crossings as a Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework underpinning this chapter is based on an updating of Giroux's notion of "border crossing" that he articulated in 2005, and that was itself an updated version of his conceptualisation of this notion published originally in 1992. For Giroux, consistently attentive to the politicised landscape in which education systems are enacted, "Borders and border crossing as political and heuristic metaphors still occupy a central, if not more concretized, place in any viable social and education theory". In particular, and in words that resonate powerfully with the similarly politicised landscape on which occupational Travellers receive and make sense of their educational experiences as explained in the previous section of the chapter:

...the concept of borders provides a continuing and crucial reference for understanding the co-mingling – sometimes clash – of multiple cultures, languages, literacies, histories, sexualities, and identities. Thinking in terms of borders allows one to critically engage the struggle over those territories, spaces, and contact zones where power operates to either expand or to shrink the distance and connectedness among individuals, groups, and places. In the broader political sense, the concept of borders and border crossing serves to highlight that the goal of politics is transformative of both relations of power as well as public consciousness.

For Giroux (2005), given his highly politicised conceptualisation of borders and border crossings, it was not surprising that, in concert with this conceptualisation, he had moved from focusing on critical pedagogy in the first edition of *Border crossings* (Giroux, 1992) to taking up the notion of public pedagogy, "...in which the production, dissemination, and circulation of ideas emerges from the educational force of the entire culture". More specifically:

Public pedagogy in this sense refers to a powerful ensemble of ideological and institutional forces whose aim is to produce competitive, self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain. Corporate public pedagogy now largely cancels out or devalues gender, class-specific, and racial injustices of the existing social order by absorbing the democratic impulses and practices of civil society within narrow economic relations. This form of dominant public pedagogy has become an all-encompassing cultural horizon for producing market identities, values, and practices.

Giroux (2005) brought together these two ideas of border crossings and public pedagogy in this way:

The concept of border crossing not only critiques those borders that confine experience and limit the politics of crossing diverse geographical, social, cultural, economic, and political borders, it also calls for new ways to forge a public pedagogy capable of connecting the local and the global, the economic sphere and cultural politics, as well as public and higher education and the pressing social demands of the larger society. At stake here is the possibility of imagining and struggling for new forms of civic courage and citizenship that expand the boundaries of a global democracy.

On the one hand, Giroux's (2005) account of borders and border crossings constituted a characteristically provocative and insightful analysis of social systems, including education, particularly through the prism of United States politics and power. On the other hand, that prism, and the associated notion of public pedagogy, did not necessarily provide a sufficiently nuanced and situated understanding of the distinctive and highly differentiated

educational experiences of particular communities of occupational Travellers. From this perspective, the “updating” of Giroux’s ideas referred to in the abstract for and the introduction to this chapter relates particularly to linking them with, and locating them in, the specific territories – certainly physical, yet also discursive, political, psychological, sociological and spiritual – in which occupational Travellers live their lives, and in which educators and researchers work with them to enact and evaluate certain forms of educational provision. From this perspective, “border crossings” take on an occupational Traveller-specific character that was encapsulated recently by the second-named author of this chapter with regard to:

...the continuing power of the forces that construct margins and that thereby position some individuals and groups on these margins. That power is manifested in the inhabitants of the margins being characterised as variously different, deficit and deviant – characterisations that those inhabitants are sometimes conditioned into accepting as accurate self-representations. At the same time, these accounts also demonstrate the dynamism and fluidity of specific margins as markers of sociocultural identity and the emergence of alternative discourses about those margins, in so doing confirming the possibility of productive and sustained change in the effects and effectiveness of such margins. (Danaher, 2019a, p. 5)

Occupational Travellers and Researchers as Educational Border Crossers

Having described the historically constructed and highly diverse material contexts in which different communities of occupational Travellers live their lives and earn their livings around the world, and also in which they receive and engage with educational experiences of varying kinds, and having outlined the conceptual framework underpinning the chapter we turn now to outline and illustrate the proposition of those occupational Travellers and the researchers who work with them alike as educational border crossers. We locate this proposition in our research with Australian and British fairground people (see for example Anteliz, Danaher, & Danaher, 2004; Danaher, 1998a; Danaher, Coombes, & Kiddle, 2007).

