

In the Midst of Participatory Action Research Practices: Moving towards Decolonizing and Decolonial Praxis

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Abstract

Where disenfranchised groups such as women, immigrants and people of color more generally were either excluded from the academy or not thought to have important 'stories' to tell, several qualitative methodologies now value these voices, in large measure because disenfranchised research participants have an understanding in their bodies of what it means to be exposed to patriarchy, racism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, xenophobia and other complex forms of oppression (Gitlin, 2007, p.1).

Advocates of participatory action research agree that the impetus of this method is to attempt to restructure power relations in the research process, to honour the knowledge and strengths with/in/of diverse communities, and to challenge the dynamics of inequalities by furthering the struggle for social justice (Saba Waheed, Nguyen Ly-Huong, Anna Couey, 2005). But how can decolonization support participatory action research?

This paper will explore the ethical, social and epistemological assumptions and values informing participatory action research from the perspective of decolonization of methodologies (Battiste, 2001; Smith, 1999; Tandon, 1981; Sandoval, 2000; González y González, & Lincoln, 2006; Sikes, 2006). From this perspective, this research attempts to uncover the hegemony of modernism, monolingualism, eurocentrism and colonialism that continues to be prevalent even in many liberatory participatory action research projects. Through its form and content, this work, with its focus on a decolonial praxis as employed in the researchers' present projects, will attempt to create a deeper awareness toward the need for decolonizing and decolonial participatory action research work.

The authors share their personal research experiences in an attempt to highlight some of the ambiguities and tensions in their current work as well as the emerging questions, learnings, and

research dilemmas for their future community co-created research. In the spirit of decolonization and decolonial praxis, each of the counter-hegemonic narratives below acknowledges the importance of our participating communities as significant theorists informing the research along with the theorists of the academy. In addition, the authors acknowledge the importance of personal voices/narratives and subjective standpoints in the process of decolonizing monolithic dominant academic writing (Morega & Anzaldúa, 1983; Anzaldúa, 1987; Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002).

Coming Together

We all come from very distinct cultural and historical backgrounds - Punjabi, Taiwanese, Estonian, and Colombian, belonging to and rooted in diverse communities, research locations and experiences. We share a commitment to and interests in participatory action research in education to build dialogical and co-created spaces with communities, which have been historically, socially, and institutionally marginalized due to racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and classism. Engaged in different participatory action research projects we all agree that this research must begin from an anti-colonial perspective and that it is rooted in decolonizing and decolonial praxis. Beginning from the specific research, pedagogical and relational contexts in which we are presently situated, we hope to come together to extend our work into a larger Participatory action research project with marginalized communities.

I began my research with South Asian educators and youth out of a deep concern and responsibility for "my" community. Social constructions of "Indo-Canadian" males as inherently violent gangsters and females as passive recipients of this violence led me back to my community and to the life work that I cannot ignore.

Hartej was born in India and her family came to Canada soon after the immigration laws changed in the 1970's and Canada lifted its color bar. Growing up in Canada, she faced extreme racism, classism, double patriarchy and eurocentrism and soon realized that multiculturalism was a discourse of tokenistic colonial benevolence rather than a genuine decolonizing act. Living in the colonial reality of the diasporic in-between, she is learning to reconnect with her indigenous "roots" in her homeland and is deeply aware of the importance of social justice, decolonization, and decolonial work not only in theory, but also in praxis.

