Practicing *Palimpsest*:
Layering Stories and Disrupting Dominant Western Narratives in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Interpreting and contextualizing the meanings of spoken, transcribed, visual and embodied languages, we explore how the life stories of immigrant educators evoke socio-cultural and diverse imaginaries. We incorporate the Greek practice of *palimpsest* - a *layering* of stories, voices, fragments, and traces - to understand forms of active becomings which provide possibilities for dissonance and transformation and treat the self as relational and inherently multiple. Critically reflecting on this stratum of narratives and cultural understandings, we draw on the insights of several theoreticians and scholars to consider how the language of immigration, trauma, and displacement emerge in educators' thinking about the curriculum they are given. In transcribing stories - the participants' and our own - we heard "layered voices" (Aoki, 2005) that pointed us to different understandings about the immigrant experience, the connections between the self and other and what it means for immigrant educators and students to live together in ECE settings.

Keywords

diversity; early childhood education; hermeneutics; identity; language; narrative

> Embedded in the lives of the ordinary, the marginalized, and the muted, personal narrative responds to the disintegration of master narratives as people make sense of experience, claim identities, and "get a life" by telling and writing their stories. (Langellier, as cited in Riesseman, 2008, p.17)

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Introduction

Carolyn told Lisa a story about the hermeneutic "event" that initiated her doctoral research study:

C: Five years ago, while I was teaching a Child Development course in an early childhood education post-secondary program, I was concerned when the administration gave me a single textbook, written by American authors, to use as the core curriculum. Not long into the semester, I noticed that immigrant learners in the class had very different ideas about child development and childcare practices than those written about in the course textbook.

L: What different ideas? Can you give an example?

C: Well the text noted that western parents see a newborn's erratic sleep cycle as a behavior problem that requires fixing through parental intervention and forcing infants to sleep through the night – this is a common western childrearing idea[i]. The authors noted that "in the majority of cultures in the world, babies sleep in the same bed with their parents, typically until they are weaned" (Bee & Boyd, 2010, p. 70). Anyway, one day a major interruption happened in our class that completely changed the focus and direction of teaching and learning.

L: Go on! What happened next?

C: Well, an Ethiopian student strongly disagreed with the American authors' perspective and insisted she had experienced no adverse effects from co-sleeping with her mother from infancy to age seven years. Her comment opened a floodgate of questions from other students who both agreed and disagreed with her views. It raised quite a stir in class!

L: It sounds like your students came to recognize that non-western child rearing customs were represented as abnormal and in opposition to western practices which they deemed normative. Through the syllabus students were not asked what they knew but told what to know – what counts as correct.

C: Exactly! And so for the rest of the semester, I used the course text to open conversations and I invited students to relate their own ideas and experiences to curricular and textbook topics. It was a wakeup call for me – for sure! I recognized the importance of listening to multiple voices and views instead of focusing on a single textbook or my own ideas. I understood how layering our personal stories (mine and the students') with ideas from several texts and sources, disrupted dominant western narratives about children, childhood and early learning.

L: So how does this story relate to your doctoral research?

C: I now want to understand how immigrants position them/selves and juxtapose their cultural beliefs and understandings in a dominant western curriculum. My dissertation is

> *a collection of life stories - mine as well as those recounted by seven early childhood educators who interpreted their biographical experiences through memories, imagination, reflection, and multiple (spoken, written, visual, and embodied) language modalities.*

In this paper, we critically consider how the interrelation or *layering* of stories and intercultural dialogue was invoked by immigrant early childhood educators and the researchers (Carolyn & Lisa) to construct and interpret life-stories narrated in conversation, written research transcriptions and visual images. Understanding that our own attempts to work alongside and teach immigrant educators and students are not devoid of challenges and are always framed within western "master narratives" (Langellier, as cited in Riesseman, 2008) and notions of "whiteness and privilege" (Carr & Lund, 2007), we believe our struggles can be productive if we tell and attentively listen to stories about the "worlds we come from and those to which we will belong in the future" (Henning & Kirova, 2012, p. 238). In so doing, early childhood education (ECE) classrooms and child care centers in Canada might become places where cultures are shared and reconfigured even through opposition and disagreement with differences. After Aoki, we understand difference according to "where you locate it, but it's not either this or that; it's the working together of both somehow, coming out of the two discourses and bumping into each other and not fitting at all" (Smits, 2010, p. 16).

Etymologically defined, *to lay* is "to place on the ground (or other surface)" (OED). Language digs below the "ground" so-to-speak, unearths buried meanings and creates possibilities for new stories, voices, and understandings to emerge. Beyond simply relaying or communicating life stories, we envision *layering* as a penetrating and complex process, "that intertwines the self … and the other… – which in the hermeneutic language of Hans Georg Gadamer is understood as… intersubjectivity fused in a 'we'" (Aoki, 2005, p. 212). Understanding hermeneutics as an "art of deciphering multiple [and allusive] meaning," philosopher Richard Kearney (2011, p.1) described it as a reflective, interpretive process that discloses concealed messages, by exposing "covered up" or "surplus" meaning. Like Kearney, we "understand hermeneutics as the task of interpreting (*hermeneuein*) plural meaning in response to the polysemy of language and life" (p. 1). Furthermore, we explore how *layering* stories and cultures can, as a critical collaborative and conversational pedagogical and research praxis, disrupt dominant western ideals about children, childcare, and early learning.

