

## From the personal to the institutional: Exploring language and identity across spaces

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*Abstract: This editorial suggests that language practices and identities shift across spaces, and in response to lived and imagined social, systemic, colonial, and historical realities. The editorial presents an overview of the six articles in this issue related to issues of language, diversity, and identity in a variety of contexts, including: elementary schools (Birner), after school programs for secondary students (Hauseman), post-secondary institutions (Surtees & Balyasnikova; Lepp Friesen), policy context for refugee youth (Brewer), and in an evocative personal reflection on identity in relation to Canada's colonial project (Wright Cardinal).*

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### Editorial

The idea that schools are social spaces is nothing new (see for example, Crawford & Fishman-Weaver, 2016; Duncan, 2013; Smyth & Hattam, 2004). Schools—as institutions and as physical spaces—are situated within larger societies and social realities. Within Canada, schools act as a physical and ideological extension of state values, including supporting official multicultural policy, while critical issues of race and racism are often ignored (Kubota, 2015). From classrooms to lunchrooms to the land on which many schools stand, it is necessary to ask Canadian citizens and residents “to consider and transform their own investment in and relationship with colonialism” (Cannon, 2013, p. 21) especially in relation to schooling. Individuals acting within these colonial spaces shift their language practices to address specific audiences and structural concerns—both real and imagined. Imagined communities—first articulated by Anderson (2006) in reference to the ways in which citizens think about nations—are equally applicable to learning spaces, as this concept,

enables us to enhance our understanding of learning on both temporal and spatial dimensions... On a spatial dimension, we can examine the interaction between national ideologies and individual learners' identities on the one hand, and the influence of globalization and transnationalism on language learning and identity construction on the other. (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 248)

It is also necessary to think about the ways in which imagined identities are transformed by colonial realities, as identities too shift and react across spaces and contexts. Early and Norton suggest that in fact, identities can also be imagined, as:

People who have access to a wide range of resources will have access to power and privilege, which will in turn influence how they understand their relationship to the world and their possibilities for the future. Thus the question, “Who am I?”, cannot be understood apart from the question, “What can I do?”, and what learners [and actors] aspire to “do”, must be understood with respect to frequently inequitable distribution of material resources... (2012, p. 199)

How do individuals respond to social and historical realities—and how do these realities shift the ways in which actors form their own identities and influence their language practices? How might we address language practices and imagined identities within a colonial context? What happens when actors are perceived to be removed from larger social contexts?

In the Spring 2016 Issue of the CJNSE—my first as managing editor—notions of language, diversity and identity are taken up in diverse spaces in each of the issue's contributions. While each of the contributions in this issue are situated within social spaces in Canada—from the personal to the institutional—the ways in which identities and language practices are taken up shift depending upon the specific study. Issues of identity, diversity, resettlement, multiculturalism, and colonialism are each taken up from a number of perspectives and contexts, including elementary schools (Birner), after school programming for secondary students (Hauseman), post-secondary institutions (Surtees & Balyasnikova; Lepp Friesen), policy context for

refugee youth (Brewer), and in an evocative personal reflection on identity in relation to Canada's colonial project (Wright Cardinal).

### **Overview of the Issue's Contributions (English)**

The first article in this issue is "Best Practices in After-School Programming for Secondary School Students" by David Cameron Hauseman (OISE / University of Toronto), explores literature relating to after school programming. From this review, Hauseman finds that much research on best practices in after school programming focus narrowly on structural concerns, and he argues that more thorough research must be undertaken to evaluate these programs beyond the structural.

The second contribution, from Courtney Brewer (Western University), explores literature on refugee youth in Canada, and the resulting review provides "An Outline for Including Refugees in Canadian Educational Policy". Brewer argues that the education system needs to play a key role in accommodating refugee youth as they navigate school systems, to interrupt their social and academic marginalization.

The third article, by Victoria Surtees (University of British Columbia) and Natalia Balyasnikova (University of British Columbia), reflects on membership diversity within culture clubs at a large Canadian university. Surtees and Balyaniskova challenge the notion that culture clubs encourage cultural silos and discourage cross-cultural exchange. Rather, they argue that culture clubs act as important social spaces for students to build community and contribute to campus life.

The fourth contribution comes from Helen Lepp Friesen (University of Winnipeg), and describes a study on student engagement with difference at a Canadian post-secondary institution. Lepp Friesen finds that equitable educational and pedagogical practices need to be implemented in these post-secondary classrooms, highlighting the need to incorporate students' lived experiences.

The fifth article is Alexis Birner's (University of British Columbia) provocative "Boys don't wear dresses!" which is a thoughtful deconstruction of gender representation in an elementary classroom. In the article, Birner argues that critical literacy pedagogy works to transform narrow conceptions of gender roles, and students' conceptions of gender were reconstructed.

The powerful final contribution in this issue is Sarah Wright Cardinal's (University of Victoria) "A framework for Indigenous Adoptee Reconnection: Reclaiming Language and Identity." Through a reflexive process that emerged in the writing of a critical personal narrative, Cardinal situates her own experiences with the child welfare system in the larger Canadian colonial project, and offers a necessary critique in support of the need for decolonizing education based on Indigenous perspectives. Cardinal's piece resonates and sticks with the reader, and it is an important place to end this issue.

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