*As an immigrant researcher in Canada born in Estonia who dwells in the intersection of multiple languages (Estonian, Spanish, Russian, English), I am painstakingly aware of language displacement and questionable borders between English and other languages. Located on the contested ground of "multiculturalism" and "otherness" it has been the intention of my academic work to decolonize the Canadian multicultural imagiNation and create a different, im/migrant culture of scholarship and pedagogical knowing. Although Estonia is located in North Europe, Estonians are not Europeans (linguistically and ethnically) but belong to Finno-Ugric group of people whose ancient migration roots/routes extend to Siberia. Estonians have lived more than 700 years (since the beginning of 13th century) under, first, German, and later, Russian, colonial rule. They became an independent Republic only in 1918. Before the Christianization and colonization my ancestors did not call themselves Estonians, which is a name given to us by the Germans, but *maarahvas* - "people of earth." Thus...I belong to the people with suppressed memories and wounds of colonization. And yet, as my colleague, Hartej says:*

“Your whiteness is deceiving.” How does/will this whiteness and my “borderland English” impact the relationships that I am developing/will develop with my research community?

Kadi has journeyed to Canada from Estonia through Russia and Colombia.... She has come from a colonized home and now lives as someone who looks like the ‘colonizer’ and speaks like the ‘colonized’. She is constantly aware of the huge privileges of her white looks and of the responsibilities she has in her family and in her new home - Canada - to work and to build bridges with the people who were not born with ‘white privilege’...

As far as I can remember, supporting “immigrants” has always been part of my life growing up in Canada. My familiarity with the challenges they face comes from my personal experience. My passion and compassion for working with “newcomers”, especially youth, takes me on this journey to working with international students and learning from that experience as we prepare for our future work with institutionally marginalized communities. The trend of schools becoming service providers, education becoming a service, and international students becoming a commodity has led me to ask the question, “Where is the care in all of this?”

Gloria was born in Taiwan. She has struggled to maintain her Taiwanese identity and language while growing up in Taiwan and later in Canada. While attending primary school in Taiwan, Gloria was forbidden to speak Taiwanese under the Chinese Kuomintang government. During her primary school education in Canada, she was told, “Speak English only!” As a graduate student, a Chinese professor openly criticized her for introducing herself as being from Taiwan because as he said, “There is no such place called Taiwan. There is only China!” Even the Canadian government does not recognize Taiwan as a sovereign nation and omits the city of her birth on Gloria's most recent Canadian passport. These issues of identity and belonging inform and direct Gloria's research in regard to immigrants and International students...

Our Research Communities

We bring our own worldviews and perspectives... and are mutually transformed by the process of engagement with the community and the research.... (Saba Waheed, Nguyen Ly-huong, Anna Couey, 2005).

As we reflect on our collaborative community research we find ourselves engaged with/in complex realities, questions, and questionings of possibilities and impossibilities of meaningful decolonizing participatory action research...

Hartej: *My research with South Asian educators and youth emerged when the two educators that I presently work with in the Lower Mainland of Vancouver and I came together in a university class that I was teaching in the summer of 2007. Our activism interests converged into a research initiative the day they told the story of how their school had an unwritten rule that did not allow boys of “Indo-Canadian” background to walk together in the hallways of their school because of the fear of their gangster activity. They further mentioned that if even one Caucasian boy was part of this group the boys were not broken up, but if it was made up solely of “Indo Canadians” they were asked to separate.... Hearing this story I was compelled to advocacy work with these educators in their schools, which eventually became the research context. In my experience as was the case in this study, decolonizing research does not begin with institutional requirements or goals of research,*

but rather co-emerges or is co-created relationally from a sense of ethical responsibility or as a result of passionate activism/advocacy with a specific research community or context.

Gloria: When I first came across the infamous label ‘cash cows’ being imposed on international students, I was in the midst of a heated debate on issues concerning equity and efficiency in educational finance with teachers and administrators. I was in disbelief given my deep involvement mentoring both Korean and Taiwanese international students and their families. The rhetoric that I heard surrounding these families and the funding of the public education system also continues unabated in the literature. For example, Lee (2005) points out that between 2000 and 2005 B.C.’s education system lost 113 schools and 2,558 teaching positions. Declining enrolment and decreased government funding for public education have forced districts to look elsewhere for revenue (Steffenhagen, p. B1). For some, the solution to budgetary shortfalls in public schools lies in international education (Hennessy, Holtum & Woods, 2008). International students have become a commodity that has become a necessity to the funding necessary for financing of the B.C. public education system.

