Politics, pedagogies and poetics of belonging: Negotiating differences between home and school communities/cultures

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This paper is based on our inquiry into the literature on parental involvement in public education from diverse scholarly, personal, and community perspectives. This paper interrupts the convention of reviewing as a form of surveying or overviewing and brings together our voices as citizens and academics belonging to and rooted in diverse communities, cultures and experiences. Our multiple cultural identities (Punjabi, Taiwanese, Estonian, Colombian) and our social positions in Canadian school system, our voices such as those of daughters, parents, teachers, and administrators are interwoven within the scholarly text to interrogate some of the following questions: How do families from diverse backgrounds negotiate differences between 'home' and 'school' cultures? To what extent do parents from marginalized groups feel welcome to participate in their children's education? Finally, how do parents assume leadership roles in their school communities? We hope to respond to critical questions of identity, inclusion and exclusion, and emotional attachments on one's sense of belonging; how local and global conflicts and tensions inform, form and transform families, schools and community relationships.

Introduction

When in English class we talk about Canada, I mean, I really don't care about Canada.

No?

I live here – yeah! I speak the language – yeah! But I don't feel Canadian.

Who is Canadian? What does to be 'Canadian' mean?

I don't know. But when we were talking about past history of Canada or geography of Canada at school . . . whatever, I couldn't care less.

Why?

I don't know. I just don't care. Its not valued and it doesn't feel important!

(Purru, 2003)

Canada is a nation of complex ethno-racial composition where critical understandings of identity, race, ethnicity, citizenship and other ways of social belonging are increasingly important goals for social justice, equity, and inclusion. The so-called 'diverse' population in Canadian schools is growing dramatically due to continuing immigration and the increased presence of socially, racially, linguistically, and economically etc. disadvantaged families. How do families from diverse backgrounds negotiate the differences between 'home' and 'school' cultures? To what extent do parents from marginalized groups feel a genuine sense of belonging in their children's education? By placing the largely unexplored but increasingly compelling notion of belonging (Probyn 1996; Beck & Malley 1998; Ahmed, Castañeda, Fortier & Sheller 2003; Yuval-

Davis, Kannabiran & Vieten, 2006) at the center of this inquiry, we hope to encompass critical questions of identity, inclusion and exclusion, emotional attachments, local and global conflicts and tensions informing, forming and transforming family, school and community relationships.

Recent mandates by the British Columbia Ministry of Education (School Planning Councils Policy, 2002; Campagnolo, 2005) and research over the last two decades has highlighted the urgent need for parent involvement and parent leadership in the educational achievement of their children (Epstein, 1995; Zacharatos, Barling & Kelloway, 2000; Moles, 1987; Brant, 1989; Hawley & Rosenholtz, 1984; Foster & Goddard, 2003). Many of these studies have focussed on categorizing or describing types of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995; Mattingly et al., 2002). Others have focussed on developing effective strategies for parent participation in public education (Chavkin & Williams, 1993; Seeley, 1989; Kerr, 2005; Collins, Moles & Cross, 1982; Parhar, 2006). This literature in general, however, falls short of addressing social, historical, economical, and political inequities that may exist for socially, racially, linguistically and institutionally marginalized parents and how these inequities may impact their sense of belonging or their involvement and leadership in public education.

Noticeably absent from the literature on parent leadership and parent involvement is the impact that belongingness may have on parental involvement and leadership in public education. The existing literature on parent leadership, the majority of which is from the United States, also fails to bring the voices of socially and

institutionally marginalized parents and students in dialogue with school staffs and community advocacy groups in regard to belongingness and involvement in public education. The projects and research conducted in the field of home and school relationships which focus on family involvement and leadership have unanimously been undertaken with the aim of increasing student' success at school.

Mitchell Beck and James Malley, however, in their article "Pedagogies of belonging" argue that "Most children fail in school not because they lack the necessary cognitive skills, but because they feel detached, alienated, and isolated from others and from the educational process" (133). Their argument is based on the substantial psychological, sociological and pedagogical research (Adler 1939; Berman 1997; Crandall 1981; Glasser 1986; Kagan 1990; Maslow 1971; McNamara 1996).