From this perspective, clearly Australian and British fairground communities exhibit customary, habituated and routine border crossings by virtue of their physical movements as they follow the itineraries (which are relatively extensive in both countries) associated with their respective fairground guilds. These border crossings include the political boundaries signified by states and territories (in Australia) and local authorities and counties (in Great Britain). They involve also traversing the highly ambivalent and complex spaces characterising the local communities for which they provide paid and very popular entertainment. On the one hand, fairground people and the members of those local communities exhibit heightened economic and social interdependence: for instance, the annual shows in Australia attract hundreds and thousands of patrons, and a significant component of that attraction is provided by fairground ride operators (Danaher, 1998a). On the other hand, there continues to be mutual prejudice and suspicion between the two groups that derives in part from the fairground communities crossing the borders into what at least some of the local townspeople regard as properly their exclusive space (Danaher, 2001, 2010), prompting the lively characterisation by the chapter authors and a fellow researcher of the fairground communities as being seen as “space invaders” in this situation (Danaher, Danaher, & Moriarty, 2003).

Against this backdrop of their regular physical border crossings across political and sociocultural borders, Australian and British fairground communities demonstrate also their traversing of educational boundaries. This traversing derives from the fundamental disjuncture noted above between the distinctive rhythms and routines that occupational Travellers require in order to enact their particular forms of mobility on the one hand and

education systems' predication on learners remaining in one place on the other hand. From this perspective, understanding Australian and British fairground people as educational border crossers entails being attentive to the ways in which they move out of the "...different, deficit and deviant..." (Danaher, 2019a, p. 5) characteristics assigned to them by education system on account of that disjuncture to the much more agential and proactive roles that leading members of their respective communities have exhibited. Examples of these roles have included the Australian fairground people lobbying government officials to establish a specialised school exclusively for their children (Danaher, 1998a), and instances of very strong and sustained collaborations and partnerships among British fairground families, the local schools attended by their children and the English Traveller Education Support Services (Danaher, Coombes, & Kiddle, 2007). These kinds of educational border crossings require commitment and courage by the fairground communities, many of whom find schools alien institutions, and goodwill from the education systems. When they succeed, the effort on all parts is well worthwhile.

Correspondingly, our fellow researchers and we have engaged in distinctive educational border crossings by virtue of working for several years with Australian and British fairground communities and with the teachers and headteachers/principals who have provided formal education to them. In doing so, we have been challenged to reconnect with our previously largely unproblematic of the purposes, character and effects of such education, and we have become increasingly aware of the politicised landscape in which their and our "border crossings" (Giroux, 2005) have occurred. We have also been prompted to problematise our understandings of our own responsibilities and roles as education researchers, moving from an initial assumed but unexplicated position as interested observers to being drawn into a set of networks based on mutual interests and the obligations of reciprocity to interrogating ourselves as potentially engaging in certain kinds of activism on behalf of the occupationally mobile communities with whom we have worked (see also Danaher & Danaher, 2008; Danaher, 1998b).

This account of the Australian and British fairground families, and of our fellow researchers and ourselves, as separate but interdependent kinds of educational border crossers has been informed by our updating of Giroux's (2005) notion of border crossings. In both cases, the families and the researchers have encountered and engaged with variously constituted sites of power and sources of authority. These encounters and engagements have challenged previously unexamined assumptions about customary educational and research practices that have been found on reflection and through analysis to privilege some perspectives and voices and to disempower others. Yet they have also afforded opportunities, working through diverse collaborations and developing innovative variations on those educational and research practices, to generate material improvements to educational provision for, and the accompanying research about, these occupationally mobile learners. At the same time, these challenges and opportunities have enabled the occupational Travellers and the education researchers alike to interact with highly diverse cultural experiences, and also to create sometimes profoundly influential intercultural experiences.

