

Countering narratives: Teachers' discourses about immigrants and their experiences within the realm of children's and young adult literature

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ABSTRACT: Contemporary issues in education should include conversations about immigration which has shaped our past, defines our present, and will enrich our collective future. This article explores a cadre of K-12 and collegiate United States (US) educators' participation in a graduate course on the construction of immigrants in multicultural literature and the ways in which the educators constructed themselves and immigrants during and after the course. Specifically, the article addresses how the immersion in and discussion of literature involving immigrants can cultivate educators' awareness of hegemonic policies and practices toward immigrants in the US. Engaging in a multilayered analytic method interweaving thematic analysis with critical discourse analysis, the author shares educators' oral and written discourses which both reinforced and countered prevailing socio-political constructions of immigrants in the US. Their discourses also illuminated the interplay between thought and action as indicators of ideological shifts. The author concludes with a discussion of issues surrounding the power of stories as mediums for personal and social change, the use of language as a social act, and educators as aspiring agents of change.

KEY WORDS: Children's literature, critical literacy, dialogic discussions, discourse, discourse analysis, multicultural literature, social justice, thematic analysis, US immigration.

INTRODUCTION

Migration, an inherent characteristic of mankind, is a highly contentious issue and an integral component of global social policies under the auspices of national security and goodwill. International media outlets consistently showcase anti-immigrant sentiments and laws throughout the world. More recent anti-immigrant policies include France and Italy's continued deportation of the ethnic Roma from their countries (Faiola, 2010; "France to Continue Deporting Roma", 2010) and Germany's call for the cessation of Turkish and Arab immigration (Connolly, 2010). Angela Merkel, the current German chancellor, recently announced the "death of multiculturalism" and charged immigrants in Germany with the sole responsibility of learning how to live successfully according to "German culture" (Weaver, 2010). Within the United States (US), hegemonic and racist depictions of immigrants, especially those undocumented, continue to be interwoven into various political arenas. In April 2010, Arizona enacted a law requiring immigrants to carry documentation of their legal status at all times and providing law enforcement the power to detain anyone who they believed *might* be living illegally in the US. Opponents of this law liken it to the apartheid laws in South Africa during the mid- to late-19th Century. Furthermore, US 2010 mid-term election campaigns involve mug shots of individuals of assumed Mexican nationality, adorned with captions such as "Mexican illegal aliens". Governing bodies of higher education, such as Georgia's

Board of Regents, have also created policies which deny undocumented immigrants access to higher education.

Weakening national and global economies have provided fertile ground for the amplification of these negative views toward immigrants, particularly those identified as “illegal” or “undocumented”. Ongoing demands for increased border patrol between the US and Mexico, accusations of immigrants’ usurping US jobs, as well as unfounded correlations between immigrants and increased crime, are frequently entertained in the news and within various social circles. The aforementioned sentiments and behaviours are of grave concern, since approximately 1.6 million immigrants arrive in the US annually and approximately 20 percent of US public school students are children of recent immigrants, regardless of their status (Camorata, 2007). Thus, individuals who are unaware of the complexities and socio-political agendas surrounding immigration may unjustly harbour resentment and exhibit prejudicial attitudes and behaviour toward immigrants. Such behaviours further marginalise immigrants in already contentious environments.

With the juxtaposition of an increasing number of linguistically and culturally diverse student populations in the public school sector and escalating anti-immigrant sentiments within the US, educators are poised to become more active stewards of critical thinking and agents of change. However, before occupying such positions, educators should recognise and work with and through their views of immigrants. Teachers may feel a sense of personal resistance when engaging in such participatory tasks due to prevailing ideologies of the dominant culture surrounding immigration. These ideologies are exacerbated by the sociology of school knowledge and selective tradition evident in schools’ and educators’ offerings of children’s literature to students. Selective tradition and the sociology of school knowledge encompass investigations of the types of knowledge that are consciously selected and taught in school. Such knowledge involves a complexity of “power relations and struggles among identifiable class, race, gender, and religious groups” (Apple, 1992, p. 4) and privileges specific groups to help sustain the function of particular social structures and behaviours. Selective tradition, as the process where texts are selected to endorse specific ideologies, specifically contributes to both teachers’ and students’ social and cultural definitions and identifications (Williams, 1977, p. 115; Taxel, 1984). Children’s literature, as a way of creating and reflecting societal norms as legitimate or truthful (Inglis, 1982), has often been affected by the concept of selective tradition and plays a significant role in the development of ideological constructs. Such events and beliefs may offer students a unilateral ideology endorsed by educators.

One example of selective tradition is evident in the genealogy of immigration through master narratives (Foucault, 1980). Immigration’s master narrative in the US is one which historicises immigration, conjuring immigration as a crucial nation-building experience which led to the US becoming the land of opportunity for all. Markedly absent from many school texts are representations of Asians’ immigration processes at Angel Island, which are markedly different from European American’s experiences at Ellis Island. Exclusionary and racist laws barring particular ethnic groups entry into the US are also often absent from classroom discussions, contributing to historical whitewashing. The construction of immigration as a historical subject studied rather than a contemporary issue experienced is another example of selective tradition. Students often read historical fiction and informational texts highlighting the first

designated wave of immigration (early to late 19th Century) and part of the second wave of immigration (early to mid 1900s). Thus, for many immigrant youth and their families, their experiences, via absence, are negated in school but emphasised, and perhaps distorted or sensationalised, in media.

The movement toward multicultural children's and young adult literature in the US (hereafter referred to as multicultural literature) was born from the eras of civil rights and feminism in the 1960's and 1970's (Cai, 2002, p. xiii). Multicultural literature enables marginalised groups to offer authentic representations of themselves and their experiences and to showcase beliefs, perspectives, and experiences previously overshadowed by dominant communities. Thus, multicultural literature offers opportunities for plurality and has the potential to disrupt readers' understanding of the world (Cai, 2002; Dyson & Genishi, 1994; Gustavson, 2000; Harris, 1990). Given the possibilities of multicultural literature for either mirroring society or providing a window to alternative views of society, I developed an elective graduate seminar for educators which focused on critical analyses of the construction of immigrants in multicultural literature. My intentions for this seminar included, firstly, to provide educators with opportunities to better understand the sociocultural and socio-political mechanisms and infrastructures involved in immigrants' geographical, emotional and educational journeys in the US and, secondly, to offer opportunities of engagement in praxis – a reflective practice which encourages dialogue and develops into transformative action (Freire, 1993). Multicultural literature served as a conduit for these goals.

The year following the seminar provided ample evidence of the seminar's transformative effects upon some of the 19 participating teachers. Many teachers continued to converse with me via email, phone or during office visits. These conversations included stories about their development of immigrant-focused initiatives at their respective schools and churches, recommendations of or requests for recently published books highlighting immigrants' experiences, and inquiries about another iteration of the seminar in order to occupy a "place where we are able to discuss such controversial topics in a safe location". One teacher shared: "I don't know where else to go" (email conversation, May 2009). These conversations piqued my interest in better understanding how the teachers' discourses (language-in-use) reflected their ideologies of immigrants a year after their immersion in the graduate seminar. What did they recall and how did they position themselves and immigrants in those recollections? Thus I investigated the ways in which the teachers' oral and written discourses complemented or contested prevailing constructions of immigrants in the US.

