

## **Braided Stories and Bricolaged Symbols: Critical reflection and transformative learning theory for teachers**

### **Histoires métissées et symboles fabriqués : réflexion critique et théorie de l'apprentissage par transformation pour les enseignants**

Susan M. Brigham

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When Adult Education Invites Itself to the Debate About Teacher Development

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Résumé de l'article

Par le biais de cet article, je démontre que la théorie de l'apprentissage par transformation, une théorie de l'apprentissage associée aux clientèles adultes et une méthodologie de recherche axée sur les arts, se révèle d'une valeur cruciale pour la pratique professionnelle des enseignants ainsi que la formation des maîtres. Pour ce faire, je fais référence aux deux phases d'une étude impliquant des femmes enseignantes dans leur pays d'origine et ayant immigré dans la région canadienne des Maritimes. J'illustre le processus au cours duquel les participantes peuvent développer de multiples perspectives, déconstruire leur perception de la réalité et devenir davantage réfléchies quant à leur identité et leur pratique enseignantes.

# BRAIDED STORIES AND BRICOLAGED SYMBOLS: CRITICAL REFLECTION AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THEORY FOR TEACHERS<sup>1</sup>

SUSAN M. BRIGHAM *Mount Saint Vincent University*

**ABSTRACT:** In this paper I make the case that transformative learning theory, a specific adult learning theory, and an arts-informed research method have important value for teacher professional practice and teacher education. I refer to two phases of a study involving women who have immigrated to Maritime Canada and were teachers in their countries of origin. I illustrate a process through which participants can weave multiple perspectives, unpack constructed realities, and become more reflective about their teacher identity and teaching practice.

## HISTOIRES MÉTISSÉES ET SYMBOLES FABRIQUÉS: RÉFLEXION CRITIQUE ET THÉORIE DE L'APPRENTISSAGE PAR TRANSFORMATION POUR LES ENSEIGNANTS

**RÉSUMÉ.** Par le biais de cet article, je démontre que la théorie de l'apprentissage par transformation, une théorie de l'apprentissage associée aux clientèles adultes et une méthodologie de recherche axée sur les arts, se révèle d'une valeur cruciale pour la pratique professionnelle des enseignants ainsi que la formation des maîtres. Pour ce faire, je fais référence aux deux phases d'une étude impliquant des femmes enseignantes dans leur pays d'origine et ayant immigré dans la région canadienne des Maritimes. J'illustre le processus au cours duquel les participantes peuvent développer de multiples perspectives, déconstruire leur perception de la réalité et devenir davantage réfléchies quant à leur identité et leur pratique enseignantes.

## INTRODUCTION

Adult education, far more than any other field of education, has, from its inception, perceived its mission as that of creating conditions in which adults dialogue across difference *sine qua non*. It has defined itself as a form of education designed to overcome just the kinds of intrusions in learning of power influence and inequality which has led some postmodernists or antimodernists to condemn reflective dialogue and education as illusionary goals (Mezirow, 1995, p. 60).

Adult educators have traditionally centred on the disenfranchised and the socially, economically and culturally disadvantaged and have reached out to men and women through such universally recognized programs as the Highlander Folk Schools, Mechanic Institutes, Workers' Theatre, Women's Institutes, the Frontier College, and the Antigonish Movement; the latter two programs arose in Nova Scotia. These programs have involved their learners in community work to address a range of social needs (i.e., lack of access to resources, services, a united voice) and to alleviate immediate difficulties faced by community members while at the same time developing critical thinking and reflection, fostering conditions for dialogue, critiquing larger social, economic and political structures, and challenging power hierarchies through informed social action. While each of these adult programs was/is influenced by various philosophies and learning theories, the notion of change (e.g., personal, professional and/or social) as well as "the power and potential of risk and challenge in learning" (Clover, 2006, p. 56) are strong common undercurrents. Many teachers and teacher educators understand the value of reflection, contemplative practices, critical inquiry, and engaged dialogue to heightened states of consciousness or awareness for creating new ways of thinking, expanding knowledge systems to promote a shift in worldviews, and taking action to build and sustain a socially just society. Brown, Morehead and Smith (2008, p. 180) pointed out that:

reflections and critical discussions that scaffold new understandings about the knowledge teachers must possess in today's classroom will ultimately help future teachers develop the foundation for a personally meaningful professional identity that will continue to grow throughout a teacher's career.