Background context

This paper is rooted in our interest in and inquiry into the issues of marginalized parents' involvement and institutional possibilities/realities of parents taking leadership roles in public education. Although set out to be a review article, this paper interrupts the convention of reviewing as a form of *surveying* or *overviewing* and brings together not only scholarly voices, but personal voices, institutional voices, and professional voices belonging to and rooted in diverse communities and experiences. Our voices such as those of the immigrant mother/parent, the immigrant daughter/student, the international students' mentor, and the

immigrant school administrator and vice-principal are interwoven within the scholarly text as a way of providing a more meaningful praxis.

All three members of our research team, the authors of this article - Hartej Gill, Gloria Lin, Kadi Purru - come from very distinct cultural and historical backgrounds.

Hartej *was born in India in the state of Punjab. She is the daughter of Mohinder and Jiri Gill and the grand-daughter of Kishan & Naranjan Gill and Balwant & Pritam Sull who all come from a tradition of rice, sugarcane, date, wheat and vegetable farming in their respective villages of Fatehpur, Moranwali, Jindowal, and Palahi. Hartej's education began at the Government Primary School in Moranwali in the District of Hoshiarpur. Her family came to Canada soon after the immigration laws changed in the 1970's and Canada lifted its color ban. Growing up and going to school in Canada, she faced extreme racism, classism and double patriarchy and soon realized that multiculturalism was a discourse of tokenistic colonial benevolence rather than a genuine decolonizing act. Hartej has tried to deal with these issues throughout her working career as an Elementary School Teacher in the North Vancouver School District and a Vice-Principal at Sherwood Park Elementary School. At the core of her current work as the Educational Administration Faculty in the Department of Educational Studies is the goal of provoking critical dialogues about identity, power, systemic oppression, colonialism, patriarchy and modernity. From her professorship position, she hopes to use her praxis as way of co-*

creating transformative and reciprocal relationships between universities, public schools, and the larger community.

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.*

Kadi *has journeyed to Canada from and through Estonia, Russia, Colombia.... Kadi was born in the university town of Tartu, Estonia; studied theatre in Petersburg, Russia, and taught at the University of Valle, Cali, Colombia. After completion of her doctoral dissertation, Acknowledging Home(s) and Belonging(s): Border Writing (2003) at the Center for the Studies of Curriculum and Instruction, University of British Columbia, she has continued living in Vancouver, Canada. As an immigrant grandparent, parent, community worker, and scholar, Kadi dwells in the intersection of multiple languages and cultures: Estonian, Spanish, Russian, and English. She has come from a colonized home - Estonians have endured more than 700 years of German/Western colonization - 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 to build bridges with the people who were not born with 'white' privilege... Located on the contested ground of 'multiculturalism' and 'otherness' (national, ethnic, cultural, racial) Kadi intends (in her work) to decolonize the Canadian multicultural imagination and create a different, immigrant culture of scholarship and pedagogical knowing.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) Michel de Certeau[1] compares two different ways of viewing: 1) looking at the city of New York *from the top* of the World Trade Centre with voyeuristic pleasure as a whole, as a single map and 2) seeing the city from the perspective of the pedestrians when walking on the streets *down below*. Rather than looking 'from the top' and situating ourselves in the position of the expertly authoritarian over-viewing, defining and mapping the entire field, we surrender to a more fragmentary, implicitly incomplete and subjective process of re-viewing relationally and dialogically from multiple positions and perspectives in the hopes of providing our readers with a more 'experiential' and complex portrait of differences/relationships between home and school communities/cultures.

[1]M. De Certeau develops these thoughts in his writing "Walking in the city", *The practice of everyday life.* (S. F. Rendall, Trans.). Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, pp.91-111.