In this article, I discuss the discursive narratives constructed by these teachers during the semester-long seminar and during individual interviews the following year. These discourses reflect ongoing constructions of individuals continually marginalised in mainstream society and constructions of educators as committed stewards of social equity. I also address the potentialities and paradoxes associated with a graduate seminar immersed in literature that investigates a highly contested and controversial topic: immigration. I begin this discussion with the catalysts of the seminar and an overview of the theoretical foundations which guided the seminar and informed this particular study. I then share the seminar's curricular framework and my methodology. I conclude with my analyses of the teachers' constructed discourses and

identities which fuel further contemplation about the power of story, the use of language as social practice, and transformative pedagogy.

IMPETUS FOR THE GRADUATE SEMINAR

A variety of circumstances that coalesced into a “perfect storm” surrounding immigration and literacy education led to the development of this course. The state of Georgia experienced a 233 percent increase in immigrant residency between 1990 and 2000 and has more recently experienced another 58 percent increase within the past ten years (Migration Policy Institute, 2010). Almost 80 percent of the immigrants arrive from South or Central America and various regions in Asia, with Mexico, India and Korea as the most popular countries of origin. Refugees from over 30 countries currently call Georgia “home.” In 2008, almost 5 percent of school-aged children were identified as immigrants and almost 20 percent of school-aged children had at least one parent identified as an immigrant. Such significant cultural shifts in population, coupled with prevailing hegemonic ideologies about immigrants in the US, necessitated a concerted look at how schools were adapting to these rapidly changing demographics. My informal inquiries about how educators were including immigration in their classrooms indicated that immigration remained a historical concept. Furthermore, the selective tradition of literature involving immigration persisted, with an emphasis on a unilateral approach to assimilation as the sole path to success in the US.

Even more disconcerting were my discussions with youth in grades 3-8 (ages 8-14) about multicultural literature in their school lives. Immigration was not the focus of these conversations; however, these youth (who did not identify as immigrants or as children of immigrants) expressed opinions about immigrants that mirrored the discourse of their larger communities. The following list typifies their comments:

- “Why would I want to read books about people who are ruining where we live?”
- “I ain’t reading no Spanish speaking books. Why we gotta read their language when they don’t know ours? It’s not fair.”
- “Hey, no way I’d read that. They be takin’ like jobs and stuff. Now they’re takin’ the books?”

The youths’ statements reflect and support the dominant ideologies and xenophobic sentiments espoused by anti-immigration groups in the US: immigrants as the root of societal difficulties and evils, the desire for a monolingual society, and the supremacy the English language, especially as the language spoken by the dominant culture. Subsequent discussions further revealed these youths’ deliberate use of multicultural literature to convey their disdain toward particular immigrant populations. For the youths with whom I spoke, books served as vehicles of extreme intimidation toward minority populations of immigrant status. They placed Deborah Ellis’ (2001) novel, *The Breadwinner*, on peers’ desks with an accompanying note that the recipients should be “like Saddam and be blown up” and asked if a peer wanted to read *My Name is Bilal* (Mobin-Udden, 2005) so that they could know how to “cover up their faces like Muslims. We don’t wanna see their faces, them, anymore.” Regardless of the youths’ inaccurate associations and prejudices, the alarming desire to intimidate

immigrant populations with books, often considered a symbol of social status and of academic and social success, solidified a need to take a more concerted look at multicultural literature and its relation to social issues such as immigration. One starting point was to offer aspiring and practising educators an opportunity to discuss immigration through the lenses of multicultural literature and critical literacy and to construct multiple approaches to and uses of multicultural literature in the classroom.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Inherent in the graduate seminar and this study are theoretical paradigms which advocate personal and social investigations of hegemonic practices that greatly contribute to the exclusionary and prejudicial positions and environments of those who are oppressed. Theories of critical multiculturalism and critical literacy involve discussions of and interactions with oppression, domination and power relations in society. Within these constructs, individuals are often engaging in negotiations of many social identities. These negotiations create initial uneasiness, work with established differences, and seek to (re)form meaning rather than smoothing out the tensions evoked through difference (Janks, 2005; West, 2002). Negotiations, from a critical perspective, become “border pedagogies” where existing borders are challenged and redefined (Giroux, 2003; Janks, 2001; 2005). Language, as a medium for communication and understanding, is central to such negotiations and transformations. It cannot be extracted from power, perspective, and positioning, for it both shapes and is shaped by these three elements. Below I provide a brief overview of critical multiculturalism, critical literacy, and discourses as narratives of perception and power.

Critical multiculturalism and critical literacy

Humans, as social beings, both shape and are shaped by society, with power as the centrifugal force in this process. Critical multiculturalists and critical literacy advocates investigate the power structures involved in ideological constructions of people through lenses of and intersections between race, class and gender. These powerful structures shape individuals’ perceptions and lifestyles and create subjugated knowledges (Foucault, 1980), whereby particular knowledge, especially knowledge of marginalised or oppressed populations, are understood and discussed through critical analysis. Such analyses facilitate understanding of the way knowledge is both produced and legitimated (Festino, 2007; Janks, 2005; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Educators can employ subjugated knowledge in the curricula to challenge hidden cultural assumptions involved in knowledge production, contest the dominant culture’s interpretations of “reality”, and recognise the complexities of knowledge production and dissemination.

Critical literacy adheres to similar constructs to critical multiculturalism, with a focus on reading comprehension. Critical literacy is a dynamic process which addresses the bias inherent in texts and invites readers to entertain multiple perspectives and read both the “word and world” from critical perspectives (Comber, 2001; Freire, 1993; Leland, Harste, Ociepka, Lewison, & Vasquez, 1999; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004, p. 33). Critical literacy enables individuals to challenge both literary texts and society through actively investigating how language and power shape not only the texts they read but also *how* they read those texts. Readers position themselves as crucial

contributors to their meaning-making processes as they question, challenge, dispute and examine texts, their personal and societal prejudices, and any contradictory voices experienced in those exercises.

Multicultural children's and young adult books often provide readers with social justice themes and all the accompanying complexities inherent in such themes. Instances of social, ethnic and political differences invite readers to explore the dominant infrastructures of contemporary society, question the positions of various social and ethnic groups, and amplify the voices of those often marginalised (Lewison, Leland, Flint & Möller, 2002). With multicultural literature, readers can "talk back" to the books and themselves as they encounter "metaphors of and meanings about differences" (Enciso, 1997, p. 13). However, one's desire to "talk back" and one's receptivity and social negotiation of such books can be curtailed by realistic endings that defy the Disney-like, fairy-tale motif of "happily ever after". Overt challenges to educators' or students' social identities and ideologies may create resentment or other problematic reactions, perhaps making enactment of social change more difficult (Beach, 1997). Ultimately the power of perception and transformation rests with language, the mediator of understanding through interaction and thought.

Discourse: Language, identity and power

Language, the primary medium of communication and engagement which informs our position in the world, is a dialogue between individuals and between individuals and society (Gadamer, 1975). This dialogue occurs via utterances (Bakhtin, 1986), or meaning units, which involve addressivity, responsiveness and expressivity (p. 86-87, 95). Our decision to speak and our selection of words, syntax and style are influenced by the intended audience, their assumed responses to our spoken/written thoughts, and the concrete context in which the dialogue exists. Each utterance is imbued with intentionality and is immersed in dialogue with an "other", including ourselves. Communication, as linguistic to-and-fro interactions, is dialogic and fraught with the tension of ambiguity as one's responses are always predicated on former, current and anticipated responses and reflect the grammatical forms anticipated in specific social contexts (speech genres). One can command, plead, warn, reference or compare, shifting the form and function of language in accordance with the desired social identities, practices, purposes and environments. The interpersonal and intrapersonal spaces we occupy condition both our discourse (language-in-use) and our Discourses (socially situated identities) (Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 1996; 2005). We reconceptualise our discourses and ideologies in dialogic ways, creating context-specific identities as we migrate between different social settings.

