

## **Learning ‘social responsibility’ in the workplace: Conjuring, unsettling, and folding boundaries**

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### **Abstract**

This article proceeds from the argument that while the discourse of social responsibility (SR) is increasingly evident in pedagogies circulating through the workplace, its actual practices tend to be obscured beneath complex tensions and moral precepts presented as self-evident. Through an examination of individuals’ learning of SR in the workplace contexts of small enterprise, this discussion asks: How can we consider social responsibility in work, and the project of learning social responsibility in and for work, in more flexible ways that account for its complex enactments in pluralist contexts? The article explores dynamics of responsibility as both response and identity within literature on social responsibility in the workplace, and examines the process of learning SR as a matter of negotiating boundaries to enact response and identity. Drawing from findings of a qualitative study of 25 small enterprise owners engaging a process of learning SR practice, the article explores what are argued to be their boundary practices of conjuring, unsettling and folding boundaries as they developed viable locations and relations of social responsibility in their unique situations.

### **Introduction**

The discourse of corporate social responsibility (SR), which is becoming pervasive among private and public sector organisations, can be viewed as a rather powerful set of pedagogies in the workplace. Various textual declarations are circulating such as the “CAUX principles” intended to guide workplace practice (Hopkins, 2003). Different instruments have been generated for organizations to measure their own and their suppliers’ SR performance standards (ILO, 2006; Verite, 2006). SR practices, or at least claims of SR, increasingly can be found in organizations’ annual reports and promotional materials; SR consultants and special product suppliers have emerged to assist work organizations to become more socially and ecologically responsible; and consumer demands for socially responsible practices have escalated (CBSR, 2001; Joyner & Payne, 2002; McWilliams et al., 2006).

However, despite the apparent presumption that SR practice will somehow flower through the influence of these various texts, teachings, audits and exhortations, it is unclear how SR practice in work organizations actually develops. Complicating the question is, rather obviously, the troublesome connection of social responsibility with business where logics of production and market conflict with those of altruism and the common good. Social responsibility itself is not at all a straightforward ideal, and deserves some critical challenge to unsettle certain sedimented virtues and naturalized assumptions about what constitutes responsibility and ‘the good’ to which it is directed. With an interest in these complications and taking as its basic assumption that everyday practice in the workplace is an important site for learning, this article focuses on the processes through which work organizations and workers actually learn to negotiate the complexities and tensions of SR practice. How can we consider the project of learning to practice social responsibility in and for work? And how can we consider this learning in more flexible ways that account for its complex enactments in pluralist contexts? These questions are explored through dilemmas experienced by people striving to learn how to ‘do’ social responsibility in their work, dilemmas which emerged in a qualitative study of SR practice in the workplace.

As a pedagogical objective, social responsibility is making appearances in school curricula (ESR, 2008) and has been long debated in adult and professional education (Wildemeersch, et al., 2000). The language perpetuating SR often promotes moral imperatives as presupposed ideals for social order and human development: social justice, inclusion, democratic participation, equity, and so forth. In some school curricula the mantra of social responsibility has been employed as character education (Chinnery, 2003), which aims to instil particular virtues such as empathy, respect and peace-making in a project of socialization. In the tradition of much adult education, SR has become a central mobiliser in re-politicising education through declarations like this one: ‘The central purpose of critical and creative adult education, as distinct from the current hegemony of lifelong learning, should be precisely to challenge this depoliticisation of politics and to raise such matters as issues for urgent democratic deliberation and debate’ (Martin, 2003, p. 569). In many of these pedagogical uptakes SR is often represented uncritically as the ‘good’ educative purpose. The discourse remains pervasive despite much critical caution (Ellsworth, 1989; Biesta, 2008) that moral prescription often closes possibilities, rather than liberating them.

As in education, in workplace contexts SR tends to be defined through universal laws purporting to represent self-evident social goods. Hopkins’s (2003) list of corporate SR principles includes cultivating justice, peace, community well-being, global citizenship, and environmental sustainability, among others. Some SR treatises for the workplace share the radical educational project of transforming society through empowerment of the collective (Davidson and Hatt, 2005). However in the everyday, the lived practice of SR in workplace and perhaps even in educational contexts is complicated when such ideals must be negotiated within dynamics of the market economy, discourses of entrepreneurism and flexibility, diverse stakeholder demands for response, and contradictory consumer desires.

What are the dynamics at play in these negotiations of social responsibility in work environments? How do people committed to learning SR practice constitute themselves as responsible or responding to diverse moral demands of the ‘social’ in the different encounters of their work? To whom do they respond and in what forms when they practice? How do they locate themselves and their work practice in relation to these pluralist demands? These are questions about learning processes related to the uptake of SR practice in work. They are also questions about working with boundaries – boundaries that create the locations, identities, and conduct that create SR practice. Most critically, boundaries bring into presence the actual relation that constitutes responsibility in commitments of social responsibility. The more closely we examine the nature and forms of ‘learning’ SR practice, the more clearly these appear to be issues of boundary work: not just recognising and making boundaries, but also unsettling and unmaking them.