A conversation between a mother and her daughter - Unbelongingness: I could not imagine how desperately my daughter was struggling with the right 'to belong'

When you are a kid, you want to be part of majority; you don't want to be minority.

How did you realize this?

That's how it was. Everybody was looking at me. And you want to fit in, you want to blend in. You don't want to stand out, to look different. If you don't speak perfectly, if you have a different background then you stand out. That's why you learn English; you adapt to the society so that you fit in and don't stand out at all.

But how did it then happen that you became aware of yourself as Latina, as Colombian? I remember when you went to high school …

At the beginning of the high school I was still more in the 'Caucasian phase'. It happened in one class when an Iranian girl came into my class and sat right behind me. And the first thing she said to me was: "Are you Spanish?" And at that point I thought: "Should I tell her the truth? Or should I lie?" A very strong part of me wanted to lie and say: "Oh no, not really!" or to say: "Half!" and then I thought what does it matter if I am "half" or "full," I still am Spanish and I said: "Yes." And I wanted to avoid it all, I didn't want to talk about it anymore, but she said: "Where are you from? What country?" Then again... I had that fear like I was going to be judged. Even though she was a minority, I was still afraid that I was going to be judged. Then I said: "Colombian." She smiled and said: "It's really neat; I have tons of friends that are Colombian, that are Latino." Then I felt good, I was accepted. I thought okay, that's okay to say who I am. Because once again - I fit in!

Did you ... were you able to overcome your fear of being seen with your dad because he was Latino?

Well, yeah ... then it was okay.

I also remember this period of hatred towards 'white culture' you had. You began looking at me, your mother as 'white'... for you I became a part of this white culture you seemed to be becoming increasingly uncomfortable with. And then you left Kitsilano High School to go to Charles Tupper High School. I still haven't understood completely why you decided to do this... I remember there was so much pain. Your desire to change the school was so strong that I could not say no, although ... and I remember I was talking to the Mexican family whose kids went to Tupper. I phoned them inquiring about Tupper school. They told me that they would love to send their boys to Kitsilano, because when you go to Kitsilano you have more opportunities in your future life in terms where to go to study, who you hang out with, what societal group you belong to. Their mother told me that she couldn't get her boys accepted in Kitsilano because they don't live on the affluent West side area. And she was so surprised that you were going from Kitsilano to Tupper on the East side - that you were willingly giving up the opportunity that she saw as a big social and educational advantage. How do you explain it now?

> *I was tired of Kitsilano...I wanted to go to school where we are all Canadians brought up here but born in different countries as opposed to Kitsilano where the majority is born here and their parents are born here and they are Scottish, Irish or something like that...in Tupper I was a majority. Whites were a minority. I felt powerful. I felt like I was blending in... I wasn't happy in Kitsilano. I did not like it there. It was very groupy, cliquey, people weren't human.*

But you had several friends. And you were already speaking English 'perfectly'?

Yeah, but it didn't matter, it felt like I was pretending. I could not talk about my background. When I went to Tupper it was understood, yeah, you are Chinese or you are brown and, although, you have been raised here you still speak your other languages -- like Asians for example occasionally exchanged one or two words in their language.

So this was understood in Tupper but not in Kitsilano?

Not so much!

But your friends in Kitsilano were Iranian, Italian, Chinese backgrounds…

They were pretty much Canadian; they didn't keep any of their Chinese heritage for example. Yeah, they ate Chinese food, so what?!

As I am listening I am starting to realize that you were feeling like …. not being able to be who you are.

I felt repressed!

In what ways? In terms of environment? Your classmates? Did teachers…

No, the whole atmosphere!

In terms of your skin color, your English – it is hard to imagine that someone would ask you 'what culture you belong to'? Your 'cultural difference' is not so visible or audible…

It is not just your appearance…. It is you, yourself. Deep down you just know that you are different. I knew that I was different! I knew that I had a 'background'!

So you had reached like a point where you started to realize that what you felt inside and the role that you had to play at school became so contradictory that you couldn't bear that conflict anymore… like what you felt inside who you are and what you had to be in order to fit into white mainstream culture!

