Article

Internationally Educated Female Teachers Who Have Immigrated to Nova Scotia: A Research/Performance Text

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Abstract

This research/performance text emerged from a study involving internationally educated female teachers who have immigrated to Atlantic Canada. The text features the words and artwork of the research participants as well as excerpts from newspapers, academic writing, and documents about immigration in Nova Scotia juxtaposed so as to foreground the complexity of the women's immigration and integration experiences. Introductory comments provide contextual information about the research project, the participants, and the evolution of, as well as rationale for, the text as performance piece.

Keywords: Internationally educated teachers, immigration, arts-based research, readers theatre, alternative forms of representing research

The following performance text is based on an arts-informed research project involving women who have/had immigrated to the province of Nova Scotia, Canada, and who were teachers in their countries of origin.[1-3] All of the women have international university degrees and previous teaching experience. Although some have taught in Canada in informal settings, at the time of our work together only one had obtained teaching credentials in Canada, and she was not teaching in a public school. All but one of the women were un- or underemployed in relation to their education and work experience. In this introduction, we outline our research project as well as the evolution of this performance piece. We also provide a theoretical framework for (re)presenting our research in a form different from that of a traditional academic research report. To contextualize,

we begin with brief comments from the current literature about teachers who have immigrated to Canada.

Phillion (2003) has outlined three categories of obstacles facing female teachers who have immigrated to Canada: systemic, social, and general. Systemic barriers include difficulty in gaining accurate information about having credentials assessed (and the cost of doing so), having to return to school for additional education, and also the necessity of somehow gaining "Canadian experience" in the school system. Social obstacles include racism both in the schools and in the community at large, an unexpected obstacle in a country that was " 'sold' . . . [as] a welcoming multicultural society" (p. 44). General barriers include the sense that previous teaching experiences are not valued as well as difficulties with language and accent, in terms of both personal concerns about proficiency and discrimination on the basis of accent regardless of proficiency. Myles, Cheng, and Wang (2006) concurred with the above and also noted that feelings of "otherness" were compounded as internationally educated teachers in an alternative accreditation program tried to negotiate practica where their professional expertise was not always acknowledged and where "power issues" arose at times with the mentoring teacher (p. 236). The difficulty of renegotiating one's identity as a teacher in a culturally different context is a theme also discussed by Bascia (1996), Beynon, Ilieva, and Dichupa (2004), and Mawhinney and Xu (1998). Internationally educated teachers are also concerned about whether they will be able to secure employment commensurate with their education and experiences even after they have met the requirements for teaching qualification (Myles et al., 2006; Phillion, 2003). In a broader sense, obstacles faced by teachers who come to Canada must be considered in the context of immigration policies that aim to attract well-educated and skilled professionals (see, e.g., Hyndman, 1999; Man, 2004; Mojab, 1999; Preston & Man, 1999)—and also in the context of a country where birth rates are low, the labor force is aging, and immigration is a crucial component of current and future growth in terms of population and economy (Harvey & Houle, 2006; Owen, 2005).

Our research project involved 11 women from eight countries: Korea, China, Hong Kong, Mexico, Jordan, Kuwait, Iran, and Poland. The women had been teaching in a variety of areas, such as computer studies, science, English, English as an additional language, history, and math, for a range of 1 to 14 years at the elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels. The research project was modeled on an arts-informed research process developed by Walsh, variations of which have been previously used in two studies involving female teachers (see Walsh, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2006). As we the researchers/authors (Walsh and Brigham) wanted to ensure that each woman had the opportunity to share her story, we divided the group into two smaller groups; we met separately with each group every second week over the course of several months. In these sessions we worked to create a "safe" setting where, through the arts-informed processes and dialogue, the women's "voices, experiences and emotions [were] valued and shared, which provide[d] a basis for understanding broader social issues" (Brigham, 2002, p. 370). Our research received ethics approval from the Mount Saint Vincent University Ethics Review Board.

Briefly, in the groups we brainstormed ideas, words, and phrases about experiences related to immigration and integration into Canadian society. We then individually wrote for a short period of time following the guidelines of Goldberg's writing practice (1986, 1990, 2000);[4] each participant used her language of choice. One woman would then share her story, either by reading aloud what she had written or by speaking about it. The rest of us would respond to the story using a variety of media, such as paints, pastels, fabric, modeling clay, or blocks. The responses often highlighted new or different insights about the story-as-told and also elicited a spin-off effect of similar stories and shared experiences. At times, requests for clarification and what seemed like "mis"-representations resulted in talk about cultural differences. Each research

session was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Artifacts collected over the course of this work included transcripts of the group meetings, photographs of the artwork/responses, and the writings that we did at the beginning of each session.