This international education phenomenon comes with a multitude of colonial practices that strive behind the ideologies of economic progress and cultural exchange. It is implemented to serve/help the people who want to learn English or to receive a western education. Since the input-output model of accountability is prominent in B.C.’s education system, it would be imperative to ask whether these students are receiving the kind of education and related support services to help them succeed in school and graduate. It would also be imperative to ask whether the kind of education received is representative of the large sums being paid. Where is the accountability? For example, is there an adequate support system set up for these students during their stay in Canada? Some areas for consideration include providing bilingual and culturally relevant counseling services to help students adapt to their new lives both at school and with their host family as well as developing and maintaining social and emotional support networks appropriate to their own circumstances. Another area that requires further discussion is parent involvement. Many studies and government reports have shown that parent involvement is a key factor in increased student achievement (Epstein, 2010; British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2002; Thorsen, 2003). Therefore, it would be critical to discuss ways of ensuring that the parents of these students, many of whom live afar, continue to be involved in their children’s education. Finally, more research regarding whether these programs have been effective from the perspective of international students is needed. Or alternatively, what happens to these students if they stay in Canada? These are important issues surrounding this phenomenon that need to be answered in my work with international students and their parents.

Kadi: *I am involved in the Co-lingual Family Literacy’s community project with immigrant families from Colombia, China, Philippines, and Japan at the Marpole Oakridge Family Place in Vancouver. Canadian multiculturalism tolerates and encourages diversity, but within a framework that ensures the unquestionable English and French language-cultural supremacy along the lines of policy “all cultures and ethnic groups are equal in status within a bilingual framework” (Fleras & Elliott, 2002, p. 77). The goal of my participation in this project is to advocate language diversity as well as to support the articulation of new, emerging border zone languages – “accented englishes”. I am interested in learning how immigration modifies languages, how different “immigrant” languages undermine the hegemony of dominant languages, how the relationships between languages and cultures de-stabilize hierarchical multiculturalism by creating co-cultural and co-lingual spaces.*

Community and Academy Relation

The dismantling of the hierarchical power relationships between participants from the “academy” and participants from the “community” remains a major site of struggle in the process of participatory action research. It would be hypocritical and unethical to negate the position of power that the location of the academy provides for researchers. It is equally irresponsible to dismiss the inequitable socio-political and economic institutional power structures that support colonial research over decolonizing research in the academy. Even in some projects of participatory action research, we cannot help but question the ethics of whose interests are being served and whose interests are being displaced on whose land?

Hartej: The first time I was to arrive at the "research site" to meet the educators involved, I found myself walking into a room in which several South Asian youth from grades 11 and 12 had stayed around after school on their own time just to see me since as they said they "had never seen an Indian professor before." Similarly, during one narrative sharing as part of the research, one of the youth who had been in India when I first met the school community came in to meet me for the first time and said: "Oh I thought you would be White...because everyone from the university is always White." Although, I have spoken extensively about representation and the importance of role models for systemically marginalized groups, it was not until this moment of contact between the "researcher and researched", that I deeply "innerstood" these scholarly notions. Being an insider (although I recognize my dialectical locations as both an insider and outsider) the words and actions of these students were very troubling to me since for the first time I really felt the impact of these continuing colonial institutional absences on future generations of members of a community that I knew well. At the same time as an outsider, I came to realize how much I had come to normalize from within the institution especially with regard to research praxis. Going into my own community supposedly as an insider, it never occurred to me that most of these students or educators would never have met an Indo-Canadian professor or researcher especially not a woman. This was shocking learning for someone who works in the area of social justice education and deals with these issues at a theoretical level on a daily basis. Was I/will I really be aware of what it meant/will mean (even though I hold the little institutional knowledge passed on to me) to do decolonizing/decolonial work with a community who continues to embody and live the legacy of colonialism? I am grateful to the community of this study for helping me realize through their formal and informal roles as participant-researchers/pedagogues, the potential of participatory action research as decolonizing and decolonial pedagogy (simultaneously involving shared teachings/learnings/advocacy) as well as decolonial praxis.