Our critical questions focus on how culture and one's life stories impact immigrant educators' understandings of a western ECE post-secondary curriculum. Notably we focus on how the educators compare what they know about early years education, childhood, and childrearing from their own cultures with what they observe and experience in Canadian schools and childcare centers. We ask: What is the role of stories - specifically *layering* stories - in shaping our hermeneutic understanding of cultural differences and the experiences of self and other? How does intercultural "polyphonic" dialogue of "multiple voices" (Depalma, 2010) serve to situate early childhood educators ontologically (individually and collectively) through the process of interpretation and meaning making?

Some educators believe that *erasing* differences and implementing uniformity or likenesses within socio-cultural groups ensures peaceful, agreeable communication and encounters. Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) has emphasized that, "the collision between differing points of view on the

world …are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new 'internal forms' for perceiving the world in words" (p. 360). Equally, failing to invite intercultural dialogue about difference and diversity in ECE settings potentially create barriers, misunderstandings, fear, and conflict. Through relating and layering narratives - the participants' and our own - we "ground" or value the solidified understandings of self and other, thereby acknowledging differences. Aoki explained "diversity not as something fixed but as something living dynamically in relation to other identities and the stories that carry those identities, so that the important space is one in which there can be interplay between those stories (Smits, 2010, p. 16).

Listening to someone speak, we are aware of the visceral embodied performance of self and other giving resonance to diverse interdisciplinary languages and layers of meaning. Cognizant of Aoki's (2005) caution of the dangers of "becoming the language we speak" (p. 23), we incorporate his notion of active becomings — a layering of stories, voices, fragments, and traces which provide possibilities for dissonance and transformation and treat the self as relational and inherently multiple. Interpreting and contextualizing the meanings of written, spoken and visual languages we explore how the life stories of immigrant educators evoke socio-cultural and diverse imaginaries. As we listen to ourselves and others, we are vigilant of the work of language and the histories, narratives, and meanings that it offers up. "[The telling is] not just a record but a filling out … a record that will supplement or supplant other accounts. This possibility suggests a definition of narrative as it functions in the historical and cultural imagination: not just a story but a further story, a missing story" (Wood, 2012, p. 131).

Palimpsest as a Methodological and Collaborative Research Praxis

Over the past years, we have shared many stories with each other about teaching, pedagogy, teacher education, and its relation to the expansive world in which such concepts are intricately entangled. Through our conversations—a spilling of stories—we have come to see that we share a deep commitment to interpretive approaches, that is, an interest in human inquiry, understandings, meanings, subjectivities, and identities as they arise in our interactions with others in the lived world. In our work together, we incorporate the practice of *palimpsest*, as a way to underscore our collaboration and communion in an intensely interpretive and hermeneutic way of knowing and acting in the world. *Palimpsest,* from the Greek palimpsests' means to "scrape off or smooth again." Once a matter of economic and practical necessity, given the scarcity of writing material, *palimpsest* referred to the process in which a piece of parchment containing earlier writing was scraped again in order to allow for new writing and thought. Inherently an incomplete process, the remnants of the earlier notation often remained visible through the new writing. However, this erasure and re-surfacing also had critical political and religious implications for marginalized groups whose cultural beliefs could be effaced and ultimately subverted. From a contemporary perspective, Kaomea (2003) has illustrated the need "to delve beyond surface appearances" (p. 15). Calling on Derrida's notion of *sous rature* (under erasure), Kaomea argued for the "defamiliarizing [of] dominant narratives," as a way to counter colonized and oppressive relations in schools and classrooms.

Our dialogic and recursive approach to writing and thinking together seeks to echo the way our narratives are continually layered next to and upon one another. To retain the phenomenon of the event/experience, we overwrite each other's sections, drawing out new questions and inquiries,

complicating our own and each other's trouble-free descriptions. Accordingly, our process of inscription evokes the fragility of our own knowing and the tentativeness of our conclusions. As the Greek practice of *palimpsest* involved "scraping and smoothing" parchments, we recognize how language opens meanings and creates possibilities for new layers of stories, voices, and understandings to emerge.

Referring to narrative inquiry in human science research, Catherine Kohler Riessman (2008) noted the term *narrative* can refer to various written and visual works that overlap – a layering of "stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive), interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observations (a story about stories), and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant's and investigator's narratives" (p. 6). We recognize "stories can be described not only as narratives that have a sequential and temporal ordering, but also as texts that include some kind of rupture or disturbance in the normal course of events, some kind of unexpected action that provokes a reaction and/or adjustment" (DeFina, cited in Reiessman, 2008, p. 6). Understanding that grand narratives are constructed by overlapping stories, we want to explore how practicing *palimpsest* – layering cultural and life experiences of immigrants – can effectively "scrape" away and even *erase* dominant western narratives.