This discussion examines these issues in the context of small enterprises that declare commitment to social responsibility in their operations and purposes. Central conflicts occur between the objectives of sustaining a viable small enterprise in the hyper-competitive and globalised markets and the practices of social responsibility. Wide variation of interests, ethical commitments, modes of response, influences and practical constraints shape these owners’ engagement with SR in particular situations. These issues point to wider debates about how to consider ‘responsibility’ itself, and its associated learnings, within notions of social responsibility, and how to approach these considerations more flexibly in diverse ethico-political contexts. The discussion begins by outlining in more detail the meanings and practices of social responsibility in work organizations. Then turning to the question of learning SR, the second

section explains the complexities of enacting ‘responsibility’ as a matter of boundary practices. This argument is illustrated through examples of individuals’ experiences in small work organizations, described in section three. The discussion concludes by suggesting a complication of pedagogies of social responsibility, specifically to focus more on responsibility as response rather than obligation. This move understands the emergence of social responsibility practices to be connected with boundary practices of identity and relationships as well as ethics, a coming into being alongside different others, in relations of responsibility.

### **Meanings and practices of social responsibility in work**

Social responsibility (SR) in work as in education is at best a slippery concept, manifesting itself as contested discourses, social visions, institutional missions, rhetorical moves for public relations, prescriptions for virtuous practice, and as a new moral economy of audit imposed by public demand. A well-recognised definition of corporate SR is the commitment by organizations to respond ethically to social and/or ecological concerns, often by recognising what has been referred to as a ‘triple bottom line’ of economic as well as social and environmental measures of success (Hopkins, 2003). Increasingly, emphasis in corporate SR is upon sustainability, accountability, and transparency in practices targeting this triple bottom line (Ares and Crowther, 2007). The *social* in corporate SR usually refers to non-shareholding stakeholders that may include local or even global communities, government, customers, and interest groups ranging from environmental to religious, ethnic, and trade groups (Crowther and Rayman-Bacchus, 2004). Studies reveal wide-ranging practices all in the name of SR (Joyner & Payne, 2002; McWilliams et al., 2006; Whitehouse 2006), from treating these stakeholders in a responsible manner, to actually focusing the enterprise’s core purpose on environmental or social issues. While criticism has been launched against corporate ‘green-washing’ and lack of systemic change (Davidson and Hatt, 2005), analysts have shown that corporate SR has in fact created notable changes. SR has focused public attention on responsible consumption (Joyner & Payne, 2002), generated global compacts such as the United Nations Global Compact Forum (Kell, 2003) and tripartite dialogues (labour, management, policy actors) about fair globalization. However, motives and level of participation range widely (McWilliams et al., 2006), from ‘weak’ SR as public relations or strategic community partnerships to ‘strong’ SR as altruism or even efforts to transform prevailing social structures and practices (Lange and Fenwick, 2008).

Small enterprise is defined here as profit-generating businesses ranging from one (where owner is self-employed in a firm) to 30 employees. In this context the term ‘corporate’ SR (or CSR in much business literature, usually referring to corporations and large organizations) is hardly appropriate and indeed was rejected by many of the study participants. However, commitment to SR practice is evident in small enterprise despite researchers’ lack of attention to describing or developing strategy for these owners (CBSR, 2003; Jenkins, 2006). Owners of small enterprise can be expected to exercise considerable control over the mission and practices of their enterprise. We might assume, then, that if they like SR values, they can simply select and implement SR practices. However, Lepoutre and Heene (2006) show that particular challenges affect small business SR, given slim resources and loan recall vulnerability. The expense of organic or fair trade supplies and supplier audits, for example, while an issue for all firms, can hit small business especially hard. The work overload of small business owners who typically manage all operational aspects can be isolating, and leave no energy for learning SR practices. Introducing SR products and practices is particularly risky for the small business owner who often relies on local customers (Vitell, Dickerson & Festervand, 2000) whose commitments to SR may not be compatible with the business owner’s.

