

# Examining Students' Experiences as a Foundation for Multicultural Curriculum Development

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CANADA IS BECOMING increasingly diverse through immigration and the birth of children into immigrant families (Statistics Canada, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008). This cultural pluralism is also reflected in school communities. Thus, there is a related growing requisite for issues of educational quality to be defined according to notions pertaining to multicultural education in order for educators to identify and to develop innovative ways of meeting the needs of diverse classroom populations. Moreover, there is a progressive need for pre-service and in-service educators to learn about effective ways of working with English Language Learners (ELLs) to support their rapid integration into mainstream classrooms (Janzen, 2008). This practice would be in line with the recent move in the field of English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction toward integrating ELLs into mainstream classes earlier as a means of engaging students in content area instruction, which might challenge students toward higher levels of English language proficiency (Janzen, 2008).

In this article, we discuss the findings of a narrative inquiry into the development of a classroom-based experiential and multicultural curriculum in the context of an urban, public, and culturally diverse comprehensive elementary and middle school located in Toronto, Canada. In particular, we present the implementation of curriculum activities that drew upon students' lived stories of culture, immigration, and settlement to explore the social and linguistic impact of such activities for ELLs. We highlight via the findings of our qualitative study into diverse learners' educational experiences the formation of a multicultural curriculum that intermingles academic objectives for Language Arts and ELL lessons with curricular goals toward education for diversity. We further illustrate how students' own stories of schooling, culture, and cross-cultural movement have the potential to expand possibilities for teacher preparation and development for engaging in curricular situations and interactions with diverse student populations as a means of cultivating hopeful imaginings of multicultural education.

While statistics exhibit growth in the areas of culturally diverse populations, and thereby increasingly diverse student populations, across Canada, such information does not delve into the pragmatic interactions of multicultural education in school contexts. Using the integrated education of ELLs within a highly culturally diverse school and classroom as one lens for examining the multiple facets extant within the concept of multicultural education, we explore students' narratives of multicultural curricular experiences. We aim to breathe life into statistical information by gaining insight into what it means to learn, teach, and live in culturally diverse societies. In this way, we move beyond societal constructions to highlight stories of hope and hopeful possibilities for students from multicultural backgrounds. Although this inquiry is contextualized within Canada, it is anticipated that the findings might be applicable in other countries with diverse populations, such as the United States.

### **Relevant Literature**

Existing research on immigration patterns and policies (Dentler & Hafner, 1997; Moodley, 1995), acculturation and enculturation (Brown, 1994; Herskovits, 1958; Schumann, 1978), voluntary and involuntary immigrants (Ogbu, 1978), bilingual education (Cummins, 1989, 1996, 2000, 2001; Ovando & McLaren, 2000), multicultural literacy (Courts, 1997; Well, 1998; Willis, Garcia, Barrera, & Harris, 2003); race, gender, and class issues (Grant & Sleeter, 1986), and student voice (Cook–Sather, 2002; Pekrul & Levin, 2006) contributes to a theoretical understanding of the socio–political and cultural context of the education of immigrant students. Within this wide array of literature on immigrant and minority background students, there is a dearth of qualitative studies that looks at schools and schooling experiences as lived by students. In this study, we collected students' stories of culture and schooling as a means of exploring ways in which students of diverse ethnic backgrounds interact with one another in a school context and see themselves fitting into their school community. We worked with the students' teacher in order to draw upon the students' lived cultural and curricular stories as resources for the development of ELL and English Language Arts curricula.

### **Research Objectives**

In this inquiry, we specifically set out to explore the use of students' stories of experience with diversity in creating a personalized multicultural curriculum. To this end, our research objectives were to: examine students' interactions with peers and their teacher inside and outside of the classroom on a culturally diverse school landscape; analyze students' voice, as expressed through their narratives of cultural heritage and/ or immigration and settlement within a diverse school setting; and create ways to employ students' stories as a means of covering and expanding the existing curriculum. Within our inquiry, we aimed to identify a group of students' stories of their cultural backgrounds and/ or their experiences with immigration and settlement at the intersection of their schooling within a multicultural educational context. We further intended to draw upon these students' personalized stories of cultures, cultural identities, and their lived scenarios of diversity within a culturally pluralistic school as a foundation for developing a culturally and academically relevant curriculum that might open up new possibilities for students in diverse communities.