Early childhood education scholars and researchers have raised important questions about storytelling and early literacy (Bjartveit, 2011; Carr & Lee, 2012; Paley, 1981; Rodari, 1996), race and identity (Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; MacNaughton & Davis, 2009) and diversity and difference (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008; Pacini-Ketchabaw with Nxumalo, 2010). Scholars and educators pursuing these issues reconceptualize the role of storytelling in supporting language learning, opening intercultural polyphonic dialogue and building equitable relationships in ECE settings. We draw on the interpretive and layered theoretical understandings of several scholars (Aoki, 2005; Gadamer, 2004; Kearney, 2002), whose nuanced writing on the critical implications of liminalities, the fluidity of becoming, as well as the political and socio-cultural implications of narratives have assisted our own understandings and interpretations - especially around how the language of immigration, trauma, loss, displacement, as literal experience is manifest and reconstituted through these life stories.

The participants, all immigrants and living in Canada for more than two years, had recently graduated from a Canadian ECE postsecondary program and were working as preschool teachers and daycare workers in various early childhood settings. Utilizing an interpretive narrative approach that included listening to and recording the autobiographical accounts, Carolyn met with each participant on two separate occasions and documented the educators' responses to questions relevant to the lifeworld of school, culture, curriculum, and their immigrant experiences.

At the first meeting, Carolyn offered each participant a copy of artist Shaun Tan's graphic novel *The Arrival* (2006)[ii] – an immigrant's story of arriving in a new land - hoping that it might initiate conversations and elicit questions. Tan's fantastical, yet realistic, images provoked discussion between the researcher and participants as they explored and imagined the in-betweens of past/present, reality/fantasy, race/identity and cultures. Notably, Carolyn did not ask the participants specific questions relating to the illustrations and encouraged them to engage

with and freely interpret the artwork according to their own ideas and experiences. Following Kohler Riessman (2000), we recognize that

> [a]lthough dehumanizing research practices persist, feminists and others in the social sciences have cleared a space for less dominating and more relational modes of interviewing, which reflect (and respect) participants ways of organizing meaning in their lives (DeVault, 1999). We have made efforts to give up power, and follow participants down their associative trails. (pp. 2-3)

In reviewing the transcripts of these interviews, we have come to see how language – written, spoken, visual, and embodied - not only defines but also *reflects* culture (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003) and the self, and expresses it through metaphor. Relaying their auto-biographical stories, the research participants situated themselves between past and present events and, in so doing, each developed "a sense of [their *self*] as a narrative identity" (Kearney, 2002, p. 4). Moreover we noted how the conversation *itself* directed the participants. Carolyn recorded that "[a]s the conversations took hold …we often lost track of the time…as our dialogue transported us to foreign lands, deep into the past and forward to the future" (Field note, April 29, 2012, p. 4). Away from objective research approaches, Carolyn attempted to balance deep listening and observing with ongoing fluid adjustment and redirection, as she recorded in a field note following her interview with research participant, Aiko:

> I felt tension or a kind of wall in-between us. I found myself repeating and rephrasing questions in order to draw out responses … I sensed not only in what she said but in her pauses that Aiko was cautious about what she shared and how she responded to my questions. I doubted that her immigrant experiences were *all* positive as she described them, which points to my own engrained [normative western] assumptions that the immigrant story is one of pain and suffering – the "single" immigrant narrative. (Transcription, May 1, 2012. p. 44)

We argue that no essentializing human universals exist or as Chimamanda Adichie expressed: "The single [immigrant] story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story" (2009, para. 24). Rather than interpreting individual "cases," we read a strong message of hope in the layered meaning of participants' collective stories. Hope is not only something we have as individuals but also it lives out in our encounters in and with humanity. Practicing *palimpsest* erases and subverts western dominant narratives –what we continue to hope for and work toward (Thompson & Zizek, 2013).

In the interviews, the action of uncovering truth [*aletheia*]— the event of concealment and unconcealment— contained in the transcriptions was arduous, time consuming, and demanded patience, empathy, and care. Practicing *palimpsest* required "scraping and smoothing" - reading and re-reading the transcriptions, analyzing the intercultural dialogue, remembering the moment of the encounter and remaining open to possible subverted meanings. We acknowledge *palimpsest* and storytelling as a research methodology that "pushes against the constraints of those traditions … in its explicit recognition of the use of the self as the primary research instrument

for documenting and interpreting the perspectives and experiences of the people and the cultures being studied" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, pp. 13-14).

