**Setting the Scene for Researching within the Educational Margins:
Selecting Strategies for Communicating and Articulating Voices in
Education Research Projects**

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Introduction

Learners conduct their activities in highly varied contexts and environments. In some cases, they are afforded opportunities to engage with highly skilled educators and with high quality resources that generate enriching educational experiences and that maximise their success. In other situations, by contrast and for a variety of reasons, learners encounter challenges that derive from their distinctive circumstances rather than from their learning capabilities, and sometimes those challenges prevent their success, despite their best efforts and often those of their teachers.

From this latter perspective, this book is focused on the phenomenon of *researching within the educational margins*. As we elaborate below, there are multiple potential approaches to conceptualising and constructing such margins, and to tracing their manifestations and effects. At the same time, these approaches have in common an attentiveness to the educational aspirations, experiences and outcomes of individuals and groups whose lives are variously different in particular ways from the sociocultural norms of the community majority, and/or who are subject to specific forms of marginalisation in comparison with mainstream community members. In some instances, these people are *educational fringe dwellers*, positioned as being "other" in relation to citizens with regular access to capital, power and status. This state of otherness or alterity may generate educational bias, and might impact on these fringe dwellers in multiple manifestations. In other cases, these people are *educational border crossers*, who mobilise opportunities to contest the ideological bases of their marginalisation and positioning, and who thereby engage in practices that can potentially enable and transform their situations, including through formal and informal learning.

The subsequent chapters in the book are concerned with the approaches taken by education researchers who work with these individuals and groups who are learning within these educational margins. In particular, the book investigates the diverse and specific *education research methods and strategies* that these researchers have developed and applied in order to ensure that their research is authentic, rigorous, situated and where possible empowering. These methods and strategies are located against the backdrop of increasing scrutiny of the conduct of researchers working with marginalised people, including in relation to the sets of protocols associated with gaining formal ethics approval and informed consent by participants in order for such research projects to take place. In view of this scrutiny, it is timely to examine and evaluate the effects and the effectiveness of the research methods and strategies deployed by education researchers who are working with variously marginalised individuals and groups.

A crucial element of researching within these educational margins is the capacity to communicate and articulate voices. These voices are recognised as being diverse and sometimes contradictory, reflecting as they do divergent worldviews and sometimes competing interests. In varied ways, the subsequent chapters highlight some of the complexities entailed in communicating and articulating voices in specific research projects, as well as strategies of proven effectiveness in achieving that communication and articulation.

This chapter consists of the following three sections:

1. Setting the scene for researching within the educational margins (situating such research in contemporary scholarly literature)
2. Selecting strategies for communicating and articulating voices in education research projects
3. Structuring the book and sequencing the chapters.

Setting the Scene for Researching within the Educational Margins
Contemporary scholarly literature reflects increased interest in researching within the educational margins. Appropriately, such literature evinces considerable diversity in terms of paradigms, research questions and methods, findings and recommendations for action. Likewise, the subsequent chapters in this book demonstrate an equivalent diversity of focus and approach, while having in common an interest in understanding the circumstances of learners who inhabit the educational margins.

More broadly, yet equally appropriately, there is a considerable diversity evident in definitions and conceptualisations of marginalisation. One such definition was provided by Schiffer and Schatz (2008): "Marginalisation describes the position of individuals, groups or populations outside of 'mainstream society', living at the margins of those in the centre of power, of cultural dominance and economical and social welfare" (p. 6). A variation on this theme was afforded from a nursing perspective: "Marginalization is defined here as a process by which persons or groups are socio-politically peripheralized from dominant, central experiences, that is deprived of mobility, control over self will, and/or critical resources, indignified [*sic*] and humiliated…" (Hall & Carlson, 2016). The feminist theorist bell hooks (2000) defined marginalisation even more succinctly: "To be in the margins is to be part of the whole but outside the main body".