In all of this what remains under-theorised is the question of what ‘responsibility’ might mean in these diverse and internally-contested contexts. In the tradition of rational philosophy, responsibility invokes notions of both obligation and moral decision-making (Gibbs, 2000). Obligation calls forth a sense of duty to care for others (humans, collectives, ideas, nature) extending beyond one’s own self-interest, and accountability to others for one’s actions. Moral decision-making to act upon one’s responsibilities rely upon conceptions of the ‘good’, the attendant ‘laws’ or community expectations that should guide individual action, and the extent of one’s freedom to choose. However, in work contexts with varied economic, social and ethico-political commitments, such virtue-based laws of social responsibility become problematic. First, the question of accountability for SR decision-making is difficult to ascertain when so many different interests are at play in the web of relations comprising a workplace. Who is accountable to whom, for what, to what extent, and how can it be measured? How can accountability to diverse stakeholders be measured, for example, when their (often conflicting) demands exceed the capacity of a given organization or individual? Second, a rational tradition regards responsibility as a matter of choice-making, as though there exists a free agent who can make a distinct choice. In work contexts such as small enterprise, everyday individual ‘choices’ are inscribed within networks of joint action (Jenkins, 2006), orderings of routine and expectation, and power relations circulating throughout.

Most importantly, a rational view of responsibility does not sufficiently account for the dynamic of *response* and how it is excited and what it generates (Fenwick, 2009). Levinas (1981) has argued that responsibility is enacted within moments of active intersubjective connection – an immediate participation with others that calls forth an irresistible response. This response is pre-conscious, and has nothing to do with rational application of moral principles or conscious intention of an autonomous agent: it is actively ‘being’ with others. In the moment of this active response and connection to an other, the human subject *comes into presence*. Derrida (1995), in expanding this Levinasian view of responsibility, raises the problem of considering just who or what is Other to oneself, and what other Others are excluded by responding to a particular Other. These considerations shift the focus of responsibility from law and duty to active response within complex webs of connection and multiple demands. Derrida (1995) describes this responsibility as leaping into action without certainty, without the limitations of moral principles that prevent full engagement and ‘becoming’ in the moment of response. The question remains the extent to which these relations are evident in interactions that human beings practice as social responsibility. Given the prominent assumptions of virtue-based rational decision-making and community accountability underpinning SR discourses in work, how do individuals understand the dynamics of ‘responsibility’ when they believe themselves to be engaged in SR? How do they learn to enact this responsibility as SR practice in work?

#### **Learning social responsibility as boundary-negotiations**

In this discussion, work learning is understood to be a process of change that is practice-based and embedded in everyday action (Billett, 2006; Bratton et al., 2003; Fenwick, 2007; Gherardi, 2006). Learning in and as practice is enmeshed with people’s work identities and sense of self and meaning in their work practice (Chappell et al, 2003). It is social and interactive, a cultural phenomenon. The histories of a collective and of each individual interacting within a collective – whether a collective is defined by geography, proximity, generation, occupation or interests such as a small enterprise and its suppliers and customers – also shapes how and what it learns. The cultural norms, accepted practices, relationships and everyday objects and technologies that constitute a particular collective also influence what is considered useful

knowledge, e.g. what is normatively considered ‘good’ to learn, what identities are learned, and what processes are recognised to be evidence of learning by various actors in the collective (Sawchuk, 2003; Wenger, 1998).

When we focus on issues of responsibility from the perspective of practice-based learning in work environments, the process of learning to negotiate response can be viewed as a matter of boundary practices. Making boundaries, explain Edwards and Fowler (2007), ‘is the material and symbolic practices of conceptualization and categorisation’ (p. 110), which then order arrangements and mobilise knowledge. Boundary-making creates concepts such as ‘social responsibility’, and identities such as a ‘socially responsible’ small enterprise. Boundary-making also creates routines and objectives that define work practices. A boundary is drawn whenever one commits to some conduct – this action, not that. Such boundaries are not always, or even often, made intentionally, but emerge through a history of traces conjured through performances in text and activity. Part of learning might involve recognition of these boundaries of conduct: their construction, their movements, and the possibilities they open (or close). As Edwards and Fowler (2007) point out, the existence of an entity relies upon its exclusions, upon the boundary separating this concept from that one, and delineating for it a distinct space of enclosure. Boundary-making, and the effort to maintain and defend boundaries, makes things visible – categories, subjects, rules – and mobilises these things in work.

Learning to apprehend and enable the *differences* as well as the relations of self and other in these mobilisations is a process of boundary-making. Biesta (2006) argues that coming into presence as unique and distinct, alongside and in active response to different others, is a central dynamic of learning responsibility. That is, in emergent action and response, human beings become distinct; they become present through acknowledging and enabling each other’s difference, and responding to the different other. Each juncture of these movements is animated by boundary practices. The boundaries work in multiple ways: to make visible the different other, to delineate the domain of response and the extent of relation through this response (the responsibility), but also to grant full presence and identity to oneself. To extend the argument drawing upon Derrida’s reminder of the excluded Others, boundaries are conjured whenever one turns attention and priority to a particular Other, and defines the extent of one’s response. In workplace SR, this becomes an ongoing dilemma given the multiple stakeholders who engage with an organization. The question becomes even more complex when considering how boundaries of identity can be permeable or can move about, as Law and Mol (2005) observe, and how boundaries become folded. A fold occurs when otherness is created according to one’s own worldview, as when a stakeholder might be viewed as unreasonable or impractical according to one’s values. Or one may focus on similarities of other, folding the other into oneself rather than enabling difference, and responding to it. In this sense, ‘we’ also includes the ‘other’, even while it is excluded’ (Law and Mol, p. 640), sometimes even when trying to break from it.