## Research Questions

We formulated three overarching research questions to use as a framework for inquiring into students' experiences with culture and the curriculum. As such, the following research questions guided us toward the development of an experiential multicultural curriculum: 1) In what ways do students from underrepresented backgrounds express themselves culturally via interactions with their peers and their teachers in a diverse school context? 2) How do students in ethnically varied schools relate to each other from a cultural perspective? 3) What opportunities may exist in a middle school classroom for the integration of teaching and learning objectives with goals for multicultural education?

## Theoretical Framework

This investigation into students' experiences was founded on the theories of Connelly and Clandinin's (1994, 2000) narrative research tradition. Narrative inquiry provided us with necessary scaffolding with which to inquire into the situations and interactions of students' experiences, particularly as they unfold on school landscapes. In addition, in conducting and analyzing the findings of this qualitative study, we made use of several theoretical resources in association with the general notions of experience and diversity.

### Experience

Following Dewey's (1938) theory of the interconnectedness between experience and education, we based our study on the notion of experience as the encapsulation of the curriculum that is lived out in schools. We used students' "stories of experience" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) as data, as well as for the establishment of a multicultural curriculum, concentrating on Schwab's (1969, 1971, 1973, 1983) categorization of curricular situations according to the commonplaces of the teacher, the learner, the subject matter, and the milieu. Furthermore, we employed a narrative inquiry approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 2000) to explore the interaction of curriculum and diversity in a multicultural school context. This framework provided us with a structure for addressing and deliberating over the temporal, social–personal, and contextual aspects of students' experiential stories.

### Diversity

Multiculturalism is defined as the most significant current societal issue of the epoch (Kalantzis & Cope, 1992), affecting education more greatly than any other field (Phillion, He, & Connelly, 2005). Since this study is set within the context of diversity and education in Canada, it was significant for our inquiry to broadly consult with work that outlines diversity and education from a Canadian educational vantage. The heritages of Canadian people are overseen by the Multiculturalism Policy of 1971 and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988 (Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2005). In addition, a recent report on school safety advocates for the inclusion of diversity across curricula as a means of promoting safe and healthy school environments for Canadian students (School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2008).

While the Canadian government has taken measures to ensure that the languages and cultures of all Canadians are protected, there might be less unity in terms of how the

Multiculturalism Policy and Multiculturalism Act translate across all schools and amongst all regions of the country. In fact, descriptions of Canadian education include acknowledgement of regional differences. Chambers (2003) states that Canada is “A vast territory with many regions, innumerable groups (with different traditions), and relentless (and competing) stories in a seemingly infinite number of languages— these are the challenges that face curriculum and curriculum scholarship today” (p. 221). Therefore, work on multicultural education in Canada may be both representative of and unique to curricular situations and interactions in that country.

Although multiculturalism plays a strong role in schooling across Canada, there was a need within our inquiry to draw a narrow lens in order to contextualize our study of individualized multicultural curriculum formation within one school in Canada, which further embeds the values and goals of one community within one school board of a Canadian city. Portraits of the Canadian population portray much diversity (Statistics Canada, 2003a, 2003b, 2008) and Toronto, Ontario, the regional context for this inquiry, is recognized as one of the most culturally, linguistically, and ethnically varied cities in the world (Statistics Canada, 2002a, 2002b, 2003a). Additionally, the research site for this study is a project school known for its diversity, located in a neighborhood that is historically recognized as a settlement area for recent immigrants (Connelly, Phillion, & He, 2003).

Therefore, our inquiry into the use of students' stories of experience to inform classroom curriculum development also necessarily includes curricular concerns related to cultural sensitivity (Cummins, 1996; Igoa, 1995; Kouritzin, 1999; Nieto, 2000; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Wong-Fillmore, 1991a, 1991b) and cultural relevance (Banks & McGee Banks, 1995, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2001; Page, 1998). Our investigation was further informed by research that addresses the role of curriculum in multicultural education and diversity in schools (Carlson, 1995; Cornbleth, 1995; Cummins et al., 2005; Ross & Chan, 2008; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005). This work was also influenced by the literature on the curricular impact of cross-cultural movement (He, 2003; Schlein, 2010).

## Methodology

Over the course of this inquiry, we worked with 30 seventh grade students and their homeroom teacher, William, at a diverse K–8 school. During one academic year, we participated in William's classroom, assisting with lessons and attending school field trips. In addition, William consulted with us to create coordinated oral and written tasks for the students as classroom activities to engage them in discussion about their families' stories of immigration and settlement. We recorded detailed field notes following each school observation visit.