Yet while teachers are called upon and assumed to be reflective, I believe their reflective practices are more often done outwardly rather than inwardly, despite the strong emphasis in teacher education programs on what I have heard referred to by preservice teachers as the dreaded "R word" (reflection), as in "Not another R [reflective] assignment!" Van Woerkom (2010, p. 351) suggested that:

critical reflection is a mysterious concept to students not because they have never thought critically reflectively during their academic careers before (Spalding & Wilson, 2002) but because they do not recognize the abstract and neat theories on critical reflection in their own everyday ways of learning and thinking.

Van Woerkom added, "critical reflection is not the solution to all problems and we need to develop theories about creating balances between critical reflection and other ways of learning" (p. 351). In this paper I highlight the value of theoretical, methodological and conceptual frames used in research in adult education that can respond to questions about teachers' professional learning processes, questions related to critical reflection and also transformative learning and teacher identity. I make the case that transformative learning theory (TL), a specific adult learning theory which has gained greater purchase in recent

years (cf. Mezirow, 2000), and an arts-informed research method have important value for teacher professional practice and teacher education. To make this case, I refer to two phases of a study involving women who have immigrated to Maritime Canada and were teachers in their home countries. Arts-informed methods have been used in both adult education research (see for example, Brigham, in press; Brigham & Walsh, 2011; Butterwick & Selman, 2002; Clover, 2000; Clover, Stalker & McGauley, 2004; Grace & Wells, 2005;) and teacher education (see for example, Diamond & Mullen, 1999; Fels, 1999; Leitch, 2006; Telles, 2006; Walsh, 2003; Walsh & Brigham, 2007). I propose that both the theory (TL) and the research method (arts-informed) combined and integrated in teacher education programs can enrich veteran and preservice teachers' reflective practices and support a shift in the rational/cognitive and the extrarational/affective domains of their meaning schemes specifically with regard to teacher identity. In the following sections I discuss the theory and then provide an overview of the research process.

## TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

The main purposes of the many theories of adult learning that have developed over time are "to provide us with a vocabulary and a conceptual framework for interpreting the examples of learning that we observe ... [and to help us] look for solutions to practical problems. The theories do not give us solutions but they do direct our attention to those variables that are crucial in finding solutions" (Hill, 2002, p. 190). Adult learning theories that are located within a humanist orientation are, according to Elias and Merriam (2005), most prevalent in North America because of their "compatibility with a democratic political system and ... adult education's voluntary nature" (cited in Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 284). A humanist orientation holds that humans are inherently good and will strive for highest good, have unlimited potential for growth and development, are free to act and are able to determine their own futures (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1983). A humanist learning process centres on learners' needs, experiences, knowledge, values and emotions. A particular learning theory that has its roots in humanism is transformative learning (TL), a theory attributed to Jack Mezirow who published his seminal work in 1978. Since then TL theory has been debated, further developed, and refined by adult practitioners and researchers who have evaluated TL processes, methods and effects in numerous social, political, and cultural contexts.

Transformative learning is learning which troubles one's taken-for-granted assumptions, meaning perspectives ("set of schemas, worldview or personal paradigm," Mezirow, 1995, p. 42) and meaning schemes ("specific set of beliefs, knowledge, judgment, attitude, and feeling which shape a particular interpretation," p. 43). It moves one to test new integrated-meaning perspectives, and take actions to challenge and transform both oneself and the societal status quo. Lange (2004) clarified TL is not just an epistemological process; "it is also

an ontological process where participants experience a change in their being in the world including their forms of relatedness” (p. 137).

