

IEN PIE Conference 2018
In a room full of history: IENs, hybridity and the third space
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Indigenous Acknowledgement

Who we are

My name is Andrea and this is Hanif and we work for the British Columbia Nurses' Union.

The British Columbia Nurses' Union is one of the province's largest unions. Its membership is made up of some 47,000 nurses and health care workers. In recognition of the increasing diversity of the membership and as a way of addressing some of the challenges that members face in the work place, BCNU runs a three day workshop called Communicating: Essential Skills. The course is designed to offer a space in which internationally Educated Nurses can cultivate strategies for increasingly skillful engagement with colleagues – patients – managers.

The workshop is structured around a formal curriculum. Over the three days – and through conversation and role play – we look at issues related to power, language, emotion and culture. If we were to sum up the course in a single phrase it would speak to something of the necessity of open-hearted listening and relationality. Consistently, indeed inevitably, the issue of the environment of the workplace emerges. Sometimes it emerges as a casual anecdote about workplace gossip or a whispering campaign, laughed off with a hint of embarrassment. On other occasions someone will come up during a break – shift her voice to a lower register and in confidence tell us about the way in which her workplace has become a space of suffering. Very often the issues the workshop attendees face are framed by a discourse that exposes a vein of unkindness, a cruelty, an unvarnished racism, and mistreatment at the hands of their colleagues. This alerts us to the fact that people are entering the space of the classroom in a condition of vulnerability, of pain, of sorrow but also of resilience as

those who have crossed borders and who understand the contemporary moment as one that is demarcated by borders - both visible and invisible.

Thus the classroom becomes a space made up of vulnerable and resilient bodies, bodies marked by history.

The class is a room full of history ~ a room full of histories.

What does it mean to arrive?

What does it mean to arrive? To cross a border – across landscapes – to cross a border and arrive? What does it mean to arrive? To find yourself in a place and to wrap your tongue around new words, idioms, metaphors, phrases - to feel the sound of a language, an accent, a dialect take shape in your mouth. What does it mean to arrive? To wrap your mind around new neighbourhoods, landscapes, spaces - and to often feel as if you have yet to truly arrive. A workplace can feel like that – a place of perpetual arrival – a place of perpetual strangeness even in the midst of familiarity.

A classroom can replicate the feel of the workplace – in its style and morphology – in the feeling it evinces in you when you walk through its door.

What is it that brings you into this space? A thirst for greater knowledge perhaps – a hunger to fit in for your sentences not to raise eyebrows - your diction not to result in a callous shrug - but often your presence here is marked by an absence: of a particular skill or technique, an uncertain finesse, a hesitancy over the right word, the-too-fast-pace with which you speak, the words you elide.

Your presence here might have been demanded by a manager so that your presence here is because of the trouble you are in at work – so your job is on the line when you

arrive – your job is contingent on what you grasp in these three days – what you walk away with in terms of the practical – the highly applicable.

And so it's as if your arrival is forever postponed.

The structure of the classroom and the content that unfolds within it can often reproduce the scrutiny you are subject to in the work place – and reproduce the borders you have crossed to arrive and simultaneously not-arrive - here.

The workshop that we run is based on the principles of popular education – so part of what we aim to do is to privilege the voices and experiences of those who arrive in the space.

We recognize that their experiences are foregrounded by the macro politics of migration and movement and border crossings and the micro politics of the everyday erosion of the self – through unkindness, and tone of voice and racialization, and by power and uncertainty.

Do I belong? Is my professional identity at risk? Will I be able to nurse? How do I go back to face my situation?

So we mindfully shift the space. As facilitators we mindfully shift the space. We invite the participants to claim the space - to introduce themselves to each other by moving through the space of the class room and so claim it – make the space their home – the space as welcoming.

We recognize the un-ceded and traditional territory on which we are situated – not as a pro forma piece of performativity but by way of deconstructing the idea of belonging –

that belongingness is contingent and that all of us are shaped by this contingency – as settlers on un-ceded territory.

So we foreground the realities of colonization – which are the realities of displacement and migration and border crossings.

And we talk about power – about personal power, and the power of embodiment and positional power with its hierarchies and politics.

So what becomes possible is not delimited by what others feel you lack or the trouble you are in at work or by your own misgivings about your ability to communicate clearly - indeed what begins to happen is that the vulnerabilities that you carry into the classroom space offer a lens through which to appreciate the vulnerability of others – the patient for instance, the resident in care, the client at home and alone.

So in a role play that invites the participant to attend to the emotional concerns of the patient-actor and to attentively listen to their fear of being discharged – your own uncertain state of belonging becomes a resource that enables you to listen more generously – alert for the vulnerabilities that are so familiar to your own experience of belonging/not belonging – your own hesitant arrival.