We further conducted informal interviews with the students in groups of three or four on five occasions. Each interview took place during regular school hours in the work area outside their classroom or in the school library. We developed the interview questions in consultation with William and the school principal. We wrote extensive field notes following each interview.

Upon completion of the transcription phase of the data collection, we worked with William to amalgamate portions of the students' written stories and excerpts of their transcribed oral stories about their cultural backgrounds and their experiences of immigration and settlement into a class yearbook. We then distributed the class yearbook, which was comprised of the students' stories, photographs that the students had selected from family albums, as well as those that we had taken during class field trips and pictures that the students had drawn. After the

initial period of data collection, we reviewed our field notes and the interview transcriptions several times to identify general themes among the data. We maintained contact with the students and their teacher throughout the process of analyzing the field texts and writing research texts of the findings of our study in order to seek clarification from our participants. We also accepted William's invitation to return to the class to attend special activities with the students.

#### Data Analysis and Discussion: Personalized Multicultural Curriculum

A central focus of our work with the students in William's classroom was to engage them in discussion on and reflection upon issues of diversity. Specifically, our primary concentration within this investigation was to explore students' experiences related to their cultural backgrounds and identities. We wanted to gain insight into ways in which students from an array of different cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds interact with one another in a school setting in order to draw upon students' lived individual and cultural experiences as a means of building a personalized multicultural curriculum. As a result of our study, we were able to work together with William to access and draw upon students' stories related to their cultures for class activities. Together with William, we further explored and made use of recently immigrated and first generation Canadian students' experiential narratives concerning their immigration and settlement into their school and their local community to develop a curriculum that combined teaching methods and practices to target learning outcomes for the literacy and language development of ELL and mainstream English-speaking students with learning outcomes for multicultural education. In the process, we investigated the realization of multiculturalism, while contributing to an enhanced understanding of the experience of cultural diversity within and between cultural groups in a school context.

#### **Learning About Students' Experience of Schooling Through Their Stories of Culture, Identity, and Language**

We present here stories told to us by the students to illustrate the rich potential for cultural knowledge that students from a variety of backgrounds may contribute to classroom curricula and to the preparation and development of educators for professional practice among diverse learners. We begin with a discussion of the cultural knowledge we gained through examination of students' experiences of culture within their school. We follow with an examination of the findings of our study in terms of the curricular implications of working with students' stories. In the following interview transcription excerpt, Henry, an ELL, illuminates some of the nuances of diversity that may exist within certain cultural groups, as well as some of the possible culturally related difficulties that students may experience in multicultural schools.

Elaine: Did you think it was scary to go to class when you first came to Canada?

Henry: Yeah, because everybody talked Mandarin and I didn't.

Candace: You don't speak Mandarin?

Henry: But now I do.

Elaine: What did you speak?

Henry: Cantonese and Spanish.

Elaine: When you first came, you spoke Cantonese, but you didn't speak Mandarin. But all the other Chinese students spoke Mandarin? Did you talk to them in Cantonese, your language?

Henry: I never talked a single word. I didn't know their language. I don't understand them while talking to me. They won't answer.

Candace: But were you speaking in Cantonese?

Henry: Yeah.

Elaine: Did they try to talk to you?

Henry: Some friends speak Cantonese. They speak with me. And Fujianese.

Elaine: Do you speak Fujianese too?

Henry: I want to try to learn Fujianese.

Candace: Is Fujianese very different from Mandarin?

Henry: Yeah. A lot.

Henry highlights in the story above the cultural multiplicity that may exist within an ethnic group. An example of the application of the notion of diversity within and between cultural groups is the label *Chinese*. At the research school, a majority of the students come from a Chinese background. However, it would be a fruitless endeavor for teachers at the school to create a curriculum or attempt to meet their students' academic, social, or personal needs based on an assumption of the similarity of the needs, interests, or experiences among their Chinese students. Instead, Henry's story illustrates the importance of teachers taking into consideration cultural factors that may supersede superficial cultural categories. For instance, the story above exemplifies how William, Henry's teacher, in planning culturally relevant lessons for Henry, may need to consider whether he is a first- or second-generation Chinese-Canadian, whether he is an ESL student or a mainstream ELL, as well as if he is a native speaker of Cantonese, Mandarin, Fujianese, or another Chinese dialect.

