

**O CANADA, WHOSE HOME AND NATIVE LAND?  
AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO  
THE CRITICAL ROLE OF CURRICULUM IN IDENTITY AFFIRMATION**

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Canada

By

MOMINA A. KHAN

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University of Saskatchewan  
116 Thorvaldson Building, 110 Science Place  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan  
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Canada

## Abstract

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) guarantees fundamental freedoms of conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion. However, the interpretation of such freedoms, and the extent of accommodation within the context of secular public schools, is not always clear (Shariff, 2006). I am a mother of four children who hold multiple identities, languages, nationalities and beliefs as Canadians. In this autobiographical narrative inquiry fused with poetic representation, I explore my ‘mother stories’ of my children’s experiences with curriculum in schools. Through this research, I examine the critical role of curriculum, implementation of curriculum, and shared curriculum making in affirming the identity of ethnically diverse students. The narratives of my experiences from immigration to citizenship, from multiculturalism to eurocentrism, from parent involvement to parent engagement, and from a racialized mother to a researcher are narratives of “gaps, silences, and exclusions shaped in the bumping places children and families experience in schools” (Clandinin, Huber, J., Huber, M., Murphy, Pearce, Murray-Orr, & Steeves, 2006, p. 173). Our lives are lived, and stories of our lives are told, retold, and relived on storied landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), landscapes on which larger social, cultural, political, and institutional narratives are simultaneously unfolding (Murphy & Bengezen, 2015). Seeing narrative as a “way of organizing episodes, actions, and accounts of actions” (Sarbin, 1986, p. 9), I engage in constructing “juxtapository narrative” (Bhabha, 2006) and “counter-storytelling” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) to challenge dominant stories of curriculum. I aim to sensitize readers – educators, curriculum and policy makers, parents, and community members – to the issues of identity politics and to experiences shrouded in silence in order to deepen individuals’ capacity to respond to the place and voice of people who are different from them (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Growing up between two cultures and languages, living in in-between spaces, balancing cultural identities and a sense of belonging is a highly complex process for racialized children. Teachers, curriculum makers, and schools all play a fundamental role in shaping students’ identity. Too often, schools are places in which the complex conditions of minority parents’ and children’s lived experiences and their right to be heard are excluded and ignored. Practically, socially and poetically, this inquiry has the potential to positively impact the lives of racialized students, parents, and families by reimagining curriculum in ways that include multiple narratives, identities, realities, perspectives and practices and, thus, a place for their equal rights, voices on this land and in their home, Canada.

## Preface

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the previous publication of a version of the following chapters, poems, and images included in my dissertation:

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---

<sup>1</sup> *Allah* is the Arabic term used by Muslims to refer to God.

## DEDICATION

*To all the courageous  
minority parents and families  
who leave behind their roots, relationships, and familiarities  
to make Canada home  
in hope for a better and equitable life  
for themselves, their children and families.*

*And especially ...*

*to my husband, Mohammad,  
my daughters, Irteqa and Iman,  
and my sons, Hassan and Abbas  
for sharing their experiences,  
silences and deepest selves  
Your stories, and generosity  
made this work possible.*

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## Notes to the Reader

### Where My Work Begins, Where It Travels

[I] do not stand  
on the shoulders of giants  
[I] stand on the earth where they stood  
[I] know they are still present  
even if there is no soul, no spirit. (Leggo, 2018, p. 82)

All work begins “in the midst” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63), sans isolation. There is a story already unfolding, one with a narrative history, an unfolding present, and an imagined future. It is a story with narrative interrelationships and communities, with narrative circling and intersecting plotlines, with narrative resonance and narrative dissonance, and with narrative humanity and inhumanity written on this very earth on which we all stand. As a researcher, I honour the ground on which I currently stand, I honour those who stood before me, and I honour those who will stand after me.

As a researcher interested in minority parent engagement and the complexity of a dual sense of identity, I deeply acknowledge the work of my supervisor, Dr. Debbie Pushor (2001), who has challenged the notion of schools as “protectorates” in which teachers wear a “badge of difference” that perpetuates the hierarchical nature of schools and the “taken-for-granted” practices within it which position parents in the margin of school landscapes. Given her work in this area, and her differentiation between conceptualizations of “parent involvement” and “parent engagement” (2005) which established *how* these relations have come about and *why* they have prevailed over time, I move forward from this point with my own research, focusing on alternative orientations to current parent-teacher relationships by proposing ways that diverse parent knowledge can be laid alongside teacher knowledge in decisions regarding students’ identity in order to transform teaching, learning, and curriculum.

As an underpinning to my work, I also honour the significant ground established by Annette Lareau in regard to capital – whether it be cultural, social, symbolic, or afforded as a result of race or class – particularly as such capital influences relationships between parents and educators. I acknowledge that Lareau and colleagues made visible how the value of cultural

capital does not exist unto itself but depends on the social setting, on processes of activation, and on the institutional response to such activation (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). In exploring the relative influence of race and class to children's and family's experiences with school, Lareau and Horvat found that it was easier for white families to comply with the institutional standards of schools than it was for non-white families. Here again, accepting this work as established in the academic field, I have chosen to attend to my positionality as a mother by paying primary attention to my brown skin, my accented voice, the hijab on my head – the visible differences which seem to trump or drown out my social, educational, and economic status.

As an autobiographical narrative inquirer, I honour the work of Conle (1996) who wrote of “narrative resonance,” articulating how when one individual writes a story and another individual reads it, the value of the work does not reside in the story itself but in how that story evokes the reader's own story, of how it causes the reader to pull forward a story of experience of his/her own, to see it anew, to analyze it in new ways, and to evoke new and educative meanings from it. Accepting narrative resonance as an already established justification for my research methodology, I move forward in telling my story, believing it will be evocative and provocative for others, as they retell and relive their own experiences of ‘other’ and ‘othering,’ of ‘marginalization’ or ‘marginalizing,’ of ‘binary’ or ‘between.’

As a poet, I honour the work of Carl Leggo, an arts-based and autobiographical scholar, life writer, and poet. Just as Leggo's (2008) commitment to living poetically in the world resonates throughout his writing, it resonates within me. In his work, Leggo has established poetry as a way of knowing, a way of living, a way of examining lived experiences. He has used poetry to explore concepts of identity, of relationship, and community – themes that resonate strongly in my work. Leggo has already broken ground to affirm that heart and imagination are integral parts of human knowing and knowledge. Working from this established premise, I use poetry to make visible my diverse parent knowledge and the opportunity such knowledge offers teachers, leaders, curriculum writers, and policy makers in the field of education.

Entering in the midst, there are many academics, researchers, narrative inquirers, and poets who have provided me the opportunity to stand on ground they walked before me, and to build from their work in order to take a place beside, between, and among them. With the opportunity to read their work, to reflect on their words, to take up – and to extend – their challenges to the reader, I fulfil my responsibility to move this work forward and to further shape

this earth for those who will stand here after me. I have not repeated or (re)searched their work but instead I have picked up from their contributions to the fields of education, curriculum, parent knowledge, narrative inquiry, and poetry as I moved in a new direction, from a new lens, and to a new place, using that work as a springboard to explore what has been previously unexplored. I leave my work and my stories open to this earth and the people of this earth as a contribution both in this point in time and as a stepping off point for researchers who will follow this work with their own. Just as I began this work “in the midst,” I leave this work “in the midst.”

### **The Complexity of Choosing Identity Terminology**

Throughout this dissertation, I have used different terms/adjectives to represent the complexity of my children’s identity as diverse Canadians. After immigrating to Canada, these terms are the terms we heard and were assigned through policies and documents, and by persons and institutions. To this day, my children and I puzzle over which term best fits us and is most authentic in representing our experiences. In my research I have attempted to deconstruct these very terms and, therefore, decided that throughout my dissertation I will use them simultaneously. Expressions such as *hyphenated Canadians*, *naturalized Canadians*, *multicultural Canadians*, *racialized Canadians*, *minority Canadians*, *new Canadians*, *diasporic Canadians*, *settlers of color*, *non-Indigenous peoples*, *migrant indigenous populations*, and *migrant people* suggest that our identity and positioning on school landscapes and on the Canadian landscape falls outside of hegemonic notions of what it means to be Canadian.

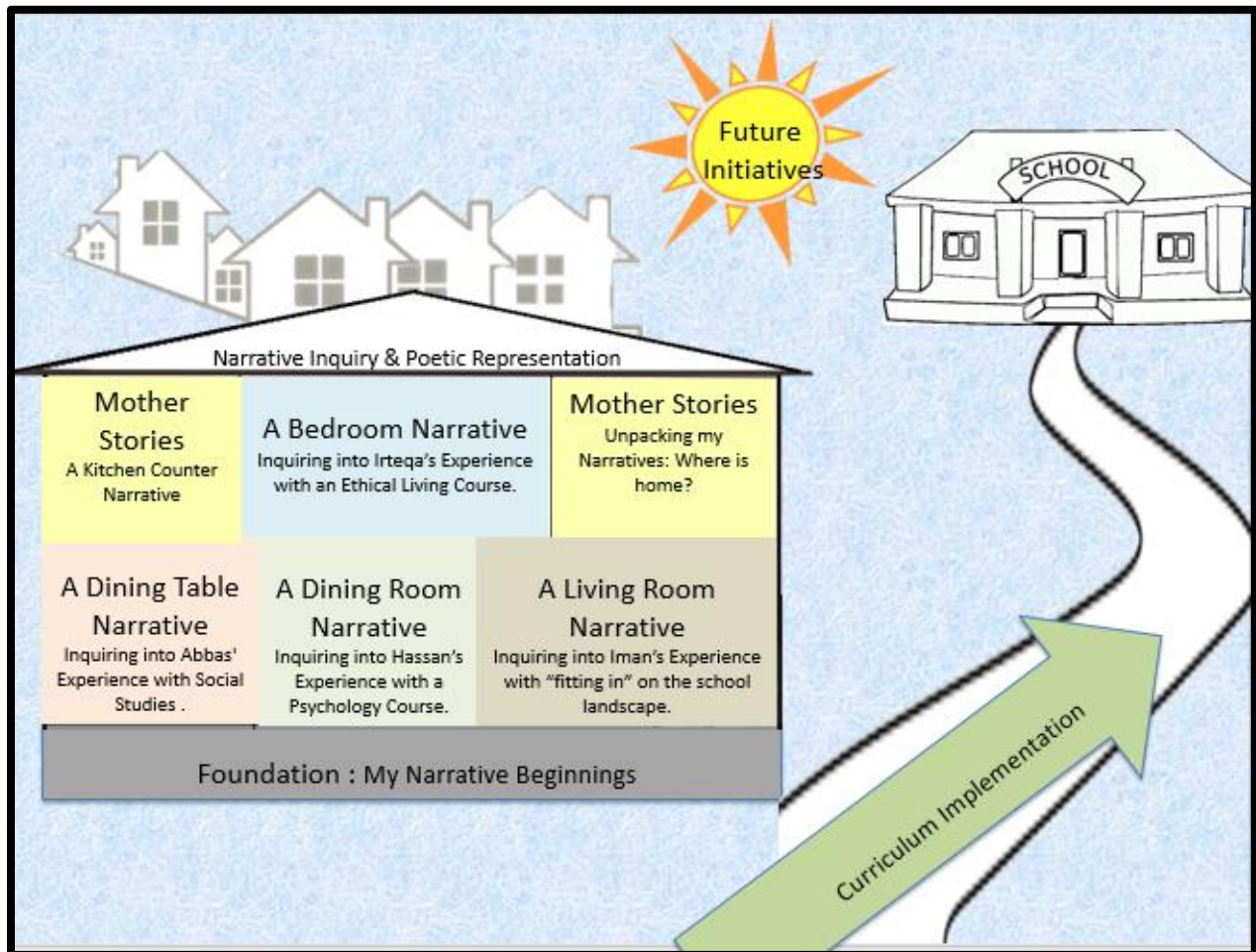
### **Poetic Representation**

My research is autobiographical narrative inquiry with poetic representation. Throughout my dissertation, I have woven poetry into my chapters – sometimes in the beginning to provoke readers’ thoughts, sometimes in the middle to arouse wonder, and sometimes at the end to galvanize ponderings.

## Chapter 1

### My Narrative Beginnings

*But enough about you, let me tell you about me... (Apple, 1996, p. xiv)*



*Figure 1.* Home is where my story begins. My 'mother stories' sculpt my journey from home to school and from soil to soul.

#### **A Kitchen Counter Narrative**

As I sit at my kitchen counter and write these sentences on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017, I notice that my husband has turned on the television right across from me. The breaking news on CBC flashes disturbing scenes which go beyond the typical worries that may flit across a traveler's

mind before taking off for a flight. I am frozen by an image of a security officer forcibly removing a passenger from his seat and dragging him off the plane as he screams. Watching this extremely troubling video – the plane, an airport, the mistreatment, the fact that the passenger is of Vietnamese-American heritage and a doctor by profession – brings back many memory fragments of my lived experiences. I am flooded with emotions and swirled in images, taken back to the time when my husband, who too is doctor, worked as a porter and baggage handler at Pearson International Airport in Toronto. He took this job within six months of our arrival to Canada as Pakistani immigrants. The baggage of that period holds a bounty of emotions that I am bound to carry with me everywhere I go, and the airport is a place that holds a significant place in my life. It is a place that unites and separates me from my loved ones, a place I enter with new hopes, dreams and aspirations, a place where I feel pride in my importance as an individual who has been allowed to immigrate to Canada. At the same time, it is a place where I learned how dreams shift, twist, and are challenged, a place I learned what othering means, and a place that marked my journey from passenger to complete stranger.

How can I ever forget the excitement on my husband's face, an emblem of hope, when he opened the letters from the Canadian organizations he had applied to in the medical profession? Each time he received the same bold statement in each letter stating, "Thank you for applying but you do not have Canadian certification and/or Canadian experience, therefore we cannot offer you this position." I remember gently reminding him what we had gone through, and what we had given up, to reach our current position. Simultaneously, while seeing his despondence, I also gave him my support for his expressed desire to return to Pakistan with the few dollars he had stashed in the closet for this purpose. To make ends meet, he finally gave up trying to obtain a medical position and started looking for odd jobs. Being a doctor, it was hard for him to prepare himself to do odd jobs, not because he underestimated the value of the work, but because of the loss of his sense of pride to do what he was trained to do and, according to him, what he was born to do.

My husband's first step began with him making a new resume, removing a variety of his degrees in order to get accepted for an odd job. Muhammad's first job at the Toronto Pearson airport as a luggage loader became a constant reminder for us of our arrival, living experiences, and positioning in Canada. Loading and unloading baggage and seeing planes flying back and

forth everyday became a regular struggle as it caused us both to ponder our positioning and our challenges to begin a new life in a new home away from home.

One bright morning a new day appeared in a devastating way. The day will never be forgotten, as it is the day that changed the world. The unforgettable and unforgivable day – 9/11 – the day of the attacks. We turned on the morning news and witnessed something that horrified the whole world. Not only did that day change the American nation and the lives of all those who lost their loved ones, but it also changed the lives of every single Muslim living on this planet, and especially those living in the West. When terrorists attacked the World Trade Centre, the icons of capitalism, towers which seemed to represent the very neo-liberal ideas that have come to be the very foundations of the United States (and thus the West itself), the worth and value of different lives were altered permanently (Baliko, 2014). As it impacted the world forever, it shifted and traumatized ideologies and identities. On this same day in which 911 smeared Muslims with a new identity in the world, my husband received a phone call from his employer at the airport. He was told not to come to work anymore as his services were no longer needed. My husband's journey from racial to religious discrimination happened faster than the unfolding story of 9/11. He was no longer an immigrant, a Pakistani, a doctor, or a porter; he was solely a 'Muslim' in Canada.

Shaking away this memory and returning to the coverage on my television screen of the Vietnamese-American doctor being forcibly removed from the airplane, I am struck by how significant position and positioning are to identity formation. I believe it is imperative for all of us to “recognize and critique how one is positioned and how one positions others in social structures” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 37).

### **A Furnace Room Encounter**

urge to emerge

from East to West

from West to Quest

from Alif to Ye, from A to Z

from unknown to known, from learn to unlearn



search for a room continues  
rushing to find a room  
the only option, running upstairs  
I reach the quietest room in the house - an Attic  
pin drop Silence  
for me, it begins in the East, an insider  
singularity of identity, similarity of beliefs  
familiarity of land, particularity of being  
repeated rhythms, homogeneity of voices and choices  
living among family, sharing same stories  
knitting vibrant cloth, cooking together in the kitchen  
nostalgic aroma of spices, eating naturally grown fruit  
sun feels warmer  
the sounds so familiar, the chanting of Adhan<sup>2</sup>  
wrapped in the softness of humility, love, and longing  
yelling of vendors selling spicy goods  
the cheering voices of kids playing cricket in the streets  
the honking noises of rickshaws  
tapping of barefooted beggars on gilded gates  
heavy quilts of smog powdering the horizon  
cobble streets forming blinding storms of dust

---

<sup>2</sup> Adhan is the Islamic call to prayer.

a loud bang, a familiar sound  
a bomb blast in the corner  
my city then another city  
now in the whole country  
it can't be true, hard to sleep  
to the sound of my country's cacophony  
quest for change begins  
a challenging journey ahead  
things becoming louder, messier, hot and unsafe  
deliberation extant  
chaotic contemplation in peace  
*Now, I can hear the echo of my breath.*  
Across seven seas, now in the midst, of  
a difficult journey  
rushing to find a room  
the only option, running down stairs  
I reach the loudest room in the house – the Furnace Room  
ear-splitting Noise  
in the West, an outsider  
plurality of identity, multiplicity of beliefs  
unfamiliarity of land, universality of being  
sporadic rhythms, heterogeneity of voices and choices  
truly a flight of fantasy, this is not real

colossal buildings stationed closely to each other  
seem to stretch all the way to the clouds  
structures so tall, immaculate  
foreign air rushes through my lungs  
feel so purified and distilled  
urge to question  
freeze on the spot  
awed by how the sun seems so bright  
beautiful fair faces, tolling of church bells  
this new world painted with shades of white  
deeply and utterly different from the one  
I just came from  
questions tossed faithfully  
“Where are you from?” and “Where is home?”  
identity negotiation, a new beginning  
what makes me different  
me or my color, custom or costume  
culture or ethnicity, race or religion  
values or beliefs, language or accent  
reflecting self in relation  
to self and others  
a minority in a majority  
things becoming louder, messier, cold and insecure

deliberation extant

peaceful contemplation in chaos

*Now, I can hear the echo of my soul.*

emerge to submerge

Reborn

deep down

into the ocean

I can't

hear

see

touch

taste

or

smell

At last,

I can

*Breathe*

feeling

evolving

mindfulness

fluid consciousness

to lose

myself  
in chaos  
becoming fully human  
speaking by listening  
seeing by feeling  
receiving by giving  
reliving  
*Reborn*

### **Unpacking My Narratives: Where is Home?**

For over 18 years in Canada, I have learned that the simple question, “Where do you come from?” or “Where is home?” is a conversation starter. It is like a script everyone feels required to deliver when they come across another face with inscriptions of color, accent, attire, ethnicity, or race. The notion of ‘home’ is not easy to define. The sense of home, regardless of its meanings, migratory status, or spatial aspects, is part of a human process of identity construction and it is tied to emotions, relations, and behaviors. People have the need to attach themselves to a context where they have ownership in ever-changing associations of place, society, and time (Terkenli,1995). The notion of home is predominant in our understanding of diaspora because it is from the notion of home that we draw our identity (Lord, 2011, p. 7). Both Hall and Radhakrishnan (2003) describe how lost homelands mingle with new homelands, and how a sense of identity and the notion of home arises from the interaction between the lost and found homeland. While the word ‘home’ is multifaceted and combines different concepts, for me ‘home has less to do with a piece of soil than with a piece of soul’ (Lyer, 2013).

*As I sit at my kitchen counter, writing my story on the piece of soil that is my home, I am consumed with questions about what forces or attractions compel people to leave their native countries. At what cost are these decisions made? What is the payoff? Could one be fair and rational in balancing out sacrifices and gains? Are these choices made based on need or want, logic or reality, fascination or intimidation, oppression or freedom? My husband and I left our*

country, roots, family, loved ones, and familiarity for peace, freedom, security, and a better future for our children. Our family was growing and so were our needs. We were worried about what the future held for our children in Pakistan. We had limited options: either to attempt to change the system, which was beyond our power, or a decision to become part of the system, which was against our moral values. The only option left to us was to leave the country, to 'escape.' It was an uncertain option but, at the same time, a promising one. We did not leave our home country predominantly for a higher standard of living, the attractiveness of the Western world, or an extraordinary life for our children, but because of our loss of hope and optimism.

It is ironic, then, that when we arrived in Canada filled with new hope and promise, the airport was the very first place that greeted us and the very first place that informed us of our place and positioning in Canada. When a qualified doctor with an American degree works at the Pearson International Airport as a bag-handling, cart-steering porter, teaching itself happens. Sitting here at my kitchen counter, my questions, wonders, puzzles, experiences and stories sculpt my journey from soil to soul and make me ponder, "I am really in my home?"

### **the blossoming existence**

born under the desert sun, the flower begins to bloom  
vibrant petals, fragrant scent, true existence begins  
sister to the rose, friend to the lily, companion to the fern  
sewn into the land, comfort but silent emptiness  
to where am I headed?  
baggage, belonging & the known, wrapped in securely  
unexpected margins, what is it like?  
journeying towards prophesized possibility  
unfamiliar, uncomfortable, unsure  
land of cold white blankets, paved streets, flying geese  
how have I gotten here?

unusual tongue, distinct sky, unlimited land, many questions

echoes of mystery, wander, wonder, ambiguity

windy, rainy, sunny, stormy

the flower continues to blossom little by little

vulnerable heart, thin smile, to the brim

with emerging thoughts, unlearning, relearning

aligning self with the truth of the moment

a heightened state

am I complete, yet?

being in becoming, consciousness, fluid expression

an existence that has forever grown

ascending hopes, new feelings, shifting identity

growing soul, hopeful prayers, beating heart

I commit to keep on living

shape to reshape, fine to refine, silence to whisper,

words to voice, receiving to giving, paying off to pay back

to borrow to return, to lend to keep, to observe to endure

city to province, province to country, country to world

I promise to keep on giving

from guest to host

from land to earth

from foreign to familiar

from involvement to engagement

emptiness fills with illumination  
a new space, informed, inspired, inspirited  
where reciprocity blooms, generosity grows  
humility stands confidently  
assumptions vanish  
opportunity grows firm roots  
only then humanity becomes united  
voices chant in unison  
searching souls find home  
finally  
I am home

### **Research Puzzle**

#### **O Canada, Whose Home and Native Land? Home Away From Home**

Home is where our story begins. In the effort to create a new home, my family and I had bid farewell to our old home. We journeyed from a home that was seven long seas and an entire world away, separated by the earth's many landscapes. We journeyed toward a new home in which my husband and I envisioned that the hopes, opportunities, freedoms, rights, and aspirations of our children would be realized. Our new home in Canada, which along with dreams and possibilities, began to swell with furniture, amenities, and other material comforts as time unrolled softly. Every room in our home began to flourish with stories and with the objects with which we created a sense of place.

To make our new Canadian home cozy and inviting, my family and I went to a furniture store one afternoon. As my four children were frolicking around and embarking on imaginary adventures, the sales associate, an elderly woman, asked me if all four of them were mine. As I smiled at her and replied, "Yes," she threw back her head and joyously responded, "You have a



two-million-dollar family!” My curiosity towards the exact meaning of her gleeful exclamation persisted and so, when I returned home, I googled the idiom. A “million-dollar family” is one in which there is one boy and one girl, while a “two-million-dollar family” is comprised of two boys and two girls.

At that time, we were settled in Saskatchewan in our own home, with Muhammed now working in the medical field, albeit on a special license where he was only allowed to practice in Saskatchewan and no other province. With our pre-school aged children safe, happy, and growing, I did feel the joys of being a “two-million-dollar family.” I cooked our traditional foods, read, spoke, and sang in Urdu<sup>3</sup> to the children, dressed at home in my Pakistani clothing. My days and nights in the cozy and comfortable environment of our home, with my children in my lap, full of warmth, love, familiarity, and belonging, life felt rich and complete.

*the epitome of a Canadian quilt*

\*

*sunset shivering / a mortal winter that cannot die // white snow everywhere / I freeze // basting  
the epitome of the Canadian quilt / humanity fabric // separated pieces destined to be tied /  
asymmetrical and colorful embroider // fragmented identity / folding at the seam allowance //  
iced-stone-cold-world / this land is my cotton down // a quilt is a way / we survive on patches //  
found pieces and gangly fibers / assembling to keep ourselves warm // till the sun comes out /  
leave me to bask in this laundered paradise*

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<sup>3</sup> **Urdu** is a language spoken in South Asia specifically in Pakistan.

## **The Bumping Up of Home and School Contexts**

The years passed and it was soon time for my eldest daughter, Irteqa, to begin school. It was when she embarked on her journey to school that new stories began to enter our home. Stories created by the context of school bumping up against our home context included requests that I drop her at the school door instead of near the classroom, a refusal to take traditional foods I had cooked for lunch, and English becoming the preferred language spoken among my children. As time went on and more of my children entered school, these kinds of new stories continued. They included my children's correction of my Urdu accent, their desire to dress up as ladybugs, unicorns, and tigers for Halloween instead of wearing traditional gowns, and how excitedly they awaited Christmas – memorizing carols, pleading to go to the mall and to purchase a Christmas tree – and asking when Santa would come to deliver presents. My perception of our two-million-dollar family began to change.

Just as my children did in these moments, I began to see our family as “other” (Bedard, 2000; Delpit, 1995; Kumashiro, 2000; Mackey, 2002; May, 1994). “Otherness means feeling excluded, closed out, precluded, even disdained and scorned. It produces a sense of isolation, of apartness, of disconnectedness, of alienation” (Madrid, as cited in Turner-Vorbeck & Miller Marsh, 2008, p. 2). When my children began correcting my English, I wish it had dawned on me that Urdu language was escaping our home. Instead of speaking more Urdu, I naively spoke English as much as possible in hopes that my children would find acceptance in school and be able to connect with their peers and teachers. Many questions began arising for me and I began to feel my repositioning as a mother. I asked myself many questions, ‘Why is Halloween celebrated? How should my children participate in it?’ ‘How do I understand the excitement my children feel for Christmas in comparison to Eid<sup>4</sup>?’ These kinds of questions caused me to embark on a new journey full of wonders about the values and beliefs by which I should raise my children in their new home of Canada. I puzzled, ‘How do I as mother make sense of the hybridity of my children's identity?’ ‘How do I help them to understand their multiple worlds and the often in-between position “third space of enunciation” (Bhabha, 1988, p. 208) which they find themselves?’ These questions also caused me to wonder about how my children's teachers were making sense of these same questions on the school landscape. Were they awake

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<sup>4</sup> *Eid* is a Muslim religious festival.

to them too? Puzzled by them? Struggling with them? How were my children being reflected in school curriculum, language, literacy, pedagogy, history, and celebrations?

Stories about school, curriculum, and teachers; stories that were institutional, political, social, and racial; stories that perpetuated dominant plotlines and hegemonic notions all began to descend into the nooks and corners of the rooms of our home. Through this, my ‘mother story’ kept mounting and forming. The older my children grew, the harder the questions got. Early on, my mother story was shaped by the fact that my children, who spoke, read, and wrote fluent English, and were academically high achieving in reading and writing comprehension, were placed in an EAL class for their first four years of school. I was puzzled by how their color seemed to speak louder than their comprehension skills. Later on, my mother story was further shaped by my younger daughter’s friends, who asked her why she wore a hijab<sup>5</sup> and wondered aloud what her hair was like. I, in turn, wondered why what was on her head seemed to speak louder than what was in her head. Even later, my story was further shaped when my daughter, who was graduating high school, questioned the nature of festivities like the Graduation Banquet and After Grad Party, asking how young Muslim students graduating could be a part of them instead of feeling excluded and alienated by them. I was struck by how her religious choice not to partake in dancing or drinking seemed to speak louder than her right to celebrate her graduation with her peers.

With time, I began to see that the stories that entered our home from the outside changed the climate within as well – some days storms, some days rain, some days sunshine, and some days wind. There became a nonstop duality of speaking English and Urdu, valuing Christmas and celebrating Eid, displaying one half of the closet with casual pants and t-shirts and the other half with traditional shalwaar kameez<sup>6</sup>, eating pasta and pizza but also appreciating biryani<sup>7</sup> and Haleem<sup>8</sup>, lip singing to Western pop music but also sitting in silence when the adhaan was recited. It is out of this nonstop duality that my mother story emerged, a story that forms the research puzzle at the heart of my autobiographical narrative inquiry.

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<sup>5</sup> **Hijab** is a head covering worn by Muslim women.

<sup>6</sup> **Shalwaar kameez** is a traditional outfit worn by women and men from South Asia.

<sup>7</sup> **Biryani** is a south Asian mixed rice, spices and meat dish. It is popular in Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia.

<sup>8</sup> **Haleem** is a stew composed of meat, lentil and pounded wheat made into a thick paste. It is popular in Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia.

## **A silent epiphany**

A face, a race, a color,  
a culture, a language, a religion  
an existence emerges  
then borders crossed  
now living in between  
mystified by plurality, multiplicity, diversity  
each moment held in conflicting spaces  
spaces to get lost or to be found forever  
neither compartmentalized nor split into halves  
shifting from a static state to fluid consciousness  
endeavouring to throw certainly to the wind  
attempting to disturb the convenient truths  
merging boundaries, a new way of seeing things  
willful discourse and a quest for objectivity  
peeling off my layered self  
making meaning of my nested experiences  
mindfulness of being different  
dismantling ethnocentrism piece by piece  
unity, cohesion, and solidarity streamline simply  
reborn not from a tormented soul or a utopian dream  
freedom emanates from the soul's periphery  
I am a hybrid identity

## **A Research Puzzle Emerges**

As a first generation Canadian, I call two countries home, Pakistan and Canada. As a minority mother raising four children with multiple identities, cultures, nationalities, languages, and beliefs, I have experienced, through my lived stories, how complex the process of integration, blending, and balancing identities can be. My experiences have shaped my understanding in a narrative manner. As a law-abiding Canadian, a mother helping my children with homework, or a former educational assistant in the school system, I have diligently followed the social, political, institutional, dominant stories presented to me. Faithfully following along led me to practice “structured silences” (Greene, 1993) without fully knowing it. My structured and self-imposed silences were founded upon my feelings of wanting to sound grateful to Canada and Canadians as Canada welcomed us through immigration. While the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) assured us of equality, cultural pluralism, inclusivity, and our fundamental freedoms, it did not take long for the clear gaps between policies and practices to appear. When I silenced my questions and wonders, they began to create both chaos and resistance within me. The contradiction between what I felt internally and what I acknowledged externally rendered my realities blurry and made me feel all the more vulnerable. My children’s experiences of being colored and “multicultural” Canadians on the school landscape and in the school curriculum shaped my mother story, a story that bumped up against my silences. It was in that bumping up that my silences began to tremble and shift, eventually causing me to awaken my voice to the possibility of new and competing stories. Wiebe and Johnson (1998) affirm that to begin a story, someone must break a particular silence. As a mother, I came to realize that I cannot compromise my conscience by passively accepting the official stories presented to my children through curriculum. Instead, I determined that, as a parent researcher, I would critically analyze and interpret my mother story in an attempt to provoke and evoke consideration of how curriculum can legitimate the identity of diverse children who are Canadian ‘born and raised.’

Provincial curricular innovations have not kept pace with the recent transformations in demographics, inter-group relations, and identity/power dynamics, as schools seek to wrestle

simultaneously with the legacies of colonialism and the challenges of immigration and globalization (Falihi & Cottrell, 2015). As a researcher, I have been deconstructing the terms assigned by policy, persons, groups, and institutions to define my children's identity as Canadians. Expressions such as *hyphenated Canadians*, *naturalized Canadians*, *multicultural Canadians*, *racialized Canadians*, *minority Canadians*, *new Canadians*, *diasporic Canadians*, *settlers of color*, *non-Indigenous peoples*, *migrant indigenous populations*, and *migrant people* suggests that their identity and positioning on school landscapes and the Canadian landscape falls outside of hegemonic notions of what it means to be Canadian. What does it mean to identity making to recognize yourself as positioned on the outside looking in (Clarke, 2014, p. 117)? The path to holiness lies through questioning everything (Peck, 2002, p. 194). I question and wonder, How does a minority mother explain to her children the meaning of 'exclusion' when she sees her children's identity being shaped by "structured silences" (Greene, 1993) offered through curriculum? How does a mother compose an answer for her Canadian born and raised children when they are being consistently asked where they are from? How does a mother respond to a question when her 'Muslim Canadian' children ask her about why Muslims are the most targeted group in the Western world? What happens when children's sense of themselves is under attack by a dominant curricular narrative that does not fit coherently with their own? How does a mother prepare her culturally diverse children for a world that will not care for them unconditionally? As a mother, I know that one of the cruelties my children may encounter, over and above the typical slings and arrows of childhood and adolescence, is racial prejudice. My inquiry, being autobiographical, situational, and contextualized in nature, explores my understanding, as a mother, of the role of curriculum in affirming identities of my children who are bearers of multiple nationalities, languages, cultures, and beliefs.

My research puzzle, as an autobiographical narrative inquirer and a mother, has been to determine, 'What imagined possibilities have the potential to shift curriculum conceptualizations from a place of binaries to a place of shared hope and responsibility for a different future for all Canadians?' My research has three interconnected purposes: 1) to inquire into my mother story of how current curriculum accommodates "multicultural" students' identity, cultural backgrounds, and voices; 2) to mobilize that narrative to create dialogue about how the construction and transmission of curriculum might acknowledge and accommodate the rapidly-changing demographic and socioeconomic realities of Canadian society; and 3) to imagine

ethical and honouring spaces for silenced voices in curriculum in order to move closer to the development of a just and democratic Canadian society.

**Researcher's positionality: Being active and a captive.**

I am privileged to be a Canadian citizen, I am privileged to be the wife of a specialist physician, I am privileged to be the mother of two girls and two boys, and I am privileged to be an educated woman. Yet, privilege is not only determined by citizenship, belonging to the upper middle class, income security, and education, but also by one's positionality, rights, and how one is treated by the system and society at large. In spite of all my privileges, given that I am positioned as a member of a visible minority, I still do not hold real privilege. I am a citizen of a country labelled one of the most multicultural nations in the world, but a country which operates "on the narrative of white settler-colonial imperialism rooted in European Enlightenment traditions" (Abawi, 2018, p. 85). I am a citizen of a country where all diverse faces and races are welcomed but the perpetuation of whiteness effectively continues to flourish through diversity policies. I am a citizen of a country which is called liberal and democratic, but where endemic racism and discrimination prevail at all institutional levels through white hegemony. I am a citizen of a country which is called the land of equal job opportunities for all but is a country with income inequality, discriminatory salary packages, poor financial compensation for heavy workloads, limited job security and bargaining power, and minimal opportunities for professional development to visible minorities (Foster, 2016). I am a citizen of a country which takes pride in inclusion and respect for diversity but a country where I am treated and judged by the way my speech is accented, the way I dress, the way I practice my culture and faith, the way I impart values and beliefs in my children, the way I educate my children, and the way I look and I live (Podhoretz, 1993). I am a citizen of a country where education is free for all students but where white privilege and Eurocentric knowledge shape the core of school culture, epistemology, pedagogy, curricula, and power relations. I am a citizen of a country in which I am active and to which I am captive (Smith, 1987). I am a Canadian woman, a mother and a researcher; I am a body with a race, color, culture, religion, accent; therefore, regardless of my privilege, I am a bearer of oppression.

## Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry

### Why Narrative Inquiry?

Overwhelmed with past, present and future possibilities, I take my glasses off, set them down on the kitchen counter, and pause for a few moments. Feeling so full with stories, I return to my laptop and continue my writing. I am struck by how narrative is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed, narrative starts the very history of mankind (Barthes & Duisit, 1975). Since our origins, humans have been telling stories to shape and inform our understanding; narrative is central to human life, and our narrative instinct was built to tell stories and share experiences (Wang, 2017) “to raise our consciousness and figure out the best action to take” (hooks, 2003, p. 107). As Greene (1995) described, “Some of us may like pure theory, theology, or philosophy, but all of us like stories. It's where we see the spirit best” (p. 233). By telling and retelling stories, we narratively interact and respond to and with one another; we share and understand who we are, who we have been, and who we are becoming.

Dewey (1938/1997) in his work, *Experience and Education*, emphasized, “Experience does not occur in a vacuum. There are sources outside an individual which give rise to experience” (p. 40). Our experiences teach us how to respond to interpretations, representations, situations, and crises. The meanings that come from these experiences generate transformations and our future movements. The narratives of my experiences from immigration to citizenship, from multiculturalism to eurocentrism, from parent involvement to parent engagement, and from a mother to an inquirer are narratives of “gaps, silences, and exclusions shaped in the bumping places children and families experience in schools” (Clandinin, Huber, J., Huber, M., Murphy, Pearce, Murray-Orr, & Steeves, 2006, p. 173). Lives are lived, and stories of our lives are told, retold, and relived on storied landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), landscapes on which larger social, cultural, and institutional narratives are simultaneously unfolding (Murphy & Bengezen, 2015). Seeing narrative as a “way of organizing episodes, actions, and accounts of actions” (Sarbin, 1986, p. 9), I understand narrative inquiry as a methodological path to coming to understand my experiences in relation to curriculum implementation on school landscapes. Through inquiring narratively, I deliberately engage in constructing counter-stories to challenge dominant stories of curriculum. In telling counter-stories, I am “telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society)” (Solórzano & Yosso,



2002, p. 32). My counter stories are stories of living color, stories of “why certain choices are made and others are passed over” (Bayoumi, 2008, p. 12) stories of a constant struggle to try to fit in, to determine who you are and where you belong; stories of living in two different worlds without ever belonging to either one, the continuous mixing and stirring of values, beliefs, culture and identities in an attempt to reach normalcy.

By using narrative inquiry as both “method and phenomenon” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I reconstruct stories of my personal experiences and narratively analyze those experiences in order to gain new, different, and deeper understandings of my lived and told stories. The nature of narrative inquiry is constructive and inductive; that is, it is concerned with encounters, the process, and the deeper understanding of the research phenomenon (Ulin, Robinson, & Tolley, 2012). Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin (2013) asserted, “Often our understanding as narrative inquirers does not come instantaneously, or quickly, or by engaging in clever analysis. Instead our understanding deepens as we retell and relive our lived stories over time, place, and social contexts” (p. 581). I tell and retell my mother stories of my children’s experiences with curriculum with the hope that they have the potential to transform my children’s experiences by shaping their identity as Canadians in powerful ways. At the same time, I also hope that my stories will create “narrative resonance” (Conle, 1996) by striking a spark in readers’ minds or evoking in readers a feeling that the experience described is “authentic, believable and plausible (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 185). Stories create relational reverberations; they overlap and are interwoven and “stories connect us to each other. In ways that polemics and polls cannot” (Bayoumi, 2008, p. 12). The resonant threads of my narratives will evoke readers to feel the dilemmas, critique the dominant stories, and to think with my stories rather than about them, joining actively with my decision points (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In this way, readers become co-participants who engage with the story lines morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually (Richardson, 1994). By narrating stories of my children’s experiences with curriculum, I bring theory and story together via the “threads of scene, actor, plotline and tension arising through discontinuities and significant moments” (Mattingly, 1998) in order to help myself and others better understand practice. Narratives are universal but each narrative has personal, practical, and social significance as “stories are embedded within larger sociocultural, historical, geographic and temporal contexts” (Elliot, 2014, p. 32). My personal justification for my research fuels my ethical responsibilities as a mother. It enables me to reposition myself,

both as a researcher and as a minority mother raising children with dual identities. It compels me to keep inquiring into who I am and who I am becoming in relation to myself and to my children. My practical and social justifications stem from my mother stories of my children's complex experiences which occur in the in-between spaces of their school and home landscapes and which raise issues of identity, equity, social justice, visibility and voice. These spaces call forth an opportunity for realization, transformation; to create a deeper understanding of how social and educational contexts shape students' experiences and how they might they have the potential to be shaped differently in future. Stein (1998) understood that "transformation is realization, revelation, an emergence, not self-improvement, change for the better, or becoming a more ideal person" (p. xxiv).

### **Narrative truth.**

Sitting alone at my kitchen counter immersed in my thoughts, I wonder about truth. Every individual has many stories, and within each story is its own truth. While the narrator's story is the teller's truth, the listener's truth translates into resonance. I wonder about the ways in which my story will resonate with the public, will my story interact with and speak to them? How will they receive my stories? Narrative inquirers are not interested primarily in the facts or truth as such, but rather in the meanings that are portrayed in story form and that arise from the telling and unpacking of the stories. The storytellers construct their stories to convey a specific perspective of an event; it is meaning, not necessarily truth, that is conveyed in the form of stories. Giovannoli (2000) commented:

Truth implies an objective reality, and the realm of narrative is the realm of subjective meaning. Narratives must be seen as interpretive, and the researcher as interpreting those interpretations. Narrative research does not aim at certitude, prediction, and control; it is about interpretation that is trustworthy and valid. (pp. 45-46)

The purpose of narrative inquiry is to reveal meanings of an individual's experiences as opposed to objective, decontextualized truths (Bailey & Tilley, 2002). Given that the only way we can access another's experience is through their telling of it (Riessman, 1993), narratives are, necessarily, subjective stories of experience. To add to the complexity, narratives are told in a time and a place, "nested within an almost endless array of other situations" (Downey & Clandinin, 2010, p. 388). With narrative inquiry, therefore, a researcher aims to "sign up many

truths/narratives” (Byrne-Armstrong, 2001, p. 112), seeking to make visible and inquire into the layers of meaning, rather than determining one generalizable truth. Perhaps it is important to recognize that each one of us is the truth—at least as much of the truth as can be identified (Leggo, 2004). Olson (1995), in accord with this line of thinking, wrote about narrative knowledge rather than truth. She stated:

[Narrative inquirers] value narrative truth based on what a story of experience does—how it is used, understood, and responded to for and by us and others as writers, participants, audiences, and humans (Bochner, 1994; Denzin, 1989). Narrative knowledge is constructed and re-constructed as we author stories of our experience to explain ourselves to ourselves and to others. (p. 122)

As I share my mother story, I share the truth of my own knowing. By making visible why I am foregrounding particular stories, out of all the stories I could tell, the reader is privy to how I am working to make sense for myself and for others as I use my narratives of experience to construct pathways and possibilities for re-imagining and reconstructing an equitable place for all Canadians in school curriculum.