The creation of the research/performance text, or readers theatre script,[5] that we offer below involved two main phases: one in which the researchers made decisions about what to include in the script and one in which we revised and shaped the script with a group of women who had agreed to take part in performing it. In the first phase, we (Walsh and Brigham) examined the transcripts for themes that seemed to recur (e.g., the silence and silencing that the women experienced in different contexts). All instances of each theme from across transcripts were catalogued in electronic files.[6] We also examined the artwork for visual themes. In some cases, themes that emerged from the visuals corresponded with themes from the transcripts (e.g., mouths that were gagged or taped shut corresponded with the silence/silencing theme). We selected specific themes that demonstrated the complexity of the women's integration and immigration experiences. We then juxtaposed these with quotes from our literature review about challenges facing teachers who had immigrated to a new country and about provincial immigrative initiatives. The excerpts from our review of the literature—and the way we have arranged them in the text—are intended to position our work within a critical and post- structuralist theoretical framework.[7] In particular, we recognize that language and forms of language structure the knowing and being of subjects, and that using language in exploratory ways to represent research is a strategy for calling attention to the author(ity) of the text. Whose voices are being heard, and what happens in the spaces of the text? What issues arise? (Please see below.)

The second phase of working with the script began as we prepared to present our research for the first time at the orientation, or professional seminar week,[8] for first-year bachelor of education students in the teacher education program at our university. We asked the women who had worked with us in the original research study if they wanted to participate in the presentation as readers. Some of them, however, had returned to their countries of origin, some were unavailable for other reasons, and some did not wish to present. Thus, we also called on a group of women who had not participated in the original study but who had expressed interest in our work to act as readers; all of these women were also teachers who had immigrated to Nova Scotia (from countries such as Sudan, Jamaica, Kenya, China, and Kuwait). Over the course of several meetings, we read aloud, discussed, and reread versions of the script, making changes in terms of its length and clarity, and questioning the relevance of various sections. As the script-as-text took shape, we added the accompanying slide show of visuals derived primarily from the artwork of the women in the original research group.[9]

The following text/script is fragmentary and includes visual elements as well as different forms of writing; it is not a text that is intended to appear cohesive and straightforward—with a single clear "voice." In fact, an important aspect of (re)presenting our research in this way is to highlight the multiple voices and the complexity of experience expressed by the women who participated in the original group. As noted above, we have juxtaposed quotes from academic writing and documents about immigration in Nova Scotia with the original participants' words and artwork. Elsewhere, Walsh has written about the need to disrupt the smooth linearity and apparent cohesiveness of a text in order to call attention to the ways in which language operates as a taken-for-granted means of structuring "truth," knowledge, experience, and also subjectivity (in this case, of the participants and also of the researchers) (see Walsh, 1990, 2000, 2003b, 2004, 2006; see also Luce-Kapler & Walsh, 1996). The authority of the author/researcher to report the truth and/or to document experience through traditional academic expository writing is problematized in alterative research re-presentations where her role as user of language and producer of knowledge is made more transparent. Nontraditional use of space, line breaks, and so on work to

create a text that is clearly, even at first glance, being structured by the authors, thus positioning them as writers/choreographers of the text (see Walsh, 2003b).[10] Lather (1991) has noted that in a poststructuralist view of research, "the focus is on the development of a mutual, dialogic production of a multi-voice, multi-centered discourse" where "attention shifts away from efforts to represent what is 'really' there and shifts, instead, toward the productivity of language" (p. 112). Such a text requires readers/audience members who are willing to "engage with the text episodically, associationally, playfully," who are "willing to be unsettled," and who "do not seek closure, clear answers" (Walsh, 2003b, p. 18).

Working from a poststructuralist frame of reference (see, for example, Belsey, 2002; Irigaray, 1985a, 1985b, 1992, 2002; Weedon, 1997) and within a tradition of female experimental writers (see Brandt, 1996; Cixous, 1981, 1986, 1993; Marlatt, 1984; Williamson, 1991) and arts-informed researchers (see Barone & Eisner, 1997; Cole, Neilsen, Knowles, & Luciani, 2003; Diamond & Mullen, 1999; Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Mienczakowski, 1995; Neilsen, Cole, & Knowles, 2001), we offer a performance piece intended to evoke questions and discussion about the complexities of women's experiences of immigration and integration as internationally educated and un- or underemployed teachers in Nova Scotia, Canada, an open-ended textual performance.[11]

Performance Text/Script

I am listening to you is to
listen to your words as something unique
irreducible . . .
as something new,
as yet unknown . . .
I am listening to you:
I perceive what you are saying: I am attentive to it
I am attempting to understand and hear your intention.
Which does not mean I comprehend you.…
I am listening to you as someone and
something I do not know yet . . .
(from Irigaray, 1996, pp. 116-117)

This is me, and this is a new land, a new life. Sometimes I feel alone. For me it is not easy to stay here. I miss the things I was doing in Mexico. I miss my job, my students, and I don't know if I can do the same things here that I can do there. I've been a computer teacher for over 10 years . . . now that I'm here, I'm not working, and I'm not studying, because I'm waiting for my papers and everything . . . I am standing here alone . . . and I hope to do my best to learn English. I don't know if I can.

I want to continue my career because I like my career but I don't know if the teacher's job [here] is the same as a Chinese teacher's job. In Asia, when you are teaching you are not [just] teaching knowledge, you are teaching people how to be a good person. But here I don't know.

. . . I think teaching is a very meaningful job . . . the
most meaningful job in the world, but I don't know
if I'm qualified here.

If I go back to China, everything seems clear.