Away from the objective, pre-determined and static interview methodologies that are sometimes adhered to in educational research, we propose that *storytelling* as an element of narrative can be recognized as a legitimate form of research and classroom praxis. In layering personal narratives, researchers and participants interpreted their experiences and topics through multimodal lan-guages and ultimately constructed new understandings and meanings about self and other (Bjartveit & Panayotidis, in press). Educational researchers from a variety of fields have ex-plored the possibilities inherent in using palimpsest as a metaphor, a theory, or a methodology for reading historiographies and other bodies of literature (Diamond, Arnold, & Wearring, 1997; Huyssen, 2003; Kaomea, 2003; McArdle & Piscitelli, 2002; Powell, 2008; Saunders, 2003). Our contribution to the work on *palimpsest* in education is to highlight the ways in which palimpsest lends itself to a collaborative praxis in interviewing.

Layering Stories of the Self to Understand Identity and Difference

> [E]very life is in search of a narrative…We all seek willy-nilly to introduce some kind of concord into the everyday discord and dispersal we find about us…In our own postmod-ern era of fragmentation …narrative provides us with one of our most viable forms of identity – individual and communal. (Kearney, 2002, p. 4)

Working as a preschool teacher years ago, Carolyn remembers her young students' engagement and interest in stories and storytelling. She recalled when children imagined and told *Stories from the Garden* (Bjartveit, 2011) and masterfully created characters with personality traits to which they related - a mischievous squirrel, a bossy Queen bee and a magical fairy, to name a few. Through imaginary play and dialogue, the children layered their *selves* with the characters and constructed a different sense of identity while "trying on" various roles. One young boy, who against the wishes of his parents wanted to be a fairy, came to a different sense of his own identity by crossing and exploring gender roles. "Self, in other words, is a story that is constantly being rewritten. The writing and rewriting of the narrative which is self is hermeneutical and cyclical in nature… self is a narrative which is constantly reinterpreted and rewritten by oneself" (Kazmi, 1990, pp. 285 - 286).

Remembering how the children layered stories to understand identity and difference, Carolyn related her personal story to *The Arrival*, and envisioned the immigrant experience. Inspired by Tan's visual poetry and the stories that participants told her, Carolyn imagined her grandfather - an immigrant from Germany who arrived in Canada in 1930. By placing a photograph of her ancestor between the pages of the graphic novel and sharing his story with the educators she interviewed, Carolyn adopted the dual roles of researcher and participant. She became more than an empathetic listener and risked becoming *known* – an ontological exercise that involved *opening* herself up to others, exposing and "placing [or laying her/*self*] on the surface" (OED). In layering her story with the accounts of immigrant participants and Tan's story characters, the fragmented pieces of information that Carolyn gathered about her grandfather from family members, record books, official documents, and photo albums pieced together differently and re-created the story of his arrival and adjustments to life in Canada. Embracing the complexity - not

simplifying, reducing or ignoring the layers of multiple stories - uncovered hidden meanings about her identity and others and re-invented the immigrants' experiences. Apart from co-constructing stories through the interpretation of visual, spoken, and written language(s), we believe that layering the self of researchers and participants can develop trust, open conversations, build relationships and exercise "compassionate knowing" (Munro Hendry, 2008, p. 24).

When Carolyn invited the participants to respond to Tan's illustrations[iii], interview questions, and conversations in visual, written and spoken languages, many of them chose to describe their ideas and experiences verbally and/or in written notes. Jin, a music teacher from South Korea, planned to write a song and create a storybook about her immigrant experiences. Others talked about writing poems, or sketching/drawing whereas some participants said they were not "artistically inclined" and preferred to talk about their ideas.

While many of the participants shared initial plans to create visual works, only Sumiko, a participant from Japan, drew a picture to represent her ideas. Identity was a strong thread weaving through Sumiko's story and, following the interview, she gave Carolyn her drawing depicting light and shadow – a metaphor representing how she had lost her identity in Japan and in Canada was trying to discover her/*self* [Figure 1]. In the interviews, Sumiko told Carolyn she was struggling to understand how her culture influences her ideas and who she is. She was wrestling with her identity and wanted to focus on her/*self* rather than on cultural labels – specifically being Japanese. In a field note (April 2, 2012, p. 4), Carolyn described her conversations with Sumiko as deep and painful:

> It is difficult for me to describe in words – the dialogue was rich, intense and raw. I felt like Sumiko wanted to be honest and yet it was a strain at times for her to re-visit her lived experiences and to articulate her thoughts… Her pauses were long and loaded and I included her expressions of "hmmmmm" and "uhhhh" in the transcription – indicators to me of her thoughtful moments and struggle.

