

SMUDGING COMPOSITION LINES OF IDENTITY AND TEACHER KNOWLEDGE

Cross-Cultural Narrative Inquiries
into Teaching and Learning

Edited by Elaine Chan and Vicki Ross

ADVANCES IN RESEARCH
ON TEACHING

VOLUME 46

SMUDGING COMPOSITION LINES
OF IDENTITY AND TEACHER
KNOWLEDGE

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ADVANCES IN RESEARCH ON TEACHING VOLUME 46

**SMUDGING COMPOSITION
LINES OF IDENTITY AND
TEACHER KNOWLEDGE:
CROSS-CULTURAL
NARRATIVE INQUIRIES
INTO TEACHING AND
LEARNING**

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Vicki:

To my doctoral students, both past and present, I express heartfelt gratitude for the cross-cultural understandings you help me inquire into and deepen through the lives you bring into my world. Many thanks. I am a better person for having known you.

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INTRODUCTION

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EXAMINING TEACHER KNOWLEDGE IN CROSS-CULTURAL CLASSROOM CONTEXTS

Vicki Ross and Elaine Chan

ABSTRACT

Chapter 1 overviews the purposes, organization, and various contributions in the volume, “Smudging composition lines of identity and teacher knowledge: Cross-cultural narrative inquiries into teaching and learning.” Through these inquiries, we unpack the complexities of teachers and students engaging in cross-cultural classroom contexts. We present narrative inquiry as a fitting research approach to document and to analyze complexities underlying and informing understanding of teacher knowledge in cross-cultural teaching contexts. Such a methodological approach reveals details of the kinds of cross-cultural perspectives that might unfold in the implementation of curriculum, and explores ways in which teachers’ sense of teacher knowledge are shaped by experiences of teaching and learning. We recognize complexities revealed through a comparative cross-cultural narrative approach as a way of highlighting the educational significance of this work. We organized chapters of this volume into sections, using Schwab’s (1973) curriculum commonplaces as a framework for examining some of these complexities. The four section headings are: Section I: “Becoming a cross-cultural teacher: Developing teacher knowledge from cross-cultural experiences;” Section II: “Learner experience informing teacher knowledge;” Section III: “Subject matter/curriculum informing teacher knowledge;” and Section IV: “Milieu informing teacher knowledge.”

Keywords: Teacher knowledge; cross-cultural teacher knowledge; cross-cultural comparative narrative inquiry; narrative inquiry; social justice; teacher education

Today, I watched the students practice lining up in rows out on the schoolyard for hours in the hot sun. They've also been practicing their Sports Day dances every day for the past two weeks. They've been doing this in place of their usual Math, Japanese, Social Studies, . . . classes, and no one seems bothered that they were wasting so much instructional time!

This excerpt is taken from a letter that Elaine wrote home to her family, describing what she had seen in schools that she had visited in the early weeks of September during her first term in Japan as a foreign English teacher. The letter captured her impression of how Japanese teachers in the schools where she had been teaching were using their instructional time. The words also reveal a little of the judgment that teachers may carry when they see how schooling is conducted in communities/countries different from their own. This judgment may reflect a difference in professional opinion about how time could/should be better spent, according to one's idea(s) about how instruction should be conducted in their home countries/communities; this criticism might also be the result of a lack of understanding about goals and theories underlying the practices in the host country or new community.

In this volume, "*Smudging Composition Lines of Identity and Teacher Knowledge: Cross-Cultural Narrative Inquiries into Teaching and Learning*," of the "*Advances in Research on Teaching Series*," we examine tensions at the heart of teaching in cross-cultural school contexts, where teacher knowledge, student experiences, curriculum design and implementation, and assessment intersect on shifting landscapes of classrooms and schools. We explore nuances and complexities of cross-cultural teaching, and raise compelling questions about what it means to work in an increasingly diverse global community that comprises classrooms where students and teachers of different social, socioeconomic, cultural, language, ethnic, and religious backgrounds need to adapt in order to accommodate for differences, both expected and unanticipated, and "come alongside" one another in the enactment of curriculum. We hope to advance knowledge about teaching and teacher education through this cross-cultural comparative narrative inquiry research lens. More specifically, we

- introduce and describe similarities and differences from one school system to another, that become apparent when teachers work in cross-cultural teaching contexts, as they pertain to the structure of schooling; experiences of students in school; implementation of school curriculum; teacher education for future and practicing teachers; partnerships with parents and members of the community; and ideas about acknowledging diversity in school practices and curriculum.
- consider shifts and complexities in teacher identity formation/teacher development in cross-cultural teaching contexts;
- uncover dilemmas and tensions in the process of conducting this research that inform and contribute to the development of cross-cultural comparative narrative inquiry as a methodological approach to examining teacher knowledge in cross-cultural teaching contexts;

- illuminate methodological developments and ethical tensions in the examination of cross-cultural perspectives in teaching, from the perspective of teachers and teacher educators who are also narrative inquirers.