Researchers interested in critically understanding discourse address the construction of Discourses through analyses of the relationships between language and society. Specifically, critical discourse analysis (CDA) scholars believe discourse can never be extracted from or analysed without particular attention to the socio-political, socioeconomic and racial ideologies enacted in social contexts. Language serves as a set of "consumptive, productive, distributive, and reproductive processes that is in relation to the social world" (Rogers, 2004, p. 5) and is represented as "systemic cluster of themes, statements, ideas, and ideologies that come into play within a text" (Luke, 2000, p. 456). Thus by investigating the function of language to support human performance, one better understands how ideologies and conceptions of social

capital inform individuals' negotiations with different discourses to construct personal identities. Literacy scholars, such as Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993), Comber, Thomson and Wells (2001), Dyson (2003), and Rogers, Marshall and Tyson (2006), have investigated how students and teachers alike construct their identities in social spheres of literacy learning. The present study examines how discourse illuminates the identity constructions of the immigrant "other" and of the participants.

CURRICULAR FRAMEWORK

Within one semester, 19 educators who taught youth spanning the age continuum (5-18 years of age) and I investigated written and iconic narratives of immigrants and their experiences in children's literature and partnered their interpretations of such experiences with empirical data from sociological and political science research. This course was organised thematically [for example, Family Dynamics of Immigrants (generational differences, expectations, family composites, and separations-reunions), Immigrants' School-based Relationships, and Immigrant Voices in Autobiographies and Memoirs] and involved weekly readings of and responses to scholarly and literary texts. Core scholarly texts included Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco's (2001), *Children of Immigration*, as well as excerpts from Rumbaut and Portes' (2001) *Ethnicities: Children of Immigrants in America*, Kinchloe and Steinberg's (1997), *Changing Multiculturalism*, Kress & van Leeuwen's (2001) *Grammar of Visual Design*, and McLaughlin and DeVoogd's (2001) *Critical Literacy*. Other articles specific to weekly themes were self-selected by the students. Core multicultural literature included Shaun Tan's (2007) graphic novel, *The Arrival*, Donna Jo Napoli's (2005) historical novel, *The King of Mulberry Street*, Eve Bunting's (2006) contemporary fiction picture book, *One Green Apple*, and Marina Budhos' (2006) contemporary novel, *Ask Me No Questions*. These texts represented multiple facets of immigrants' experiences and challenged the binary constructs [legal (documented) vs. illegal (undocumented)] of immigration perpetuated in the US. Throughout three-quarters of the semester, teachers self-selected multicultural literature related to the weekly themes and as potential texts for student readership. By the end of the course, each teacher read between 12 and 20 books, depending on the type of book (for example, picture book or novel). I provided the teachers with a bibliography of approximately 200 titles available in the university library or local public libraries. This list was organised by genre and provided dominant themes for each book to better assist the teachers for self-selected readings.

Class-based activities were designed to offer students as much security as possible while engaging them in critical thinking opportunities. These activities also acknowledged teachers' agency in their learning processes and experiences, and initiated teachers' participation in a dialogic "wobble" (Fecho, Graham, & Hudson-Ross, 2005): time-space constructs where one's ideological stances are in imbalance, with such imbalances inviting interrogation and introspection. Throughout the seminar and in course evaluations, teachers indicated that such activities did compel them to "wobble", to acknowledge and reflect on their inner dialogue; however, some worked with the "wobble" and others opted to remain steadfast in their ideological positions. During the interviews, some shared their realisation of their discourses as being double-voiced (Holquist, 1990). They appropriated discourses of their peers and even the US government; however, they made semantic distinctions between their use of the discourse and how others used it.

Examples of class-based activities included:

- a) “Care to Share” time: This activity, initiated by teachers, began each class because of the “overwhelming presence of immigration” in their daily lives. At this time, teachers would voluntarily share what they witnessed, heard or read about immigration throughout the week. Their stories led to interactive discussions.
- b) Teacher read-alouds and discussions of provocative multicultural picture books or novel excerpts.
- c) Personal (Scholarly response journals) and social (small group/whole class) discussions facilitated by me.
- d) Whole-class semiotic analyses of picture books.
- e) Transmediation activities: activities which allow individuals to transfer (and recreate) meaning from one medium to another such as moving from print to drama (tableau).
- f) Independent inquiry projects.

Such activities aided the development of a community of inquirers and learners committed to engaging in controversial issues within a safe enclave of respectful dialogue and behaviour. The teachers’ feedback during the seminar indicated that the trans-mediation activities created sites of discomfort and perplexity, which a few teachers initially contested because “it made me feel like an immigrant in something [literary analysis] I should be a native in” (response log, November, 2008); however, many resonated with these activities during their interviews.

During their interviews, the teachers often cited our social discussions as catalysts for intellectual and social contemplation. All but one of the teachers indicated a shared sense of trust, compassion, respect and open-mindedness, and relished the opportunity to engage in “ideological risk-taking” in our small- and whole-group conversation circles. Daphne’s sentiments expressed during her interview captured the essence of other teachers’ responses about our discussions. Her statements also convey the empowering effect discussion had upon their reading and thinking.

I always left thinking in a different way than when I came in...we would question each other, never in a punitive way, but in a wondering kinda way....if we had never had those conversations, I would have never really moved beyond how I read....our thinking was really pushed, um, to really read critically and delve, you know, a bit deeper. I didn’t know I can go that far with children’s literature....I also didn’t know the power of “well, you know, perhaps” when talking. It strengthened our talk rather than showing uncertainty.

PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS

Twelve of the nineteen educators agreed to participate in this study. Ten educators taught youth 5 to 18 years of age in US public schools and two taught at the collegiate level. All were enrolled in various graduate education programs. Eleven of the twelve teachers self-identified as female and one teacher identified as male. Nine teachers considered themselves US citizens and three teachers initially identified themselves as international students during the graduate seminar. However, two of the three teachers

described themselves as immigrants or “part-time immigrants” rather than “international students” during their interviews. All considered themselves “middle class” and their ethnic heritages varied with European ancestry being cited as the dominant heritage. All of the teachers shared that they interacted with children identified as immigrants or children of immigrant families in their respective schools and communities.

The research data included the teachers’ personal response journals, class activities, my notes about the seminar throughout the semester¹, and one open-ended interview with each teacher. These interviews took place one year after the graduate seminar was offered in order to better ascertain the ways in which the teachers had internalised and potentially acted upon the knowledge developed during the seminar. Using the email addresses provided by the students while enrolled in the course, I contacted all of the students explaining my interest in understanding their current conceptions of immigrants and their recollections about the class. I then arranged a mutually agreed upon date and method (for example, in person, on the phone, instant messaging/Google-Chat) for the interviews. Nine of the interviews were conducted in person and three were conducted over the phone due to the teachers’ geographical locations. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was digitally recorded and transcribed.