Thus questions of learning SR in work involve negotiating boundaries that are discursive, moral and material. What is interesting is what happens as people come to enact these boundaries through practices of identity, difference and response, as well as of conduct and meaning-making in the project of social responsibility. Boundary practice is not just about apprehending or creating boundaries, but also maintaining, challenging, and moving among boundaries. How permeable are these boundaries? Where and how do boundaries move, and fold? When do boundaries become unsettled or collapse? What become enacted as concepts, identities, and practices of social responsibility through these boundary practices?

### **Boundary practices in the workplace: practicing social responsibility**

The remainder of this argument draws from examples that emerged in an interpretive study . examining learning processes and practices of SR experienced in work, as reported by 25 owners of small enterprise (1-30 employees). The enterprises, located in the two western Canadian cities of Edmonton Alberta and Vancouver, BC, all indicated strong commitment to practicing SR although some described themselves as having little SR knowledge. Owners were identified through snowball referral methods, and had operated their enterprise from two to sixteen years in sectors of retail, business services, personal services and food service, with one in manufacturing.

Individuals were interviewed individually and in groups. In the personal interviews we asked owner-managers to outline their business purpose, strategy, client focus, etc, then to explain their own meanings of social responsibility, its role in their business, and how and why they had become committed to SR in business. They were asked to describe SR practices that they had tried or would like to try, the challenges of doing so and how they worked through these challenges. Five owners arranged site visits so that the researchers could view certain material practices of their SR activity such as water reduction processes, installation of a green roof, spatial arrangement to create educational areas, and so forth.

A group of these owner-managers was also gathered in Edmonton (6 participants) and in Vancouver (9 participants) for group interviews that explored the questions posed in the personal interviews. These group interviews were useful for further exploring the themes and tensions that arose in the individual conversations, particularly in describing common frustrations and how they were produced, comparing individuals' diverse strategies and contexts of response, and tracing the more nuanced dilemmas. The groups met periodically (every 4-5 months over a period of 18 months), and the dialogues began to probe layers beyond straightforward description. Owners shared stories of practices and problems related to social responsibility in business, then began to articulate the ambiguities of their business identity, the more perplexing difficulties of developing an enterprise that didn't seem to fit any available categories, issues around what constituted responsibility and its enactment, and the personal doubts and struggles related to their convictions. All interviews were fully transcribed, and interpretive comparative content analysis identified common themes, significant differences and points of tension among the participants.

While professing commitment to general values of social and environmental responsibility, owners described significant challenges in practicing their SR values and delineating an identity of social responsibility. These challenges were often related to direct conflicts between SR values and sound business practice for sustainability, in effect, between contradictory territories of discursive practices whose boundaries had to be continually unsettled and re-constituted in everyday practice. Other challenges were linked to setting boundaries of identity as a socially responsible enterprise, and working to maintain distinction and difference from other enactments of enterprise and of social responsibility. Boundaries defining their location within their communities and the market were continually being made, remade and monitored when these enterprises encountered unexpected demands as customers and community developed new forms of relationships with these new types of enterprise. These multiple manoeuvres of boundary-making and boundary-unsettling appeared to constitute important learning processes for these enterprise owners: they became aware of the existence or need for boundaries, learned to make, blur and dissolve boundaries, or found themselves

becoming folded into larger territories while sustaining certain closures and distinctions. Responsibility as a practice, moral position and identity became visible through these boundary practices of learning. Not as a fixed location or inert set of universal laws, but as continual conjuring and reconstituting, a continual folding and unsettling, a continual coming into presence, through the shifting everyday flux of action and relationships.