Explaining her drawing, Sumiko said that, although the central object does not change, shadows cast from it shift according to the direction and source of light. Notably, the light represents, "environment, people, experiences, and culture" (Transcription, April 25, 2012, p. 91) that influence and transform her identity, similar to the changing shadows in the drawing. When Carolyn invited Sumiko to further explain the metaphor - specifically what changed the direction of the light and influenced her transformation - she responded:

> S: Oh for me [pause] moving – yes. But for me, the dynamics of people around me. [Pause] But I'm still questioning myself that – [Are] they really different from people in Japan? People are people and I know that um there are many individual differences in each single, different person but am I just making an excuse or huh. [Pause] I wasn't able to create my own strong identity – this is what I'm feeling. Why?
> C: In Japan, you mean?
> S: In Japan and even here maybe. I'm asking to myself, *why*? And maybe environment? But it's an excuse and I'm blaming [pause] other people and something – hmmm. I just want to put the blame on something but not on me. It's my responsibility to create my own life. It's no one's responsibility but it's mine. So ... [Pause] yes so why did I let oth-

ers, environments or other factors um change my life or change me, myself? I didn't need to let anything change me but something changes me and uh why is that? I don't know. (Transcription, April 25, 2012, pp. 91-92)
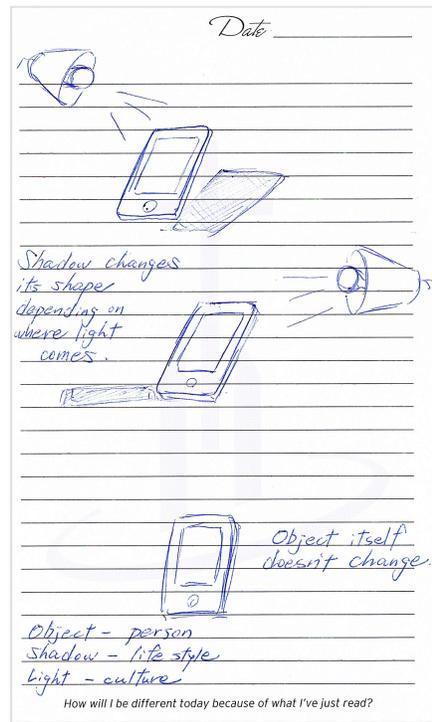

Figure 1: Sumiko's visual description of light and shadow as it relates to her cultural identity.

Bruner noted that "it is through narrative that we create and re-create selfhood, and self is a product of our telling and re-telling. We are… expressions of our culture. Culture is replete with alternative narratives about what self is or might be" (2002, p. 86). Sumiko articulated her own identity crisis by layering and imagining her/*self* as the main male protagonist in Tan's novel [Figure 2]. Tan's drawing of the man struggling to understand a new language made an impression on Sumiko. She said the immigrant character is frustrated about his inability to communicate and about losing his identity. She imagined the man knew who he was in his own country but when he came to the new land he no longer knew him/*self*. When Carolyn asked Sumiko if her experience is similar to the story character's, she said that she lost her identity in Japan and in Canada continues to work out ideas about her/*self* (Field note, April 25, 2012). Sumiko related to the frustration and emotions represented in Tan's drawing:

He's so confused, worried, scared and he is frustrated because he wanted to say something but he was not able to say something. There is a gap between what he wants to say and what he is able to say. And uh he's hopeless, frustrated because of lack of communication. And uh I think this page is the moment that his identity was taken away for the first time and he wants to prove it, he wants to prove his identity but he can't and this is really scary to him 'cause he is losing his identity. (Transcription, April 24, 2012, p. 70)
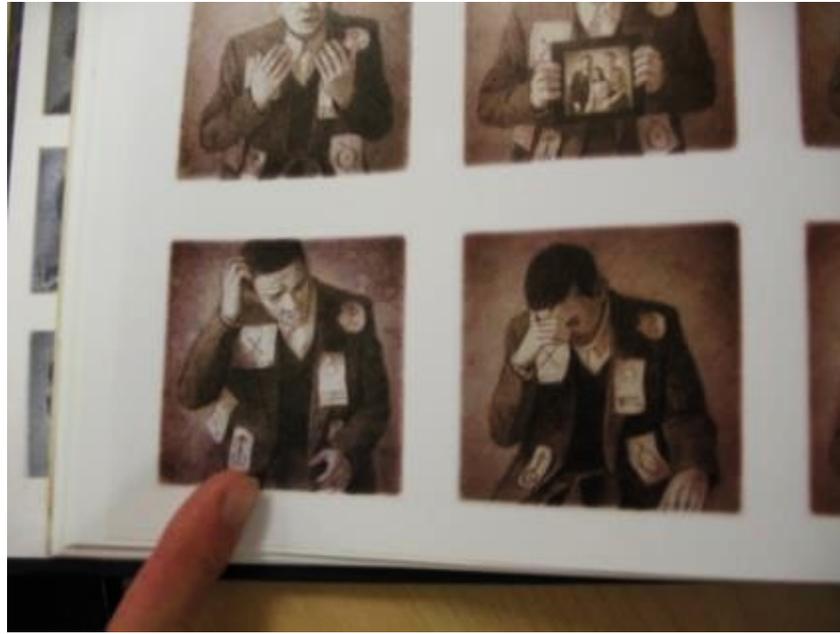
Figure 2: "[H]e sensed that he's losing his own identity, I think. It's really devastating, this is"
        Sumiko (Transcription, April 24, 2012, p. 70).