Such a transformation can occur through various learning processes, which Mezirow (1995) suggested involves a triggering event that is either personal and life altering, such as a marriage or divorce, a birth or death of a loved one, being diagnosed with a terminal illness or surviving a near death experience, or is social and life-altering such as a war or a natural disaster. Mezirow acknowledged that a series of events over time can have the same transformative potential as a singular disorienting dilemma. TL requires critical reflection and reflective discourse with others in a safe setting with a dialogic or transformative educator who uses conscious raising strategies such as critical questioning, journaling and role-plays (Cranton, 2002).

Some researchers have critiqued Mezirow as being too concerned with rationality in the process of transformation and insufficiently attentive to the affective dimension of learning (feelings and emotions) (Dirkx, 2001; Scott, 2006; Taylor, 2000). Scott (2006) for example suggested TL requires that we be engaged in imaginal dialogical relationships with our unconscious psychic energy through, for instance, meditation, poetry, art, and paying special attention to our dreams. In this paper I stress the importance of both the rational and extrarational as well as cognitive and affective dimensions in TL. I will discuss this further below.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The research method for this study is arts-informed. As a method it is “designed to enhance meaning, to broaden and deepen on-going conversations about educational policy and practice” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 102). The research process follows a previous study involving teachers (Walsh, 2003). The participants in the study are 24 women who immigrated to the Maritimes as international students, temporary workers, or permanent residents; a few are now Canadian citizens. All were teachers in their home countries, which are: Australia, Bangladesh, China, El Salvador, Egypt, France, Hong Kong, India, Iran, Jordan, South Korea, Kuwait, Mexico, Nigeria, Poland, Singapore, and Sri Lanka. Some of the women are now teaching or are in the process of getting certified to teach in Canada. With regard to their family status, some are in long-term relationships, some are single, and some have children. Their age range is between late twenties and mid sixties.

The study involved two phases that took place in the Maritime provinces over the span of 5 years (between 2005 and 2010).<sup>2</sup> Phase one involved 11 women and phase two, 13 women. Each woman was a part of a small group (consisting of 5 to 7 women) which met on a regular basis over many months. At each meeting the women participated in several processes, which included dialogue around issues of teaching, learning and migrating to Canada; flow writing; story-

telling; and art making with materials such as water colours, coloured pencils, pastels, fabric, and clay. Most of the meetings proceeded in the following way: we reviewed the main points from previous meetings and often times picked up some of these strands for further discussion. This was followed by about 10 minutes of flow writing; each woman chose what to write about related to teaching, learning and migration (i.e., an idea we just discussed, a recent incident, or a personal experience) in a language she preferred. The women were instructed to write in silence, to keep their pens moving at all times and not be concerned with spelling, grammar, or neatness. Subsequent to this, one woman shared what she had written either by reading it aloud or speaking about it. After a few brief questions for the story-teller, the women, including the story-teller, selected art materials with which they responded to the story that was just shared. Art making took approximately 30 minutes, after which each woman, including the story-teller, showed what they had made in response to the story, saying a little about the meaning or process. The storyteller often responded to each of the group member's art pieces, perhaps with questions, clarification of her story, or comments. Group dialogue ensued in which, at times, voices were raised in frustration, anger or relief; laughter rang out; tears were shed; and more questions were posed. In their art and talk the women drew on symbols, metaphors, images, and occasionally parables, proverbs, and idioms. Through art, the women were released from the restrictions of language which does not necessarily incorporate embodied knowledge (what is known in and by a person) and which can conceal non-verbal meanings including that of the unconscious (Leitch, 2006).

The research processes (i.e., the combination of writing, art and dialogue), engaged the research participants in the imaginative, experiential, cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. Through the processes the women explored multiple modes of knowledge construction and dimensions of identity. By meeting regularly in small groups over a sustained period of time the participants came to know one another very well and felt safe within the community we developed, such that in the research sessions, they shared their inner most thoughts and memories and challenged one another with opposing views. Before the research began and on a few other occasions during the study the research participants were reminded of the importance of respecting one another's privacy and confidentiality by not identifying other participants outside of the group and not discussing what transpired in the sessions outside of the group.