At the same time, there is a recognition of the potential risks associated with these kinds of definitions. One such risk is that of homogenising, and accordingly of eliding the differences among, individuals and groups who exhibit possibly marginalising characteristics, prompting Williams and Horodnic (2015) to endorse "…a more nuanced understanding…" and a "…more variegated assessment…" (p. 153) of marginalisation. This "…more nuanced…" and "more variegated…" approach was exemplified by Scharr's (2014) study of young people participating in social enterprises, whose "…core foundational definition of the young people's lack of participation in education and employment" (p. 12) was augmented by acknowledging that they "…dealt with multifaceted issues such as offending history, lack of social support, limited work experience and early school leaving" (pp. 12-13), thereby "…demonstrat[ing] the complex nature of their marginalisation" (p. 13).

A different potential risk relates to researchers needing "…to ensure that they do not deploy the discourse of 'marginalization' in ways that actually help to replicate the inequities that they are seeking to make explicit and to contest" (Danaher, Cook, Danaher, Coombes, & Danaher, 2013, p. 4). This risk was illustrated neatly by the crucial point by Winkle-Wagner, Hinderliter Ortloff and Hunter (2009) that definitions of marginalisation differ markedly accordingly to whose perspectives those definitions reflect. For example:

> …to provide a working definition of the margins by the boundaries of dominant culture is to define those in the margins as *not* something. Marginality becomes defined as the non-normal, the non-mainstream, the non-center; invoking a deficit model upon those people, ideas, and so on that are marginalized while reaffirming the normalcy of the center. (p. 3; *emphasis in original*)

At the same time, it is often difficult for people who are marginalised to define their situations without invoking – or at least acknowledging – the same "…deficit model…": "Marginality inherently references the mainstream" (p. 3).

Against the backdrop of these varied definitions and potential contradictions, constructions of marginalisation are being applied to an increasing array of scholarly endeavours and policy concerns. These applications range from the intersection between mental illness and poverty (Helsel, 2015) and the negative effects on individuals employed in informal, non-formal and non-industrial work (Jammulamadaka, 2019) to the economic and social status of African-American males in the United States (Weatherspoon, 2014) and encounters with racism by academics of colour working in British universities (Sian, 2019) to initiatives in civic and political participation by Muslim citizens in Australia and Germany (Peucker, 2016) and the experiences of silencing and suffering by particular excluded groups (Herzog, 2020). This diversity of applications parallels an equivalent variability in conceptions of marginalisation and in prescriptions for its amelioration.

More specifically, the scholarly literature reflects multiple understandings of the character of educational marginalisation. For instance, Messiou (2006) observed helpfully that children in the same challenging situations vary about whether they experience those situations as personally marginalising, and consequently emphasised the importance of including children's research when researching about inclusive education (Messiou, 2012). Mowat (2015) emphasised "…the importance of [analysing] the wider societal and political context" in which children experience marginalisation through schooling, and proposed "…the concept of resilience as a lens through which marginalisation can be understood" (p. 454), thereby highlighting the multiple contextual layers and levels in which marginalisation is manifested, as well as the ways in which it saps children's resilience. From a different perspective – or, paradoxically, perhaps relatedly – Minton (2016) interpreted school-based bullying as a form of marginalisation that reflects broader psychological and sociocultural forces. Ferfolja (2018) drew on these broader forces to assert powerfully that "Marginalisation…[is] the process of pushing an individual or group of individuals to the edges/fringes of society. In the case of educational marginalisation, this refers to systemic, institutional maltreatment, which includes curricular and pedagogical neglect" (p. 65).

These various accounts of educational marginalisation accentuate another potential paradox related to formal – and perhaps non-formal and informal – education. This paradox is that such education can, and often does, function as an agent of marginalisation, by contributing to perpetuating and reproducing existing socioeconomic inequities. On the other hand, such education can function also as a means of empowerment, and of challenging and possibly transforming those inequities. Or as Lanskey (2015) synthesised this paradox succinctly in terms of:

> …the interplay between exclusionary and inclusionary interests operating within and between the agencies of education and youth justice and the extent to which they play a role in sustaining young people's involvement in education or compounding their educational and social marginalisation. (p. 568)

In setting the scene for researching within the educational margins, this section of the chapter has situated such research in contemporary scholarly literature. In doing so, we have sought to highlight the diversity of definitions and conceptualisations of marginalisation, and hence of educational marginalisation, as well as the contested policy and practice terrains in which such definitions and conceptualisations are enacted. We have referred briefly to specific renditions of the character of educational marginalisation, and we have emphasised education's ambivalent status in reinforcing and/or in contesting such marginalisation. We turn now to the crucial task of selecting strategies for communicating and articulating voices in education research projects.

