

**“QUALIFYING” AS TEACHER:
IMMIGRANT TEACHER CANDIDATES’ COUNTER-STORIES**

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Teachers in Canadian schools are over-representative of the dominant group: white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied, Christian and Canadian born (Bascia, 1996). Yet, Canada is a multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-faith and multi-linguistic country. In the last 5-7 years faculties of education have been accepting increasing numbers of immigrant teacher candidates (Association of Universities and Colleges Canada, 2007) with little attention to the issues and challenges those candidates confront in the face of community expectations of who 'qualifies' as teacher. The experiences and perspectives of what it means to be a teacher are stories that are predominantly told by the dominant group. Drawing on the work of Solórzano and Yosso (2002) I use narratives and stories told by those who have been “othered” or “counter-storytelling” to bring complexity and richness to the prevailing concept of who can be a teacher. This research builds on Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of cultural capital and draws from Yosso’s (2005) model of “community cultural wealth” to explore the specific tension of linguistic capital in relation to immigrant teacher candidates. Findings from a qualitative study explore the challenges immigrant teacher candidates experience as they move through a pre-service teacher education program.

In the landscape of Canadian teachers, there exists an image of a prototypical teacher. Particularly at the elementary level *she* is: white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied, Christian and Canadian-born (Bascia, 1996). Causey, Thomas, & Armento (2000) and Ladson-Billings (2005) among others have found that in North American schools the norm is a white, middle-class homogenous representation amongst teaching staff. In the last 5-7 years faculties of education have been accepting increasing numbers of immigrant teacher candidates (Association of Universities and Colleges Canada, 2007) many of whom disrupt the image of the prototypical teacher. The Ontario College of Teachers (2008) reports certifying “record numbers” of

internationally educated teachers in recent years; yet, only 7 percent of so-called “new-Canadian” teachers found regular teaching jobs in Ontario publically funded schools in 2007 compared with 29 percent of graduates overall (OCT, 2008).

Situating the Research

My research explores a growing yet under-researched area: the experiences of teacher candidates who are marked or self-identify as “immigrant”. The challenges for immigrant teacher candidates (ITCs) occur at three crucial junctures: first, securing entrance into competitive Bachelor of Education programs; second, experiences of discrimination in the university and practicum placements; and, third, obtaining employment post-graduation. Firstly, immigrants encounter numerous barriers and gate-keeping practices that limit their access and therefore entrance into Bachelor of Education programs. They may also have been practicing teachers in their home country prior to immigration, which garnered them enough points to enter Canada; however, they are now required to by their provincial college of teachers to recertify or upgrade. Secondly, and this is where my research is situated, immigrants who are able to gain entrance into a B.Ed. program encounter additional barriers and confront racism on multiple levels in both the university and school board settings. Thirdly, as Mawhinney and Xu (1997) found, many foreign-trained teachers are unable to navigate the barriers to their certification and end up in jobs for which they are overqualified and overeducated. It is also of significance that immigrants who are able to gain entrance into a B.Ed. program, navigate the program and graduate are disproportionately over represented (48%) in the occasional/supply teacher workforce as opposed to their Anglo-Canadian counterparts (Ontario College of Teachers, 2005).

The myth of meritocracy suggests that having the right credentials and qualifications will ensure success, be it academic or employment related. However, there are a variety of non-merit factors (such as age, religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, nationhood, education, ability and class) that complicate ITCs’ success in their teacher education programs. Despite growing diversity among student, and more recently, teacher candidate populations, teacher education programs continue to privilege certain types of knowledge and ways of knowing (Myles, Cheng & Wang, 2006; Putnam & Borko, 2000). The experiences and perspectives of what it means to be a teacher are stories that are predominantly told by the prototypical teacher. My research is specifically concerned with immigrants who are in the process of becoming teachers in an Ontario Bachelor of Education program. In the context of this study I am interested in the narratives of ITCs who have been historically marginalized and “othered” by the dominant group in Canada and who are challenged by assimilation expectations. Historically, the ability to assimilate was a key selection criterion for immigrants in Canada (Joshee, 2004). The Canada Immigration Act (1906) and the subsequent Act of 1910, in combination with other policies, practices, and amendments restricted immigrants for a variety of reasons: some races were deemed unsuitable for the Canadian climate, some people were excluded on the basis of having a particular socio-economic status, some occupations were deemed unneeded, and some applicants’ characters and moral fortitudes were questioned (Canada, 1906). Presently, faculties of education are accepting ITCs who previously had limited access to Canada’s border. For example, teacher candidates from Asia, Africa and the Carribean who bring ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious diversity to the dominant or charter groups in Canada, i.e., the English and French, are increasingly common (see James, 2005).