**Boundaries of identity: conjuring and reconstituting**

What – or more properly, who - is a socially responsible enterprise? All of these small business owners had conjured a boundary of difference that separated themselves from others. They were different, they thought, to other small businesses that were perceived to be focused mostly on profit-making or building relationships more to serve business purposes than for broader concerns of social responsibility. But they also distinguished themselves from corporations that claimed purposes of social responsibility. :

Creating the social change, that's really, I think that's the essence, one of the essences anyway that makes us different from the corporate model because they're still using the dominant model. [Roberta, Market Earth, ll. 2020-2023]

This boundary established a particular identity as other to a perceived dominant approach to business. This identity was rooted in personal commitments to a range of social or environmental concerns that often formed the core purpose and image of their business. For example, one general store owner was committed to encouraging use of environmentally-friendly and fair trade products. A fashion designer was committed to hiring and training Aboriginal youth to create clothing that promoted pride in their cultural heritage. A gardening distributor focused the entire business on hiring and supporting persons excluded from the workplace, including those without homes or with substance addictions. One consultant focused on creating accessible, inclusive spaces in workplaces for persons with disabilities. While this boundary of difference seemed clear, its nature was difficult to articulate. Participants in both group discussions and individual interviews struggled to find language to describe the identity location they were striving to create. All resisted the term CSR both to avoid identification with anything 'corporate' and because they felt their concerns were unique and completely distinct from larger organizations. Some even distrusted general rhetoric of social responsibility as inauthentic, and wanted separation from it. Partly for these reasons all but two enterprises expressed disinterest in joining networks such as Canadian Business for Social Responsibility (CBSR) that facilitates links and education among other businesses interested in social responsibility.

Most also conjured a clear boundary separating their work in social responsibility from other agencies doing similar work, such as community not-for-profit (NPO) agencies that, like themselves, promoted local issues, social justice and environmental awareness. In fact many owners started their business to pursue specific goals of social/ecological responsibility within their community. When we asked why they originally chose to act through a private business rather than an NPO, owners generally agreed that small business allowed them control, freedom from slow-moving bureaucratic processes, and the capacity to actually get things done in ways that NPOs did not. Most emphasised the business aspect of their enterprise's identity, characterising themselves as innovative, action-oriented, and focused on measurable results.

I think the individual has the most power because every time you get more and more people then it's more and more difficult to focus action and to focus on mission. ... [NPOs] don't do any action. And so a handful of people do the action. And uh, and

usually one or two people steer the organization. [Mike, Holistic Consulting, ll. 530-536]

Most also maintained separation from institutions such as education or government, avoiding alliances to bring about change because they distrusted the motives and values: ‘I wish the government would keep their nose out of it. . . . the government doesn’t know anything about social responsibility or organics or agriculture. . . . They’re ill informed and they are, uh, corporate driven, they’re not people driven.’ [Ron, Organic Restaurant, TF 0906-09, ll. 554-563]

However, customers and community sometimes treated them as a public service agency, frequently requesting the business’s volunteer involvement or gratis promotion of their social issues. The owners’ difficulty was, after establishing themselves as a non-corporate social responsibility enterprise, to conjure new boundaries to signify the ‘business’ part of their work. For some, this boundary was a difficult personal struggle to decide what social involvement should be offered freely as part of one’s social commitment and what demands became unreasonable. To some extent all businesses must determine this boundary. But for the small business where the identity of the business is closely tied to the owner, when SR is at the core of its purpose the difficulty seems to be deciding when one should respond as a business and when as a concerned citizen.

These boundaries had to be cut into ambiguous spaces, for individuals and groups interacting with these enterprises tended to work from existing categories and their associated regulations that clearly divide business from social enterprises. One owner sponsored free screenings of documentaries about social issues such as poverty and sweatshop labour. Renting space for these screenings presented a challenge because the corporate rate was unaffordable by a small business but she did not qualify for the non-profit rate. Sometimes she was able to negotiate rate reductions with individuals, and sometimes she allowed screenings at her own store. In either case she had to support this non-profit activity through business resources. The boundary between what should count as paid work and what activity was expected to be unpaid had to be re-constituted continuously, as did the boundaries defining their value commitments and identities.

There’s this list that either you’re a hardest capitalist or you’re a softest socialist and . . . there’s no understanding that you can - well why can’t you just be then as a business and a political perspective socially responsible and sustainable? [Mike, Holistic Consulting, ll. 381-385]

Their dis-identifications with other small businesses, as well as with larger businesses or social agencies practicing similar forms of social responsibility, left many in an ambiguous region outside of existing definitions. In this region, the boundaries making them visible to others had to be created and continually reconstituted through language (explaining and justifying their social responsibility purposes), through relation-making (recognising and responding to different others’ concerns), and through practice (contrasting their own conduct and performances with practices of others).

### **Boundaries of conduct: unsettling conflicting territories**

Social responsibility and business responsibility are typically viewed as disparate, even conflicting territories. The ethico-political demands of SR for animating social change are assumed to belong to a fundamentally different, even oppositional world to the demands that



define economically viable business practice, such as growth, efficiency, cost-reduction and customer satisfaction. For many of these small business owners, a key challenge was to unsettle the apparent boundaries separating business and social responsibility as reified and distinct categories. At the same time, owners had to survive in ways that folded SR activity into business realities without either co-opting their social commitments or bankrupting the capital that sustained these commitments.