From a large amount of data generated in the study, which cannot be condensed for this journal article, I focus mainly on data from one research session involving five group members. Resisting the temptation to reduce the data to isolated short snippets I attempt to keep the actual flow of data intact and the narratives as whole as possible. I describe the relevant art work.

## BRAIDING TEACHER NARRATIVES

In this section I begin with one woman's narrative, Catherine's (all participants' names are referred to with pseudonyms), and a few of the participants' responses, particularly Katka's response, to illustrate how the artistic processes and the ensuing dialogue lend themselves to creative tensions. These tensions provide additional narrative resources from which a sort of critical reflective "narrative braid" (Collins, 2003) and a bricolage of symbols emerged under the theme "a 'good' teacher."

### A "good" teacher.

**Catherine's story.** After a period of flow writing, Catherine shared the following,

I think it is a big challenge for me to stay here to be a teacher.... I've got my education in China....that is sixteen years of education.... So you can imagine, like, how I have been shaped and cut in a certain way....to fit a certain society. And it is like a small part of big machine. It is useful there in a particular machine but it may not work in other machine. And, uh, China and Canada, uh, in my eyes are two different machines....here it seems that students do not like teachers who give them much homework. Teachers without humor seem not able to survive. Like, uh, one of my teachers I see here, in one of my classes, I think in China she would be a perfect teacher; she's so diligent and she care about her students,....but she is not....humorous. And, uh, she is not always, like, praise the students. And the two of the native students say they do not like her because when they give answers the teacher is kind of, "Oh." But, you know, they do not give the perfect answer, so the teacher turn to others, like, "Oh, what do you think?" But that is totally unacceptable to them....[hits desk] "You should value what I say and then you can turn to another."

Susan Brigham (SB): Okay. I see.

But that in China is very reasonable. Like no one can give a perfect answer. I think teaching is a more difficult job here than in China. And maybe, maybe different...that is, difficult in another sense.... But, uh, maybe some people would think, like, uh....teach[ing] here [is] easier.... Like one....teacher, I do not like her because....I don't think she has enough knowledge. When we talk about theories or something she doesn't really understand. But....she respects the students, and she, like....admitted to us, "I don't know totally those theories, but...by, uh, discussion you can....we can understand the theories." But for me, that's not good teacher. The good teacher should know more than the student. And the teacher should do their job, not to get the students to lead a discussion or something.... And she's always, you know, like you say something; she's always like, "hmm, yeah." ....I do not feel good about that. I just think, "Oh what I've learned from you?" Nothing.... We can have this classroom outside of this building and....without you we can carry on our learning. Why would....we need you here? We need your expertise. That is what I paid money for, right? .... The other teacher, who really knows....and she's.... so experienced in the field, she knows a lot....and

she cares about students, and if....people who cannot talk well, like,....they can, uh, write a journal; “Then I can still know what is going on in your mind.” You know, she cares about different learning styles.... So, in my eyes, she is a very good teacher but she is seen by the students as weird. She’s naïve and weird. So, it really makes me confused. So different. How can I be a teacher? ....In my eyes one is better; the other is not better. But in their eyes it’s different, you know? They....value the other things more.

Katka: I agree with you, ‘cause it was the same in Poland. You go to the class; you don’t open your mouth....at the University level. You just sit there and just hope that [the Professor] doesn’t catch you. ‘Cause they just talking, and they have the biggest knowledge, and they ....I mean, ....all the way to elementary high school, um, like we talk about the parents’ participation. Parents won’t go and participate in the school because the teacher is like a god. She knows everything, and I don’t know any, so I’m not going to help and participate.... That’s their kingdom, and I’m not going to invade it.