Review of the Relevant Literature

My research primarily explores the non-merit factors that complicate ITCs’ success in their teacher education programs. As Britzman (1986) contends, the process of “becoming teacher” involves many facets of cultural reproduction commensurate with the socializing of teacher candidates into the profession. Britzman suggests teacher candidates come equipped to faculties of education and practicum schools with valued cultural capital and tools for navigating the education system. This may be true for the prototypical teacher candidate; however, ITCs may not have cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) that is valued by the school system. My work situates itself in the space of the unexamined as I consider the taken-for-granted, unquestioned and unexamined capital that ITCs bring to Canadian schools and faculties of education. In this section I will situate my research in relation to the concepts of cultural capital, cultural wealth and linguisticism.

Cultural Capital and Cultural Wealth: Currency of the Immigrant Teacher Candidate

For the purposes of this paper, there are two contentious and related issues that I examine: the cultural capital that is and is not valued by schools and the ways in which the linguistic capital of ITCs is contested in schools. In this next section I will expand upon my use of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) and explore Yosso’s (2005) model of community cultural wealth.

Bourdieu (1977) argues that schools choose to use, and, therefore, to value, certain kinds of language and materials, which reflect the values, tastes and interests of the dominant group. Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of cultural capital is a way of conceptualizing the value of cultural resources. Immigrant teacher candidates in faculties of education bring cultural resources in the form of competencies, skills, attitudes, divergent knowledge, and alternative ways of thinking

and knowing. When “diverse” ways of knowing are seen as a resource, as opposed to a deficit, they can be conceptualized as “diversity capital” in that it offers the dominant group the opportunity to see things “otherwise”; potentially, what *might* be. Too often “diversity” is not viewed as “capital”; rather, “diversity” is viewed as an impediment to the socialization of Canadian students into Canadian society. Benyon, Ilieva, and Dichupa (2004) critically examine there-certification of immigrant teachers in British Columbia. Of key importance was their finding that

The BCCT [British Columbia College of Teachers] operates as a gatekeeper, authorized to insure that teaching positions in mainstream schools are filled by individuals who will transmit the cultural capital of the dominant society. The regulations constructed to accomplish this work render valueless the social and cultural capital of teachers from other jurisdictions. In addition, these regulations close off opportunities for bringing diverse cultural resources to students in British Columbia public schools; they thus impose the very opposite of Canada’s claimed status as an inclusive, multicultural nation. (p. 442)

Benyon, Ilieva, and Dichupa’s (2004) finding draws attention to the ways in which the prototypical teacher is able to maintain a stronghold on the profession. While the intent of multiculturalism may have its roots in transformative educational practices, the discourse of multicultural education is constrained by numerous institutional structures such as the hidden curriculum (Anyon, 1980) and hegemonic practices that reinforce white privilege (Roman, 1993). Yosso posits that Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of cultural capital has been used to show that white, middle class culture is the standard against which all other communities are measured and therefore those that do not “measure up” are defined as deficient in some manner. To question and counter deficit model thinking Yosso utilizes critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) to assert that communities of colour are rich in an array of cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities and outlines six forms of cultural capital, all of which contribute to community cultural wealth. I draw from Yosso’s concept of community cultural wealth and apply it to my work with