90% . . . white. This is more or less consistent with the ethnoracial demographics of teacher education programs across [Canada] (Finney & Orr, 1995; Hesch, 1999; Schick, 2002; Young & Buchanan, 1996) indicating that teaching is and continues to be a predominately white profession, despite the ever-increasing ethnoracial diversity of the student population (Mujawamariya & Mahrouse, 2004, p. 338; see also Delpit, 2002, p. 163; Phillion, 2003, pp. 41-42).

Interviewer: *What does a "good teacher" look like?*

Participant:
female
with pulled back hair
maybe blonde or brunette . . .
definitely white
and thin
quite feminine
proper
the way a lady should look
no body piercings
no tattoos...
no spikes . . .
everything in place
perky
smiling
tooth paste smile . . .

(Counternormativity Discourse Group, 2005, pp. 188-189)

The Royal Commission on Learning (Government of Ontario, 1994) . . . indicated that a more diverse teaching force is a necessity. Universities in Ontario, Canada, responded to this call by developing initiatives to recruit a more diverse teaching population (Lundy & Lawrence, 1995). Foreign-accredited teachers, however, are not looked at as a source of these much needed minority teachers.

Not only can these teachers increase the numbers of minority teachers in education systems,

they come to Canada and the U.S. with a wealth of professional experience in diverse settings,

they speak the languages of the students and parents in the schools,

they understand the specific educational backgrounds and current needs of students from their countries. (Phillion & Singh, 1997)

Foreign-accredited teachers can also enrich the dialogue on education for immigrant students,

and expand our notions on the meaning of education. (Phillion, 2003, p. 42)

> *As I sit and write this assignment one revelation hit me that I did not think of before. The uptight feelings I had in this class, although brought out because of the topics, were affected by the instructor. It had nothing to do with his capabilities as a teacher but rather the colour of his skin. This may sound racist but let me finish. In the eighteen years I have been in school, I have never had a Black teacher, or one of any minority.* (Student assignment for teacher Carl James, quoted in James, 2001, p. 165)

I think Canadian people need to change their attitudes. This is really funny. This guy lives in Mexico City; it's a big city, 25 million people, but when he came here his host family showed him how to use the bath, the toilet, how to turn off the lights, the name of the computer. He was so angry, because in Mexico, we have computers. Some people think that we don't have a washroom, but in Mexico we have at least two in a house, and many homes one in every bedroom. It was very annoying when people ask, "Do you know what is a computer?"

One day, somebody asked me, "Are you still riding camels back in the Middle East?"

The only way they know China, is from very old, old films, the documentary films. Very old, probably shot around the sixties in China.

I had an incident, and it was really bad actually . . . While I [was] teaching in Halifax at the immigrant centre, one of my students mentioned that she loved coffee, but she's afraid to go to

Tim Horton's. There was a Tim Horton's nearby the centre, so I said, maybe we can go and take a class there. At Tim Horton's I was ordering [with one of my students who is from Somalia] and a customer asked, "I'm just wondering where your lady's from."

I told him and he said, "Okay, she must be glad she's here drinking coffee."

Another customer started talking about September 11. I was like, "Oh my God, what do I do?" I think that [my student] heard what he said, because she did not show up the next week. I didn't know that Tim Horton's was [a] place that immigrants could feel discrimination.

I feel that I am discriminated here, but I'm glad not to be an immigrant of color—it's even worse.

> I took a diversity course [for my master's degree] last spring, and we were talking about immigrants and stuff, and of all the students in my class, I was the only non-native Canadian. I mentioned to them that my father pays almost 200,000 Canadian dollars to bring the whole family here. A student asked,
>
> "What? Are you not on welfare?"
>
> I said, "No, you can't imagine how my father paid to bring the whole family here."

From the Halifax Sunday Herald, Oct. 31, 2004
What people don't know is that the vast majority of people who come to Canada receive no government money and seldom end up on welfare... (Bradley, 2004, p. A4).
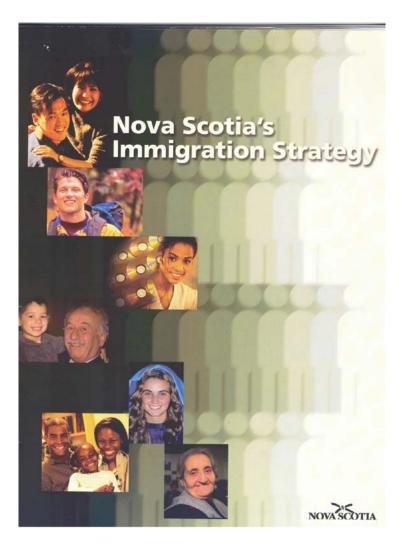
But look at this Letter to the Editor!
Letter to the Editor, The Daily News, Halifax, NS, Sept. 7, 2002

> *To say that Nova Scotia's or Canada's future growth depends on immigrants is so ridiculous. How can accepting immigrants from Third World republics enrich Canada? All that will do is quicken Canada's demise into becoming a Third World nation itself. . . . If immigrants are so valuable to our nation, then how come they can't make their own homelands prosper? Is this a consideration when they try to lure more immigrants here from the Third World to "enrich" us? I have children and I am not going to sell out their future to a bunch of immigrant invaders who can steal their birthright.* (Ryan, 2002, p. 16)

In the past few years, there have been many reports that have discussed the implications of the aging of the Canadian labour force. Almost half of the labour force in 2001 was between the ages of 37 and 55, and by 2011, half of this group will be over 55. [It is predicted that there will be] 1 million skilled job vacancies in the next 20 years. Medical practitioners and teachers are thought to represent a particularly "aged" cohort.

