Building a Third Space in the Research Higher Degree

Dominic Keuskamp, Chad Habel, Belinda MacGill

Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia

Although academic disciplines have moved beyond the simple dichotomy of the Two Cultures espoused by C. P. Snow in 1959, communication among disciplines remains limited. Divides that may be perpetuated in universities by administrative entities, research practices and geography also have the potential to isolate research higher degree students academically, psychologically and socially. The cultures inhabited by “academic tribes” and the disciplines patrolled as their “territories” have been well documented by Becher and Trowler (2001), however they concluded following their enquiry of the disciplines that “[t]he problem remains of how to bridge the evident divisions…”. Using Bhabha’s (1994) “third space” among cultures as a metaphor, we seek to build a zone for research students where disciplinary borders can be interrogated and transcended, “[t]o construct some sort of vocabulary in which they [the differences] can be publicly formulated” (Geertz, 1983). By bringing together students from disparate disciplines into groups for discussion, we hope to facilitate students’ understandings of disciplinary discourses and boundaries and the potential for transcending them, make knowledge structures explicit as a precursor to effective collaboration, and elicit students’ experiences of studying across boundaries and the challenges involved. In this forum we will facilitate a discussion of how academic disciplines shape postgraduate research, and explore the capacity for building a ‘third space’ in the research higher degree.