While I use the formal term *interviews*, these interviews typically resembled conversations among friends or trusted acquaintances. We typically began the interviews catching up on each other’s lives, especially given the length of time (approximately one year) since our last correspondence. Our discussions often began with genuine inquiries about each other’s professional, educational and personal lives, with the teachers often discussing their current students and asking about my current research projects, and with both of us sharing books we were currently reading, familial updates and vacation stories. Such discussions enabled us to establish a mutually satisfying comfort zone. Laughter and frequent digressions accompanied intense discussions between us and I attempted to listen more than speak during these conversations. During these conversations, I used verbal indicators of attentiveness such as “un hunh”, “OK”, “Mmmm”, and “I see”, and physical indicators such as head nods, smiles and leaning forward or backward as we conversed. For approximately half of the teachers, our “interviews” evolved into lengthy monologues. There were times when the teachers’ “inner speech” manifested itself and led to their startled physical (jumping back slightly in the chair; hand on chest) and oral responses (laughter; “Oh! You scared me!”) when I responded to their comments. Apparently some teachers, immersed in thought, forgot I was present.

The different genres of data – verbatim discourse (response journals and interviews) and interpretive discourse (my notes and retellings of activities) – necessitated a multilayered analytic approach. I first analysed the teachers’ thoughts and responses to literature thematically in order to recognise the ways in which they were making meaning and the processes through which such meaning was constructed. I adopted an inductive method of thematic analysis, which aligned with the constructionist epistemology of this study. My first three analytic steps resembled Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) three-tiered coding system (open-axial-selective codes) with an

¹ Because the study was developed a year after the course completion, my notes and other class artifacts provided limited information as they were not completed with the study in mind.

emphasis on using the language of the teachers and developing data narratives within each theme. Subsequent creations of “thematic families” based on internal and external heterogeneity (Braun & Clark, 2006) substantiated coherence within themes and distinctions across themes. I then crafted thematic essence statements that best fitted my inquiry and the data. These themes are similar to stanzas in discourse analysis, where specific narrative excerpts across different data are united by topic or perspective to form a story and then titled to reflect particular scenes in the narrative.

My next layer of analysis involved adopting aspects of Gee’s (2005) discourse analysis framework to analyse these themes from a critical perspective. Microanalyses of form-function (utterance-type) and language-context (situated meaning) tasks (Gee, 2005) within the themes were completed to provide linguistic support for the “meaning potential” of the teachers’ discourses and their situated identities constructed in the graduate seminar and during our interview. In the following section, I discuss two prominent motifs among the teachers’ dialogic journeys of identity building: 1) humility, humanity and heterogeneity and 2) negotiating discourses and seeking justice. Within each theme, the teachers crafted identities about themselves and immigrants in reciprocal ways. Centrifugal and centripetal forces (Bakhtin, 1984) were engaged as the teachers constructed their identities in response to their personal and societal perceptions of immigrants and subsequently constructed identities of immigrants based on their personal identity constructions.

HUMILITY, HUMANITY AND HETEROGENEITY

The teachers’ reader response logs, activities and interviews conveyed narrative trajectories where teachers initially positioned immigrants as *something* (emphasis added) that potentially lacked enough social capital to be considered worthy for investigation outside of the category of “multicultural literature”. While intrigued by the seminar focus and eager to participate, some wondered about the need to “focus so intensely on such a topic”, while others wondered if they should know another language, such as Spanish, in order to be successful. Teachers also conveyed surprise and disbelief that “so many books have been written about this topic”. Their initial wonderings indicated how distant the topic of immigration was for them.

As the seminar progressed, many teachers, regardless of ethnic affiliation and nationality, spoke of a growing awareness of immigration and immigrants from a more holistic perspective which supported heterogeneous rather than homogeneous communities. They constructed identities of more informed and socially aware teachers and citizens with compassion and understanding and acknowledged the humanity (and perhaps inhumanity) of immigration in the US. In Table 1, I share three narrative excerpts from three teachers² which illustrate these intersecting and overlapping positions and identities. I have placed line numbers and a letter next to each meaning unit (Gee, 2005) to ensure easier reference in my subsequent discussion of these excerpts. Words in all capitals indicate the speaker’s tonal emphasis and italics in parentheses identifies non-verbal language.

² All names included in this article are pseudonyms.

A. Sophia: Response journal entry excerpt	
Line 1A	I never thought immigrants would be a focus in literature.
Line 2A	My bad I know.
Line 3A	I just never thought about it.
Line 4A	I didn't even think of immigrants as plural, you know "the immigrant experience" and all that . . .
Line 5A	I am reading literature I would NEVER have picked up . . .
Line 6A	My eyes are open – wide open – and
Line 7A	my heart is wide.
B. Stella: Face-to-face interview	
Line 1B	Like, the class –
Line 2B	I can't believe I'm saying this –
Line 3B	but umm, it made me realise that immigrants aren't topics for TV.
Line 4B	They are people with real experiences –
Line 5B	often difficult experiences that I couldn't even imagine.
Line 6B	They are people.
Line 7B	They are PEOPLE (<i>raised voice; back of her hand hits palm of the other hand</i>)

Table 1. Humanity and heterogeneity

The admissions from both Sophia and Stella, tinged with self-reproach (Sophia: Line 2A) and incredulity (Stella: Line 2B), speak to the objectification of immigrants in mainstream media and the possible internalisation of that objectification. As “headline news”, “poll topics”, and “policy concerns”, especially when associated with criminal acts, immigrants are socially stripped of their position as humans with needs, interests, desires and difficulties. Instead, immigrants are “topics for TV” (Stella: Line 3B) to be socially dissected, maligned, or celebrated without their consent. They can also be individuals of such minimal importance that their presence in literature is never considered (Sophia: Lines 1-2A; 5A). However, as the excerpts of Sophia and Stella’s reflections signify, their participation in the course contributed significantly to their conceptual shifts. These shifts are linguistically grounded in their transitions from past tense in their opening lines to present tense in their concluding lines. Additionally, Stella’s “they are people” (Lines 4B, 6-7B), becomes more emphatic after multiple repetitions, further accentuating her cognitive transition from object (topics for TV) to human subject (they are people). Her choices of adjectives “real”, “difficult”, and “unimaginable” to describe immigrants’ experiences (Lines 4-5B) as well as adjectives “wide” and “open” when referencing human features associated with the soul (eyes and heart; Lines 6-7A) convey the personal significance Sophia places upon her altered perspectives and increased open-mindedness.

At the beginning of the seminar, Sophia adhered to a prominent ideological message that all immigrants’ acculturation processes in the US are universal and thus singular (*the* immigrant experience). The process involves a) arriving in the US, b) learning English, and c₁) assimilating and positively contributing to society or c₂) leaving the country. Sophia’s acknowledgement of her current belief in the plurality of immigrants’ experiences (Line 4A) suggests her recognition and dismissal of that master narrative constructed by the dominant culture. Furthermore, Sophia’s use of

singular quotes and inclusion of the article “the” (Line 4A) with “immigrant experience” reflects double voicing (Bakhtin, 1986), as her utterance echoes the dominant discourse of US Immigration. Her use of “you know” before “the immigrant experience” (Line 4A) confirms this dominant Discourse through her presumed solidarity with me based on a shared understanding of the master narrative of immigration. Yet, she dismisses the credibility of this Discourse through the use of quotes and her concluding generic phrase “and all that”. Other teachers, such as Daphne, also used discourse, such as “no two stories were the same”, “just no one experience” and “put a human face on the term”, to suggest an evolving understanding of the heterogeneity of immigrants’ experiences and the humanity of their circumstances. Their inquiries as to why many societal messages involving immigration do not necessarily highlight the varieties of immigrants’ experiences began during and continued beyond the seminar.