Immigration already accounts for 70% all labour market growth, and this will increase to 100% by 2010. (Owen, 2005, pp. 1-2)

Canada's immigration policies have become increasingly focused on attracting and retaining well-educated and skilled professionals (Hyndman, 1999, pp. 6-7; Man, 2004, p. 2; Mojab, 1999, p. 123; Preston & Man, 1999, p. 115).

The Nova Scotia Immigration Strategy, released in January 2005, is a provincial initiative intended to attract and retain more immigrants to Nova Scotia. One important impetus for such an initiative in Atlantic Canada is the declining population and diminishing work force because of out migration of young adults, low birth rates, and the inability of the province to attract and retain immigrants (Province of Nova Scotia, 2005, p. 1). Immigration, the document states, is "one way by which Nova Scotia can help meet our long-term population, economic, and labour force needs" (p. 1).

> I don't work and I need to work to assist my husband. I mean my husband he is an engineering assistant and now he is working in a convenience store for $5 an hour. It's not enough for our living.

> *I think Canada needs laborers, but not professionals... Now they use professional people to do menial labor. How do you expect us to function well psychologically? (*cited in Man, 2004, p. 145).
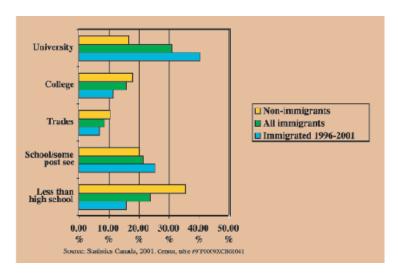
What are you?

What are you?

What are you?

What are you?

What are you?

What are you?

What are you?

A taxi driver with an immigrant degree
Badgered by: Speak slower.
Is that English you're speaking?
Or icanunderstandawordyoujustsaid

It's been one too many times
I haven't been Indian enough,
Black enough;
Certainly I've never been Chinese enough, nor Canadian enough.
When will you be able to look at me
Beyond the straightness of my hair,
the thickness of my eyebrows,
The roundness of my face,
or the angles of my eyes.

When will this interrogation stop?

(from a poem by Stephen Patel, 2001, pp. 302-303)

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, Census, table #9 T00C9XCB01041

In Nova Scotia immigrant women are more likely than Canadian-born women to have high levels of education. Over 40% of recently immigrated women (i.e. between 1996 and 2001) and over 30% of all immigrant women to Nova Scotia have university education compared with 16.5% of Canadian-born women. However, immigrant women's labor force participation is somewhat lower than Canadian-born women.. *(Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the Gender/Immigrant Women Research Domain, Atlantic Metropolis Atlantique, 2004, p. 6)*

Many immigrant women are unable to find jobs at all, and many find work in low paying jobs such as in the restaurant and/or hotel industry and as garment workers. (Man, 2004; Mojab, 1999; Preston & Man, 1999)

The deskilling of immigrant women operates at the conflicted intersection of an immigration policy that aims to attract highly skilled and educated people to Canada while economic restructuring produces a labor market that has not demonstrated that it needs such workers. (Man, 2004; Mojab, 1999)

Issues like these are exacerbated along lines of race, ethnicity, class, and gender. (see, for example, Brigham, 1997, 2000; Man, 2004; Mojab, 1999)

I came to Canada to search for peace and when I came here I thought that I would find a job as soon as I reached [here] and unfortunately that was not correct. I was shocked to know that my certifications are not recognized.
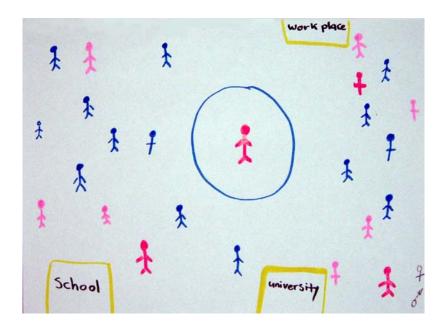

These lines which you see those spaces represent Canada and the open society, and this happy face represents me when I came to Canada. I was excited. This rough ball represents my fear, my great fear from the open society . . . And this sad face represents my disappointment, how much I am disappointed because of the situation here
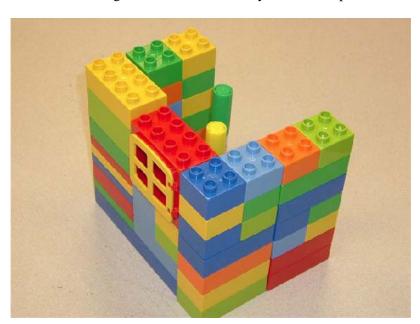
because of my fear,

because I didn't get a job,

or an opportunity to finish my exam in microbiology.

My fear is bigger than me being happy.

This is me, trapped, in this circle. So here are the people all around me in the community, and I am trapped in my home and in my culture. I'm still not really emerged with the community. At this point, I am looking at the school, university, and workplace, so I need to find a way to these places and to communicate with other people. So, you see, there is blue colour—those are Canadians, and there are a few from other cultures and red, those are people from my culture. So I see there are people out there joining the community, happy, living the lives they want to live. At this stage, I am here, but I don't know if after finishing this master's degree I am going to be trapped again or if I can find a way to the work place.