Kadi: "The more we get together the happier we'll be..." since February 7, 2008, we have begun our Saturday morning Song-Game Development: Co-lingual Family Literacy project meetings with these song-lines. This project was initiated outside of the academy by the Marpole Oakridge Family Place (a community organization) and the Living Language Institute Foundation (a non-profit organization). Its main goal was to use traditional songs to engage young children and parents in interactive singing and playing to support family literacy as well as kindergarten and pre-school readiness. Based on the Sound to Symbol Methodology (developed by Dr. Fleurette Sweeney who was the workshops facilitator), song games carry the natural cadence of the spoken language underlining the importance/primacy of orality. They also model social interactions and incorporate sensory motor movements to support healthy child development. The Sound and Symbol Methodology is Dr. Sweeney's lifework that has emerged through her practice

and research as a music educator for over fifty years. During all these years the focus of her method has been on Singing English.

The Co-lingual Family Literacy Project was an attempt to move beyond the development of ESL skills. In addition to English, the song games in four languages (Mandarin, Japanese, Spanish and Tagalog) of the immigrant families in the Marpole area (Vancouver, BC) were developed and included with the help of participating families. Using Singing English as the “departure” template, the intention of this project was to enhance the acquisition and appreciation of languages of the families from different linguistic communities as well as to model culturally inclusive social interactions among the various participating neighborhood communities. Additionally it aimed to de-centralise and de-hegemonize the role of English in linguistic interactions. Therefore, the term colingual was used as a resistance to multilingual.

“There’s Gloria with Larry and Larry with Maki and Maki with Ty and Ty with Mamiko and Mamiko with Nubiola and Nubiola with Sawwa and Sawwa with Kishia and Kishia with Fleurette and Fleurette with Nicole and Nicole with Kadi and Kadi with Cynthia and Cynthia with Andrés Felipe and Andrés Felipe with...” The song does not end until more than 30 participants, children between one and four years old, mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, facilitators, community organizers and university researchers are all introduced and included. I am honoured to be a participant of this multigenerational, multilingual, multicultural multi-skilled (experiential) group. In every session I witness the co-creation of linguistic and cultural spaces that move from multi- inter-cross-trans-... towards co-lingual and co-cultural spaces. I am eager to begin inquiring into the deeper issues that these encounters between languages, cultures and experiences evoke/provoke. Yet, I am uncertain how to move from my role as a participant of an organizing, facilitating team to the role of a researcher. How can all of us who will be/are happier the more we get together become a community of researchers?

Gloria: In my present work with international students, I am beginning to uncover mainly colonizing notions that I will need to work through before undertaking my research with international student and parent communities. Although the number of international students is on the rise and there is an apparent interest from the provincial government to make British Columbia a destination of choice for international students to study abroad (Speech from the Throne, 2010), there is a lack of research in this area. I am interested in opening up a dialogue for international students, their parents, educators, administrators and other service providers involved in the process of bringing international students to this country. What roles do they see themselves playing? How does each party relate to one another? What issues and difficulties have they encountered during the process? How does each party want to benefit from the process? What hopes and dreams do they have? However, I do not want to limit the inquiry to questions I consider important. Alcoff (1991) questions the desires and needs, both positively and negatively, of speaking for others. White (2003) discovers that through collaborative narrative inquiry, youth are capable of voicing their needs and desires when given an opportunity to do so. Although youth do not speak with one voice, their collective “voices” can contribute to the research and design of any program to help schools and the wider community serves the needs of all peoples in a socially just manner. As Barnsley & Ellis (1992) emphasize, participatory action research requires a deep understanding of doing research for the purpose of making change in a community and by the community. Research is only one of the tools to facilitate change, so it is not always necessary. Research would become pointless if the research goals are not carried out and changes are not implemented. In other words, if schools and the wider community do not act on the recommendations made by the youth participants of a study and the youth participants are not the main instigators behind the research, the

research itself becomes meaningless. Participation from the community is the spirit of this methodology, and it is what makes change happen.