ITCs. Yosso’s concept includes: *aspiration capital* or the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, despite obstacles; *familial capital* or the knowledges nurtured among family that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition; *social capital* or the networks of people and community resources that may assist people of colour obtain an education, access to resources such as health care, employment, and legal assistance; *navigational capital* or the skills of maneuvering through social institutions; *resistant capital* or the knowledges and skills obtained through oppositional behaviours that challenge inequities; and, *linguistic capital* or the intellectual and social skills attained through experiences in more than one language. Rather than looking at the cultural capital ITCs do not have, the concept of community cultural wealth draws on the dynamic processes and the advantages ITCs bring to universities and schools. Community cultural wealth must also be examined critically to explore its limitations and the ways in which it might be used to reinforce negative stereotypical ideas about immigrants, such as suggesting that “good” or “desirable” immigrants are those who can persevere and “make it” in Canadian society because they have access to resources or are well-connected. For the purposes of this paper I focus on Yosso’s definition of linguistic capital: the intellectual and social skills attained through experiences in more than one language. Linguistic capital, however, is not always perceived as an asset for ITCs particularly when ITCs speak English with a non-Anglo Canadian accent. Linguistic capital will be explored in greater detail as the accents of some ITCs, particularly those who are visible minorities, are constantly questioned and it is a particularly contentious issue in the research on IETs.

Linguistic Capital: Accent and Linguicism

Research by Solomon and Levine-Rasky (2003) examines the implicit measures of educational inequity toward immigrants in Canada, exploring additional gate-keeping methods that are often utilized in practicum schools. Accents are a recurring issue (Mawhinney & Fengying, 1997; Myles, Cheng, & Wang, 2006). By accent, I am referring to the phonology of language and draw from Lippi-Green’s (1997) definition which considers both the prosodic features of language (intonation and patterns of pitch levels as well as tempo of speaking) and the segmental features (the sounds of language: vowels and consonants). Specifically, Lippi-Green states “[accents] are loose bundles of prosodic and segmental features distributed over geographic and/or social space” (p. 42). Lippi-Green distinguishes between the accents of first language (L1) and second language (L2). L1 accent is refers to the structural variations of language and posits that every native speaker of English, for example, has an L1 accent, regardless of how ‘unmarked’ the language may seem to be (Lippi-Green, 1997). L2 accent is defined as follows:

When a native speaker of a language other than English acquires English, accent is used to refer to the breakthrough of native language phonology into the target language. Thus we might say that an individual has a Welsh accent, or a Tagalog accent, because the phonologies of those languages influence the learner’s pronunciation of US English, and this is accomplished with differing degrees of success. (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 43)

This definition of accent is useful in that it serves to trouble the myth of non-accent. To suggest that those born in Canada, for example, do not speak with an accent is to misunderstand variations of language with respect to pronunciation, regional dialects, and socio-economic status. Lippi-Green refers to US English, but for the purposes of this study, I am referring to an Anglo-Canadian or non-Anglo Canadian accent. ITCs who speak English with a non-Anglo Canadian accent encounter numerous obstacles both in school placements and in the university

as members of the dominant language group use their power to restrict access to learning opportunities and experiences. As Pollock (2006) reports,

Tests such as the TOFEL test for language proficiency do not test for occupation-specific language and the subtle nuances of word meanings, leaving many IETs unaware of the present ‘politically correct’ discourse. This can lead to a number of negative outcomes such as being perceived as not suitable to teach and not called back for supply work or hired for any type of permanent teaching position. In addition, the accents some IETs have can also carry a negative value. (p.3)

The questioning of accents is evidence of what Skutnabb-Kangas (1988) terms linguicism. In one form, linguicism exists among and between speakers of a language when one dialect is privileged as standard. As Sethi (1998) contends, discrimination based on accent is a severe and pervasive form of racism that is often unacknowledged. As Richardson, McBey & McKenna (2006) note in their study of international faculty in Canadian universities, difficulties in communication may have detrimental repercussions with respect to evaluations and perceived competency. As Myles, Cheng & Wang (2006) argue, non-Anglo accents add fuel to a fire that is already questioning the legitimacy of immigrant teacher candidates.

Methodology

In 2006 I conducted a study at a small Ontario university with five ITCs. Methodologically, this critical ethnography (Carspecken, 1996; Simon & Dippo, 1986) explores (i) the issues and challenges ITCs confront as they move through a pre-service teacher education program, and (ii) the knowledge ITCs bring to a program of education and to their work in schools. In particular, my work exposes discriminatory practices and points of view concerning ITCs and explores the inherent contradictory tensions of the school system.

