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Symposium: “Migrations in Professional Knowledge”

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Recommended Citation

Malcolm, Irene; Colley, Helen; Fenwick, Tara; and Slade, Bonnie (2011). "Symposium: “Migrations in Professional Knowledge”," *Adult Education Research Conference*. <https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2011/symposia/4>

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Symposium: “Migrations in Professional Knowledge”

Irene Malcolm, Helen Colley, Tara Fenwick, & Bonnie Slade

Introduction

Migration has been controversial in society at large, and in adult education it has far-reaching and underexplored implications for adults’ professional learning. In this symposium we draw on an open conceptualisation of migration which encompasses the physical movement of people across regions and regulatory frameworks, and migrations in professional knowledge effected by changes in policy, and changing conditions of work. The migration of knowledge refers both to the way knowledge is carried by individuals and groups to new locations, and the way knowledge itself migrates to different professional and ethical places. We examine migration critically from four different perspectives that are competing as well as complementary. The symposium papers are connected by a concern with the context of globalisation, late capitalism and the capitalist economic crisis: conditions associated with intensification of migration. Different perspectives produce a rich and diverse analysis of our theme, through engagement with empirical data and theoretical critique. While there are creative tensions in the theoretical stances adopted, there are synergies across the four papers in our objects of interest. We are concerned with the impact on professional knowledge of time and space, of how and why certain knowledges are validated; we are also interested in the ambiguity of professional knowledge, and the use of power, care and responsibility.

Responsibility, Difficult Communities, and ‘*Being Singular-Plural*’: Professionals Migrating to New Forms of Pedagogic Practice

Tara Fenwick, University of Stirling, UK

Across Canada, most urban centres contain at least one so-called difficult community that experiences multiple social issues related to high unemployment, insufficient low-cost housing, substance dependency, and neglect. Professionals who have located their practices in these communities, ranging from health care and social service to educators and designers, often find themselves grappling with the relation of their role and their responsibility to the complexities of their community and the human beings who animate it – to participate in what Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) calls a mutual coming-into-presence. Traditional professional orientations drawing from disciplinary problem-solving and even emancipatory models can threaten the fragile dynamics holding such communities together: they can reinforce hierarchical and alienating relations of the elite, mobile helping professional, teaching and fixing the ‘deprived’ and socially excluded.

In contrast to such models, this paper examines forms of practice undertaken by selected professionals working in Vancouver’s Downtown Lower-East Side (DtES) neighbourhood, considered a notoriously ‘difficult community’ because of its concentration of highly visible social issues. These professionals have migrated in a double sense – from institutionalized centres and clear epistemic communities into often ambiguous spaces that challenge their professional identity and knowledge, and from routinized relations and practices to relations demanding continuous invention and reconfiguration of what it means to respect difference.

Three cases form the focus of the paper: a graphic designer, a nurse, and a social worker, who each struggled with the meaning of professional responsibility in working with DtES residents.

To help understand the nuances of their endeavours, this discussion draws from concepts outlined by Jean-Luc Nancy particularly in his 2000 essay *Being Singular Plural*. Nancy talks of encounters as touching, being touched and being in touch with, as a way to expose singularities: 'the being of community *is* the exposure of singularities' wrote Nancy (1991, p.30). Being is irreducibly being-with, a togetherness. But this is not a communal togetherness, and community is not a unity, never a common being. Instead, community is a juxtaposition of singularities that share a space while remaining distinct. They share through a reciprocal exposure of their singularities, their uniqueness. In this exposure, this touching, singularities come into presence - as intimately joined but separate. Community can never be a common being, but 'the mutuality of being-in-common at a distance'. *Being* is a continuous coming into presence. It is coming into presence as distinct from others, but also sharing with others the quality of being equally unique. Each is just as singular as every other. Thus, all have in common their singularity, while all are unique.

One of the three cases of professional practice featured here, a nurse who is now director of what is known as the 'Learning Exchange' in the DtES, shows a process of linking university students – many with no experience of this neighbourhood beyond negative stereotypes – with DtES residents. The emphasis is on working alongside, not necessarily connecting or 'building relationships', but sharing space, engaging *in activity* over time – 'touching' uniqueness. The process involves multiple tensions and disagreements. The University's demands for achievement outcomes don't map well onto the rhythms of students' 'becoming present' with DtES. Angry blogs from some DtES residents express suspicion and even hostility at the University's presence, at being objects for yet more research. A recent media feature attracted online comments attacking the Learning Exchange activities as naive academic social liberalism, feeding the quagmire of DtES and wasting taxpayer funds on irresponsible derelicts.