Selecting Strategies for Communicating and Articulating Voices in Education Research Projects

In this section of the chapter, we propose some possible strategies that might be effective in communicating and articulating voices in particular education research projects. These strategies are intended to resonate with the highly diverse conceptual and methodological resources that are deployed in the subsequent chapters in this volume. From this diversity, researching within the educational margins emerges as a theoretically sophisticated enterprise, with significant applications and implications for educational policy-making and practice alike.

Why more specifically is it important to communicate and articulate voices in education research projects when we are researching within the educational margins? Pragmatically, in any research project it is desirable to engage with the full range of experiences and perspectives of participants in the activity or enterprise under review, in order to maximise understanding of the associated concerns and issues. More significantly, given the accounts of marginalisation synthesised in the preceding section of this chapter, educational marginalisation generates differentiated levels and types of access to educational provision, which in turn signify competing and unequal speaking positions.

Such positions are often associated with feminist theory (Couldry, 1996; see also Lipton & Mackinlay, 2017). However, here we mobilise the term more broadly to denote the different accounts of the same, shared phenomenon communicated by different participants in that phenomenon, and also the different degrees to which those accounts are attended to, respected and valued. From this viewpoint, speaking positions on the educational margins are inherently politicised and unequal, thereby generating greater complexity for education researchers striving to communicate and articulate voices in research projects about those educational margins. This important point about the interplay between marginalised voices and social (in)justice was illustrated poignantly by this cry from the heart expressed in 2015 by a female activist and educator working in Myanmar: "Where is equality? Where is justice? Where is fairness? Where is the voice of the poor, marginalized, and uneducated people?" (as cited by Maber, 2016, p. 416).

Fortunately, a growing body of literature is able to assist researchers working in the educational margins to navigate this complexity in relation to communicating and articulating voices. For instance, it is incumbent on such researchers to explicate "…how to understand the agency of people who are marginalised", and also "…to explore how the most marginalised individuals reclaim or reconfigure subjecthood in ambiguous terms" (Strange, Squire, & Lundberg, 2017, p. 243). A vital means of understanding agency is to analyse the intersection between such agency and the development and exposition of voice, while the generation of increasingly capable and confident speaking positions can be posited as an effective strategy for reclaiming and reconfiguring subjecthood.

From a different perspective, harnessing voices in education research can entail the reversal of generally enacted roles and the associated sharing of knowledge that otherwise remains tacit and unexamined. For example, Morris (2019) explored what happened when a group of secondary school students provided professional development for their teachers about using information and communication technologies in their classrooms in England. Morris interpreted the outcomes of this student voice initiative in terms of transformational learning for both groups of participants, and the improvement of teacher–student relationships.

Likewise, a recent investigation of approaches to engaging student voices in higher education in the United Kingdom (Lygo-Baker, Kinchin, & Winstone, 2019) employed varied research methods to record and analyse such voices. Simultaneously, the editors warned against notions of the student voice as a monolithic entity that elide the heterogeneity of distinctive perspectives, including those held by single participants. The editors and

authors advocated also developing ways of working in partnership with research participants – in this case, university students – as a welcome corollary of engaging their voices.

A different corollary of communicating and articulating the voices of marginalised learners is what Khoja-Moolji (2016) conceptualised as "…the 'work of hearing'…" (p. 745). Khoja-Moolji elaborated the specific elements of this politically charged process as follows:

> Focusing on an engagement with girls in Pakistan, the author theorises that the practice of hearing entails attending to the seepages and excesses of girls' voices – or, that which exceeds dominant codes – that point to the multiplicity of their investments, commitments and visions of [a] good life; being open to new terms of development that are identified by the participants themselves, terms that may not align with prevalent "best practices"; and being cognisant of the weight that Eurocentric knowledges carry, which often makes the work of hearing indigenous knowledges difficult. (p. 745)

In other words, communicating and articulating voices in education research projects within the margins can often carry the researchers into previously uncharted waters, requiring them to develop new and potentially innovative techniques for authentically and genuinely hearing those voices.