Henry's story also addresses the significance of teachers attending to the tacit and explicit features of the experiences of their students from a cultural vantage as a means of comprehending some of the factors which may underlie both their academic and their social curricular situations and interactions. Henry depicts how linguistic diversity can pose a challenge for some students, even within their own cultural groups. Henry's Cantonese-speaking family is from southern China, and he discusses needing to learn Mandarin to communicate with his other Chinese classmates. Learning Mandarin, English, and potentially also Fujianese, was an important social goal for Henry so that he could interact with his Chinese peers in Canada. The ability to communicate with non-Chinese classmates was also a crucial academic goal.

As we interacted with students in William's class over the course of the study, we collected stories from the students about their experiences regarding immigration, schooling in Canada and in their home countries, maternal language use, studying English, peer relations, and settlement into their school and the surrounding neighborhood. Like Henry, some of the students were part of an enriched ESL program, whereby they participated in regular English-medium lessons for a portion of the school day as a step toward full integration into mainstream classes. One day, John and some of his classmates from the ESL program were late coming to William's class. We went to the ESL classroom with a list of the names of the students for whom we were searching. The ESL teacher looked at the list and stated that she did not have a student named John. We asked John about this when we saw him later that day.

Candace: Say your name first.

John: John.

Candace: John. Okay.

John: Tony. Sometimes John, sometimes Tony.

Elaine: You change your name sometimes? Why do you change your name?

John: Sometimes you don't like that name, then you change it.

Candace: Do you change your Chinese name too?

John: No, not that.

Candace: Why not?

John: Chinese names you cannot change.

Elaine: But you can change English names?

John: Yeah.

John's statement in the interview transcription excerpt above suggests that his family's immigration to Canada may also be accompanied by a shift in the way he sees himself, and a growing awareness of ways in which participation in his school in Canada may present different expectations than those he understood to be important in his former school in China or within the Chinese community outside of the school context. While we had come to know this student as John over a period of several months, we were surprised to learn that in his regular ESL classroom, he often switched between John and Tony, after having previously discarded several other English names. Some language teachers may encourage students to adopt a typical name for the language of study, primarily as a means of facilitating elements of grammar or pronunciation, but this practice is not common in contemporary ESL classes, especially in the context of recently immigrated students in North America. Although John's ESL teacher did not force John to select an English name, and some of his classmates had decided to retain their original names, John perceived his adoption of an English name as connected to his efforts at learning English and his integration into his new school and new community in Canada. John's story above touches upon some interesting beliefs about names, identities, and cultures, in that John recognized that his Chinese name could not be changed while his frequent changes to his English name suggest some of the transformations in cultural and identity formation that students who have recently immigrated may experience as they adapt to Canadian schools.

Our student participants also informed us about possible obstacles that they have encountered in the pursuit of academic success. While the research school site has many resources for helping newcomer students to learn English as a means of integrating them into mainstream classes and preparing them for full participation in Canadian society, for various reasons many students remain in ESL classes throughout their stays at the school. In the following story, Sam, a first-generation Chinese Canadian, describes his experiences with learning English upon his arrival to Canada.

Sam: At the time there wasn't any school to go, so then I went with everybody go to library and find some books to, like, try to read it.

Elaine: So you read English books and Chinese books?

Sam: Yeah...Oh, then, there was like activities in the library, then I joined, and I...but I still didn't know English, so then I went to this school. I was in the Reception Class when I came so then I learned a bit then. I was too good to be in Reception class.

Candace: How long were you there? How long were you in the Reception class for?

Sam: Ah...from September to December.

Sam arrived in Canada during the summer, and he wanted to begin to learn English before he started school. For this reason, he frequented the local library and taught himself English by reading English books and through participation in various activities at the library. Sam's story displays that creativity and a high level of motivation were key factors in aiding him to learn English. In turn, his efforts paid off, since he was quickly moved out of the ESL Reception class and placed into a program for partial mainstream class integration after only four months of schooling in Canada. Sam's story illustrates the strong desire that some newcomer students may have to learn the majority language of their new host country so that they are able to fully participate in their schooling and in their communities. Sam shows how students may benefit by seeking innovative ways to supplement their educational experiences through community interaction and immersion in majority language contexts.