### **Why Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry?**

My existence as a woman manifested itself in different roles as daughter, sister, wife, aunty, and so on. The day my first child, my daughter, was born, I transformed from a woman to a mother; what makes me a mother are my children. My bonding with my babies began when no other bonding existed for them, from conception to the umbilical cord, from feeling the joy of them kicking up their legs inside me to the fear of quiet movements, from hearing silent calls inside my womb to loud cries after they opened their eyes in the new world. As Maushart (1999) expressed:

The experience of motherhood is mediated through the body to an extent unparalleled by any other form of relationship. Women who speak of being altered by motherhood from the inside out are not engaging in metaphorical flights of fantasy; they are expressing literal truth. (p. 242)

Given this bodied connection, no one in this world can understand, love and protect my children more than the way, as a mother, I can. Winnicott, (as cited in Pushor, 2015), a psychoanalyst, saw “the mother’s body [as] a kind of a nautical marker – the reliable object that shows the child

where he is on the map” (p. 15). Winnicott believed that “[t]here is no such thing as a baby – there is only a baby and someone else” (p.15). We are always relational, he emphasized, and from the beginning “the baby holds the mother as much as the mother holds the baby” (p. 15). My positioning as mother is unique in our family and specific to me.

Pryer (2011) noted that a parent’s “emotional, intellectual, and sensorial understandings...always arise out of specific locations, contexts, and circumstances, [and] from, dynamic interactions” (p. 33) with her children and family members. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) asserted, “One of the starting points for narrative inquiry is the researcher’s own narratives of experience, the researcher’s autobiography. Narrative beginnings of our own living, telling, retelling, and reliving help us deal with questions of who we are in the field and who we are in the texts that we write on our experience of the field experience” (p. 70). My children are the focus of my stories, and they shape my mother knowledge, understanding, and experiences. A narrative researcher’s experience is always dual, always the inquirer experiencing the experience and also being part of the experience itself (p. 81). Thinking and reconstructing narratively not only helps me recall, revisit, and report my past and present experiences, but it essentially creates the foundation for future priorities and possibilities. By narrating my mother stories of my children’s experiences with the school curriculum, inquiring into them, and imagining possibilities and transformations, I awaken to the particularities of excluded epistemologies, power relations, hegemonic institutional structures, intersections of my children’s identity narratives, and the tensions that arise in regard to the mandated curricula for all children.

### **Who are you in your research?**

I exist because of you

you exist because I do<sup>9</sup>

a tiny voice whispers from the womb

carried each of my babies

in a cozy niche inside me

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<sup>9</sup> Rajabali, A. (2017). *(Re)turning to the poetic I/eye: Towards a literacy of light* (T). University of British Columbia.

for nine months  
my blood runs in them  
bonding with my babies began  
when no other bonding existed for them  
from conception to the umbilical cord  
from feeling the joy of them kicking up their legs  
inside my womb  
to the fear of quiet movements  
from hearing silent calls  
inside my womb  
to loud cries  
after they opened their eyes  
in the new world  
now holding a piece of my body  
maternal euphoria, a splendored miracle  
a baby & mother born together  
it's all about feeling the feelings  
I am a mother  
Mother of babies ....

**How do you know what you know about mothering?**

I exist because of you  
you exist because I do  
the game of words begins

asked to convince  
to provide evidence  
of love, care and maternal instincts  
mother speaks to words  
in the eyes  
words are in pain now  
are you willing to do this?  
A silence...  
not even a single letter of the alphabet is ready  
the whole army of A to Z returns  
words are in desperate need  
now ready to make a plea  
a request that shocked the mother  
would you be willing to become our mother?  
our existence, survival and function exist on you  
now holding a piece of prose  
it's all about feeling the expression...  
I am a mother  
of words

## **Epistemological Underpinnings**

**Knowledge as constructed.**

The notion that knowledge is constructed through experience has been described by Dewey (1938) and examined by numerous researchers. “Our knowledge of the world and of ourselves in the world emerges from our experience (Olson, 1995, p. 120). Researchers have described this experiential knowing in a number of different ways: as knowing-in-action (Schön, 1983, 1987), as practical knowledge (Elbaz, 1981), as craft knowledge (Tom & Valli, 1990), as constructed knowledge (Bruffee, 1986; Duckworth, 1986; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Kelly, 1955), as embodied knowledge (Johnston, 1989; Polanyi, 1966), and as personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986; Craig, 1992; Johnston, 1991). Alive in the world and engaged constantly in experiences, we all construct knowledge as we pour ourselves into the particulars of the reality that surrounds us. This knowing is the knowing to which we passionately commit as we engage with the world and are changed by it (Polanyi, 1958). It becomes a part of the fabric of who we are – neither objective or verifiable, nor falsifiable or testable – “we live in it as the garment of our own skin” (p. 64). We participate in both shaping our knowledge and being shaped by it (p. 65).

All knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known (Belenky Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986, p. 137). In writing about knowledge which is constructed from experience, Pushor (2015) asserted that every human being, regardless of such factors as age or gender, culture or religion, socioeconomic positioning or sexual orientation, parent or non-parent, is a holder of what González, Moll & Amanti (2005) identify as “funds of knowledge.” These funds of knowledge are defined by them as being “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being (Greenberg, 1989; Tapia, 1991; Vélez-Ibáñez, 1988)” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 2005, p. 72). Funds of knowledge emphasize the community or family as holders of historical and cultural knowledge. Thus, this can change dramatically as the community or family adapts to new situations. As a young girl born and raised in Pakistan, my funds of knowledge entailed Pakistani culture, the Urdu language, definitive gender roles, and religious rituals. However, when I immigrated to Canada my funds of knowledge began to develop in a new country through a new culture, language, system, interactions, and relations. My writing, reading, and speaking were purely in Urdu in Pakistan, whereas in Canada my interactions were in the English language. For functioning and wellbeing, we as humans always

gather funds of knowledge from various situations and interactions. When I became a mother, my parent knowledge came into being.

### **Parent knowledge.**

Pushor (2015) has further asserted that while all individuals alive in the world possess “funds of knowledge,” only parents possess parent knowledge. She characterized parent knowledge as being knowledge which is relational, bodied and embodied, intuitive, intimate and uncertain (pp. 15-19). Because of the unique role of a parent and the unique context of a home, it is knowledge that develops in relationship with a particular child, in intellectual, physical, metaphysical, and emotional ways. It is knowledge that shifts and changes over time as the child, the parent, the family grow and develop and as circumstances and situations change in their lives. As a mother, my knowledge about my children exists in ways which only I know. For example, when my youngest daughter was a toddler and she would grumpily pull on the right side of my shirt, I knew that she was ready for her nap time. That signal was visible only to me. When my two year old son, who was being potty trained, hid behind the curtain, I knew that he was embarrassed because he had not let me know in time that he needed to go to the bathroom. To this day, simply by looking in my daughter’s eyes, I recognize that she is not be feeling very well. Often I know of disagreements and patch ups with old friends without words ever being exchanged. Parent knowledge arises from my living in the complex context of our home, over time, and in intimate relationship as a mother with my children.

### **Maternal knowledge.**

Looking at Pushor’s (2015) conceptualization of parent knowledge through a gender-specific lens, I believe that maternal thinking as a way of knowing offers further insight into an epistemological exploration of knowledge construction.

The journey into motherhood is an odyssey of epic proportions, and every woman who undertakes it a hero. Celebrating our role at the very core of humanity means learning to sing every line of that epic freely, the lamentations along with the hymns.... What lies beneath the brave and brittle face of motherhood is a countenance of infinite expressiveness, a body of deepest knowing. (Maushart, 1999, pp. 246-247)

While motherhood has been glamorized for centuries, narratives of mothering remain unexplored and under-researched. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) suggested that because the role of motherhood is seen as natural, in essence a gift of nature, the mother is seen to be



exerting no ‘agency’ – no activeness, no self-directedness – and, thus, her caring work is counted as contributing nothing. Anzaldúa (1990) argued, “Because we are not allowed to enter discourse, because we are often disqualified and excluded from it, because what passes for theory these days is forbidden territory for us, it is vital that we occupy theorizing space” (p. xxv). As mothers, when we bring in our own approaches, methodologies and practices, we amend that theorizing space. In the field of curriculum, maternal knowledge has not been included as part of the discourse. Given the unique perspective and insight it provides, and the bridge it offers between the worlds of home and school, I believe it has transformative potential to contribute to current ways of thinking.

### **Poetic Representation: Writing, Rewriting, and Reimagining the Story**

Poetry refuses to be confined to a single mode of discourse (Nancy, 2006, p. 5) as it is “a mode of being, radically different from that of other forms of discourse” (Fairchild, 2003, p. 1). Therefore through, by and in poetry I can wrap up all of my natural, distilled, and chaotic thoughts, microscopic experiences, and grand narratives while achieving a powerful sense of fulfillment. It portrays particular qualities of being, elicits metaphorical wondering, synthesizes various modes of perception, unravels imaginative openness, and shows a way of paying deep attention (Wormser & Cappella, 2004). Poetic representation is situated in my understanding, retelling and reliving of my pivotal experiences and cross-cultural encounters. “Poetry thrives on irony, on juxtaposition, incongruity, and discordance” (Leggo, 2018, p. 81), therefore it invites and entices me to fearfully but comfortably enter a space where “tensioned ambiguity newness emerges” (Aoki, 2005, p. 318). Rorty (1989) encourages that poet must have “the courage and audacity to engage, look for and think through the “blind impresses,” the gaps and the blind spots of thoughts, ideas and practices (p. 43). As I retell through poetry, and the narrative unpacking of this poetry, I engage in reliving the moments captured in particular times and places. By metaphorically connecting each of these moments to my poetry, I dwell in the in-between spaces filled with moments of full consciousness where newness and possibility come into the world. Behind every poem that I write is a role which I embody as a Canadian: a mother, a researcher, a Muslim, a vulnerable being, and simply a writer.

### ***Poetic Inquiry***

moving on now  
dancing with impossibility  
each time the words placed on the page  
a call for self-conscious participation  
a component of an investigation  
to poetically represent lives  
dare not to study just  
the social in the social sciences  
the human in the humanities  
the habitual in the habitat  
whether sung out in shamanic rhythms  
or just whispered in a mirror  
unafraid of sensual immersions and subjectivities  
an attempt to more authentically express human experiences  
to get to know humanity in all of its phases  
foibles, tragedies, triumphs, histories, accidents, cruelties  
passions, enchantments, creations, kinships, friendships  
and concrete realities  
from running from fire dancing in a jungle  
to deep breathing in outer space  
aware of ethical practices  
representation of the voices and stories of others  
attempt to work effectively in interdisciplinary ways

a response to the crisis of representation  
experienced in postmodern critical perspectives  
attentive to creative language-based processes  
of constraint, synthesis, crystallization, image, and lyrical forms  
sometimes a socio-political and critical act  
of resistance to dominant forms  
an effective way to talk back to power.  
sometimes a phenomenological and existential choice  
extends beyond the use of poetic methods  
a way of being in the world  
By writing life rather than writing line

*(Found Poem)*

Poetry and story-making help us to live by mapping our own passage through movement and meanings and moving with intuition, reflection and conviction (Rajabali, 2017). Therefore, narrative inquiry does not privilege one method of gathering, interpreting, or representing data. Because research is life as it is lived on the landscape (Phillion, 2002) then inevitably other events, actions, happenings, details also become a part of the research and are woven into the stories that are retold (Trahar, 2009). Poetry in research has been variously labeled as poetic representation (MacNeil, 2000; Richardson, 1994, 1997; Waskul & van der Riet, 2002), poetic inquiry (Butler-Kisber, 2011; Galvin & Prendergast, 2012; Prendergast, Leggo & Sameshima, 2009; Thomas, Cole & Stewart, 2012), poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997; Madison, 1991), narratives of the self (Denzin, 1997), poetic narrative (Glesne, 1997), investigative poetry (Hartnett, 2003), research poetry and interpretive poetry (Langer & Furman, 2004), autoethnographic poems (Furman, 2006), or simply poetry (Faulkner, 2005; Richardson, 1997). Through my poetry, I attempt to conceptualize and gather my nested experiences, narratives, and various situations of my being and becoming. Life is always in flux and so too are our experiences, therefore, my poetry is not bound to any specific genre of poetry. So far, if it is at

one point a representation and inquiry, in another place it explains narratives of the self. Elsewhere, it is investigative or interpretive poetry, or simply poetry.

As a parent researcher, the themes I sought to explore and present to my readers include the human complexities quilted within diversity, the multiplicity of Canadian identity, the quality of equality, the rising tide of intolerance, the politics of color, the significance of ethical values and morality, and the challenges associated with raising Canadian children with multiple identities, languages, nationalities, and values in this era of identity politics. Poetry convinced me that having awful thoughts is necessary as they “open [us] to the horizons and influx of inspiration, intuition, imagination and intention” (Rajabali, 2017b, p. 137) and they help us respond to “life’s ruptures, seeking to live well with ourselves and others” (Jordan, Richardson, Fisher, Bickel, & Walsh, 2016, p. 34 ). They can break us out of the numbing routine... our thoughts can question their own grounds and then wonder over the relation and difference between thoughts and things (Britzman & Dippo, 2000, p. 34). Therefore, I am willing to let myself drift into “the perpetual and elusive process of becoming” (Gide, 1970, p. 197) in order to enable myself to live well for existence and coexistence. The focus of my poetic representation is to become an understanding mother who grasps the complexity of my children’s hybrid identity instead of making chaotic attempts to imprint them with my traditional cultural mold. It is also to speak as an emerging researcher whose voice is not only mine, but also a representation of many other silent voices, extending this voice to every nook and corner of mandated curriculum and the school landscape.

### **Research Design**

Looking away from my laptop, the graduation pictures of my three children hanging on the right corner of the dining room wall bring forward the moments of my hopes and dreams. Looking backward into the past but moving forward to the achievements of my children, reflected in their graduation photos, I am reassured of my choice to immigrate to a new country.

When I immigrated to Canada in 2000, I came with my husband and three children. My oldest daughter Irteqa was three and a half years old, my son Hassan was two and a half, my youngest daughter Iman was one and a half years old, and my fourth and youngest child, Abbas, was born in 2001 in Toronto. Now, 17 years later, three of my children have graduated from high school and my youngest child is in Grade 11. For the past 15 years, my children have come home from school with stories of moments and experiences that have shaped, shifted, questioned, and

confronted their sense of identity and belongingness. Their stories of experience have shaped my mother stories, calling me to interrogate the dominant stories presented to my children through curriculum. As an autobiographical narrative inquirer into my mother stories, I have 15 years of field text with which to work as I consider which narratives to tell, of all the stories I could share, to provoke and evoke thoughtful contemplation of how curriculum can legitimize the identity of diverse children who have grown up as Canadians.

Following introductory and methodological/poetic representation chapters, I center the body of my dissertation around four chapters, each one written to foreground a pivotal mother story of one of my children, evoked when a school story bumped up against a home story, causing me to ask questions, explore conceptualizations, challenge notions about the role of teachers, curriculum, and schools in my children's ongoing search for identity legitimization. Each mother story has been chosen because of what it uniquely adds to the overarching narrative, and of how it holds potential to add to the body of literature in curriculum theory and practice. In these four chapters, as I move from room to room in our home, and I engage in conversation with each of my four children, I paint a picture of the work it takes, the concerted effort, the dilemmas and decisions which must be faced by a mother, to sculpt a home away from home. To provide you, as reader, with a schema of my overarching narrative, I include here excerpts from my four stories, stories that I later unfold deeply and critically in their fullest form in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6.

## **Mother Story 1: A Bedroom Narrative**

### **Inquiring into Irteqa's Experience with a Health Course**

As the news continues to play and I am caught up with thoughts and images of my children, and my recollections of our many shared stories, I am interrupted by Irteqa's voice. Her words bring me back to the present moment as she asks me if I would like my bedding changed to a nice floral fabric. I respond by agreeing with her choice and I leave the kitchen to go upstairs for evening prayers. The floral fabric laying smooth on the bed reminds of the time wherein I was witness to the story she shared with me about her ethical living class.

One evening, a little after supper and during our family homework ritual, Irteqa, who was in Grade 9 then, politely whispered to me and asked if she could talk to me in private. In my

bedroom upstairs, we sat comfortably together. While speaking, the tone in her voice sounded a bit puzzled, as if she was thinking of the right way to express her feelings and thoughts. As a mother, my automatic and natural reaction was to ask, “Is everything alright?” She, in an unsure manner, mentioned that she had experienced a new feeling that prompted her thoughts about identity. She explained to me, all the while juggling her words and feelings, that in her Health 9 class, as part of a required subject, they were taught “Sex Education” (precisely, male anatomy and its functions) to male and female students at the same time, together. She felt trapped, disturbed, and faced an immense lack of clarity in deciding what to do and how to feel in her Sex Education class. She expressed how she underwent feelings of doing something wrong and unethical by sitting in that class. She even experienced hesitation in looking at the male teacher standing and lecturing. Being a young Muslim-Canadian girl, it was against her religious and moral values to be part of the conversation about sex and male anatomy which was occurring on her Canadian school landscape. She was caught in between the dynamics of dominant white culture and her cultural and ethical values which, eventually, were disrupting the foundations of her identity.

What occurs in the classroom influences a student’s overall schooling experience and, similarly, what occurs outside of the classroom influences a student’s curricular experience (Bigelow, 2008; Haw, Shah, & Hanifa., 1998; Kassam, 2007; Sarroub, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008). High school is a time when Muslim girls are subjected to tough decisions related to negotiating between their religious and secular worlds and when they have agency to make their own choices. Given the “adaptive dimension” of the curriculum (Saskatchewan Education, 1992), I wonder why the teacher did not accommodate the lesson for my daughter based on her religious needs. Why in a Health class, which focuses on ethical living, was a student positioned to experience unethical feelings? Gay (2002) argued that it is important that teachers’ knowledge of different cultures goes beyond a basic awareness and respect for different cultures. To be truly effective in teaching diverse students, Gay continued that it is imperative that teachers learn about the particularities of each group present in their classroom so that they can tailor the curriculum in meaningful ways (p. 107).

In Chapter 3, I explore the intersection of ‘ethical living’ and ethical teaching on a school landscape marked by diversity, and the ethics of teaching subjects which contradict a student’s beliefs and family values. How might curriculum making with parents, laying parent knowledge

alongside teacher knowledge, enable the attainment of defined curricular outcomes and, at the same time, honor a diverse family's beliefs and values?

## **Mother Story 2: A Dining Room Narrative**

### **Inquiring into Hassan's Experience with a Psychology Course**

Alone in my bedroom, I perform my prayers and make a special duaa<sup>10</sup> for my children for them to have a peaceful and equitable life in Canada. I fold up my prayer mat and rise with hope. I leave my bedroom and return to the kitchen to check on the food that I had begun to cook earlier and to ensure it is simmering nicely. Hearing the door chimes, I look up from the stove to see Hassan entering after a long day at work. Seeing his face, I offer him a milkshake I had ready for him. As I watch him drink, I can see there are stories and experiences etched on his face today. Since Hassan has been a young child exposed to the outside world, I have been able to map the stories that inscribe themselves on his countenance. A story involving Hassan that stays with me to this day, one for which I continue to regret not having a discussion with his teacher the very next day, emerges in my mind. I think backward to the time when the world was ignited with fury and defensive passion for the victims of the attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris. One afternoon my son came home hungry and inquisitive. While eating the meal I had served him, he started talking about the debate that students in his Psychology class had had that day. The students in his class had been asked to share all their deepest reactions, thoughts, and feelings towards the horrendous happening in France.

Hassan said that majority of the students felt sympathetic for the victims and strongly disagreed with the killing of human beings as an outlet and reaction to the "freedom of speech" policy. When this discussion was occurring in the class, my son told me that he expressed distaste for killing as well, but amongst all the distaste and anxiety, there was one female Muslim student who had been sitting quietly for quite a while. She suddenly spoke up angrily and said that Islam also condemns the killing of human beings but, on the other hand, a human being does not have the right to mock and create caricatures of a very focal figure, prophet, or entire religion in lieu of "freedom of speech." She told them that in Islam, the killing of one innocent is equivalent to the death of humanity. Immediately after she expressed her views on "freedom of

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<sup>10</sup> A duaa is an Islamic prayer or invocation.

speech,” a heated discussion ensued among the students. Hassan recounted that it appeared that the teacher was not prepared to handle this delicate situation, and so his immediate response was to quickly end the conversation. After the class was over, the teacher pulled the Muslim student aside and apologized to her, in the event that she had felt offended. On a moral level, the teacher did the right thing to protect the Muslim girl but, on an ethical basis, why was this incident not discussed openly and in such a way that all of the students in the class received validation of their identity? What strategies might the teacher have used that would either enable students to agree to disagree or to discuss the event in a way that enabled them to escape the binaries of offensiveness and defensiveness?

No matter how much a teacher encourages students to open up and talk about their lives in class, a lack of knowledge of individual experiences might lead to a 'tribalising' of students (Duff & Uchida, 1997) or a dependence on dominant discourses which may not serve the interests of the people whose identities they help to construct” (Cooke, 2006, p. 70). How might a starting place in teacher education be the creation of opportunities for teachers to listen to or to learn about the “real life stories of learners’ lives” (p. 70)? Have educators discussed the topic of identity crisis during any of their professional development days? Have they professionally pursued the questions of how it feels to live a liminal life or to be a minority in curriculum, in school, and in Canada? Have they ever considered inviting a parent to any of their meetings or professional development days to talk about the struggles and challenges involved in maintaining and balancing multiple identities? Felman (1995) argued that teaching and learning take place only through entering and working through crisis, since it is this process that moves a student to a different intellectual, emotional, and/or political space. Noddings and Brooks (2017) asserted that pedagogical neutrality should be the vantage point from which educators facilitate the hard talk about critical concerns, discussions of controversial issues, and matters concerning contested spaces. The starting point, instead of telling “students what is right or wrong,” is to encourage “them to think on each issue critically and to listen carefully to opposing views” (p. 33). Ladson-Billings (2003) affirmed that teachers have ethical and relational responsibilities to their students and have an obligation to teach students to never avoid the knotty and uncomfortable issues of race, class and gender in our society”.How might teacher education include learning the strategies to facilitate deep dialogue and controversial conversations with students about race, racism, antiracism, patriotism and social, political, and religious incidents? How might parents



play an important role in both these aspects of teacher education? How might parents play a role, alongside the teacher and students, in a safe classroom environment in which they discuss these real life issues and experiences of which we are in the midst? How might parents support teachers in challenging students to ask what has not been said – by the student, by the teacher, by the parent, by the text, or by society (Ellsworth, 1997)? What controversial issues are we neglecting to bring into the conversation and why?

In Chapter 4, I raise questions regarding the ethics of curriculum – of what stance teachers take in relation to curriculum content, of how they connect that curriculum to the very students who sit in their classrooms, of how they facilitate the teaching and learning. How might teachers, drawing on parent knowledge, employ “approaches that transcend local and national borders and recognize flexible ways of belonging” (Oikonomidou, 2009) as they work to disrupt the dichotomies of “us” and “them,” or “home culture” and “host culture,” and create spaces for a multitude of hybrid identities?

### **Mother Story 3: A Living Room Narrative**

#### **Inquiring into Iman’s Experience with “Fitting In” on the School Landscape**

After Hassan went to his room to shower and return for supper, the food continued to broil and cook, Muhammad switched the news off and went upstairs, and I approached my computer with all of my fragile feelings and stories spinning inside my head. I began to write my younger daughter’s story. My daughter, Iman, who first set foot on Canadian soil when she was one and a half years old and is now an adult of 18 years. With angry tears in her eyes the morning of the tragedy in Paris, she asked me a question, "Mama, what should we do as Canadian Muslims?" With the television flashing relentlessly with current updates from Paris of victims and perpetrators in the background, we were in a state of shock where it felt like we were sinking deeper into the sofa as much as into our thoughts. My daughter’s question made me speechless and freeze further, not because of what to present to her as an answer, but because of how to present an answer to a daughter who is both a patriotic Canadian and a devoted Muslim simultaneously. I did not know how to begin to explain all of this to her, and to my other three children, when I, as a grown adult, was having my own difficulties wrapping my head around what was occurring. As a nation and particularly as Muslims, we are trying to make sense of

what is taking place all around us. Why is it that whenever my children watch the news and learn of the inhumane incidents going on around the world, instead of their hearts beating in sadness and lament, they race in curiosity towards finding out who committed or contributed to the incidents? Why does “who” matter more than “why” or “how”? Is it because “who” is exclusive to the conscience of Muslims who are expected and asked to justify the actions of fundamentalists? My daughter’s question compelled me to ask Canadian society what role educational institutions and school community have in all of this? Will I have to answer this question alone, as a parent? Or must we unite as one community within society to answer it? As a parent, I am raising ‘Canadian-Muslim’ children. What is the role of Canadian society in this? I would be able to answer my daughter if I was raising only a Muslim, but I am raising a Canadian Muslim. How am I to answer now? Where does my knowledge as a minority parent stand on the school landscape and in relation to the curriculum unfolding there?

A generation of Muslim students growing up in the 21st century is confronted daily with issues of cultural diversity, identity struggles, acculturation, and global conflicts. Growing up between two cultures, and balancing cultural identities and a sense of belonging, is a highly complex process. Sirin & Fine (2007) wrote, “When one’s identity is fiercely contested by the dominant discourse either through formal institutions, social relationships, and/or the media, one of the first places we can witness psychological, social and political fallout is in the lives of young people” (p. 151). When religious identity and the interconnected cultural identity is the subject of stereotypes and discrimination, adjustment to a new culture can be affected (McBrien, 2005; Mosselon, 2009). Learners whose “cultures have been discounted and marginalized” (Williams, 2008, p. 511) “often devalue their own experiences, believing that their cultural and linguistic identities must be forfeited once they enter the classroom” (Griffiths, 2014, p. 107). I believe personal stories of students can serve as a powerful vehicle to analyze myths, assumptions, and presuppositions. So what part can parents play in helping to create counter stories to the current stories of curriculum making on school landscapes? How can parents, working together with teachers and children, help to create a more inclusive space which bridges the gap between home and school landscapes? How can parents, working together with teachers and children, help to create a more inclusive space in which students are invited to share their personal stories as a way to assist them in integrating their diverse aspects of identities, lived experiences, cultures, and world views without hiding their sense of self?

## **Mother Story 4: A Dining Table Narrative**

### **Inquiring into Abbas's Experience with Social Studies**

Supper is finally done. I listen and watch as Irteqa and Iman tell Abbas to clean his school supplies and homework off the table, so we can eat. Abbas scowls playfully in response. After we all sit down and have our meal together, and clean up the kitchen afterwards, everyone heads in the direction of their rooms. Since Abbas has not finished his work, he reopens his books to resume his schoolwork once more. I, too, sit in front of my computer with my work. This evening is like any other, except that it feels unusually long this time around. As I watch Abbas work, old feelings resurface. I am drawn back to the fourth day of his new school year. Convinced that my son had found his place of belonging in his new classroom amongst his Grade 8 classmates and teachers, I recall asking him how everything was going, what he thought of his homeroom teacher, and what he was learning. I remember how, in such a tired voice, he replied, "I almost fell asleep in class today." As he was saying this to me in the evening, I proposed that he go to sleep earlier from now on in order to further himself from his summer sleeping patterns. He said, "No. It's not that. It's because of the movie that they show us repeatedly in Social Studies class."

"Which movie?" was my curious response.

"A movie about Aboriginal people," he stated.

I asked him what he saw in this movie and he said, "All about residential schools, how their land was taken and what 'we' did to them."

In a highly cautious and alert voice, I had inquired, "Who did what to them?"

"We, the Europeans," he replied.

That was a profound moment for me as a parent in regard to the identity formation of my children as "multicultural" Canadians. The moment these words escaped my son's lips, I was overcome with shocked surprise. In his tired and throwaway words, I recognized identity choices my son had made regarding "us" versus "them" and "winner" versus "loser." A multitude of questions rushed through my mind. Why was my son relating himself to the White oppressors and not the Aboriginal oppressed? Was he taking the blame because he is non-Aboriginal? Yet, as a son of Pakistanis, he is not White either. So why then was he considering himself a part of the colonialist regime? Was it because of the obvious white dominance, Eurocentrism, and

power and authority that exists in Canadian society (Bannerji, 2000; Razack, 2004; Thobani, 2007)? Or was it because he understood that a great injustice has been done to Aboriginal people which he has not personally suffered, therefore leaving him with the only option of associating himself to the Europeans? Or is it because of compassion fatigue (Tester, 2001) as a result of becoming inured to the narrative of residential school brutality? In what ways had well-intentioned curriculum and/or curriculum implementation compelled him to become part of or take sides in someone else's legitimation battle, at the expense of negating his own right to a unique identity, culture, and beliefs?

I remember being flooded with a host of other questions that followed for me. How might the provision of curriculum to children containing this explicit information on residential schooling widen or lessen the gap between the "Oppressed" and "Oppressors"? How may it cause 'multicultural' students to get trapped in a history of contact between Aboriginal peoples and Europeans, forced to take one side? How may repeated exposure to deep historical violence lead non-Aboriginal students to desensitization, both to violence and compassion? And how may it lead Aboriginal students to become hyper-sensitive to their historical oppression, capable of seeing themselves as no more than victims and non-Aboriginal students as no more than oppressors? And how may the continued realities and messages of inequity in our society and world negatively affect White children's sense of self and attitudes toward others?

In Chapter 6, I inquire into why my Canadian children must be reminded regularly that "our home and native land" is not theirs. It is the "Native Land" of the Aboriginal people and the "Home" of the white dominant culture. What then is left for my Canadian children who are born and raised on this land? Is it only their home built on someone else's land or is it their homeland? Or neither? How can they construct and shape their identity and a sense of belonging without a land and a home? How can they develop their sense of responsible citizenship in such a scenario where curriculum is inappropriately inculcating their dispositions as Canadians? Does it mean our national anthem insults half of the Canadian population? Does it mean that my son begins every morning at school with hypocrisy by singing, "O Canada, Our Home and Native Land"? In this chapter, I critically explore the complexity of our positioning on the Canadian landscape, the challenges of hybrid identity formation in shifting national and global spaces, the meaning of democratic citizenship, and the troubling aspects of "multiculturalism" in order to open dialogue

on identity, equity, and social justice. It is only when this work is realized that Canada becomes a “home” and a “native land” for all Canadians.

## **Chapters 7 & 8**

Following these four chapters, I write an integrative chapter, Chapter 7, which challenges the narrow conception of diverse parents’ knowledge as problematic, deficit or less knowing. As Pushor (2015) does with parent knowledge, I attempt to make visible what diverse parent knowledge is, and how it can be used by parents, schools, and educators. Teachers, who are positioned as one of the stakeholders in students’ lives, enter students’ lives and stories right in the midst. Differently, parents are positioned as key stakeholders in their children’s lives “from birth to forever” (Pushor, 2013, p. 8). Parents become part of their children’s narratives from their birth, caring for and educating them all of their pre-school years, supporting them through their school years, and continuing to nurture and educate their children post-graduation, right until parents draw their last breath. As a result of this lifelong relationship, parents know and understand their children in a way that no one else in this world can. Therefore, it is critical that all parents’ knowledge and voices are heard, honored, and accommodated on the school landscape and in curriculum construction and implementation. Nonetheless, to be truly inclusive and representative of racialized children and families, it is important that policy makers, curriculum developers, and teachers come to understand the particular and unique knowledge held by diverse parents. Drawing on Moll and Amanti’s (2005) “funds of knowledge,” Villalpando and Solórzano’s (2005) “cultural wealth,” Yosso’s (2005) “forms of capital,” Pushor’s (2015) “parent knowledge,” and Guo’s (2012) “immigrant parent knowledge,” I suggest that there are eight sources of ‘knowledge’ that are held and enacted in particular ways by minority parents: immigrant knowledge, cultural knowledge, linguistic knowledge, religious knowledge, liminal knowledge, counter-narrative knowledge, transnational knowledge, and trans-community knowledge. Given that many teachers do not possess these same bodies of knowledge or ways of knowing as diverse parents, it is imperative that teachers co-construct curriculum alongside diverse parents in order to create an affirming, representative, and inclusive space for diverse students in curriculum, in classrooms, and in schools. In this integrative chapter, I address the questions, “Whose voice and knowledge gets heard in determining what is best for children (Delpit, 2004)? How do teachers lay the distinct knowledge of racially and

culturally diverse parents alongside their own teacher knowledge as they interact with curriculum and with parents?

To conclude my dissertation, I write a final chapter in which I look backward and forward, inward and outward, thinking about what my research has offered the fields of curriculum and parent engagement, and what further research may still be needed. I contest that “just as hegemonic ideologies infiltrate many levels of society simultaneously, counter-hegemonic strategies must operate on many levels as well” (Etmanski, 2007, p. 123). I propose a re-conceptualization of dominant aspects of mandated curriculum in which Eurocentric perspectives, knowledge, and content are de-centered, and teachers are challenged to work with diverse parents to reflect and include in curriculum and curriculum implementation their alternative and worthy perspectives and knowledges.

### **Ethical Responsibilities**

As the day comes to an end and, as usual, carrying my mother stories of each of my children, I shut off the lights in our home, double check the locks, tug the curtains closed, and head towards my room to perform the last prayer of the day. As I kneel on my prayer mat and am swept away in duaas for my children, I am no longer a mother but a prayer in itself. My dua expresses my wish that my children in their home, Canada, will have equal rights and the same treatment as any other citizen of Canada; that when they use their voices, they will be treated as the voices of Canadians; that, in such a time of terror, they feel comfortable in their own skin and religion; that society treats them not as a guest or immigrant or outsider or new Canadian but as a valuable part of society. My final prayer of the day ends on the wish that my children will gain enough strength that they may successfully carry all of their identities and maintain a balance between them.

As I lay in the darkness of my bedroom, ready for sleep and yet still reflecting on the stories that have been so present in my mind today, I am aware of the ethical responsibilities to which my autobiographical narrative inquiry has worked to attend. I recognize that, in sharing my mother stories, I could potentially position my children in vulnerable ways, as I am unable to protect their anonymity or confidentiality. Given all the mother stories I could tell of my children’s encounters with curriculum and identity legitimation, there are many stories that I could have shared. Together, my children and I discussed what stories to present, stories which

are significant for my children and for me, stories which we believe have educative value, and yet are also stories which pose limited risk for my children to be judged. I am confident in these decisions we made together.

### **Procedural Ethics**

Considering the ethics of my study, obtaining ethical approval for my study from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board was the most straight forward piece of this work. Their processes are clearly defined, forms are readily available, and the Tri-Council Policy Statement II underpins this aspect of the ethics process. No participants were enrolled in the study as it is framed as autobiographical research. Utilizing autobiographical narrative inquiry, my four children and I are most central to the research. As any researcher does, I obtained informed consent from each of my children. I fully described the research process both verbally and in written text form. They were given an opportunity individually to read and respond to the text and had the right to mask or remove pieces of information. They were made aware of my inability to protect their confidentiality and anonymity, and we discussed the risks and benefits of this methodological reality.

Field text was constituted from my memory, recollection of stories, reflections, family pictures, family artifacts, family home videos, and journal entries. No interviews or observations were used to collect field text given the autobiographical nature of the research design. While teachers, students and parents were not the characters of my stories, yet, since my children's stories unfolded on a school landscape, I protected the anonymity and confidentiality of all characters who appeared indirectly in my narratives through masking identifying characteristics and details.

### **Relational Ethics**

What is different for me, as a parent researcher and as my inquiry is autobiographical, is that my children are necessarily the main characters within my stories. As a mother, my relation and bonding with my children is embodied, emotional, and intimate. My children have, in effect, been co-researchers of my autobiographical narrative inquiry as their stories have merged with my own and, in so doing, created new stories. At all times, I maintained sight of the

wholesomeness of their lives as our narrative connection is embedded in our biological relationship. I did not enter into the midst of their nested stories, as many researchers do, as we have lived, composed and recomposed our stories and lives together through all the certain and uncertain times of their lives. They have shaped my mother stories as much as I have shaped their stories through our lived and living experiences. As their mother first and always, I treated and honored their stories with only trust, love, and care.

My children, as characters in my narratives, were given a copy of the draft chapters. Together, we discussed how they are represented and made any necessary changes to ensure they are presented accurately and fairly. Each member of my family is aware that they are characters of my stories, and they recognize that what I inquired into and told are my ‘mother stories’ as an experience of my own thoughts and perceptions. Every family member read all of my mother stories, and each family member had the opportunity to ask for changes, omissions, or rewording. If they were not comfortable with their representation in the research text, the representation was adjusted to reflect their perceptions as well as my own. I ensured that my children understood the value and importance of their contribution to this inquiry. I intended that they feel strengthened and empowered, as humans and Canadians, as a result of this research process.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Before drifting into sleep, I think about what will happen in the next morning, and the morning after that, and over a long series of mornings. Will these coming mornings show any change towards the responses and questions I pose? As Canadians, we take pride and often congratulate ourselves on the fact that we are one of the most “multicultural” countries in the world. The ground reality is a little different. We have color, race, religion and identity related issues and are far from being the racially harmonious country we like to tell ourselves we are. Through my research, I offer my own story from my perspective as a minority mother researcher by sharing my children’s lived experiences on the Canadian school landscape and with curriculum. I use my narratives to invite others to tell their stories so we, as a culture, as communities of faith, as families, as parents, as educators, and as Canadian citizens, can have more informed and robust conversations around the increased complexity of hybrid identity formation and the possibility of a more holistic approach to the inclusion of multiple narratives,



realities, perspectives and practices on school and societal landscapes. My narratives of experience remind us that we still have a long way to go if we intend to champion our values of pluralism, tolerance, and inclusion on the world's stage. My research also opens critical possibilities to see different perspectives, share frustrations, work through conflicts, and collectively explore controversial and provocative issues in respectful ways by bridging the gap between story, theory, and practice.

I believe the partnership of school, curriculum, teachers, and parents, all the while keeping students central, is the cornerstone of change. In this research, I open channels for constructive dialogue and collaborative discussions between parents and educators through which “to begin to question underlying epistemologies, challenge the status quo, and value and build upon the funds of knowledge and parent knowledge intrinsic to the home environments of students. I believe such conversation will counteract barriers to effective home-school relationships that plague the school system” (Overstreet, 2014, p. 20).

I sink into slumber, hopeful and optimistic that such a reformation of curriculum, as theory, policy, and practice, can positively impact the lives and identity formation of all students because our children are the most valuable asset of our nation. What affects our children affects us all.

## Chapter 2

### Looking Inward: Unpacking a Mother's Love

*The moment a child is born, the mother is also born. She never existed before, the woman existed, but the mother, never. A mother is something absolutely new.*

*(Rajnish, as cited in Tate, 2013, p. 167)*



*Figure 2. Momina and Irteqa Khan, 1996. Johar Khatoon Hospital, Peshawar, Pakistan.*

“Mother,” a tiny voice whispers from the womb. “Your tender caresses and euphonious whispers assure me that this world is beautiful and welcoming.... what can I do other than rejoice in this cozy niche of mine?” This is the voice I conceived of and felt as a mother, well

before my child had taken his first step in the world. When the time came and his lively cries were heard, the little baby now outside, weakly opened his eyes to see the world. As soon as the nurse congratulated my husband and placed our child in his hands, my husband kissed our son's forehead and cleared his throat for the deliverance of a sacred rite. Tilting our child's tiny right ear to his lips, he delivered an *adhan* brightly and resonantly. This rite symbolized our son's entry into the human world and into a Muslim family and laid a straight path for him in terms of humanity and religious faith for the rest of his life. In that moment, with the *adhan* resounding at the forefront, *Allah* became his.

Allah is the Greatest,  
I bear witness that there is no God besides Allah,  
I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah,  
Come to prayer,  
Come to success,  
Allah is the Greatest,  
There is no God besides Allah. (Adhan, n.d.)

Hunger and the attachment bond drove the child to me as his mother, with whom he began an outer-body relation of love, expression, and reliance. When I held my child, kissed his head, and thanked Allah, tears unconsciously flowed from my eyes. I envisioned my own mother, my father, siblings, and family who were seven seas and thousands of miles away in Pakistan. From that moment on, so far away from family, we became our child's everything: his father, mother, grandparents, aunt, uncle, and cousins. What was different for our fourth child was that, unlike his older siblings, he was born on Canadian soil, among Canadians, and during a Canadian spring. Every new day as he grew into a young boy in his Canadian home, my son was nurtured by our love as parents, Urdu lullabies, visits to the mosque, and traditional cuisine. During celebrations of Eid, he received guests to our home with his cute "Assalamu Alaikum"<sup>11</sup> and "Allah Hafiz,"<sup>12</sup> mimicking the accent of his siblings, subsisting comfortably in the sanctuary that was his home in Canada.

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<sup>11</sup> *Assalamu Alaikum* is a standard salutation among Muslims which means, "Peace be upon you."

<sup>12</sup> *Allah Hafiz* means, "May God be your guardian," The vernacular translation is good bye.

Then, a day came when he stepped foot away from us and into a new world, his first day of school. For this child, whose everything was us and us alone, it was difficult and scary to let him go. My mind was inexplicably brimming with questions this day:

- How can I leave him with a teacher who does not know anything about him?
- How can she possibly understand him as much as I do?
- Will she be able to recognize the difference between his shyness and his struggle to express his thoughts and emotions?
- Will she have time to understand his silence as he cannot speak and comprehend English?
- Will she put enough effort to get through all the layers of his identity, to learn about his family background, and try to know him?
- Will she know how precious and vulnerable this gift I am sharing with her is?

One day my son came home from school and spoke to me in our secret language, the language of mothers and children, a language in which eyes speak more than words. As I studied his eyes and face, my son took out his lunch box from his backpack and started eating. He was hungry. Once he was eating comfortably, he said, “Mama, please don’t pack me potato cutlets for lunch from now on.”

Speaking in a curious voice as I reminded him how much he loves potato cutlets, I asked, “How come you don’t want to take them to school anymore?”

He said, “Cuz no other kids in my classroom bring them for lunch.” In that particular moment, I found myself dwelling in a contested space, experiencing I am sure the same mysterious feeling my son felt each time he opened his lunch box at school.

I dwell in contested spaces  
the betwixt and between  
constantly surprised  
by twists and turns  
views and vistas  
fission and fusion

Morning, as usual,  
in the kitchen  
beckons the thrumming of pots

boiling of earth's edible wares  
the fry pan sizzles  
aroma of masala lingers in every nook  
pinch of savory spices and herbs mixed  
tantalizing desi fried potato cutlets ready  
the gardening of lunches, and  
clicking of a gratified lunchbox

In sleep wiped from early eyes  
making a motion down the stairs, as usual,  
asking about his lunch for the school day  
*What are you making, mama?*  
Fried potato cutlets, your favorite  
(refusal to accept the known)  
*No, I don't want to take these to school*  
(request to embrace the unknown)  
*Can I have pasta instead?*  
But it's what you love, my son  
*I do, but I don't*  
opening the lunch box at home  
is different from opening it at school  
*No one, none of my friends, brings it for lunch*

Moment of silence, awkward spaces of mothering  
unsettling emotions, into the abyss of the bizarre  
in between spaces filled with uncertainty  
realizing my son is making sense of his duality  
grade two, a process of self discovery  
seeing self in relation to self and to others

Identity negotiations in a cold white land  
Stem from what others think of me  
Others from whom I look different

in a struggle of self legitimation  
not only color, race, religion, and language matter  
but also, and even  
a potato cutlet

In my son's refusal to take a potato cutlet in his lunchbox, I heard the unspoken words, "Mother, this world is so very different from the one of which you inspired me to dream. It judges me on the basis of 'who I am' and treats me based on the stratification of my color, race, religion, ethnicity, beliefs, culture, language and accent."