> This is the mainstream of Canada and these markers are people. There are a lot of people trapped in the [language] block . . . many people, especially immigrants, are trapped in the language block, and they connect [to] each other, communicate [with] each other. But this [other] person is completely blocked because of the language barrier. They don't know what happens in Canadian society. . . . They are ignored and they also ignore what happens in the mainstream.

[The green marker] is a very fluent English speaker but he is also blocked because of the culture or language or social knowledge, so this person can see what happens in the mainstream of Canadian society, but just through their window, so their knowledge is very limited and they cannot participate. There should be a door to open, but there's just a window.

[One] day in class [I was studying my Ph.D at OISE in 1981], the discussion centred on immigrant women. . . . The debate had been raging for close to an hour when finally the professor was asked to give her opinion regarding what constituted an "immigrant woman". The professor smiled, looked in my direction, and said, "We have an immigrant woman in our midst, why don't we ask her what she thinks?" Following the professor's example, the whole class focused on the space where I was seated, and, likewise, I too, glanced behind me, trying to find the "immigrant woman" to whom the professor was referring. In my astonishment at being included in this category, I was rendered speechless. It had never occurred to me that I could be perceived as an "immigrant woman", a category that, to be precise, did include me because I had emigrated from Egypt in 1967, but one that did not fit me anymore than it did our "immigrant" British professor. (Khayatt, 2001, pp. 74-75)

> *The three visible minorities and myself had carried the load of race for the entire class. The class always looked to us for examples on culture and always expected us to address issues of race (which often came up in our program). It was as if we were the only ones with "culture," and the only ones who belonged to a "race."* (Serbeh-Dunn & Dunn, 2001, p. 268)

> *[Teacher education candidates in a Canadian study] did not articulate an understanding of the need to question their own biases, privileges, or issues of power in any way. Rather, their responses indicated, as Fine (1997) states [that], "the gaze of the surveillance, whether it be a gaze of pity, blame, or liberal hope" (p. 64) was always on the Other.* (Mujawamariya & Mahrouse, 2004, p. 348)

I was teaching English for 13 years and am learning English now. Canada has a big language problem because most Canadians don't seem to respect other languages. They are very English centered and if people can't speak English or speak with a very strong accent [the Canadians] seem to neglect them . . . think the really sad thing is that you happen to realize that you are not accepted even though you have something to say.

> In most cases, I just keep quiet. And this is the best way. Don't be rude and don't hurt others.

But to be silent also makes you feel bad, so you want to say something, you want to express your feeling as well, but you can't, you are so sad.

> In the classroom sometimes I'm not sure what is involved—like is it right to speak or not? I want to be safe. I do not want to break the rule—like do I interfere with others? I'm not sure if the teacher expects me to speak. That is one thing and the other is my language is not good. I think it is better to ask the teacher after class instead of in class.

> It is a barrier because of the language so that's why I put these little people with the covers on their mouths. Because it doesn't matter what education you have, you can't express yourself. So those are kids. And they're in the school because they adjusted so well to the life whereas immigrant teachers are just kept away. They have to really jump that fence in order to get to teaching.

Conversation is not simply a process of exchanging different viewpoints but can only be called conversation when people do indeed listen to one another . . . In a way a conversation is a form of political action because it allows voices to be heard which are otherwise silenced or struck from public consciousness. (Hart, 1998, p. 195)

Anyway when we speak other languages, we are putting ourselves in a disadvantaged situation because we are subjected to mistakes. When foreigners come to Asia, when they speak Chinese, I will be very happy and think, oh, they respect our language and they take the effort to do that. I really appreciate that, but here, I don't know.

> Sometimes I just dream people should be more open to the other, more patient to the others' words.

I got my education in China . . . I've always been one of the tops,

and have been so hard working . . . that is sixteen years of education, and I've always been trying to be the top . . . So, I have been shaped and cut in a certain way . . . to fit a certain society. And it is like a small part of big machine. It is useful there in a particular machine, but it may not work in [an]other machine. And, China and Canada, in my eyes are two different machines. And in China, we respect knowledge . . . knowledgeable people. But here, creativity is more valued than knowledge.

It's a great comparison to a machine, how you are trying to get into the machine, and sometimes you can get hurt if the machine is going too fast. Some people are able to jump right in and they're okay. Some people they're still at the side of the machine spinning around. They don't really know where they're going. Some people just gave up, and they can't get in . . .

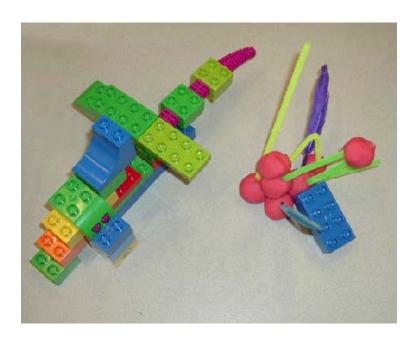But it's not that easy to get into the machine . . .

you're not stopping that machine once you come.

You're jumping right in while it's moving.