After this brief dialogue the participants made artistic responses to Catherine’s story. Using bristle blocks, 3 plastic figurines and 5 wheels that can rotate, Katka constructed a “machine,” picking up on the analogy that Catherine had used at the beginning of her story. The machine has a base upon which are 3 walls. The 3-sided structure has just enough interior room for the figure that stands in this space. The back wall, which is taller than the 2 side walls, extends above and beyond the ceiling. The ceiling has 2 wheels attached with one of the wheels up on a block. On the exterior of one of the side walls, near the top is a block that juts out upon which a person stands. Below the person, at the base of the machine, is another wheel. Outside the other side wall is a wheel that faces outward. Katka explains:

So anyway, here’s my contraction....it’s a great comparison to a machine, and completely different how you are trying to get into the machine, and sometimes you can get hurt if the machine is going too fast....So some people were able to jump right in, and they’re okay [indicating a plastic figure of a woman inside the machine]. Some people are still at the side of the machine spinning around [indicating a figure of a man who is attached half way up the outside of the machine]; they don’t really know where they’re going. Some people ....just gave up and they can’t get in, so they’ll be always on the side [indicating a figure of a boy who is not attached to the machine but is on a block close by]....but for some people this machine has like a big wall and they’re trying to climb over it....‘cause the ideal place would be here that you do belong, ‘cause you’re supposed to both turn. If I had a few hands this would be all turning, turning, [demonstrating how each of the 5 wheels rotate] because it’s....not that easy to get into the machine.... ‘cause you’re not stopping that machine once you come, you’re jumping right in it....while it’s moving....If you’re not jumping in the right spot, you can get hurt.

Two others in the group share their artwork which also depicts different types of machines. One artistic response is a water coloured painting of cogs that are parts of two larger machines. On each cog is a picture of a teacher conducting her classroom in different ways. For example, upon one cog is a drawing of



a teacher standing and directing learning as the students sit quietly at desks. This cog is well oiled and turning smoothly while the same teaching style depicted on another cog in a different machine is rusty, squeaky and barely moving. The artist explains:

You'll notice that....the cog within the machine that's moving smoothly ....is a teacher who's very open and accepting, and all the students are around her, and they are all engaged in a dialogue process and theory building. That one seems to be quite effective in this particular machine, whereas the teacher who is spouting knowledge all the time and not involving the students in some way, um, there's a problem because students are resisting, you know, maybe they don't like the fact that the teacher thinks she knows everything. And so, she doesn't go over quite so well. So her machine needs to be more oiled in order for it to function properly in there.

Another response shows two distinctly different machines, one from duplo® blocks and another from clay, a feather, a piece of pipe cleaner and one piece of duplo®. The art maker explains:

Somebody who comes from this machine over to here....doesn't know how to fit into that. So then what? Do they change their shape? And become, you know, something else? Or do they stay like this and then change the shape of the machine?

Catherine: Or does the machine have to change a bit to accommodate?

....It's hard to tell which will help them.

Catherine then explains her art piece which she made using a lego® house with open windows. Hesitantly she explains:

I think it goes with a house....and people. There are people in a house and maybe that [house] is in Earth, I don't know, and they want to find the truth but from different windows. [And they are looking] and they see differently. I don't know. I just see [from one window]. No one knows maybe.... You want to have a better life on the Earth, but....we do things differently; so many things.

In her story and art work Catherine considers epistemological questions of knowledge and truth as well as identity. She begins her story by explaining that over time and through experience within a specific context or "machine" she has "been shaped and cut in a certain way....to fit a certain society" and now in a new context (Maritime Canada) she has to refit herself which requires a re-thinking of the values and assumptions around, for example, what constitutes "a 'good' teacher." Catherine defines a teacher as one who should "know more than the student" and a student as one who is not being capable of providing a perfect answer. Katka picks up the idea of the knowledgeable teacher and warns that the teacher or professor who assumes to know everything silences both students and parents and creates a deep moat between families and the teacher's "kingdom." When Catherine shows her art work she struggles

to explain that “through different windows” people can see different truths, perhaps acknowledging that the assessment of the quality of teachers can vary depending on the context as well as individual perspectives.