Apart from Sumiko's drawing, it was evident to us, in reviewing the interview transcriptions, that the visual was calling for *words* – asking or beckoning readers to place written text along-side Tan's illustrations. The *Post-it* notes, many of which were written in point form, described immigrant stories of departure and arrival, family, emotions, adjusting to a new culture and identity [Figure 3].
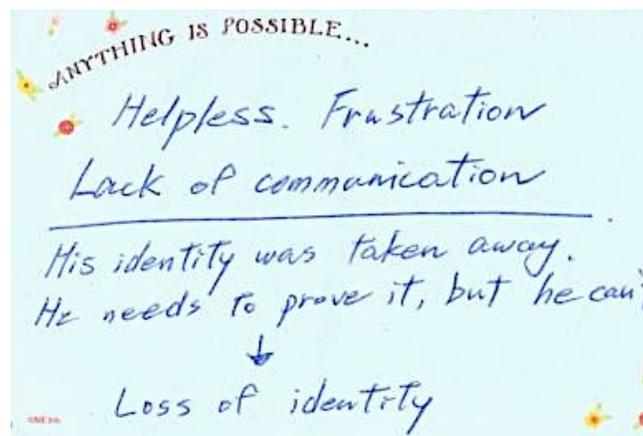

Figure 3: The *Post-it* note Sumiko left on Tan's illustration (see Figure 2) - a trace of her/*self* and
        identity

Shilpy, a research participant from Bangladesh, did *not* relate to the images in *The Arrival* (2006) because she had few lived experiences to relate them to. Shilpy emphasized that Tan's stories might be her mother's or grandmother's. Although their experiences were not hers, they are

inscribed on her – especially the troubling accounts they told her about the War of Independence in Bangladesh during the 1970s. As Shilpy looked at Tan's drawings she said, "I can't explain because I have no language… it's a kind of [a] story I know, telling *something*" (Transcript, May 4, 2012, p. 68). Shilpy verbally articulated her ideas and so we question why she said, "I have *no* language" and seemed lost for words. Derrida (2000) stressed "what [we] don't want to say or cannot, the unsaid, the forbidden, what is passed over in silence, what is separated off... - all these should be interpreted" (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 12).

Figure 4: "And this - it's a kind of story I know, telling *something*" Shilpy (Transcription, May 3, 2012, p. 68).

Shilpy left no *Post-it* notes and expressed anxiety both in what she did and did not say about the illustrations. We believe the layers of visual and embodied languages - her pointing gestures, sighs and silences - were meaning/*ful*.

Having said this, we recognize that the process of *layering* may in itself be driven by western communication ideals and interpretations. This necessitates researchers to be self-aware - conscious of dominant standards and beliefs, and open to immigrants' diverse responses and modes of communication. We vacillate between our own stories and the participants' accounts, recognizing that, in the past, we ourselves have misunderstood others based on wrongful interpretations of the stories they told. After Kearney, we concur that "[t]he key is to let the other be other so that the self may be itself again…[O]ne of the best aids in this task is *narrative understanding*: a working-through of loss and fear by means of cathartic imagination and mindful acknowledgement" (Kearney, 2003, p. 8).

Our literal and philosophical understanding of Tan's title - *The Arrival* - exemplifies how interpretations differ and new meanings arrive in layering spoken, visual, and written stories. *The Arrival* might refer to the immigrant experience of coming to a new land and/or to "the event" – the often-unpredictable coming of truth [*aletheia*]. However, *who* or *what* is arriving or coming? Derrida said *l'avenir* refers to "someone who comes whose arrival is totally unexpected…. it's the coming of the Other when [we are] completely unable to foresee their arrival" (Zeitgeist

Films, 2002, 1:44). We recognize how, in relating to various illustrations and telling their stories, the participants "arrived at" different understandings of self and other and their lived experiences. Ghiso and Low (2013) emphasize that "'arriving' does not imply either an incremental shedding of one cultural identity in favour of another, or a static endpoint. Rather… narratives showcase stories of struggle, loss, excitement and disjuncture, representing, through visual modalities, the nuance and contradiction of claiming transnational identities" (pp. 32-33).

Recognizing, too, that stories remembered are fragmented, we believe that some/*thing* true arrives through layering memories and accounts told in multimodal languages. Jacques Derrida explained his own resistance to storytelling:

> Even when I confide things that are very secret I don't confide them in the mode of a story. At times I provide certain signs, facts, dates but otherwise I don't write a narrative. And so the question for me is the question of narration which has always been a serious question for me. I've always said I can't tell a story. I'd love to tell stories but I don't know how to tell them. And I've always felt that the telling is somewhat inadequate to the story I'd want to tell. So I've given up telling stories. I've just given up. (Zeitgeist Films, 2002, 33:45)

If stories and the storytelling that ensues cannot be accurately told because events are forgotten or misrepresented and words /language misunderstood, we ask: Is it better to remain silent and not tell them at all? Here is where we take a turn from Derrida. In recognizing that stories are incomplete - not actual accounts but interpretations of life experiences - we believe they *must* be told. The value of the "telling" is to come to an understanding about self, other, and events through language which "provides the *Mitte*, the 'medium' or 'middle ground,' the 'place' where understanding…takes place" (Gadamer, 2004, p. xvii). The continuous interplay of verbal, written, embodied, and visual languages - one playing off of the other - fill in missing pieces of narratives and accounts of events. Layering stories told in multiple language modalities provided different meanings and deepened our understanding of the immigrants' life-stories.