If you're not jumping in the right spot,

you can get hurt.

And you are hurting, because you think that
you don't belong, or
your education is not as good as
the people who are already there.

A: So here is the machine. And over here is a different kind of machine, completely different kind of machine. So, somebody who comes from this machine over to here doesn't know how to fit into that. Then what? Do they change their shape? And become something else? Or do they stay like this and then change the shape of the machine?
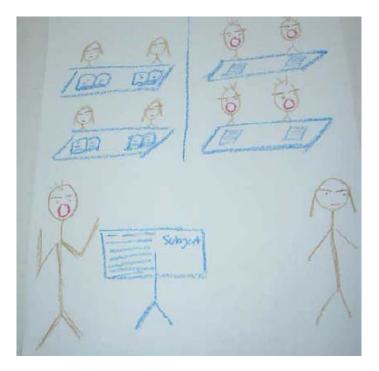
B: Or does the machine have to change a bit to accommodate?

A: Yeah, change the shape of the machine, like, on both sides. Both the . . . person and the machine itself.

I was teacher in my country. So, I have a lot of interest in school activities and my daughter's education in Canada . . . So several times I volunteered as a chaperone or a volunteer. I always felt nervous and concerned because I don't know the Canadian school systems and customs well. Moreover, I don't feel confident in my English. Sometimes, I felt I am not welcomed in school. . . . They patiently listened to my broken English and were very polite. However, actually they don't seem to consider what I was in Korea. So I don't know whether I should go continuously to my daughter's school to be a volunteer or not.

Teaching as an ally relies on our recognition of partial perspectives—our own and that of our students—and our need to engage in collaborative efforts to

recover and make central the experience of previously excluded groups in the construction and reconstruction of knowledge. (Winkler, 1996, pp. 63-64)

In Asia students are just waiting for the teacher just to ask them questions . . . but in Canada, students won't wait—you just can't stop them from asking questions in the classroom. For most Asian students these kind of acts can be seen as showing off, but in Canadian culture it is kind of normal, right?

In China, people tend to be modest. Not to be proud. And, you cannot say "Oh, I'm good." . . . But here, it is more acceptable to say, "I'm proud of what I have done." But in China, you cannot say that. It is always, "Oh, I've done not good enough."

A: I believe if students are taking music class then they are supposedly expected to show their music knowledge through music . . . but [my daughter's] teacher said music class in grade 6 curriculum is closely linked with language. She added that unfortunately most of immigrant students have lower grades because they are shy in speaking during the class activities. I think that's prejudice.

I really doubt that the students were given enough chances to show their knowledge or skill through various methods except language. Actually I complained [about the] program. One Canadian suggested me to call the teacher or to phone the principal.

B: Good idea.

A: Is it a good idea? Culturally in Asia we don't do that because I was a teacher and I know the teachers' trouble and responsibilities.

In Poland, parents feel that they don't have enough expertise and knowledge to help the teacher. So, when we talk about why some parents are involved in the school or why not, look at the cultural background. Don't judge them because they don't want to come.

> *It was hard for my children to celebrate Halloween during Ramadan, the Muslim Holy month, as they could not share candy with their classmates. My sons . . . were fasting, and their teachers did not acknowledge that fact.* (El-Essawy, 2006, p. 11)

Teachers sometimes order food to reward their students without acknowledging that some cultures and religions have restrictions around eating certain types of food. (El-Essawy, 2006, p. 10)

> *Rama . . . [said that] in Canada, there is no holiday for "Eid" which is a Muslim celebration. . . . She mentioned that there are many mosques in her home country and also . . . a room in her school where she can pray.* (El-Essawy, 2006, p. 10)

I'm just thinking of the Canadian people in the sunshine and the immigrants are in the darkness. [The Canadians] do not understand the stars

because they may never really see a star—maybe just very early in the morning or in the evening they see the star and they have something in common. We all see the sea [immigrants and Canadian people]; we have something in common but still ([he Canadians] are not understanding and they are so bright that our light is so small. It cannot be seen really.

A: I had to calculate our money and this is the first time by the way because in Middle East . . . to get a salary is easy. After four months, I may ask social assistance, if I don't get a job. Really I don't like the idea of thinking about this. So that's why, I am sometimes thinking of going back to the Middle East. And that's why most of the immigrants in fact, they just come here for two or three years and just go back to other Gulf areas or their countries—because of the money issues and the job issues.

B: Are you going to stay here in the future?

A: This is a good question and I don't know until now. I feel I can't control my children. I'm doing my best, in fact now, I am trying to control them not only to show them the religious basis, just the traditions, remind them of . . . how we were living before but it's the sense that I can't really control them so that's it. I will go back. Yeah, I did the whole thing. I left my family, my friends, my work everything because of my children.

B: If you go back can you control them in your country because they already changed in Canada?

A: That's a good point . . . but I have my relatives, my sisters, my brothers, my friends, of course, they will help me in doing this and I will not be alone. But here I am alone.

B: But how about the language? They are already here. So they are in an English environment. So do they speak your native language?

A: They are chatting in English but I am teaching them Arabic. So it will be OK for them if we return back. They will not be in difficulty.