Catherine’s analogy of transforming as a painful process is reiterated by Katka who suggests there are different ways to approach a new context; you have to know where you are going, be prepared to maneuver around obstacles (i.e., climb over walls), and jump into the ideal place where “you do belong” or you will get hurt. Katka’s representation of a society that is in motion, has its own momentum, and is in a state of flux does not stop to let the newcomer enter in at his/her usual pace; the newcomer must make his/her way in the best way s/he can, or risk remaining on the margins and/or getting injured.

Through a process of plaiting, unplaiting and replaiting stories, the group members developed a braided dialogue where some strands were taken up and woven in, some tightly and some loosely, and some strands were left out, which were taken up at another time. The braid above is composed of complex overlapping questions related to teaching, learning, identity, culture, and power within micro, meso and macro contexts. For example, as others in the group picked up Catherine’s strand of thought related to identity and change, they queried the role of the individual and society; who/what changes – the society, the individual or both? How does society change the individual and how does the individual change society? How does a teacher position her identity and what instigates re/positioning? Which begs the question, what is the role of teachers in facilitating and/or stymieing individual and societal change?

In sessions involving other participants, the same theme “a ‘good’ teacher” arose. For example, a group explored different perspectives about the power invested in teachers, which stemmed from Rita’s quest to become a good teacher despite a lack of role models in her own schooling. She explains:

I was one of the good teachers in my country. But now I think....I was not good teacher and the way I taught was not good. Oh! What did I teach there? Nothing....Repeating and repeating is not good teaching. ...I said [to my students],....“What I give you now, you follow. You have to write 10 times, you have to read 10 hours, it does not matter you sleep or not. Just read and remember it”. Now I think what I did with them. I took them like machines. I feel very sad. Many times I wake up with bad dreams.

After a period of art making and dialogue others in the group return to Rita’s theme, such as Sara who states, “Guru means teacher. Guru is before God. Gurus are more important because they are showing the way to God.” Sandi agrees with this assessment, adding: “Teaching is....very powerful. Students can know what is good or bad and can choose because of the teacher,” while Ocean cautions, “In our country....teacher said it is right but even she is not right, we have to respect the teacher.” Rita rejoins that the power imbalances between the teacher and the student are “not good for the learning process.”

The braided stories and bricolaged symbols contain opposing themes, such as the qualities of “good” and “bad” teachers, powerfulness and powerlessness, as well as differing characteristics of Canadian-born teachers and teachers from other countries. Yet, through the group processes, the contrasts become less distinct. For example, while the research participants praise the provincial education systems in Canada and the quality of teachers educated in Canada, they are also critical of the discrimination they have experienced in schools and in teacher education programs, as well as the discrimination their children consistently encounter in their schools, highlighting the pervasive silence around discrimination, which they assert must be addressed in provincial education systems and teacher education programs.

## DISCUSSION

The braided stories that emerged remind us that: (1) we must pay attention to the little stories for they are worked through with culture and they tell us who and what we are (Abu-Lughod, 1993); (2) storying can help us to see ourselves reflexively and expose distortions in our interpretations of our experiences; and (3) there is not one grand narrative of “female internationally educated teachers,” but strands of individual stories, each situated in particular contexts, which contribute to the larger social analysis of female internationally educated teachers and more generally, what it is to be a teacher. The bricolaged symbols remind us that symbols can (1) evoke a relationship with our emotions and our unconsciousness (Scott, 2006), (2) engage us in interpersonal dialogical relationships, and (3) help to bring our habits of mind and meaning schemes into consciousness.

The dynamic interplay of flow writing, art making, storying and dialogue in a safe setting, helped to unblock blind spots necessary for creative thinking, critical reflection, and revisioning micro and macro power structures. Catherine underscores the value of comparing interpretations of common experiences as a way of recognizing taken-for-granted frames of reference (Mezirow, 2003):

Especially after the presentations; they had me really thinking...I mean...I haven't been thinking clearly, but just disease is really doing in my mind. I'm very encouraged to listen to your stories.