Moreover, Sam's ELL classmate, Marnie, spoke to us about challenges she encountered in fitting in with same-aged peers and within her new community in Canada. As an ELL, she saw herself as an outsider in her Canadian school. Marnie related to us how she felt that her time in the intensive ESL program has served to segregate her from her Canadian peers and to prevent her from learning more about the English language and Canadian culture. For this reason, she expressed to us her hope that her eventual move from the intensive ESL program to full integration into a regular homeroom classroom with same-aged peers would provide opportunities to socialize with non-ELLs in the school and thereby adapt more fully into the school community.

As we conducted our research, we collected stories from the students about their experiences regarding immigration, schooling in Canada and in their home countries, maternal language use, studying ESL, peer relations, and settlement into their school and the surrounding neighborhood. We came to realize the potential of the students' stories of immigration and settlement as a foundation for developing culturally and academically relevant curriculum for students from diverse backgrounds. We also recognized the possibilities of student narratives as a resource for teacher preparation and development with respect to the creation and fostering of culturally sensitive curricula for practice in multicultural schools and communities.

Within our study, sharing stories of schooling experiences regarding such issues as cultures, identities, and languages gave students the opportunity to learn about cultures and communities, as well as about the experiences of students from a variety of backgrounds and a diversity of situations to which they would not otherwise have had access. Our informal interviews with the students within our study also seemed to engage the students in thinking about sharing their knowledge and interests in their home cultures. For example, students began to bring pictures of their home countries to show us and to approach us with stories about their cultural traditions outside of the designated time for our work on their cultural backgrounds and/or their immigration and settlement stories.

In encouraging the students to share their experiences and by acknowledging students' stories as a contribution to knowledge about their home cultures and schooling in their birth countries, their Canadian teachers and classmates were giving voice to the immigrant and minority background students. In turn, the sharing of these stories of experience enabled the students to become cognizant of the power of their own voices, as their stories were utilized as knowledge for classroom activities. The students' teacher, William, also came to perceive this form of experiential knowledge as valuable and worthy of inclusion in the curriculum. We see this attention to students' stories of culture in shaping the curriculum as an important step toward creating hopeful school environments, whereby the focus is on academic and social possibilities

and curricular enrichment through students' experiences of culture rather than the use of a deficit model for interacting with students from underrepresented cultural and language backgrounds.

Furthermore, it became apparent over the course of our inquiry that engaging with students in experiential storytelling yielded advances in the group of ELLs' skills in English. We recognized throughout the school year the increasing willingness of newcomer second language students to communicate with their English-speaking peers at length about their lives before and after coming to Canada, despite the fact that they had previously seen themselves as outsiders in their school due to their inability to speak fluent English. Additionally, the curricular consequence of our conversations with the students came to the forefront in working with their homeroom teacher to extract the rich details from the students' stories in order to identify ways of building on the content to improve their language development.

The stories that we discuss in this article provide examples of insights that may be gained about ways in which students may interact with one another on a culturally diverse school landscape, and into the cultural nuances that may exist among students as they attend to their own experiential stories. At the same time, as we collected stories, such as those which we explore above, we worked with the students and the teacher toward developing a personalized multicultural curriculum. We aimed to integrate the students' stories into the study of ESL and English Language Arts through various written and oral classroom assignments and the final class yearbook project. This process also became a means of exploring methods and practices for ameliorating the quality of education for diverse student populations. As we began to conduct this study, William suggested that we omit the group of ELLs who participate in his class on a part-time basis. He informed us that they were quiet children who did not speak much in English. Their ESL teacher also expressed her surprise when we told her that we were interviewing some of her students, since she did not believe that they possessed the necessary language skills to carry out sustained conversations in English. It is therefore significant to recognize that the stories that we highlight and discuss in this article are the words and experiences of some of the students from that group of ELLs. Their stories exemplify the manner in which the students' participation in the creation of an oral and written personalized multicultural curriculum within our study pushed them to improve academically in the area of English language study, possibly because of their sense of ownership of lessons that valued and incorporated their heritages and their individual experiences.

At the same time, the process of learning about the students' stories of immigration and settlement within this study also highlighted aspects in need of further attention for educators working in school contexts where students are interacting with individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds. For example, it was puzzling to us that when one student brought in a book about her home country after a conversation about her culture and her initial experiences of coming to Canada, her peers made fun of her. On another occasion, it was interesting to hear that although some of the students indicated that they enjoyed learning about their peers' cultures and traditions, they expressed that they were reluctant to speak about their own home cultures.