C: I feel we are on the same path. I have a son, grade 6, same situation. Speaks Chinese but cannot read maybe a few characters but not more than that and cannot write in Chinese. Quite often we have conflicts at home so he just cannot understand me or his dad so he says, "Canada is a free country! So everybody is equal!"

My 12 year old son wants to change the colour of his hair to yellow and to put in blue lenses. I swear. Yesterday we were at Shoppers Drug Mart, and he said, "Mum, please I love to do it."

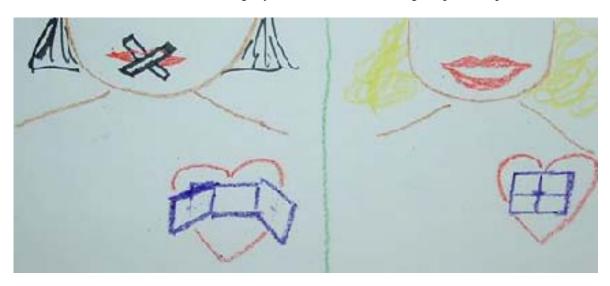I said, "Son, I feel worried about these

situations. Really you want to change?"

He said, "Yes, Mama, it would be very nice. My friend, he did the same, and he was accepted. With the blue lenses I'd be Number One."

I said "What!"

He said, "Number One means, officially I would be Canadian."

I find I'm becoming a radical. I'm not going to let the system defeat me. I feel I am both liberated and domesticated at the same time. With [these Education] courses I am liberated. I am finding my voice. I am transcending to spaces of possibilities.

For the Asians, especially the immigrants… they close their mouth but in their hearts they really want to be open to all.

They want people to know them, and they want to know people—so they are not as silent as they seem to be.

What does [it] mean to listen to a voice before it is spoken?

It means making space for the other. It means not rushing to fill our students' silence with fearful speech of our own and not trying to coerce them into saying the things that we want to hear. It means entering empathetically into the students' world so that he or she perceives you as someone who has the promise of being able to hear another person's truth. (Palmer, 1998, p. 46)

I am listening to you is to

listen to your words as something unique
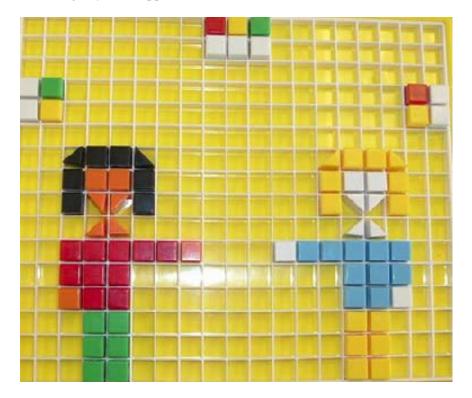
irreducible . . .

as something new,

as yet unknown . . .

I am listening to you:

as someone and

something I do not know yet . . .

(from Irigaray, 1996, pp. 116-117)

Comments

Through storytelling in a group and responding to one another's stories through visual art, research participants discussed concerns and experiences and shared insights in community. A few (some of whom lacked confidence in their English language abilities) noted that they could express some of their ideas more powerfully through art. Obstacles, for example, were (re)presented as a river that one cannot reach across, a "languages block" made of Lego/Duplo, and also a green clay fence that keeps the "immigrant teachers" out, a fence they "have to jump to get to teaching." The script that resulted, with its multiple voices and images, is a decentered and complex research text that invites readers and audience members into conversation. By representing our research as a readers theatre script and performing it as a group with internationally educated female teachers, we have worked together to raise important issues publicly in a form that is accessible to a greater number of people.

Audience response has confirmed the latter. Each time we have presented the readers theatre, a discussion period has followed. Without exception, audience members have expressed surprise and dismay, sometimes shock, and occasionally skepticism about the stories and images, and have sought further discussion with the women who have acted as readers. Many have indicated that they had not previously given serious consideration to the experiences and perceptions of people who immigrate to Canada, although a few related to the women's stories and shared some of their own. Furthermore, when we performed the readers theatre for 140 first-year bachelor of education students and conducted subsequent small-group workshops (that included the women who had read the script as workshop leaders), many issues with regard to racism and misconceptions about immigrants arose, as did concerns about the Eurocentric nature of curricula/hidden curricula in Canadian schools. Some of the women involved with performing the script have become friends and have gained strength through solidarity with others who are share similar experiences. As researchers we see the potential for the readers theatre and other art forms as social action, a direction that we intend to pursue in our ongoing work with internationally educated teachers.[12]

Those involved with the readers theatre—as members of the original research group, as reader/performers, as audience members, and as researchers—had the opportunity to develop "a more holistic critical understanding of the complex interrelation of . . . global, economic, political, and social systems" (Brigham, 2002, p. 21). We have begun a process that Freire (1981) has referred to as *conscientização*, or coming to critical understandings about social structures—understandings that can inform social action.

Notes

1. The term internationally educated professionals (i.e. teachers, engineers, physicians, and so on) is one that is gaining currency in describing people who immigrate to Canada with high levels of education and work experience in their professions. In using this phrase, we follow the terminology used by organizations/institutions such as the British Columbia College of Teachers, the University of Manitoba, Ontario Institute for the Study of Education/University of Toronto, Ontario College of Teachers, and the Nova Scotia Association for Internationally Educated Teachers (NSAIET).