The teachers’ verb selections, as represented in Stella and Sophia’s excerpts above, indicated possible sites of tension as they participated in the seminar. Most of the teachers shared at various times that the seminar “compelled”, “forced”, “proved”, “caused”, or “made” (see Stella: Line 3B) them to not only read literature they would “never pick up” (see Sophia: Line 3A) but also to think differently. Some might consider such an interpretation hypercritical; however, when asked why other verbs such as “helped”, “enabled” or “guided” were not used, the teachers, albeit surprised by their choices, supported them. The teachers mentioned in their response journals and in class that they resisted personal reflection and dialogic thinking, citing the difficulty of such processes as the reason for resistance. However, engaging in such conversations to the best of their abilities was part of the course participation criteria, so excusing themselves from these opportunities was limited. Therefore, their verb choices make sense.

The teachers’ use of the word “difficult” seems to connote “fear” or “apprehension” of self-discovery. However, their narratives about the literature read suggested that books provided welcomed scaffolding. They could first dialogue through conversation and drama with the issues, sentiments and themes of the book and then listen to or watch their peers, while deciding whether to engage with their ideological selves. Over time, the teachers shared their pleasure in engaging in such activities and attributed some aspects of ideological transitions to these activities. Their admissions, at the very least, testify to the need for ongoing, supportive discussions and dialogic activities with and without multicultural literature, as one pursues transformative action.

Humanity and heterogeneity: Subverting the gaze

Michelle was an international student who also identified as an Asian immigrant. In her interview, she volunteered her surprise that “illegal immigrants have similar kinds of experiences as I had and I’m a legal visitor!” and indicated increased sympathy for the plight of “illegal” immigrants in Georgia and the US. However, many of her reflections and shared response journal entries delineated her relationship with her US peers. Michelle’s construction of herself and her US peers in relation to each other subverted the “gaze” to position herself in the centre (the observer) looking at her US peers on the fringes (the object of her gaze). In Table 2, her response to my query about the ways in which the seminar affected her personally elucidates her previous prejudices toward her US peers which informed her later conceptions.

Michelle: Interview excerpts	
Line 1	This class help me a lot. A lot.
Line 2	Before I just – I would just think, “All white people, they don’t think about my position.”
Line 3	I would get so angry. I would think “You racist!”
Line 4	I would blame them a lot.
Line 5	Like, OK, they don’t think about it.
Line 6	They don’t know anything about me.
Line 7	They don’t even want to try to learn
Line 8	So I’m not even going to try to share my experience.
Line 9	I don’t even want to . . .
Line 10	If they are not ready, why should I educate them?
Line 11	Why should I share my experience?
Line 12	It’s just waste of my time.
Line 13	But now I kinda understand why they do that.
Line 14	I see a kinda process that makes them see me that way
Line 15	So now I approach them.
Line 16	It’s OK.
Line 17	I like sharing and help solve the problem.

Table 2. Solving the problem

Unbeknownst to me until after a few weeks of class, Michelle harboured great resentment toward her US peers whom she identified as “white people” (Line 2). Her previous experiences in the US, which she shared in her response journals, in class, and in the interview, spurred her resentment toward others. She often struggled to find friends and believed her contributions in class would open a conversational porthole where others would realise she could speak English and would testify to her “worth as a friend”. However, that rarely happened. She also felt victimised by airport security and immigration officers based on what she described as interrogating practices. She often spoke with her classmates and me about her difficulties adjusting to the US and developing friendships.

Our class readings and discussions contributed to Michelle’s tentative (*kinda*: Line 13) understanding as to the personal and societal infrastructures which complicate relationship-building opportunities for immigrants. Michelle also appeared to either give her US peers the benefit of the doubt or exonerate them from their patterned behaviours of personal distance and for the negative social mirroring (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001) she had little control over (*I see a kinda process that makes them see me that way*; Line 14). According to Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2001), children of immigrants or immigrant youth’s identity-building is often in response to how they believe the dominant society views and receives them – their social mirror (p. 7). In this excerpt, Michelle contests social mirroring by dismissing her US peers’ views as ignorance, passivity or lack of maturity (Lines 5-7, 10). Thus, she vacates her position as a passive recipient of assumed racism (Line 3) to be an agent of change (Lines 15-17). For Michelle, societal mechanisms, rather than her

peers' characters, negatively portray immigrants as "racial others" and prevents communication and friendship (Line 14). Acutely aware of the difficulties associated with an attempted dismantling of hegemonic constructs, Michelle initiates a grassroots approach – beginning with people – to help bridge cultural and social gaps potentially present between immigrants and non-immigrants.

Michelle's shift in agency, as presented, is paradoxical. On one hand we have hope that her efforts are recognised and shared. On the other hand, her discourse is of concern because of the tone I believe I heard during her interviews. I had also connected her statements to her past experiences with racism and bigotry. Michelle chooses to use oppositional personal pronouns in the same sentence (*I/they; they/me*) instead of the collective pronoun "we", and emphasises deficit thinking (*don't; won't; not even try; waste of time, blame*). She concludes with an assuring "It's OK" (Line 16) and justifies her agreement with the decision for her to initiate conversations with her white peers. However, the pairing of "It's OK" (Line 16) and "I like sharing and help solve the problem" (Line 17) ripples with an undercurrent of resentment or resignation potentially stemming from her previous unsuccessful efforts. While her anger has lessened and her understanding grown through her small group discussions that she indicated she enjoyed, additional time and dialogue might be required. Paulo Freire (1992) believed that dialogue fosters a sharing of information which privileges the expertise of the individuals involved without diminishing the presence and value of those individuals. "Dialogue does not level them, does not 'even them out,' reduce them to each other....it implies a sincere, fundamental response on the part of the subjects engaged in it" (p. 101). Even if Michelle's peer interactions had yet to evolve into the kind of dialogue Bakhtin (1986) and Holquist (1990) favour, her journey from reactive anger and frustration to proactive action and understanding within a 14 week timeframe is noteworthy and hopeful.

Acknowledging heterogeneity through the lens of the "status quo"

A few teachers' narratives spoke to the difficulties associated with challenging ideology that reflects the status quo, especially if they are immersed in that ideological status quo. This is, in part, one of the tenets of dialogic conversations. Through conversations with the self and others as well as conversations with and about multicultural literature which speaks to social mores, one approaches instances of ambiguity. Trina's response journal excerpt in Table 3 reminds us of how ideological shifts occur gradually over time and the benefits of compassionate conversations. Some context is needed for Trina's excerpt. Trina admitted to me that while she felt she could "share anything with you [me]," she typically felt like she coming to class was akin to "preparing for battle, but not in a bad way". She "just had to prepare for the worst and get ready to defend what I believe." On one occasion, she likened her preparation to the Civil War – an ideological civil war. Based on Trina's narratives, her participation in dialogue was minimal due to the defensive place she felt she needed to occupy in class. Trina labeled her thoughts about immigration as "conservative", and shared during her interview that, at times, she felt as though she "stood alone" in class. While others in class expressed similar thoughts to Trina's in their reader response journals and small group conversations, Trina typically fulfilled the role of conservative spokesperson in class and questioned others' beliefs in accordance with her own ("going to battle"). Interestingly, I didn't recall nor write in my notes a tonal quality in Trina's voice which indicated her expressed position of

defense. Her views shared in Table 3 represent perspectives she held about a month into the course and conveyed during her interview.