Yeah.

And in Tupper school? Did you feel better?

> *I felt better, I felt well. But then again, I was torn. You know, some or most Spanish people, I guess, look very Native or very much like Native Americans. They looked at me and said: "You don't look 'that' Spanish! You look more like white!" So it was like I was pushed away from them as well. But they accepted me anyway even though I looked kind of 'more white' than them, so it was okay. So it became like a whole skin color thing for me.*

Because you have been living in this culture... you have been living in between cultures. Would you feel comfortable being all of them? Colombian, Estonian, Canadian? Together!

No!!!

No???

I don't feel that way!

The conversations with my daughter about her school-life and belonging have been/are common in our Canadian Columbian Estonian home. Yesterday the parents of Reena Virk appeared on the TV screen again. It has now been over fourteen years since they lost their daughter as a result of a tragic bullying incident but the story has not ended for them. It will never end; no court decision can bring peace back to their hearts. I relate closely to this story since one week before this East Indian student's story, my daughter was involved in a very similar bullying incident. After she left to go to Tupper her 'friends' from Kitsilano came to retaliate. They lured her out of school into the isolated back alley. My daughter was very lucky because the unexpected passing ambulance's sirens interrupted the

'punishment ritual' and scared the girls away. The physical scars of this incident disappeared a long time ago, but the deep emotional wound keeps hurting. As parents we have been bewildered about what happened and are still feeling helpless. When the principal from Sir Tupper School phoned us on that day November 7, 1997 we were scared and shocked - we learned in a very painful way about the seriousness of not belonging culturally, racially, ethnically... Like in Reena's case, the court decision did not alleviate the pain nor did it bring about justice.

I blame myself for what happened to my daughter. As an immigrant mother, a newcomer to Canada, I was totally unaware of the gravity of tensions my daughter lived at school. I had never experienced anything like that in my school-life, and I could not imagine how desperately my daughter was struggling with the right 'to belong'. I did not have any connection with the school other than parent-teacher conferences. There were no ways of relating to the school that were offered to me; and I was completely ignorant about my rights or opportunities to ask questions, to question, to initiate communication with the school to talk about getting involved or building coalitions with other parents and families. As a newcomer to Canada, I always felt inadequate and insecure about my knowledge and about my English. As a researcher I have now returned to face my 'guilt' by inquiring into home and school relationships and looking at the ways in which parents can take leadership roles at school and ways in which schools can create opportunities and open spaces for them to do so. It is only now that I've come to realize that

it's not just my responsibility – but that schools need to change their institutional practices as well.

Much of the research in parent leadership continues to portray marginalized families through deficit model lenses (Montemayor & Romero, 2000) and focuses on changing parental behaviour – especially in the area of parenting and supporting home learning – rather than on changing teacher practices or school structures (Mattingly et al, 2002). Furthermore, this literature defines parental involvement in very traditional ways (mainly to activities that take place at school), and largely limits involvement to activities that relate to the parent's child only, thereby dismissing both parent-initiated forms of leadership and community-oriented expressions of support. There is virtually a complete lack of studies addressing the impact of changing school-family involvement policies, practices, and interactions with minority and low income families (Henderson and Mapp as quoted in Boethel et al., 2003, p. 24).

A memory of the student's days -

Negotiating Canadianness: *To this day, my parents will never enter an educational institution alone*

Other than on one occasion, my father never entered my elementary or high schools ever again. My mother only went for parent-teacher conferences in the company of my aunt who spoke English. After being told that they were never to speak to their daughters in Punjabi at home, they feared every time they entered the institution that the educators would find out that they hadn't followed their rules of "English only at all times". I remember that my mom