Participants

The participants¹ were completing a one year consecutive teacher education programme and certifying in either the primary/junior divisions or intermediate/senior divisions. All five participants completed all of their elementary, secondary and post-secondary education outside of Canada and self-identify as immigrants. The participants came to Canada from the following countries: India, Egypt, China and Syria. Three of the five participants were experienced and practicing teachers in their country of origin prior to immigration. Three of the five participants held advanced university degrees (i.e., Master’s Degrees). Participants were invited to share their stories of becoming a teacher and how they infused their cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) into the Ontario curriculum.

Data Collection

Critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) posits that personal narratives and stories are crucial for challenging the dominant voice in our society. Whose stories of teaching are privileged and whose stories are silenced? Drawing on the work of Solórzano and Yosso (2002) I use “counter-storytelling” as a method of data collection in order to bring forth the telling of stories by those on the margins of faculties of education. Counter stories bring complexity and richness to the prevailing concept of who can be a teacher and are transformative in nature as they have the potential to disrupt common understandings of what the journey to becoming a teacher might involve. Transformative teacher education should go beyond the admittance of under- represented cultural groups and challenge the structure of schools and society itself, to ensure at a primary level that all teachers can engage in the complex work necessary for systemic change. One of the central tenets of critical race theory (CRT) is the

¹ All names used are pseudonyms.

“recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color” (Matsuda et al., 1993, p. 6), the voices of those who have been historically silenced serve to challenge the status quo and offer ways to explore and examine discriminatory practices in education. As Dixson and Rousseau (2005) summarize, “CRT scholars believe and utilize personal narratives and stories as valid forms of ‘evidence’ and thereby challenge a ‘numbers only’ approach to documenting inequity and discrimination” (p. 11). I contend the narratives of immigrant teacher candidates are being silenced. Their stories trouble the myth of meritocracy in education and challenge privileged ways of knowing. As such, I pose the following questions: 1. How do immigrant teacher candidates negotiate prevalent prototypical images of the “Canadian” teacher? 2. What knowledges can immigrant teacher candidates offer Canadian-born teacher candidates and Canadian faculties of education? 3. How can faculties of education maximize the diverse experiences of their teacher candidates?

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed inductively, using techniques described by Bogdan and Biklen (1998). Concepts and categories were identified, allowing the analysis to develop from observation to the identification of general patterns. Focus group transcripts, individual interviews and the analysis of personal narratives and emails allowed for data triangulation. In addition, participants were involved in member checking to validate the data. In order to understand how ITCs think about the challenges they confront and success they experience as they move through the pre-service teacher education programs and explore the knowledge ITCs bring to programs of education and to their work in schools, I believe it is necessary to examine their thoughts in addition to their narratives about the process. The qualitative approach allowed

me “to understand behaviour from the subject’s own frame of reference” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 2). I intended to gain a better understanding of my participants and to understand their unique perspective from their narratives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This work begins a dialogue about the discourses and practices that position the immigrant teacher candidate as a deficient and as a “site of conflict” (Britzman, 2003). The participants’ counter stories took many forms: focus group responses, narrative works, visual art, email correspondences and recorded interviews.

Findings and Discussion

My research participants share many successes and they also share the numerous ways in which they are “othered” in the university and in the classroom settings. Their counter-stories reveal the complexities through which they must navigate. Some participants are “othered” by their accent. Participants without a so-called “accent” are “othered” by their skin colour. Some are “othered” for wearing religious dress and some use religion to mobilize their diversity capital. The specifics of race, religion, class, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, ability and nationhood cannot and should not be examined in isolation. In order to understand oppression and discrimination we must also explore the ways in which these factors intersect and how they affect those who are trying to fit in to a resistant country and community. The counter-stories I have chosen reveal the subtle and overt ways in which ITCs’ legitimacy is both questioned and asserted. I have selected two themes from the data for discussion in this paper: “becoming” a “Canadian” teacher through infusing cultural wealth, and linguistic tensions.