In my heart I responded, "I know my child, how torn you are between your two worlds of identity. I promise you that I will teach you how to see the beauty in broken things. I promise you that I will teach you that it is "in this third space—in the in-between— where [you] find the light... the light of knowing, that has promise, purpose, and possibility" (Rajabali, 2017b, p. 147).

I promise you that I will teach you not to let your silence make the loudest noise as it allows the ones in position of power and authority to hold onto practices and beliefs that might make you more vulnerable. I promise you that I will teach you it is okay to feel weak and scared because, when we feel the weakest and the most defeated, we are not breaking apart, we are just transforming into who we are meant to be. I promise that I will teach you how "we must struggle to recreate the shattered knowledge of our humanity" (Levin Morales, 1998, p. 13). I promise you that I will teach that you are visible and how not to let your existence become invisible through "mediating the inequities within the system and fighting for positive change" (Lau, 2008, p. 39). I promise you, my son, that I will relay your message of identity struggle to everyone who has a role to play in your life until you learn how to stand up for yourself and speak through your own voice."

I am a mother who has carried each of my four babies in a cozy niche inside me for nine months; my blood runs in them. My bonding with my babies began when no other bonding existed for them, from conception to the umbilical cord, from feeling the joy of them kicking up their legs inside me to the fear of quiet movements, from hearing silent calls inside my womb to loud cries after they opened their eyes in the new world. No one in this world can understand, love and protect them more than I can, as a mother. I am a mother of four Canadian children

who, for the past 18 years, have called Canada “home.” As a minority parent raising children with multiple identities, cultures, nationalities, languages, and beliefs, I have experienced, through my lived stories, how complex integration and the process of blending and balancing identities can be. My experiences have shaped my understanding in a narrative manner; either being a law-abiding Canadian, or a mother helping my children with homework, or a former educational assistant in the school system, I have diligently followed social, political, institutional, dominant, standard, and structured stories presented to me. Somehow faithfully following along led me to practice structured silences without fully knowing it. My children’s experiences of being colored and minority Canadians on the school landscape and in the school curriculum bumped into my silences.

I vividly remember times in my graduate education classes when teachers would share their stories and experiences of children and families. One colleague said that the goal of teachers should be to treat and see children equally, to teach them in a “colorblind” way. In that instance, I began constructing meaning out of my personal lived experiences as a minority mother. I wanted to request, as a mother, to please invite me into your classroom, create a space for my voice, and present me with the choice of whether or not I would like you to teach my child in a colorblind way. I wanted to tell that teacher that I would like her to be colorblind when treating my children equitably in relation to others, but not when teaching them. I wished to let her know that “color” is a significant aspect of their identity and makes them who they are as individuals and Canadians. I wanted to tell her that when educators ignore the differences in their students' identities or “assume that their students are ‘normal’ i.e., expect them to have the normative, privileged identities or neutral, i.e., without race, sex, and so forth which is often read as ‘normal’ anyway” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 29), they miss the opportunity to create inclusive classrooms.

I believe “for every story that sees the light of day, untold others remain in the shadows, censored or suppressed” (Jackson, 2002, p. 11). By narrating my mother stories of my children’s experiences with the school curriculum, inquiring into them, and imagining possibilities and transformations, I become awakened to the particularities of excluded epistemologies, power relations, hegemonic institutional structures, intersections of my children’s identity narratives, and the tensions they experience in regard to the mandated curricula for all children. Newton (1995) expresses similar sentiments about narrating story that “sheer experience of narrating or

witnessing stories can transform persons in ways they often cannot control” (p. 291). Through my stories, I challenge the validity of existing policies, practices, and attitudes. I wonder what happens when children’s sense of themselves is under attack by a dominant narrative that does not fit coherently with their own. I wonder what it means in terms of identity making to be excluded so readily and so regularly that the only comfortable space is the space that excludes. What does it mean to identity making to recognize yourself as positioned on the outside looking in (Clarke, 2014, p. 117)?

*I question!*

Why does a thin piece of fabric on my head carry the weight of the world?  
Why does my name switch to Alpha, Bravo, or Charlie at airports?  
Why does my skin colour speak louder than my spoken words?  
Why does my accent receive more attention than my English skills?  
Why does my ethnicity appear quicker than my humanity?  
Why does my difference lock my place as the ‘other’?  
Why does my higher qualification adhere to odd jobs?  
Why does my faith become politicized as an extremist ideology?  
Why does my positioning face subjugation to systemic power and privilege?  
Why does my identity become tormented in a dichotomy between home and land?  
Why does my racial identity bump into racialization of identity?  
Why does my citizenship demand a certificate of assimilation?  
Why does my hybrid identity undergo ceaseless rupturing?  
**Why** does my silence make the loudest noise?

*We question!*

**When** can we be ready to affirm the identity of all citizens?  
**Who** can we engage in combating the biases and assumptions?  
**How** can we sculpt the colourless face of every race?  
Our quest and attempt to honour *Humanity Matters*,  
*We seek to find answers!*



Questioning is a powerful way of learning because it not only mediates the temptation to plunge in with our opinions, wonders, conclusions, and proposals but it also initiates a wrestling with our personal biases, assumptions, preconceived notions, and ideologies. Questioning is an introspective way to gain deeper insights into our lived experiences in order to understand ourselves better, and to also understand our existence in relation to others. I question and wonder:

- How does a minority mother explain to her children the meaning of “exclusion” when she sees her children’s identity being shaped by “structured silences” (Greene, 1993) offered through curriculum?
- How does a mother compose an answer for her Canadian born and raised children when they are being consistently asked where they are from?
- How does a mother respond to a question when her “Muslim Canadian” children ask her about why Muslims are targeted the most in the Western world?
- How does a mother prepare her culturally diverse children for a world that will not care for them unconditionally?

As a mother, I know that one of the cruelties my children may encounter, over and above the typical slings and arrows of childhood and adolescence, is racial prejudice, an inequitable categorization of difference and disadvantage which can lead to suffering, disparity and marginalization (Pease, 2010). My autobiographical narrative inquiry into my mother stories, situational and contextualized in nature, explores the role of school community in affirming identities of children who are bearers of multiple nationalities, languages, cultures, and beliefs.

### **Where Are You From?**

Every time you ask, I pause

no longer annoyed, I seek

*You persistently ask me, “Where are you from?”*

I am an ‘ethnically diverse’ Canadian.

*You question me about my origin.*

I am a ‘hyphenated’ Canadian.

*You remind me that policy calls me multicultural.*

I am a 'multicultural' Canadian.

*You label me a promoter of mono-culturalism.*

I am a 'racialized' Canadian.

*You consider me an advocate of differentialism.*

I am a 'Pakistani' Canadian.

*You suspect me as a dubious subject of patriotism.*

I am a 'Muslim' Canadian.

*You brand me a hallmark of fundamentalism.*

I simply assert... I am a Canadian.

*You innocently ask me, "Where are you from?"*

I am a Canadian.

I operate in a pluralistic mode

neither White nor Indigenous

neither 'half' nor 'bi' nor 'multi'

I am one 'whole' of an in-between identity

I live beside, between, and among you

in a space between 'your' home and 'their' land

a little like you, a little different from you

I am only one, but I am one of you

Ah, don't forget to ask me again, *"Where are you from?"*

[Your question helps]

it invites me to think, wonder, seek, and know  
it staples together the narratives of my diasporic moments  
it offers me a chance to love living on the periphery  
it stirs an inquiry into myself in my own autobiography  
it clarifies my response to the crisis of representation  
it challenges me to effectively talk back to power  
it drives me to resist dominance and authority  
it forces me to foresee inquiry in a failed experiment  
it convinces me to crave confusion  
it inspires me to unmask inequalities  
it braces me to embrace mystery  
it prompts me to compose poetry  
it solicits me to make sociology  
it assists me to restore humanity  
Questions matter.

### **Looking Outward: Unpacking a Researcher's Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry “highlights the importance of acknowledging the centrality of the researcher’s own experience – the researcher’s own livings, tellings, retellings, and relivings” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 70). Narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical. The focus of autobiographical narrative inquiry is personal lived experience – that is lives and how they are lived (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Caine (2012) employ the terms *autobiographical* or *narrative beginnings* to refer to the personal stories narrative inquirers explore to “make evident the social and political contexts that shaped our understandings” (p. 171). Inquiry into the researcher’s own narrative of experience includes “living, telling, retelling,

and reliving” (p. 70) in order to understand ourselves in deeper ways. With understanding ourselves comes understanding others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). “People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context” (p. 2). As Eisner (as cited in Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) wrote, “Experience is what people undergo, the kinds of meanings they construe as they teach and learn, and the personal ways in which they interpret the worlds in which they live” (p. ix). Our personal and practical experience teaches us how to respond to situations, crises, representations, and interpretations. The meanings that come from these experiences generate transformations within us and lead to our future movements. The narratives of my experiences from immigration to citizenship, from multiculturalism to eurocentrism, from colonialism to neocolonialism, from racial to religious divide and from parent involvement to parent engagement on my children’s school landscapes, are narratives which emerge from my “personal, social, [ethnic], practical, [historical], [ideological], [spiritual] and political experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 447) and which result in my knowledge of schools, curricula, and the world. I continue to understand narrative as “the ability to bestow meaning on otherwise disorganized events” (Fulford, 1999, p. 113) and narrative bestows meaning as much as it recognizes some of the possibilities of meaning that lie always in the seemingly tangled messiness of lived experience (Leggo, 2008, p. 5). We live in and we live by many stories throughout a lifetime; story is “a living thing, an organic process, a way of life. What is taken for stories, only stories, are fragments of/in life, fragments that never stop interacting while being complete in themselves” (Trinh, 1989, p. 143). Storytelling and unpacking stories emerged as a resource enabling me to revisit my past experiences, reconnect to my present experiences, envision my future priorities, weave webs of significance and cohesion, and create meaning out of what otherwise might have remained an unbearable and unquestionable sequence of happenings. “Our stories are authored from the particulars of experience and are expressions of our personal practical knowledge” (Olson, 1995, p. 122). My everyday experiences in personal, social, institutional, political, and ethical settings reflect, create, and contribute to broader socio-economic and socio-political conditions as they are expressed through grand narratives like immigration, multiculturalism, capitalism, eurocentrism, neocolonialism, and racism. Through inquiry I unpack my mother stories, the layers and depth of the moments I live and relive in order to raise consciousness and unmask personal and institutional realities.

The horizons of our knowing shift and change as we awaken to new ways of “seeing” our world, to different ways of seeing ourselves in relation to each other and to the world. We begin to retell our stories with new insights, in new ways. (Connelly & Clandinin, as cited in Olson, 1995, p. 124)

Knowing comes from experience while wakefulness comes from experiencing the experience. “There are occasions of seeing for the first time, of revelation, of insight, and occasions of seeing again, of resonance and of recollection” (Sacks, 1984, p. xi). I am seeing again that as an individual I am both unique and separate, being isolated in my own “continuity of experience” (Dewey, 1938). At the same time, being part of this world situates me in the context of interaction with the social world, granting me an insight to collective identity. Bateson (1994) specified that insight “refers to that depth of understanding that comes by setting experiences, yours and mine, familiar and exotic, new and old, side by side, learning by letting them speak to one another” (p. 14). My identity negotiations as a culturally diverse Canadian encouraged new insight in me about retelling my familiar and foreign, and new and old stories in new ways. I seek to write and unpack my mother stories and to present this analysis to all Canadians to attain legitimation of my Canadian “born and raised” children’s identity.

Often in my stories, I situate myself in my incessant state of negotiations: dialogues of dilemmas, moving back and forth, inward and outward, between right and wrong, black and white, fairness and injustice, belongingness and alienation, exclusion and inclusion – essentially in dialogues belonging to the “in-between” (Bhabha, 1988) spaces in which I reside. In the act of unpacking these stories, unpacking brings forward the most focal moment of my story, and makes visible the multiple climaxes where I, or others, either dissolve or evolve as characters in that story. Unpacking is a critical stage where we either melt into our fears, vulnerabilities, insecurities, and silences or a stage where we evolve beyond who we have been, and into who we are meant to be. Unpacking a story requires attention to extreme detail and intricacies of the moments in which we live, those we hold on to, and those we are trapped within.

As Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin (2013) stated, “These in-between spaces also called the “third space of enunciation,” (Bhabha, 1988, p. 208) are filled with uncertainty and indeterminacy. They are places of liminality; the betwixts and between, which, we argue, require attention to context(s), relationship(s), and time to explore narratively” (p. 580). Through dwelling in these spaces of liminality and thinking narratively, I became awakened to how my

children and I are positioned on both school and Canadian landscapes. “Thinking narratively creates possibilities for imagining “counter-stories” (Nelson, 2001); stories that hold tremendous potential for educative reverberations in lives, in and outside of schools” (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 229). By dwelling in an in between space I create a “generative space” for myself and my children where only words and whispers but “actions and encounters [are] juxtaposed” (Fels, 2013, p. 40), where the margin serves as a “crack where the lights comes in” (Aoki, 2000/2005, p. 332). Being in a state of intense liminality and “living in tensionality” (Irwin, 2003, p. 64) offered new “ways of knowing” or “in/sights” (p. 63) and developed my understanding of who we are to ourselves and to each other. Without this process of analysis, I would not have seen an inquirer in myself.

Unpacking my mother stories awakened in me “something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (Bhabha, 1990, p. 211) which Asher (2002) calls “hybrid consciousness” (p. 85). With this consciousness I endeavoured to sit with my struggles. It is not easy to sit with one’s struggles and almost equally impossible to push past them. A series of questions followed my emotions: Is it safe to unpack my stories? Will the people around me understand me, or further silence, isolate, and judge me? Will I be able to take those words back or is it going to be people’s property to interpret the way they want? Will I be prepared to face the aftermath of people’s interpretations? Do I have the right to share my mother stories of my children? Will sharing my mother stories of my children make them stronger or even more vulnerable? Is it a safe space and place to unpack my stories? Is it the right time to unfold my stories publicly? Do I have enough words and strong enough English skills to unpack hard matters with softer words? Thomas King (2003) stated:

...once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world. So you have to be careful with the stories that you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told. (p. 10)

I weighed the meaningfulness of unpacking my stories for myself, my children, and all of us as a society. “Stories are not to be treated lightly as they both carry, and inspire, significant obligations and responsibilities”: stories must be cared for as they are at the heart of how we make meaning of our experiences of the world” (Huber et. al., 2013, p. 214). Simultaneously, I weighed the significance of unpacking my story as opposed to the implications of holding it in. “When the stories we tell differ from the stories we live, we may live a cover story of self-

deception” (Crites, as cited in Olson, 1995, p. 132). Though fearful, I felt prepared to unpack my stories, yet I still found myself wrestling with what to uncover and what to conceal in those particular moments of unpacking. “Sometimes dissonance will break through and pull you into an intense involvement” (Bateson, 1994, p. 5). As I sat at my kitchen counter unpacking my stories, I realized that the authorship and ownership were strictly mine, and that “authorship not only expresses itself through narrative, it also develops through narrative” (Tappan & Brown, 1989, p. 192). This realization inculcated in me the strong sense of responsibility and empowerment to put the entirety of my translucent thoughts to transparent words on paper. In the transfer from thoughts to written words, I experienced the transformative power of the single word “unpack,” which gave birth to inquiry in my life’s narrative. The moments of “unpacking” taught me that it was not my story that had to be unpacked, rather it was an inquiry into the vulnerabilities, insecurities, and silences of my past, present, and future which were hidden among the endless words of my narrative.

Through this process of unpacking my mother stories, I learned to uncover my whispers, my long self-imposed and structured silences. I learned to question, to resist, and to create a “counter story” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). I learned that “we are a species whose main purpose is to tell each other about the expected and the surprises that upset the expected, and we do that through the stories we tell” (Bruner, 2002, p. 8).

It was when my eldest daughter embarked on her journey to school that stories that upset the expected began to enter our home. Stories created by the context of school bumping up against our home context included requests that I drop her at the school door instead of near the classroom, a refusal to take traditional foods I had cooked for lunch, and English becoming the preferred language spoken among my children. As time went on and more of my children entered school, these kinds of new stories continued. They included my children’s correction of my Urdu accent, their desire to dress up as ladybugs, unicorns, and tigers for Halloween instead of wearing traditional gowns, and how excitedly they awaited Christmas – memorizing carols, pleading to go to the mall and to purchase a Christmas tree – and asking when Santa would come to deliver presents. When my children began correcting my English, I wish it had dawned on me that Urdu language was escaping our home. Instead of speaking more Urdu, I naively spoke English as much as possible in hopes that my children would find acceptance in school and be able to connect with their peers and teachers. Many questions began arising for me and I began

to feel my repositioning as a mother. I asked myself many questions, such as: Why is Halloween celebrated? How should my children participate in it? How do I understand the excitement my children feel for Christmas in comparison to Eid? These kinds of questions caused me to embark on a new journey full of surprises and wonders about the values and beliefs by which I should raise my children in their new home of Canada. I puzzled, “How do I as mother make sense of the hybridity of my children’s identity?” “How do I help them to understand their multiple worlds and the often-in-between position in which they find themselves?” These questions also caused me to wonder about how my children’s teachers were making sense of these same questions on the school landscape. Were they awake to them too? Puzzled by them? Struggling with them? How were my children being reflected in school curriculum, language, literacy, pedagogy, history, and celebrations?

Our lived and told stories arise from the temporal nature of experience in which we are simultaneously participants and tellers of their life stories (Carr,1986). By inquiring into and telling my stories I have become awakened to map my own passage through conviction and to reconstruct my way of being and becoming by bridging cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious divides.

King (2003) quoted the Nigerian storyteller Ben Okri as having said, “We live by stories, we also live in them... if we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives (p. 153). The older my children grew, the harder the questions became. Early on, my mother story was shaped by the fact that my children, who spoke, read, and wrote fluent English, and were academically high achieving in reading and writing comprehension, were placed in an EAL class for their first four years of school. I was puzzled by how their color seemed to speak louder than their comprehension skills. Later on, my mother story was further shaped by my younger daughter’s friends, who asked her why she wore a hijab<sup>7</sup> and wondered aloud what her hair was like. I, in turn, wondered why what was *on* her head seemed to speak louder than what was *in* her head. Even later, my story was further shaped when my daughter, who was graduating high school, questioned the nature of festivities like the Graduation Banquet and After Grad Party, asking how young Muslim students graduating could be a part of them instead of feeling excluded and alienated by them. I was struck by how her religious choice not to partake in dancing or drinking seemed to speak louder than her right to celebrate her graduation with her peers.



As Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin (2013) asserted, “In a narrative inquiry, stories are not just a medium of learning, development, or transformation, but also a life” (p. 578). As we compose narratives, then, we are also composed (Clarke, 2014, p. 114). Through inquiry into my mother stories, I began to realize my state of being. With time, I began to see that the stories that entered our home from the outside changed the climate within as well – some days storms, some days rain, some days sunshine, and some days wind. There became a nonstop duality of speaking English and Urdu, valuing Christmas and celebrating Eid, displaying one half of the closet with casual pants and t-shirts and the other half with traditional shalwaar kameez,<sup>8</sup> eating pasta and pizza but also appreciating biryani<sup>9</sup> and Haleem,<sup>10</sup> lip singing to Western pop music but also sitting in silence when the adhan was recited. It is out of this nonstop duality that my mother stories emerged. I realized that I was in the midst of my own fluid story, which involves the experiences of my four children who are struggling daily with the ambiguities and pressures of blending and balancing their national, ethnic, and religious identities as Canadians, Pakistanis, and Muslims. By moving backward and forward, inward and outward, between the spaces of policy and practice, home and land, belonging and alienation, us and them and, multicultural and dominant narratives, I became a parent-researcher. I began to produce “supplementary discourses as sites of resistance and negotiation” (Khan, 2002, p. 114).

As a researcher, I have learned “new ways of decentering [myself], of breaking out of the confinements of privatism and self-regard into a space where [I] can come face to face with others and call out, ‘Here [I am]’” (Greene, 1995 p. 31). I have become awakened “to new ways of storying experience and constructing knowledge (Olson, 1995, p. 131) through unmasking oppression and openly dialoging with the world. I have dared to invite readers of my work into a space of “wakefulness which allows us to proceed forward with a constant, alert awareness of risks, of narcissism, of solipsism, and of simplistic plots, scenarios, and unidimensional characters” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 182). As eloquently expressed by Greene (2000), “If we keep our own questions open and take intentional action against what stands in the way of learners’ becoming, of our becoming, the spaces for freedom do enlarge” (p. 13). As Canadians, we all must continue to explore the complexity of our positioning on Canadian landscapes. “We no longer accept what is given but awaken to wonder how it came to be and what other ways might be possible” (Olson, 1995, p. 131). We must ask ourselves how to create ethical and honouring spaces for silenced voices in curriculum in order to unearth the weeds of oppression

and move closer to the development of a just and democratic Canadian society. “Perhaps in our lifetimes we will not succeed. Perhaps things will only get worse. But this does not invalidate our efforts (Hedges, 2009, p. xv).

### **Looking Through: Packing it All Up with Poetry**

#### **(When the Words Begin to see the World)**

Unpacking my story lead me to inquiry, whereas inquiry initiated an inner dialogue about “clarification and magnification of [my] being” (Aramitage, 2014, p. 26) through sensuous experience of listening, feeling, and seeing new ways of how the words and the world interact. Inquiry enabled me to gather the scattered thoughts from every nook of my body and how to fold them nicely. Inquiry inspired me to play with the words sans hesitance. The consistent fight between Urdu words of my native language and English words of my additional language was unstoppable; it still is to this day. I find myself continuously kicking around words in my head, pulling them apart, putting them back, switching them with other words, balancing words with rhyming words, and twisting and weaving them incessantly, sometimes in search of rhythm, flow, and specificity and, at other times, to unveil ambiguity, tension, and wonders. Stronach (2011) wrote that “casting around in ignorance, confusion, (and even despair!) is very much the process of coming-to-think” (p. 308). As I seek to make sense out of the chaos of words, emotions, identity negotiations, experiences, and thoughts that swirl around my head without end, I am constantly reminded that my life is inextricably intertwined with language, rhetoric, and literary device whereby I disclose (and conceal) what I know about the world and my experience in it. I am caught up in language, in word-making, in meaning-making, in metaphors, constantly striving to create the world, or at least a sense of place in the world (Leggo, 2004).

#### **People of Metaphor**

WE, the people of metaphors not literalism  
the people of intuition not institutionalism  
the people of conception not commercialism  
the people of spirituality not secularism  
the people of mother earth not capitalism

the people of magnificence not narcissism  
the people of consecration not consumerism  
the people of evolution not materialism  
the people of sacredness not fundamentalism  
the people of imagination not pragmatism  
the people of soul-full-ness slit from isms

we, sans isms, sans time-frames, sans leakages  
WE, a bloc of hoping humans  
texture becomes us  
the cartographer's wrought  
in flesh, bones and blood  
muting & mapping & marrying  
desires of the corporeal body  
released from pollution  
dissected imitations  
redemption  
a mystical puzzle  
to find the sojourning soul  
filling the metrics of life  
may be  
60, 70, 80  
or perhaps ninety  
from end to end  
an interminable journey  
trodden primrose path  
towards mystery  
searching for ichor

Initially this search and process of word making, meaning making and a sense of place in the world felt chaotic, cluttered, incredibly difficult, and painfully overwhelming. With countless

listening practices, self-talk, restless thoughts, sleepless nights, grammar fights, frequent word tensions, sentence flipping, and idea spinning, finally playing with words freed up my mind and gave me access to the cave of wonders where imagination resides. The non-linearity of thinking and inquiry unlocked the doors of imagination where I can finally see the world filled with possibilities. I learned that inquiry did not exist between A and Z, or Urdu and English, or outward and inward, or backward and forward, or past and future, rather it got me everywhere; it began to flow in my every breath, it began to run everywhere in my body and blood. Poetry began to rewrite my story. "I rarely think of poetry as something I make happen; it is more accurate to say that it happens to me" (Kingsolver, 2002, p. 229).

### **Night...**

in the middle

don't fall asleep yet

a gentle knock

on my soul

is it my mind?

conscious?

unconscious?

subconscious?

something on the move

evading the caged body

awakening

whispers in silence

hearing a mysterious melody

echoing of wonder, to ponder

breathing in breathing out

drawing in drawing out

moving into mystery

mystical silence

(re)awakening

circling seeds of creation

in a heightened state

the light of knowing

intuitive leaps

coming to know

though unknowing

it's not reflection

it's not meditation

it's not contemplation

a felt sense of presence

'symphony of theophany'

revelation

write...

and

write...

writing in the dark

be written

Sullivan (2007) indicated that there is a delicate architecture in poetry that includes concreteness, voice, emotion, ambiguity, tension, and associative logic. The writer is open to the experiment of writing in which the world is not reduced to what is known already, instead “journeying towards possible, multiple truths” (Rapport & Hartill, 2012, p. 18), by pushing out into other ways of knowing, into the tangled possibilities of intersecting, colliding and separate lives (Badiou, 2001) to change myself by rejection of naïve realism and opening myself to what may have been threatening and alien. As my inhibitions began to go, the ideas kept flowing and, finally, I found a new and deeper understanding of my “in-being” (Heidegger, 1985) and “in-seeing” (Rilke, 1987) where “I grow more and more enamored with the echoes of wonder, mystery, and silence that I hear when I attend to the words and world all around me” (Leggo, 2008, p.167). Poetry came into being for me and for the first time my words began to see the world rather than me. Poems began to come into being and started to rewrite me within me. Poems became my voice, a way of expression, and reliving from moment to moment. I began to live and relive in a different place in my same body.

### **I am a Story I Tell Myself**

I live by my stories.

I exist to tell,

to discover my story.

everything in this universe is a contradiction.

messy moments embossed in a fluid path,

numbing and disembodied sensibilities,

lost time never returns but the past can be recalled.

time to unpack, to reveal the concealed.  
trying hard to pull myself out of dissonance,  
the crushing weight, the hollowness and questions,  
my settling words into the new configuration.  
scratching scars to help the itch stop,  
it burns even more,  
an inquiry arises, a path to recovery begins.  
(re)living the moments of experiences,  
echo, repetition, and patterns interacting,  
rhythms and a beat aligning,  
gazing at harmony in contradiction,  
moments of silent emptiness.  
seeing and hearing the world,  
in a new dimension,  
I live in my stories.

Richardson (1994) explained that “lived experience is lived in a body, and poetic representation can touch us where we live, in our bodies. Thus, poetry gives us a greater chance of vicariously experiencing the self-reflexive and transformational process of self-creation...” (p. 143).

An urge and intuition to write poems echoes and symbolizes the birth of my Canadian identity and experiences with which that birth is correlated. “And since writing is always situated in a place, and since the place of writing always motivates and informs and constrains the writing, it is important to grow more aware of the places where writing is situated” (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009, p. 98). My writing is situated in the tension-filled spaces, always in-the-making, the in-between spaces of “my identity [which is] leaky, porous, performed and partial” (Springgay, as cited in Bickel, 2006, p. 119) and “embraces a metissage existence

that integrates knowing, doing, and making” (Irwin, as cited in Bickel, 2006, p. 118). Through poetry I attempt to capture and express myself “in rhythm, totality, and patterns that comprise speech, and therefore extend [my] understanding of giving voice” (Aramitage, 2014, p. 27) to myself and my children.

Orr (2002) advocated for the “enormous transformative power” (p. 6) of poetry and story-making because they help us “to live” (p. 21). Poetry forces me to look and think twice, not just over the poems themselves, but at myself, my children, the world, life, and the people around me. Poetry to me is an enriching medium in which I can wrap up all of my natural, distilled, and chaotic thoughts, microscopic experiences, and grand narratives while achieving a powerful sense of fulfillment. It portrays particular qualities of being, elicits metaphorical wondering, synthesizes various modes of perception, unravels imaginative openness, and shows a way of paying attention (Wormser & Cappella, 2004). My existence as a naïve poet has grown between my two homes in which I have transitioned my writing from a right-to-left beginning (Urdu) in the east to a left-to-right ending (English) in the west. Through poetry, I find my truest expression of soul, self, and thought. Poetry invites me to breathe, to attend, to slow down, to embrace the healing of body and spirit and imagination (Leggo, 2004). The poetic representation is situated in my understanding, retelling, and reliving of my pivotal experiences and cross-cultural encounters. My “writing becomes my mediation and my meditation on identity” (Rajabali, 2017a, p. 115) and makes me engage “in living a life of deep meaning through perceptual practice that reveal what was once hidden, create what has never been known, and imagine what [I] hope to achieve” (Irwin, as cited in Pinar, 2004, p. 9).

In my attempts to retell through poetry, and the narrative unpacking of this poetry, I engage in reliving those particular moments in that particular time and place. By metaphorically connecting each of those moments to my poetry, I dwell in the in-between spaces filled with moments of full consciousness where newness and possibility of sense of renewed being, belonging, human connection and understanding come into the world. “At every crossing there is always a moment in which one is neither on one side nor on the other, neither what one was nor what one will be – hovering timelessly in between” (Crapanzano, 2004, p. 61). Such a metaphorical depiction of transformation and becoming is mediated within the liminal space.

As a sincere liminar, I will “continue to abandon the center, choosing instead to speak from the margins, regularly shifting locations, [positions], roles, and voices, continuing always to



challenge” (Prayer, as cited in Bickel, 2006, p.120) dominance and authority, and power and privilege in the pursuit of attending to the humanness. My inspiration comes from my second home, Canada, my children’s experiences of dual identity, the diverse Canadian people, and unpacking and inquiring into my own self, my experiences, and my stories. Behind every poem I write is a role which I embody as a Canadian: a mother, a researcher, a Muslim, a vulnerable being, and simply, a writer.

As a parent-researcher, the themes I seek to explore and present to my readers include the human complexities quilted within diversity, the multiplicity of Canadian identity, the quality of equality, the rising tide of intolerance, the politics of color, the significance of ethical values and morality, and the challenges associated with raising Canadian children with multiple identities, languages, nationalities, and values in this era of identity politics.

There is a place where poetry and politics converge, but it’s a zone of complexity and nuance. Poetry at its best is always a frank, pained, sometimes elated expression of reality. It discovers and contemplates injustice...It asks readers to imagine what has happened, and—perhaps more important—to imagine what might follow. (Parini, 2003, p. 20)

We are defined by our inextricably intertwined relationships with ourselves, our surroundings and others whether inscribed by dynamics of politics and economics and history and topography, education and religion. Poetry becomes one more way of questioning and reconstituting our knowing (Leggo, 2004) through these dynamics. We begin to question grounds of our threatened interconnectedness, location, dislocation, power, authority, plurality of perceptions, politics of color and our embodied representations as humans. What are the intersections of our individual and collective knowing and being? Who counts and who does not? Who matters and who does not? Who dominates and who subjugates? Who sows and who reaps?

Poetry convinced me that having “awful thoughts” (Britzman & Dippo, 2000) is necessary as it stirs emotional nuances and develops evocative renderings of the way things are. “They can break us out of the numbing routine... our thoughts can question their own grounds and then wonder over the relation and difference between thoughts and things” (p. 34). Poetry keeps replacing all of my whys with hows by teaching me to distrust neatness and accept messy moments embossed in a fluid path of identity, mutuality and liminality and it stresses to see and hear the world with various lenses. Each poem that I write offers me “a mode of engagement for

the imagination to play, and where the senses meet the external world and freedom is attained to express the inexpressible, and to utter the unspoken (Aramitage, 2014, p. 27). The changing colours of one's own being (Rajabali, 2017b, p.147) and "knowing what it means to be a human is to know what lies beyond" (p. 10). The transcendent obligates one "to be anchored in one's spiritual center" (Lakhani, 2010, p.181). It is where I attune to the soul of my own being and where the manifestations of my soul's revealing become an outcome of my dwelling and indwelling in poetic knowing (Rajabali, 2017b). In this way, poetry is prayer and prayer is poetry "where [soul], intellect and faith are not separate... allowing me to witness, see, and revere my creation" (p.7). As a Muslim I pray (*Sacred Salah*) five times a day in five various states of five numerous shades I rendezvous self and creator, my purified heart, cleansed soul, speechless mystical understandings. Now I pray poetically.

### **Times Five a Day**

who says my five is a number

I + IV no more

VI - I is none

boundless addition sudden deletion

flimsy abstraction curt subtraction

to be alive

to strive & thrive

the cure of the fall

to rise in a papered fall

love without death

the sun and the moon

visible gears invisible

invisible nears visible

it's a suave encounter  
a carapace  
of you and me  
of soul breathing in earth  
God in the seven seas  
God in the seven skies  
in everything low & high  
poetic, meditative, contemplative  
religio-spiritual  
it's a true call  
a Prayer  
my daily lectio divina  
reciting with poetry  
superior, sensorial, symmetry  
listening to the melody of my soul  
speaking to movement  
body abounding  
from dawn to dusk,  
dusk to twilight night  
kiss and kneel  
pry open the core  
capsule of self & soul  
Five is infinity

five is *Fajar*<sup>13</sup>, dawn

five is *Zuhr*<sup>14</sup>, afternoon

five is *Asar*<sup>15</sup>, evening

five is *Maghrib*<sup>16</sup>, dusk

five is *Isha*<sup>17</sup>, night

the eternal love between a celestial pair

sun and moon

makes me begin

\. **FAJAR – the dawn**

*Silent lullaby lay*

*warm in night's comprise*

*the moon is rebirthing*

*to bestow somewhere else*

*a sheen in the cosmos*

*veiled sky, serenity at its crux*

*faded stars: grey and blue*

*preparing to revel in a musical silence*

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<sup>13</sup> Fajar is Dawn Prayer.

<sup>14</sup> Zuhr is Noon prayer.

<sup>15</sup> Asar is Evening prayer.

<sup>16</sup> Magrib is Dusk prayer.

<sup>17</sup> Isha is Night prayer.

*a birthing sun*  
*holding a pallet*  
*the hue of realization*  
*opaque mindfulness*  
*ready to paint a paradise for the eyes*  
*piercing the darkness*  
*enlightening*  
*soul hearing the melody that ears cannot*  
*celestial tune to the earth of earths*  
*quietude and stillness*  
*night dew meant to cling to the soil*  
*sweet vapours rise from the earth*  
*glorious rise*  
*restorative remembrance*  
*of all truths*  
*Prayer is superior than sleep*

I step on the prayer mat

I enter Fajar salah

“Allahu Akbar”

Standing

Kneeling

Bowing

Kissing

the ground  
God's truth  
is beauty

٧. **ZUHR – the afternoon**

*the sun charioteers the day*

*radiant heat hastening*

*to give abundant light and love*

*amidst the verdant blinds*

*righting the rays*

*Ascending*

*movement, motion, moisture*

*voices and choices*

*the sound of weighty winds*

*a coterie of creatures*

*rhythm in the curve of trees*

*beauty in the bow of flowering petals*

*spinning wheels on the highway*

*thinking, feeling, feeding, doing,*

*speaking, listening, trusting*

*busy mind, busy body*

I step on the prayer mat

I enter Zuhr salah

“Allahu Akbar”

Standing

Kneeling

Bowing

Kissing

the ground

God’s power

is immortal movement

۴. **ASAR – the evening**

*the sun sinks low*

*behind the bend of life*

*the commotion begins to repose*

*chirp metamorphoses into whisper*

*home is the beginning and end*

*fluttering of day’s delight*

*winding down*

*the falling light*

*neither vivid nor dark*

*in the middle*

*of transitory time*

*in a state of losing*

*day, time, light*

*moments, movements*

*descending*

*time is limited*

*and so is our worldly stay*

I step on the prayer mat

I enter Asar salah

“Allahu Akbar”

Standing

Kneeling

Bowing

Kissing

the ground

God’s glory

is absolute

ξ. **MAGRIB – the dusk**

*On the brink*

*the sun sojourns into*

*night and fading light*

*luminosity growing dimmer*

*painting veins of indigo*

*sapient strokes of most blended colours*

*on the canvas of today*



*shuttering close*

*coming to rest*

*calm simplicity*

*a moment of change and chance*

*the gifts and guises of today*

I step on the prayer mat

I enter Magrib salah

“Allahu Akbar”

Standing

Kneeling

Bowing

Kissing

the ground

God’s might

is eternal

◦. **ISHA – the night**

*the moon rolls in mirth*

*silvery & heavenly light*

*crooning a little symphony*

*to the squealing stars*

*in the dark*

*dripping in tranquility*

*listening to my heart*  
*speaking to my mind*  
*stroking my conscience*  
*deeming my wonders*  
*knowing my deepest yearnings*  
*seeking my inner divine nature*  
*permeating into my being*  
*descending to the depth*  
*of my innermost core*  
*agony bequeaths depth*  
*ecstasy endows height*  
*I see the light*

I step on the prayer mat

I enter Isha salah

“Allahu Akbar”

Standing

Kneeling

Bowing

Kissing

the ground

God's in me

and so it shall be

.....

*I begin in prayer, I end in prayer*

*I am born with prayer, I will die with prayer*

“Allahu Akbar”

I enter

&

re-enter

Poetry as a contemplative, intentional, spiritual, and transformational process can assist ‘both the authors of the poetry and the audience of the poems to reach praxis or the process of being moved to action, to affect change, and to better the next experience’ (Roberts, Crawford, & Brasel, 2014, p.168).

### **Distrusting Neatness**

Because we are constituted in color  
because we are created in our living stories  
because we see ourselves in everyday experiences  
we constantly tell, retell, and relive our lives  
when mysterious moments arrive  
with sharp poignancy in a new place  
away from home and in a strange culture  
separateness, alienation, loneliness  
when fact unveils its real face  
a heightened sense of self evolves  
the frailty of being human  
alert awareness of risks

of who we are to ourselves and others  
unfolding stories of the self  
and deconstruction of the social self  
the imagined now, some imagined past  
or some imagined future  
experiences growing out of experiences  
bumping into each other  
incidentally, accidentally, monumentally  
rather than trying to fix the mess  
distrust any neatness  
repositioning in the continuum helps  
now writing, rewriting, and reimagining the story  
searching out and valuing the complexity  
marvelling at richness that comes with the mess  
by changing the story we live by  
We change our lives  
*(Inspired by text readings)*

Parini (2008) claimed, “The poem is also a labyrinth. One makes a journey through the poem, from beginning to end, moving within the space of the work, its boundaries, tracking its labyrinth or pattern” (pp. 100-101). Like each living day, we seek the way in a labyrinth. Poetry can show us the way (Leggo, 2016) – a journey of story writing to story unpacking, to inquiring into a story, to poetic representation. In this entire journey, the labyrinth in which I maneuver, poetry is the “way,” where instead of being surprised in speechless moments, I discover

possibility by “witnessing the contents of consciousness” (Hart, 2004, p. 28) “where the silence of our inner conscious feelings can be broken” (Aramitage, 2014, p. 27). Eisler (1987) told us:

The human psyche seems to have a built-in need for a system of stories and symbols that "reveal" to us the order of the universe and tell us what our place within it is. It is a hunger for meaning and purpose seemingly beyond the power of any rationalistic or logical system to provide. (p. 183)

We construct our narrative knowledge through telling and retelling, writing and rewriting our stories in order to make comprehensible meaning of our experiences. As I enter the personal and poetic space of inquiry, I am “drawn by the gaze of something that stares back at [me]” (van Manen, 2002, p. 5) and I capture the “consciousness of perception” (Hejinian, 2000, p. 67). Instead of searching for logic, and getting stuck in structures and binaries, I am learning to be “willing to risk thinking again and again” (Britzman & Dippo, 2000, p. 34). I now understand that “learning to see differently requires a willingness to live with new fears (Boler, 1999, p. 182). I agree with Bingham (2004), “Poetry is scary because it whispers transformation – of self and world” (pp. 224-225).

### **Closing Thoughts**

in the process of writing and rewriting

I am ready to risk

thinking again and again

hearing with obsessive ears

gazing beyond

in between

sun, moon, ocean, earth

life and end

luminous to murky

dissolving to emerging

through the brightest day  
in the darkest night  
willing to loose myself in chaos  
an urge to change everything into words  
as I turn my gaze on the written words  
they turn their gaze on me  
thoughts and experiences are looped  
I come to see that it's not only about me  
it is also about the play between  
words and ideas  
thoughts and things  
thinking and doing  
it's breaking me out of the numbing routine  
it's not reinventing the narratives  
rather capturing the essence of experience  
playing with words freed up my mind  
giving me access to a cave of wonders  
I meet imagination there  
I smell possibility  
I feel stillness  
I hear silence  
I touch earth  
I see myself

finally,

my words can see the world

*(Inspired by text readings)*

*Looking inward* as a mother, I see that autobiographical narrative inquiry has deepened my understanding that my children's dual identity is not breaking them apart, rather putting them together. *Looking outward* as a researcher, narrative inquiry has deepened my understandings that duality exists within the construct of narrative and emerges from the tension between familiar and foreign "interwoven with the threads of past and future in the creation of a continuous whole" (Elliot, 2014, p. 33). My existence of duality has offered me a voice where instead of fearing silence, I am able to "inhabit a more ambiguous and flexible sense of self" (Boler, 1999, p. 176). I am able to act as an interpreter between the chaos of my experiences and an assembly of unbroken monologues and sporadic dialogues. Finally, *looking through* as an amateur poet, I practice poetry "as a method of inquiry to move into [my] own impossibility, where anything might happen—and will" (St. Pierre, 2005, p. 973). "Becoming unsettled is partially a resistance of linearity, an interruption of the autonomous humanist self. (My)self, conceptualized as tangled and mangled" constitutes non-linear possibilities. The intersecting fragmentation and dispersal of selfhood is "something other than a conscious, free decision to shape shift" (Aamodt, 2016, p. 35). I have learned that poetry is "an awareness of the disorderly and chaotic world we inhabit [as] a fundamental aspect of being human" (Orr, 2002, p. 16). As a result, I am willing to let myself drift into "the perpetual and elusive process of becoming" (Gide, 1970, p. 197) in order to enable myself to live well for existence and coexistence.

### **Who are We?**

integrated not assimilated

different but one

not the same but equal

different races but identical in humanity

not a single story but a complete plotline

diverse languages but one voice  
several accents but similar in expression  
many cultures but parallel in compassion  
different colors but with the same red blood  
autonomous but interconnected  
neither Us nor Them  
We are Canadians



## Chapter 3

### Mother Story 1: A Bedroom Narrative

#### Inquiring into Irteqa's Experience with a Health Course

*There is no such thing as a value-free story because stories inevitably demand ethical understanding. There is no such thing as just a story. A story is always charged with meaning. (Fulford, 1999, p. 6)*



*Figure 3. Looking Forward*

As the news continues to play and I am caught up with thoughts and images of my children, and my recollections of our many shared stories, I am interrupted by Irteqa's voice. Her words bring me back to the present moment as she asks me if I would like my bedding changed to a nice floral fabric. I respond by agreeing with her choice and I leave the kitchen to go upstairs for evening prayers. The floral fabric laying smooth on the bed reminds me of the time wherein I was witness to the story she shared with me about her ethical living class.