The first two years we were not making money at all and there were many, many nights where we thought, ‘Should we continue? Is it worth it? Should we just go all conventional?’ and we just put in, we didn’t do it because we had so much heart into what we’re doing. [Jamila, Earth’s Grocery Store&Cafe, ll. 827-830]

For most owners, SR activities represented expenditures that had to be carefully budgeted. Donations of cash to philanthropic events were uncommon, although some small businesses donated a small percentage of profit to particular causes related to their business purpose such as local environmental campaigns or to owners’ special interests such as supporting breast cancer research or children’s charities. Businesses that devoted retail space to informational resources (displays on environmental or social issues community advocacy materials, etc) allotted this carefully: it had to be deducted from limited revenue-generating square footage. Introducing new products and practices to customers – whether as an organic restaurant attempting to shift consumer choices to better quality locally grown produce, or a retailer attempting to distribute only socially responsible suppliers and fair trade products – was more difficult than they had assumed, as some enterprise owners learned:

When we opened in 1997 we were more assertive in what it is that we were going to be organic, we were going to be healthy, we were going to be nutritious, we’re going to do this, and we’re going to do that. And we put it all over the menu and we went into, you know when people came in we were right into their faces, evangelising the whole thing like fundamentalists on this whole thing. And what it did is it backfired. People stopped coming. . . . You know they started talking about it, gossiping about the vegetarian freaks and gay chefs and they had all kinds, they thought it was just wacko!’ [Ron, Organic Restaurant, ll. 303-327]

Maintaining credibility while unsettling existing customer preconceptions was a common challenge of constituting their boundaries of conduct for many owners. Dominant community attitudes could be conservative and suspicious of a ‘radical’ business. As owners shifted their own business identities and learned where and how they could influence community members and consumption patterns, they wondered just what they were conjuring. Was social responsibility something they were selling for their own self-interest? What is this thing ‘social responsibility’ that they were performing? Several talked of the compromises they learned to develop between their ideals and a minimal viable customer base – in effect, unsettling the boundaries they had conjured to distinguish themselves. Market Earth for example, a business selling household products such as cleaning fluids, paper supplies and tools, carried only biodegradable materials from socially responsible suppliers: manufacturers certified as ‘sweat-free’. But because of the higher prices and unfamiliar labels, business was slow. The husband-wife owners were having difficulty paying rent in what was an excellent location on the main floor of a busy shopping block. For these owners the decision came down to moving, or redesigning their image to fit the block and carrying cheaper brands that they believed to be

environmentally harmful – in effect, unsettling the material boundaries defining their business as well as their community. In the end they decided to relocate to an inexpensive second-floor facility in a low-traffic area and the business survived, if in a different form. Most important to the owners, they said, was upholding their commitment to distribute products they believed in. So while thoroughly unsettled in location and identity, they had avoided a fold into customers' expectations, remaking themselves to fit other categories.

A key conflict of moral conduct was embedded in these small business owners' negotiation of action as change agents. All described themselves to varying degrees as agents working for social change: to bring about a new, alternate vision of society. For some, these were radical visions of change:

I mean to make change right, you, are you going to be passive about it or do you want to be more assertive ... by being here we're stepping forward and we're saying you know, we have to change. Therefore you should be doing this. We're not asking you to do it. We're telling you to do it. Because we need to make a change. [Jana, Strategic Design, ll. 1500-1514]

They wanted to create change *through* business practice, not in spite of it, or alongside it. However to survive, small business owners found themselves walking a careful line, unsettling their customers' boundaries of expectation, taste and routine as well as unsettling their own boundaries delineating their particular vision and commitments to social responsibility practice. This learning was balanced with the continual boundary practices of conjuring themselves as 'special' and distinct without being folded either into conflicting consumer expectations or conceptions of their practices as 'wacko'.

### **Boundaries of responsibility: unsettling and folding**

In bringing about the changes they sought, unsettling conventional boundaries determining lifestyle practices and consumption values as well as business behavior, almost all owners explicitly described their activity in terms of a responsibility to educate their communities.

There's an educational component. We often have displays and stuff in the foyer of different environmental, active and fun type of things. And, not all of our [customers] agree with that point of view, we have a ... percentage of our membership who are hunters and ... [we are] an anti hunting organization. [Leslie, Apex Equipment, ll. 319-323]

Distributors of organic foods, wilderness adventure, and responsible consumption carried products promoting sustainable lifestyles, then taught customers how to use them. Some retailers promoted free educational materials or public educational events on social justice/environmental issues that were not necessarily related to their business. Business consultants described modeling and mentoring their clients to encourage them to shift to off-shore suppliers and waste reduction practices. Educating staff was also a concern in firms with more than two or three employees.