“Becoming” a “Canadian” Teacher: Infusing Cultural Wealth

Participants expressed a deep desire to learn “Canadian” teaching practices in order to secure a job upon graduation. One participant indicated she just needed to know the songs and rhymes, then, she reasoned, she would be successful as she would have a better understanding of the culture of the dominant group. Assimilation and enculturation was valued by the participants, as opposed to examining what they had to offer and ways in which a transfer of knowledge could occur which concurs with the findings of Benyon et al. (2004): teacher candidates want to ensure they can transmit the “Canadian” culture effectively in order to secure employment after graduation. The ITCs expressed concern over the differences between teaching in Canada and their experiences of teaching and learning in their home countries. Tensions arose between the ITCs’ implicit beliefs and their desire to modify their teaching practices to be more compatible with their own beliefs about good teaching (see Olson, 1981). They all spoke about many unknowns: knowledge of songs, stories and rhymes particular to Canadian culture, differences in classroom conceptions of learning and teaching, and fears regarding student-teacher relationships. In their desire to be deemed “legitimate” teachers, the ITCs were attributing their feelings of alienation to a deficit on their part: knowledge of overt and explicit aspects of the curriculum. In their aspiration to assimilate ITCs negated their own cultural capital and cultural wealth. When a participant was specifically asked if the opportunity to share her unique experiences with the class had ever arisen, tears welled up in her eyes and she simply shook her head “no”.

Through the course of the research, many participants began to find creative ways of sharing their diverse knowledge and experiences with their practicum students, perhaps as a result of our interviews and focus group conversations and also as a result of coursework.

Explicitly infusing their cultural wealth into their teaching became a way of proactively addressing potential concerns and pre-empting negative comments and low teaching evaluations. The participants’ attempts to address intolerance in proactive ways may also have been the result of an experience shared by this participant:

I am a new Canadian, in a way (I've been in Canada for 8 years) . . . English is technically my second language, too. I was a bit shocked on my first placement... and I was the only Chinese person in the whole school. There were two girls with my last name, but they weren't Chinese at all (I asked). And the rest of the school had maybe 4 more students who were from ethnic minorities. My whole class was Caucasian, and they got a bit excited to hear me say that I was Chinese (although it was quite obvious). One of the students tapped me on the shoulder once and started singing, "Me Chinese...", wearing a paper coned hat on his head. I don't think he realized that it could've been interpreted as offensive by other people. I didn't really feel offended, but I did make a mental note to try to incorporate some multiculturalism into my lessons (never really got a chance to, though). I didn't really know if I should say anything, so I just smiled and continued what I was doing. [Suxie, *email correspondence*]

Suxie’s experience reveals the overt and subtle examples of racism she encountered. In a school environment reflective of the dominant group and void of much ethnic and racial diversity, students mocked Suxie with stereotypical interpretations and understandings of being Chinese. Suxie did not take offense to the student’s overt racist expression which may have given the message that such expressions are acceptable. Certainly, the associate teacher did not intervene nor was the student reprimanded nor were his actions discussed. Rather, Suxie sees this as a “teachable” moment and yet the onus is on her to do the educating. Suxie’s desire to infuse ‘multiculturalism’ into her lessons and the lack of opportunity to actually do so fuelled many of the participants to begin exploring innovative ways to introduce themselves to their students, utilizing their cultural wealth.

Many participants spontaneously and independently came up with creative strategies to address intolerance: powerpoint presentations that shared their immigration journeys, locating

multicultural resources and teaching materials, and creating paintings and visual representations of their experiences. Leila used her cultural wealth to teach a poignant lesson on stereotyping and bias. She began the lesson by standing in front of the class wearing her *abaya*², something she only did during prayer in the month of Ramadan. Typically, Leila wears western dress. She asked the students “what do you think when you see a woman dressed like this?” The students declared such a woman was “poor”, “uneducated”, “sad” and “cold”. One student wrote, “She lives as a slave to a big leader. She is really poor. She is probably very old. She has lots of kids. Afraid of predators. She is very sad also mad.” Leila removed her *hijab* and announced to the class that was in fact Muslim. She asked the class if they considered her poor, unhappy, or uneducated, to which she received a resounding “No!” Leila utilized her cultural wealth to create a transformative learning opportunity for her students and provided a space in which preconceived assumptions could be examined. She used her diversity as an asset in the classroom to explore issues of racism, stereotyping and prejudice. The response to this participant by both the students in her practicum and her associate teacher was very positive. The same cannot be said for other participants’ proactive strategies. Manisha, for example, created a power point presentation to show at the start of her placements, geographically locating her homeland for students, sharing various customs and discussing the multiple languages she speaks. The presentation was created in the hopes of pre-empting racist and intolerant comments that she had encountered during previous placements. However, her attempt to be proactive was thwarted by an intolerant associate teacher who laughed inappropriately during the presentation revealing a subtle and rigid desire to maintain the status quo in the classroom and sending a message of intolerance to the students.