Recognizing Difference and Disrupting Dominant Western Narratives in ECE

While interrogating master ECE narratives and questioning "fixed representational forms of identity," we agree with Aoki that "identity-and difference- must always be understood relationally: identities with each other, against a background, in a context of contested meanings and possibilities" (Smits, 2010, p. 16). Per se, what does it mean to recognize difference in culturally diverse ECE settings? Secondly, "how can we articulate an explicitly intercultural ethic of dialogue?" (Ganesh & Holmes, 2013, p. 85). Understanding how to "world" is in itself a multi-*layered* concept and includes learning to be responsible, building relationships with others, negotiating interests, bringing others into our "common worlds" and practicing a "relational ethics" (Taylor & Giugni, 2012, p. 117).

When Carolyn invited participants to read the *Post-it* notes left by others in *The Arrival*, a type of intercultural polyphonic dialogue ensued. Notably, participants spoke "from a fugal space 'in between each other' which is a communal space. They explore[d] an 'interpersonal' reality: a social reality that appears within the poetic image as if it were …aesthetically distanced, held

back, yet historically framed" (Bhabha, 1996, p. 55). The participants' strong interest in reading and writing *Post-it* notes – traces and narratives of the self, related to Tan's illustrations - was in itself note/*worthy*. The participants came together around shared communication – a dialogic context that is not between two selves but uses symbol (the *Post-it* notes) as the other/*self* rather than a person. Reading the notes, participant Tina commented "we are one people in the real world and we feel the same things. We see the same things but we see them *differently*" (Transcription, May 25th, 2012, p. 89). Ultimately this "distanced" polyphonic dialogue interrupted the notion of a stereotypical "single" (Adichie, 2009) or universal immigrant story and pointed to the participants' unique and individual life experiences.

Now working as preschool teachers and childcare providers in Canadian ECE settings, immigrant participants observed and described childrearing and childcare practices that were different from their own. Participant Jin watched a caregiver at a daycare reprimand an African child, a new arrival in Canada, for using her fingers to eat rice. Jin commented that if the childcare provider had recognized and considered cultural differences, she might have allowed the child opportunities to learn about spoon feeding practices in western culture. Instead, Jin recalled hearing the caregiver comment to her co-worker: "Oh their family doesn't know how to use a fork and knives yet and she just grab the food like this – all over. She make a mess" (Transcription, April 14, 2012, p. 38). Tina was likewise troubled when she observed wastefulness and an excess of food and materials in the daycare where she works: "I would see lots of paper, recycled paper…everything was just too much! Like full of toys, full of paper, full of food – they'd throw it away and…where I was coming from and the schools I was coming from [in Zimbabwe] we grew up being resourceful" (Transcription, May 25, 2012, p. 49). Reading the participants' accounts, we wonder how layering cultural ideas and understandings through dialogue might have created different outcomes to these experiences.

Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw (2010) questions how "forces and intensities" that come together in dialogic encounters – when layers of life stories and cultures bump up against each other- might "be rearranged to create new movements and new arrangements… [And] slow down the forces that create binaries and centralisms and take them somewhere else where different arrangements would be intensified" (Lenz Taguchi, as cited in Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010, p. 145). This requires educators to remain open to transcultural and contextual interpretations of language and narratives. Diversity and difference should not be "interpreted as a technical problem to be fixed by our scientific gaze", we recognize its critical importance in opening dialogue and coming to a "greater and deeper understanding" about self and other (Panayotidis, 2011, p. 58).

Early childhood educators might also attempt to create spaces and opportunities for meaningful conversations and encounters to take place, so that relationships and communities can grow. While working as a preschool teacher, Carolyn created a comfortable and welcoming space in the school for families to meet prior to and after program hours. As months passed, she noticed how the parents increasingly utilized the space and lingered there to talk, share ideas, and spend time together. Carolyn specifically recalls how a family that had recently immigrated to Canada from Romania, established meaningful connections and friendships with other parents and children at the preschool.