One evening, a little after supper and during our family homework ritual, Irteqa, who was in Grade 9 then, politely whispered to me and asked if she could talk to me in private. In my bedroom upstairs, we sat comfortably together. While speaking, the tone in her voice sounded a bit puzzled, as if she was thinking of the right way to express her feelings and thoughts. As a mother, my spontaneous and natural reaction was to ask, "Is everything alright?" She, in an unsure manner, mentioned that she had experienced a new feeling that prompted her thoughts about identity. She explained to me, all the while juggling her words and feelings, that in her Health class, as part of a required subject, they were taught "sex education" (precisely, male anatomy and its functions) to male and female students together. She felt trapped, disturbed, and faced an immense lack of clarity in deciding what to do and how to feel in this class on sex education. She expressed how she underwent feelings of doing something wrong and unethical by sitting in that class. She even experienced hesitation in looking at the male teacher standing and lecturing.

Being a young Muslim-Canadian girl, it was against her religious and moral values to be part of the conversation about sex and male anatomy which was occurring in that context on her Canadian school landscape. Ochoa and Pineda (2008) caution that "we should be aware of the ways in which power, privilege, and exclusion in the larger society may be reproduced in our own classrooms" (p. 45). Irteqa was caught in the in-between space of Eurocentric knowledge and dominant culture and her own religious and ethical values as a young Muslim woman. While it is acceptable practice in Canadian public schools for male teachers to teach courses on human development and sexuality to female students and while it is also common that young men and women attend those classes together, these practices do not honor the beliefs held by Muslims in which pre-marital conversations about sex are prohibited. For many of Irteqa's fellow students, what unfolded in the classroom that day was not upsetting, marginalizing, or ethically challenging. Such topics can be comfortable for mainstream youth to explore as they reflect the

foundations of their identity, rather than disrupt them. As Irteqa's identity in that moment was disrupted, she was overcome with what Asher (2002) explains as a "hybrid consciousness," an "awareness that emerges out of the struggle to situate oneself in relation to multiple borders at the dynamic intersections of race, culture [religion], gender/sexuality, class, and nationality, in specific historical and geographic contexts" (p. 85). She questioned herself, and later me, if it was right for her to be present there. At that time, Irteqa felt herself in a dual space of belongingness and alienation. Sitting together with other students in her Grade 9 high school class learning the mandated curriculum, she felt a sense of belongingness as a Canadian student. However, when it came to the topic of sex education and her teacher openly discussing it with the class, she felt alienated as a Muslim student because this unit contradicted her religious, cultural, and family values. Just as Irteqa experienced it that day, identity construction is an ongoing negotiation of often conflictual conceptualizations of Self (Flores & Day, 2006; Tran & Nyugen, 2013, 2015), "a way of living at the borders" (Trinh, 1992b, p. 157). These conflicting representations of individual identity emerge not only from Self, but also from counter-narratives of Other (Lyle, 2016, p. 37), of living confronting "narratives we have not authored ourselves" (Hicks, 2012, p. 91). Irteqa felt neither safe and comfortable nor a legitimate member of the class in that moment. Her sense of not knowing what to do in that moment, of feeling unethical in a class intended to foreground ethical living, reflected her internal attempt to "rework the boundaries of Self-and-Other" and to "understand [her] relationship with and/or connection to [her] difference" (Asher, 2002, p. 83). Negotiations of self-and-other play a critical role in either improving or impeding a "student's ability to learn and feel safe and comfortable as a member of the class" (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009, p. 2). As a strongly committed student, Irteqa felt it would be disrespectful to leave the class. As a young Muslim woman, Irteqa felt trapped in an act of wrong-doing.

Fulford (1999) stated, "There is no such thing as just a story. A story is always charged with [feelings] and meaning" (p. 6). This statement was so true for me in this the midst of this experience. Irteqa's feelings with Health 9 caused me to reflect on my own feelings of frequently being trapped in complex situations where there is no easy response. Her experience compelled me to feel that my daughter has now grown up and is nearing the stage where I, as a minority mother, reside, many times a day questioning my children's and my own hybrid identity formation in a "multicultural" society. Canada aspires to be a pluralistic and inclusive society.

However, as Clarke (2005) acknowledged, “Simply articulating these values will not make our problems go away. Real conflict and tension confront us continually” (p. 375). My daughter, in her Health class, was trying to make sense of her “otherness” in her home country of Canada and to find a place for her religious identity in that home. Her sense of self was influenced by the place in which she was living and the content of the curriculum which she was experiencing. She felt alienated by the differences between her religious practices and the mandated curriculum. Her feelings of a sense of alienation compelled me, as a minority mother, to inquire about what was being taught to my ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse daughter in a Canadian school. Finally, overcoming the initial uncertainties that had confounded me, the next day I wrote an email to my daughter’s teacher, expressing my voice.

I would like to share some concerns about the subject of "sexuality" that is being taught in Health 9. I am having a bit of a hard time understanding how such subject is taught to minor students without parental consent. It may be in the curriculum but still parental consent or some information to the parents should have been shared prior to starting the unit. In our culture, it is preferred that a woman teaches girls separately about this subject and only about female systems and a male teaches boys separately only about male systems. We would like our daughter to withdraw from this unit but, on the other hand, we do not want her grades to suffer. I would appreciate if you let us know our options. My husband and I can come and meet with you if needed. I hope you understand our “position.” (April, 4<sup>th</sup>). The next day, the teacher responded:

I will discuss the issue with my administration and respond to you in detail as soon as possible. I have been in consultation with the guidance department and we will try to work toward a solution as soon as possible. I can understand cultural differences, but I am following the Health 9 curriculum as it is outlined. In the meantime, I will remove Irteqa from tomorrow's class and during class she can work on her math. (April 5<sup>th</sup>)

The teacher emailed again on (April, 6<sup>th</sup>):

In consultation with administration they have decided that your daughter will be omitted from the Gr. 9 Health Unit on Sexuality. This decision was made based on the fact that

the Health 9 Curriculum is not a credit requirement for the Secondary Level (high school) education program. However, administration wishes to make it clear that sexuality may be covered by different curriculums that are requirements of a Secondary Level education program. Once your daughter reaches Gr. 10 and throughout the remainder of her high school education she may find herself in classes that cover sexuality as part of the curriculum. She will need these courses to graduate and will not be removed from class as completing the curriculum is mandatory for credit. For now, I will consider the matter resolved and if you wish any further correspondence please feel free to contact our Principal. I would like to pass on what a joy it is to teach your daughter. She is a very polite and conscientious student and shows a maturity beyond her years. She is very well spoken and works very hard in my classes. During the time that she is to be removed from the Health class; it will be an expectation that she remains in the library and works on other areas of the curriculum. (Email communication)

Based on this email correspondence with her teacher, I felt that there was no place for my voice as a parent. According to school protocol, any concerns about the child on behalf of parents involves discussing the matter with the teacher first, not the principal or the administration. I question why the teacher did not consider working with me as a parent or initiate a meeting with me to discuss my email before he immediately went to the administration to find a solution. Why is the protocol different for a teacher than it is for me as parent? Or why is the teacher not held to the same standard in regard to following the protocol? When the teacher responded, he spoke on behalf of the administration, who also decided that my daughter would omit that unit. In doing so, he removed a second level of opportunity for me as a parent to use my parent knowledge to co-construct a solution that would honor my daughter's hybrid identity. Finally, when the teacher commenced to inform me that he considered the matter resolved, he reinforced to me that there was no place for my voice or knowledge in co-determining my daughter's curricular experience in Health 9. Just as my daughter was othered and marginalized by being sent to the library to work on her math during Health 9, I was othered and marginalized through this silencing process.

Students and parents are in direct relationship with teachers, not with the school administration. Neither the teacher nor the administration provided any opportunity for a

dialogue, discussion, or crucial conversation about what my daughter wanted and what I wanted for my daughter as a parent, or whether the unit should be taught to her or in what manner. I was disappointed by the teacher's response, conveying to me that he had contacted the administration that for this year Irteqa could omit the unit in question, but reminding me that she would "not be removed" next year and would need the later course in order to graduate. I believe that my daughter's personal story as a young culturally and religiously diverse Canadian girl was juxtaposed against a social dominant story of Canadian classroom teaching and learning. Such a juxtaposition opened a possibility for a space of inquiry where marginalized voices could be heard, both my daughter's and my own. On school landscapes, teachers are positioned to take an inquiry stance towards silence because it is in these moments "curriculum ceases to be a thing .... It becomes a verb, an action, a social practice, a private meaning, and a [collective] hope (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995, p. 848). I believe Irteqa's experience was a critical moment where my daughter's discomfort with the curriculum content and the manner in which the knowledge was imparted offered a space of inquiry. How might a call to stay attentive to students' cultural and religious sensitivities be an invitation to reimagine curriculum or curriculum implementation? As Gitlin (1990) stated, "The development of voice... reshapes roles so that disenfranchised members have the right to tell their stories and the opportunity to examine underlying assumptions" (p. 460). My daughter, positioned as a Muslim student in that moment in her Health 9 class, felt unsettled and unsafe to share her religious story with her teacher or the school administration. "Because stories inevitably demand ethical understanding" (Fulford, 1999, p. 6) Irteqa decided, instead, to share her experience and story with me in the safe environment of home. How can school landscapes be changed so that ALL students feel it is safe to tell their stories and that their stories will be met with "ethical understanding"?

When I reflect on this experience, four key aspects clearly stand out for me: the adaptive dimension of Saskatchewan curriculum, a place for parents' voice in sex education curriculum, examining the form of parental consent, and a role for parent teacher partnerships in curriculum making.

### **Adaptive Dimension of Saskatchewan Curriculum**

The Adaptive Dimension detailed within Saskatchewan curriculum refers to the concept of making adjustments to any or all of the following variables which affect a student's teaching

and learning experience: learning environment, instruction, assessment, and resources. Adjustments to these variables are intended to make learning meaningful and appropriate in order to support student achievement (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2017). That one-size curriculum does not fit all is acknowledged by the inclusion of an adaptive dimension. It is understood that curriculum expectations are age-related but not age-dependent – the readiness of students to learn will depend on their individual physical and emotional development (Watson, 2015). But, are the notions of adaptation and readiness to learn based solely on age? Given the presence of an “adaptive dimension” within the curriculum (Saskatchewan Education, 1992), could not the teacher have accommodated my daughter within the sex education lesson based on her religious needs?

As I lay the presence of the adaptive dimension in the curriculum alongside the response of the teacher to my expressed concerns, I wonder if there is a discrepancy in the existence of policy and practice. Current federal and provincial legislation (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982; Canadian Human Rights Act, 1985; Multiculturalism Act, 1996; Human Rights Code, 1996) provide a broad values framework regarding the protection of a diversity of religious beliefs, as well as a respect for individual rights. How is the adaptive dimension of the curriculum intended to reflect rights and freedoms? Could it be used for this purpose?

Curriculum is the corner stone of what happens in the classroom.

Curriculum is a statement of what our collective society believes all children should know and learn. Yet we don't all necessarily agree on what our children should know and learn. When that disagreement has a religious basis, it becomes important to strike an appropriate balance between the interests of different actors (parents, child, and the state) who are directly concerned over public education and its control of curriculum. (Jacquet & Amico, 2016, p.16)

Students enter schools with their values, beliefs, and deeply felt convictions. How might students' negotiation between their religious and secular worlds be made easier on the school landscape with the teaching of curricular concepts, classes, and units in ways which make space for students' diverse beliefs and family values while still attending to curricular outcomes? High school is a time when Muslim girls are subjected to tough decisions related to negotiating between their religious and secular worlds and when they have agency to make their own choices. This is the time when their peers begin asking them difficult questions about their

identity like why they wear a hijab when others do not, and why they wear long clothes in gym class instead of shorts and t-shirts. The friendships between Muslim girls and their high school friends takes a new twist when/if the latter begins to date, attend parties, and/or drink alcohol. Boundaries become sharp and defined between friends and so do identity negotiations. What occurs in the classroom influences a student's overall schooling experience (Bigelow, 2008; Haw et al., 1998; Kassam, 2007; Sarroub, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008). How might the thoughtful use of the adaptive dimension within curricular implementation in classrooms enhance students' sense of identity and belonging outside of the classroom as well?

Sexual health curriculum offers us possibilities to stay attentive to the gaps, silences and exclusions that are often shaped by the bumping up spaces and places youth and families experience in curriculum and schools. "The challenge for a teacher when seeking ways to empower students is" to see the curriculum beyond something that is pre-established and organized, to "release control of the curriculum; to realize that curriculum is not 'set in concrete,' but created in response to the needs, interests, concerns, and desires of the students" (Davis, Kieren, & Sumara, 1996, p. 163). Huber and Clandinin (2005) wrote, "One of the places where lives meet in schools is in curriculum making" (p. 318), therefore curriculum is an organic co-evolving entity that is formed through the interactions of teacher and students within a specific context of location, time, and inquiry (Davis et al., 1996, p. 163).

My concern as a mother was not so much about the knowledge students were to acquire in the class on sex education, as about the manner in which it was imparted. Sharatt & Fullan (2012) emphasized that teachers must keep in mind some important questions while instructional planning in order to address the needs of their diverse students.

What am I teaching? Why am I teaching it? How will I teach it? How will I know when the students have it? What then? These five focusing questions must be at the top of all teachers' minds when they are planning for instruction. (p. 103)

Missing from these five questions is, 'Who am I teaching?' It is THE question that should be at the forefront of teachers' minds while planning curricular instruction.

We want teachers who use their deep knowledge of subject matter along with knowledge of children's histories, routines and dispositions to use their inquiry skills to alter approaches when the evidence that passes their eye says [the current approaches] are not working. (Pearson, as cited in Allington, 2009, p. 110)



Through the application of the Adaptive Dimension, teachers provide opportunities for students to recognize what they require as learners, and to express what they need to maximize their learning (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 5). When what is required by learners includes adaptations to curriculum or curriculum implementation due to cultural, religious, or ethnic considerations, teachers also provide students the opportunity to live their hybrid identity in classrooms and schools in non-othering and non-marginalizing ways.

### **Parents' Voice in Sex Education Curriculum**

According to the Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education, sex education should be accessible to all people and should be provided in an age appropriate, culturally sensitive manner that is respectful of an individual's right to make their own educated choices (McKay, 2004). In the last two decades, the ongoing tension between adjusting the curriculum to respect parents' or children's religious rights or views and maintaining the state's educational responsibilities has been discussed by various scholars, in a number of disciplines, including philosophy, law, and education (Clarke, 2005, 2012; Collins, 2006; Ghosh, 2013; Gutmann, 1987; Shariff, 2006; Smith & Foster, 2001).

In 2010, a new sex education curriculum introduced by Premier Dalton McGuinty's government, in the province of Ontario, received massive opposition and was withdrawn after just two days as a result of pressures from faith based communities, religious leaders, and parents who objected to children being taught about topics such as masturbation and homosexuality. Ontario's revamped sex education curriculum was unveiled in February 2015, almost five years after the Liberals scrapped their earlier version. Sexual health education in schools remains somewhat controversial among many parents, however, much of this controversy appears to stem from hearsay or misconceptions about the content of school programs or teaching styles (Dyson, 2010). Some parents are happy with the curriculum and others are not. Some parents support sexual health education in school while others strongly feel that their family values about sex should be conveyed first by them. Some parents worry about too much information being provided for their children, others about providing too little. Most parents with concerns say they are not against sex education, but believe it should be age-appropriate.

In Irteqa's Health 9 class, there were three other Muslim girls in that class. Since they belonged to our neighbourhood and community, I called their mothers in the evening to find out

what their thoughts were about the content of the class Irteqa described to me and if we should meet the teacher together. I found out at that point that even though they were Muslim too, everyone had their own diverse opinions on the matter. Two mothers believed that any information about sexuality should be provided only by parents or family members, while one believed that sex education is a vital part of the instruction students receive in school. Intrigued by differences in opinion about this topic, I began to discuss it with my friends and other women in our community. Some women believed that because of the demand of the changing times in which children are now so regularly and pervasively exposed to sex within the general environment, through social media and entertainment, that they considered good positive sex education as essential. Other women were against the idea, believing that sex education remains parents' prerogative about which to educate their children at an age, and in a culturally and religiously appropriate way. For some mothers, it was not the full sex education curriculum which concerned them but only aspects of the content about which they had questions or concerns.

In speaking with other parents about the content and teaching of sex education curriculum, I learned quickly that 'no one size fits all' in this area, just as is the case with curriculum in general. In regard to the adaptive dimension, teachers create an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to determine a teaching and learning approach suitable for meeting the needs of a learner identified as needing accommodation. How might this approach also be used to meet the curricular needs of students with hybrid identities? Given the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, is it not just as important to accommodate the needs of diverse students in regard to learning environment, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and resources as it is to accommodate for the needs of students who learn at different rates and in different ways for other reasons?

### **The Form of Parental Consent**

As noted above, when I wrote to Irteqa's teacher, I stated, "I am having a bit of a hard time understanding how such subject is taught to minor students without parental consent. It may be in the curriculum but still parental consent or some information to the parents should have been shared prior to starting the unit." The teacher neither discussed nor addressed this concern about my prior consent in his email response. I remember that in my children's elementary years consent forms were sent home. While these consent forms often required a basic "yes" or "no"

on my part, and could have been greatly enhanced with the inclusion of detailed information or an attached outline or syllabus, at least I was given notification of an upcoming topic or activity and the opportunity to provide or not provide my consent.

According to Section 50.1(1) of the Alberta School Act, parents have the right to exempt their child, without academic penalty, from all or a portion of human sexuality instruction. Taking that into consideration, along with the adaptive dimension of the curriculum and the requirement that students with additional needs be provided supports, how might the model of an IEP or an “Inclusion and Intervention Plan” (Government of Saskatchewan) be modified to address the needs of students with hybrid identities in curricular areas such as sex education, in order to give them the opportunity to participate to the extent and in the manner deemed appropriate by them and their parents in consultation with educators?

In Saskatchewan, we are guided by the philosophy and principles of a needs-based model to provide supports for students. This model focuses on the strengths, abilities and needs of each individual student. Students are supported in inclusive settings by a collaborative team that includes their parents, education professionals and other individuals who can help the student reach his or her goals. (Government of Saskatchewan Supporting Students with Additional Needs, 2015)

I believe it is apparent that a student with a Muslim-Canadian identity in a classroom, in a school curriculum and on the school landscape, has “additional needs.” Rather than a teacher and principal deciding to exempt that student from course content and exclude her by having her work in isolation in the library or somewhere on school premises, how might a collaborative team that included her, her father and mother, the teacher, administrator, perhaps a school counsellor, perhaps the high school’s religious education teacher, perhaps a public health nurse, perhaps the Imam from our mosque, determine an inclusion plan that recognized her “strengths, abilities and needs” and that helped our daughter reach her goals in a way that reflected both our family’s cultural, religious, and ethnic values and a recognition of intended provincial curricular outcomes? Rather than creating binaries in schools, either/or options which include or exclude students, what if students’ hybrid identities were acknowledged in curriculum as an additional need, worthy of thoughtful accommodation? What if parents were given meaningful and authentic voice and place in co-determining their child’s inclusion plan? In this way, parents become a resource to teachers, a source of knowledge, and a support. Schools and educators can

strive to accommodate Muslim youth who wish to fulfill religious identity obligations while at school. Their “additional needs” may include:

arrangements for modifications of physical education dress requirements, compliance with [Halal] dietary laws in the breakfast and lunch program (e.g., putting an image of a pig on foods containing pork products in the lunch line so that emerging-literate children can easily identify food content), and accommodations for fasting students or those observing prayer. For students who wish to pray in school, parents and school staff are encouraged to meet to discuss provisions for adequate prayer space during the designated times. Within a study of world religions, teachers could make use of resources within the community by inviting practicing members [Imam] of a faith tradition to help understand the religion in context. (Abo-Zena, Sahli, & Tobias-Nahi. 2009, p. 20)

Some other additional needs of Muslim students are based on the realities of the post 9/11 tensions and increased wave of repression on Muslims which has further pushed Muslim students into the margins of the classroom, schools and society. My daughter’s confusion whether to stay or leave the classroom in her sex education class also included a fear of classmates’ attitude towards her, risk of being isolated or looked down upon, un-readiness to reveal her faith to other students, pressure of untangling myths about Islam and Muslims, facing the implications that she is not a real Canadian. It is problematic and challenging for Muslim students to be spotlighted because of their religion. All these pressures made my daughter stay in the classroom with her disturbed feelings and tangled questions. She decided to mask her uncertainty and puzzling moments until she got home and discussed the matter with me, her mother. This clearly depicts the vulnerability, pressure, confusion, conflict, and silence that my daughter experienced in her sex education class. By acknowledging Muslim parents as a critical resource in the teaching and learning processes of school sexual health curriculum, we may disrupt some of the misunderstandings about Islamic faith and Muslim religious practices through our interwoven relationships. Parents can assist educators in addressing the gaps that exist in public education.

### **De-/Re-conceptualizing Parent Partnerships**

Parents and guardians are an important and primary source of education and guidance for their children. As Pushor (2013) has delineated, there is a difference between education and schooling. As explained in the previous chapter, parents’ education of their child is a lifelong

process of continuous learning, which begins with a child's birth and lasts forever. It is a process full of wonders, imagination, creativity, and innovation as parents introduce their child to the world, and immerse that child in varied experiences, with diverse people, in a myriad of places, and in relation to multitudes of objects, sights, sounds, and emotions. Schooling is the formal and institutionalized form of a child's education where students are taught in the classroom about subjects based on mandated curriculum subjects and content. Schooling is a complementary piece to the education that parents provide their child.

Our schools are pluralistic where the diversity of students is represented through differing cultural and religious values and belief systems, and thus varying perspectives towards human sexuality. Gay (2002) argued that it is important that teachers' knowledge of different cultures goes beyond a basic awareness and respect for different cultures. To be truly effective in teaching diverse students, Gay continued, it is imperative that teachers learn about the particularities of each ethnic group present in their classroom so that they can tailor the curriculum in meaningful ways (p. 107). "Teachers should seek to discover students' unique requirements for optimal growth, and then implement differentiated strategies to help them bloom" (Armstrong, 2012, p. 4). Generally, policies and practices are developed to promote "best practices" to achieve desired outcomes by keeping in consideration the needs of the students as a whole. How might a partnership with parents assist teachers in coming to know the particularities of their students and being able to respond in more personalized and individualized ways? With such parent teacher partnerships, sex education in schools would be provided in a culturally and religiously sensitive manner that is respectful to each student and her/his identity. Partnerships which are genuinely collaborative and which reflect an open approach between the school and the home can be developed and would increase the potential benefits and outcomes of sexual health education programs (Dyson, 2010, p. 17).

In using the term 'partnership,' like Lewington and Orpwood (1995), I do so with concern for the conceptualization and intention of the word partnership.

Partnership is the overworked word of the day, as education leaders attempt to demonstrate their willingness to move beyond the historic divide of "them" and "us" that separates parents and teachers. But in the experience of some parents, the paradox of education is that, in practice, the system is resistant as ever to building real bridges to the outside world. (p. 4)

The rhetoric of “parents as partners” or “family partnerships” is quite familiar and is often tossed around generously in school newsletters and communications. Nonetheless, as with my experience with the teacher about my concern regarding Irteqa’s class on sex education, his response challenged the notion that we work in any sense of partnership. Partners recognize their shared interests in and their responsibility and accountability for children, and they work together with schools to create better programs and opportunities for students (Epstein, 1995). Bhabha (2007) asserted that “talk, conversation, discourse, dialogue [that] constitute the ‘human right to narrate’... [are] essential in building diverse, non-consensual communities” (p. 3). The impression I received from the teacher’s email, which was written in consultation with the administration, is that there was no room for parents’ concerns and questions related to students’ ethnic and cultural alternatives and that students were expected to accept and accommodate the requirements of the standard curriculum in order to graduate. With this experience, my hope to be a parent with a voice faded as the teacher and administration seemed to be unwilling to consider our position as religiously diverse Canadians. The teacher, positioned in a protectorate structure as owner of the ground called school (Pushor, 2001), prioritized the requirements of the standard curriculum over Irteqa’s or our family’s ethnic and religious needs. Huber and Clandinin (2005) wrote, “One of the places where lives meet in schools is in curriculum making” (p. 318). Although parents could assist educators in addressing the gaps that exist in public education (Raible, 2008), the story of school as protectorate continues to prevent educators from taking advantage of this resource (Pushor, 2012). Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot’s (1978; 2003) work focuses extensively on relationships between parents and teachers:

There are very few opportunities for parents and teachers to come together for meaningful, substantive discussion. In fact, schools organize public, ritualistic occasions that do not allow for real contact, negotiation, or criticism between parents and teachers. Rather, they are institutionalized ways of establishing boundaries between insiders (teachers) and interlopers (parents) under the guise of polite conversation and mature cooperation. (1978, pp. 27-29)

The starting place must be a re-envisioned sense of partnership, of having reciprocal relationships with an acceptance that both teachers and parents have much to learn from each other. A rewriting of the teacher's email shows how the well-rehearsed story of school could be changed to create space for a parent's voice and for a parent's repositioning as a partner on the

school landscape. Imagine this new response from a teacher who is consciously attempting to position in new ways on the school landscape, a teacher who understands how to engage parents, a teacher who goes beyond curricular guidelines and mandates, a teacher who acknowledges that human relationship is at the heart of schooling, a teacher who identifies that engaging parents affirm the “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al, 1992) and “parent knowledge” (Pushor, 2015) available in the community, a teacher who is not only keen to teach but also to learn, a teacher who understands and respects the moral, ethical, cultural and religious beliefs of students and parents. Here is how the response of such a teacher could be rewritten:

Thank you very much for sharing your concern and bringing this matter to our attention. I can certainly understand your concern and appreciate your values and beliefs. I would be interested to hear and learn from you about your beliefs in order to better teach your daughter. This would not only help us understand your daughter’s identity but could be an opportunity for us to engage more effectively in dialogues with parents of other religious and cultural backgrounds. I would also like to let you know that according to the adaptive dimension of the curriculum (Saskatchewan Education, 1992) we could work on developing a study unit based on your daughter’s values. I would like to apologize if this unit offended or disturbed your daughter and her beliefs but I assure you we had not intended for it to be this way. I will also consult with the administration regarding this matter. Please let me know a good time for you after school hours so that we can discuss and work on it together. Your questions and concerns are always welcome.

Many families have learned to stay silent and not question what is being taught in the world of school curriculum making. The relationship between parent and teacher is an uneven and disconnected relationship (Lessard, 2015, p. 12). Parents are positioned as unknowing, or less knowing (Pushor, 2015) than educators about children, teaching, and learning and their parent knowledge is neither acknowledged nor invited as decisions are made that affect their children and their families’ diverse beliefs and identity. Just as teachers have expert and professional knowledge about pedagogy, teaching and learning, parents have personal knowledge about their children. Parents know and understand their children differently than anyone else in the world because of the uniqueness of their relationship. Regardless of the awareness of human rights,

fundamental rights (freedom of conscience and religion, freedom of expression, equality for everyone) and regardless of the richness of both teacher knowledge and parent knowledge, and regardless of what each type of knowledge offers in support of children's moral and religious differences, schools continue to privilege teacher knowledge (Pushor, 2015). Through creating space for parents' voice and knowledge to be used alongside teacher knowledge, we can discover and implement practices that benefit all students and that lead to more socially just and democratic classrooms and schools.

### **Closing Thoughts**

What I am asking of teachers and principals is not new or different. The Adaptive Dimension of the curriculum is currently in place. Students with additional needs are currently being accommodated through Inclusion and Intervention Plans or IEPs. What I am asking for is this same attention to the increasing population of diverse students in our schools who possess hybrid identities as students with other learning differences receive. Diverse students, too, would benefit from teachers' attention and commitment to adaptations and accommodations in curriculum, curriculum implementation, learning environments, and resources in order for them to be honored for who they are, to be affirmed and included on school landscapes, and to be given the best opportunity for social, emotional, and academic success.



## Chapter 4

### Mother Story 2: A Dining Room Narrative

#### Inquiring into Hassan's Experience with a Psychology Course

*The stories told by the ingroup remind it of its identity in relation to outgroups, and provide it with a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural. The stories of outgroups aim to subvert that reality. (Delgado, 1995, p. 64)*



*Figure 4. Portraying the story's other side*

Alone in my bedroom, I perform my Salah and make a special duaa for my children for them to have health, prosperity and a peaceful and equitable life in Canada. I fold up my prayer mat and rise with hope. I leave my bedroom and return to the kitchen to check on the food that I had begun to cook earlier and to ensure it is simmering nicely. Hearing the door chimes, I look up from the stove to see Hassan entering after a long day at work. Seeing his face, I offer him a milkshake I had ready for him. As I watch him drink, I can see there are stories and experiences etched on his face today. Since Hassan has been a young child exposed to the outside world, I have been able to map the stories that inscribe themselves on his countenance. A story involving Hassan that stays with me to this day, one for which I continue to regret not having a discussion about with his teacher the very next day, emerges in my mind. I think backward to the time when the world was ignited with fury and defensive passion for the victims of the attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris. One afternoon my son came home hungry and inquisitive. While eating the meal I had served him, he started talking about the debate that students in his Psychology class had had that day. The students in his class had been asked to share all their deepest reactions, thoughts, and feelings towards the horrendous happening in France.

### **Majority Speaks While Minority Stays Silent**

Hassan described to me how the white male teacher stood at the front of the classroom, settled his gaze on raised hands, and granted individual students permission to add their voice to the discussion of the attacks by Islamic extremists on employees of Charlie Hebdo, a satirical magazine that had published controversial cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. Hassan noticed that majority of the students felt sympathetic toward the victims and strongly disagreed with the killing of human beings as an outlet and reaction to the “freedom of speech” policy. When this discussion was occurring in the class, my son told me that he expressed distaste for killing as well, but amongst all the angst and anxiety, there was one female Muslim student with a neatly wrapped hijab around her head who had been sitting quietly for quite a while. She suddenly spoke up angrily and said that Islam also condemns the killing of human beings but, on the other hand, no individual has the right to mock and create caricatures of a very focal figure, prophet, or entire religion in lieu of “freedom of speech.” She told them that in Islam, the killing of one innocent is equivalent to the death of humanity. Immediately after she expressed her views on “freedom of speech,” a heated discussion ensued among the students. Hassan recounted that it appeared that the teacher was not prepared to handle this delicate situation, and so his immediate

response was to quickly end the conversation. After the class was over, the teacher pulled the Muslim student aside and apologized to her, in the event that she had felt offended.

On a moral level, the teacher did the right thing to protect the Muslim girl's right to free speech but on an ethical basis, why was this incident not discussed openly and in such a way that all of the students in the class received validation of their opinions and identity? Paulo Freire (1986) asserted that "because education is politics, it makes sense for the liberating teacher to feel some fear when he or she is teaching" (p. 61). However, it is a teacher in a power position in the classroom "to confront orthodoxy and dogma" (Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009, p. xviii) and "to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug" (Said, 1996, p. 11). What strategies might the teacher have used that would have either enabled students to agree to disagree or to discuss the event in a way that encouraged them to escape the binaries of offensiveness and defensiveness? Housee (2010) noted "that sometimes the silence in the class can be both a consequence of oppression and a form of resistance" (p. 421). When passivity, non-participation or silence are considered, much of the discussion comes from the perspective of the instructors and "strikingly absent from most of these explorations of silence are the perspectives of students" (Reda, 2009, p. 7). While it is important that teachers "[a]llow everyone to express his/her view to ensure that everyone is heard and respected, pupils should give reasons why they have a particular view" (Oxfam, 2006, p. 6). This invitation to provide an explanation enables vulnerable and less confident students to feel more secure to voice their opinions and views without being judged.

I asked my son about any opinions he wanted to share as a Muslim student in the class. He replied that he did want to say something, but when the female Muslim student expressed her thoughts and the debate became heated, he started to feel uncomfortable. As Schultz (2010) observed, a student who remains silent is able to "hold on to practices and beliefs that might make them vulnerable to their peers and teachers" (p. 2835) and their silence is thus a form of protection. In addition, he said, "It is hard to say that I am thinking differently." Glenn (2004) warned that "silence is too often read as simple passivity in situations where it has actually taken on an expressive power" (p. xi). For Hassan, he was unable to justify his religion through any comments, despite agreeing with the female Muslim student's point of view.

While this Muslim student was portraying the story's other side, she was composing a "juxtapository narrative" (Bhabha, 2006, p. 17), placing her voice alongside the voices of other

students in her class. Simultaneously she was “constructing a Muslim space” (Khan, 2009) for herself and other Muslim students. It is such “a space of juxtaposition and re-alignment that opens bodies and thought to new arrangements and possibilities” (Springgay & Freedman, 2009, p. 30). Reda (2009) suggested that when a student who rarely speaks does speak, other students tend to take the time to listen. As a mother of a Canadian Muslim student with a multifaceted identity, I wish the teacher had known how to continue with the discussions in order to shape an inclusive classroom in that moment in time for all voices – Muslim and non-Muslim, complementary or juxtapositioned.

### **Entering and Working Through Crisis**

Felman (1995) affirmed that teaching and learning take place only through entering and working through crisis, since it is this process that moves a student to a different intellectual, emotional, and/or political space. In Hassan’s psychology class, the Charlie Hebdo discussion resulted from the teacher’s invitation to students to engage with current events happening around the world and to express their thoughts on that brutal incident which reaped extreme consequences for freedom of speech. The irony is how core liberal values, like freedom of expression, keep bumping into conflict with commitments to religious pluralism and religious freedom. It was evident in the aftermath of the attacks on the Charlie Hebdo magazine offices who had published crude and rude cartoons that mocked the Prophet Muhammad. The killings of 12 staff members at the Parisian satirical publication drew massive repercussion by staunch defenders of free speech, while also fueling Islamophobia and another wave of repression on Muslim communities (Anwaruddin & Fernández, 2015).

I believe free speech is not synonymous with offensive speech or hate speech. Freedom of speech is a precious right but when it is used to provoke divisions or hatred or there is a chance of it potentially leading to an extreme polarized justification; religious intolerance may become an inevitable consequence. Therefore, it is critical to understand religion as a social, cultural, ethical, historical and political phenomenon in modern secular societies. Thinking seriously about religion is critical not only because of the gruesome violence being perpetrated in the name of or against religion, but also because students carry their faith, active religious practices and strong religious identifications with them in the classrooms (Anwaruddin & Fernández, 2015). Hassan’s Psychology class was an opportunity for students and teacher both to

look at the incident from different angles, positioning, and perspectives. It was an opening for openness to others, to engage in dialogue about cross cultural and religious sensitivities, moral controversies, identity talk, citizenship and difference, and an opening for all to interrogate their own beliefs and assumptions, opinions, and positioning. Such a conversation offered the teacher a gateway to develop students' critical thinking and analytical skills, to nurture students to recognize the necessity of time and struggle toward a better society by collectively constructing "...narrative acts of insubordination" (Nelson, 2001, p. 8). To this end, Oxfam (2006) emphasised that the facilitation of curricula that addresses contentious issues teaches students how to critically access multiple perspectives, makes them aware of the complexity of controversial topics, opens them to the necessity of discussions and dialogue with those whom they disagree and supports them to learn to re-adjust their moral responsiveness to others. Finally, it invites them to recognize the need to co-exist with people who have differing views and beliefs about religion, including no religion at all.

Ladson-Billings (2003) took the stance, "We have an obligation to the students we teach never to avoid the knotty and uncomfortable issues of race, class and gender in our society" (p. X) as these are the keys pieces in shaping student's liberation in a multiracial society. To build from this, as a society, we have an obligation to our humanity to ensure that everyone is heard and respected. In regard to education, this means that we have an obligation to our educational institutions to push them to work against exclusionary and discriminatory policies and practices. We have an obligation to the education profession to disrupt the canonization and re-inscription of curricula and dogma that do not offer safe space for differing views and controversial discussions (Ladson-Billings, 2003). We have an obligation to educators to challenge their potential resistance to and/or ignorance of these complex issues of Canadian identity formation. In my son's Psychology class discussion, the Muslim female student who stood up and shared her comments was not only offering her perspective, but was unearthing the deepest roots of the surface issue. Her differing perspective, a "juxtapository narrative," (Bhabha, 2006, p. 17) had it been explored, had the potential to reflect all three broad areas of learning that reflect Saskatchewan's goals of learning: lifelong learning; sense of self, community, and place; and engaged citizenship (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011). Depending on the specific outcome(s) of the Psychology curriculum which the teacher chose to pursue, inquiry questions may have included such topics as if, and why, the world is becoming more unmerciful; why

Muslims are currently the most targeted group in the world; how historical injustices were committed against minorities; how power operates and persists; the roots and effects of colonialism; the inherent, and conscious or unconscious, biases of mass media; the complexity of freedom of speech; anti-immigrant rhetoric; the ethical limitations of art; and the politicization of religion.

Acknowledging the conflict and messiness in our world begins with avoiding simplifications (Douglass, 2000; Haynes, 2011). Hess (2004, 2005) advocated for a “balance approach” to be used in a classroom in a context in which teachers believe an issue to be controversial, teaching it without favoring a particular perspective, so that all students are exposed to various positions in a neutral way. Such a position supersedes a “denial approach” in which a teacher refuses to believe an issue to be controversial, or a “privilege approach” in which a teacher does believe an issue to be controversial but also believes that there is a right answer. Since schools and classrooms are so diverse and yet a majority of teachers are white, when an incident like Charlie Hebdo occurs with a religiously motivated conflict, it is important that teachers carefully watch and follow updates, as well as do some research, in order to facilitate balanced and informed conversations about it with students. In such a way, the teacher, in a situation like Hassan’s Psychology class, could have organized a talk in which a knowledgeable Muslim parent was invited in to speak to the students. Another option would have been to invite the Imam of the local mosque to offer his perspective on the incident, introduce Islamic teachings about human rights, and speak to the significance of the Prophet Muhammad for Muslims around the world and of the seriousness of creating any sort of physical or artistic representation of him. At the same time, the Imam could have stressed the Islamic belief that no human being has the right to take the life of another and that, because violence and bloodshed can never resolve a problem, dialogue and discussion are important where people and societies are divided. To ensure multiple perspectives were represented, the teacher could have juxtaposed these Islamic beliefs and teachings with talks or presentations by a human rights lawyer or commissioner specializing in freedom of speech. Such an approach would have provided a balance of perspectives, and would have called on students to think critically through the motivations underpinning a complex societal event.

Both avoiding conflicting views and oversimplifications of such views are unjust toward religious individuals and communities, and such actions in schools do not prepare students “to

meet people and ideas in their life that they don't understand, and possibly don't agree with" (Byrne, 2014, p. 26). It is important that all teachers concern themselves with any simplistic and sometimes erroneous representations of religion found in the media and school textbooks (Jackson, 1997), as they easily result in negative stereotypes (Jackson, 2014, p. 61). "While overemphasizing uniformity and thereby ignoring conflict is one form of simplification, another is overstating religious conflict" (Patrick, Gulayets, Peck, 2017, p. 611). For example, a deconstruction of misleading headlines such as "Islamic terrorism targets innocent civilians," "Muslim radicalized youth were homegrown terrorists," "Does the 'Muslim world' oppress women?" assist in students' development of a more realistic notion of religious conflict. In such a deconstruction, teachers are able to instruct students about how language and concepts of tolerance, individual freedom, and political liberties may be unconsciously used to position the religious "other" as deficient and threatening (Patrick et al., 2017).

Noddings and Brooks (2017) asserted that pedagogical neutrality should be the vantage point from which educators facilitate the hard talk about critical concerns and contentious topics, discussions of controversial issues, and matters concerning contested spaces. Pedagogical neutrality implies the avoidance of a preferred paradigm, ideology, or religion. The starting point, instead of telling "students what is right or wrong," is to encourage "them to think on each issue critically and to listen carefully to opposing views" (p. 33). It requires teachers to "present all significant sides of an issue in their full passion and best reasoning" but "avoid claiming any one perspective as true" (Noddings, 1993, p. 122). In Kelly's (1986) framework, teachers' perspectives are described as exclusive neutrality, exclusive partiality, neutral impartiality, and committed impartiality. According to Kelly (1986), where exclusive neutrality prevents teachers from introducing any controversial topic into the curriculum, exclusive partiality encourages them to intentionally endeavor to persuade students into accepting a favored position on the issue. Neutral impartiality requires teachers to position their students to examine all relevant points of view on an issue and directs them to honor the strongest argument. Committed impartiality, on the other hand, encourages teachers to state their own opinions on contentious topics and then ensure that all competing points of view receive a fair hearing through critical discussion. Kelly (1986) argued that teachers have a responsibility to express their opinions when discussing contentious topics with their students and suggests that they should take the role of committed impartiality when addressing controversial issues.

## **Embracing Religious Identity**

Given the world where researchers, policy makers, curriculum designers, educators, and students now live, “it is senseless to carry on with schooling practices as if nothing [has] changed” (Hoechsmann, 2008, p. 69). Curriculum is a fertile space where “the edge of chaos” and where patterns of interwoven relations are caught in a continuous process of making, unmaking and remaking through an “endless dance of co-emergence” (Waldrop, 1992, p. 12). Rather than perpetuating divisions among students from various religious groups, schools are now challenged to teach students how to have critical dialogues and discussions with those with whom they disagree. It is solely by creating spaces for what Bakhtin (1981, 1984) described as a polyphony of multiple valid voices, by recognizing the “moment of entering the interstices of multiple possible worlds” (Fels, 2002), that students are invited to occupy “simultaneous but different space” (Holquist, 2002, p. 21).

Some teachers argue that there is no place for teaching controversial subjects in the classroom because of the overcrowded curriculum they have to cover (Holden, 2002). Other teachers claim that they have insufficient knowledge and limited confidence to handle controversial issues because they have had inadequate preparation and support in managing such matters in their pre-service teacher-training program (Lynagh, Gilligan, & Handley, 2010). While conversations about students’ religious identity are not simple, at the same time distancing oneself from religious identity is equally difficult. Across the globe, eight in ten people identify with a religious group (Pew Research Group, 2012). Despite the reality that religion is a part of many [students’] lives, topics of religion can be considered taboo in the public-school setting (Keller, Camardese & Abbas, 2017). As Noddings (2008) stated, “Religion plays a significant role in the lives of individuals, and increasingly it is playing a political role that affects both believers and unbelievers. We cannot remain silent on this vital topic and still claim to educate” (p. 386). While children of all religious persuasions are in theory welcomed in public schools, religious identity is often ignored, silenced, repressed, or forbidden (White, 2009).

Although teacher education programs that provide instruction in multicultural education highlight differences such as race, class, gender, and language, religion is often either omitted or only briefly mentioned (Subedi, 2006; White, 2009). This “culture of silencing of religious identity as well as silencing of learning about other religions creates a climate of religious



illiteracy” (Keller, Camardese & Abbas, 2017, p. 29). Aown (2011) cautioned that religious illiteracy can lead to increased discrimination and prejudiced viewpoints of students of faith. (p. 5). When the curriculum assumes religion as a private matter, or “thinking about religion in public education as a conversation stopper” (Rorty,1999), it fails to recognize that many students carry their faith with them into the classroom and it shapes the ways in which they learn to engage with knowledge, content, and relationships. Therefore, the secular conception of education which supports the exclusion of faith from education and the inability to deprivatize religion in schools can only lead to further masking the marginalization of religious minority groups (Anwaruddin & Fernández, 2015).