² An *Abaya* is a garment worn in Arabic countries and consists of a *hijab* and *jilbab*. Traditionally black in colour it covers all of the woman except for her face, feet and hands.

Linguistic Tensions

While some participants found jobs in the major urban centers after graduation as occasional teachers, echoing the findings of the Ontario College of Teachers (2005), some, like Suxie chose to seek employment outside of Canada. As one participant reflects about Suxie’s decision to take a teaching contract in Mongolia:

The reason is she did not have the confidence to stay. She just wanted to go out and teach people who would value her, that’s what she said, but I do understand. She said in Toronto, she had no problems, nobody complained about her English, but when she was teaching [in this smaller city], she did get the comments, the students said they didn’t understand her accent. The reason is, say in Toronto, a lot of kids, their parents cannot speak English well so they grow up with the way and listen to the strong accent in English, even though they are probably Spanish background, or Portuguese, or Italian, or whatever the thing, so they understand broken English. (Yien, *interview excerpt*)

Yien’s comments and reflections draw attention to the devaluing of ITCs’ linguistic capital: it is often seen as a deficit rather than an asset. Yien’s interpretation of Suxie’s experience suggests that those who are raised with multiple accents amongst L2 speakers will do the work to listen to the speaker and implies that those who are raised with L1 speakers may be less likely to do the work of listening to L2 speakers. While ITCs assume their ability to speak multiple languages would be seen as cultural wealth in larger urban centres, in places where English is the dominant first language, speaking with a non-Anglo Canadian accent is potentially viewed as a detriment and an ever-present reminder that they are outsiders. ITCs understand the perceived barrier their accents present. Yien spoke about the obstacles she encountered with respect to her accent,

For international students, when we come to this country, the reason we can come to this country, is because we are really on the top 10% at our own country because otherwise we won’t have a chance to come over here. . . We all have like a very, very good achievement, accomplishment before so that’s the thing, sometimes, it’s hard when you come to here and you are getting put down a lot because of the language... because of accent. You know in physics... we are

getting comments...we are losing marks in microteaching because of accents – we losing marks because of that and you cannot correct that at all, right? (Yien, *interview excerpt*)

Yien’s counter-story reflects the prevailing and contradictory aspects of the intersectionality of cultural capital and linguicism in my research findings: ITCs have garnered enough points or demonstrated enough “cultural capital” to gain entrance into Canada, as Yien states she had to be in the top 10% of her country to even be considered a potential Canadian citizen; yet, many ITCs suggest they want “voice” lessons in order to minimize their L2 accents and have come to equate “success” with the lack of noticeable L2 accent. Having an accent that could pass for L1 was viewed positively by the participants, as reflected by Leila. As she recounted her struggles to gain entrance into a Bachelor of Education program, she bemoaned, “I speak good English! I don’t even have an accent!” Yien’s counter-story also illuminates the linguicism in the faculty as she lost presentation marks as a result of her accent. When faculties of education and educators focus on the perceived “deficits” of ITCs (e.g., accent, content knowledge, familiarity with the Canadian school system) they are legitimating unjust social relations and reproducing and reinforcing the image of the prototypical teacher. Focusing on what ITCs do not have negates what they do have. Exploring the taken for granted in schools reveals the dominant discourse that continues to ensure a white, female, middle class, Canadian-born representation amongst TCs.

