Cartographical Imaginations: Spatiality, Adult Education and Lifelong Learning

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Abstract: This symposium explores the significance of space and spatiality for research in adult education and lifelong learning. Drawing on recent theorising in the social sciences, we examine empirically and theoretically questions of space, place and power in adult education.

Cartographical Imaginations: Introduction

In recent years there has been increasing interest in spatial issues in the social sciences and humanities, if less so in the study of adult education. At one level, this is surprising given the importance of space and time for the organisation of teaching and learning and the increasing distances across which learning is being organised and distributed through the use of information and communications technologies. It becomes even more surprising when one considers the extensive use of spatial metaphors in the discussion of pedagogy, for instance, student centredness, border crossing, (dis)location (Edwards and Usher, 2000). Much of the discussion of such changes has remained at the level of technical implementation – of how to extend access and widen participation - with few attempts to provide a wider theoretical framing. This is surprising given the ways in which developments in adult education and lifelong learning play out in the wider processes of globalisation – itself a key spatialising metaphor - and the ways in which the forms of interconnectedness they foster contribute to such processes.

What we wish to do in this symposium is explore the significance of spatiality for our understanding of adult education and lifelong learning. There are two aspects to our interest in the spatial. The first is what can be termed a sociology of space, examining the spatial orderings in specific pedagogic practices and the forms of knowledge, learning and identity they include and exclude. Second we wish to explore the spatial and spatialising metaphors in the discourses of adult education. In what ways do these order and reorder pedagogic practices? In both, the notion of order draws upon the work of Foucault (1979) wherein to organise is also to exercise power. Inevitably, this also involves us in theorising space and spatiality. There are thus many strands to the symposium, which we consider to itself be an opening space in which to begin to examine some of the issues to which we have pointed above.

This focus on the spatial both necessitates and results in what we are tentatively terming cartographical imaginations. In 1959, Wright Mills published *The Sociological Imagination* in which he argued that men (sic) not only needed information and reasoning skills, but also a quality that enables them ‘to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves’ (Wright Mills, 1983, p. 11). This sociological imagination enables people to shift their perspective and to relate the

impersonal and remote to the intimate, itself a spatial relationship. It is through this imagination that what is happening in the world and in oneself is grasped. Wright Mills was and remains hugely influential. The sociological imagination focuses on history, biography and society. What we are exploring here, however, is the need to develop cartographical imaginations. These are about geography, inter-connectedness and history (Gregory, 1994). They are plural and relational, embracing time as well as space, as each entails the other i.e. space-time. They embrace a mapping approach, recognising the endlessness of such practices and the contested and temporary nature of any maps. And with that, there is the need for translating, as the forms of inter-connectedness and the power geometries embedded with them mean (Massey, 1994) that the notion of a centre from which one can speak authoritatively about the social world, adult education and lifelong learning is rendered problematic. Thus, there may be many maps and mapping practices. With translation inevitably comes the possibility of both benign and malevolent mis-translation. It is through cartographical imaginations – the spatial mapping and translating of adult education and lifelong learning – that we begin to embrace differing understandings of the practices in which we are involved and the way generative spaces for learning are actively constructed, both enabling and constraining.

Part-time Students' Participation in Higher Education: A Cartographical Approach

As adult education in the UK has become locked into whatever state policy objectives are current, so the planning table is increasingly attended by vested interests that serve to partly determine the political and social structure of the spaces within which adult education is produced and delivered. Key points of contention now include fundamental issues, such as who has the expertise to deliver what and where and who can be allowed to travel from one space to another (typically from work to education spaces though the traffic may move problematically in both directions). These discussions are often couched in educational discourses that emphasise flexibility of provision and a student-centred practice. Implicit here is the idea that, as adult educators, we are responsive to the student experience and that our ability to produce and deliver education in diverse places is emancipating for students and perhaps also for adult educators. Yet delivery in diverse settings means that education is now offered in places characterised by power relations that the adult educator may not understand and certainly has little control over. This profoundly affect the student's ability to travel between spaces. Despite this, many adult educators still operate with a romanticised view of the adult student as someone who moves stoically through a variety of spaces in achieving their educational aims.

There is an established tradition of writing which describes the particular balancing act required of mature students who must straddle the spaces of work, education and domestic life (Edwards, 1993; Blaxter and Tight, 1994). However the relationship between these spaces and the greater diversity of study modes, domestic structures and patterns of employment which characterise the increasing complexity of modern living, are still under-explored despite the public debate over the fit between work and family life (Franks, 1999; Hochschild, 1997)

Inevitably the experience of this complexity is highly socially differentiated and therefore highly gendered. This manifests itself in a variety of ways. In my research on part-time students (Morgan-Klein & Gray, 2000) I was particularly concerned to highlight the ways in which we expect students to be flexible while all the time emphasising the flexibility and accessibility of our provision. Of particular importance is the way in which flexible participation in work and domestic spaces influences a student's ability to participate flexibly in education. Adult students often manage complex work patterns and the extent to which they experience a net cost or benefit from flexible working is socially differentiated with lower occupational groups and women likely to experience net costs rather than benefits.