Acknowledging students’ religious identity in public school is a “way to expose [students] to the plurality of worldviews, belief systems, values, practices and forms of community that make up the various religion of the world” (Seljak, 2009, p. 179). In a public-school setting, where religion does not have a particular place, children at an early stage begin to learn that their non-religious self is not welcomed in school and their religious or spiritual self must remain at home or in the community. Due to this, children are unable to cultivate their sense of self nor the worldviews of others around them. As a result, they feel a sense of shame at the fact that their religious beliefs and differing understandings of spirituality are in the minority (Keller, Camardese & Abbas, 2017). Let’s acknowledge that schools are already religiously diverse and this diversity is clearly reflected when a Muslim female student has a hijab wrapped on her head, when schools receive requests for halal lunches, when Sikh male and female students don a pagri, when Hindu students ask for vegetarian meals, when Jewish students specify Kosher food, when Muslim parents have their children opt out of Christmas festivities, when parents of many faiths request that their children be opted out of Sex Education. It is hard to argue that schools are religiously neutral when Christian students cheerfully sing Christmas carols and make beautiful ornaments for their Christmas tree at school and, especially, when the entire school receive a Christian holiday for Christmas celebration, given that this Christian celebration is not outlined as a teaching requirement in mandatory school curriculum.

There has been a long-held notion that the categories “religious” and “secular” are strictly binary. Bouchard and Taylor (2008) defined a secular regime in one of two ways: as confining religion to the private sphere or as state neutrality, in that “the State may not espouse all of the worldviews and deep-seated convictions of all citizens” (p. 45). “Public school curriculum

neither promotes nor negates a religious perspective, thereby supporting the theory that students do not have the belief that everyone must have the same religion as they do” (Keller, Camardese & Abbas, 2017, p.14). However, Young (2009) stated that the norms and values of the predominant culture, wrapped in patriarchal, Western, Eurocentric knowledge and perspectives, infiltrate society and set expectations for what is typically accepted.

According to Parker (2003), schools often promote diversity and inclusiveness through the lens of citizenship education. Teaching and discussions about shared democratic life, equality, fairness, respect, and responsibility are often embedded in the social studies curriculum, yet conversations about cultural and religious diversity are excluded. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) guarantees fundamental freedoms of conscience and religion, as well as thought, belief, and opinion. However, the interpretation of such freedoms, and the extent of accommodation within the context of secular public schools, is not always clear (Shariff, 2006).

It is not sufficient anymore to just provide resource supports without critically challenging the Eurocentric curricula, nor is it acceptable to tolerate teachers’ lack of knowledge of the Muslim faith and practices or to have to challenge the teachers’ own biases and preconceived notions. More importantly, the youth would like to be acknowledged, understood, and respected for whom they are—both Muslim and Canadian. (Ahmed, 2016, p.194)

It is not simply a matter of accommodating differences by promoting diversity and cultural pluralism but also about how we are oriented towards each other and how actively we engage with each other in the dynamic process of being, becoming and belonging. Therefore, a blanket defense of liberal values like freedom of expression, protection of religious expression, status of sovereign citizen, and national unity makes little sense and, in fact, might encourage further violence and marginalization when confronted with the need to build bridges between religious communities that have experienced historical conflict and are experiencing ongoing wave of repression. (Anwaruddin & Fernández, 2015).

### **Teacher Education**

I raise questions regarding what stance teachers take in relation to curriculum content, of how they connect that curriculum content to the very students who sit in their classrooms, and of

how they facilitate the teaching and learning. “How can we help more teachers recognize the role they play in keeping racism and [silence] alive?” (Donaldson, 1997, p. 37). Corrigan (2011) acknowledged that although scholars and teachers have “resisted injustice through breaking the silence on oppressive systems and ideologies” (p. 8), the resulting work (i.e., critical perspectives on class, race, gender, ecocriticism, postcolonial studies, and disability studies) still have not “fully given voice to the voiceless” (p. 9). Current in-service and pre-service teacher education programs insufficiently prepare teachers for teaching sensitive and contentious issues and debatable subject matters in the classrooms. It would be valuable for teacher education programs to include content on pedagogical approaches and practices applicable to teaching controversy in the classroom and that experiential learning be facilitated for both pre-service and in-service teachers. In this way, both teachers and students would learn to explore, discuss, and come to understand opposing points of view. Curriculum teaching and education are not simply about imparting knowledge, content, and information from teachers to students nor about depositing points-of-view; they are about an exchange of ideas, and about being critically engaged in and awakened by what is going on in the world (Freire, 2009). They are about disrupting damaging and oppressive positions. They are about disturbing normative, official and rigid narratives by destabilising the troubling aspects of the dominant stories that are embedded within the standard curriculum.

One of the major concerns with teacher education today is the lack of inclusion of teacher voices in curriculum matters and educational decisions (Moore, 2007; Wilson & Delaney, 2010). Teachers, who work alongside diverse students every day, feel the pressure to occupy the space between not encouraging, at the same time as not discouraging, religion in schools. Therefore, teachers often walk a fine line between protecting students’ rights to express their religious beliefs and promoting a particular religion. As a result, many states have discontinued teaching religion altogether (Hartwick, Hawkins, & Schroeder, 2013). As an alternative to keeping religion away from schools, parents are a huge and untapped resource who can be invited into teacher education programs where their knowledge and expertise can be counted and utilized. With such an approach, the intimidation teachers feel for contentious topics will be lessened and a space for sensitive discussion will be effectively opened up.

## **Bringing Stories of Learners' Lives into Curriculum**

No matter how much a teacher encourages students to open up and talk about their lives in class, a lack of knowledge of individual experiences has the potential to lead to a 'tribalising' of students (Duff & Uchida, 1997) or "a dependence on dominant discourses which may not serve the interests of the people whose identities they help to construct" (Cooke, 2006, p. 70). How might a starting place in teacher education be the creation of opportunities for teachers to listen to or to learn about the "real life stories of learners' lives" (p. 70)? When there is a questioning, destabilizing, and troubling of these dominant stories, presented through media – the "unofficial curriculum" – then learners and teachers can dynamically engage with the lived curriculum of the everyday, and not simply allow media to construct and govern the discourse (Baliko, 2014, p. 99).

During their professional development sessions, have educators discussed the topic of students who live with an in-between identity or how to respond to controversial issues they encounter in their classrooms? Have they professionally pursued the questions of how it feels to live a liminal life or to be a raced subject or to be a minority in curriculum, in school, and in Canada? Have they reflected upon how minority children negotiate religious identities in the public-school context? Have they considered inviting a parent to any of their meetings or professional development days to talk about the struggles and challenges involved in maintaining and balancing multiple identities? How might parents play an important role in teacher education in supporting teachers to learn strategies to facilitate deep dialogue and controversial conversations with students about race, racism, antiracism, patriotism and social, political, and religious incidents? How might parents play a role, alongside the teacher and students, in a safe classroom environment in which they discuss these real-life issues and experiences of which we are in the midst? How might parents support teachers in challenging students to ask what has not been said – by the student, by the teacher, by the parent, by the text, or by society (Ellsworth, 1997)?

As a minority mother of children who live with all of these complex questions and challenges to their identity, these issues are fundamental to me. I believe it is critical to interrogate both the current role the teacher and the possible role of the parent, as a conduit for

curriculum, to create a place for diverse children's identity in curriculum and schools and thus, ultimately, contribute to shaping a place for their voices on this land and in their home, Canada.

### **Shifting from Accountability to Responsibility**

Students spend a large part of their time in schools in silence (Schultz, 2010). Teachers have a daily influence on the lives of their students. Not only imparting teacher's professional knowledge but every word, comment, gesture, eye contact, voice tone, movement and body language leaves a deep imprint on their student's life. In the midst of all their professional responsibilities, the ethical responsibility which entails an unconditional acceptance and protection of the right of free speech of the students remains an overarching goal of the teaching profession. "Because we see the professional knowledge landscape as composed of relationships among people, places, and things, we see it as both an intellectual and a moral landscape" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, pp. 4-5). Also speaking to relationships, Edmond (1979) stated, "We can, wherever and whenever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that" (p. 23). What we yet have more to learn about is how to use the unique and complementary positioning of teachers and parents as an integral and complementary aspect of the teaching and learning of students on the school landscape. "Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far" (p. 23). In his statement, Edmond foregrounded issues of "responsibility and accountability" (Noddings, 2009) in terms of what and to whom teachers respond as they reflect on their perspectives and practices. Applying Noddings' conceptualizations, I believe policymakers and educators are acting with accountability when they discuss, develop programs for, and take initiative towards developing and promoting critical literacy, critical pedagogies, and a scope of multi-literacies. In such instances, they are responding to a mandate from those above them in power – governments who approve and mandate curriculum, and senior administrators in school divisions who monitor the implementation of curriculum. In being accountable, they may or may not meet the needs of their students.

Alternatively, when these same policymakers and educators act with responsibility, as opposed to accountability, they look outward to those in their care, rather than upward. In this instance, as they look to students and families, they seek to deepen re-conceptualizations regarding the pressures and struggles of integration, blending identities, and the burden of

current events carried by Muslim Canadian youth. They take up their responsibility to participate in the lives of children who are struggling with identity pressures, or the challenges of fitting in at school. Of important note, Noddings (2009) indicated that when educators are responsible to those in their care, attentive to their needs, accountability is inherently achieved. How significant, then, that teaching responsibility becomes a main tenet in teacher education programs.

Though commonly characterized in such a way, it is critical to mention here that identity struggle is not a mental health issue but rather an educational issue related to social and civic literacy. How might educators act with responsibility when they notice the signs and symptoms of an identity crisis? How might they respond to a child with a dual identity with compassionate and understanding eyes? When ethnically diverse children, while dealing with the pressures of identity, fall behind in grades, how do teachers move from a stance of accountability, where they inform parents that their children are not doing well, to one of responsibility where they question how a student's underachievement may be influenced by who is reflected and who is silenced in the curriculum? Why do we as parents never receive calls or emails from teachers that inform us about the identity struggles of our children in school? I remember a time when my daughter was struggling with whether to continue to keep her hijab or remove it for good to fit in with her peers and friends at school. Her experience of living life on the 'hyphen' as a Canadian-Muslim became intense for her in her high school years. She struggled to feel 'normal' and be accepted by her friends, as she was aware of the stereotypes and misconceptions about hijabi girls discussed among various groups of girls on the school landscape. At the same time, she was determining the way to practice her religious values.

Any attempt on our behalf as parents to discuss these critical matters with the teachers either meet a dead end with no response, or an unwillingness to go further and create an opportunity for dialogue and discussion. Teachers have the opportunity to be responsible in their partnerships with parents, just as they have that opportunity with their students. As schools shift from a climate of accountability to one of responsibility, space is opened for authentic and meaningful relationships and conversations. Let's look again, think again and attempt again; together this time.

## **Look Again, Think Again**

It is not differences, *but our judgments that divide us.*

It is not religious beliefs, *but our secularist bias that marginalizes us.*

It is not assumptions, *but our unguarded attitude that obstructs us.*

It is not curiosity, *but our certainty that puzzles us.*

It is not isolation, *but our interconnectedness that threatens us.*

It is not theories, *but our practices that fail us.*

It is not curriculum, *but our mutual dialogic pedagogies that teach us.*

It is not policies, *but our ethical values that shape us.*

It is not relationships, *but our positioning that informs us.*

It is not actions, *but our thoughts that create us.*

It is not voice, *but our silence that educates us.*

It is not ignorance, *but our knowledge that interrupts us.*

It is not vision, *but our mindfulness that changes us.*

It is not solutions, *but our challenges that strengthen us.*

It is not hope, *but our attempts that inspire us.*

### **Creating Relational and Conversational Space**

Relational and conversational spaces are inter-reliant. Parents and teachers share an inescapable relational mutuality because of the child/student they both share. Regardless of how comfortable students, parents and teachers feel in these spaces, a moment of awkwardness or uncomfortable silence is a good starting point.

[W]here and with whom children live, and their social, cultural, religious and economic contexts are all significant to teaching and learning. [It presents] curriculum as a dynamic

interplay between particular people--children, teachers, parents, family and community members--teaching and learning about particular things in a rich range of particular places. (Pushor, 2013, p. 10)

Re-conceptualizing collaborative relationships among students, parents, teachers, families and community creates relational and conversational spaces. These relational spaces are characterized by mutuality and possibility, where embodied, lived tensions become resources or triggers for telling and retelling stories. Conversational spaces reveal, constitute, or embody the world between people, and are not simply spaces to exchange and confirm already familiar understandings, but, rather, are characterized by emergent occasions for exploring other possible stories (Clandinin, Lessard & Caine, 2012). Without attention to creating these transforming spaces for all the partners involved in a child's life, differences will not be expressed or they will be expressed in a way that leads to presumptions, alienation or rejection.

Establishing and maintaining robust relationships among partners is the core component of bridging the gap between the home and school landscape, theory and practice, and teaching and learning. When we position parents and families alongside teachers, we collectively and consciously engage in a process of unlearning and relearning that will lead to a new story of schools and a new story of parents as integral to school landscapes. Whose voice gets heard in determining what is best for children (Delpit, 2004)? Who better to speak to the interests of oppressed families than a fellow minority parent? Jones (1999) warned that [parents] must recognize that not only the 'telling' of stories is significant but even more important is the fact that the stories are 'heard,' that the marginalized have a 'voice.' Engaging parents in the processes of teaching and learning on the school landscape means a willingness on behalf of teachers and educators to welcome what parents bring to these processes. The foremost thing that I carried with me every time I entered my children's school landscape was my knowledge, my parent knowledge about my children and their identity in its entirety. "[P]arent knowledge is overlooked as teachers privilege their own knowledge and prioritize the school's agenda over that of the parents" (Pushor, 2010, p. 14).

Schools have become sites where the complex positioning and contextualization of parents and children's lived experiences are often ignored, misunderstood and excluded. The use of parent knowledge in schools is not an option anymore, but rather a dire necessity. Parent



engagement, providing an authentic and meaningful place and voice for parents in their children's teaching and learning (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005) is just not possible without honoring parent knowledge. Frequently schools and teachers take a paternalistic approach, essentially parenting the parent. While schools have expertise on pedagogical knowledge, curriculum content, and child development, they are not experts on individual families or children (Edwards, Pleasants, & Franklin, 1999).

Engaging parents in teaching and learning, appreciating family stories, building partnerships and developing reciprocal relationships between teachers and parents are all reliant on parent knowledge. Parent knowledge cannot be defined as a specific set of knowledge, rather it is knowledge that is constructed alongside the children (Pushor, 2015). This knowledge is shaped for the children and by the children. Parent knowledge is a knowledge of a parent child relationship. It is the knowledge of love, care, emotion, feelings, and bonding. It is the knowledge of a child, child's abilities, needs, values, beliefs, strengths, weaknesses, vulnerabilities, habits, and fears, verbal and non-verbal communication. Parent knowledge is fundamental to both teachers and students and teaching and learning, "If parents are to 'fit together' with teachers, and to be an integral part of the processes connected to teaching and learning, it is important to know what knowledge they bring to this relationship" (Pushor, 2007, p. 9).

### **Being the "Other"**

As a minority mother researcher, whose research encompasses engaging ethnically diverse parents on the school landscape and their knowledge in curriculum, I have found a plethora of literature and research on the professionalism of teachers, teaching practices, and engagement of parents but very little on parent knowledge. Lareau (2000) largely focused on the resources that working class, middle-class, and minoritized parents use to help their children succeed in school. She emphasized that despite parents' differential status, abilities, and knowledge, all of them desire to help and to maximize their child's educational experiences. Given their different positioning, the type and number of resources parents bring to the school landscape varies. In comparison to minority and working class parents, middle-class parents tap their social advantages such as high status jobs, educational sophistication, and organizational skills as they support their children toward success in school.

I accentuate our differences as a starting point for fostering dynamic parent-school, parent-teacher, and parent to parent relationships. Fostering authentic and meaningful relationships “requires a deep and self-critical analysis of perceived social and cultural differences in family-school interactions” (Kirmaci, Alexsaht-Snyder, & Buxton, 2018, p. 26), both on behalf of educators and parents. Such “analysis requires that educators not predetermine any particular family practice as inappropriate” (p. 26) and that educators not attempt to “convert a wide range of behaviors by families into a uniform [and orthodox and dogmatic] style of interaction” (Lareau, 2000, p. 4). It is critical that all parents and families are valued and seen as valuable.

Similar to Pushor (2015) in her work on parent knowledge, I am particularly attempting to understand how parent engagement can flourish without honoring, understanding, and incorporating parent knowledge. Looking inward (Pushor & Ruitenbergh, 2005), I question my parent knowledge as a mother of four children. How can I define parent knowledge which is composed of two words joined together, “parent” and “knowledge”? I am a parent, but when I look at myself in a Canadian context, I am an ethnically diverse mother, Muslim woman, minority Canadian, and colored person. My experiences of “otherness” as a parent on the school landscape have taught me that my parent knowledge is just as similar and significant as that of any other parent for their child, except it does not have an equal space on the school landscape. As Madrid (as cited in Turner-Vorbeck & Marsh, 2008) stated:

Being *the other* means feeling different; is awareness of being distinct; is consciousness of being dissimilar. It means being outside the game, outside the circle, outside the set. It means being on the edges, on the margins, on the periphery. Otherness means feeling excluded, closed out, precluded, even disdained and scorned. It produces a sense of isolation, of apartness, of disconnectedness, of alienation. (p. 2)

In order to weigh, discuss, and begin to understand the depth, dimension and complexity of otherness, it is critical that educators are mindful that “otherness” is the most prominent trait of diversity which is not deficit based but rather capacity based. As Aoki (1993) challenged, “Embrace the otherness of others” (p. 255). The space between deficit and capacity emerges from the core of how I see myself in relation to others and how others see me in relation to themselves. My otherness includes my color, culture, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status and religious beliefs, and is normally equated to the concept of ‘them,’ in relation to the dominant “us.” Even if immigrants and ethnically diverse Canadians are willing to become fully integrated

into mainstream society, the degree of openness of those in the mainstream remains debatable. Podhoretz (1993) provided a powerful example of the defensive explanation of the identity suppression;

That country is sometimes called the upper middle class; and indeed I am a member of that class, less by virtue of my income than by virtue of the way my speech is accented, the way I dress, the way I furnish my home, the way I entertain and am entertained, the way I educate my children—the way, quite simply, I look and I live (P. 98)

Self-awareness, often develops through series of sore experiences, painful introspection and extreme gazing. Since part of being who I am is a result of my otherness, it becomes essential to reveal the negotiations of my existence through a lens of multiple identities: a parent, a Muslim, a Pakistani, a Canadian, and a researcher. Without carving a space for otherness, in order to unravel the realities of identities, we can never create a place for equivalence. Pushor (2015) addressed “the power and politics of knowledge – who is seen to hold knowledge, whose knowledge counts – and what teachers have to gain in learning from and acting upon parent knowledge in their work with children” (p. 4). Pushor’s quote hits to the core of diversity: ‘who is seen’ comes before ‘who holds knowledge and whose knowledge counts.’ Through my presence on my children’s school landscape, I began to learn the boundaries for my interactions, how far I could push, and how much I could be present. I began to wrestle with a tension. While I firmly believed that I needed to be present in multiple ways to make a difference in my children’s education, I simultaneously knew that there are standards for those interactions which I had to respect (Graue & Prager, 1999). I learned what Delpit (1995) called the “culture of power” through my presence and involvement; I learned its rules, its goals, and its players. It is indeed a matter of visibility and voice, and until what is other about minorities/culturally diverse Canadian parents remains invisible to the open eyes, their voices, knowledge, and engagement will never find a space and place on the school landscape.

### **On the Periphery**

We are not “the other” but half of one another  
I foray into school to greet my child’s teacher  
Not as “the other” but simply a mother  
together as mother and teacher

let's deconstruct and undo othering "the other"  
by redrawing our interrelationships with one another  
sans keeping ourselves over and above each other  
by humanizing "the other"  
each of us is either  
a mother or father  
sister or brother  
educator or teacher  
leader or pleader  
we keep growing deeper and further  
into one another  
one after the other  
instead of seeking out the similar  
let's reach out to the unfamiliar  
with, by, and alongside each another  
we can mend and heal one another

There is a need to see the parents walking among us who have been rendered invisible and to listen to their as yet unheard voices speak louder than our resolution to not hear them. "With parent engagement, possibilities are created for the structure of schooling to be flattened, power and authority to be shared by educators and parents, and the agenda being served to be mutually determined and mutually beneficial" (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005, p. 13). Let's look, think, reflect, and attempt again and again to destabilize our perceptions about who belongs and who does not, who is accepted and who is alienated. We can begin again by contextualizing our relationships as equitable and knowing partners on the school landscape.

### **Changing School Landscapes**

Teachers have an opportunity to come to understand more fully our school landscapes and ourselves as shaping and being shaped by these landscapes and, in response, to shift our practices in relation to teaching and learning, teachers and students, teachers and parents, and in the co-construction of curriculum. Perhaps, in such a shaping process, we can truly change school landscapes (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray Orr, 2007, pp. 33-34). It is time to move

beyond Parent-Teacher Associations, School Community Councils, and celebrating an annual official “Diversity Day.” It is easy to “discuss the culture of ‘other’ groups without asking too many difficult questions such as why such groups are not in positions of authority within the education system and Canadian society in general” (Kelly, as cited in Vanhouw, 2007). Voices of the other are ignored except to experience music, food, and dance (May, 1994). This inability is particularly destructive in classrooms where teachers view minority children as “other” and “see damaged and dangerous caricatures of the vulnerable and impressionable beings before them” (p. xiii). It is time that educators employ “approaches that transcend local and national borders and recognize flexible ways of belonging” (Oikonomidou, 2009). In this way, educators can disrupt the dichotomies of “us” and “them” or “home culture” and “host culture,” or “white dominance” and “raced subject” and create spaces that shift from “our” schools to spaces that are comfortable to a multitude of hybrid identities.

The solution to the challenges involved in blending identities does not need decades of research, millions of dollars, and multitudes of anti-terrorists protocols; in simple words, one has only to enter the marginalized communities, meet the minorities, and talk to the vulnerable people who are around us everywhere. It is a matter of narrative ethics; it is about putting students’ stories, stories of personal identity and the complexity of collective identity, at the core of educational institutions. “Stories have the capacity to convert a line drawing into flesh, and to dislodge the power of presumption and prejudice” (Bayoumi, 2008, p. 12). Stories create us and stories connect us by awakening us to “the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected (Greene, 1995, p. 28) therefore we need to enlarge existing spaces of possibility and create practices which invite experience of collective narration without denying our dynamic state of being and becoming, mutuality, and deep interrelationships.

### **Seize Possibility Not Assumption**

Diversity, one in identity, unique in identification yet not a single story

Seize possibility not assumption, end othering people in the process of becoming

When the voice of the marginalized pierces through the armor of judgement

Silence situates itself on an island of tears filled with hope and optimism

Creation craves confusion, disruption of rhythms, and messiness of flows

Do not be scared of changeability, a powerful path to chance

Reshaping inner self desires moments of silence and isolation

We are humans with eyes to see sincerity, hearts to yearn for relationships

Inner provocation obliges morality so let it openly pledge a sense of humanity

Urge for certainty kills curiosity to question our subjectivities, objectively

Desire inquiry over certainty, involvement over numbness, and tension over assumption

Change exists in the empty space right between the US and THEM dichotomy

Think rationally, reflect critically, act ethically, and create collaboratively

Our voices and choices make us who we are to ourselves and to the human race

Let's not let our perceptions and actions be unguarded.

## Chapter 5

### Mother Story 3: A Living Room Narrative.

#### Inquiring into Iman's Experience with "Fitting In" on the School Landscape

*None of us can be perfectly free of social prejudices, those subtle stereotypical reactions to surnames or cultural backgrounds or skin tones or eye slant or nose width and breadth or sexual orientation that are jumbled in the haunted attic of our psyches, causing us to prejudge people before any evidence is in. (Gioseffi, 1993, p. xxvi)*



Figure 5. From Racial to Religious Discrimination

**“Mama, what should we do as Canadians Muslims”?**

After Hassan went to his room to shower and return for supper, the food continued to broil and cook, Muhammad switched the news off and went upstairs, and I approached my computer with all of my fragile feelings and stories spinning inside my head. I began to write a story of my younger daughter’s experience. Iman, my youngest daughter, who first set foot on Canadian soil when she was about one and a half years old, is now an adult of 19 years. With angry tears in her eyes the morning of the tragedy in Paris, she asked me a question, "Mama, what should we do as Canadian Muslims?" With the television flashing relentlessly with current updates from Paris, and with images of victims and perpetrators in the background, we were in a state of shock.

*January 7, 2015*

*Daylight nightmare*

*once the shooting at Charlie Hebdo / for the love of free speech / we heard cries of 'god is great'  
through the gun-smoke, a repeated mantra / killing before you die / bursting and bleeding /  
chaos seizes the eyes / two masked gunmen brothers in black and armor / cradling Kalashnikov  
assault rifles/ I looked for blindness in vision / my obsessive heart beating in my ears / a  
caricature / forbidden fruit from the barren garden / vengeance and division / made lines fly into  
headlines / then twenty-first-century-problem-solvers / vengeance and division / utopia?  
paradise? / caricatures bleed the ink of blood / warm blood feels like a warm hug / red rivers of  
ink dance from pulp to earth / witnessing, making, rearing, ground realities / over / above /  
beside / beneath/ everywhere /Parisienne satire to massacre / a caricature / in nomine / free  
speech vs mocking what cannot be mocked? / then why is worshipping God becoming god? /  
sleep walking into segregation / what affects one directly / affects all indirectly / core liberal  
values leapt into religious pluralism/ divided humanity/ divided classrooms/ divided children/  
same yet split share/ time to confront orthodoxy and dogma/ overlooked paradigm of harm and  
offence / hand-drawn caricature and hand-held Kalashnikov revealed deep divides.*



It felt as if we were sinking deeper into the sofa just as much as we were sinking into our thoughts. My daughter's question made me speechless and frozen, not because of what to present to her as an answer, but because of how to present an answer to a daughter who is simultaneously a patriotic Canadian and a devoted Muslim. I did not know how to begin to explain all of this to her when I, as a grown adult, was having my own difficulties wrapping my head around what was occurring. My daughter's question was an answer as much as it was a question, one wrapped neatly in the shell of the other. Likewise, pain and responsibility were extant. Why in fact, did she want to do something about it at all? There and then her question began stitching her dual identities together.

As a Muslim mother, I often experience anxiety and confusion in how to interact with my children as I am raising them in an entirely different place, context and time than how and where I was raised. I have become immersed in forming an autonomy of my own existence by “decentring of [myself] as [I] experience and confront the world with feelings of insecurity and instability” (Aramitage, 2014, p. 26). I am continually trying to find a balance between my own cultural and religious standards and mainstream social norms so that my children are successful in blending and maintaining their “hybridity” (Bhabha, 1990; 1994) an identity of “dwelling at the borderlines of several shifting categories” (Trinh, 1992a, p. 137). As a nation, and particularly as Muslims, we are trying to make sense of what is taking place all around us. I pondered upon my own questions as a parent, ones with which I am consistently puzzling. Why is it that whenever my children watch the news and learn of the inhumane incidents going on around the world, instead of their hearts beating in sadness and lament, they race in curiosity towards finding out who committed or contributed to the incidents? Why does “who” matter more than “why” or “how”? Is it because “who” is exclusive to the conscience of Muslims who are expected and asked to justify the actions of “Islamic” fundamentalists? The linking of Islam to violence and holding Islamic doctrine accountable for terrorism and violent extremism perpetuates a vicious cycle of anti-Muslim hatred. This not only creates more divisions in society, but also ultimately fails to protect people.

As Martin Luther King (as cited in Hillis, 2013) reminded us, “We are in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly” (p. 184). It is out of this inescapable mutuality that my daughter's question emerged.

The more these horrific incidents have intensified over the years in the name of Islam, the more Muslims in the West are living in a climate of fear. Since 9/11, North American Muslim communities have increasingly been constructed as enemies to Western nation states and are vulnerable to discrimination and surveillance (Choudhry, 2001; Helly, 2004; Macklin, 2001; Morgan, 2001). Stereotypes about Muslims have become commonplace and discrimination based on one's religious and national background has become politically sanctioned (Driel, 2004). Anti-Muslim sentiment and discrimination targeting Muslims is on the rise, and school communities are not immune (Abo-Zena, Sahli & Tobias-Nahi, 2009) as "politics and schools are inexorably intertwined" (Sensoy & Stonebaanks, 2009, p ix). My daughter's question compels me to pose questions of my own to Canadian educators, 'What role do educational institutions and school communities have in all of this? Will I have to answer this question alone, as a parent? Or must we not unite as one community within society to answer it? As a parent, I am raising 'Canadian- Muslim' children. What is the role of Canadian schools and teachers in this?' I would be able to answer my daughter's question if I was raising only a Muslim, but I am raising a Canadian-Muslim. How am I to answer now? Where does my knowledge as a minority parent stand on the school landscape? Have educators considered their role in exploring how Muslim students contest the dominant conceptions imposed on them, including the assertion that they are a threat to Canada and do not belong in the country which they call home? How does it feel for Muslim students to live with a loss of sense of safety and security in their own home?

Perhaps as a school system and as a society we are failing and it is fundamentally vital to fully recognize that what happens to our children affects us all. Felman (1987) affirms that ignorance is no longer simply opposed to knowledge; it is an integral part of knowledge. Coming to know through unknowing and learning through unlearning is very much a part of coming to know. Not knowing is not a passive state of absence, a simple lack of information, but the incapacity or refusal to acknowledge our own implication in the information.

### **'Allahu Akbar': Rising Tide of Suspicion**

Islamophobia appears to be on the increase in many Western societies, including Canada. Since 9/11, prejudices and stereotypes about Muslims, their religious beliefs, or Islamic identities have intensified in North America. In the past 10 years, the Muslim population of North America has had to deal with increased visibility, religious stigmatization, otherness and discrimination

(Ali, 2012, p. 6). After 9/11, Muslims in the Western world have been portrayed as dangerous and “ideologically represented as a threat” (Sirin & Fine, 2007, p. 151). Many Canadians hold a negative view of Islam, and the women who wear hijab as a sign of such oppression (Khan, 2009). According to a June 2017 Abacus poll conducted for Macleans magazine, 60% of Canadians think Islamophobia is a problem in Canada, and 38% somewhat or strongly disagree that it is an issue at all (Williams, 2017). One of the common stereotypes about Muslims, which has worsened since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, is that Muslims’ values are not compatible with Westerners’ values.

Islam is a greatly misunderstood religion and Muslims have been propagandized through media, movies, art, and cartoons. “Dominant images that are readily accessible and immediately stimulating have done...much damage...in how our life stories have been told” (Bhimani, 2006, pp. 95-96). The issues surrounding differences, culture, race, color, religion, and identity that have been prevalent throughout the centuries have been granted an added dimension, shaped by the media and technology of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While interaction and communication “is the medium in which the exchange of meaning absolutely saturates the world” (Hall, 1997, p. 14), the media has one of the “most powerful and extensive systems for the circulation of meaning” (p. 14). The media entertainment images “consistently and systematically represents a homogenous and myopic Islamic faith” (Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009, p. x) and violence, extremism, terrorism as an inseparable part of Muslim identity and Islam as a justification for violent actions. Another stereotypical example includes a series of repeated portrayals of Muslim women as passive victims of male power and domination and their hijab and dress code as signs of oppression, domestic violence and holding a disadvantaged position. Such media representations are shaping public opinions of Muslims as foreign and alien, and are fueling the notion that Islam is a threat to “progressive, liberal, pluralistic, democratic, and secular society” (Asher, 2002). This increasing reaction and tension is leading to serious divisions and polarization in societies. The identity crisis that Muslims are facing currently has presented some blatant challenges, particularly to Muslim youth born and raised in the western society. A generation of Muslim students growing up in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is confronted daily with issues of cultural diversity, identity struggles, acculturation and global conflicts. Muslim youth in the West, “wherever they are on the continuum of secular to orthodox, continue to struggle in negotiating

intersecting, and sometimes dissecting, meanings of self – their religion, race, ethnicity, culture, way of life, community and knowledge” (Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009, p. x).

Extremism and Islamophobia, a disruption of balance and harmony, and its link to Muslim identity has posed serious concerns about the role of educational institutions in the lives of Muslim Canadian students. Denying its existence or having a flippant understanding of it suggests that white Canadians remain isolated from their Muslim neighbours, leading them to treat them as an alien group (Williams, 2017). Therefore, a significant responsibility lies with our educational institutions in preparing Muslim students to recognize that their beliefs and identities will contribute to the challenges they face in public schools and society in general. “Creating an open and non-threatening space may be difficult for both teachers and students (Anwaruddin & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2015, p. 151), however addressing religious pluralism in educational settings has become critical.

### **Troubling aspects of multiculturalism.**

Canada was the first country to adopt multicultural policy and prides itself as a country made up of a cultural mosaic. “Conceptually, multiculturalism is an ideal policy that addresses the multitude of issues that surface when cultures try to coexist but the reality of Canadian multiculturalism” (Lau, 2008, p. 27) is different. After living for about nineteen years, I have learned that “official multiculturalism barely acknowledges the historical inequities of race and ethnicity within Canada and it does little to address systemic racism” (Srivastava, 2007, p. 291). By using the term “multiculturalism,” I try to capture the politicized understanding of the issues (Dei, as cited in Kelly, 1999) by shifting away from an emphasis on aesthetic experiences relating to the “three F’s” – food, film, and festival. It is critical that we, as citizens, move towards real talk of dislodging power and privilege of white dominance and away from focus on diversity issues and considerations such as whether we should eat samosas or poutine or wear eagle feathers or a cowboy hat. These superficial considerations limit the possibility of going beyond issues of inequality and power, and exploring and questioning the identity of “us” and “them.” Instead, bringing othered voices to the discourse and honouring stories and experiences of diversity produces social change that benefits all (Syed, 2010). Dominant groups accept a limited amount of heterogeneity as long as the core cultural hegemony and Eurocentric notion of Western superiority is maintained therefore the unified white project remains dominant because

multiculturalism allows for limited difference (Thobani, 2007). Young (1987) suggested that the “mosaic” model of multiculturalism has been predisposed toward a post-colonial attitude of Canadian nationality, and is no longer sufficient.

To understand the way in which immigrants, refugees, “multicultural” Canadians and their children build their lives and identities in their new home requires a continued “wide awakesness” (Greene, 1995) to the notion of “multiculturalism,” both in meaning and in how it is lived in the protection of (or lack thereof) human rights, policy, and practice. Decision makers, academics and teachers are “members of the community of “us,” that is, people in positions of power” (Syed, 2010, p. 256). To deconstruct “how some groups and identities are othered, that is, marginalized, denigrated, violated in society, but also how some groups are favored, normalized, privileged” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 35) there must be “an examination of the intersecting complexities of multiculturalism in education” (Syed, 2010, p. 256). Therefore, it is critical to conceive of the meaning of integration as something more than a simple notion of ‘cultural mosaic’ predicated upon nicely fitting multiple sized, colored, and shaped pieces. The ‘base’ upon which the mosaic sits plays a critical role in defining how well and to what extent the pieces are going to be integrated. Academics have long argued that Canadian identity has historically been defined by whiteness (Bannerji, 2000; Razack, 2004; Thobani, 2007), and anyone who does not fit this identity is vulnerable to discrimination.

Many academics believe the mistreatment of Muslim communities in the post 9/11 era brings to the forefront Canada’s foundation as a racial state, something which has been hidden by the proclaimed nature of a multicultural Canada (Nagra, 2011). Multiculturalism fails to acknowledge and cope with the social, historical, economic, institutional, and educational inequalities that minority Canadians face instead it encourages minorities to focus on diversity issues rather than on more important issues such as racism (Bannerji 2000) sexism, inequality, assimilation, intolerance, marginalization, Islamophobia, and xenophobia. The founding of the Canadian state was constructed upon racial supremacy as evidenced by its overt racial dictatorship of the Aboriginal population under the Indian Act until the mid-20th century. It remains infused with the colonial tropes of white racial supremacy and western civilizational superiority (Thobani, 2007). Racialization can encourage a negative recognition that does not celebrate difference but problematizes it [where] difference is seen as abnormal and

unacceptable” (Lau, 2008, p. 22). Omi and Winant (1994) argued that “modern nation states should be understood as racial states, as they were founded by deeply racialized processes which involved internal unification and the differentiation of peripheral others” (as cited in Nagra, 2011, p. 9). Thobani (2007) asserted that the linking of immigration and Muslim communities with hatred and fear after 9/11 reproduces past encounters in the present moment; “silencing, exclusion, subordination and exploitation of minority groups” (Ng, 1995, p. 133) and that the reappearance of racialized peoples again makes possible the production of a white identity.

### **Creating spaces for polyphony of voices.**

Repeated media portrayals of Muslims as terrorists make it more challenging for parents to find ways to begin hard and crucial conversations with their children at early ages so that they grow and develop in both their citizenship and religious identity. Living without both reflects a loss of self and jeopardizes their sense of who they are. “By shaping majority-culture notions of authoritative truth as well as the nature of contemporary Muslim self-representation and advocacy, media sensationalism” (Sharify-Funk, 2009, p.75) has made Muslim minority communities an increasing target of suspicion, intolerance, and oppression. Muslims are left to navigate and encounter fears, religious stigmatization, intimidation, stereotypes and biases on their own as a marginalized group in a “multicultural” society. As Lorde (1984) affirmed, “People [of colour] are expected to educate white people about our humanity. Women are expected to educate men” (p. 115). Muslims are expected to educate non-Muslims and secularists. “The oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own actions” (p. 115). Thus, it has become the work and responsibility of all Muslims to defend their religion by speaking out to the dominant group about the actions of religious radicals. “The oppressed become the bearers of the oppressor’s ignorance while also living through their own oppression” (Brady, 2017, p. 119). Such an expectation of fixing and condemning the violent acts of radicals should not fall on Muslims only, but rather our entire society. Those who commit such heinous acts in the name of religion are also members and citizens of our same society. A shared sense of belongingness does not depend solely on religious beliefs, but rather on our shared humanity. “It is important to be critical of such dynamics so that people of colour [and Muslims] do not bear all the responsibility for the privileged to learn and unlearn about their privilege” (p. 119). Demonizing or holding Islam and Muslims accountable for the actions of fundamentalists and of religious extremism negatively disrupts the efforts of those who are

working to eradicate barriers to our shared citizenship as Canadians and shared identity as humans.

**‘What if that colored individual is a Muslim radical?’**

Looking backward from 2017, it is apparent that the uneven world in which we live has undertaken and experienced the perils and disasters that extremism is capable of stirring. European and North American nations have retreated to their governing institutions to establish anti-terrorism policies and laws, political leaders have enacted military mobilization in the Middle East, funerals for soldiers have been held before national audiences, the origins of alleged terrorists have been superficially scrutinized, and social media activism persists as an antidote among traumatized global populations. In retreating into the trauma that extremism has caused various nations in the West, problem-solving agents, such as politicians, world leaders and governments have directed their energy toward identifying and labelling the individuals who perpetrate atrocities on behalf of radical ideologies and false beliefs. Reliance upon simple, parsimonious categorizations such as moderate vs. extremist, liberal vs. fundamentalist or religious vs secular are leading to distorted reality by enforcing us versus them. Such categorizations “cultivate an elitism of insiders and outsiders” (Kincheloe, 2008a, p. 28) and are highly consequential for the solidarity of the groups to which they are attributed and for those who enter into relationships with them” (Sharify-Funk, 2009, p. 77).

Identifying perpetrators on the basis of ideologies, religious, and cultural beliefs foregrounds the notion of identity, and implicates the identity of not only those who commit extremist acts but also those who share the same identity and faith with them. Homegrown terrorism is a branch within the greater scope of terrorism that may be blamed for the disruption of democratic societies and is the essential cause of distrust among the citizenry towards each other and their governments. The notion “homegrown” describes the identity of radicalized youth who were born and raised in the West. This prevailing mindset creates misgivings among citizens, ‘What if that colored individual is a Muslim radical? How can I trust that I will be safe?’ It also creates misgivings towards governments, ‘What will the government do to ensure my safety and that of my family? Why can we not stop immigration from Muslim countries?’ When all of these questions become commonplace, the foundation of democratic society begins to crack.

Canada has not been immune from post-9/11 Islamophobia and the politics of fear. I say this not so much to echo the episodic Muslim discourse of victimology but as a Canadian saddened by the impact of anti-Muslim prejudice on the Canadian polity, whose defining premise is the equality of all people living under one law, uniformly applied. (Siddiqui, 2008, p. 1)

It is evident not only in Europe and the United States of America but also in Canada that the current extreme reaction is leading to open and heartless propagandas against Islam and racism against Muslims. 21<sup>st</sup> century technology and media is giving birth to new a form of blatant racism. Reported incidents have indicated the existence of Islamophobia in Canada. In January 2017, six Muslims were killed in a shooting at a Quebec City mosque. On December 31, 2013, a bomb threat was made against a Vancouver mosque and, in 2011, a Muslim woman wearing a niqab was with her children when she was attacked at a Mississauga Mall. Further incidents which occurred in educational institutions include the defacing of posters for a conference on Islam at Durham College and the University of Ontario Institute of Technology; anti-Muslim flyers and insults on student election materials at McGill University, the University of Calgary, and the University of Ottawa; and a request for a student at Simon Fraser University to remove her hijab (Williams, 2017).

### **Our Sandwiched Second Generation**

Academics have long argued that while minority groups may hold legal citizenship, they may still be treated as second class citizens, not full citizens (Sassen, 2004; Young, 1998). Given this political and societal context, feelings of defensiveness and of being under attack or scrutiny because of their religion are widely considered to be part of the fabric of a Muslim youth's life experiences. Correspondingly, this psychological dimension and fear of being an outcast is an aspect of their lives within the school context (Beshir, 2004; Kahf, 2006; Zine, 2001). When my daughter was in Islamic school in her elementary years, she wore a hijab in school as part of the school dress code, but she did not wear a hijab outside of school. When she came across any Muslim schoolmates in the shopping mall or at a restaurant, she nervously hid behind me out of fear of being recognized and asked numerous questions about why she did not wear her hijab outside of school. Upon entering high school, a completely different experience from Islamic school, she was under pressure to fit in and become accepted by her non-Muslim peers. Facing



yet a different series of questions, her friends and classmates wondered why other Muslim girls did not wear a hijab and she did, or what her hair could possibly look like under her hijab. “Muslim women’s identity work is constrained by gazes, Muslim and non-Muslim” (Mir, 2006, p. 288). The gaze of their Muslim and non-Muslim peers and adults creates a certain level of surveillance and expectation of how youth “should” behave (Mir, 2006; Sarroub, 2005). These identity negotiations wrapped in the responsibility and commitment of wearing a hijab and representing her religion as a good Muslim girl, along with the media pressure and the way in which Islam and Muslims were related to terrorism, perhaps became too great of a pressure. Thus, my daughter removed her hijab and said goodbye to it for good. Ali-Karamali (2008) asserts “very few people realize what it is like to be the subject of daily socially acceptable lies, slander, defamation, and distortion” (p. 215).