Nancy insists on ethical responsibility with respect to different others with a position that avoids the problems of defining the good for a community, such as prescribing an ethics of reciprocity and unconditional hospitality. Being-with is not communion, it is sharing a place. As James (2006) writes, 'Being-with' is irreducible, a relation of being side-by-side rather than an "otherwise than being" of transcendence in the face-to-face. Nancy's singular plurality is a mutuality of being-in-common, 'the mutual exposure of bodies and incommensurability-in-common' (Watkin, 2007, p.61). Being-in-common does not depend on what participants share, but *that* they are exposed to each other. Responsibility enacted by these professionals begins with an irreducible sense of being-in-common with others in the DtES, of sharing their space and their problems. None insists on a single moral definition of the good in behaviours and relations for a community, and in fact, none particularly promotes an ethical responsibility to care for the other. Instead, the focus seems to be upon allowing difference to come into presence in shared spaces, to basing a practice on ways of 'being-with' in the 'passion of encounters' and 'melee' that is community (Nancy, 2003). Drawing from these three cases read through Nancy's conceptions of community emerging through encounters of touching and being touched, of *being-singular*, the paper suggests forms of pedagogic practice to which some professionals are migrating to better engage with communities.

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Professional Knowledge Migrating Across National Boundaries

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Premised on an assumed positive correlation between increasing levels of knowledge and economic growth, Western nations are involved in an intense competition for migrants with professional credentials and work experience. Immigration policies of both traditional immigrant receiving countries and former imperial powers are geared toward attracting highly educated and experienced professionals for migration. Canada was the first country to develop a point system to assess migrants, and over the years has been successful in attracting a large number and a wide range of professionals. Research has demonstrated, however, that upon arrival in Canada immigrant professionals experience great difficulty in securing appropriate employment in their professions (Galabuzi, 2006; Preston, et al, 2011). It is not uncommon for immigrants who are highly proficient in English with graduate degrees and years of international work experience to work without pay in order to get a foothold in the labour market (Slade & Schugurensky, 2010). This paper, drawing on the methodological and ontological orientations of institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005), investigates how this devaluation of international professional knowledges is accomplished in the ordinary work practices of professional regulators.

The immigration point system codifies professional knowledge, assigning points in the categories of education, language facility, work experience, and existing social networks. Engineers who speak at least one official language with a minimum of four years' work experience do not have a difficult time qualifying for permanent migration to Canada. In fact, over the past decade with the prioritization of occupations in science and engineering, engineers have formed the largest group of immigrant professionals (Couton, 2002). The men and women who immigrate hoping to continue in their professional engineering practice frequently encounter labour market barriers, such as lengthy credential assessment and recognition, devaluation of international work experience, difficulties in obtaining local work experience and references, discrimination, lack of professional networks, lack of knowledge of Canadian standards and practices, and professional licensing processes that are both lengthy and expensive. Many of these barriers are rooted in activities that seek to evaluate, compare, and validate their professional knowledge against an (often unarticulated) assumed Canadian standard.

The regulation of professions in Canada is not a federal responsibility, and therefore each provincial or territorial jurisdiction has its own distinct licensing process which includes an educational assessment of international credentials. In Ontario, the province with the highest number of internationally educated engineers, it is a volunteer committee of the engineering regulatory body, comprised of licensed engineers who are not experts in credential assessment, that reviews applications for academic equivalency. This assessment is done by reviewing academic transcripts and course descriptions, and comparing them to provincial syllabi. While there have been efforts to ensure the mobility of professionals within Canada, in effect, there are

13 different professional standards in Canada pointing out the diversity of codified professional knowledge.

Institutional ethnography, with its focus on starting in the actualities of people's lives and discovering how their experience is organized through texts, provides a powerful ontological and methodological lens to analyze how knowledge is validated or invalidated through tangible and varied work practices. Texts are analyzed as a window into the licensing process that is carried out by various people at different times; the texts, when activated, coordinate peoples' actions and give shape to the licensing process itself. Smith highlights that "the replicable text makes it possible for the same words and images to be present to people in different places and at different times and hence introduce into people's doings the same organizing – though not determining – component" (2005, p. 206).