Research Question/ing(s)

Kadi: *My concern has always been that more often than not colonialism is seen and perceived as history, left behind in the dusty closet of the past. Due to this (convenient) understanding people in/from privileged societal, racial, gender positions seem to be unable and, therefore, unwilling to acknowledge the existence of ongoing injustices and systemic inequalities in the world and institutional power structures. Yet, as Nelson Maldonado-Torres claims, “as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and everyday” (p. 244). Nelson Maldonado-Torres is part of the Latin American Subaltern Study group whose goal has been to de-centre the dominant eurocentric academic centre from the perspective and position of “subalternized” knowledges. I appreciate the work of this group because their focus on notions like “colonial difference”, “coloniality”, “and coloniality of power” has helped to bring attention to the presence of the ongoing systemic colonialism in our present social relationships and viewings of the world. Based on the views of the Peruvian liberation theologian Aníbal Quijano, Maldonado-Torres explains the difference of coloniality from colonialism as follows:*

Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations (p. 244).

The Latin American Subaltern Study group proposes a project of liberation – the de-colonial turn as an epistemic shift that involves delinking from coloniality and modernity. The leading scholar of this group, Walter D. Mignolo, calls this project “decoloniality” and sees it as

[the energy] that does not allow the operation of the logic of coloniality nor believes the fairy tales of the rhetoric of modernity. [D]e-colonial thinking is ... thinking that de-links and opens possibilities often hidden (colonized and discredited such as the traditional, barbarian, primitive, mystic, etc.) by the modern rationality that is mounted and enclosed by categories of Greek, Latin and the six modern imperial European languages (Mignolo as quoted in Galfarsoro, 2008).

Pheng Cheah explains that the project of decoloniality involves a double gesture: “first, the re-embodiment and relocation of thought in order to unmask the limited situation of modern knowledges and their link to coloniality, and second, an-other thinking that calls for plurality and intercultural dialogue, especially within the South” (2006).

As an immigrant researcher dwelling at the borderland of Western academy I see the notions of decolonial thinking and delinking relevant and productive in the context of participatory action research. It has been my experience that more often than not participatory action research is caught up in the “modern disembodied universalistic project of Marxism” (Mignolo, 2007). Mignolo’s notion of “delinking” goes beyond political, social and economic decolonization by

proposing the urgent need for delinking at the epistemic level, at the level of the production of knowledge.

Gloria: *There is an extensive literature on student voice (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). Many authors (Garcia, Kilgore, Rodriguez & Thomas, 1995; Dahl, 1995; Lincoln, 1995; and Lincoln, 1995) ask some simple but challenging questions: “Why search out student voices? What can those voices, long absent from educational research or dialogue about school reform, tell us, and what kinds of contributions might they make” (Garcia et al., 1995, p. 88). They point out that students are stakeholders in their learning, and often they have much insider information and internal resources that they can share with other stakeholders involved in education, such as teachers, administrators, and parents. They also emphasize that students do not speak with one voice and that the diverse backgrounds and personal traits of youth contribute to rich and honest observations which demonstrate youth have a deep understanding of their education. Their thoughts must be included in conversations about their education.*

In a similar vein, from an interview-based study of nine female students’ perceptions of their disconnection from high school and reconnection to school in an alternative program, Loutzenheiser (2002) indicates that the complicated nature of students’ lives must be recognized. Students themselves must be invited into the discussion about their education and the kind of support they need from school and society. They offer great insights into what is working and what is not, what makes them leave school and what inspires them to return. However, Rodriguez and Brown (2009) argue that simply having a voice is not enough. They contend that youth need to be the actual agents of change in research and suggest that participatory action research is an empirical methodological approach in which people directly involved in a research are co-researchers in the research process and agents of change in their own lives. Participatory action research shares similar empirical assumptions with student voice research. Even though like student voice research, participatory action research positions research participants as knowledge holders and experts on their experiences, it engages research participants as co-researchers who can “actively participate in and exercise influence over the production of official scholarly knowledge” (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009, p. 23).