At the pre-service level, some associate teachers³ in the elementary grades raised concerns about ITCs as primary teachers. In particular, associate teachers took issue with ITCs teaching young children (particularly kindergarten and grade one). The rationale provided by some associate teachers is that primary students are acquiring English language skills and the

³ By associate teachers I am referring to the classroom teachers with whom TCs are placed for practicum.

modeling of “correct English” is paramount. The notion that “correct English” should be modeled was raised on numerous occasions. Since not all accents were challenged equally, this is conceivably another gate-keeping measure. Indeed, accents *per se* are not the primary cause of concern as the accents from certain countries such as Britain, Australia, and Sweden were rarely questioned. Students of colour originating from countries such as India, Syria, and China, on the other hand, did have their accents questioned, as indicated by Manisha’s counter-story:

Now and then [the associate teacher] reminded me that “I don’t know how ‘people like’ you manage that language part; with your accent and knowledge about Canada I wonder how you will manage if you get a job (teaching) in Canada”. That was at times not so good to hear at times in lows but still my husband kept reminding me that she is my ‘Guru’ so do whatever she may say and just focus on learning. . . . I ignored when she at times, during group activities laugh[ed at] the typical words that I spoke with accent and would quiet down at my proximity. That was upsetting for a while but let it pass (I had an accent but I was not stupid). [Manisha, *email correspondence*]

While a non-Anglo Canadian accent is sometimes overtly named by associate teachers as a cause for concern, there is an underlying suggestion that L2 speakers do not have enough “Canadian” knowledge to be effective classroom teachers. As Solomon and Levine-Rasky (2003) write, “[t]he naming of differences and, concomitantly, racism or ethnocentrism is often deflected to other phenomena that are easier for speakers to utter” (p. 27). Speaking with an L2 accent is equated with lack of clarity and an inability to communicate successfully revealing the ways in which dominant English speakers in positions of power are often unwilling to acknowledge their own bias and disrupt their subject-position privilege.

Conclusion

This study examined the narratives of ITCs who have been historically marginalized and “otherized” by the dominant group in Canada. The participants’ narratives draw attention to

practices that undermine the success of ITCs and also illuminate the ways in which ITCs have successfully navigated the system and infused their cultural capital in their teaching and learning. In the study ITCs shared their stories of being questioned repeatedly about their suitability to teach in elementary and secondary schools given their non-Anglo Canadian accents and their perceived lack of “Canadian” knowledge. Their counter-stories reflect both the significant pressure and a strong desire for ITCs to assimilate into Anglo-Canadian culture and in doing so limits valuable opportunities for students in Canadian classrooms to expand their world views and to engage with other ways of knowing. The ITCs in the study also shared the creative and innovative ways in which they were able to utilize their cultural wealth to open up spaces for discussion in the classroom and infuse other ways of knowing. The five ITCs who participated in this study have lived experiences that have the potential to expand students’ and teachers’ knowledge. For a start, all of the participants can shed light on the process of immigrating to Canada and the challenges of reestablishing oneself in a new country. All of the ITCs in this study speak English as a second, third or even fourth language. Their linguistic capital or their experiences learning languages should be held in high regard as it translates into lived experiences from which they can draw upon when teaching students of all ages. In addition, as we educate teacher candidates, faculty members are concerned with exploring the notion of “teacher identity”. For many of our ITCs, they already have a rich and well-developed sense of their teacher identity, which is negated by many faculty practices. Pressing faculty to expand their vision of “teacher” to include multiple demographics including a range of ages, sexual orientations, socio-economic statuses, and so on would be a crucial step in re-imagining the field of “teacher”. When faculties of education and educators focus on the perceived “deficits” of ITCs (e.g., accent, content knowledge, familiarity with the Canadian school system) they are

legitimizing unjust social relations and reproducing and reinforcing the image of the prototypical teacher. Focusing on what ITCs do not have negates what they do have. Exploring the taken for granted in schools reveals the dominant discourse that continues to ensure a white, female, middle class representation amongst TCs. The telling of counter-stories by ITCs uncovers the discourse and conditions that have restricted ITCs’ access to B.Ed. programs and thwarted their success in field placements placements and coursework, complicating the imagined immigrant and the concept of what it means to be Canadian. The counter-stories also reveal the ways in which participants use their cultural wealth for success in an inequitable system. As a result of this study, a much larger study is underway. Currently, there is little to no support for the notion that the growing diversity of teachers indicates a significant change is needed with respect to the power structures of schools. Educators can ill-afford to overlook the potential contributions of ITCs. Immigrant teacher candidates bring cultural capital and linguistic capital that is integral to the future of global education possibilities for Canada. At the very least exploring, and perhaps ideally dismantling, the ways in which the status quo is perpetuated and reproduced in schools must be seriously considered.

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