Using the engineering licensing process as a case study, this paper shows how professional knowledge is a social construction which is given shape by policies of government and professional regulatory bodies, and practices of numerous people in different sites. While the professional knowledge of immigrant engineers is validated through immigration selection, their knowledge is sharply devalued in the process of applying for a professional licence. As a result, immigrant engineers, most particularly women because of the male dominance of the profession, experience downward class mobility taking employment below their capabilities in their fields as technicians or technologists or working in unrelated survival jobs such as cleaning offices or driving taxis. It is important to note that professional knowledge gained in international contexts is not devalued when Canadian engineers have gained it; thus, it is a focus of this paper to examine how power relations of race and gender impact professional knowledge. This empirical investigation into professional regulation points to the political ground on which supposedly neutral knowledge claims are made.

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Knowledge Migration in the Digital Economy: Distribution and Containment

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This paper explores the migration of professional knowledge among workers employed in the distributed context of the Digital Economy (DE). It is premised on the idea that the virtual sphere changes fundamentally the contextual factors in present theorisations of learning and work. The

aim of the paper is to draw critically on the theories of Karin Knorr Cetina to explore a recent conceptualisation of professional knowledge and to evaluate its use in understanding professional practices in distributed contexts. The data from the study on which the paper is based revealed questions relevant to current theoretical debates and to practical considerations of professional knowledge practices. To explore these, the paper takes the software localisation industry as a case for distributed knowledge work. Localisation was an early sector to develop in the digital economy, dating back to the 1980s and linked to the desktop publishing industry. Software packages and educational products that were required to operate in a range of languages and cultures began to be localised and marketed globally, and localisation workers were distributed across different countries.

The wider context of these developments in digital working is the “knowledge society” where knowledge is said to be a productive force that replaces capital and labour as a wealth-creating power. Here knowledge and learning in work are linked to the notion of lifelong learning which is seen as essential to education policies needed to address the conditions of fast capitalism. Initial qualifications are seen to be insufficient, and on-going learning is required to meet changing demands on workers. However, while lifelong learning is seen as essential in these conditions, a fundamental paradox of fast capitalism is that knowledge itself appears to be unstable, difficult to pin down and to formalise in professional education. If learning is “an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 31), then it is not clear how social practices of knowledge building and migration are sustained in conditions of knowledge instability and in work that is distributed.

Despite the contested nature of knowledge, understandings of it exercise a far-reaching influence on society and the economy, affecting how we learn and work. To explain knowledge in such conditions, Knorr Cetina developed a theory of epistemic cultures as “cultures of creating and warranting knowledge” (Knorr Cetina, 2007, p.363). She sees society as permeated with knowledge settings where epistemic cultures “appear to be a structural feature of knowledge societies” (Knorr Cetina, 1999, p.8). While dominant definitions of a knowledge society have been economic, Knorr Cetina’s work shifts the focus of discussion from knowledge as “an intellectual or technological product” to knowledge as a “production context in its own right” (ibid, 1999, p. 6). This focus on knowledge as a production context leads to the idea of expert systems that operate in society and that do not focus on a technological elite, but on wider contexts of expert work.

Knorr Cetina’s theories signal what she refers to as a split with received ideas of professional knowledge, since, in epistemic cultures, knowledge is conceived as practice-based and not circumscribed by disciplinary boundaries. Her theory moves from ideas of knowledge as representational, to knowledge as a process and knowledge as practice (2007, p. 364). She examines critically received ideas that frame professional practice as “recurrent processes” ruled by schemata and prescriptions (Knorr Cetina, 2001, p.175). Epistemic practice is based on a form of relationship which is transformative of itself and the entities in the relationship. Conceptualising knowledge practices as relational allows Knorr Cetina to theorise practice in a way that encompasses non-routine responses. The conceptualisation aims to be dynamic, and to embrace potential for change as a basis of knowledge-centred practice “in a relational rather than performative idiom” (ibid, p.176).