Unstructured temporary work results in the highest costs to employees and makes the journey between work and education including employer support and workplace learning least likely. Predictably, the research found that female employees were least likely to receive time off or financial help from employers for their studies and female students were most worried about the impact of their studies on their domestic lives. However, both men and women discussed the difficulty of creating a comfortable boundary between domestic life and their studies particularly distance students who were mainly home based.

The point here is that while we have been congratulating ourselves for delivering education in a variety of spaces and within diverse time structures, we have ignored the problematic nature of these – in particular their power structures, increasingly complexity and the way in which these are socially differentiated. This of course also includes the education space itself. While writing this I advised an adult student who half a year into his studies was having difficulty. It transpired that he had not realised that the university library had more than one floor. He could not conceive of a library as big as the one to which he now has access – a good example perhaps of the way in which cultural capital conditions the use of space we think we have made available.

To better understand the student experience around the planning table, we need to acknowledge the differentiated nature of the power relations experienced by students in the diverse spaces within which they pursue their studies. Moving between spaces implies a flow of costs and benefits (in terms of who pays, childcare costs, who picks up domestic tasks). The increasing spatial and temporal complexity of modern life means that we can make less and less assumptions about our students. Here a cartographical imagination may be helpful in modelling the experience of adult education in a world of shifting boundaries and risky journeys.

Space is not nothing: Mapping Geographies of Power in the Practice of Adult Education

In responding to the symposium question, we begin by saying that "space" plays a significant role in producing power relations in adult education and lifelong learning. Where we "locate" our educational programs influences not only their purposes and processes but also helps to produce the power participants exercise in society. Thus in our continuing work to understand the politics of educational practice, we argue here that adult educators need to develop an understanding of space – a cartographical imagination – in order to negotiate the geographies of power and responsibly represent interests in planning and producing adult education.

To begin to see these geographies of power, we must have a different understanding of what space is and how it works. In a stream of analysis focused on "reasserting space" into social analysis, it is becoming increasingly clear that not only are knowledge and power interconnected but that knowledge, power, space/place closely intertwine to frame our social practices; "space is not a scientific object removed from ideology and politics; it has always been political and strategic" (Lefebrve as cited in Soja, 1989, p. 80). As Foucault (1984, p. 252) writes, "space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power." We take this to mean that structures of meaning which are implicated in the production and use of power are themselves implicated and produced in specific places (envisioned as relationally recursive, not as causally linear). While the thing we call "place" may begin as a physical construct, "the *organization* and *meaning* of space is a product of social translation, transformation, and experience" (Soja, 1989, p. 79-80; emphasis added). Important for understanding the role of place in producing power in adult education is the claim Keith and Pile (1993, p. 24) add that "space is produced and reproduced and thus represents the site and outcome of social, political, and economic struggle." Most directly then, space is not the typically presumed neutral container of social action; it itself is a fundamental producer of and distillate from knowledge/power regimes. Thus Harvey (1992,

p. 21) asks, “why and by what means do social beings invest places … with social power; and how and for what purposes is that power then deployed and used across a highly differentiated system of interlinked places?”. To understand adult education, we have to map geographies of it as sets of social practices. Developing such a cartographical imagination means we have to come to understand how space is represented, how its meaning is produced, and who gets to produce it. Space, then, is not nothing but rather a significant constituent of social life.

To understand the political consequences of everyday adult education practice, we have argued that adult educators in producing programs with specific outcomes also through the production of those programs either reproduce or change the relations of power in which they act (1998). Part of understanding this simultaneous "acting in" and "acting on" means understanding the geography of power represented in the working relations required to both produce programs as well as maintain or reconstruct the working relations themselves. These working but changeable relations of power exist not just in time but in space as well. In order to understand the production and/or transformation of power relations, we have to understand the role of place in producing power and how we as adult educators shape and are shaped by out "placeness."

In negotiating power to responsibly represent interests, we have recently (2001) argued that adult educators are knowledge-power brokers who must make clear whose side they are on in a terrain constructed by the unequal distribution of symbolic and material benefits. Where in this world do they typically take these sides – at that place where most educators eventually gather, the planning table. We use the image of the planning table (literally and metaphorically) because it draws attention to where in the social context people make judgements about what they are educationally going to do. By locating where these negotiations occur, we move education out of the minds of individuals and into socially and politically constructed places. Once education is at the table we can see linkages between individuals and the political/social structures in which they act. With a sense of how place plays in the production of power – a cartographical imagination – we can better read, assess, and act in/on these terrains of power in order to ethically choose the right sides to represent in producing adult education and lifelong learning.