2. We have attempted to contact all of the women who participated in the creation of this performance text, whether through involvement in the original research study and/or thorough their work in helping to revise and/or perform this script. Those with whom we have been in contact and who wish to be named in this paper include (in alphabetical order) Eunice Abaga, Wafa Abbas, Maha Abdelrhman Amin, Nisreen Alkasawneh, Guoping Chen, Somaya El-Essawy, Sun Haiyan, Sunyi Jung, Huwaida Medani, Rowena Ng, Yina Wang, Patricia Wilson, Huiling Zhang, Kangxian Zhao, and Jia Zhu. We offer our thanks to all of the women (named and unnamed) who took part in various ways; our work together was a rich learning experience.

3. We say "have/had immigrated to Canada" because some of the women have returned to their countries of origin since the completion of this research.

4. Some of the guidelines for Goldberg's (1986, 1990, 2000) writing practice include write for a set amount of time, keep your arm physically moving across the page, do not talk, and do not edit and/or censor your words.

5. Readers theatre is a dramatic discipline wherein actors/readers read from a prepared script

during performance. The readers generally remain seated and rely only minimally on movement, gesture, and costume. The readers' vocal interpretations, in combination with the audience members' imaginations, are the crucial aspects of a readers theatre performance. In terms of research "dissemination," readers theatre affords a structured possibility for disrupting the norms of the traditional academic report (and accompanying epistemological claims to truth and the authority of the author) and creates instead an evocative space for response, conversation, and meaning making with audience members.

6. As a member of the Counternormativity Discourse Group (2005) Walsh previously co-wrote and co-performed a readers theatre script on the topic of normative structures and counter normative strategies in teacher education, an experience that influenced the process above. We therefore acknowledge our indebtedness to the work of this group, especially in terms of the early stages of preparing the script and also in terms of its final format. Members of the Counternormativity Discourse Group include (in alphabetical order) Brent Davis, University of British Columbia; Gloria Filax, Athabasca University; Dennis Sumara, University of British Columbia; and Susan Walsh, Mount Saint Vincent University.

7. The theoretical framework from which we have been working is based on several assumptions. We assume, for example, that individuals and groups are positioned at the intersections of socially constructed and often conflicting discourses (Ellsworth, 1997; hooks, 1994; Scott, 1992; Weedon, 1997). In our research, gender is a fundamental category for understanding the taken-for-granted ways that difference, inequity, and privilege operate. We also recognize that gender overlaps with categories of race, class, and citizenship, and that all of these influence our research participants' experiences and also our own position(s) as researchers. We also assume that institutions are not politically neutral. Inequities are perpetuated in ways that are not necessarily apparent to dominant groups in a society (Foucault, 1980; Freire, 1981; Gramsci, 1971). Following a poststructuralist perspective, we contend too that language is not neutral and that it structures subjects in particular ways (Cixous, 1993; Irigaray, 1985a, 1985b, 1993a, 1993b, 1996, 2002; Weedon, 1997).

8. With two colleagues, Michelle Forrest and Valda Leighteizer, we have written about our work in planning, reflecting upon, and problematizing the orientation or professional seminar that takes place at the beginning of September with the first-year bachelor of education students at our university (see CORE, 2006).

9. The script with which we worked did not include identifying names or information about the original research participants, and no such information has appeared in any subsequent versions of the script. Furthermore, women who had taken part in the original research and who were acting as readers generally remained anonymous. Two women in particular, however, chose to reveal their participation in the research study and, indeed, went so far as to be interviewed on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) Radio about their experiences as immigrants to Nova Scotia and also about their participation in our study. The women were determined to discuss publicly the issues related to their lives as women who had immigrated to Canada so as to educate others. We discussed this situation with the women and with the director of research at our university before the CBC interview took place.

   In our introductions to all readers theatre presentations, to protect the identities of the original participants who wished to remain anonymous, we clearly stated that the people reading the script were readers/actors and that the words they were reading were not their own. When necessary, we ensured that original participants did not read their own words.

10. Please note that all italicized sections of the script are quotes. Appropriate reference

information follows each one.

11. Different versions of this script, rewritten for different audiences, have been performed by Walsh, Brigham, and various members of the Women, Diversity, and Teaching Group in contexts such as the following: Bachelor of Education Orientation, Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, September 2005, 2006; Atlantic Educators' Conference, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, November 2005; Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (Atlantic Regional Conference), Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, March 2006; Canadian Association for the Study of Women in Education (CASWE) Conference, York University, Toronto, Ontario, May 2006.

12. In addition to our arts-informed research with internationally educated teachers in Atlantic Canada, we have conducted a survey of Canadian teacher education programs. The forthcoming report is entitled *Internationally Educated Teachers and Teacher Education Programs in Canada: Current Initiatives*. This research was supported by an Atlantic Metropolis Centre Pilot Project Grant (2005) as well as by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRCC) grant (2006-2009). We are also continuing our research (using the arts-informed research methodology) with female internationally educated teachers in two Atlantic provinces in a study called Experiences of Female Teachers Who Are Immigrants to Atlantic Canada: Implications for Canadian Teacher Education Programs, funded by the SSHRCC grant noted above.

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