and my aunt would both shed their kurta pajamas *or* saris *for the day and put on their finely creased* Woolco *(which was the only place where they could afford to shop) pants and blouses. I hardly recognized them as they entered my CLASSroom. Despite their efforts, I must shamefully admit that I was embarrassed not only by their clothes and scarf-covered heads, but also by their brown skin and their Punjabi accents. In only one year of schooling, I had internalized 'Canadianness' and they did not fit this category. Due to their visible absence from the site of my schooling, one might assume that they did not participate or were not involved in my education. They were, in fact, overwhelmingly consumed in helping me; my sisters and my cousins dealt with the emotional turmoil of the daily racism that we endured silently outside of our homes. More importantly (I say this only because racism became so normalized in our/their lives), my parents and my grandparents spent hours regularly helping us understand and negotiate between the conflicting expectations of the colonial institution with aims of language and cultural 'integration' and my parents' resistance to the continuation of the British Raj's violent erasure in the guise of civilization and citizenship. How our tongues learned to lie inside the institution in order to protect our parents' fears despite our own colonized resistance to their colonial resistance.... These unrecognized/unrecognizable teachings were contradictory to the nation building goals of schooling and our dedicated parents were labelled as uncaring, irresponsible, negligent, lazy, "unfit to have children," and in need of "parenting". The systemic racism, classism, and exclusion of the institution was seen as ideologically neutral and as an extension institutional power was apolitical,*

ahistorical and relationally equal. Everyone was seen to belong to the homogenous parent body of the national imaginary. My parents never felt this sense of belongingness. To this day, they will never enter an educational institution alone. The horrors of colonialism live deep in their souls and in their routes.

When this colonialism comes into play with globalization, together they create a phenomenon of making education a tradable and commodified service. This phenomenon can be observed in the escalating influx of students who represent a group referred to as international students. According to the BC Ministry of Education (2009), the population of international students studying in BC secondary schools has increased nearly 30% from 7,377 in 2004 to 9,498 in 2009. These students are mainly from Asia and often live with a host family, relative or a family friend. Despite the millions of dollars, schools receive yearly from international parents, not one study was located in the area of parent involvement or parent leadership with this group of parents.

Concerns of an international student mentor -

Uprootedness: *Oftentimes, they feel confused, frustrated, and lost, whether it is with their school or their home-stay situations*

As someone who immigrated to Canada from Taiwan during grade school years, I have had to negotiate between my home culture, language, and identity, and the culture, language and 'identity' of mainstream Canada. I have gone through various phases of adjustment and transition and am still in a constant process of re-defining myself, my identities and my sense of belonging. Over the

years, I have become a mentor to several international students and their families. My main role is to bridge cultural and language barriers between schools and students, between counsellors and parents and between host families and students. When assisting students with their school assignments or relating their challenges with their school assignments and school situations to their teachers, I question whether these students are receiving the kind of education and support they need to do well in the Canadian education system. When translating report cards and letters from school for the students and their parents, I wonder why there is no one available institutionally to translate school related information to the international students and their parents. Is information delivered to the parents in a language they understand? When observing conflicts between the international students and their host families, I wonder where the students and their host families can turn for support networks. Are bilingual counselling services readily available? What kinds of accountability systems are in place for host families to prevent neglect and abuse? What kinds of mentorship programs are available to assist host families when they encounter difficult situations? What is the role/what kind of space is institutionally created for the involvement of the parents of these students, many of whom live afar, and what other services have been implemented that ensure the development and well being of these young people in a foreign country?

These questions have emerged in the process of witnessing the challenging lives that many international students and their families have gone through. I have built trusting relationships with students

between the ages of 6 and 16 who come from Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. Some of them have been living here for over two years and some of them have been here only a few months. The challenges they and their parents face in negotiating social and cultural spaces, in expressing themselves, and in being heard are complex. Many students have shared with me their feelings of isolation and exclusion from their peers. Oftentimes, they feel confused, frustrated, and lost, whether it is with their school or their home-stay situations. Many students seem to have difficulties deciphering cultural implications, social norms, school rules, and overt and covert boundaries. The personal, social, cultural, institutional challenges and struggles that they have shared with me have been alarming. Troubled by the economic nature of the phenomenon of International Education, how will I negotiate my space as a guardian from that of a parent and advocate especially when struggling over questions of injustice, inequities, exploitation, care and belonging myself? Why is there not an institutional space of collaboration for guardians and parents of international students especially given the substantial monies received by school districts from these parents?