Furthermore, the research school context is one where diversity seems to be celebrated among teachers and parents, where learning about diversity of cultures and languages is integrated into the regular school curriculum, and where the use of a variety of languages and references to cultural practices are a part of ongoing conversations among members of the school community. We had initially believed that this kind of exposure to diverse cultures and languages would contribute to an interest in learning about other cultures and an interest in sharing cultural knowledge. This situation engaged us in reflection about the long-term effects of

our work with the students, and whether they might have been more greatly impacted if we had continued our work with the students and their teachers across more subject areas or over a longer period of time. These are questions that remain to be explored in our future research with students.

### **Educational Significance**

While we focus in this paper on a few examples of students' stories of cultures and identities, within our study we were able to gain a wealth of knowledge from many students about cultures and the interaction of youth between and among members of different ethnic groups by listening to their stories. Moreover, the students' teacher, William, assessed that the use of students' stories served to increase the motivation of several students in the class, while also offering an opportunity to improve the literacy skills of many of his students. While such general results were reached across the board, we became aware that the most academic progress in the area of language skills seemed to occur within the group of ELLs, who were recent immigrants to Canada, since they expanded their respective levels of abilities in oral and written English in order to have their stories heard within the personalized form of multicultural curricular activities developed within this research.

The use of students' stories as the base for multicultural curriculum development is rich in possibilities for improving the quality of education in multicultural contexts. While this curriculum is not new, it remains under-developed as a means of engaging culturally and linguistically diverse students in the school curriculum. Also under-developed are ways in which this culturally engaging curriculum may be designed and implemented, and understanding about the potential benefits and challenges of doing so. For this reason, we encourage teachers to make use of their students' stories for improving students' literacy skills, for learning about pupils' family histories, and for multi-disciplinary curricular activities, such as lessons in Geography and Social Studies classes. We further see the potential of such stories for disseminating information to students and their teachers about various cultures, which may in turn lead to improved cross-cultural understanding and cross-cultural relationships within school communities.

This work offers a glimpse of some of the complexities of curriculum development for a diverse student population. This study was set in a Canadian context where practices and policies guiding schooling are undoubtedly shaped by circumstances unique to this particular school community. Yet some of the nuances of challenges experienced by teachers and students featured here may offer insight into circumstances and experiences of teachers and students in other countries, where student communities are also becoming increasingly diverse, such as in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2005, 2007, 2008).

The findings of our investigation suggest that the use of students' narratives as a form of multicultural curriculum is a culturally relevant means of curricular interaction and an academically appropriate way to support the development of literacy and language skills, especially among second language learners. This knowledge may inform teacher development for work in diverse schools and for engaging in practice with ELLs in mainstream classroom settings. Consequently, knowledge gained from this study contributes to research in the areas of multiculturalism, literacy, ESL education, teaching, teacher development, and teacher education.

In addition, this study contributes to the body of qualitative and experiential literature in the field of education. There is a paucity of qualitative studies in education from the vantages of students, and even fewer investigations focus on the benefits of the employment of diverse learners' experiences as a foundation for multicultural curriculum development. Schlein and Chan (2010) address how, despite the abundance of studies that advocate for the inclusion of culture in school curricula, there remains little research focusing on the lived experiences of students from underrepresented cultural backgrounds. Their examination of the experiences of a Muslim student and her mother in a secular public school in Toronto, Canada may be considered an example of "multicultural education in action," in that it contributes to research highlighting the complex situations and interactions that religiously, culturally, and ethnically underrepresented students, their families, teachers, and school administrators may encounter in the process of schooling. This paper may be considered another example of "multicultural education in action" in that it addresses nuances and challenges teachers of ELLs may encounter in the process of drawing upon the experiences of their students of diverse backgrounds as a means of informing the development of a culturally relevant curriculum.

This inquiry is significant, because we demonstrate how providing students with opportunities to share their narratives within their regular school curriculum has the potential to enhance teachers' and researchers' understanding of the schooling experiences of immigrant and minority students. Thus, this represents a way to acknowledge and draw upon students' cultural knowledge as a curriculum resource. Moreover, we underscore the potential of multicultural student narratives for inciting in teachers imaginative possibilities for developing multicultural education that inspires academic and social hope within children from diverse backgrounds.

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