In other words, participatory action research challenges the western positivist research paradigm that often apply deficit approaches to people who are historically marginalized (Sinclair, 2003; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). In the case of children, whose voices were historically absent in research, through participatory approaches children would be able to define the research process, and therefore affect the research outcomes, rather than letting adults impose research on them (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2005). Gallacher & Gallagher (2005) contend “research reflects a set of values and assumptions which are held predominantly by adults - we may even go further and say white, middle-class, western adults - and not by children” (p. 1). They further elucidate that when children are seen as unable to “fully exercise agency in research without encouragement and aid from adult-designed participatory methods,” the traditional deficit model of children as incomplete and incompetent is being reinforced (p. 3). The use of participatory techniques will enable children to exercise their agency by constructing knowledge about themselves. When all these stakeholders (children and adults) work together, new holistic understandings and wisdom can be realized for further actions.

Although participatory action research encourages deconstruction of western positivist research paradigm (Sinclair, 2003), as a researcher I need to be mindful of the different ways that international students may cope with their living situations and not impose my understanding on them. I also need to be mindful that the research project becomes participatory action research only when the international students want to see and implement change in their lives. Furthermore, like many high school students, international students are susceptible to bullying at school, but they are also vulnerable to other forms of oppressions, such as institutional racism and possible violence

and intimidation from homestay families. How can I ensure that I do not abuse my power and reinforce the perception of them being vulnerable and incompetent to speak for themselves?

Since for most international students English is not their first language, I need to consider the important role that language(s) and culture(s) play in the process of data collection and analysis. As Gonzalez & Lincoln (2006) explicate, "there is no formula to translate culture, the collection of data in a local language and the presentation of the analyses in a second language, becomes an important issue to consider" (p.1). They point out that "context plays an important part in the act of interpreting data. Without an understanding of the context where the participants live, the results could emerge with no clear interpretation of the data. Participants express their ideas, perceptions, and interpretations, based in a context in which they have learned and that imbues their realities" (p. 2). For my future research with students and their families who might be silenced due to language and culture barriers, it will be necessary to explore the notions of language and agency. I would like to invite students and parents to consider co-creating spaces of agency, so students, their parents and myself, as a researcher, are able to co-construct knowledge about ourselves rather than continuing positivist paradigms of top-down research or colonial deficit approaches of having knowledge constructed by white middle class adults.

Hartej: *As a formerly colonized person and as someone learning to reconnect to my indigenous heritage, Rajesh Tandon's (1981) work on participatory action research with rural communities in India along with Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) work were both very significant for me in terms of Participatory action research and decolonizing/decolonial praxis. Tandon's words were not words I had ever heard in the academy at that point in my university life. His focus on ethical and reciprocal notions of research was quite foreign to me even though such significant work in this area was being undertaken in my homeland. It would not be until many years later when I was fortunate enough to work with indigenous scholars at my university that I would come to understand and value the ethical nature and integrity of Rajesh Tandon's words about the community's complete involvement in setting the agenda of the inquiry, about their participation in the data collection and the data analysis and finally about the community's control over the use of the outcomes and the whole process (Tandon, 1981). His message, likening research that does not take these practices into consideration to cultural imperialism, was powerful and incisive for me as I began to engage with my own work involving diverse communities.*

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) work adds to Tandon's through her deconstruction of colonial western scholarship and research practices. In her decolonizing framework (perhaps somewhat different from Mignolo's (2007) decolonial critique) "deconstruction is part of a much larger intent. Taking apart the story, revealing texts, and giving voice to things that are often known intuitively does not help people to improve their current conditions. It provides words, perhaps an insight that explains certain experiences - but it does not prevent someone from dying" (Smith, 1999, p. 3). In this manner, from the perspective of Linda Tuhiwai Smith, we might question if decolonial praxis is ever possible without participation or if we can ever decolonize without action/activism?