Although the need and desire to collaborate in children's education is expressed and shared by both schools and families, the fostering of these relationships has not been so easy. What does this collaboration look like? Who is included and who is excluded? How and by whom are school-family relationships defined? The majority of the studies dedicated to parental involvement struggle to define relationships between families and schools. School personnel have long talked about the need for 'parent involvement' as well as

'partnership', (Epstein 1995, 2001; Funkhouser & Gonzales 1997; Mattingly et al., 2002) 'participation' (Parhar, 2006) or 'family/school linkages' (Henderson & Mapp 2002). While focussing on developing effective strategies for parental involvement, the meaning of these terms has changed little over time (Collins, Moles, and Cross 1982; Kerr 2005; Seeley 1989; Williams and Chavkin, 2002). More significantly, the terms and conditions of these relationships continue to be defined and dictated by school staffs and administration. The projects and research that differ from school-defined 'parent involvement' models have attempted to further the 'community organizing' mode of relationships (Lopez 2003; Johnson, Muñoz, and Street 2003), by mobilizing collective power between parents and schools. There have also been a growing number of projects and initiatives highlighting the involvement of parents and families in leadership roles. Through policy documents, it is clear that the mandates of the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2005) support the development of school and family relationships under the aegis of 'parents' leadership'. However, the limits of 'parents' leadership' seem to be delineated by efficiency and economy rather than human rights or equity.

A reflection of a vice-principal -

Exclusive inclusiveness: *efficiency and economy are more important goals for the school and the school district than inclusion and institutional responsibility to accessibility, human rights, and equity*

I witnessed one of the saddest incidences of 'parent leadership' in my first year as an educational leader in the Lower

Mainland of British Columbia. When I arrived to my new school as a Vice-Principal, I was told that the school Parent Advisory Council (PAC) and the Administration were planning an exciting new playground for the students and school community. Everyone seemed enthusiastic about what was going to be a special gift a special legacy that the Principal would leave behind when he retired in a few years. Plans were going well until a parent sought me out (perhaps she saw me, as a woman of color, as an ally?) to speak to me about accessibility issues for her child who was in a wheelchair. I was in utter shock when I found out that this had not been taken into consideration and that a new school community playground in the year 2000 would be inaccessible to students and community members with disabilities! This parent mentioned that she had investigated fundraising options and other financially feasible ways to contribute to the budget allocated for the playground and would be happy to share this information with the PAC and the principal. I was inspired (and yet not surprised since advocacy from those in positions of social and institutional marginalization is not a choice and takes incredible energy and time) by how hard this parent had worked to lay out the details of her proposal including budgets, plans, people and organizations who would support a more inclusive playground.

Unfortunately, when her ideas were brought before the PAC parents and the principal, the majority voted against her proposal stating that the additional costs were too high (despite the fact that these would be covered eventually by advocacy organizations and fundraising by the parent of the child with a disability) and that it would take much too long to build the additional sections. Her ideas

were immediately dismissed and her voice along with mine (as a new Vice-principal) was completely silenced by the PAC parents, the principal, and later, members of the district for whom efficiency and economy were more important goals then inclusion and institutional responsibility to human rights and equity. I still remember and often feel the profound sadness and anger of the day of the ribbon cutting ceremony for the playground when Ty watched on from the periphery of the playground in his wheelchair as all the other students ran in to jump on the monkey-bars and go down the slides as soon as the ribbon was cut by the principal, PAC members and district officials - clearly delineating who was allowed in and who belonged....

Several months later however, Ty's parents and I anonymously called the Human Rights Coalition for Persons with Disabilities (by this time the parents had learned how the school system worked in this regard and I had a much better idea of the nature of my power and my role as an 'educational leader')...One year later we managed to have sections added to the playground in order to create one of the first new inclusive school-community playgrounds in the city at that time.

