Chapter 9

Dare to Hope:
A Critical Examination of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse International Students – Graduate Students’ Experiences in the Southeastern United States

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ABSTRACT

In this critical examination, 10 culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) international graduate students attending a public university in the southeastern US were interviewed to understand their graduate school experience. Students’ writing samples and university policy and website were also analyzed. Findings indicated that obstacles included off and on campus challenges, physical barriers, and intangible conceptualizations that deemed international students different or even deficient. CLD students struggled with academic English proficiency. University policy limited students’ opportunities and time. The university website was incomplete and/or outdated. Universities should develop research-based guidelines for working with international population. Students need strong language skills and must be academically proactive. Mutual recognition, understanding, and acceptance of a pluralistic society via international education can bolster international relationships.

FROM MY EXPERIENCE

Sitting in the foreign classroom.
Taking many notes in a way that nobody sees my spelling.
Cannot keep up and make the letters fit

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the English conventions.
The ever-present feelings of inadequacy and alienation.
Speaking and sounding stupid.
How to make my words sound as they do in my mind.
Not belonging.
Being different.
English is so much better in my head.
Getting the PhD in your language
and in your world.
Constantly trying to make my sentences have
the proper structure.
Learning of how much the Whiteness, Occidentalism, and status quo
hurt the not-belonging.
However trying to submit to it with every corrected term
Fighting the war of words.
The defeated quest before it started.
The language, my voice will always give me away.
Betray me.
Reveal the truth.
“What if I am exposed?”
Impossibility of concealing what cannot even be hidden.
Irony of the situation.
Hide-and-seek.
Ready or not here I come.
You won.
Born too proud, fallen too many times.
I stand up.
To look into your eyes
as your equal.
Arrogant about my mistakes
not about my knowledge.
Language will not define me,
limit me, or win over me.
Roots that nurture advocacy and activism.
Made me too.
Ready or not here I come.

My story starts in Wrocław, Poland. I did not know as a child that my hometown could be considered a center of Europe, as it was nothing less or more than a home to me. Also, Poland from the 1980s and 1990s scarcely resembled what one expects of a European city. Growing up in a gray communist and then socialist land without any western influence and closed from the rest of the world caused me to experience very little diversity. Looking back, the monolithic composition of my country translated into