

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

0421

Borderland theory: How would you apply this to doctoral education?

Susan Carter<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

**Research Domain:** Postgraduate Scholarship and Practice (PGSP)

**Abstract:** Borderland theory is premised on a metaphor, a vivid metaphor that resonates with both high aspiration and awareness of considerable risk (Andzaldūa, 1987). Metaphor is great for teaching and learning—‘apt to seem peculiarly satisfying, intriguing, beautiful, or simply to have a kind of “pull” to it (Schön, 1963, 67). This paper is a provocation for further discussion of the borderlands of doctoral teaching and learning (Carter, Smith and Harrison, 2021). At the end of this seminar, **you’ll be invited to talk about the metaphor of borderlands as it can apply to doctoral education.** We’ll critically apply the metaphor of borderlands to doctoral pedagogy.

### References

Andzaldūa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/la frontera: The new Mestiza*. Spinsters/Aunt Lute.

Carter, S., Smith, K. & Harrison, N. (2021). Working in the borderlands: Critical perspectives on doctoral education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 26(3): 283-292.

**Paper:** Borderland theory is premised on a metaphor, a vivid metaphor that resonates with both high aspiration and awareness of considerable risk (Andzaldūa, 1987). Metaphor is great for teaching and learning—‘apt to seem peculiarly satisfying, intriguing, beautiful, or simply to have a kind of “pull” to it (Schön, 1963, 67). This paper is a provocation for further discussion of the borderlands of doctoral teaching and learning (Carter, Smith and Harrison, 2021). At the end of this seminar, **you’ll be invited to talk about the metaphor of borderlands as it can apply to doctoral education.** We’ll critically apply the metaphor of borderlands to doctoral pedagogy.

Let’s start with the borders that criss-cross doctoral journeys. The first checkpoint is getting accepted into a university—mine turns back more expressions of interest than it accepts, or it did last time I heard. Then the first year doctoral review is a fairly frightening border to get through because too often academics feel that it is good professionalism to be interrogatory. Publication, often seen as essential for candidates, is usually a border crossing where reviewers demand more—there’s a strip search and the need for more proof of identity. There are also borders where theories abut, providing further questioning from gatekeepers as to card-carrying credentials. Borders can be helpful: epistemological differences are most visible at disciplinary borders. Central support across disciplines can help candidates to see, understand and be able to explain their own epistemology after talking to others in different fields. That insight comprises a conceptual threshold crossing (Kiley

& Wisker, 2009). Then, each border successfully crossed adds confidence and affirmation. Nonetheless, getting past gatekeepers always requires effort. Borders are usually approached with anxiety.

Between borders, doctoral candidates exist in *borderlands*, a metaphor captures that anxiety relating to border crossing, and also captures the positive and negative socio-political intensity of liminal spaces. We've picked this metaphor apart as journal editors, citing feminist and Mexican forerunner Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and observing that '[d]octoral education, like other borderlands, is marked by uncertainty, hope, risk and identity transition' (Carter, Smith & Harrison, 2021, p. 283). In the Special Issue we edited, contributors mapped out doctoral borderlands from different interesting starting points.

And two points about Rafi Rashid's and Harry G. Rolf's papers that might encourage you in your own discussion. Rafi Rashid shows how doctoral education can relinquish disciplinary borders to best solve current urgent problems. This is radical, and universities are not radical. Right up until the last few years, I have often commented on how conservative universities are, and how slowly they move, if at all. They are hard to budge, even from arguably unethical habits. But universities reacted swiftly to pandemic lockdowns. That floats the possibility that maybe we can change and change quickly when it is responsible to do so. You could be radical in your own use of borderland thinking.

Then Harry G. Rolf applies a data feminism (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020) approach to analysis of 1,216 publications from research students; by interpreting a substantial amount of data through a feminist lens, he shows the power brokerage at play in this particular borderlands wilderness. Borderlands theory emerged from Anzaldúa's (1987) defiant and poetic feminist context. That gives inspiration for considering the ethics of power relationships that play out in doctoral education.

Can we work the connotative power of metaphors further around doctoral education? Can our critique prompt change to better practice? This seminar rounds off with discussion, an important part of our inquiry into doctoral borderlands since there is more to be said and *Teaching in Higher Education* is open to further submissions.

Here's some prompts:

Are there other academic borders that need to be dismantled?

Are there other issues of hierarchical power relationships that need to be challenged?

Is there benefit in applying the metaphor of borderlands to other aspects of doctoral experience and pedagogy?

## References

Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La frontera: The new Mestiza*. Spinsters/Aunt Lute.

Carter, S., Smith, K. & Harrison, N. (2021). Working in the borderlands: Critical perspectives on doctoral education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 26(3): 283-292.

D'Ignazio, C. & Klein, L. F. (2020). *Data feminism*. MIT Press.

Kiley, M. and G. Wisker (2009). Threshold concepts in research education and evidence of threshold crossing. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 28(4): 431-441.

**References:**