Trina: Note in response journal	
Line 1	Well, I think that not all immigrants who come here are <u>illegal</u> immigrants, ya know?
Line 2	And we, we <u>do</u> have this image about immigration that's you know It's <u>always</u> a problem.
Line 3	Well, it's not always a problem. It's a pain ☺
Line 4	But it's not always a problem.
Line 5	And I think that a lot of people come from different countries, who, you know.
Line 6	They come here as professionals.
Line 7	They work in professional settings.
Line 8	They are not necessarily, you know, <u>those people</u> .
Line 9	There is that side too.

Table 3. Problem and pain of immigration

This particular entry of Trina's occurred after our class had read and discussed immigrants' autobiographies or memoirs. Trina provided a note at the top of the page which said "this was written very fast because I didn't want to lose the ideas", as if to indicate the excitement that accompanies spontaneous or novel thoughts. In this replication of Trina's excerpt, I've used the same typographical tools Trina used. Trina's decision to refrain from editing her stream-of-conscious response and retaining its conversational quality is quite significant because I did not collect their response journals every week in order to provide opportunities for them to revisit their responses and document any additional thoughts after class. The personal tenor of her note and entry constructed Trina less like a graduate student and more like someone sharing some thinking with a friend or acquaintance. Her informal tone contributes to the genuineness of her thoughts rather than her using discourse to please her professor. Thus, this journal entry appears to be a marker of Trina's modification in thought.

In this entry, Trina chooses to share that she now believes the term "all illegal immigrants" lacks merit (*not all*; Line 1; *There's that side too*; Line 9). Additionally, she believes immigrants have varied experiences and identities (Lines 5-7, 9); however, she retains her identity as a US citizen with conservative views shared by many (*we*; Line 2). She then positions immigrants in a binary construct – "professionals" and "those people" (illegal immigrants; Lines 6-8) in a hierarchical position, with "professionals" occupying a higher status than "those people." Embodying Discourses attributed to conservative pundits, Trina believes professional immigrants retain their professional status upon arrival in the US without question. She assumes an equitable transfer of employment and status without much difficulty, thereby overlooking the influence of one's socioeconomic and ethnic or racial affiliations upon one's social status in the US (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Furthermore, the privileged status of immigrants as professionals minimises the "pain" (inconvenience; Line 3) they create for society. They, as professionals, do not experience "problems", nor are they "a problem" (Lines 2, 4) for others. However,

based on Trina's initial statement, if "those people" are interpreted as "illegal immigrants", then immigration becomes problematic for both immigrants and established citizens. Trina acknowledges her current belief in the heterogeneity of immigrants in the US; however, she also continues to support hierarchical structures which privilege immigrants who explicitly convey their worth as productive citizens – professionals.

As evidenced in her substitution of "those people" for "illegal immigrants" (Line 8), Trina engaged in "white talk" – talk that helps white people refrain from investigating their participatory roles in racist attitudes and actions (McIntyre, 1997, p. 46) – on more than one occasion. In her response journals and during our interview, I found additional evidence of Trina's "white talk," such as her use of overgeneralisations (*everyone, always, all*), nominative plurals without reference (*they, them*), ample use of "interesting" (for example, *That's interesting~*) to imply agreement, avoid further introspection, and deflect dialogic opportunities, and the infrequent use of the term "immigrant". However, Trina's adoption of white talk discourse is not necessarily indicative of her complete resistance to engaging with her opinions and beliefs about immigration. Trina's use of "you know" in the excerpt above (Table 3) illuminates the multiple ways in which one term can not only connote "white talk" but also indicate an individual's vacillations between entering and leaving dialogic spaces.

The phrase "you know" is a common phrase used in oral discourse to indicate assumed solidarity or at least shared understanding between two speakers. Trina's initial use of a question mark after "ya know" (Line 1) indicates both her conviction of the statement and her desire for my agreement. In oral discourse, people often end strong assertions with "ya know?" to evoke a less commanding tone and invite affirmation from their audience. In this instance, Trina seems to be ensuring that both she and I (as an assumed audience member based on her note) understand and support her new thoughts. The two "you knows" that follow in lines 2 and 5 can also be interpreted as "hesitancy markers" or "place keepers" as Trina negotiated her thoughts about immigration. Her development of more serious commentaries about immigrants can also be represented by her shift from the less formal "ya know" to the more formal "you know" as her narrative progresses. Her final "you know, followed by "those people" (Line 8) without subsequent details, is another example of white talk, using "you know" as a specific linguistic buffer. Such buffers are used by people who wish to insulate themselves from examining their individual and collective roles in perpetuating prejudice (Rogers & Moseley, 2006, p. 46). By substituting one's actual thoughts with a suggestion of shared knowledge (*you know*), individuals do not need to reify their prejudices through language. Thus, they opt out of engaging with the "wobble" (Fecho, Graham & Hudson-Ross, 2005). Trina's linguistic choices reflect much of her conservative ideology, which she shared at the beginning of the semester. However, her awareness of the different immigrant groups, even if the groups are dichotomous, show ideological movement. Her self-adopted position as "defender" in class also illuminates the significance of Trina's dabbling in dialogue.

Status quo images of current immigrants' circumstances in the US were also shared in many teachers' narratives. The narratives, while attesting to teachers' understanding about the diverse contexts, people and practices involved in immigration, revealed the internalisation of society's racialised identification of Mexican immigrants as impoverished people living in the US "illegally". As previously stated, the core

literature read by the entire class and the suggested titles for independent reading encompassed a variety of individuals representing various religions, ethnic affiliations, geographical settings and socioeconomic stratifications. These books also included the myriad reasons for immigrating. Given the prominence of the *Mexican immigrants are illegal immigrants* narrative in the US, I wanted to offer counter-narratives to generate dialogue about possible societal Discourses of Mexicans as illegal immigrants. I intentionally included Marina Budhos' (2006) *Ask Me No Questions* as a class novel, in part because it addressed "illegal immigration" through the experiences of a Bangladeshi family who had intentionally overstayed their tourist visa. I also included literature such as the bilingual picture book *My Diary from Here to There* (Perez, 2002) in a class activity to showcase a "legal" immigrant family from Mexico. However, when most of the teachers spoke of illegal immigrants in their responses and during our interviews, Mexicans were their exemplars. Their examples were surprising given the discussions of representations in class. However, such examples might attest to the power of dominant narratives when specific spaces to discuss and negotiate those narratives are not consistently available.