Researching Ethically and Reciprocally within this Educational Margin

In this final section of this chapter, and drawing on our shared status as educational border crossers with members of occupationally mobile communities, including Australian and British fairground families, we explore some of the strategies that our fellow researchers and we deploy in order to research ethically and reciprocally with the research participants in spaces that are in certain and complex ways positioned as being on the margins of educational provision. In doing so, we seek to demonstrate contextually appropriate and

effective ways of helping to communicate and articulate the voices of the research participants and stakeholders who work and learn within this particular educational margin.

Firstly, we have always endeavoured to ensure that we are attentive to the situated affordances of facilitating rapport and reciprocity with, and representation of, these occupationally mobile communities. This attentiveness has included, for instance, explicating and analysing the asserted and actual benefits to the research participants. This attentiveness has entailed also being open to the proposition that the interests of research participants and researchers can differ, and sometimes conflict, between as well as within each group, and to the consequent need to talk and work through these differences and potential conflicts (Anteliz, Danaher, & Danaher, 2001). Relatedly, representation of research participants is simultaneously an analytical, discursive and political process that requires careful navigation among sometimes competing imperatives between participants and researchers (Danaher, 2008).

Secondly, we realise that the strategies that we have employed when researching within this particular educational margin have involved instances of intercultural communication and nuanced vocality. Intercultural communication has been evident when striving to understand distinctive worldviews that derive from specific kinds of cultural contexts, with important implications in turn for understanding diverse educational experiences (Danaher, 2015). Nuanced vocality is evident when the research participants and the researchers explore multiple ways to express their separate and shared aspirations and interests, and to convey the subtleties of meaning attached to particular utterances that might otherwise be taken to evoke only straightforward or superficial meaning.

Thirdly, while this is not always possible or perhaps desirable, we have explored opportunities for co-authorship between research participants and researchers where that co-authorship has been feasible and hopefully mutually beneficial. These co-authored publications have included two articles with the founding Principal of the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children (Fullerton, Danaher, Moriarty, & Danaher, 2004; Fullerton, Moriarty, Danaher, & Danaher, 2005), an article with the then Headteacher of one English Traveller Support Service (Currie & Danaher, 2001) and a co-authored book with the then Headteacher of a different English Traveller Support Service (Danaher, Coombes, & Kiddle, 2007). Certainly, when it can occur, co-authorship can represent a deeper and more profound dialogue between the two groups than is often the case in many education research methods (see also Danaher, Cook, Danaher, Coombes, & Danaher, 2013).

While our interactions with Australian fairground families were more extensive and direct than with their British counterparts, nevertheless we have found with both communities that these specific strategies outlined in this section of the chapter were generally effective in sharing between the research participants and the researchers the respective aspirations, concerns and imperatives of each group. This has assisted each group in its particular itineraries as educational border crossers. It has also contributed to ensuring that our research within this particular educational margin has been as ethical, reciprocal and in some ways empowering as possible. It has helped as well to communicate and articulate the voices of these occupationally mobile communities, thereby supporting the amelioration of any misunderstandings related to learning and researching within this educational margin.

Conclusion

There are multiple instances of education research entailing multiple forms of “border crossings” (Giroux, 2005), often resulting in significant and transformative shifts in the worldviews of research participants and researchers alike. These kinds of border crossings can generate and incorporate equally significant and transformative changes arising from those borders exhibiting axiological, epistemological and ontological dimensions.

Certainly, we acknowledge the broader lessons to be learned from this particular evocation of occupational Travellers and researchers as educational border crossers, focused on the cases of Australian and British fairground people. We see these lessons as including distinctive understandings of cultural differences and intercultural experiences, and as contributing to the broader enterprise of communicating and articulating diverse voices when researching within this particular educational margin.

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