Drawing on his expertise in intercultural education research, Dervin (2014) devised helpfully a set of questions for researchers to consider when engaged in such research – questions that apply equally to researching within the educational margins:

> Who is really talking and making a statement? [F]rom what position-s is an individual speaking? On whose behalf? Whose voice cannot be heard? In what language(s) are people "doing" voice and what impacts does it have on what they say and their interlocutors? (p. viii)

Crucially, Dervin (2014) insisted that education researchers need to subject their own voices to critical scrutiny in analysing and talking and writing about the voices of the participants in their research projects:

> How much are the voices that we analyse influenced by our presence, the context of interaction, the intertextuality we share with our participants? Researchers' voices need to be taken into account: their inner voices through reflexive accounts but also the voices through which they construct discourses with their research participants… (p. viii)

Relatedly, Midgley, Davies, Oliver and Danaher (2014) expressed a countervailing concern that, while the increasing focus on attending to research participants' voices is laudable, there might be circumstances in which "…the voice for researchers' rights is virtually drowned out" (p. 9). Moreover, the influence of context is vital with regard to researcher–research participant relationships and voices: "What might, in one instance, be emancipatory could, in another instance, be burdensome" (p. 9).

This section of the chapter has considered diverse approaches to selecting strategies for communicating and articulating voices in education research projects. We have placed that selection against the backdrop of the affordances and responsibilities of researching within the educational margins highlighted in the preceding section. This placement in turn positions the communication and articulation of voices in such projects as politicised and situated. As we seek to demonstrate in the next section, in relation to the following chapters in the book, these characteristics behove education researchers to design, conduct and evaluate their projects cautiously and judiciously, yet also with a sense of hope and optimism that those projects can also generate productive and even transformative outcomes.

Structuring the Book and Sequencing the Chapters
As one means of enhancing the coherence of this book, chapter authors were asked to engage directly with one or more of the following organising questions:

1. How can education researchers help to analyse and explain ***why and how*** some individuals and groups come to be learning within the educational margins, and what the ***effects*** of learning within the educational margins for those individuals and groups are?
2. How can education researchers develop and apply ***effective strategies for researching*** with individuals and groups who are learning within the educational margins?
3. How can education researchers maximise the ***innovativeness, reciprocity and utility of their research methods*** for the marginalised participants in their research?
4. How can education researchers contribute to ***educational fringe dwellers communicating their experiences and articulating their voices***?
5. How can education researchers assist the marginalised participants in their research to ***become successful educational border crossers***?

The chapters in the book are divided into the following five sections:

- Section 1: Contextualising and conceptualising researching within the educational margins.
- Section 2: Researching with children and marginalised youth.
- Section 3: Researching about cultural differences and intercultural experiences.
- Section 4: Researching about informal learning and with older learners.
- Section 5: Applications and implications of researching within the educational margins.

Section 1: Contextualising and conceptualising researching within the educational margins

[Insert Figure 1.1 about here]

As is outlined in Figure 1.1, in helping to contextualise and conceptualise the broader terrains in which the subsequent chapters in the book are located, Chapter 1, written by Patrick Alan Danaher and Deborah L. Mulligan, situates the book in selected literature about marginalisation and researching and learning within the educational margins. Relatedly, Chapter 2, written by Deborah L. Mulligan and Patrick Alan Danaher, elaborates the notion of wicked problems as exemplifying one among several ways to inform research within the educational margins, and to animate strategies for communicating and articulating voices in such research.

Section 2: Researching with children and marginalised youth

[Insert Figure 1.2 about here]

As is presented in Figure 1.2, Section 2 contains six chapters about researching with children and marginalised youth. Michelle Jayman uses Chapter 3 to link harnessing the "unique voice" of the child with enhanced program evaluation and development in education research in the United Kingdom. In Chapter 4, Corey Bloomfield and R. E. (Bobby) Harreveld interrogate the ethics of insider research when investigating an alternative learning program in Central Queensland, Australia. Naomi Ryan examines in Chapter 5 ethnographic research in exploring career development in a flexible learning program in South West Queensland, Australia. Chapter 6 is deployed by Jennifer Clutterbuck to map the inequity arising from the datafication of educational data infrastructures in Queensland, Australia. Christian Quvang advocates in Chapter 7 the benefits of using narrative research to articulate the voices of students referred to special educational needs units in Denmark. Finally in Section 2, Chapter 8 is employed by Karen Glasby to elaborate her innovative approach to ethics in researching with autistic young people in South West Queensland, Australia.

