

On the Value of "Leaky Boundaries"— A Response to Patrick Slattery

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We are grateful to our colleague, Patrick, for his willingness to so thoughtfully and eloquently enter into conversation about the nature of arts-based educational research. His articulation of a postmodern perspective of this approach to research is exactly the type of contribution that can foster productive discourse within this emerging community of scholars.

In "Troubling the Contours of Arts-Based Educational Research," Patrick (2003 [this issue]) reminds us of the danger of putting forward a position that appears to be a single reality. In constructing his argument, Patrick equates our concept of "contours" with boundaries and then raises concerns about creating artificial boundaries that "are shaped rigidly or universally," serve to objectify and categorize others, and lead to stereotypes and marginalization of "persons who do not conform to dominant theories or genres" (p. 193). Clearly, these are grave concerns, grounded in Patrick's deep-seated passion for social justice. Yet we see an irony in his vehement distrust of boundary construction. Although sounding an alarm against the injustice of "boundaries as labels" that restrict human creativity, Patrick minimizes the power of "boundaries as constructs" to name and thereby to raise awareness of what has previously been unseen. In the realm of social justice, for example, "labels" such as racial profiling and sexual harassment have called attention to unjust practices that were once taken-for-granted social norms. More central to the thesis of our original article is the importance of the label "arts-based educational research," a social construct that we use to signal a boundary between a culture of scientific inquiry and a culture of aesthetic inquiry. As Goodman (1978) reminded us, concepts are ways of world making. For this reason, we are not so readily willing to abandon the notion of boundaries,

although we prefer the concept of contours that for us better conveys a sense of what Jean Houston (1980) referred to as "leaky margins."

With this in mind, let us revisit a few points that Patrick raises as problematic. One of his concerns is for the arbitrary and needless compartmentalization among the roles of artist, educator, and researcher. As he rightly points out, we engage holistically in life's endeavors, acting as an integrated self that encompasses a multiplicity of roles. Our suggestion that arts-based educational researchers consider in what sense they see themselves as artists, researchers, and educators arose not from a desire to bifurcate the self but from a belief in the possibility of generative conversations about these ways of experiencing the world. As we pointed out in our article, individuals with a variety of backgrounds have been drawn to arts-based educational research, and sharing those backgrounds with each other can lead to deeper understanding of the interconnections between various forms of art, various genres of research, and various dilemmas of education. Far from being reductionistic, such conversations would, it seems to us, begin to create a continually evolving landscape of discourse.

Yet the very act of self-conscious reflection represents another problematic concern for Patrick. He states, "We have a long tradition of postmodern and poststructural critiques of modern notions of the self and self-consciousness. Many scholars today have no intention of producing self-conscious and reasoned artifacts" (Slattery, 2003, p. 195). Constructing a boundary between modern and postmodern notions of reason, self, and self-conscious is, itself, a binary framing of the problematic. St. Pierre (2000) reminded us, "As with truth, postmodern critiques argue for multiple and historically specific forms of reason" (p. 25). Blaise Pascal raised a similar caveat with an eloquent turn of phrase—"Two extravagances: to exclude Reason, to admit only Reason" (as cited in Paulston, 1999). Thus, in a postmodern age, it may be more fruitful to explore how such multiple forms of reason play out in arts-based educational research than to resist the very notion of reason. Indeed, both Patrick (see Slattery, 2001) and Pat (see McMahon, 2000) offer provocative examples in which intuitive, nonconscious knowing finds form in aesthetic representations, and these aesthetic representations are, in turn, probed with considerable reason to yield insights into self, Other, and arts-based educational research.

For many, it seems the nascent arts-based educational research community affords space in which to share and discuss their art as well as the opportunity to explore art making. With them, we celebrate the infusion of aesthetics into educational and research discourses that have been dominated for far too long by a rational, technical, scientific-like view of knowledge and truth. At the same time, however, we long for conversations about the epistemological, ontological, and axiological intricacies of aesthetic ways of knowing that scholarship like Patrick's and Pat's makes possible. Thus, our call for sculpting the contours of arts-based educational research is not a call

for hegemony or exclusion. It is a call to explore more deliberately and deliberately the shape of spaces within this discourse. In this, we resonate with Paulston's (1999) view that

perhaps the single most important characteristic of postmodern sensibility is an ontological shift from an essentialist view of one fixed reality . . . to an anti-essentialist view where reality constructs are seen to resist closure and multiple and diverse truth claims become part of a continuous agonistic struggle. (p. 440)

In other words, we see boundaries, not as immutable or impermeable but as conceptual constructs to be debated and contested. Before such deliberative discourse can occur, however, there needs to be what Paulston (1999, 2000a, 2000b) and other postmodernist social cartographers referred to as "maps."

Mapping of a postmodern discourse community aims not to exclude on the basis of difference but to portray diversity of thinking and multiplicity of perspectives. Individuals, like Patrick and like us, hold positions. When these positions are articulated in text, they can be represented on a map. As more positions are mapped, the contours of the field can begin to emerge. This is not an arbitrary imposition of rigid categories by those who may neither understand nor value arts-based educational research. This is a voluntary expression by individuals of who they see themselves to be and how they see themselves in relation to the broader discourse community. Miles Davis chose not to see himself as a member of Julliard. In making that choice, however, he understood what Julliard represented within a broader world of music and committed himself to creating a different space within that world.

Granted, once a map of a world begins to be shaped, there is always a danger that those in positions of power may try to exclude "persons who do not conform to dominant theories or genres" (Slattery, 2003, p. 193). At times, we have felt this exclusionary force exerted toward our own position on the importance of articulating aesthetic logics-of-justification for arts-based educational research. Perhaps this is why we so passionately feel the need to call for explicit conversation about various positions that constitute the discourse. As Paulston (1999) indicated,

Social mapping may also be seen as an emergent methodology from within the hermeneutic mode of inquiry which acknowledges that worlds are constructed and interpreted both objectively and subjectively, that is, that within fields of study or sites of knowledge a dialogue is always taking place which involves meaning systems which are illusive. These meaning systems are formed by those who elaborate them, and an open, intertextual field can be seen to be created by the dialogue. (p. 454)

Our call, then, is not for consensus or hegemony. Our call is for an articulation and mapping of positions within a discourse community committed to arts-based educational research in all of its creative manifestations. We take it as postmodern given that the boundaries among various positions will be contested and see this as desirable. It is through this friction at the edges that the

contours of arts-based educational research can be sculpted. As boundaries in art allow us to see the shape of things, sculpting the edges of various positions within arts-based discourses can help us to understand the textures, nuances, and subtleties of this landscape. We are grateful to the editors of this special issue of *Qualitative Inquiry* for making space for this point-counterpoint conversation. We are grateful to our colleague, Patrick, for his willingness to join us in conversation. It is our hope that this exchange is only one of many more to come.

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