Muslim youth today face qualitatively different identity tasks than do many of their peers, which includes a dramatic increase in racial and religious stereotyping. They feel misunderstood, stigmatized, unacknowledged, defensive and under attack or scrutiny because of their religion. As a result, they negotiate their religious identity and religious practice in a context that often includes explicit or subtle themes of misunderstanding, fear, and marginalization (Abo-Zena, Sahli & Tobias-Nahi, 2009; Watt, 2011). Identity is not something that can be neatly left at the door when entering school (Beaman, 2013) and is “not a one-time process but it involves a continual negotiation and renegotiation between children and schools” (Nassir, 2004, p. 155).

Taylor (1992) argued:

Identity is partly shaped by recognition and its absence, so often misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. (p. 25)

While the construction of identity is certainly a personal endeavour, it is also a situated activity to which others respond (Hofmann-Kipp, 2008). More recently, Portes and Rumbaut (1990; 2001; 2006) have used the theory of ‘reactive ethnicity’ to understand the experiences of second-generation immigrants in the U.S. The term is used to explain how youth from marginalized ethnic groups can intensify their ethnic identification when they experience or perceive racism. The authors suggest that ‘reactive ethnicity’ enables second-generation youth from ethnic groups

to cope with systemic discrimination. As a result of these growing controversies, media misrepresentations and “dominant conceptions, in their struggle against racism, young Canadian Muslims invest a great deal of time establishing themselves as thinking, rational, educated, and peaceful persons” (Nagra, 2011, p. 114). Growing up between two cultures, balancing cultural identities, occupying pluralistic selves, and a sense of belonging is a highly complex process. Sirin & Fine (2007) wrote, “When one’s identity is fiercely contested by the dominant discourse either through formal institutions, social relationships, and the media, one of the first places we can witness psychological, social and political fallout is in the lives of young people” (p. 151). When religious identity and interconnected cultural identity is the subject of stereotypes and discrimination, adjustment to a new culture can be affected (McBrien, 2005; Mosselon, 2009). Learners whose “cultures had been discounted and marginalized” (Williams, 2008, p. 511) “often devalue their own experiences believing that their cultural and linguistic identities must be forfeited once they enter the classroom” (Griffiths, 2014, p. 107). Adolescence is a central period in which youth begin to negotiate their identities, situated in complicated power relationships and sociohistorical contexts of local and global spaces (Erikson, 1985). During this time, youth begin to experience tensions between how they define themselves in relation to how they are defined and represented by their families, immediate communities, and the broader society (Ajrouch, 2004). Gee (1996) argued that multiple identities may cause conflict within and around students, if students feel that the society represented by the school seeks to co-opt their cultural identities. Second generation visible minority Muslim youth are sandwiched between immigrant parents who associate more with their native homeland and a third generation who will be born and raised in Canada with English as their first language, national identity as their only pride, and the dominant culture and values as their core sense of belonging. As schools and teachers lack an integration of critical understanding of cultural and religious diversity, schools may be particularly unwelcoming for those youth who are Muslim (Salili & Hoosain, 2014). Watt (2007) asserts that “in order to live with others, we have to learn to see ourselves as other. Difference is not the gap between one individual or group and another, but is a relation” (p.155). Teachers can play a vital role in disrupting the normative, dominant, rigid and static narratives by teaching students to question and destabilize ideas about who is accepted and who is alienated (Baliko, 2014). Teachers can play a vital role in teaching students how to engage in critical discourse in a way that demystifies assumptions and transforms stereotyping into opportunities for exploring

other possible stories. It is critical to ensure “that people of colour do not bear all of the responsibility for the privileged to learn and unlearn about their privilege” (Brady, 2017, p.119). Democracy and citizenship can be reinvigorated when schools are welcoming and inclusive places for all students where students are positioned as equals in their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and where students’ diverse voices, values, beliefs and identities are acknowledged and validated.

### **Looking Beyond Policy**

The researcher's experience cannot be silenced; it is impossible (or if not impossible, then deliberately self-deceptive) as researcher to stay silent or to present a kind of perfect, ideological, inquiring, moralizing self (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 61-62). The challenge I pose to the educational system is not a reactive approach, but rather a proactive and preventive one. I invite educators and teachers “to see how curriculum is a contested cultural document that excludes some identities as it includes others” (Watt, 2016, p.26). As a minority Muslim mother, I am raising Muslim-Canadian children. What is the role of Canadian schools and teachers in this? The educational experiences of all students are enriched when the lived realities of the racially oppressed are acknowledged and validated (Dei, as cited in Carr & Klassen, 1997). However, the important question to ask is, ‘In what ways are privileged groups willing to listen to the ‘other’? The effect of changing times is evident and controversial issues are already present in the curriculum. To counteract widespread biases against Muslims and developing “a sense of Muslim identity in a time of political targeting, social polarization and economic marginalization” (Shah, 2012, p. 58) requires “deconstructing othering at the individual and systemic levels” (Asher, 2002, p. 83). We do not have the option to avoid discussing divisive topics about various contentious subjects in the classroom. Therefore, counter-stories present a vehicle for opening up dialogue to disrupt impeded perceptions, fabricated conceptions, and taken for granted practices in order to support and engage students understand their social relationships and social discourses about discrimination (Edwards & Ruggiano Schmidt, 2006). When schools create a space for counter-narratives, they facilitate the repair of damaging, hegemonic narratives that have permeated the Western dominant consciousness and collective memory (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). By discussing local, national, and international issues

and events, teachers foster their students' interests in politics and public matters, while developing better critical thinking, communication, civic, and social skills (Hess, 2004).

It is critical to recognize that creating inclusive and culturally responsive schools and classrooms in a progressive, liberal, pluralistic, democratic, and secular society is an ongoing effort and that creating space for identity, voices and dialogue is a lifelong collaborative endeavour. Inclusion is a process which encourages an attempt to fit together by co-creating and constructing a shared space. Asante (1997) stated that inclusion is not an idealistic image of a human being who is always friendly, unselfish, unafraid, never dislikes or feels strange with anyone, and is unbiasedly accepting of difference. Let's begin by telling each other who we are: who we are as teachers in relation to students, who we are as parents in relation to our children, who we are as partners in relation to the school landscape and who we are in relation to each other as Canadians on the Canadian landscape.

I am a foreigner to you, and you are a foreigner to me, and yet we play this game of deception and pretence that we are *not* foreign, that we know one another, that we understand one another, that we acknowledge one another. Let's confess our foreignness, our alienation, our separation, our lack of understanding. (Leggo, 1998, p. 180)

This telling and sharing of who we are in relation to each other and the confession of our foreignness, alienation, separation, and lack of understanding and misunderstanding can help us learn and acknowledge that we are one even though we are not the same. It helps us to collectively fight against exclusion and all the social diseases born in the process of exclusion (Asante, 1997).

Purkey (2000) captured the important positioning of teachers when he wrote, although academic places, policies, programs, and processes all play an important role in promoting student achievement and learning, "it is the teacher who makes the critical difference in student success or failure" (p. 56). It is imperative to recognize and critique "how one is positioned and how one positions others in social structures" (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 37). As educators face the many educational challenges of the evolving era, it becomes critical that they reflect on their own privileged positioning. The rationalization to identity crisis does not need decades of research, millions of dollars, and multitudes of anti-terrorists protocols. It is a matter of narrative ethics; it

is about putting people's stories, stories of personal identity and complexity of collective identity at the core of educational institutions.

***Let's stop pretending!***

that we know each other  
that we hear each other  
that we understand each other  
that we embrace each other

+

*knowing the known*

you me know me by  
the origin of my name  
the melanin of my skin  
the enunciation of my accent  
the silhouette of my shape  
the covering on my head

-

*practicing the unknown*

I invite you  
identify

( )

*who am I?*

an economic slice    immigrant  
a classed subject    a newcomer  
a political policy    multicultural  
a social practice    discrimination  
a practical experience    the other  
a hierarchical position    minority

an unfamiliar face      a foreigner

×

an excluded race              racialized

an oppressed identity        colonized

an embattled faith            a threat

a brown body                  a suspect

a muted story                 silence

÷

*Transforming the known*

the epitome of cultural mosaic

=

*Let's imagine for once!*

who we are

as humans in relation to the *Global landscape*

as Canadians in relation to the *Canadian landscape*

as partners in relation to the *Educational landscape*

as citizens in relation to the *Political landscape*

as community in relation to the *Social landscape*

### **Who are the Curriculum Stakeholders?**

I wonder, when will an “affirming space” (Kumashiro, 2000) be created in schools for educators, parents, and students so that they can discuss these real-life issues and experiences of marginalization, of which we are in the midst, instead of deeming them irrelevant or normal? Like Britzman (1998) I ask, “What makes normalcy so thinkable in education?” (p. 80) and “how normalcy is being constituted again and again” (p. 87). Where and what is the space for my “parent knowledge” (Pushor, 2015) on the school landscape and in curriculum? I am not attempting to share any theological knowledge nor any fundamental knowledge, it is simply my “personal practical knowledge” as a parent that I am wanting to share. Schwartz (as cited in May,

1994) spoke of the importance of “non-hegemonic emancipatory narratives” (p. 43). Conversations between families and teachers about home experiences can empower parents to participate in their child’s education in personally meaningful ways (Edwards & Ruggiano Schmidt, 2006; May,1994). Delpit (1995) stressed the significance of the moments when we put our beliefs on hold. Those are the moments of utter transformation and ultimate learning of how to exist to co-exist. Instead of accepting a dubious set of assumptions about Islam and Muslim identity, let’s acknowledge the need to prioritize a holistic understanding situated in lived experience by “painting a portrait of parent engagement” in order to correlate the epitome of the identity crisis with the increased need for engaging parents in schools beyond ubiquitous use. It is essential that parent engagement oversee the creation of space and place for parent knowledge, bring forth and unfold the untold stories, instil the harmony of reciprocity, ensure the significance and depth of shared responsibility, and color the scope and space of family and community engagement in vivid nuances and intensity. As parents and educators begin to question underlying epistemologies, critique hegemonic structures and ideologies, challenge the status quo, and value and build upon the “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 2005) intrinsic to the home environments of students, they can “begin to counteract the barriers to effective home-school relationships that plague the school system and can discover and implement practices that benefit all students” (Overstreet, 2014, p. 20).

When schools, along with their dominant ideologies, and educators, along with their paradoxical positioning, challenge and reimagine mandated curriculum, structured policies and scripted practices, they create a place for diverse parents’ positioning and safe space for all stories, voices and worldviews. In this way, the boxed land of school becomes a boundless landscape and the curriculum shifts from being a mandate to a movement where the natural flow of learning and teaching creates living and breathing communities of engagement. It is within such engaged communities that students become empowered, creative and reflective citizens. Sharify-Funk (2009) proposes that “recognizing patterns that have impeded dialogue in the past can become a first step toward bridging divides in the future” (p. 86). It is important to constantly remind ourselves that “we are not simply the effects of discourses” (Butler, 2005, p.121) and “our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human” (p. 13).

## Chapter 6

### Mother Story 4: A Dining Table Narrative

#### Inquiring into Abbas's Experience with Social Studies

*If the history of colonization is a problem facing all Canadians, then it is each and every Canadian who needs to acknowledge and understand how this is so...we need a wholesale rethinking of our departure points in educational, methodological, and activist-based contexts. (Cannon, 2012, p. 22)*



*Figure 6. In relation to white peoples and in relation to Indigenous peoples*



Supper is finally done. I listen and watch as Irteqa and Iman tell Abbas to clean his school supplies and homework off the table so we can eat. Abbas scowls playfully in response. After we all sit down and have our meal together, and clean up the kitchen afterwards, everyone heads in the direction of their rooms. Since Abbas has not finished his work, he reopens his books to resume his schoolwork once more. I, too, sit in front of my computer with my work. This evening is like any other, except that it feels unusually long this time around. As I watch Abbas work, old feelings resurface. I am drawn back to the fourth day of his new school year. Convinced that my son had found his place of belonging in his new classroom amongst his Grade 8 classmates and teachers, I recall asking him how everything was going, what he thought of his homeroom teacher, and what he was learning. His shocking response made me realize my son's unique positioning as a Canadian where he not only stood in relation to white peoples in Canada, but also in relation to Indigenous peoples and their lands (Haig-Brown, 2009) positioned both as an oppressor and oppressed.

### **Current Curricular Binaries**

Curriculum, in any time and place, becomes a contested site where debate occurs over whose values and beliefs will achieve the legitimation and respect provided by acceptance into the national discourse (Klieberd, 1995, pp. 250-251). In the Canadian jurisdiction of Saskatchewan, imperatives to reconcile the history, presence and aspirations of the province's Indigenous peoples and the largely Caucasian settler population have preoccupied curriculum makers for well over two decades (Cottrell & Orlowski, 2014; Tupper, 2007, 2012, 2014). More recently, because of a significant increase in ethnocultural diversity due to immigration, an additional challenge of accommodating the values and beliefs of "Newcomers,"<sup>18</sup> who neither have a dominant European background nor Aboriginal roots, has arisen. The identity struggle of ethnically diverse Canadians has rarely been explored in light of how they are positioned in this struggle. Here I seek to describe and interrogate the tensions within this very new curricular space from the perspective of one "Newcomer" parent. My purpose is three-fold: firstly, to

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<sup>18</sup> The term Newcomer in this paper refers to visible minority Canadians. According to the Employment Equity Act of 1995, "members of visible minorities" means persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colors.

explore how the juxtaposition of my personal parent narratives regarding my children's lived experiences, with identity narratives held by First Nations people and by members of the dominant group with "white privilege" (McIntosh, 1988) or settler society, facilitates or impedes the affirmation of my children's identity as "multicultural Canadians"; secondly, to mobilize that narrative to initiate a conversation on how the construction and transmission of Social Studies curriculum might more accurately acknowledge and accommodate the rapidly-changing demographic and socioeconomic realities of Canadian society (with a specific focus on the Saskatchewan context); and thirdly, to create an ethical and honouring space for silenced voices in order to prevent an identity legitimization battle and move closer to being a just and democratic Canadian society.

My over-arching goal is to explore Canadian curricular possibilities for moving from a place of binaries defined by guilt and blame, oppressors and oppressed, winners and victims, home and land to a place of shared hope and responsibility for a different future for all Canadians. I ask how we might envision a future in which a more holistic approach to the inclusion of multiple narratives, realities, perspectives, identities, beliefs and practices in educational institutions can be embraced to animate a more socially just future for all.

### **Local Context**

The need to address issues related to immigration, cultural diversity, and the challenges of building and maintaining community cohesion under conditions of rapid change has become increasingly urgent in Saskatchewan, one of Canada's three Prairie Provinces (Falihi & Cottrell, 2015). Approximately 18% of the population claim Aboriginal status (Peters & Lafond, 2013) while the remainder of the population is descended predominantly from northern, central, and eastern European immigrants who settled the Canadian prairies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Falihi & Cottrell, 2015). Until very recently, less than 5 percent of the population identified as members of visible minorities (Anderson, 2005). Longstanding Saskatchewan demographic trends changed dramatically after 2004, when the government implemented measures to encourage economic development in the province through labour mobility and investment (Garcea, 2008). Partly due to these policy incentives, the number of immigrants coming to Saskatchewan from outside the country, as well as migrants from other parts of Canada, increased dramatically, resulting in a population growth of over 120,000 people in the

last 10 years (Garcea, 2013; Keatings, Down, Garcea, Zong, Huq, Grant, & Wotherspoon, 2012). The 2006 national census revealed that Saskatchewan's foreign-born residents had almost doubled to approximately 7.6 percent of the population in the previous decade, and these numbers continue to increase. Since many of these Newcomers have come from China, South Asia, Philippines, Africa, Latin America and Syria, visible minorities have increased from 3.6 percent of Saskatchewan's population in 2006 to 6.3 percent in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2015).

Adding further complexity to the Saskatchewan context is a troubled history of colonial relations between Aboriginal peoples<sup>19</sup> and predominantly Caucasian Settlers within the wider provincial community, which has made the recent demographic changes particularly sensitive (Cottrell, Preston, & Pearce 2012; Falihi & Cottrell, 2015; Cottrell & Orłowski, 2014; Keatings et al. 2012). Because of historic treaties, First Nations people occupy a unique liminal space as both a racialized and a legal/political group with a constitutionally protected legal status. However, because of the troubled history and persistent racism, many Aboriginal peoples in Saskatoon experience "statistically probable lives of immiseration" (Green, 2005, p. 519). Recent curricular changes, such as the mandatory teaching of treaties and the history of residential schools, represent laudable attempts to wrestle with the legacies of colonialism within the school system. However, as the story shared below demonstrates, those initiatives are premised on a neo-colonial binary in which the economic and cultural influence of Settlers has dominated the positioning of Indigenous peoples. Such a binary ignores the new Saskatchewan reality of diversity and does not accommodate the values and beliefs of "Multicultural Canadian" school aged children.

We use the term "multiculturalism" to capture the politicized understanding of the issues.... instead of talking about culture in a depoliticized way as just being about food, habits, tastes, clothing, or customs.... a talk about race, color, ethnicity, gender, and class (Dei, as cited in

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<sup>19</sup> The Canadian government defines Aboriginal peoples as First Nations (Indians), Métis, and Inuit. Two thirds of Aboriginal peoples in Saskatchewan identify as First Nations, roughly one third as Métis, and less than 1 percent as Inuit (Statistics Canada 2015). Peters (2005) further noted that it is essential to recognise that the Aboriginal population is heterogeneous in terms of its history, legal rights, socioeconomic status and cultural identities. She concludes that Aboriginal peoples prefer to identify with their cultural community of origin rather than the legal categories established by the Canadian state. Many prefer to call themselves by their particular origins such as Cree, Dene, etc.

Kelly, 1999). In essence, curricular development and implementation have not kept pace with the recent transformations in demographics, inter-group relations, and identity/power dynamics within the province, as schools seek to wrestle simultaneously with the legacies of colonialism and the challenges of globalization (Falihi & Cottrell, 2015). It is within this rapidly changing context that my son's story resides.

### **Non-Indigenous Colonized People on Colonized Lands**

To begin a story, someone in some way must break a particular silence (Wiebe & Johnson, 1998, p. 1). I begin with an honest confession of my naivety and ignorance regarding the plight of Canada's Indigenous people and their colonial history. I move beyond "passive empathy" (Dion, 2009) to an active subject who seeks to disrupt normalcy "as part of the necessary and urgent process of reconciliation" (Tupper, 2012, p. 143). Simultaneously, I also express great disappointment and frustration with Canada's political, institutional and ethical irresponsibility in not doing enough to educate Newcomers and visible minorities about Aboriginal peoples, broken treaties, land theft, cultural genocide and the history of residential schools which underpin much of the deplorable conditions facing Aboriginal Canadians today. Although it precipitated great confusion and angst, I also consider it a stroke of luck that my son's story became a catalyst for my own learning in this area, requiring me to deeply acknowledge Aboriginal peoples' history and the responsibility of all Canadians to contribute to a process of reconciliation. In the process, I learned that Aboriginal peoples and visible minorities share a colonial past and mutual vulnerability to minoritized Canadians. Sharing vulnerability is one of our unique strengths as it teaches us what equality and justice signify, what compassion and humanity mean and the significance of ethical equilibrium for all Canadians.

The same vulnerability which I felt upon coming to Canada and struggling to integrate into the dominant culture in search of acceptance is the vulnerability which I feel at this time relaying my story. Ellis (1999) acknowledged the vulnerability experienced by the researcher doing autobiographical work in revealing him- or herself, of not being able to take back what has been said, of not having control over how readers will interpret what is said, and of feeling that his or her whole life is being critiqued. Jean Jacques- Rousseau (*Confessions*, 1782) asserted:

I may omit and transpose facts, or make mistakes in dates; but I cannot go wrong about what I have felt, or about what my feelings have led me to do; and these are the chief subjects of my story. (as cited in Kim, 2015, p. 122)

I position myself as a mother who feels passionate about my love, care and concern for my son. What I felt about his positioning as a Canadian is the main subject of my story. I am a mother researcher who asserts that I cannot compromise my morality or conscience anymore by passively accepting the official stories presented to my children through curriculum. Instead, I seek to author my own and my children's stories and to present these to Canadians in an attempt to attain legitimation of my Canadian born children's identity. Laslett (1999), in her review of personal narratives as sociology, stated that personal narratives can address several key theoretical debates in contemporary sociology: macro and micro linkages; structure, agency and their intersection; [and] social reproduction and social change" (p. 392). My story goes beyond reflection and makes me a subject for critical analysis (Kim, 2015). It is a story which allows readers to enter and feel part of a story that includes emotions and intimate detail and examines the meaning of human experience (Ellis, 1999). It invites readers to feel the dilemmas, to think with a story rather than about it, and to join actively with the author's decision points (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), becoming co-participants who engage with the story line morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually (Richardson, 1994). While writing this story I struggled with anxiety producing questions "about how to represent myself, how others would respond to my story, how to work ethically" (Wall, 2008) and if it is a right time and context in which to present my story.

### **Search for Canadian Identity: Where Do I Legitimately Belong?**

September, the month of welcome, waving hands, and a new academic year, with the joy and anticipation of a new autumnal beginning. Looking at my eldest who was beginning her first year of university, I could see a cosmic map of her future – arrays of academia before my eyes. With a pivot in the opposite direction, I looked at my youngest who was preparing for his last year of elementary school. Images of his birth, his first day of kindergarten, and the lunch boxes in which he refused to take biryani and potato cutlets, swirled through my mind. Especially from Grade 2 onwards, he insisted that I, donning my shalwar-kameez, drop him off at the school entrance and not at the classroom door. What he did not understand was that, on the first formal

day of school, as I dropped him off with excitement, not only did I share my child with the school, but also the tender bundle of my dreams, hopes, goals, culture, and beliefs.

On the fourth day of this new school year, with the confidence that my son had found his place of belonging in the classroom amongst his Grade 8 classmates and teachers, I asked him how everything was going, what he thought of his homeroom teacher, and what he was learning. In a tired voice he replied, "I almost fell asleep in class today." He was saying this to me in the evening so I proposed to him to go to sleep earlier from now on in order to further himself from his summer sleeping patterns. He said, "No. It's because of the movie that they show us repeatedly in Social Studies class."

"Which movie?" was my curious response.

"A movie about Aboriginal people," he stated.

I asked him what he saw in this movie and he said, "All about residential schools, how their land was taken and what 'we' did to them."

In a highly cautious and alert voice I inquired, "Who did what to them?" "We, the Europeans," he replied.

That was a profound moment for me as a parent in regard to the identity formation of my children as "multicultural" Canadians. The moment these words escaped my son's lips, I was overcome with shocked surprise. In his tired and throwaway words I recognized identity choices my son had made regarding "Us" versus "Them" and "Winner" versus "Loser." A multitude of questions rushed through my mind. Why was my son relating himself to the White oppressors and not the Aboriginal oppressed? Was he taking the blame because he is non-Aboriginal? Yet, as a son of Pakistanis, he is not White either. So why then was he considering himself a part of the colonialist regime? Is it because of the obvious white dominance, Eurocentrism, and power and authority that exists in Canadian society (Bannerji, 2000; Razack, 2004; Thobani, 2007)? Or is it because he understood that a great injustice has been done to Aboriginal people which he has not personally suffered, therefore leaving him with the only option of associating himself to the Europeans? Or is it because of compassion fatigue (Tester, 2001) as result of becoming inured to the narrative of residential school brutality? In what ways had well-intentioned curriculum and/or curriculum implementation compelled him to become part of or take sides in someone else's legitimation battle, at the expense of negating his own right to a unique identity, culture, and beliefs?

A host of other questions followed. How might the provision of curriculum to children containing this explicit information on residential schooling widen or lessen the gap between the “Oppressed” and “Oppressors”? How may it cause ‘multicultural’ students to get trapped in a history of contact between Aboriginal peoples and Europeans, forced to take one side? How may repeated exposure to deep historical violence lead non-Aboriginal students’ to desensitization, both to violence and compassion? And how may it lead Aboriginal students to become hyper-sensitive to their historical oppression, capable of seeing themselves as no more than victims and non-Aboriginal students as no more than oppressors? And how may the continued realities and messages of inequity in our society and world negatively affect White children’s sense of self and attitudes toward others? Harmful colonial discourses are often reproduced in schools (Tupper, 2014) therefore “careful attention must be paid to the knowledge and subjectivities produced in the process” (Gebhard, 2017, p.3). In considering these questions, my emotions as a parent shifted from a state of tension to incredulity, trying to understand when and how my son’s struggle of belonging became one of transformed in-betweenism. How had my son’s ‘identity struggle’ over how much he belongs to Pakistani ethnicity and how much to dominant Canadian culture transformed into an ‘identity conflict’ regarding how much he belongs to white Europeans and how much to Aboriginal people? I wonder also if my son must accept blame and responsibility for colonization and the resulting residential schooling, and speculate about the possible implications of this for his identity formation? If he accepts the blame, he is not only associating himself more with the oppressors but also surrendering himself consciously to historical acts of violence and injustice that he did not commit, in the name of belonging. If he denies the blame, then his Canadian citizen-hood, loyalty and patriotism is doubted. It is ironic that he is caught between Aboriginal history and dominant culture through curriculum. Additionally, I feel it is important that my son is taught about the various forms of colonialism, imperialism, Indo-Pak partition and about who the British Raj was so that he understands his positioning as both oppressed and oppressor in his complex and multiple identity as a Canadian with a Pakistani ancestry. Perhaps this may cause him to think differently about his choice of the word *we* while saying what we did to them; or perhaps this may allow all of us as *we* to understand our complex positioning as Canadians.

## **Apprehensive Whisper Interrupts Silence**

It is critical that every Canadian know, acknowledge and learn both ‘dark’ and ‘white’ sides of Canadian history and how it shaped Canadian identity and the positioning of Canadians on this globe. Teaching about historical injustices, mistreatment of Canada’s Indigenous people, the history of residential schooling, and colonization, in this neo-colonial era serves as a great weapon for challenging Eurocentric ideology and knowledge. It is important that educators “constantly re-create the spaces by asking, whom does this space harm or exclude” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 31)?

How can we forget or dismiss Canadian history as it continues to shape our existence in this era of neo colonialism, an era in which control is exercised through means of emotional manoeuvres, identity politics, economics and immigration? Teaching and learning about history or culture is inevitable and desired. Understanding the complexities of world history can be one of the most vivid paths to justice, how the world works and interacts, and how individuals can collectively make a difference. On the other hand, it is equally significant to teach historical narratives through multiple lenses and to ensure that the identities of diverse students do not become buried or camouflaged. If, in an attempt to decolonize Canadian curriculum, culturally diverse students still relate themselves more with Europeans and white dominance, then curriculum clearly continues to reinforce the Eurocentric understanding of difference, infused with the ideology of superiority and inferiority. Therefore, it continues to be a concern for social justice which verifies very much the existence of power, authority, and eurocentric ideology in Canadian society. In a public address at the University of Toronto in December 2009, Justice Murray Sinclair raised the intricacies of reconciliation in Canada, He stated:

We have been challenged to determine what...we are going to say to new Canadians who themselves are unable to accept responsibility for anything...because they’re not the ones who did this...But what I say to them is this: if you are to properly enjoy the benefits of this society...you have to take responsibility for the fact that what you have now, what you are gaining now, is something...that was taken away improperly. (cited in Cannon, 2012, p. 29)

St. Denis (2011) in regard to calling on new Canadians to take responsibility for colonialism also highlighted the ideology of Lawrence and Dua (2005), stating that the “people of color in settler formations are settlers on stolen land.... and historically may have been complicit with on-going



land theft and colonial domination of Aboriginal Peoples” (p. 311). My children and I, as Canadian citizens, take full responsibility for being settlers on stolen land as we acknowledge that “we are exercising a treaty right simply by living where we do” (Epp, as cited in Tupper, 2012, p. 143) and we appreciate that our “ongoing privileges are directly connected to treaties” (Tupper, 2012, p. 146). The deliberate use of the term *settler* has the potential to contribute to anti-colonialism, dislodging white dominance and authority and transformative peacebuilding, as it may set us on a decolonizing pathway toward more just and peaceful relations with Indigenous peoples (Regan, 2010; Tupper, 2014). However, I still wonder how we can hold ourselves accountable for the “ongoing land theft and colonial domination of Aboriginal people” as we ‘Canadians of color’ are ourselves subject to ongoing racialization and discrimination. “Oppression is both a shared experience and something that is experienced differently” (Cannon, 2012, p. 33). No one is off the hook since we can all claim to stand as oppressor and oppressed in relation to someone (Razack, 1998, p. 47). If the history of colonization is a problem facing all Canadians, then it is each and every Canadian who needs to acknowledge and understand how this is so” (Cannon, 2012, p. 22). How can we deny that this very colonial rule destroyed our own home country, forcing us to leave for a better life, only to be treated as second class citizens in Canada? In many ways, our very different racialized identities are a product of that very colonial rule. I appreciate it is difficult to determine how my children are more or less privileged than Aboriginal people. Aboriginal peoples are fighting for their rights on their land and in their home. But my son, who is born on Canadian land and raised in Canada, and who calls Canada his home, has not been accepted by either Aboriginal peoples or White Canadians. Who is he then? He is not an immigrant as he is born in Canada. He is not a tourist as he is not visiting Canada. He is not a Pakistani as he is neither born nor raised in Pakistan. He is not a white European settler either. Let me put it this way, he is non-Aboriginal, he is non-white, he is non-Pakistani, and a significant part of his identity is that he is a Muslim.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This section highlights the complexity of Canadian ‘identity conflict’ since many white groups (such as Irish, Italians, Ukrainians, etc) also experienced significant persecution and exclusion in the past because they were deemed “other” in particular historical contexts. It also raises complex questions about the necessity or appropriateness of historical guilt in contexts of post-colonial reconciliation. Awareness and acknowledgement of past injustices and their contribution to current inequities, recognition of White privilege and a commitment to contest ongoing oppressive and discriminatory practices are likely far more appropriate and useful positions in advancing reconciliation than debates about who should demonstrate guilt.

My son is certainly a Canadian and “a Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian” (Trudeau, in *The Global & Mail*, 2015), but my son’s experience also demonstrates that it is not that simple. “I find that when I talk about issues of racism...it is easier to talk about capitalism first” (Khan, Hugill, & McCreary, 2010, p. 42). Despite being positioned as commodified objects of production and key players promoting the Canadian economy as highly qualified cheap labor, we keep being discriminated against based on race, religion, color, name, language, accent, qualification and so on. For how long will my children have to experience “democratic racism” (Henry & Tator, 1994, p. 1)? Henry, Tator, Mattis, & Rees (2000) define democratic racism in the following way:

The primary characteristic of democratic racism—the most appropriate model for understanding how and why racism continues in Canada—is the justification of the inherent conflict between the egalitarian values of justice and fairness and the racist ideologies reflected in the collective mass-belief system as well as the racist attitudes, perceptions and assumptions of individuals. (p. 19)

This highlights that despite promoting the values of justice and fairness through Multiculturalism, the Western superiority, racial Otherness and the “dominating aspects of white culture are not called into question and the oppositional potential of difference as a site of struggle is muted” (Giroux, 1992, p. 116). What role do educational institutions play in unmuting the struggle of difference and addressing the legitimate concerns of students around diversity and equity issues?

### **Issues of Racism**

Before engaging people in questions about white privilege and colonial dominance, it is vital to encourage them to realize their various forms of exclusions both subtle and blatant, systemic and institutional, so that an invested and shared sense of commitment and thinking about action might be realized (Cannon, 2012). Since people in society live in an inescapable tie of relationships, this realization is critical both for those who exercise power and those on whom power is being exercised. As Hall (1978) stated:

Racism is not a set of false pleas which swim around in the head. They're not a set of mistaken perceptions. They have their basis in real material conditions of existence. They arise because of concrete problems of different classes and groups in society. Racism represents the attempt ideologically to construct those conditions, contradictions, and problems in such a way that they can be dealt with and deflected in the same moment. (p. 35)

As a parent, I inquire into why my Canadian children must be reminded regularly that “our home and native land” is not theirs. It is the “Native Land” of the Aboriginal people and the “Home” of the white dominant culture. What then is left for my Canadian children who are born and raised on this land? Is it only their home built on someone else’s land or is it their homeland? Or neither? How can they construct and shape their identity and a sense of belonging without a land and a home? How can they develop their sense of responsible citizenship in such a scenario where curriculum is inappropriately inculcating their dispositions as Canadians? Does it mean our national anthem insults half of the Canadian population? Does it mean that my son begins every morning at school with hypocrisy by singing, “O Canada, Our Home and Native Land”? Identities are usually produced within the play of power, representation and difference which can be either constructed negatively as exclusion and marginalization or celebrated as a source of diversity, heterogeneity and hybridity (Bhabha 1996; Butler, 1993; Gilroy, 1997; Hall, 1996; Laclau, 1990; Woodward, 1997). Castells (1997) asserted that identity acts as a source of meaning and experience for people through self-construction and individuation particularly on the basis of cultural attributes in a context marked by power relationships. Danzak (2011) drew attention to the ideology of Chang (2008), that “self-discovery in a cultural sense is intimately related to understanding others” (p. 194). In terms of my son’s identity narrative, his cultural self-discovery is not surfacing as “related to understanding others” (p. 194) but, rather, “relating himself to others to make others accept him” (p. 194). In an attempt to develop a sense of belonging on the school landscape and to conform to the curriculum, he is compromising his cultural self-discovery by choosing between the only two presented options of either identifying with Aboriginal people or white culture. In critical ways, curriculum, or the delivery of mandated curriculum, does not enable him to work toward the legitimation of his own identity as a Canadian but rather requires him to fit into a process of legitimizing his identity in relation to the binaries presented to him. Sterzuk (2008), in *Whose English Counts*, caused me to reflect on my

children's identity by raising a question about "Whose identity counts?" (p. 9). Learners whose "cultures had been discounted and marginalized" (Williams, 2008, p. 511) "often devalue their own experiences, believing that their cultural and linguistic identities must be forfeited once they enter the classroom" (Griffiths, 2014, p. 107).

My oldest son in Grade 12 is finishing his last year of high school. While sitting in his psychology class and learning the First Nations unit, he wondered why he had to learn about First Nations culture in Psychology and English as well as in History. He said, "It makes sense to learn about First Nations culture and history in History class, but I don't understand why it has to be taught in English and Psychology."

I asked him how he felt about learning that history.

He responded, "It's significant because Canada is their land and it belongs to them."

"How do you feel learning about white culture?" I then asked.

He replied, "It's fine because it's their home and country."

With my heart thrumming in my ears I calmly asked, "Then where is your home?" He simply smiled, and his smile spoke volumes. When we dismiss student voices or narratives, it becomes part of the suspicion of anything that cannot be quantified and objectified. If you can quantify it, then you know that there is a problem (Dei, as cited in Kelly, 2009). It is valuable for teachers to get students to always ask what has not been said – by the student, by the teacher, by the text, by society (Ellsworth, 1997). Clandinin, Steeves, Yi, Mickelson, Buck, Pearce, Caine, Lessard, Desrochers, Stewart, & Huber, (2010) acknowledged, "Within the institutional landscape, claiming an identity can be more challenging than passively accepting one" (p. 473). I agree that on school, social, political and economic landscapes, identity making remains complex, contested and questioned.

Is working towards eradicating racism our priority or preparing our children for the ongoing systemic racism that they will repeatedly face on many grounds, beginning with their name? Every time we pass through an airport and show our passports, the officer starts calling headquarter using alpha, bravo etc. It is a strange kind of embarrassment that we go through in those moments because of being routinely and excessively interrogated. When my children ask me why we are always held there the longest in line, compared to other passengers, I only have one option of identity left in that instance. I tell them it is because we are Muslims and the officers are fulfilling their duty. At the airport we become only Muslims, not Canadians. This

kind of racism requires us to never forget that we are different Canadians, therefore deserving of being treated differently. “Racism is sometimes visible only to its victims. It remains indiscernible to others who therefore deny its existence” (Henry & Tator, 1994, p. 3). Unfair as it is, [we] have to prepare [our] children for the reality that our humanity is not assumed, and we have to work actively to persuade others of it. (Abo-Zena, Sahli, & Tobias-Nahi, 2009, p. 13). How will we prepare our children in advance for the upcoming exclusion and racism they will potentially encounter on the social and institutional level and in the work force? What are the implications of teaching about and preparing our children for racism and marginalization? How does preparing our children for racism in advance affect their sense of citizenship? Which institutions and individuals have the role and responsibility to teach and prepare children for both racism and citizenship? And, if we do not prepare them for such harsh realities of racism, will they react to systemic racism by being beaten and battered by it? As a parent of children who live with all of these complex questions and challenges to their identity, these issues are fundamental to me. I am trying to find a place for my Canadian children’s identity and their voices on this land and in their home, Canada.

### **Students as Embodied Beings**

Students do not go to school as disembodied youth. They go to school with bodies that have race, religion, color, class, language, gender, and sexuality (Dei, as cited in Kelly, 2009). Experiences of marginality teach the politics of color. Color and language are interrelated as these two realms are the actual determinants of the face of a real ‘standard Canadian.’ Color matters more than language because my children speak English as their first language. But, since their color is different than the color white, they find themselves constantly engaged in negotiating, renegotiating and struggling to identify according to the group of people they are surrounded by and the kind of environment they are in. The most difficult positioning they find themselves in is the school landscape.

As a parent, I have been collecting an anthology of terms assigned by policy, persons, groups, and institutions to define my children’s identity as Canadians. I have been compiling this anthology since I moved to Canada. I feel compelled to collect all these adjectives in order to understand my children’s position and place, defined by other ‘real Canadians’ from whom they look different. As a caveat, I am not fully convinced that amidst all the racial categorization and adjectives assigned to my children’s identity that it can be overlooked that my children and I are

rightfully Canadians, Canadians who are paradoxically required to state their identification adjective prior to stating their national identity as Canadians. The perpetual request by ‘standard Canadians,’ to identify our personal ‘identity adjective’ first suggests that our survival is bound to retaining our dual or multicultural identity. Upon request and dire need, when my children refer to themselves as ‘hyphenated’ Canadians, they are reminded that policy calls them multicultural Canadians. When they refer to themselves as ‘multicultural’ Canadians, they are considered promoters of mono-culturalism. When they refer to themselves as ‘racialized Canadians,’ they are considered advocates of differentialism. When they refer to themselves as ‘Pakistani’ Canadians, their commitment to integration and loyalty makes them questionable subjects of patriotism. And, when they refer to themselves as ‘Muslim’ Canadians, they jeopardize their entire identity as Canadians, becoming hallmarks of fundamentalism. Finally, when they refer to themselves simply as ‘Canadians,’ the prevalent question of identity speaks loudly, “Where are you from?” My children’s identity as Muslim Canadians on a Canadian landscape is considered minority, being monitored and minoritized.

Felman (1995) argued that teaching and learning really take place only through entering and working through crisis, since it is this process that moves a student to a different intellectual/emotional/ political space. “Race continues to be a salient characteristic of one’s identity, self conceptualization, and positioning in society” (Lau, 2008 p. 14) and we can never avoid the knotty and uncomfortable issues of race, class and gender in our Canadian society (Ladson-Billings, 2003). While the traditional view of identity is fixed and transhistorical, the prevalent view advocates for identity as being viewed as fluid and contingent (Woodward, 1997), not an essence but a positioning. “[I]dentity is never a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 51). Two notable definitions of identity are “to be recognized as a certain kind of person by others” (Gee, 2002, p. 99) and as a “collection of stories about persons, or more specifically, those narratives about individuals that are reifying, endorsable, and significant” (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 16). Thus, the role of position and positioning is significant to identity formation. It is imperative to “recognize and critique how one is positioned and how one positions others in social structures” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 37). Shin (2012) suggested that “it is important to situate this identity work within the context of White racism and the alterity of Asians as forever foreigners” (p. 189). As “forever foreigners,” our color and race remain so front line that, with an event like 9/11 in the

United States, it took only one day for my husband, a specialist physician or so called “uncertified” doctor who was working at a Canadian International Airport as a porter, to receive a call and be told not to come to work anymore as his services were no longer needed. My husband’s journey from racial to religious discrimination was faster than the unfolding story of September 9/11. He was no longer an immigrant, a Pakistani, a doctor or a porter but only a “Muslim” in Canada. “Therefore, those who experience racial bias or differential treatment are seen to be somehow responsible for their state of being, resulting in a ‘blame it on the victim’ syndrome” (Henry & Tator, 1994, p. 2).

### **Ever Disturbed State of Multiculturalism**

Canada is the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as its official policy. Ever since its adoption in 1971, supporters and critics of multiculturalism have debated its impact in terms of civic integration and ethnic isolation (Kymlicka, 2010, p. 7). Critics argue that multiculturalism encourages members of ethnic groups to look inward and emphasizes the differences between groups rather than their shared rights or identities as Canadian citizens. Many Canadians are also concerned that immigration and citizenship policies attend too much to the concerns of special interest groups, rather than to those of average Canadians (Canada Citizenship and Immigration, 1994, p. 10). Some Canadians are anxious about the formation of ethnic enclaves in our communities. Native born citizens with a strong sense of national pride are also worried that their country is becoming fragmented, that it is becoming a loose collection of parts, each pursuing its own agenda, rather than a cohesive entity striving for the collective good of Canada (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010). On rational grounds, is it really possible for a multicultural person, a person tangled in multiple identities with a vulnerable voice, homeless mind, confused sense of self, living at the edge of society and always searching for home, identity, belonging, and legitimation of values and beliefs to shake the foundation and coherence of a dominant culture? Instead of opposing or supporting the multicultural ideology, I simply propose a question. Why do my Canadian children keep falling through the cracks of in betweenism, the only place where they attempt to find a balance? Why is their identity continually tossed between policy and practice, responsibility and accountability, land and home, integration and assimilation, power and politics, tolerance and acceptance, colonialism and

imperialism, historical and dominant narratives and “Us and “Them” dichotomy? Let’s focus on the fact that the ethnic, racial, and cultural makeup of Saskatchewan’s classrooms have significantly changed. Society is not just governed by laws and policies but also by the principles of ethics, integrity, values and compassion. Kymlicka (2010) stated,

Diversity policies in Canada operate within three ‘silos,’ with separate laws, constitutional provisions and government departments dealing with: multiculturalism in response to ethnic diversity arising from immigration; federalism and bilingualism in response to the French fact; and Aboriginal rights for First Nations. (p.19)

However central it is for these three dimensions to interact, it is equally critical to ensure that these three policy frameworks do not overlap. Overlapping or operating policies at cross purposes hold a strong tendency to pave a path for a contestation of the legitimation of identities. They lead to an unpleasant competition for power, privilege, resources, and to a greater danger that society will be further polarized by language, race, and ethnicity. Such competition has the potential to result in collateral damage to our country’s national identity. It can pose a serious threat to our social cohesion, collective wisdom and strengths, citizenship, national identity, and even democracy. As democracy is based on the people’s right to vote, the majority group will always win the electoral vote and hold power, thus prioritizing the interests of their own group and potentially ignoring the rights of other minority, un- or under-represented, and marginalized groups. As Kilgour (2000) stated, “It is not empty stomachs, impunity or corruption alone that necessarily jeopardize democracy; it is their accumulated effects” (para, 3). The greatest threat to democracy does not always come from the barrel of a gun, but from the collected effects of poverty, apathy, economic insecurity, inequality and an undermined prospect for healthy human freedom. Democracy implies freedom of speech, association, assembly – essentially the freedom for individuals to express who they are and what they believe (Kilgour, 2000). The goal is finding common ground to address matters of privilege, positioning, and social justice and having people acknowledge the need to address privilege and exclusion collectively, rather than individually (Khan et al., 2010) in order to dismantle the larger system of oppression.