Section 3: Researching about cultural differences and intercultural experiences

[Insert Figure 1.3 about here]

As Figure 1.3 represents, Section 3 includes five chapters about researching about cultural differences and intercultural experiences. Bronwyn Wong uses Chapter 9 to review her use of action research in an independent Christian school in New South Wales, Australia. In Chapter 10, Megan Forbes explores yarning as a culturally appropriate method in researching with Indigenous Australians in South West Queensland, Australia. Mike Danaher employs critical interculturality in Chapter 11 to reflect on an Australian university study tour to China. Samantha Burns and Patrick Alan Danaher mobilise in Chapter 12 the notion of critical interculturality to analyse Dhofari women's experiences of English language undergraduate courses in Oman. Finally in Section 3, in Chapter 13, Geoff Danaher and Patrick Alan Danaher interrogate their colleagues' and their research with Australian and British fairground people through the lens of educational border crossing.

Section 4: Researching about informal learning and with older learners

[Insert Figure 1.4 about here]

As Figure 1.4 illustrates, Section 4 presents five chapters about researching about informal learning and with older learners. Linda Claire Warner, Pirita Seitamaa-Hakkarainen and Kai Hakkarainen explore in Chapter 14 ethnography as a method for researching collective quiltmaking in Aotearoa New Zealand. In Chapter 15, Marlyn McInnerney examines her role as an insider researcher with female members of agricultural families in remote Queensland, Australia. Brian Findsen conducts in Chapter 16 a critical review of research about learning in later life. In Chapter 17, Deborah L. Mulligan highlights the ethical dimension of her multi-site case study research with older men in South West and South East Queensland, Australia. Finally in Section 4, Brian Hentz uses Chapter 18 to elaborate a phenomenological analysis of older, professional men coping with involuntary job loss in the United States.

Section 5: Applications and implications of researching within the educational margins

[Insert Figure 1.5 about here]

As Figure 2.5 signifies, Section 5 presents two chapters about the applications and implications of researching within the educational margins. Chapter 19, written by Deborah L. Mulligan, sounds a clarion call for researchers working within the educational margins to embrace activism as a means of understanding, and contributing to, real-world reciprocity. Finally in this section and in the book, Deborah L. Mulligan and Patrick Alan Danaher distil selected answers to the organising questions framing the book as a way of synthesising the preceding chapters, as well as of encapsulating the significance of the book's demonstrated effective and ethical research methods as specific strategies for communicating and articulating voices within the educational margins.

Finally in introducing the book, the chapters' academic rigour have been enhanced through a systematic, two-step editorial review process. Firstly, each chapter abstract was read and reviewed independently by each editor, with feedback being provided to chapter

authors as required. Secondly, the same process was applied to the full text of each chapter, with chapter authors engaging with the editors' feedback as appropriate.

Conclusion

This chapter has been directed at setting the scene for the subsequent chapters' highly diverse accounts of researching within the educational margins. The chapter has also presented some ideas and principles for the vital activity of selecting strategies for communicating and articulating voices in the associated education research projects.

In doing so, the chapter has highlighted some of the ways in which this book is designed to contribute new understandings of contemporary education research methods. The considerable range of such methods traversed in the following chapters includes action research, autoethnography, case study, critical reviewing, ethnography, insider research, narrative research, phenomenography, phenomenology, trans-philosophical/trans-national/trans-cultural research and yarning, and elaborating also the methodological implications of the concepts of activism, children's voices, critical interculturality, datafication, educational border crossing, emancipatory learning, ethics, representation and wicked problems.

More widely, we see this admixture of researching within the educational margins, communicating and articulating the voices associated with those margins and interrogating specific research methods for their ethicality and utility in contributing to that research as constituting a significant milestone in the continuing project of empowering research participants and of transforming understandings of education and marginalisation.

Acknowledgements

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