Taking Flight: The Deterritorialisation of Gender, Literacy and Research

When invited to contribute to this symposium, I submitted an outline based on the question, “Where are ‘women returners’ returning from?” This provides just one example of the ways in which the spatial metaphors of adult education construct a place on the inside that is defined in relation to an undefined territory “out there”. Lurking out there is an unruly mob of ‘non-participants’ who continue to evade the net of outreach, the lure of access, or the efforts of widening participation initiatives to mould us all into lifelong learners. Having rooted around out there for a few years, collecting life history narratives and relating these through feminist theory to my own experience (Clarke, 1998), I thought it would be interesting to re-visit those places with some new questions framed by social geography and the notion of a cartographical imagination.

When Richard circulated our combined abstracts, however, it looked as though the women were going to be writing about domestic spaces while the men were putting out the Big Ideas about power geometries, actor-networks and geographies of social action. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 276) acknowledge the need for women to reclaim our own subjectivity by employing the notion of “we as women…” for a subject who speaks for the political project of feminism. “But”, they warn us, “… it is dangerous to confine oneself to such a subject, which does not function without drying up a spring or stopping a flow”. So I shall take this as my cue to set aside domestic spaces (haven’t the men got homes to go to?), and weigh in with this monstrous word – deterritorialization - which represents “a line of flight”

where “the self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 249).

In another contribution to this symposium, colleagues demand that adult educators “must make clear whose side they are on in a terrain structured by unequal distributions of symbolic and material benefits”. This constructs a bounded terrain where autonomous individuals, each locked into a unitary (gendered, classed and racially defined) subjectivity can unambiguously locate themselves on one side or another. But I would argue that, like choosing to speak *only* as a woman, such demands confine our thinking, and therefore the possibilities for action, within a territorial and narrowly conceived ordering of the world. By “drying up the spring” or “stopping a flow” it excludes those who cannot or will not stand firmly on one side or the other in this terrain. Deterritorialisation means taking flight from a single identity or destiny, breaking habits of thought and perception, questioning the very notion of place or terrain.

Calling for cartographical imaginations suggests that we plunder the resources of geographers, cartographers, architects, visual artists or graphic designers to explore questions about adult education and lifelong learning. But in doing so, we have to recognise that these disciplines, perspectives, practices and their products are discourses which provide no more access to unmediated truth about the world than any other discourse (Massey, 1999). Questions of history, permanence and time are clearly implicated in cartographical practice. Recognising this relationship between space and time means calling into question those narratives of inevitability in which space is temporalised to position “Others” in different parts of the world as primitive, developing, pre-modern, post-industrial, backward or advanced within a single historical project (Massey, 1994). Can we imagine a cartography that marks particular times and places where adult educators should take a stand against the unequal distribution of resources?

As a representational practice, cartography privileges a visual and spatial understanding over the temporal characteristics of speech and writing. Deploying a cartographical imagination for research in lifelong learning would have profound implications if we consider how the entire edifice of formal education is built on the spoken and written word. This challenge to the pre-eminence of language and literacy has been taken up by Kress (2000), who argues that our understanding of the material and social world is constricted by current theories of meaning. As a product of the high value placed on written language in the public domain, the assumed dominance of language “…constitutes a major impediment to an understanding of the semiotic potentials of, among other modes, the visual and its role in cognition, representation and communication” (Kress, 2000, p. 159). Kress therefore calls for new theories of meaning based on a concept of Design, in which individuals become the transformers of diverse representational resources instead of being regarded as merely the users of stable systems. In drawing upon a wider range of resources, and using these to pursue our particular interests, we engage in the transformation of these resources, the effects they produce and of ourselves as active “designers”. If a cartographical imagination frees us up to consider the deterritorialisation of language and literacy, we are left with the question of what might our research practices look like if we choose neither to speak nor to write? Is that a question we dare, or care, to even imagine?

This Space is Not a Space

The title of this presentation consciously draws on Magritte’s famous pipe in the painting *Les Trahisons des Images*. In this painting Magritte self-consciously deconstructs the binary ‘representation-real’. He brings to our attention that the pipe is not a ‘real’ pipe but a representation. We understand that the painting is a performance – a world or space has been performed or constructed into being. The space that Magritte constructs is real even though it

is also a representation. Moreover, the space has semiotic power. The objects are arranged in a relationship that gives the totality sense and significance.