We recognize, at this time, a lack of in-depth knowledge among educators about schooling in places beyond those where we have attended and taught ourselves. Not only do we lack knowledge about ways in which school systems may be different in other places around the world, but we also lack information about ways in which they may be similar to one another. The adage, “we do not know what we do not know” rings loudly, and lacking awareness and a common language with which to begin these conversations, our discussions may be more likely to be grounded in assumptions rather than upon experience or knowledge. We hope that by providing a glimpse into details of school systems different from our own through the experiences of those who work in these contexts, we might be better able to ground our discussions in concrete details rather than continuing to rely on assumptions or generalizations.

In a global community where children and their families cross national borders to settle in new communities for a multitude of reasons, classroom contexts comprised students navigating schooling in foreign languages and cultures, and teachers adapting curriculum, implementation, and assessment in order to reach children whose prior experiences are vastly different, is a common feature of teaching in countless communities around the world. More specifically, learning to teach by accommodating for differences in ideas and knowledge, especially when students and teachers come from different social and/or cultural backgrounds, is a contemporary reality. That said, we do not pay sufficient attention to the nuances and complexities involved in navigating the space of school to acknowledge these challenges.

In this volume, we unpack some of the complexities experienced by teachers and students teaching and learning in cross-cultural classroom contexts. We examine intersections of ideas about the formation of teachers’ personal and professional identities in transition when they cross cultures to teach in cultural contexts different from those in which they were educated and/or completed initial teacher education.

Schwab (1973) posited that four curriculum commonplaces, namely, teacher, learner, milieu, and subject matter, need to be taken into consideration in the development and implementation of curriculum.

Defensible educational thought must take account of four commonplaces of equal rank: the learner, the teacher, the milieu, and the subject matter. None of these can be omitted without omitting a vital factor in educational thought and practice. (Schwab, 1973/1978, p. 371)

We organized chapters of this volume into sections, using Schwab’s (1973) curriculum commonplaces as a framework for examining some of these complexities.

In *Section I, Becoming a Cross-Cultural Teacher: Developing Teacher Knowledge From Cross-Cultural Experiences*, we focus on research examples where teacher

knowledge is informed by the experiences that a teacher has lived. Schlein (Chapter 2) and Flanagan-Borquez and Sanchez-Suzuki Colegrove (Chapter 3), respectively, examine complexities in the journey to becoming cross-cultural teachers. They focus, in particular, on ways in which their own previous cross-cultural experiences might have contributed to shaping a sense of teacher knowledge from which they may draw in work with their current students.

In Chapter 2, “*Cross-Cultural Chickens and Eggs*,” Schlein (University of Missouri-Kansas City) refers to her experiences of teaching and living in Japan to ground her examination of the interdependent relationship between teaching and experience. Schlein likens this relationship to that between a chicken and an egg – she considers ways in which cross-cultural experiences of a teacher contribute to shaping their body of teacher knowledge, just as the corollary that teacher knowledge informs teachers’ cross-cultural teacher experiences is also true. Schlein grapples with puzzles pertaining to the phenomenon of intercultural competence acquisition, addressing some of the enduring personal and professional identity and culture aspects of cross-cultural teaching. She draws from her experiences as a teacher in Japan and from previous inquiries into the experiences of novice Canadian teachers working in Hong Kong and in Japan to shed light on how fluid conceptions of culture shock and reverse culture shock might contribute to shaping cultural identity transformations. She deliberates over the use of narrative inquiry tools to unpack teachers’ experiences of immersion in a foreign country and the culture of schooling. At the core of Schlein’s inquiry is recognition of the interdependent influence of experience in shaping teacher knowledge, and teacher knowledge in contributing to shaping cross-cultural experiences – hence, her use of the chicken and egg metaphor – as a way of describing the inter-dependent nature of experience and teacher knowledge. Schlein’s inquiry offers insight into complexities of cross-cultural experiences in shaping teacher knowledge, and vice versa.

In Chapter 3, “*Transforming Our Praxis Through Cross - Cultural Perspectives in Pedagogy*,” Flanagan-Borquez (Universidad de Valparaiso) and Sanchez-Suzuki Colegrove (Texas State University, United States) acknowledge the inter-connected nature of cross-cultural experience and teacher knowledge as well, but focus more specifically on ways in which the contexts in which prior cross-cultural experiences are deeply impactful in shaping not only teacher knowledge at the time at which an individual lives these experiences, but these experiences continue to shape the development of teacher knowledge in impactful ways thereafter. They draw from their initial cross-cultural experiences living and growing up in South American households and communities to acknowledge the role of experience in shaping their sense of teacher identity; these experiences then inform their later navigation as international graduate students in American universities, and again as university faculty teaching working with students following completion of doctoral degrees.

Ideas about ways in which context intersected with experience in these beginning chapters open the way for further examination into the critical influence of context in contributing to teacher knowledge. In “*Section II: Learner Experience Informing Teacher Knowledge*,” we explore ways in which student experiences may inform teacher knowledge. More specifically, we focus on

cross-cultural experiences that may inform the work of university-based teacher educators. C. Chan and Lo offer us a glimpse into ways in which culture and context intersect in the Hong Kong context, in their work examining the potential influence of student experience in informing teacher (educator) knowledge.