We like to think that we're reaching out to a market of people who wouldn't otherwise be shopping responsibly, but are able to, when they're in the store kind of trap them with a bit of education. [Roberta, Market Earth, ll. 643-646]

The thing is that you hope that you can influence people because you're practicing something different. . . . because we are built on philosophy. [Wanda, Restaurant Organic, ll. 649-669]

This influence is about discerning and deliberately unsettling boundaries defining the public's received knowledge and habits of lifestyle, work, leisure, consumption, and health. Further, this pedagogical orientation of viewing the other in terms of one's own vision for a better world is a folding of the other into oneself, blurring the differences and exercising influence to create more similarity. Most of these owners were disparaging about advocacy or activism to challenge existing structures of people's worlds. There was concern over being 'evangelistic', and therefore biased, 'negative' and unrealistic. Instead, most preferred to focus on educating the public through offering particular products and services, modeling desirable practices, and teaching within the everyday activity and purpose of their business. This education was face-to-face, and did not use virtual environments to extend the reach. All business owners emphasised their focus on personal relationships in their immediate local sphere, supporting customers interested in social responsibility:

We support, we support individuals in their own personal choices and changes. And what's very closely linked to that is that we support, the work individuals do within organizations. ...because I'm thinking, 'every day what do we do?' we help people do whatever work it is that they want to do in the community. [Roberta, Market Earth, ll. 518-522]

For some, this raised an important conflict. Is this education a genuine response to people to help them achieve new ways of living, or just smart marketing to create demand from which their business could profit? Some drew boundaries between educative and profit-making activity and believed that 'socially responsible' educational practice was only that which was unrelated to their core business products or services. One retailer did not allow use of its 'good news' SR stories to be used in its store promotion. Others, like Organic Restaurant, came to understand that where educating customers' understanding of food production was a social commitment, this understanding was precisely what was needed to proliferate products they believed in, which ensured that their enterprise – and education – could continue. And here the boundaries of responsibility between territories of social and business commitment that appear to conflict actually become enfolded in one another.

### **Walking the lines: Conjuring, unsettling, folding boundaries**

How can we consider social responsibility in work, and the project of learning social responsibility in and for work, in more flexible ways that account for its complex enactments in pluralist contexts? This discussion has illustrated social responsibility learning in work as a series of boundary practices. In the cases presented here, small enterprise owners attempting to implement social responsibility principles must conjure boundaries of identity in ambiguous spaces. They struggled to come into presence as distinct from other organizations such as corporations or social agencies, creating boundaries amidst competing expectations from stakeholders. They found themselves having to unsettle and challenge existing conceptual boundaries defining 'business' and business success, as well as the boundaries distinguishing multiple definitions of social responsibility. Much of their practice blurred any traditional distinctions between revenue-generating and not-for-profit activity.

In conjuring responsible conduct for themselves, they had to learn to discern the boundaries and walk the lines among multiple stakeholders with diverse often conflicting interests – some presenting contradictory demands such as customers wanting socially responsible products but refusing unknown brands or fair trade prices – while remaining viable as an enterprise. Within the workings-out of these conflicts, owners often responded to a call of need that didn't easily fit what some had tried to establish as SR ideals. This response often mobilised a personal altruistic commitment by the owner, whether to a particular environmental concern, local community need, customer request or employee issue. Owners learned to soften certain moral ideals of social responsibility to accommodate these concerns, to become less 'evangelistic' and more oriented to the immediate needs that called, but also to set boundaries that refused demands (such as the retailer whose customer wanted to inspect the garbage to audit her recycling practices). Owners also said they learned to be satisfied with a few moderate SR priorities that appeared most suited to their particular environments and local communities, as they balanced feasibility and survival with stakeholder demand. They learned to accept the inevitable exclusion, in the act of responding, of what Derrida terms the 'other Others':

You just have to let go some dreams ... you can live with limits ... or it can be, the community can be the black hole that, it just swallows all your energy' [Alasie, Aputik Garments, ll. 256-259]

Boundary practices of folding also emerged. Education activities of tacit modelling and explicit promotion of SR practices (e.g. recycling, fair trade consumption, anti-poverty participation) are in fact a way to fold others into one's own social vision. Owners admitted a desire to reshape behaviours and attitudes of others (customers, suppliers, competitors), but also to minimise customers' suspicion, even confusion, about SR motives and causes. The folding of education and marketing boundaries created unsettled some, as they struggled to locate their sense of responsibility when the boundaries distinguishing their motives became blurred. Purposes of profit-making and social responsibility also became enfolded when some owners found that SR practices actually benefited their bottom line by attracting business, such as when Kelly's Mini-Cakes Inc. bakery began receiving orders from large institutions when her many donations of product became public. Bill, the awards manufacturer, lowered his production costs substantially by reducing water and reusing waste energy. The boundary tensions came through choices that compromised business goals in order to defend SR practices, such as moving to a less desirable location to lower costs:

We know we could make more money if we did things differently, but that's not why we started this business... that's not who we are. [Calvin, Earth's Grocery Store&Cafe, ll. 134-35]

Overall, the experiences of these individuals show that social responsibility practice in the workplace is complicated by multiple stakeholders' demands, where responding to one may mean turning away from others, compromising virtues, or folding together that which seems contradictory. What constitutes social responsibility is determined in the moment of action. It can exist in presupposed moral commitments, but these may or may not emerge in the moment of action. Always there is tension between commitment to autonomous, active intervention to arrange activity and to order relations, and commitment to collective, interconnected emergence. Usually there is tension between boundary practices enabling one's 'coming into presence' as a

distinct identity of SR enterprise that can distinguish and respond to different others, while unsettling and folding boundaries to blend with what is societally tolerable and credible.

Perhaps the most important implications for pedagogy and education suggested by this discussion lie in the complication of social responsibility. Predetermined ideals comprising ‘social responsibility’, and the presupposition that socially responsible behavior occurs through rational application of moral laws derived from these ideals, belie the relations of response and the complexities of pluralist contexts. The irony of imposing one unitary moral framework to colonise and discipline all of these complexities in a supposed project of ‘social responsibility’, e.g. as an educational purpose, is not lost on the participants within these diversely situated communities. When social responsibility education focuses upon the action that emerges between entities, it turns away from character education to instil particular virtues in learners, and rejects the possibility that social responsibility is produced through decisions exercised by autonomous agents. Instead, a focus on action and response connecting things, as Biesta (2006) maintains, turns towards the activity of coming into being – which occurs through locating oneself alongside *different* others, in relations of responsibility. Specific implications for education lie beyond the scope of this discussion but could be developed through a series of pedagogical practices encouraging learners to consider the deep mechanisms of boundary making in practices of social responsibility. Indeed, writers like Biesta (2006) have already developed injunctions for educators about creating conditions in which difference is enabled and response can emerge in relations of responsibility. This discussion adds only that educators might engage learners in understanding, and judging, social responsibility enactment in work as a series of complex boundary practices in conjuring, unsettling and folding boundaries that they and others enact together.

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**Table 1: Demographic Information for Study Participants.** All names are pseudonyms.

<b>Business Pseudonym</b>	<b>Owner(s)/ Representative Pseudonym</b>	<b>Type of Business</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Number of Employees</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Years in Business</b>
Apex Equipment	Leslie	Wilderness equipment retail	Edmonton	20+	Female	35
Aputik Garments	Alasie	Clothing design and manufacture	Vancouver	3	Female	2
Strategic Design	Jana	Communications and advertising	Vancouver	8	Female	14
Earth's Grocery Store and Café	Ahmed and Jamila	Organic restaurant and grocery store	Edmonton	20	Male and female	7
Eastside Works	Mary	Employment development for homeless people	Vancouver	3 to 15 (fluctuates seasonally)	Female	6
Fair Flowers	Laura	Florist	Vancouver	1	Female	20
Get Organized	Jill	Closet organising consulting	Vancouver	1	Female	2
Holistic Consulting	Mike	Holistic agricultural management consulting	Edmonton	Sole proprietor	Male	15
Humour Works	Chris	Business consulting – humour in the workplace	Vancouver	4	Female	4
Market Earth	Roberta	Household and personal goods-retail	Edmonton	5 to 6	Female	14
Mini-Cakes Inc	Kelly	Bakery	Vancouver	15	Female	5
Name Domains	Pin Yin	Register businesses on the internet	Vancouver	30	Female	7
New You	Ellen	Style consultancy	Vancouver	1	Female	3
North River Associates	Patricia	Obtain development approvals for real estate industry	Vancouver	12	Female	18
Northern Network Graphic Design	Wendy	Graphic design and illustration	Vancouver	Sole proprietor	Female	1
Ray Social Responsibility Consultancy	Raymond	CSR consultant for first generation companies	Vancouver	Sole proprietor	Male	3
Respectful Workplaces	Phyllis	Conflict resolution for businesses	Vancouver	Proprietor and one business partner	Female	17
Restaurant Organic	Ron and Wanda	Organic and locally grown restaurant	Edmonton	7 to 12 depending on season	Male and female	10
Stellar Trophies	Bill	Award manufacturing	Vancouver	11	Male	7
Steward Consulting	Leah	Marketing and communications consultancy	Edmonton	Sole proprietor	Female	6
Sustainable	Sally	Social auditing and consulting	Vancouver	Sole	Female	10



Consulting				proprietor		
Workabilities	Dumont	Design for accessible workplaces	Vancouver	2	Male	3
Write On	Sandy	Business writing services	Vancouver	1	Female	2