Educator Maxine Greene (1995) explained that "[d]emocracy… means a community that is always in the making. Marked by an emerging solidarity, a sharing of certain beliefs, and a dialogue about others, it must remain open to newcomers, those too long thrust aside" (p. 39). We stress that further time and opportunities for dialogue are essential – children, parents, community members and educators should be invited to contribute and layer their diverse ideas on an on-going basis. We believe that inviting transcultural dialogue and building relationships in early childhood settings at all levels might serve to problematize dominant western early childhood discourses and connect educators, children and families in vital ways. It can potentially "world" a community and the curriculum, and create a pedagogical philosophy that acknowledges difference, diversity, and individuality.

Conclusion

> [W]e are surrounded by layers of voices…certain voices became silent and, hesitating to reveal themselves, conceal themselves. Let us beckon these voices to speak to us, particularly the silent ones, so that we may awaken to the truer sense of teaching [and learning] that likely stirs within each of us. Before we visit the place where the silent voices dwell, let us try to uncover layer by layer…- from the surface to the place where teaching [and learning] truly *dwells*. (Aoki, 2005, p. 188)

In weaving together multiple layered narratives and our ideas about storytelling as classroom and research praxis, we hope to forge a deeper understanding of how the stories we tell can often depend on the people we are and want to be. Such interrelations suggest to us that stories told and listened to are the wellsprings of life. While examining the always convoluted intersections between the self and the intercultural polyphonic dialogue and language that it may prompt, we seek to understand more fully Aoki's (2005) "zone of between" which serves to situate students and educators ontologically through the course of interpretation. We are, however, mindful of how what we speak, write, and create can reproduce worlds, understandings, assumptions, critiques, and possibly lead to colonialized or postcolonialized identities and subjectivities. We are critically attuned to the difficult and perplexing moments in teaching and learning alongside our students - whether young children and youth in schools or adult learners in the post-secondary teacher education classroom. It is those difficult moments that unsettle us, cause us to worry, to wonder, and to reconsider what we thought we knew and perhaps importantly how we came to know. Difficult moments are palpable, deeply residing in our bodies and producing uneasiness and discomfort. Yet, as Ann Reynolds noted evocatively, "discomfort may be our only motivation to look harder at the agendas of pedagogical institutions and their devices, no matter how subtle. An assumption of universal appeal always masks a much more considered selectivity" (1995, p. 109). Within this discomfort lies the possibility for critical teaching, a commitment to a rich curricula and inquiry-based teaching practice, which is apophatic; seeking to speak, write, and imagine the unspeakable and the unsaid.

We argue for transcription (recording, writing, and interpreting) as a methodological practice of deep listening that incorporates all of the researchers' senses and recognizes the rich and multiple modes of communication and language interpretations. As such, the notion of layering language, stories, and cultural understandings are interlaced through theoretical, methodological, and visual lenses. In interrupting interview protocols, we hope to further explore research practices that

include layering stories told in multimodal language(s), and cultural understandings that point to "a process of deep examination and penetration: an inquiry that is designed to uncover layers of mask and inhibition; a search for authenticity that is rich, ranging, and revelatory" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 139). Language *itself* in its multiple modalities, layered with narratives, histories, and cultures potentially change our conceptions of relationality. In practicing *palimpsest* - layering stories, including the participants and our own – and disrupting dominant western ECE narratives, we encountered "layered voices" (Aoki, 2005) that pointed us to different understandings about the "immigrant experience," the connections between the self and other and what it means for culturally diverse teachers and students to live together in an always complex world.

Bios

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[i] Although some western researchers argue in favor of parents co-sleeping with infants, the prevailing western dominant discourse remains – babies should not sleep in adult beds. McKenna and McDade (2005) note that "there are many good reasons to insist that the definitions of different types of co-sleeping and bedsharing be recognized and distinguished…co-sleeping at the least in the form of roomsharing especially with an actively breast feeding mother saves lives, is a powerful reason why the simplistic scientifically inaccurate and misleading statement 'never sleep with your baby' needs to be rescinded, wherever it is published' (p. 134).

[ii] We would like to thank Shaun Tan and Lothian Books / Hachette Australia for permission to reproduce images from *The Arrival* (2006). Some reviewers have suggested that Tan's work exhibits and perhaps glorifies the complexities of immigration, creating a heroic 'single' story or liberal multicultural discourse of success. In a personal e-mail written to Carolyn, Tan wrote that he was intentional in this approach. He noted: "I … hope that my book adds a sense of narrative coherence to memories of real experience, that it in some way elevates the migrant experience beyond a set of day-to-day chaotic problems, and that it can be seen as something profound and even heroic" (personal correspondence, 07/01/2013). Furthermore, New York Times critique, Gene Luen Yang (2007) described how Tan's graphic depictions fit the universal narrative of the immigrant's arrival in America: "[The protagonist] sets up residence in a city that…resembles New York's historically ethnic neighborhoods. By borrowing American imagery to communicate an otherwise universal story, Tan highlights just how central the immigrant experience is to the way America defines itself".

[iii] In a forthcoming paper (Bjartveit & Panayotidis) we expand more fully on how the research participants translated their immigrant experiences through imagining and interpreting illustrations in Shaun Tan's (2006) graphic novel, The Arrival.