For many of the participants, the arts-informed group processes also provoked collective social action.

### *Collective social transformation*

Drawing on Freire and Gramsci, Weiler (1988) reminded us that interrogation which leads to critical reflection and consciousness are not enough because “real power must be changed” (p. 71). Weiler went on to assert, “social transformation must go hand in hand with a critical understanding of people's relations of power and to production” (p. 71). Indeed several

research participants' transformative learning involved social action. One participant, for instance declared, "we need to put this group into action... like invite educational authorities and share our stories and let them know what's going on!" She and some of the other research participants did find ways of sharing their stories as a way of educating communities about issues related to teaching and learning in diverse contexts, which has the potential for social transformation. With the author and her colleague, the women assisted in the development and public performances of readers' theatre scripts, conference papers and poster presentations using the research data. They also produced a play through a method called Theatre Collective Creation based on a synthesis of their experiences.<sup>3</sup> Some participants have also been involved in facilitating workshops for new students in the teacher education program at Mount Saint Vincent University.

Some of the art work was incorporated into these presentations which contributed to the dissemination of knowledge generated in the study, yet from the outset the final art pieces produced were not, in and of themselves, the main purpose, rather it was the artistic processes (i.e., of working with art materials which involved contemplation, re/symbolization, experiential learning, etc.) that were more critical than the end product. For this reason the research participants were at the beginning reassured that they did not require any formal training in the arts in order to participate in the study and that the art produced would not necessarily be the main focus.

## CONCLUSION

In an increasingly globalized world, it is critical that teacher education candidates be actively involved and challenged to think about historical and socio/geopolitical global issues, and be open to and receptive of other perspectives, stories, and questions, and to query their own values and norms (Mwebi & Brigham, 2009). The history of adult education, particularly the humanist oriented programs which centre lifelong learning on learners' experiences, embrace pedagogical methods such as dialogue and critical reflection, and nurture collective social action for a more socially just society offer valuable insights for teacher education. Additionally adult learning theory, specifically transformative learning, yields a valuable theoretical framework for teachers and teacher educators.

In this paper I have demonstrated how critical reflection is operationalized (Van Woerkom, 2010) through an arts-informed process. I have highlighted how both the rational/cognitive and the extrarational/affective dimensions are of equal importance in transformative learning. The example of the narrative braid and the bricolage of symbols derived from the research data illustrate a process through which participants can weave multiple perspectives, unpack constructed realities, become more reflective about their teacher identity and

teaching practice, and develop new ideas and possibilities. I recommend teacher educators become familiar with the rich history of adult education and transformative learning theory as inspiration for engaging preservice teachers in critical reflection and transformation. In particular, I urge teachers and teacher educators to embrace the risk and challenge an arts-informed approach, such as is set out in this paper, can offer.

## NOTES

1. This paper is based, in part, on a conference paper called "Transformative learning in teacher education programs: The experiences of immigrant female teachers in multicultural Canada," which I presented at the *Transformative Learning Conference* in Bermuda, November 18-20, 2009.
2. My colleague, Susan Walsh, and I worked together on this 5 year study.
3. Aren Morris, student in the Master of Arts in Education program at Mount Saint Vincent University and school drama teacher, facilitated this process.

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SUSAN M. BRIGHAM is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University. Before becoming a professor of adult education, Susan began her career as a schoolteacher in Ireland, Kuwait, and then Canada. Her research interests include adult education/lifelong learning, international migration of women, diversity issues and teacher education.

SUSAN M. BRIGHAM est professeur associée à la Faculté des sciences de l'éducation de l'Université Mount Saint Vincent. Susan a débuté sa carrière comme enseignante en Irlande, au Koweït puis au Canada, avant de devenir professeur spécialisée dans l'éducation des adultes. Ses intérêts de recherche englobent l'éducation des adultes/ la formation continue, les flots migratoires internationaux des femmes, les questions liées à la diversité et l'éducation des maîtres.