The classroom is a single space that contains within it a multitude of spaces and within each space a multitude of histories – the class is a room full of history – and this is what we – as facilitators – consider as we move through the course content and the lives of the participants.

3rd space

One way of thinking about the challenge of these multiple spaces and how they interact is through the theory of ‘third space’ advanced by the notoriously opaque but

nevertheless brilliant Indian writer and thinker Homi Bhabha. Bhabha writes about third space in the context of colonization that is, in the contexts in which identity is subject to certain hegemonic practices brought about by the exercise of imperial power.

Bhabha identifies the first space as that of the home – one's home – the space within which one is able, and in principle free to express one's culture and identity

The second space is the colonial space - that of the city and the administrative and bureaucratic institutions that are generative of the colonial order – for instance the way in which the classroom serves as a site of inculcation through its structure and its form and what is permissible within it and what is silenced.

To enter the second space from the first – is to be reminded of the incongruence between the two – what had meaning in the first is, in the second considered superfluous or worse, a marker of backwardness – language and culture to be peeled-off – peeled away – cauterized - in favour of the new and imported – the externally imposed - that one day might facilitate the crossing of borders.

Bhabha argues that between these two spaces exists a third space - liminal and hybrid that engenders new and renewed possibilities.

The Maori Scholar Paul Meredith notes that:

“the third space is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a productive, and not merely reflective, space that engenders new possibility. It is an ‘interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative’ (Bhabha 1994) space of new forms of cultural meaning and production blurring the limitations of existing boundaries and calling into question established categorisations of culture and identity. According to Bhabha, this hybrid third space is an ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representation have no ‘primordial unity or fixity’ (Bhabha 1994)”.

The third space is immanent in any particular moment in the classroom. It emerges as participants coalesce into conversational dyads or larger groups to discuss what it means to attentively listen – then other languages emerge – other ideas – workplace issues are surfaced – and solutions sought out – new identities are forged through this discourse.

Kris Gutiérrez professor, professor of Language, Literacy and Culture at the University of California Berkley speaks of the third space:

as emerging from the script and counter script of the classroom dialectic where participants are not just responding to and resisting what a facilitator might have to say but actively engaged in meaning making – she writes of a class room as constituting multiple social spaces with distinctive participation structures and power relations (Gutiérrez, 1993, 1994, 1995). [Here one might] attend to contradictions and to rethink a strict temporal analysis of classrooms—that is, a diachronic view of talk and interaction in classroom activity—to a view of classrooms as having multiple, layered, and conflicting activity systems with various interconnections. What intrigued me most were the borderlines of those activities, what we later referred to as the “underlife” of the classroom (drawing on Goffman, 1961), and the remarkable sense-making character of those seemingly unrelated processes, what we called the “script” and “counterscript” from which Third Spaces emerge (Gutiérrez, 1993) [shaped in turn by] points of mutual attention, harmony, conflict, and disruption...that held the potential for deeper or transformative forms of learning.

Can one be deliberative about eliciting a third/hybrid space?

At the beginning of day two we consciously invited histories into the room forging an intentional third space. We asked participants to introduce themselves in their home language and then to say a little bit about who they have been and who they are now. Through language and storytelling the room is transformed the second space of the

classroom begins to yield to the third space of a critical hybridity – a third space that honours the first space. In so doing the participants reconceptualise themselves and each other as repositories of specific forms of knowledge and wisdom as those who have crossed borders in a state of embodied vulnerability and resilience. The room begins to shift. The spaces within the room begin to shift. You begin to realize that you don't have to fit into a space only on other's people's terms but as you are – with your past and your vulnerability and your resilience.

Here's what a few participants had to say about the experience:

Knowing others history make me feel I'm not alone

I felt very nervous at first, telling my background but the experience helped me open up. Hearing other people experience either good or bad experience can help us become a better person

I really enjoyed listening to everyone's journey in becoming a nurse. It made me realize how unique we are the different life experiences/struggles we encountered through this journey that has shaped us

I felt good introducing myself in my own language. Made me feel proud. Never had the opportunity to do this

It also make me feel comfortable among the others because after hearing their stories I feel that everyone who came to Canada as an immigrant has experienced some hard time in a same way...however I learned that if you stick to your ambition you will achieve your goal no matter how long it will take...

Forging a third space through counter-narratives, counter scripts and other languages reminds us that the challenges faced by internationally educated nurses in the classroom and workplace require more than tinkering with accents and vocabulary and the skill of active listening but necessitate a radical remaking and re-visioning of second space in the classroom and the workplace.

Group activity

- a. Postcards at your tables - one side is a de Chiroco painting entitled The Enigma of the Arrival and the Afternoon.
- b. On the blank side, answer the following questions. Then share with someone in the room:
 - i. What languages do you speak?
 - ii. Tell us about a vocation you've had outside of your current work.