Some might wonder whether this is an example of parent leadership or even leadership at all....

Leadership as a construct and a practice has considerable currency in contemporary thought. "Whether one looks at academic disciplines, practical fields or the popular press, the term 'leadership' figures prominently in an attempt to describe *a particular set of relationships* (our italics) among people" (Foster 1989, p. 39). Given

our review of the literature and its focus on school centred and school defined parent-school relations, we wonder if and how parent leadership models might be different from existing models of school - family relationships? More specifically, will 'leadership' models really help in fostering more active family/parental agency with/in schools communities especially among socially and institutionally marginalized parents? What would these kinds of models need to look like? What do existing ones look like? Which kind of models get recognized as 'parent leadership', for example, with those parents whose connections to legacies of colonialism make them resist entering oppressive institutions, parents who do not speak the dominant language, parents who do not have political or social visibility in these institutions? Can these parents occupy spaces of leadership in absentia?

Remaining Questions

Our article addresses the many challenges facing researchers and institutions today in terms of supporting meaningful home-school relationships for socially and institutionally marginalized parents. Traditional approaches to promoting student success and parental involvement/participation are valuable educational goals, but they do not necessarily produce better home-school relationships especially given the impossibility of levelling the playing field for socially and institutionally marginalized students and parents. Many researchers and school personnel have failed to recognize/address the critical question of belonging in their conversations/work about home-school relationships. Unless socially marginalized parents feel that they belong or can belong to the school communities of their children their

relationships with these institutions will remain superficial and suspect as will those of their children. We would argue from our experiences and our research that without trusting and meaningful relationships of belongingness, socially and institutionally marginalized parents cannot have a foundation/platform to undertake significant leadership roles in their children's school and education.

The critical work of researchers who have begun to question notions of belonging of certain socially and institutionally marginalized groups is very exciting in terms of our future research. Fine (1993) questions the 'parent empowerment' movement which started in the 1990s and wonders how marginalized parents survive in "the contested public sphere of public education with neither resources nor power, [since] they are usually not welcomed, by schools, to the critical and serious work of rethinking educational structures and practices, and they typically represent a small percent of local taxpayers" (p. 682). In regard to aboriginal communities, Foster and Goddard (2003) and Battiste (2000) discuss how the Eurocentric curriculum and Western standards of success invalidate indigenous ways of knowing and as a result exclude many aboriginal parents' contributions from schools. Furthermore, in recent years the language in the area of parent leadership and family involvement has shifted slightly in order to honour the many other family members - siblings, aunts and uncles, even close friends and neighbours – who support and nurture children and youth and who may play significant roles in their education. This language change, however, continues to exclude the lived experiences of diverse family formations as well as same-sex families from the heteronormative space of public

education. This is a significant oversight for the Canadian context given the fact that the number of same-sex couples in Canada has grown 32.6% between 2001 and 2006, more than five times the growth observed for opposite-sex couples (Statistics Canada, 2007). Also absent from the leadership landscape are the voices of parents from low socio-economic backgrounds, parents of children with disabilities and parents of international students.

Building on the limited research on marginalized families' sense of belonging in schools, we feel strongly that when looking at questions of parent involvement/participation as parent leadership we are asking the wrong question or at least a question framed from the wrong location – from those in positions or power and authority rather than from those/with those more directly implicated. From our perspective, more reciprocal, co-created, decolonizing/decolonial questions might include:

How can school communities foster a more inclusive sense of belonging for/with parents, especially for/with socially and institutionally marginalized parents, in the hope of encouraging greater parent/family involvement and leadership and with the hope of creating more inclusive school spaces?

What is the relationship of many marginalized parents to their schools in terms of their sense of belonging?

How might this impact their involvement, participation and leadership capacity?

How might these relationships be transformed in order to create more representative and inclusive family-school-community spaces?

What social, historical, and institutional knowledge might need to be transformed in order to realize this kind of a transformation?

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