## **Compassion: Changing Our Perspectives Instead of Changing Others**

Over the past 43 years, numerous scholars have discussed issues and approaches to multiculturalism and national identity. Very few have attended to the relationship and disconnect between belonging to Canada and belonging to Canadians:

[I]n recognizing the value of cultural differences and racial diversity, Canada is also better positioning itself in a world that is becoming increasingly globalized in economy and culture. Canada has already committed itself to such a future when it entrenched the principles of equality and non-discrimination in the Charter. (Li, 2000, p. 19)

I am starting to see my children as a fraction of a bigger picture in which I understand that the more I see, the less I know. The ownership of this land may not be my children's lawful inheritance, however, licitly, Canada is their home. It is a home where they are indeed not in a position of power and authority and are often victimized by various forms of racism and prejudices, yet have an equal right to identity, voice, and liberty.

Thus, the challenge of cultural or racial diversity has less to do with the threat of visible minorities to Canada's 'social cohesion' than Canada's unwillingness to see itself beyond a conventionally European society, and to position itself as a global nation of many cultures and people. (Li, 2000, p. 18)

According to Delpit (1995), the culprit in these situations is not simply racism... it is the reluctance of people, especially those with power and privilege, to perceive those different from themselves except through their own culturally clouded vision (p. xiv). Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone (Dei, 2006). Frable (1997) concluded her review of research on social identities with a call for seeing people as whole referring to the need to address gender, racial, ethnic, sexual, and class identities as multiple identities of whole people. In the same vein, "seeing people as whole means recognizing that both our everyday lives and the larger cultures in which we operate shape our senses of who we are and what we can become" (Howard, 2000, p. 387). Instead of forming a very particular and contested constellation of views and practices, together we all as "Canadians" would benefit from moving away from binary thinking to embracing a more holistic approach to the inclusion of multiple narratives, realities, perspectives, and practices in educational institutions. As Saskatchewan grows more culturally diverse, it is imperative that, as Canadian citizens, we accept and accommodate an ever-changing cultural landscape. By acknowledging a

multiplicity of voices and views, we will reshape a much more inclusive and balanced democratic society. “We need to make spaces in our classes for the conversations which are essential in order to tell, hear, and respond to the stories of ourselves and others” (Olson, 1995, p. 132).

The growing importance of cultural and linguistic diversity in our globally connected era and rapidly changing world places enormous responsibility, primarily on the educational institutions, “to provide opportunities for youngsters and adolescents to engage in challenging kinds of conversations, and we need to help them learn how to do so” (Eisner, 2009, p. 329). Perhaps we are failing in creating these conversations and this is very reason that my son in Grade 12 securely accepted and acknowledged that Canada is the ‘land’ of Aboriginal people and ‘home’ of white people but remained insecure enough to ask his teacher simply a question, “Why do we have to learn Aboriginal history in English Language Arts and Psychology, as well as in our History class”? Why did he save this question for his parents? Adolescence is a central period in which youth begin to question and negotiate fluidity of themselves and multiplicities of their identities, situated in complicated power relationships and sociohistorical contexts of local and global spaces (Erikson, 1985). During this time, youth begin to experience tensions between how they define themselves in relation to how they are defined and represented by their families, immediate communities, and the broader society (Ajrouch, 2004). Despite their educational and economic success, the children of racial minority immigrants are less socially integrated, have a lower sense of attachment to Canada, and higher levels of perceived discrimination and vulnerability (Reitz & Banerjee, 2007). Members of ethnic minorities will be more likely to identify with a new national identity if they feel their ethnic identity is publicly respected (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010, p. 61).

I am concerned about the second-generation racial minorities, the children of immigrant parents born and raised in Canada, who include my own children. Second generation visible minority children are sandwiched between immigrant parents who associate more with their native homeland and a third generation who will be born and raised in Canada with English as their first language, national identity as their only pride, and the dominant culture and values as their core sense of belonging. Sirin & Fine (2007) wrote, “When one’s identity is fiercely contested by the dominant discourse either through formal institutions, social relationships, and/or the media, one of the first places we can witness psychological, social and political fallout

is in the lives of young people” (p. 151). Freire’s words support such contestation of dominant discourse, “There are no themes or values of which one cannot speak, no areas in which one must be silent. We can talk about everything, and we can give testimony about everything” (Freire, 1970, p. 58). Creating “a storied classroom” (Wajnryb, as cited in Nicholas, Rossiter & Abbott, 2011, p. 247), a space in which students feel free and safe to share their personal stories, is key to this pedagogical practice.

Creating this environment requires teachers to open up “possibilities for the telling rather than closing them down” (Simpson, 2011, p. 12). In order to stay wide-awake, “students as well as teachers will benefit from being encouraged to learn from the unexpected and to pay attention to what they find problematic” (Olson, 1995, p. 134). Stories are experiences that give depth to and shape students’ lives and narrative understandings. “Storytelling honours the historicity of the other by allowing students to share truths that are historically situated, embedded within culture, and which do not reflect the worldview of those in power” (Griffiths, 2014, p. 107). It is critical to create a safe sharing space for students so that they may unfold their stories of identities. Stories of ‘who they are in relation to where they are’ shift away from the hegemonic notion of identity, to raising the awareness and social consciousness of students so that they become creative subjects rather than assimilative objects in the world. Haig-Brown (2009) emphasized that students must come to realize that they not only stand in relation to white peoples in Canada, but also in relation to Indigenous peoples and their lands.

As Ben Okri (1997) portrays,

Where stories are, struggles have been lived out, triumphs have danced with failures, and human destinies have left their imprints and their stories of the land, in the air, even on the waters. Strangers to these lands can feel the vibrations of the people’s forgotten histories and fates in the air. (p.117)

For students it is important to ask, “What privileges do I enjoy? How am I less or more privileged than others and why? What are the historical conditions that contributed to these privileges? What are the implications of this for my own experiences of citizenship?” (Tupper, 2007, p. 262). Only then will students be successful in expressing their inner and silent struggle in matters of identity. It is critical to recognize that creating inclusive, respectful, and culturally responsive classrooms is an ongoing effort and that creating space for voices and dialogue is a lifelong endeavour. Exploration of differences and similarities along the dimensions of race,

gender, ethnicity, culture, beliefs, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status raises the awareness level of the students about the role of multifaceted, complex, and hybrid Canadian identities. “Interaction among students of diverse ethnic backgrounds in a supportive school environment provides a context where positive attitudes towards race and ethnicities may develop” (Banks, 1995, p. 357). Students’ consciousness of self and surroundings develop their critical and analytical thinking and help them learn how to unravel misconceptions and untie various threads of changed, shifted, and traumatized ideologies, notions, identities, and images.

In our ever-changing classrooms, educating about the notion of diversity, liberated from the false dichotomy of “us” versus “them,” is central to educational goals. Grelle and Metzger (1996) argued that social studies curriculum and teaching practices overwhelmingly support a standard socialization approach that discounts the realities of cultural pluralism (as cited in Tupper, 2007, p. 263). “Teacher education must seek to nurture, promote, and more actively understand the kinds of alliances that exist” (Cannon, 2012, p. 33). Social studies and history curricula can potentially serve as core sources to engage and empower students, from contextual problems to social realities and from assumptions to critical analysis. These curricula can empower students by revisiting the past histories from multiple lenses, promoting understandings of interaction among different cultures, critical analysis of existing social practices, and modes of problem solving that develop civic understanding and informed social criticism. Instead of simply presenting to students what we already know, we can become catalysts for change by initiating dialogue about what it means to be a raced subject, gendered subject, and a classed subject (Dei, as cited in Kelly, 1999). “By staying awake ourselves to possibilities of reconstructing our own knowing, we can provide our students with the possibility of reconstructing their own knowledge, that is, to the possibility of a lived story of educative experience” (Olson, 1995, p. 133). We need to create affirming spaces, symposia, colloquia, and inclusive classrooms for exploring and developing critical connections, transformative pedagogies, collective responsibilities and collaborations in both research and in practice (Cannon, 2012). Critical challenges currently faced by educational institutions require creative not calculated solutions which can only be accomplished by changing the ways we think and practice. Multilingual and multicultural practices can continue to evolve and be recognized and considered as sound pedagogies which provide the platform for deconstructing an assimilative approach and constructing, in its place, a justice-oriented movement to multiculturalism.

## **Our Homeland: This Land May Not Belong to Us but We Belong to This Land**

The increasingly diverse Saskatchewan demographics call for critical attention towards the Social Studies curriculum. In essence, the current curriculum and educational approaches reflect ideological limitations by consistently reinforcing and maintaining a specific status quo and excluding the possibility for all voices and narratives to be heard. My son's unofficial story reveals the constrained choices that curriculum and/or curriculum implementation offers and the voices which become buried as a consequence. Three injustices come forth as a result of his experience with the Social Studies curriculum. Firstly, my son's identity as an ethnically diverse Canadian is suppressed and delegitimized by being presented with only two binaries, to either relate himself with oppressors or oppressed. Secondly, despite inclusion of the history of residential schooling, the curriculum and the way in which it is implemented continues to obligate 'multicultural' students to discredit historical legacies by associating with the European oppressors as opposed to assuming responsibility for historical violence as a key piece of their citizenship. Lastly multiculturalism remains in a disturbed form, since the current curriculum does little to teach ethnically diverse students ways to relate themselves with Aboriginal peoples as oppressed. This omission exists both in terms of a shared history of colonialism and current realities of neocolonialism and racism.

In a published work entitled, *Inside Memory: Pages from a Writer's Notebook*, Timothy Findley (1990) acknowledged:

After all is said and done, I know I will have no answers. None. I don't expect to have them. What I will have, and all I have now, is questions. What I have done – what I have tried to do – is frame those questions, not with question marks but in the paragraphs of books. (p. 318)

In this chapter I, too, have framed questions in the paragraphs of my writing, not to seek answers or find and match facts, as neither answers paint silhouettes of all stories nor are all facts created equally. I offer my own story by sharing my children's lived experiences and invite others to tell their stories so we, as a culture, as communities of faith, as families, as parents, as educators and as Canadian citizens, can have more informed and robust conversations around the increased complexity of hybrid identity formation and the possibility of a more holistic approach to the inclusion of multiple narratives, realities, perspectives and practices on school and societal

landscapes. “Change must start by troubling, and teaching others to trouble, the interpersonal and institutional normalcy of things (Cannon, 2012, p. 33). My story of my son’s experience as a culturally diverse Canadian challenge us all as policy makers, practitioners, educators, teachers, and community members to reimagine Social Studies curriculum in order to unfold historical and present inequalities from multiple lenses based on the contemporary structure of our relationship to Canada and Canadians. The goal is neither to confess nor feel bad (Khan et al., 2010), but to foster a collective responsibility for our complicity in social inequality, and to work toward changing this (Cannon, 2012, p. 26). It is vital to fully recognize that what happens to our children affects us all. I believe it is critical that we continue to explore the complexity of our positioning on the Canadian landscape, the challenges of hybrid identity formation in shifting national and global spaces, the meaning of democratic citizenship and the troubling aspects of multiculturalism in order to open dialogue on identity, equity, and social justice. Only then will Canada become a “home” and a “native land” for all Canadians.

### **Children of the Stone**

Born from the stone raised by the plains smiled upon by the sky they are the  
Children of the Stone they dream of jovial stars the vile planets and the celestial pair  
the Sun and the Moon

Nurtured by the silhouettes of branches, chasing rainbows in the sky the Children of the Stone  
immerse in childhood swimming among silver fish cackling ducks strumming the  
symphony of Heaven and Earth

Teased by the forests, taught by the desert, liberated by the arctic the Children of the Stone reach  
adolescence they spill bugs upon the grass, weave warmth into the moss  
and paint color onto the flowers

Loved by the sea, admired by the mountains, kindled by the tropics                      the earth is their  
dwelling to collect, create, and recreate                      the Children of the Stone reach  
adulthood                      their youthful hands begin to scar

Enticed by the caves, avoided by the fissures, chased by the prairies      the Children of the Stone  
are universal in identity                      they are known as creators, as nature's origin  
they have reached their elder years

Worn hands, kind eyes, lined faces      born from the Stone                      received by the wind      they  
become the childish breeze                      that rushes past the grass, flowers and leaves  
a scent of freedom in the wind                      they can finally  
see the Universe.

## Chapter 7

### Parent Knowledge: Living out Curriculum Each Day

*Maternal thinking is a 'revolutionary discourse' that has been silenced. 'As a central discourse,' (it could) transform dominant, so-called normal ways of thinking. (Ruddick, 1989, p.269)*



Figure 7. Stories about borders, stories without borders



## **Knowledge Landscape: Within Homeland Borders**

Negotiating and dwelling in a national, international and “epistemological bazaar” (Kincheloe, 2008) invites complex questions about knowledge. Where does knowledge come from? How is knowledge acquired? What constitutes knowledge? What makes our knowledge both possible and problematic? Whose knowledge counts and whose knowledge is silenced? When I think of knowledge, I think backward in time, space, plotline, and position. When I think of my knowledge, I think of my ‘landscape’ – a familiar landscape where reconstruction and reorganization of my understandings and experiences have shaped my nested, textured, and layered narratives.

☾\*

*I return to the time when I was a young child and my grandmother told me stories of the Partition. Stories of how she had to bid farewell to her friends and neighbours as India and Pakistan separated forever. Of how people left their land behind and entrusted their precious cattle to their friends.*

☾\*

*I recall that as I grew older, my mother began telling me stories of a time before I was born – about intense blackouts and curfews that occurred nightly, about the sirens that blared and warned people to turn off all lights and sounds for their safety and the protection of life. She spoke of how, at night, people would fear for their lives whenever they heard explosions, and in the morning, they would wake up to their homes in shambles and to dear ones lost. When East Pakistan broke off and became Bangladesh.*

☾\*

*I think back to my elementary school days and to hearing, for the first time, the explosion of a bomb and feeling a fear I had not known before. I clearly remembered that feeling each time the fans and chandeliers shook violently, the windows trembled as if they were prepared to smash, and the earth shivered in pain. Sometimes near my aunt’s house, other times near my uncle’s. Phone calls were exchanged urgently in such events. As a result, before school every morning, I received an important reminder from my mother to check under the school bus seats for a bomb or dangerous objects. I had never seen explosive materials in my life before, thus it was confusing to search for either.*

☾\*

*I remember how, in my youth, my mother would tell me about how girls growing up should not run, laugh too loudly, or peek out of windows to view the streets. Young girls had to cover themselves with sashes, not talk back to their elders, and never leave home without an adult to keep them company. Whenever I went to the bazaar, I received unwanted attention and stares from strangers bustling around me. Even when I was fully covered, with a chador from my face to my knees, I felt the piercing stares of men and their intentional pushing terrified me.*

☾\*

*Thinking back, during my elementary school years, in grade five specifically, my father decided to put me in a co-education school at a time when it was unconventional for boys and girls to study together. He gave education great importance and believed in equal opportunities for girls so that they could become confident and successful, instead of suppressed and confined to the household.*

☾\*

*I can still hear to this day, the echo of the Adhan chanting across the neighbourhoods and streets, reverberating in my ears. How my grandmother would tell me that people were supposed to stay quiet as a sign of respect when the Adhan was recited, and then get ready for prayers following its immediate completion.*

☾\*

*I bring forward memories of being in my relatives' house and seeing children the same age as me working as servants, mopping the floors and dusting the shelves. When they played with us, they were always called promptly back to work by their masters. I remember wondering why, when they were just as young as me, they were not allowed to play freely and enjoy their childhood but instead had to work so often and so hard?*

☾\*

*A time came when we got into our car to go shopping, excited to buy nice things to eat and wear. Stopped at a red light, a mother with her infant children knocked on our window and begged for a small amount of cash. As a young girl myself, more than surprise at this scenario, I felt the hurt and sympathy.*

☾\*

In the context and culture of my childhood and youth in Pakistan, my parents, elders, relatives, society, social and educational institutions, and environment all contributed to shaping my various forms of knowledge and ways of knowing. The partition and separation of Bangladesh shaped my knowledge of racial and religious divides, and my conceptualization of colonialism and its effects. Bomb blasts and explosions near my relatives' houses shaped my knowledge of nation-wide political unrest. The piercing gazes and pushing of men shaped my knowledge of male entitlement, the systematic oppression of women, and the patriarchal establishment. Studying in a co-education school constructed my knowledge of education as empowerment and liberation. Being called to silence while the Adhan was recited and then being called immediately into prayer shaped my religious knowledge. Experiencing children working as servants and mothers with small children begging for money contributed to shaping my knowledge of socio-economic instability and poverty. My knowledge developed over the course of time, moving backward to before I was born through my mother's and grandmother's stories and forward through my mother's cautious words and protective gestures to her imagined future for me as a grown woman. It formed through the outward space of my social interactions and the inward space of my wonders and puzzlement about those interactions. It was influenced by the cultural, linguistic, national, political, religious, and socio-economic context in which I lived and grew. My varied, contrasting, and sometimes conflicting interactions and interrelationships gave birth to my textured, nested, and layered understandings and ways of knowing as a woman living in Pakistan.

When I think back to my mother's words to look for explosive material under school bus seats and to the explicit behaviours expected of young girls, I can clearly feel her love and instinctive protection for me as a child. In that time and place, she certainly knew that children were vulnerable and required protection. As my experiences unfolded and my knowledge accumulated, it was only then that what was once puzzling for me, as when my mother forbade me from traveling alone, made perfect sense. Knowledge transmitted from my mother only truly came into being when my experiences, old and new, bumped into each other, deepening and reconstructing my understanding.

I began to realize that actual practices and experiences of women are the "point of entry" into our knowledge of how our lives are constituted. I came to understand that I am a part of the process that reproduces class and gender differences. I began to question my own experiences,

and the relations of power that shape my existence to reflect on the full range of experiences that constitute me as a woman (Smith, 1987). Dorothy Smith (1987) warned women that a successful challenge relies on

discovering from within the expanded relations that contain, organize, and provide the dynamic interconnections linking our one-sided knowledge of our own existence into a larger knowledge of a historical process in which we are active and to which we are captive. (p. 223)

My experiences and encounters as a young woman growing up in Pakistan with numerous individuals and institutions became my “point of entry” (Smith, 1987). I began to challenge the “ideologies of neutrality” (Abawi, 2018, p. 86), including my one-sided knowledge which developed through the teachings of my parents, grandparents, and society. Instead of passively following the fixed, rooted ideological and sociological norms, values, and beliefs, I started questioning them. I wondered why I was stared at by strange men despite being fully covered from head to toe. I actively challenged such encounters at an inner level while, at the time, I was a captive of such societal norms.

### **Knowledge Landscape: Traversing Borders**

Leaving Pakistan to immigrate to Canada, my deep-rooted and familiar ways of knowing were challenged. In Pakistan, I shared with others a uniform landscape, color, language, culture, religion, beliefs, and way of living. That all changed as I made my first steps on Canadian soil.



*I remember being struck immediately by the difference in the landscape and its inhabitants from what was familiar in my own life. It seemed to be the authentic version of the beautiful and mystifying landscape, scenery, and radiant fair faces I used to observe in my school English textbooks and documentaries. It was truly a flight of fantasy to me, as my new world seemed to be illusory, living in this idyllic country that had always intrigued me as a child.*



*I recall being struck by how English was the main language of communication spoken by everyone, even those who had not yet mastered this new language. This, my new language, was*

*the language which previously I had studied only in textbooks back home or heard in television programs.*



*I remember the sound of church bells every Sunday in place of the Adhan.*



*I recall how different Canadian women dressed from the women of Pakistan, they neither had their head nor their knees covered. Women walked, ran and jogged alone, even after the sun had gone down and it was dark. Women were seen in the workplace, spoke and laughed loudly like men, drove cars, and made their own money. I was surprised that people didn't stare at them and everyone minded their own business. Men did not dare to push Canadian women.*



*I did not experience women with babies approaching our car, begging for money or food, and instead of carts pulled by animals or rickshaws being seen on the street, cars and trucks filled the roadways.*



*Bomb blasts aside, even honking was considered a huge offense here, and it appeared that everyone obeyed traffic rules carefully.*



*I was happy here that I did not observe children working as servants or doing chores in people's homes. Instead, I saw children playing outdoors, in parks and playgrounds, and on excursions with their families.*



*When I noticed Aboriginal faces, I felt a sense of connection to them, perhaps because of the similarity of our skin colors.*



*I recall how my new title in every document was stamped as “immigrant,” a word the meaning of which I did not fully understand but associated with nonetheless. At that time, I tried to make sense of the difference between immigrant and Canadian, and eventually learned that it was citizenship that helped the former become the latter. With every passing year, however, even with the title of Canadian, I still heard the words multicultural, culturally diverse, racialized, colored, and ethnic minority. My time was spent trying to make sense of these terms and of how they named my identity in my new home in Canada.*



In the Canadian context, my encounters were in contrast to my previous lived experiences and understandings – in place, landscape, people, and social institutions. The diversity in culture, religion, language, beliefs, and ways of living contributed to constructing my transnational knowledge, immigrant knowledge, neocolonialist knowledge, social knowledge, community knowledge and dominant English-language knowledge. Over the period of my life in Canada, as my institutional interactions grew with my experiences, my ethnically diverse parent knowledge also developed. My knowledge gained in Pakistan along with my knowledge developed here in Canada became a “dual frame of reference” (Guarnizo, 1997). The duality within this frame of reference created an interaction, sometimes a bumping up against, an overlapping, a re-interpretation, an interruption, or sometimes disparate perspectives, held alone in their own place. As I pondered narratives and experiences of home-land and host-land, the realization that my new world was deeply and utterly different from the one I had just come from was profound. This realization was followed with a series of wonderings and questioning, a feeling of non-stop duality.

I began my new journey in my host-land bombarded with unpredictable encounters as I discovered place, people, language, system, culture, history, relationships, way of being and way of living, all in contrast to my home-land. These encounters – with an idyllic and safe place;

radiant fair faces; English words; multiple mandatory institutions; the familiar brown faces and dark, long hair of Indigenous people; women without male accompaniment; and children playing in parks – began to shape my wonders about how I would find my place and my positioning in this new home. I soon learned, “It is impossible to predict where unraveling journeys, unpacking baggage, and re-arranging artifacts” (Morawski & Palulis, 2009, p. 6) might take us. It was through the movement itself – steps forward, steps backward, faltering and uncertain steps – rather than in the false promise of a final destination that I became most anxious to engage within (Watt, 2011, p. 9). It was through my engagement in this movement that I became aware of possessing a “hybrid consciousness” (Asher, 2002, p. 82), a state of perpetual non- resolution where “the struggle to situate oneself in relation to multiple borders at the dynamic intersections of race, culture, gender/sexuality, class, and nationality, in specific historical and geographic contexts” remains ceaseless. (Asher, 2002, p. 85). I became awakened to new ways of seeing and experiencing self in relation to self and in relation to others as I dwelled in “the lived spaces of between— in the midst of many cultures, [and] in the inter of inter/culturalism” (Aoki, 1990, p. 382). I was forced to challenge my habitual modes of perception, my ways of constructing reality. My new knowledge construction evolved with an understanding of my new title as an immigrant on an unfamiliar landscape. I remember that this shift first began with ‘institutional encounters’ such as visa approval documentation, immigration documentation, luggage declaration documentation, Permanent Residence card, health card, social insurance number, bank account, and apartment lease. These encounters were all without emotions; I understood them as functional and obligatory.

With the progression of time and my children’s entry into formal schooling, my positioning and story took a unique twist. When I became introduced to the ‘school landscape’ through my children, as year after year they entered Kindergarten, these encounters, differently, were significantly emotional and invested for me. Seeing my children in school was a realization of all of the hopes and dreams we had for our move; it was a rewarding moment to see them meet their teacher, enter their classrooms, play on the school grounds. All of the sacrifices we had made seemed worthwhile in these moments. My sense of confidence lasted through the first few weeks of school. When school celebrations arose like Halloween, Christmas, and Valentine’s Day, “our not knowing [became] a way of knowing” (Malewski, 2010, p. 535). Not knowing the context or historical background of these celebrations, we let our children

participate as Canadians in what we saw as a fun activity. With time, my husband and I began to notice our children's mother tongue was slipping, our children were no longer willing to wear their traditional clothing on Halloween days, they were more excited about Christmas than Eid, and, simultaneously, we were getting questions about the extent of our children's participation in these celebrations from parents of our Muslim community who were more established than us in Canada. It was then that I realized to what extent and in what ways my children could participate as diverse Canadians. It was through these encounters that I developed a critical awareness of my children's identity, place, and positioning on the Canadian landscape. Moving forward with time, my awakenings and sight shifted from such school elements as celebrations toward a deeper questioning of my children's representation in curriculum. I puzzled over and questioned once again where and how my children were being represented in curriculum and the pedagogical implementation of curriculum. In this vein, my constructed knowledge as a parent of diverse children bumped up against the reality of curriculum theory and philosophy, pedagogy, and practice in which my children's hybrid identity was not being addressed.

### **Epistemological Underpinnings**

My initial reality as a mother of children attending school was one that reflected my acceptance of the welcoming school environment, the warmth of the teachers, and the quality of education. As time passed, with bumping up experiences, I came to understand that "reality is always more complex than whatever we come up with to frame it" (Trinh, 1999, p. 24). I came to understand the nested nature of my knowledge and of versions of reality. It was then that I perceived how "reality is decentered, as there is a multiplicity of perspectives with no single reference point" (Watt, 2011, p. 83). With this deepening awareness, I sought epistemological understandings to navigate through a world of diverse meanings and a multiplicity of interpretations. Epistemology is an area of philosophy which is mainly concerned with the study of the nature and scope of knowledge, knowing, and justification of human knowledge (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997). As the study of knowledge, epistemology is concerned with the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge, its sources, its structure, and its limits. As the study of justified belief, epistemology aspires to answer questions about what makes justified beliefs justified and whether justification is internal or external to one's own mind. (Steup, 2017). Reflecting backward, as a woman born and raised in Pakistan, in a culture and religion different



than that of mainstream Canada, and moving forward to living in a host-land as a woman with a hybrid identity, and as a mother raising children also holding hybrid identities, the nature of my knowledge is situated in my multiple lived social, political, cultural, religious, economic, historical, and gendered contexts. It is justified through the juxtaposing of my experiences and interactions, personally, practically, and socially (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Both what I know and how I know it has arisen through living out competing and conflicting stories and creating “counter-stories” (Nelson, 2001).

### **Knowledge as constructed.**

The notion that knowledge is constructed through experience has been described rigorously by Dewey (1938) and expressed as “continuity of experience.” The individual “continuity of experience” is embedded within social, cultural, historical and topographical contexts which both shapes and is shaped by particular representations of experience (Crites, 1971 & Gadamer, 1975). According to Olson (1995), “Our knowledge of the world and of ourselves in the world emerges from our experience” (p. 120). Eisner (1988) further expanded on the notion of experience. He stated, “Experience is more than a simple given of life. It is not only an event, it is also an achievement” (p.15). My experiences with my children’s schooling and curriculum opened up questions and new possibilities for understanding my voice about my children’s identity narratives. I learned how to interpret, reinterpret and author my stories about my experiences both that contradict and coincide. I learned that I am not only the character of my stories but also an author who constructs knowledge through my stories.

Researchers have described this experiential knowing in a number of different ways: as knowing-in-action (Schön, 1983, 1987), as practical knowledge (Elbaz, 1981), as craft knowledge (Tom & Valli, 1990), as constructed knowledge (Bruffee, 1986; Duckworth, 1986; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Kelly, 1955), as embodied knowledge (Johnston, 1989; Polanyi, 1966), and as personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986; Craig, 1992; Johnston, 1991). As knowledge is constructed, the knower is an intimate part of the known (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986, p. 137). Alive in the world and engaged constantly in encounters and experiences, we all construct knowledge;

as we pour ourselves into the particulars of the reality that surrounds us. This knowing is the knowing to which we passionately commit as we engage with the world and are

changed by it (Polanyi, 1958). It becomes a part of the fabric of who we are – neither objective or verifiable, nor falsifiable or testable – “we live in it as the garment of our own skin” (p. 64). We participate in both shaping our knowledge and being shaped by it (p. 65).” (Pushor, 2015, p. 10)

Considering my personal and social positioning as a woman, and a minority woman, and the resulting lens through I view my beliefs, choices, and experiences comes a moment of recognition of multiple possibilities of action and response and an invitation to imagine alternative ways of being in the world (Fels, 2002).

Belenky et al., (1986) asserted:

It is in the process of sorting out the pieces of the self and of searching for a unique and authentic voice that women come to the basic insights of constructivist thought: All knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known. (p. 137)

My understandings of the particulars of my reality that surround me arise through experiencing and “entering into the interstices of multiple possible worlds – the real, the not-yet real, and the imagined” (Fels, 2002, p. 3). As I unpack my mother stories, examining what was and what could be, these interstices open new awareness and construct new knowledge for change; they enable me new imaginings for constructing curriculum transformation and enhanced pedagogical approaches to curriculum implementation.

### **Funds of knowledge.**

In writing about knowledge which is constructed from experience, Pushor (2015) asserted that every human being, regardless of such factors as age or gender, culture or religion, socioeconomic positioning or sexual orientation, parent or non-parent, is a holder of what González, Moll & Amanti (2005) identify as “funds of knowledge.” These funds of knowledge are defined by them as being “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 2005, p. 72). It is often the case that a family’s funds of knowledge historically accumulate in one country and in one cultural context, essentially in a familiar place over a period of time. For me, as an immigrant of color to Canada, I had funds of knowledge garnered in my homeland but, when I moved to a new country, I begin again to develop further funds of knowledge. My funds of knowledge grew dramatically as I adapted to new situations

and supported my children and family in their processes of adaptation. While my funds of knowledge do reflect a historical accumulation, it is different than the historical accumulation of knowledge for someone who resides within one homeland. As a young girl born and raised in Pakistan, my funds of knowledge entailed Pakistani culture, the Urdu language, definitive gender roles, and Islamic religious rituals. My writing, reading, and speaking were purely in Urdu in Pakistan, whereas in Canada my verbal and written interactions were in the English language. However, when I immigrated to Canada my funds of knowledge began to develop in a new country through a new culture, institutional systems, diverse interactions, English language, and multi-racial relations. My “funds of knowledge” that accumulated in Pakistan reflected a national knowledge while my “funds of knowledge” constructed in Canada reflect a transnational knowledge.

I have continued to gather funds of knowledge from various situations, encounters, positioning, interactions and interrelations over my lifetime. When my positioning shifted from a young girl to a mother, I began to accumulate my parent/mother knowledge and my new knowledge of my children became a vibrant dynamic state of my being and becoming.

### **Parent knowledge.**

Pushor (2015) asserted that while all individuals alive in the world possess “funds of knowledge,” only parents possess parent knowledge. She characterized parent knowledge as being knowledge which is relational, bodied and embodied, intuitive, intimate and uncertain (pp. 15-19). Because of the unique role of a parent and the unique context of a home, it is knowledge that develops in relationship with a particular child, in intellectual, physical, metaphysical, and emotional ways. It is knowledge that shifts and changes over time as the child, the parent, the family grow and develop and as circumstances and situations change in their lives. As a mother, my knowledge of my children exists in ways which only I know. For example, when my youngest daughter was a toddler and she would grumpily pull on the right side of my shirt, I knew that she was ready for her nap time. That signal was visible only to me. When my two year old son, who was being potty trained, hid behind the curtain, I knew that he was embarrassed because he had not let me know in time that he needed to go to the bathroom. To this day, simply by looking in my daughter’s eyes, I recognize that she is not feeling very well. Often I know of disagreements and patch ups with old friends without words ever being exchanged. Winnicott (as

cited in Jackson, 2001) believed that “[t]here is no such thing as a baby – there is only a baby and someone else.” We are always relational, he wrote, and from the beginning “the baby holds the mother as much as the mother holds the baby” (p. 61). Parent knowledge arises from my living in the complex context of our home, over time, and in intimate relationship as a mother with my children.

### **Mother knowledge.**

While, as a mother of four children, I am a holder of parent knowledge, I am even more specifically a holder of mother knowledge. For me, my “maternal thinking” (Ruddick, 1980) stems from my birthing body and takes the shape of maternal knowledge which scaffolds upon experiences of birth, feeding, care, love, and nurturing. Polanyi (1966) asserted that our bodies become the “ultimate instruments” (p. 15) of our way of knowing and knowledge construction as “we know more than we can tell” (p. 15). For others, their maternal thinking may stem from becoming a parent through non-biological processes, also including experiences of feeding, care, love, and nurturing. In my Islamic religion, it is expressed that ‘Paradise is under the feet of mothers. How significant that a mother’s role for her children is used as the point of definition! Reflecting upon my years of mothering, I remember poignantly moments of maternal thinking – laying in bed at night or sitting at the kitchen table in the morning – mentally checking in and on my children – worrying, planning, anticipating, orchestrating, arranging, and coordinating of and for my children and our household (O’Reilly & Ruddick, 2009). I think of my worry about Abbas going to bed last evening without his final snack and glass of milk. I think of planning for the best lunch for him today to fill him with energy and to avoid him getting sick. I consider how my husband and I arrange our schedules on university exam days in order to drive our children to campus and avoid putting yet another stress on them with navigating bus schedules. Looking at Pushor’s (2015) conceptualization of parent knowledge through a gender-specific lens, I believe that maternal thinking as a way of knowing offers further insight into an epistemological exploration of knowledge construction.

The journey into motherhood is an odyssey of epic proportions, and every woman who undertakes it a hero. Celebrating our role at the very core of humanity means learning to sing every line of that epic freely, the lamentations along with the hymns.... What lies

beneath the brave and brittle face of motherhood is a countenance of infinite expressiveness, a body of deepest knowing. (Maushart, 1999, pp. 246-247)

While motherhood has been glamorized for centuries, narratives of mothering remain unexplored and under-researched. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) suggested that because the role of motherhood is seen as natural, in essence a gift of nature, the mother is seen to be exerting no ‘agency’ – no activeness, no self-directedness – and, thus, her caring work is counted as contributing nothing. Anzaldúa (1990) argued, “Because we are not allowed to enter discourse, because we are often disqualified and excluded from it, because what passes for theory these days is forbidden territory for us, it is vital that we occupy theorizing space” (p. xxv). As mothers, when we bring in our own approaches, methodologies, knowledge and practices, we amend that theorizing space. In the field of curriculum, maternal knowledge has not been included as part of the discourse. Maternal thinking is a ‘revolutionary discourse’ that has been silenced. ‘As a central discourse,’ [it could] transform dominant, so-called normal ways of thinking. (Ruddick, 1989, p. 269). Given the unique perspective and insight it provides, and the bridge it offers between the worlds of home and school, I believe it has transformative potential to contribute to current ways of thinking.

### **Sources of Knowledge**

Knowledge is neither fixed nor static, neither one dimensional nor certain, within one person or among a community of diverse knowers. Ladson-Billings (2002) and Delgado Bernal (1998, 2002) have asked: whose knowledge counts and whose knowledge is discounted (as cited in Yosso, 2005, p. 69)? Does maternal knowledge count in schools or is it discounted? Remembering back to my experience with Irteqa’s teacher regarding his teaching of the sex education unit, I recall vividly receiving his email in which he silenced my concern by stating the need for Irteqa to participate in this mandatory curriculum in order to obtain her course credit. My suggested solution to him as a Muslim mother, to have girls taught by a female teacher about female anatomy, would have enabled him to meet his curricular outcomes and would have enabled my knowledge to count. In their definition of epistemological perspective, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) emphasized “source” rather than nature of knowledge. My sources of knowledge as a mother reflected a “cultural wealth” (Villalpando & Solórzano, as cited in Huber, 2009, p. 710) that could have opened new possibilities for the teacher, for my daughter, and for new ways of knowledge construction in the processes of teaching and learning.

Villalpando and Solórzano (2005) developed the concept of “*cultural wealth*” to refer to cultural capital that includes “resources and assets that students [and parents] of colour develop and utilize in spaces of marginality within educational institutions” (p. 710). Tara Yosso (2005) then extended this understanding of “cultural wealth” with her theory of “*community cultural wealth*.” Yosso’s conceptualization encompassed six forms of capital that exist within communities of colour: (1) *aspirational capital*, (2) *linguistic capital*, (3) *familial capital*, (4) *social capital*, (5) *navigational capital*, and (6) *resistant capital* (p. 78). “Her notion of familial capital is especially relevant here, as it speaks to a conception of kinship that includes parents, extended family, and communities” (Gallagher, 2016, p. 9). Guo (2012) focused particularly on immigrant parents’ knowledge. She highlighted three types of knowledge that immigrant parents hold; *cultural knowledge, first language knowledge, and religious knowledge* (p.125).

Drawing on Moll and Amanti’s “funds of knowledge, Villalpando and Solórzano’s “cultural wealth,” Yosso’s “forms of capital,” Pushor’s “parent knowledge, and Guo’s “immigrant parent knowledge” I suggest that there are eight sources of ‘knowledge’ that minority parents and communities hold.

### **Immigrant knowledge.**

Canada continues to remain a popular immigrant destination. Immigrant parents bring their values, [histories], language, culture, religion, and educational backgrounds to schools, enriching the educational environment (Guo, 2012, p. 122). However, dominant discourse often classifies parents as the problematic “others,” either seen as not knowing, less knowing, or interfering in curriculum implementation with their knowing. Immigrant parents,’ new to host-land and unfamiliar with the educational system and school curriculum, are seen as “deficit” with their inability to speak English and with their difficulties in communicating with the teachers (Guo, 2012). Their knowledge of social, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, economic, geographical, navigational, ideological differences and experiences of immigration, integration, settlement, interaction with various institutions, and their non-stop existence of duality are some of the assets and gifts they hold. Rather than seeing their gifts of difference and diversity as an opportunity to enhance teaching and learning, they are simply ignored, excluded, minimized or silenced and pushed further towards the margins of educational spaces. Regrettably, the knowledge that immigrants hold about their children and communities is often unrecognized and

discounted by teachers and school administrators (Jones, 2003). Educators most often assume that... students, parents and community need to change to conform to the already effective and equitable system (Yosso, 2005, p.75). This non-recognition and discounting of immigrant parents' experiences and multiple world view can be attributed to educators' misconceptions of alternative sources of knowledge, and lack of knowledge about different cultures (Guo, 2009; Honneth, 1995). The current curricula characterized by Eurocentric perspectives and values do not reflect the knowledge, perspectives, experiences and beliefs of ethnically diverse students, parents, and families. Over 200 ethnicities are represented in Canada and we cannot deny the fact that teachers, on the one hand, are scrambling to keep up with the unique and diverse educational needs of their students. Whereas, on the other hand, we have parents and communities of color as a critical but untapped resource available to support teachers, students and schools in education.

### **Nomadic bodies.**

crossing frontiers of space, place, time

(dis)location, (re)location

exit there enter here

physical movements

emotional moments

interweaving the lexicon of travel

moments of diaspora into daily lives

geographically dispersed homes, habitats

complex mobilities and interconnections

fractured families, telephonic relations

dualistic (dis)positions, (re)positions

bifocality of daily rhythms and routines

competing loyalties & realities  
entanglement of local and global experiences  
destabilizing the familiar  
disrupting foundations of being, belonging  
dual citizenship dual nationality dual identity  
transcending the topographical  
borderlands of place  
sociocultural, historical, political  
economical, communal, temporal  
ontological, geographical  
intersubjective and intersectional  
dimensions - a new birth

**Cultural knowledge.**

Culture is a context that we all use to understand, communicate, and practice certain rules, expectations, and values in order to move well in our family and community. It includes our family, values, beliefs, history, narratives, language, food, dress, attitudes, education, and way of communication. When I think back to my school life in Pakistan and my cultural knowledge accumulated in that context and country, I recall the expected behaviours and attitudes of students during my school and college years. We, as students, were prohibited from calling teachers by their first names and instead referred to them as “Miss” or “Sir.” We were also not to make eye contact with them nor raise our voices out of respect for our teachers. Men were not allowed to casually touch women they did not know and women were not to laugh openly or chat in the presence of men they did not know. As culturally diverse parents move from home-land to host-land, they have a wealth of cultural knowledge that they transfer to their children as a critical piece to their identity. When parents’ cultural knowledge is considered in clash with the Eurocentric classroom culture, children go through an enormous pressure in terms



of integration and identity construction. Therefore, the lack of understanding of student's cross-cultural practices can lead to negative stereotypes about students, parents, and families. When immigrants enter the new world, they instantly begin to change themselves by integrating diverse cultural life-ways into dynamic new ones. Since integration is a challenging and complex phenomenon, it results in blended forms of cultural knowledge. This integration can lead to either opposition and discrimination in terms of whose knowledge counts, or it has the possibility to lead to cultural creativity and the integration of new knowledge within academic and societal positionings (Hoerder, Hébert & Schmitt, 2006).

Returning to Abbas' refusal to take potato cutlets to school, because his lunch did not resemble that of his classmates, how might the teacher have played a role in integrating cultural knowledge? Imagine if I had been invited into Abbas' classroom to cook potato cutlets for all the children. I could have explained what potato cutlets are, shown them what they are made of, shared the spices with the children to smell and taste. Then, later when they were cooked, as we sat together as a classroom community eating our potato cutlets, I could have told stories of growing up in Pakistan, of Abbas' ancestral land, of our journey to Canada, of how Abbas travels between worlds of home and school as a Canadian born to Pakistani parents. Imagine how this would open doors to the children in the classroom – to ask questions, to inquire about another culture, to make sense of their new knowledge through exploring similarities and differences as engaged citizens of Canada. There are three Broad Areas of Learning that reflect Saskatchewan's Goals of Education (Saskatchewan Education, 2010): lifelong learners; sense of self, community, and place; and engaged citizenship. With this simple example of integration of cultural knowledge, all three of these broad areas of learning could have been practiced. By counting my knowledge, the teacher could have strengthened the social cohesion within the classroom teaching and learning environment, affirmed Abbas' cultural identity, and supported me as a mother in my continued journey in raising my children with dual identity as Canadians.