Their depictions of Mexican immigrants as illegal immigrants could also reflect the reality of undocumented immigrants in the US. According to the Passell (2004), Mexicans comprise the largest demographic of undocumented immigrants in the US (57 percent). Similarly, Georgia has a significant number of immigrants arriving from Mexico, regardless of status. Thus, teachers' ascription of immigrants from Mexico as undocumented or "illegal" is understandable. However, the teachers' categorical identifications of Mexicans as "illegal" in their shared oral and written narratives potentially reflect the internalisation of US ideologies associated with Mexican immigrants. Further fueling the ideological fire, the former US "catch and release" policy of undocumented immigrants (which was disbanded in 2006) included only two categories: Mexicans and Other Than Mexicans (OTMs). If caught, Mexicans were deported. OTM immigrants, if caught, were released on their own recognisance (Carter & Stockstill, 2005). Despite the overwhelming prejudice towards Mexicans in the US, Daphne's interview excerpt (Table 4) provides a glimpse of ideological change as she supplements her discussion of how varied immigrants' experiences can be (Table 4) with an example of one type of variety.

Daphne: Interview excerpt	
Line 1	...there is just not one experience.
Line 2	For example, some people move here because their parents got a new job
Line 3	And they left affluent Spain to go to affluent Atlanta.
Line 4	Some people rode in the engine of a truck from Mexico (laugh).
Line 5	I mean like there's just no one experience.

Table 4. Migration comparison

Like Trina, Daphne creates a hierarchical categorisation of immigrants. Both she and Trina also use employment as their criterion and position employed or professional immigrants as people of affluence. These socially stratified positions of immigrants counter prevailing narratives of immigrants in the US as economically impoverished individuals seeking a better life needing assistance. Daphne's focus on Spanish-

speaking immigrants offers even more criteria to the hierarchies of immigrants and the privileges and limitations afforded to these hierarchical constructions. For Daphne, affluent immigrants from Europe who speak Spanish are employed and simply move to the US without difficulty (*they left . . . to go to*; Line 3), retaining their socioeconomic status. Conversely, people arrive from Mexico to an undetermined destination (Line 4) and their mode of transportation is not only life-threatening (riding in the engine of a truck; Line 4) but also illegal.

When conveying these hierarchies, Daphne might be engaging in a bit of inner dialogue. Informed by Amanda Godley's (2006) work with laughter as a discursive method of individuals' establishment of borders and my awareness of Daphne's discourse pattern of laughing whenever she entertained different perspectives, I interpret Daphne's laughter (Line 4) as representational of her first steps toward "border crossing". Through laughter, as a representation of her unsettling feelings as a result of her utterance, Daphne is signalling her possible entrance into a dialogic space to better understand the possible bias present in her unwitting comparison between Spain and Mexico. Daphne begins crossing an ideological border pertaining to her beliefs about immigrants, but then quickly stops, repeating her initial statement of immigrants' varied experiences to signal communicative closure. While Daphne does not explicitly identify with her "border crossing", her discourse – laughter – does.

NEGOTIATING DISCOURSES AND SEEKING JUSTICE

Individuals participating in identity-building and ideological constructions are often entangled in powerful, linguistic tug-of-wars between their selves and society. Social, political, and economic factors frame these struggles and language becomes not only a participant but also a referee. Understandably so, language became one of the primary foci of the class and we interrogated the language used in multicultural literature, other social texts such as the local or national news, video clips, and their own discussions in critical ways. As we unpacked the ideologies believed to be conveyed through language, the teachers became more and more determined to negotiate the social use of terms such as "immigrant", "undocumented" and "illegal", and how to construct and offer counter-terminology or counter-definitions in ways which facilitated dialogue and helped them engage in social justice-oriented practice. Critical literacy activities were integral to this process, as many teachers stated they had never participated in critical literacy activities or discussions prior to the class. The following two examples illustrate two distinct approaches teachers used to negotiate discourse and seek out social justice.

Negotiating discourses: Assimilation

Theories of assimilation became an important component of the course as many teachers questioned historical approaches to assimilation as a binary construct (success or fail). They negotiated what assimilation entailed, what were the expectations and consequences, who were expected to participate and who were overlooked, among other aspects. Paul was one of the most vocal participants in our discussions about assimilation. Paul attributed parts of his dialogic venture of unpacking and critiquing assimilation to theoretical constructs such as hybridity theory (Bhaba, 1994; Kraidy, 2005), and Portes and Zhou's (1993) theories of

segmented assimilation. Paul was also influenced by his self-selected literature such as Don Gallo's (2004) edited book, *First Crossing: Stories about Teen Immigrants*, and An Na's (2001) contemporary novel, *A Step from Heaven*, both of which portray gritty portraits of immigration for some youth. Paul wrote the following questions in his response journal (see Table 5) and brought his questions to the larger class for further discussion.

Paul: Response journal entry and class inquiry	
Line 1	I am now questioning the concept of immigrants finding “their place” in a new society.
Line 2	What constitutes a success story?
Line 3	Is it the immigrant who becomes completely assimilated – American if you will, whatever that means these days.
Line 4	The immigrant who holds onto their “otherness”
Line 5	what others consider to be “other” –
Line 6	and then be thinned out – skinned if you will?
Line 7	Or somewhere in-between?
Line 8	More importantly, who decides this?

Table 5. Interrogating immigrant success stories

In his interview, Paul stated that his questions had yet to be answered to his satisfaction, in part because he wasn't sure if they could be answered succinctly, although he continued to try. Through these questions, Paul confronts the ideologies of assimilation which assure immigrants that those who assimilate will become successful (Lines 1-2). From an assimilationist's perspective, blending in with the dominant culture by relinquishing your cultural identities, or participating in “ethnic flight”, is a panacea for struggling immigrants. Definitions of successful assimilation, often controlled by the spectator (dominant society) and not by the object of the gaze (immigrant) is predicated on a cultural term which is dynamic and often difficult to define (*American* ~; Lines 3-4). The volatility of “American” often results in cultural misunderstandings and frustration if one fails the “immigrant litmus test” to be an “American” (Line 8). Are “Americans” monolingual (English) speakers? Are they homeowners? Do they love “American football”? Are they heterosexual? Are they practising Christians, Muslims or Jews? Are “Americans” “middle class”? And how many “American” characteristics does one need to adopt? The cultural indices of “American” are endless and ever changing (Lines 4-5) and anyone subject to such indices are incognisant of who makes the changes and when (Line 8). For Paul, the haphazard decision-making processes which can negatively affect immigrants is perhaps more alarming than the process of assimilation (Line 8).

Paul's metaphor of assimilation as the “skinning” of the self (Line 6) by another evokes an aura of violence, which could mirror the psychosocial difficulties immigrants often experience as they begin to acculturate in their new communities (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Immigrants, especially asylum-seekers and refugees, often experience post-traumatic stress disorder which significantly contributes to the stressors of immigration. Thus, the “skinning” of one's identity evokes both cultural and psychological pain for immigrants and calls into

consideration the social injustices associated with a unilateral path toward assimilation. Paul seemed to be negotiating the (in)equity of assimilation processes and challenging the status quo acceptance of becoming “American” as a desirable goal. Paul carried his inquiries with him to his other classes, where he anticipated seeking out the opinions of his peers. However, during his interview he shared that he rarely felt comfortable enough to actualise his intent.