In examining the work of localisers through a critical exploration of Knorr Cetina’s theory, the paper considers migration and containment in digital work and the variations in relational dynamics that affect the groups’ localisation practices. The cases drawn on in the paper

include Carmen, a South American localisation company owner and Jennifer, a home-worker, who described their professional working. Their accounts of the distributed nature of work in the industry revealed insights into macro level knowledge practices, highlighting complex migrations. These pointed to some far-reaching political, economic and social effects of knowledge cultures which were not neutral in their implications for power in dominant social structures and in professional interests.

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Time-space and the ethics of adult education: migrating from care to control?

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This paper explores the consequences of the current global economic crisis for the ethics of adult education, with a particular focus on changes in the time-space of educational work. It theorizes from a number of different disciplinary perspectives and bodies of literature, but argues that we need to turn a sociological rather than philosophical lens on these questions.

From the late 1980s, social science has taken a ‘spatial turn’ (Castree, 2009, p. 32) focusing on positionality, space, place, borders, liminality and so forth. This has largely been used to illuminate epistemological questions in a metaphorical way; although more recent studies of adult education have a more ontological focus on globalisation and its material impact on diversified learning spaces (Seddon et al, 2010). Time, by contrast, is a sorely under-researched aspect of adult education, despite its growing importance in broader social science (e.g. Adam, 1995; *Time & Society* journal). Yet it is deeply connected with adult education, not least because key philosophical understandings of time reveal that it is always intimately connected with ethics – that is to say, with values and purpose, and with the pursuit of a ‘good life’ and a ‘good society’.

Whilst most philosophical discussions of time conceptualise it either in an external-realist manner (as a material context for human action), or in an internal-idealist way (as an inescapable category of human consciousness), this paper draws on contrasting sociological understandings. Concepts offered by scholars such as David Harvey (2006), often drawing on Marxist theory, treat time not as the external or internal backdrop to human practice, but as *generated by human practice*. They see time as inextricably integrated with space. Moreover, time is generated in three different registers: historical time, related to the mode of production and particular stages within its development; abstract or ‘clock’ time, which in the capitalist era is primarily used to calculate the degree of exploitation of labour power and the rate of profit; and concrete or ‘process time’, which is particularly experienced in human service work such as adult education, where labour is driven by student needs which often conflict with the ‘clock’ time allocated (cf. Davies, 1994).

Such an analysis allows us to consider the time-space of publicly-funded adult education as productive of labour power, and as part of the ‘social wage’ within the overall circulation of capital (Allman, 1999). It also helps to illuminate how and why, in times of financial crisis and ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey, 2003), not only is public funding for adult education restricted by the capitalist class, but the ethical nature of the work is also pressured to migrate further along a spectrum away from care and towards control (Harvey, 2006). Insofar as capitalists are still obliged to divert value into the social wage, they attempt to ensure that more of it is spent on surveillance and monitoring, and less on needs-determined care. The time-space of adult education can become compressed (Harvey, 1990) (with requirements that individuals have to complete training or ‘become employable’ within limited time-spans) or simply restricted (fewer learners can enter the space, and less time is available to work with them).

This disturbing shift is connected to recent work by Cribb (2009), Banks (2009) and Colley (2010) which makes visible ‘ethics work’: the day-to-day labour for educators of making difficult ethical decisions, such as about whom they can help and how, in a context of severely restricted space, time and resources; and coping with tensions between decisions forced by these conditions (often associated with meeting policy-imposed targets) and their own personal and professional ethical beliefs. Implications for adult education theory relate to the need for more sophisticated understandings of and analytical attention to time-space in our research. Practical implications concern the impact of intensified ethics work on adult educators and learners, and how the migration of ethics towards control might be countered.

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Conclusion

Analyses of migrations in professional knowledge and ethics have much to contribute to understanding the effects of new contexts of adult learning and related new directions in CPD (Continuing Professional Development). These contexts are multifaceted and ambiguous, often outside institutional boundaries. In particular, challenges to professional responsibility through migrations of knowledge and practice raise questions of professional agency and political positioning. Similarly, the way policy decisions are taken and knowledge is warranted/discarded points to the importance of political and policy critique. The need for professionals to work with ambiguity suggests a move beyond present epistemic boundaries. This may involve new ways of working that use continuous (re)invention and that are critical and questioning.