Cheri Chan (University of Hong Kong), in Chapter 4, “*Confronting Difference: Learning to Teach in a Borderland School in Hong Kong,*” traces the experiences of a student-teacher, Joan, as she learns to teach English-as-a second-language in a cross-cultural context as part of a school-based practicum that is a core component of her initial teacher education program in her university. C. Chan documents Joan’s experiences during an 8-week induction period, when student-teachers are placed in local schools in order to learn how to integrate theories introduced in their university-based education classes into practice in real-life teaching situations. C. Chan uncovers tensions and dilemmas as Joan grapples with teaching her learners from different language and cultural backgrounds in an elementary school located in an area considered as a borderland between Hong Kong, that is considered an autonomous region of China, and Shenzhen, which is a province of Mainland China. C. Chan discusses how initial teacher education programs may be developed in ways that support student-teachers who are learning to teach across cultural contexts to explore, confront, and “deal with the emotional terrain of understanding difference” (Boler & Zembylas, 2003, p. 123; Zembylas, 2010). Examination of her student-teacher participant’s experiences are considered through the lens of her own experiences as a teacher, first growing up and attending school in the United Kingdom, and then living and working in the Hong Kong context as an English-speaking British Chinese person.

Margaret M. Lo (University of Hong Kong), in Chapter 5, “*Teacher Education for Social Justice Across Sociocultural and Sociopolitical Contexts: An Autobiographical Narrative Study,*” focuses more specifically on how intersections of theory and practice in the preparation of teachers for an increasingly diverse global context played out in a course rooted in a social justice framework. Lo’s work is grounded on the idea that teacher education for social justice aims to enable teachers to work toward equity and justice in society and humanize the educational experience of their students. Lo presents an autobiographical narrative inquiry into social justice teacher education across sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts, across time, and within different educational communities. She begins by describing the conceptualization of teaching as a political and ethical endeavor, where social justice teacher education must engage seriously with the local and lived experiences of both teacher educators and student-teachers. Questions such as *How then does teacher education for social justice move across communities and identities, and through cultural, social, geographic and temporal spaces?* are at the core of her inquiry.

Grounded in Bakhtin’s (1981) dialogic theory, Lo traces the narrative threads wherein “each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life” (p. 293). She questions her ideological becoming (Bakhtin, 1981) as a critical teacher educator in the context of a youth mentoring, service-learning course for undergraduate teacher-candidates. She examines complexities and tensions in exploring experiences and co-constructing

understandings of oppression, privilege and social justice with her student-teachers in a youth mentoring course focused on dialogic struggles. These experiences are considered through the lens of her own experiences of justice and education in the USA and Hong Kong as an English-speaking Chinese-American. Providing an in-depth examination of the convergence of identity, social relations, place, and time in her knowledge formation, she critically reflects upon the notion of social justice to argue that social justice teacher education is multi-voiced and lived both locally and globally.

In “*Section III: Subject Matter/Curriculum Informing Teacher Knowledge*,” we examine cross-cultural tensions emerging as teachers, and their students, journey across borders constructed by subject-matter – math and language (English and Korean) respectively – in the two chapters presented in this section.

Sue Kyung (Susan) Kim (University of Nebraska-Lincoln) conducted a narrative inquiry to explore ways in which the learning of English as a subject matter contributed to shaping a sense of identity and informing the teacher knowledge of a Korean language teacher. Kim writes in Chapter 6, “*Stories of Margaret: A Korean Who has Never Not Been Korean*,” what she learned about her research participant, Margaret, as a Korean language teacher. She explores tensions of identity that Margaret experienced as an ethnic Korean teacher working at an international school in Korea that follows an American curriculum where English is presented as the “language of inclusion” and instruction. Her investigation was guided by the following questions:

- How does learning of English and Korean as subject matter contribute to shaping the teacher identity of a Korean language and literature teacher teaching at an international school in Korea?
- How do the cross-cultural learning experiences of a Korean teacher contribute to shaping her sense of teacher identity and teacher knowledge about the roles of English and Korean learning in shaping her sense of Korean identity?

Kim draws from her own experiences as a current teacher in the same international school context and as a student who completed a significant portion of her own education in the United States where the language of instruction was English, after attending Korean elementary school. She explores nuances of balancing affiliation to two cultures and two languages simultaneously, while also exploring complexities of wavering between both cultures and languages.

Stavros Stavrou (University of Saskatchewan) draws from his experiences growing up in a Greek family as a point of comparative reflection to inform his work as a mathematics education outreach coordinator in Chapter 7, “*Narratives Indigenizing School Mathematics: An Intersection of Euro-Western and Cree Perspectives*.” Within his home and school cultures, Stavrou was storied, and storied himself, as intelligent and technology proficient. These narratives propelled him into becoming a mathematician. The mathematics subject-area border was more porous given his narrative construction of himself. What he encountered as he worked in classrooms with Indigenous teachers and students was a less