Generative dialogue for social justice

The female teachers interrogated the discourses and Discourses of immigration in a different way: they attempted to participate in generative dialogue through discomfort. Eight of the eleven teachers shared that they often contacted their male significant others (partners, boyfriends and husbands), fathers and female roommates after class to confer about the topics discussed and opinions shared. It was during those conversations that the centripetal and centrifugal forces began to spin for each person. Tensions surrounding bilingual education, social services, immigration laws, immigrants as cultural and linguistic brokers, among other concepts, fostered the need to engage in “risky” conversations, a dialogic wobble if you will. These intentional conversations enabled the teachers to extend their communicative circle to include family members or loved ones, who often offer the toughest resistance to those who express changing/changed ideologies while still providing love and support. Stella “tested the waters with the one person I trust”; Trina attempted to clarify “why I think the way I do because usually the way I think is the way my daddy thinks”; Daphne wanted to “stir up trouble by presenting a new side of me”; and Caitlin simply wanted to “educate my father and prove to him I’m getting an education here”. Amidst coordinates of passion for and uncertainty about the issues and rhetoric surrounding immigration, the teachers represented agents of change. They began analysing existing actions and effects and sought to extend their analyses and pedagogical knowledge to others in an attempt to not only find communicative and supportive partners of their ideological transformations, but also to participate in social change. Unfortunately, as indicated at the beginning of this article, they often found their larger social circles less inviting than their former classroom community.

The teachers’ desire for extended and sustained dialogues about immigration and additional opportunities to read multicultural literature accentuate how text and talk offer mediums through and with which one can notice and negotiate the societal infrastructures that construct hegemonic and prejudicial Discourses (Janks, 2001; Rogers & Mosley, 2006, p. 467). The multicultural literature read and discussed, as well as the scholarly readings and subsequent discussions and activities with those texts, generated teachers’ resolute dedication to understanding the policies and practices of immigration. Their dedication and sustained dialogue through language and action was evidenced in the teachers’ inclusion of high-quality multicultural literature about immigration and for immigrants in classroom and school libraries, the creation of school-wide surveys to assess and follow up on students’ and teachers’ understanding of immigrant issues. Surveys were also developed to better determine incidences of bullying, identify feelings of exclusion, and help create more welcoming schools. Teachers also indicated they provided professional development to other colleagues and created after-school clubs that offered students space for intrapersonal and community interactions. This is not to say that teachers wished to marginalise students who identified or were identified as immigrants by hyper-

attentiveness. They only hoped to engage in pedagogical practices which had been, to some extent, transformative to them and had the potential to be transformative for others who are often invisible or stigmatised in mainstream society.

CONTINUED CONVERSATIONS

Representing the teachers who helped me understand their identity constructions of themselves and of immigrants, Sophia, Stella, Daphne, Trina, Paul and Kaitlin, exemplified how learning is “changing patterns of participation in specific social practices” (Gee, 2004, p. 38). Throughout the seminar, they actively negotiated the constructions of immigrants in both literary and scholarly texts, juxtaposed those constructions next to societal discourses and Discourses as portrayed through media and their own languages, and acknowledged resisted acknowledging the heteroglossia of voices which helped inform their constructions. Through participatory activities and discussions, the teachers talked to, with and back to themselves, each other, the literature and society. Their identities, which included informed educator, conservative spokesperson, supportive citizen, and passionate crusader for social justice, testified to the power of story, language as social practice, and transformative practice.

The power of story

Story moves through the world in a living network....stories and people co-create. Stories and people co-evolve. (Baldwin, 2005, p. 224)

Stories were intellectual and emotional fuel during and after the seminar and helped both the teachers and I co-create and co-evolve as more informed and often more compassionate citizens and educators. Multicultural literature involving immigrant characters and their experiences played a large role in these developments as it contributed to the disruption of ideological beliefs about the world and offered different platforms from which new beliefs could be constructed. With and through stories, the teachers transitioned from considering immigration to be a homogenous entity to be studied in school and on the news to understanding immigration as an often tumultuous process involving diverse people whose identities are often constructed for them by the dominant culture. These constructions are based on immigrants’ socioeconomic status, their preferred language, their ethnicity and community affiliations, as well as their home countries’ political relationships with the US. Some of these constructions are beneficial and some are detrimental. Multicultural literature also began “putting a human face on such a politicised and polarising topic” (Daphne, interview). Many teachers were emotionally affected by the stories written by and about immigrants. At times, their emotional connections “blinded them” from critical thought (Claire, class comment), and at other times the emotional connections contributed to their co-constructions and co-evolutions. Teachers’ personal stories shared through discussions of the literature and during their interviews, the social stories which they brought in to begin our weekly classes, and the community stories disseminated through the teachers’ inquiry projects, local actions, and personal requests for continued conversations were also powerful.

All of these narratives showed the power of story as an “imaginative vehicle for questioning, shaping, responding, and participating in the world” for “personal and

social exploration and reflection” (McGinley et al., 1997, p. 43). They provided opportunities for dialogic conversations and subsequent reflective inquiries about the ideological frameworks within which people function. Some teachers, such as Paul, also wanted to create stories of change. They brought and read aloud literature to their students, practised critical literacy activities, which addressed power, perspective and positioning, and shared their inquiries, as stories, with their students. While some teachers preferred stories which maintained the status quo, all of their oral and written responses speak to the effect texts have on people’s attitudes and behaviours. These effects can then affect people’s social relations and the material world (Fairclough, 2004, p. 229; Janks, 2001; 2005).

Language as social practice

Our personal lives are determined by how we create our experiences through story. What we choose to share and emphasise affects our social relations and identities and helps determine what we consider possible (Baldwin, 2005, pp. xii-xiii). Our discourses, as stories, dictate our Discourses, our social identities. Yet these discourses/Discourses are not completely ours; they are shared and influenced by others. Our social speech genres (Bakhtin, 1986) become our “ways of being and doing,” and sometimes these are risky. In this study, the teachers showed me how they readily engaged in ideological makeovers with regard to immigration. All teachers attempted to “wear” new identities through their changed discourses and Discourses. They practised individually through their self-selected reading choices and personal responses and then socially with me and their classmates. They tried on different ideological outfits to match or transform their personalities and continued to fashion new ideas. Ultimately they grappled with the form, fit and function of language. For those who felt confident, they ventured into larger social circles outfitted in these new ideological constructs. They experimented with when and how to harness and transform language in order to help facets of society which they felt were unjust. Others are waiting a bit longer. Regardless of the outcomes, these experiences were of benefit to those who wished to engage in dialogical conversations and interactions. Many teachers’ desired to seek out additional safe spaces for dialogical communities, to continue reading multicultural literature involving immigrant characters, and their attentiveness to the constructs configured by different social groups demonstrated the power of language as social practice in this situation.

Transformative practice

We all carry worlds in our heads, and those worlds are decidedly different. We educators set out to teach, but how can we reach the worlds of others when we don’t even know they exist? (Delpit, 1995, p. xiv)

My experiences with these teachers in the graduate seminar and our subsequent conversations have led me to understand how literature and dialogic spaces help us not only to understanding the worlds in our students’ minds but also the worlds in our minds. Interacting in dialogic spaces with multicultural literature and personal stories as catalysts and scaffolds can provide us with glimpses into different worlds, especially those involving immigrant populations. Yet, as evidenced by Fecho and colleagues (2010), entering and remaining in dialogic spheres can be quite difficult. When we seek to communicate in genuine dialogue, we run the risk of naming

structures and mechanisms, within which we reside, that harm others or perpetuate oppressive policies. However, faith and trust are imperative. We must identify those structures and mechanisms before we can engage in dialogue and move toward transformative pedagogy. Only then will counter-narratives become narratives with an open-ended invitation for future narratives which reflect the societal transformations inherent in life.

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