Participatory Action Research as Decolonizing and Decolonial Praxis

Kadi: *As a community theatre practitioner, organizer and researcher I have been drawn towards participatory methodologies because it has helped to challenge dominant academic research paradigms as well as the dominant/global capitalist/imperialist social order. I have made use of*

participatory methods in the popular theatre work with Colombian as well as Estonian immigrant communities in Canada to address the needs of these respective communities: to create home in new country, to inquire into the different ways of belonging to build supportive community relationships and other needs.

Through my current involvement in the Co-lingual Family Literacy Project I have become aware of continuing tensions, concerns, and questions in the process of building participatory action research with community. I have witnessed when singing “The more we get together the happier we’ll be” the act of becoming a community (We) as “I-with/in-community relationships”- but how can this collective position of intersubjectivities be respected, cherished and articulated in a community of researchers who are linguistically, racially, culturally, generational and experientially different?

It is common to hear participants of the project sharing the stories of linguistic discrimination they have experienced in Canada. However, the moments of uplifting confidence and utter joy of recognition are also not rare during our gatherings. They happen when the participants-facilitators teach us their songs in Tagalog, Japanese, Spanish, and Mandarin or when the participating families suddenly realize that the languages they speak at home are recognized, respected and equally valued by the surrounding multilingual community. And yet, can all the participants of the project be/come “happy” just by getting together? Can the co-cultural space be created just by sharing and learning different languages?

Our project of co-creating co-lingual communities is taking place in the context of the hegemonic multiculturalism and linguistic imperialism of globalising English. In order to come together the immigrant languages in Canada have to cross not only cultural and ethnic differences but also colonial indifference. The Latin American Subaltern group scholars and participatory action researchers have helped me to realize that one of the most crucial undertakings in the process of the co-creation of spaces of cultural co-existence through the co-lingual family literacy project is the task of an epistemic shift to “decolonize English”. How do we de-link English from the logic of coloniality and rhetoric of modernity?

Gloria: I see myself living on the shimmering line between my old thinking and my new understandings, always in the state of learning. I also see this border is always shifting as I advance forward in my studies and realizations. I am drawn to participatory action research methodology because the focus is on a community itself and is on making change. However, as Gallacher & Gallagher (2005) stress that whether one engages in participatory research or not, what matters the most is the way in which the methods are used. They suggest that whether “participatory” or not, researchers should have an open and flexible attitude towards “the messy contingencies of research encounters” and a “willingness to negotiate with all those involved, to improvise, and to make mistakes in the process” (p. 8). Researchers should also “be aware of the limits of what they can achieve; recognizing that they are imperfect, naïve, learning and changing, rather than fully competent rational agents. As such this approach invites researchers to view their projects with a fair degree of humility. (p. 8)” They conclude that with this attitude, researchers can potentially minimize the binary power dynamics between the researcher and participants.

Hartej: *The formal and informal role of the participant-researchers as well as the role of the messiness of decolonizing and decolonial pedagogy/research process became more apparent to me during a significant teaching/learning/advocacy research moment. One afternoon I was working with a young South Asian girl who had identified herself as Punjabi.*

She began telling me her story in English as I expected of these youth many of whom were born in Canada. It was only when she switched codes and began to refer to experiences that she assumed we would have shared in common by saying things like: "izat bara karke se... like you know...." that again I was shocked at my own colonization in what was meant to be a decolonizing/decolonial research process. My inability at that moment to de-link the English language from the research process and reciprocate the code switching further made me realize my own "cognitive colonialism" (Battiste, 2001) and the colonial nature of decolonizing/decolonial research for colonized peoples and colonized participants/researchers. This experience also once again highlighted the need to recognize the role of participants as researchers (even when their role in this regard may not be as traditional/formal researchers who uncover significant findings) as an important part of decolonizing and decolonial praxis.