It was this that started me thinking about 'space' and spatiality. There's no doubt that there has been increasing interest in this topic. Does this signal the existence of a cartographical imagination, albeit contested and still in embryonic form? I think the answer is definitely yes. However, whilst the development of a cartographical imagination is generally to be welcomed, the kind of imagination that is emerging has some problematic elements. The contemporary emphasis on the significance of space can be seen as a corrective to the traditional foregrounding of time. The latter is very much a product of the Enlightenment with its emphasis on the grand narrative of progress and betterment – in time everything will get better and better, over time we learn more – a notion encapsulated in the terms *lifelong* learning. Space on the other hand tended to be neglected, taken as a given, a neutral container which is simply 'there'. In effect, it was naturalised. There is no spatial descriptor of learning with a semiotic power equivalent to the lifelong.

Spatiality can be conceived in two forms. There is Euclidean space and network space. Whilst the contemporary emphasis on space is to be welcomed, I detect a tendency to conceive space in purely Euclidean terms. This may not be very helpful if the network form of space is thereby neglected. For me, a cartographical imagination that deploys a purely Euclidean notion of space would be problematically narrow and impoverished. I draw on Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to foreground the significance of network space.

On the face of it ANT does not seem a promising resource for theorising lifelong learning since its origins lie in the study of the relationships between science, technology and society. However, its usefulness here lies in the fact that it is a theory about how new knowledge comes to be produced and in this sense it can provide fresh insights into learning processes. These insights enable us to move away from the traditional view of learning that embeds it either in psychological processes or where the social is taken account of merely as a 'context'. ANT provides conceptual resources for a cartographical imagination because space is understood as a social creation, something that is made or 'performed' rather than something 'natural'. Knowledge production requires a network of heterogeneous material objects, brought together in relationships that have to be managed and maintained. The network of relationships is a spatial configuration of interactions between actors of various kinds. Actors can be both animate (students, supervisors, peers) and inanimate (computers, books, equipment, space, etc). For the network to function successfully and produce new knowledge, all actors must be effectively mobilised (or 'enrolled') and managed (or 'translated'). ANT thus points to the importance of learning as knowledge construction and knowledge construction as learning – learning in action and interaction in settings where human and non-human actors are equally significant. In effect, it provides a semiotics of learning. Its usefulness lies in its foregrounding of action, process, relationality and infrastructure and its eschewal of the mental and the contextual as background.

How does this apply to lifelong learning? For me, the most significant aspect is the insight that the learner needs to be thought of as a 'knowing location' – 'a learner knows because he [sic] is at the right place in a network of materially heterogeneous elements' (Law and Hetherington 2001, p. 4). Thinking of learners as knowing locations immediately foregrounds spatiality although the notion of space implied here is a complex one. ANT argues that these spaces are different but necessary to one another. Furthermore, they enact a world in their own image. Law (2000) points out that if Euclidean space has been enacted in the past, it is not surprising that the notion of space as a pre-existing container becomes dominant whilst the *enactment* that brought about that space drops out of sight. The argument that space is enacted is however easier to see if we think in terms of network space because we can 'think of the engineering involved in building that space, the fact that it *is* performed, is much more visible for network space' (Law, 2000, p. 7). The learner then needs to be

thought of as a knowing location. The learner's location is defined in terms both of Euclidean space and network space. The latter is an enactment in the sense that a network is constructed and this reminds us that Euclidean space also has this characteristic. Thus rather than thinking of lifelong learning purely in terms of time we can now think of it in terms of *space-time* where the learner moves through both time and space. Euclidean space defines the learner's identity through time. Network space defines the network of actors, animate and inanimate, within which the leaner can become a knowledge producer. We are also reminded that for learning to be successful, networks have to be mobilised and managed – network space has to be maintained - or the learner will run aground.

My presentation is but a fragment and undoubtedly raises more questions than it answers. However what I hope I have done is to illustrate what a cartographical imagination might look like and that furthermore it can be an imagination that does not simply reconfigure space as a pre-existing container or background. ANT can provide the conceptual resources enabling this complex imagination to be deployed in thinking differently about lifelong learning.

Imagine

This symposium has drawn upon the theoretical and empirical literature in cultural geography, feminist and post-colonial philosophy, cultural studies and political economy to begin to open a space through which to discus the significance of spatiality to changes taking place in the policy, practice and study of adult education and lifelong learning. There are spatial dimensions to all our activities, yet these are often left unexamined. It is in the adoption of cartographical imaginings that we begin to trace the significance of space not simply as a backcloth or context against or within which we act, but as an outcome of the practices in which we engage, with important consequences for learning, power and identity.

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