## **Culture**

familiar aroma miles into home

infused fumes with fragrant spices

*Ami* as usual in the kitchen

*what are you making for dinner?*

paratha and chicken karahi

excitedly seeking the four

to glaze them glee

the news that we will

eat and love again today

a final call to the fourth one

as usual out in the street

playing cricket

waiting for *Abu* to return from work

like a gardener

preening his earth

laying bare the floral

the door bell rings

rambunctious greetings

*Asalamu Alaikum, Abu*

*Walaikum Salam*

eating mat in the living room

magic carpet on the floor

plates, glasses, cutlery, water,

sizzling karachi and crispy parathas

all decorated like garlands on a bride

everyone is ready to eat

reciting prayer in silence

blessing the food and unification

the bell rings

*Mamoo* is here

he joins in the camaraderie

we sit, eat, labor, converse,

and live

together

### **Linguistic knowledge.**

Dual identity is wrapped in language as well as in culture. Language is not just a system of communication, preserved literature, or set of syntactic and pragmatic rules, but also it is a reflection of ideology, culture, social interactions, personal and collective identity, and beliefs and values. Knowing a language is more than knowing words and meanings, and more than why expressions are put together in a certain way. Imbued in it are the customs, traditions, beliefs, and history of a certain civilization. Reflecting back on my own linguistic knowledge, I recall learning five different languages simultaneously since childhood. It included my ancestral language (*Hindko*), regional language (*Pushto*), religion based language (Arabic), official language (*Urdu*), and colonial language (*English*). Each single language was unique and different. Urdu was my first and most spoken language at home and school. I could speak, read, write, and understand Urdu while I could speak and understand regional Pushto and Hindko language but I could not read and write them. On the other hand, I could read and write English but could not speak it, while I could read Arabic but could not understand, speak, or write it. Time, practice, repetition and constantly switching various modes of languages helped improve my understanding, reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension. After immigrating to Canada, since English became my main language in terms of speaking and writing, it is mesmerizing to experience how heritage language knowledge becomes a foundation for having a grasp on the second language. Stagg-Peterson and Heywood (2007) emphasized that research findings

consistently show that learners benefit from using their home language in education in early years. Although competence in the English language is considered a form of capital by the school, they affirmed that for parents in immigrant communities, the heritage language is considered a form of capital. It is through language that linguistically diverse students maintain their long-distance family ties, community links, cultural practices, beliefs and traditions. Therefore, schools play a critical role in supporting students to maintain their heritage language. That is only possible by engaging parents in the processes of teaching and learning. There is a need to move beyond the typical perception of seeing minority parents and their knowledge as deficit-based rather than capacity-based. Cummins (2001) observed that “if ability to speak English and knowledge of North American cultural conventions are made prerequisites for ‘parental [engagement],’ then many of those parents will be defined as apathetic and incompetent and will play out their pre-ordained role of ‘non-involvement’ (p. 8). When teachers and parents work together to be engaged in teaching and learning, diverse families are provided an opportunity to help children succeed. I clearly remember a turning moment for our children and ourselves when our family went to school on Eid, dressed in our traditional outfits, and sang a song in Urdu, our children felt a sense of happiness, confidence, and self-satisfaction. We were engaged in enriching the teaching and learning for all children while affirming our children’s linguistic identity. When ownership and power is afforded to parents in their children’s curriculum making and decision making, both students’ and parents’ voices, positioning, and identity are affirmed on the school landscape.

### **motherland: language**

A dirge for home-less-ness language

intersectionality & diversity

when the nativity of language

replaced & re-laced & renamed

renovates the cavity of the mouth

into anew, slippery and resonant

*Ami* = mama

*Abu* = papa

the disconnect chatters

where teeth seeds fall and grow

*Motherland*

Mother's tongue, mother's tone, mother's home

bonding & belonging & bridging

fade into the throat like whispers

the essence of an accent

language reposes in mighty hearts

lends us our ancestors

gives us people we don't know

but love & longing anyways

forever bound to

relationships, cultural values, and identities

to lose, that is to lose

a way of being and knowing

a piece of internal peace

you, who are

### **Religious knowledge.**

A way of being and knowing. A piece of internal piece. Religious knowledge is the knowledge of God and one's relationship with God. It is a knowledge about an inward experience of divine love and divine presence. As a Muslim woman, I practice Islamic faith,

believing in one God (Allah), Muhammad as His messenger, and the holy book Quran as the last revealed and perfect word of Allah. My faith and beliefs define who I am and what I know and it interstices with the dimensions of my identity as it relates to human meaning, state of being and becoming. By ignoring and silencing religious knowledge in our schools' and educational institutions, we get involved in perpetuating an unethical pledge of cutting away critical pieces of students' identity. Without recognizing and crafting a safe space for the inclusion of religious knowledge in discussions within curriculum, along with all other sources of knowledge, how can we expect to be able to explore and challenge the assumptions, judgements, biases which are critical for deepening our understanding of different contemporary social issues? The inclusion of religious knowledge enlarges human insights and capacity to greater understanding of the world and constructive engagement with the world.

I think back to the torment in Iman's question, following her viewing of the news headlines about the Charlie Hebdo incident in Paris, "Mama, what should we do as Canadian Muslims? Why did an incident that occurred on another continent cause *my* daughter to feel responsible to respond to an act of terrorism? Her identity as a Muslim with an Islamic faith prompted this reaction. Her religious identity is a central piece of her overarching identity. As a mother in that moment, I resonated with her feelings of pressure and of being somehow implicated. I, too, experience these feelings every time such an incident happens. As a mother raising a daughter with a Muslim Canadian identity, I question how our schools can enable the inclusion of religious knowledge, when it becomes critical to create "a safe space for discussing unsafe ideas" (McKain, 2018, p. 169).

While we can create these safe spaces in classrooms, we can also create experiential opportunities for learning which enhance students' religious knowledge. I recall the excitement that I experience every year when Dr. Pushor, my supervisor and I, organize a tour to Saskatoon Misbah School (Islamic School) and the Mosque for in-service and pre-service teachers. The teachers' visit the school site, meet with the school staff, students, and the Imam of the Mosque. This experience offers them an opportunity to meet with the school principal and learn about the emergence and teachings offered in the Misbah school. They also spend time with the Imam and ask any questions they may have about such things as Islamic faith or current issues related to Islamophobia, terrorism, and challenges faced by Muslims living in the West. Their questions,

comments, and presence is graciously welcomed. In reflecting on this learning experience, students stated:

*My experience at the Misbah School was so vastly unlike what I had expected. I had expected to walk in, and feel an immediate separation of my own culture and the one present in the school. Together in our headscarves and socked feet, however, there was no separation at all. In this moment, we were all a part of the same community, a community of teachers and learners and community members.... I realized that it doesn't take extreme knowledge of ideologies and theories and philosophy and practice to show someone you care and make them feel safe.... This is the example I want to set for my own students. This is the standard that I want to set in my future classroom and school. (Teacher Candidate 1, 2017)*

*I had only heard the name Misbah School twice and had no idea what it was all about except for the fact that it was a Muslim School partnered with Saskatoon Public School Division...I know I personally never truly understood the reasoning behind the hijab but from this experience I definitely emerged with newfound knowledge, understanding and respect for the high regard Muslim people hold their women in. This experience offered that opportunity for me to learn, listen and ask questions, as well as for the brief time in the mosque, be put into the shoes of Muslim students...As an educator, I can instill this understanding in my students, by removing the barriers that surround us all. I want my classroom to be open, understanding and accepting and I believe that by sharing our own stories with each other and asking questions to things we don't understand, can make that possible. I want my students to learn from each other, embrace their cultural and religious diversities, and celebrate together as a community. By doing so this will engage my students to be curious about others, the world around them and tackle any assumptions or biases they may have. It will create an atmosphere of trust and honesty, as students will feel welcome. I want my classroom to be a second home for my students. I feel that this experience has strengthened my knowledge and understanding of Muslim culture and practices. I know this knowledge will help me relate to students, parents and other members of the community as well as in life. I could not have asked for a better way to*

*learn, ask the 'tough' questions, and see their practices first hand than from the Misbah School. (Teacher Candidate 2, 2017)*

We live in a world where topics such as sexual education, sexual orientation, gender identity, Islamic extremism, and wearing of religious symbols such as the niqaab, turban, hijab, or the kirpan require an understanding of diverse and divergent religious knowledge. Education which includes the opportunity to express religious knowledge is essential because “it is in schools and colleges that there is the best and earliest chance of breaking down ignorance and developing individuals who will be receptive to the other and who will ask difficult questions without fear of offending” (Commission on Religion and Belief I British Pubic Life, 2015, p. 36).

### ***Sacred Salah***

I begin in harmony with *Divine Presence* the most merciful

ruby rug oriented on a line with the *Qiblah* holy house in the desert

*Allahu Akbar*

Raised hands in the direction of the *Kaaba in Mecca* instruments of prayer

touching the soft of the ear

\*The LECTIO *NIYYAH*

the foundation resides in the entry of my heart

intention is a tapered door on the holy house

I intend to pray without ceasing

I enter Salah

the act of gazing, uttering, hearing

listening with my passionate ears

I reach concentration



*Allahu Akbar*

\*The MEDITATION      *QIYAM*

bowing head

overlapped hands on my chest

standing upright leaps in faith as lips read

pondering upon, dissecting quietness

entering peace

the words are with my eyes

feeling with my heart, my mind, my soul

*Allahu Akbar*

\*The ORATIO      *RUKU*

bowing down grasp my knees

sincerity and humility to God

humility is in God

I bow down and complete submission

showing reverence solely to my Creator

real emancipation lies in unconditional devotion

my dissociated self from this world and the hereafter

solely God's word and God's presence

hearing Allah's word within my soul...

you made me me so I could be me,

I am grateful &

He surely responds

when the heart is alight in trust

*Allahu Akbar*

\*The CONTEMPLATIO      *SUJOOD*

I prostrate

hands and forehead deep into the earth of earths

I feel the highest degree of obedience and servitude

I place on the earth the loftiest part of my body

in the presence of the Omnipotent Authority

I feel You, I came to the world from the dust

&

I will again return to the soil

to be back with you

I belong to You

weeping inside out and outside in

lamentations are saving me from the clutches of sins

an utter wordless contemplation

divine voice vibrating

I feel His tender love and transforming embrace

I raise my head

Resurrection, the Day of Judgment

I will rise up from the grave

and be summoned without end

*Allahu Akbar, God is Supreme*

### **Liminal knowledge.**

Bonding, belonging and bridging. Longing to belong. Liminal knowledge emerges from border crossing, ambiguity, and disorientation. I consider in-between living as living outside my comfort zone where the fluidity of my individual identity experiences causes me to feel that I do not belong on one side nor the other. At the same time, the sense that I belong to both sides pervades. Liminality, for Heilbrun (1999), is experience at the threshold:

The word 'limen' means 'threshold,' and to be in a state of liminality is to be poised upon uncertain ground, to be leaving one condition or country or self and entering upon another. But the most salient sign of liminality is its unsteadiness, its lack of clarity about exactly where one belongs and what one should be doing, or wants to be doing. (p. 3)

As an educated woman with a master's degree from Pakistan, standing and holding my eldest daughter's hand on the first day of Kindergarten in Toronto, I was certain that I wanted to approach the teacher, to introduce my child and myself, to be a part of her schooling experience. Yet, my consciousness about my limited English and my strong accent created an unsteadiness for me, a sense of hesitation about whether I should take the risk of speaking or to wait for the teacher to ask me a question to which I could reply with a simple, precise answer. For Bhabha (2006), being in a state of liminality "is not as if something comes and 'crosses over' into

something else, it is more that cultures abut on one another. There is a kind of internal struggle” (p. 16).

Living in liminality is a feeling of constant living in dualities, a partial presence and partial life in a foreign place, where memories of homeland haunt and push us to relive in the past. My experiences offered me the opportunity to become aware that I am always searching for who I am. This journey is about experiencing the dynamics of identity transition, a journey which does not have any fixed destination. There is no right answer in this process, yet the process itself is transformative. Living with dual identities is a constant living in liminality and it happens when an entire culture and language seems to be moving into liminality. It is about language and life’s philosophy shifting, resulting in the entire culture to be on the move. When the context itself is changing rapidly, our individual identities experience similar variability. As a result, our individual identities no longer seem secure, leading to the same perplexed questions that I often ask myself: Who am I? And where do I belong? As a culturally and linguistically diverse minority parent, this ambiguity, betwixt and in between living, has shaped my liminal knowledge where I now understand its struggles, complexities, anxieties, and balance. What other institution can better provide affirming spaces for students and their families than schools? That is, where parents’ hybrid and liminal experiences may be utilized to prepare students for this very journey of in- between living.

### **the drawing compass**

one leg of the compass

*Static*

fixed and rooted

in a certain spot

firmly entrenched

strong local roots

bonding & bridges

home & heredity

the other leg of the compass

*Draws*

a huge wide circle around the first one

flowing through and around each other

creating copious successive

movements and moments

of nested experiences

constituted & shaped

expressed & enacted

constantly

*Moving*

travelling the whole wide world

feeling connected

to places, cities, cultures, voices and

*People*

the existentials

body, space, time and relation

the embodiment

of life, liberty, and diaspora

*Evolution*

**Counter-narrative knowledge.**

One leg of the compass. Stories convey meaning (Leiblich, 1988) and are a natural way of interpreting our experiences. The other leg of the compass. Counter stories are a powerful means by which human experiences not often told are made meaningful (Delgado, 1989). In

Hassan's classroom, during the discussion of Charlie Hebdo, the story being told was one of Islamic extremism. When a female Muslim student voiced a challenge to freedom of speech which mocked an entire religion and the Prophet Muhammad, she was initiating a question, "When does free speech become offensive speech?" (McKain, 2018, p. 169). She was asking her classmates to consider a counter story. Given the teacher's discomfort with the potential reaction to the counter story, he shut down a crucial conversation which could have created space for dialogue and interrupted assumptions about the 'other.' Just as Bruner (1986) noted about stories, counter stories "provide a map of possible roles and of possible worlds in which action, thought, and self-definition are permissible or desirable (p. 66). "Counter-stories" (Nelson, 2001) invite a shift in role: the recipient of the story moves from being a listener to a learner, the narrator of the story moves from being a teller to a teacher. It is in assuming these new roles that they two become co-constructors of a possible world, a shared world in which reciprocal knowing and relationships challenge polarized dispositions. As a mother, I transmit my culture, history, language, rituals, and customs to my children through my personal, particular lived stories. In school, my children receive "narratives of dominance called majoritarian stories" (Hunn, Guy, & Manglitz, 2006, p. 244) these are the stories that are not often questioned because people do not see them as stories but as "natural" parts of everyday life" (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 29)

I think back to Abbas' response about residential schooling and Indigenous people, when he shared how they discussed in Social Studies what 'we did to them' and how 'their land was taken.' When I replied, "Who did what to them?" he responded, "We the Europeans." His response reflected that he was complying with the dominant hegemonic discourse while I, as his minority mother from a colonized nation, asked him to rethink his identity and his positioning as both the oppressed and the oppressor. I was asking Abbas to lay a counter story from home alongside the majoritarian story he had been presented in school in order to practice his Canadian citizenship as a diverse and patriotic Canadian. Minority parents are experts in storytelling as they themselves live and relive various forms of stories. Schools can create "supporting, affirming and empowering spaces" (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 28) where parents and students can unfold their stories to create counter stories which acknowledge and bridge the gap between the home and school binary.

## Story Travelling

every single story told  
is a sublime break in a journey  
we tell mellifluous stories of space-places  
now, always, ever-after behind us  
and the trembling topographies  
we have yet to cross as we wake  
each place and each telling  
seeds, tills, waters, harvests  
a stellar view  
oh nomad, always changing and charming  
sifting weather, seasons, landscapes  
that are passed by  
one press of the heel  
on stormy shores  
per breath  
every rest is a transition  
Janus at the gate  
what has already taken place  
what is about to occur  
is non-nascence  
to be called an absolute beginning  
sans the eternal expiry

to be called the end

is every beginning ever

### **Transnational knowledge.**

Stories of places, spaces – a journey. I hold transnational knowledge, understanding ties across national borders, the experience of living in the different countries of Pakistan and Canada. My transnational knowledge reflects my ties and relationships that connect me to individuals, societies, and a country beyond the boundaries of Canada's nation-state (Kwon, 2017). It is knowledge that helps me to sustain ties to national affiliations, local attachments, and preserve a sense of self-identification, self-understanding, and belonging that crosses geographic, cultural, and educational borders. Like me, it is through the process of transnationalism that all immigrants “forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc, 1994, p. 6). Based on my personal lived experience as an immigrant and ethnic minority, I still to this day retain “a dual frame of reference” and a dual sense of orientation through which I constantly engage in analyzing my cultural, economic, social, and political aspects and situations in my home-land to my situation in my host-land (Guarnizo, 1997, p. 311). My daily reality “is embedded in a transnational frontier of intersecting ideas, histories, identities and [relationships]” Golbert, 2001, p. 725). While teaching and learning operate within “bounded nation-centered cultural scripts” (Singh, & Han, 2010, p. 1301, teachers would benefit from immigrant parents' transnational knowledge. Transnational knowledge is conveyed by parents to their children who are born and raised on Canadian soil as a key piece of their identity. Such knowledge could be utilized by schools through engaging minority parents on the school landscapes. Saskatchewan curriculum across grade levels reflects themes related to such topics as interactions and interdependence; dynamic relationships; search for self; imagining new worlds; and conflicts, issues and choices. In any of these thematic areas across subject areas, there is an obvious possibility to invite parents to infuse their transnational knowledge as a curricular source and resource. As parents' transnational knowledge is laid alongside teacher knowledge in teaching and learning toward curricular outcomes, there is the possibility to redefine and enrich understandings of Canadian



identity, multiracial identity, privileged identity, and the meaning of citizenship in our global world.

**moving bodies.**

bodies in philharmonic momentum  
split-cell senses of orientation  
*dinner for two*: the home & the host  
understanding a kingdom of ties  
handcrafted within & across  
national & international borders  
familial ties, telephonic relations  
sounds on the move in the sweet grass  
morphing into momentous images  
*nostalgic living*  
the fringes and frontiers of intersection  
ideas, philosophies  
relations, bonds  
civilizations, relations  
histories & identities of *I*  
self-understanding sleep  
belonging is coming and going  
beyond the boundaries  
*transnational living*

where home  
is the  
being to your human

### **Trans-community knowledge.**

Kingdom of ties. Relations and bonds. Not only do ethnically diverse parents traverse boundaries of countries, moving between home-land and host-land, they also traverse boundaries of relationships. Within a host-land, a newcomer begins their understanding of community through negotiating membership in both their community of resemblance and in communities of difference. When we arrived in Canada, my family immediately sought out people of resemblance through their close or even distant connection to family and friends. I looked for people wearing shalwar kameez, my home-land clothing. I sought out voices speaking in Urdu. I remember a time in mosque, hearing a woman speaking in Arabic, wearing hijab and abaya, and while we did not speak the same language or share the same culture, we exchanged the Islamic greeting, “Assalamu-alaikum (Peace be upon you). It was then that I realized the mosque offered me both a community of resemblance and yet, at the same time, invited me into a community of difference. Outside of the mosque or our newly-formed community of friends, we lived within a larger community of difference in our new host-land of Canada – a sea of white faces, the accents of the English language, the celebrations that we had never heard of, clothing styles unlike our own. I recall the time when I was living in Melfort with my family, and how we were the only Muslim family there. It was our first experience ever living in a community of difference. There I experienced how one learns about new communities and their norms, ways of living, ways of knowing, and how one shares their own cultural values and beliefs with them. This sense of reciprocity began with small and gentle acts, such as how in our little neighbourhood we met our neighbours across two blocks and would invite them over for tea, and their children would come over to play with ours often. That sense of mutual trust and understanding in such a safe environment was so empowering that it created a level of comfort and trust that I openly shared our traditions, identity challenges, immigration experiences, religious practices, and beliefs with them. Just as we began with our neighbors, reaching out to one another across communities of difference, teachers can begin with a simple kind and

courteous invitation to parents to visit the school and classrooms frequently to share their stories and lived experiences. As a component of teachers' staff meetings and professional development days, they could invite ethnically diverse parents to school or could request parents to take them on a tour to their homes, grocery stores, cultural and religious centres, and heritage language schools.

## **Community**

deepening fibers of unity  
nested in gravities within each other  
gather, together, near the foot of fittingness  
shedding like amphibia, of assumptions  
shattering of misunderstandings  
to sear and strip silence  
bridging distances all ever  
beyond bodied boundaries  
of streets, neighborhood,  
*visible, ethnic*  
*native, foreign*  
*alien, vagabond*  
knitting our beaded perceptions  
sowing our secular conceptions  
deflating our identity contestations  
ownership, interrelations,  
places, peoples  
trusting, caring, giving, sharing

mutuality, reciprocity

requited unity

treasured feeling of shared experiences

mutual sense of humanity

bind us together

true inclusiveness

from my to our

### **The Centrality of Diverse Parent Knowledge**

Pushor's (2010) words spoke strongly to me:

When children come to school, they come with the multiplicity and contextuality, not independent of it. In both direct and indirect ways, they bring their [parents], families, and communities with them. (p. 7)

Please do not see Irteqa as solely a Pakistani girl. Please do not see Hassan as solely a minority. Please do not see Iman as solely a Muslim. Please do not see Abbas as solely the son of an immigrant. Rather than compartmentalizing the lives of our children into school and home, dishonoring their multiple communities; national and ethnic identities; cultural, linguistic, religious, liminal sources of knowledge, please see them for all of who they are and what they know as holders of hybrid identity. Let's work alongside each other as parents and educators to build intimate and compassionate links between home and school to support students' learning, achievement, identity, and humanity to the best extent possible.

As a minority parent, I send my children to school not as "blank slates" but as vulnerable beings with bodies, color, stories, experiences, "prior knowledge constructions, conceptions, and understandings" (Peck, 2011). Whatever form their prior knowledge takes, it all plays a critical role in defining how as students they accommodate their sense of identity and belonging to their learning, curriculum, teachers, and classmates on the school landscape. Now the key question is what is needed in terms of intensifying teaching and learning practices to affirm minority

students' and parents' knowledge and lived experiences of schooling and curriculum? Despite studies that support and promote the inclusion of culture in school curricula, there is little research focusing on the inclusion of hybrid lived experiences and knowledge of students and parents with the richness of multiple cultural backgrounds (Schlein & Chan, 2010, p. 265).

We can begin with a mutual point, "While teachers and parents share the same children, and they have some contact with one another, they typically do not know one another" (Pushor, 2015). Parents are positioned as significant stakeholders in their children's lives. Differently, teachers are positioned as key stakeholders in their students' lives who enter the students' lives in the midst of their life story. Parents become part of children's narratives right from birth, to feeding, to standing, to walking, and to taking them to school, and they continue to remain in their children's lives into the midst and to their last breath. Parents are the knowers and they know and understand their children the way no one else can in this world. Parents' bodies and [gazes] are the "ultimate instruments" (Polanyi, 1966) of their knowledge and knowledge construction. By challenging the narrow conception of parents' knowledge as problematic or deficit or less knowing and instead "making visible what parent knowledge is, and how it is held and used by parents", schools and educators "interrupt the current story of school" (Pushor, 2015, p. 19). Creating safe spaces for [parents] to share their knowledge is not an easy task (Olson, 1995, p.132). "Let's acknowledge that teachers and parents both hold knowledge of children, teaching, and learning – very different knowledge, arising in distinct contexts, held and used in varied ways and for varied purposes" (Pushor, 2015, p. 9). The main question is, how to lay parent's knowledge alongside teacher's knowledge as they both hold knowledge that have much in common and much that makes them distinct from one another. "Regardless of the richness of both teacher knowledge and parent knowledge, and regardless of what each type of knowledge offers in support of the growth and development of children, schools continue to privilege teacher knowledge" (Pushor, 2015, p. 14). Schools do disservice to parents by discounting their knowledge and lived experiences, and they "do [themselves] a disservice by missing out on "the gift of stretching academically and emotionally to understand the lives of others" (Lyons & Kubler LaBoskey, 2002, p. 85). Most importantly they do disservice to the children who are sent to their care along with their vulnerability and for whom they are both responsible and accountable. "We can then begin to make space for a diversity of ways of

knowing” (Olson, 1995, p. 134). Let’s lay teachers’ and parent’s knowledge side by side by letting them speak to one another to change the story of whose knowledge counts.

### **The Art of Knowing**

‘teacher’ of my child, let me know what you know that I don’t know

and I will let you know that I know as ‘mother’ of your student

we both need to know what we don’t

together we unlearn and learn

promise and pledge

spin and return

resonate and negotiate

revise and earn

Dwelling in

bodies that hold history

identities that epitomize mystery

let’s confer & encounter

the musicality of the pedagogy

knowing and unknowing

teaching and learning

the student you have in your class is my child

the child I share with you is your student

(Confer)

You teach him how to speak English

I teach him how to speak his voice

You teach him how we all are the same

I teach him how we all are different too

You teach him how to share with others his culture

I teach him how to live between two cultures

You are scared to talk to him about his faith

I am scared both for him and his faith

You teach him how to find the right answers

I teach him ways to pose hard questions

You teach him how to read and write a story

I teach him ways to tell and live his own story

You teach him how to comprehend the learning content

I teach him how to understand the living concept

You teach him the value of learning from mistakes

I teach him the value of not repeating the same mistakes

You teach him preparation for future living

I teach him preparation for living in the moment

You teach him the way knowledge is acquired

I teach him the way knowledge is imparted

You teach him all about the convenient truths

I teach him all about unsettling knowledge

You teach him to see knowledge as power

I teach him to negotiate power as knowledge

You teach him 'power without love is reckless & abusive'

I teach him 'love without power is sentimental & anemic'<sup>21</sup>

You teach him 'not everything that can be counted counts'

I teach him 'not everything that counts can be counted'<sup>22</sup>

You teach him how to develop acceptance with ease

I teach him how to disrupt tolerance without cease

You teach him it's our relationships that form us

I teach him it's our positioning that informs us

You teach him how to rename theories of power

I teach him how to proclaim practices of authority

(Encounter)

You have teacher knowledge on how to teach your student

I have parent knowledge on how to nurture my child

You have embedded knowledge crafted from educational modality

I have embodied knowledge shaped by intense physicality

You have pedagogical knowledge about theory and subject matter

I have relational knowledge about bonding and belonging matter

You have situational knowledge about various set of events & circumstances

I have cross-cultural knowledge about functioning in many contexts & stances

You have empirical knowledge where you record & weave modes of being

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<sup>21</sup> Martin Luther King Jr.

<sup>22</sup> Albert Einstein.



I have lyrical knowledge where I risk & weave ways of becoming

You have salient knowledge where you observe, direct, instruct and teach

I have silent knowledge where I see, listen, observe and reach

You have craft knowledge where you make objects function and perform

I have craft knowledge where I make subjects interact and transform

You have practical knowledge encircling apprenticeship in school context

I have transnational knowledge encompassing diaspora in home context

You have procedural knowledge about action taking and problem solving

I have liminal knowledge about border-crossing and in-between living

You have conceptual knowledge founded on factual pieces

I have intuitive knowledge grounded on spiritual creases

You have social knowledge about internalizing events and interaction

I have intimate knowledge about honoring selfless love and divine mission

You have professional knowledge on standard curriculum and epistemology

I have experiential knowledge on living curriculum and ethnic ideology

You have theoretical knowledge based on a book of instruction

I have maternal knowledge based on a backbone of conception

You are a teacher, a knowledge transmitter & a guidance banner

I am a mother, a knowledge broker & a boundary spanner

I know, you are a teacher and teaching is your profession

You know, I am a mother and protecting is my position

(..)

let's make a mutual pledge about our child and student

let me know how I can help you in teaching and knowing your student

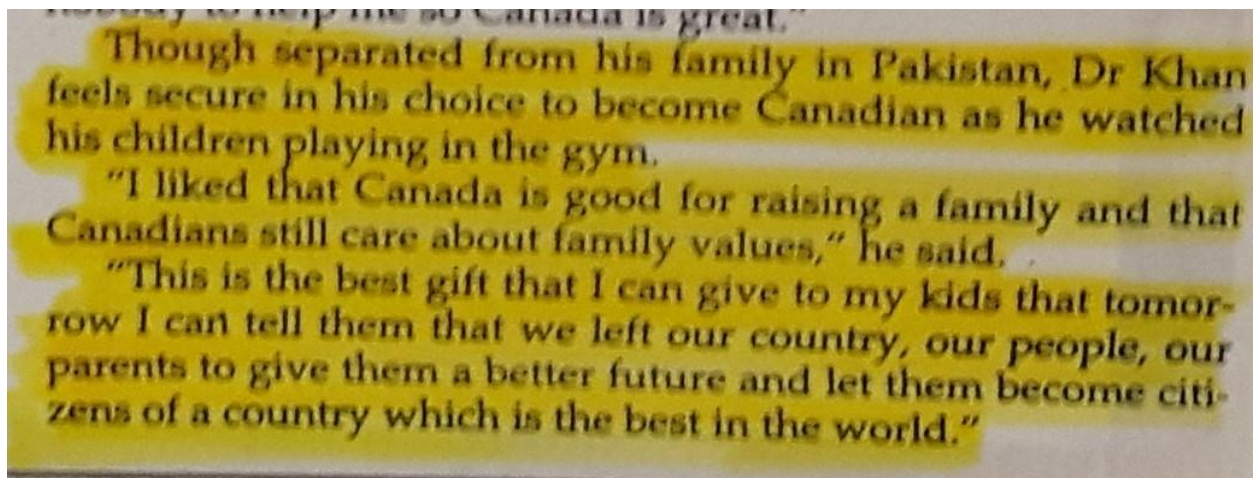
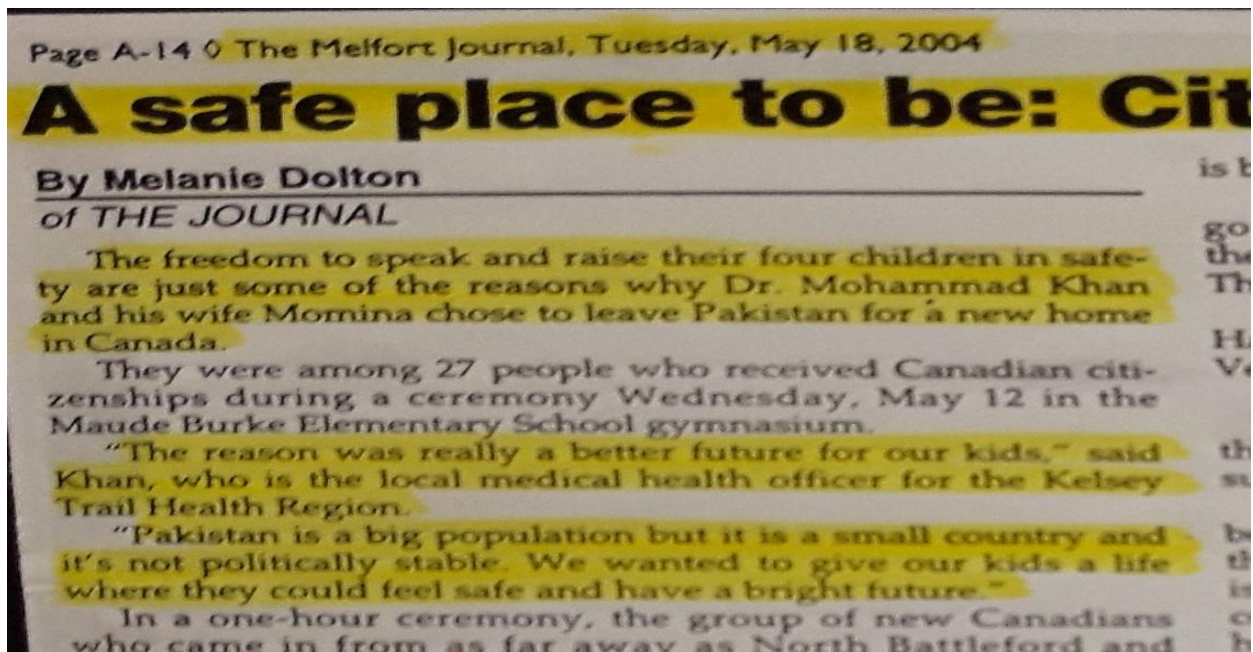
I know no other way that you can come to know my child than...

**through engaging with me.**

## Chapter 8

### Final Thoughts

*Like other newcomers, I and my family as Canadian Muslims have come to Canada “to build better lives for [our]selves and [our] children—not to dismantle Canadian society by violence. (Adams, 2007, p. 107)*



Five years ago, a “story” that I chose to write for one of my Master of Education classes changed my life. Writing that story, changed the way I looked at myself, children, family, community, Canadian people, Canadian schools, Canadian curriculum, and Canada itself. In my *Narrative Inquiry* class, the story I wrote was a personal story of my family’s immigration to Canada, our move to sculpt a new home away from home. Deconstructing that story with a personal, practical and social justification taught me how to discover, contemplate, and narrate injustices. My counter story emerged as I began “rethinking moments of tension as places of inquiry” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 76), and finding ways to wonder, contemplate, and question. Since narrative inquiry is a “way of understanding experience” (p. 9), my stories are drawn from the particularities and complexities of my experiences. As experience grows out of experience, the bumping up of old experiences with new ones, my perceptions, reflections, and actions took on new meanings in life. Through my experiences of dislocation and relocation, I began to both interweave and deconstruct boundaries that defined my in-between living in regard to self, identity, and soul. To be immersed in a foreign culture is to intensely destabilize the familiar foundations of one’s being (Hunt, 1989). My daily experiences of living and raising my four children at the intersection of culture, beliefs, values, languages, and citizenship shaped my mother stories of my children’s experience with schooling and curriculum. Since stories are living things that help us make sense of our lives, I learned how to author my experiences and explain them to myself and others to “turn the margins into places of transformative resistance” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 37) in order to imagine new curricular possibilities in schools and, ultimately, social change.

Through reading different theorists, scholars, and poets, I found the worth and value of my voice and positioning as a minority Canadian. I encountered and overcame the pressures and anxiety of living a hybrid identity – of hovering timelessly ‘in between.’ I worked to understand the complexity of integration, blending and balancing dual identities, acculturation and marginalization. With that understanding, I am able to resist and transform the hardships I encounter into power. I am teaching my children how not to let their untold stories remain in the shadows, censored or suppressed and how their stories must see the light of the day (Jackson, 2002, p. 11). I am teaching them how to be active agents of change in their own lives and in society, and how to actively get involved in transforming the marginalizing factors in their school and social environment (Khan, 2009).

## **Education Vs Schooling**

Education is a process that begins at birth and lasts forever; it is a parent's lifelong responsibility (Pushor, 2015). Education is a process of living rather than preparation for future living. Therefore, education is life and life is education, and to study life, to study education, is to study experience (Dewey, 1938). The day my eldest daughter entered Kindergarten as a new immigrant who could not speak English, I began to study my children's experiences. With time and as my other children began entering school my experiences as a parent opened up questions, wonders, and surprises about their place as students, and my own as a parent, on the school landscape and in curriculum. I learned that school and education were interdependent, related but not synonymous. Schooling is the formal and institutionalized form of a child's education where students are taught in the classroom about subjects based on mandated curriculum subjects and content. Schooling is a complementary piece to the education that parents provide their children, an education that is a process of inviting truth, innovation, and possibility. It invites children to construct meanings and interpretations of their multiple worlds, society, culture, history, civilization and interrelationships, meanings that carry through into their adult lives. Through my mother stories, I have worked to challenge schools to consider the urgency of including representations of alternative perspectives, ways of knowing and ways of being and becoming in curriculum and in curriculum making.

## **Space for Minority Parents' Voice and Knowledge in Schools**

On the school landscape, "educators are positioned as holders of knowledge" whereas "parents are positioned as recipients of this knowledge, which implies they are unknowing or less knowing" (Pushor, 2010, p.6). Rethinking possibilities of inclusive practices and co-constructing curriculum requires giving up some control by educators in order to create an affirming space for diverse parents' voice, visibility and narratives where words, action and encounters are aligned. Fine and Weis (2003) remind us that the

future of public education, as an intellectual project of serious, critical engagement lies in the hands of educators, working with students, parents, community activists, policy

makers, and others to re-imagine what could be, and what must be, in those spaces we call schools. (p. 1)

Our schools and our curriculum are Eurocentric, with dominant culture and narratives as prevalent, and the majority of teachers in provincial schools in Saskatchewan are white and middle class. Nonetheless, we live in a volatile world that is multidimensional; it is persistently evolving, constantly changing. As a result, there is a need for enhanced teacher education regarding student and family histories, understandings of cultural backgrounds, and dual identities. The presence and voice of parents in teaching, learning, curriculum making, and decision making is a currently untapped, yet available and affordable, resource to teachers which can inform and enhance inclusiveness within curriculum, schools, and between homes and schools. Ethnically diverse children come to school not as blank slates or empty vessels; they bring their values, beliefs, languages, culture, and religion with them. As critical as these are for their identity, they also make students vulnerable because of their difference. By re-conceptualizing the schooling of children in the context of family, we can bring parents onto the school landscape and into curriculum making. We can address the definition of this difference, we can deconstruct 'othering,' we can dismantle a culture of whiteness, we can challenge institutional hegemony, we can resist the powerful forces that continue the subordination of all minoritized groups, and we can reconcile our shared humanity.

### **Contributions of this Inquiry**

During my doctoral studies, I have found very little research in the educational field regarding the use of culturally and ethnically diverse parents' knowledge: what it constitutes, why it is critical in transforming our schools and curriculum, and how can it benefit teachers in their ongoing professional learning and teaching. In my research, I have defined the parent knowledge which culturally diverse families hold and use. In one of my poems, I laid teacher knowledge and parent knowledge side by side so as to draw a clear portrait to show that just as teacher knowledge is important so, too, is parent knowledge. Through this inquiry, I challenged the notion that parents are unknowing, less knowing, or have deficit knowledge. For our schools, education, and curriculum to be effective and equitable, this research concludes that meaningful and authentic parent engagement requires the merging of parent and teacher knowledge and, in particular, the unique knowledge held by diverse parents.

## Poetry & Self Together

Poetry whispers revolution. In my entire research and writing journey, poetry walked up to me mysteriously and confidently, and began to speak to and into my soul. I believe it came as a reward for my love, passion, and commitment to my mother stories of my children, stories in which I wrote of my sense making of my children's experiences with utmost care, respect, and honesty. My immersion in my emotions as a mother, comprehensive and non-stop readings, interaction and personal bonding with the text, extreme gazing and writing of words and lines made all the words fly around me; as they came to fill my life, my poems came into being. For me, poetry is neither a clever engagement nor a crystallized awareness, but an eternal peace. I began by distrusting what I already knew and believed, by actively stepping into the threatening and unfamiliar, by consciously seeking beauty in broken things, by recognizing haze in light, by finding clarity in chaos, by accepting messy moments, by feeling peace in clutter, by losing self to uncertainty, by rejecting authority, by deliberately giving up liberty. Finally, by allowing my flowing breath to fall into a choking beat, I synched self and soul in chaos and felt recomposed. It was then that my poems were composed.

Poetry... renovates  
the illusion of memory  
both past and present  
overlapping the gap  
tension & restoration  
the  
absolute difficult  
befalls  
the  
absolute possible

In offering these poems to you as reader, I feel reborn. I share them with the world to make the difference they bring in for me—peace. I share these poems as an alternative way of knowing and an alternative way of initiating dialogue, identity talk, and attention to cultural, moral, and religious sensitivities and perspectives. Throughout this entire research journey, my wonders,

puzzling moments, reflections, contemplations, thoughts, emotions, and stirring and mixing of Urdu and English languages in my head, led to the creation of poetry that validated my feelings and sense of fulfillment arising out of sharing my mother stories and interrogating my children's experiences with school and curriculum. I feel that I brought an additional sense of justice to my role and responsibilities as a mother as I conceptualized diverse parent knowledge and the potentiality of its voice and place in the education system, in schools, among teachers, and, in the end, in Canadian society. This sense of justice is what I seek for my Canadian children. It is what I seek for all Canadian children who live with hybrid identities.

### **Future Inquiries**

From my conversations and discussions with my children, I leave this doctoral research with many unanswered questions. Throughout the course of my autobiographical narrative inquiry, so many more mother stories emerged, and every story brought forward a new plotline, theme, tension, and engraved possibility. In this research, I could not include all their stories. In the future, each story has the potential to be a research project of its own. Through my research, I came to understand deeply that culturally diverse Canadians are a walking wellspring of philosophies, theories, and ideas, whose lived experiences and narratives are a valuable new project, so long as they are not exploited, exotified, alienated or materialized. Aside from this, throughout this research when I shared my mother stories with my friends and family in Canada, there were so many stories, feelings, and challenges they shared with me in return. I feel that through my research and putting my stories out there, I found a voice and the opportunity to deeply dwell in my children's stories and experiences with school and curriculum. This dwelling provided me with new puzzles and wonders along with a sense of comfort, possibility, and hope.

In future research, I will strive to connect with ethnically diverse parents at all levels possible in order to bring their untold, silenced, hidden, and censored stories forward so that they can exercise their right to equality, inclusion, and a voice as Canadians. At the same time, I will research the education of teachers and educators about the inculcation of identity matters and cultural sensitivities into their understandings and teaching practices. As much as culturally diverse Canadians and parents are responsible for their integration into host society and school, equally important is the responsibility of teachers to reposition themselves and their



understandings of integration in order to help minority Canadians integrate equitably in their new homeland.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Over the years, educators, curriculum makers, policy makers and school communities have learned about and enhanced their practices and responses in relation to many marginalized groups of students and their families. I challenge schools to become leaders in eradicating barriers to students' sense of self, sense of belonging, and sense of citizenship as these are key pieces to both their academic achievements and life-long successes as Canadians. I challenge schools, teachers, curriculum makers, practitioners and policy makers to think and wonder, "What are we still missing in our knowledge, attitudes, and 21<sup>st</sup> century practices that cause a student with hybrid identity to refuse to take potato cutlets for his school lunch, to stay silent when feeling uncomfortable with the curriculum content, and to avoid conversations about her Islamic identity? What is it that schools are negating, devaluing, and/or underutilizing?" I aim to re-conceptualize the dominant aspects of mandated curriculum by decentering the Eurocentric perspective, knowledge and content by challenging curriculum makers, educators and teachers that there are alternative perspectives of knowing worthy of inclusion. I contested that "just as hegemonic ideologies infiltrate many levels of society simultaneously, counter-hegemonic strategies must operate on many levels as well" (Etmanski, 2007, p. 123). Moving away from hegemonic notions of families, creating possibilities and making concrete attempts to change attitudes and practices in ways which honor, value, and utilize the gifts, strengths and knowledge inherent in diverse families offers a promising direction.

In a world of intersectionality, diversity, and tension, I believe that my work creates a space in which diverse parents' positioning, voice, and knowledge are made central to the teaching and learning processes, in curriculum making and teacher education. It is in such a space, that parents' identity and knowledge become accepted as valid representations of their lived experiences and narratives and valid resources for teachers and curriculum.

**a new day**

Everyday...

brings something new

some days I try to change the world

some days I try to get through the day  
some days I try to stay strong  
some days I try to embrace vulnerability  
some days I try to multiply happiness  
some days I try to roll with the punches  
some days I try to live every moment  
some days I try to acknowledge my battles  
some days I try to stay on the absolute path  
some days I try to live the uncertain journey

Every day...

brings something new

a Choice

to disrupt

the rigid corners of ready-made solutions

a Chance

to shift

the margins into places of transformative resistance

a Change

to fracture

the powerful forces that continue the subordination of all

Everyday is a new day of movement, action, liberation.

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