Not to begin from this place of relationality I believe renders research "one of the dirtiest words" (Smith, 1999, p. 1). As Linda Tuhiwai Smith states "the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous worlds' vocabulary... The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples" (p. 1). Although Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work refers to research with indigenous communities, I believe that her ideas are equally important for and with all socially and institutionally marginalized communities.

Reflecting Back, Reflecting Ahead

The impact of decolonizing work for activist-researchers embodying the legacy of colonialism has been given very little attention. This is perhaps due to the limited representation of these peoples in the academy. As decolonizing activist-researchers dwelling at the borderland and periphery of western academy we find decolonizing and decolonial notions of research very meaningful because they help us to claim, reclaim, support and legitimize "other" epistemological positions in the academy. Looking at research as insiders/outsideers in terms of a complicated, fluid and messy process rather than a clearly defined methodology and beginning from a place of mutual activism/advocacy we believe is of utmost importance. This epistemological shift along with the recognition of participants as researchers and pedagogues with agency even as they participate in informal researcher/teaching roles asks us to re-imagine research as a non-hierarchical teaching/learning/advocacy process rather than a method of investigation and discovery which echoes violent colonizing projects of history. Additionally, we feel that we have grown in our understanding of how coloniality survives colonialism and "is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience" (Torres-Maldonado, 2007, 244). The power of the Latin American subaltern studies' group of decolonial critique (Mignolo, 2000, 2007; Galfarsoro, 2008, Grosfoguel, 2011; Maldonado-Torres, 2007) along with the work of decolonizing scholars (Smith, 1999; Sikes, 2006; González y González, & Lincoln, 2006) is that they have found a way to address and help researchers pay attention to two of the deepest and most hurtful wounds - epistemological wounds and ontological colonial wounds - left/produced by the western colonial institutional regimes and scholarly signifying practices. We recognize that we touch these wounds even in the process of conducting participatory action research when we speak

about “collecting data”, “analyzing findings”, “research implementation”, “dissemination of results” and other dominant scholarly research terminology. Such language feels de-humanizing, de-valuing and objectifying.

We feel that in order to address these issues, we as researchers need to bring decolonizing and decolonial frameworks into the well established area of participatory action research. Participatory action research must begin from an anti-colonial perspective and it must have a co-created, decolonizing/decolonial and transformative agenda. Equally important, it must honour diverse communities through a co-cultural and co-lingual rather than a multicultural and multilingual approach as an extension of the genuinely reciprocal process of participatory action research.

As we come to the end of this writing, we feel that we have learned immensely from our communities and from the academy, but still we are left with more questions than answers. We share these in the spirit again of decolonizing and decolonializing (to respectfully change the subaltern scholars’ terms into a verb, a concrete action) the formal academic space of “the conclusion” in conventional research and in the spirit of continuing the dialogue and our learning with our diverse communities and with the many communities of participatory research.

In midst of our participation in community research we speak about “giving voice” or “giving back”. But what/who provides me/us with authority to “give somebody voice”? Are we aware of what we have taken or what we have allowed to be taken away when we speak about “giving back” to the community?

How do we begin to engage the academy in valuing and meriting research, which is not acolonial, apolitical, ahistorical, and monolingual?

How do we co-create open trusting, meaningful, colingual, and reciprocal relationships between scholars and practitioners where the boundaries between these categories are blurred and the process of mutual and simultaneous teachings/learnings/advocacy has the potential to emerge and to develop reciprocal transformative possibilities?

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