



“Digital Stories of Coming to Learn”

Chloë Brushwood Rose, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, York University

The Inspiration

For many newcomers to Canada the immigration process is one characterized by great loss and new beginnings, both of which demand a re-negotiation of language, identity, social location, and community. A great deal of this re-negotiation is undertaken by newcomer women, often on behalf of their families. However, these women’s voices are largely absent from mainstream discussions of community-based education for newcomers and of the socio-cultural challenges immigrants face. In response to this silence, a new project under the leadership of Dr. Chloë Brushwood Rose considers the stories of newcomer women as the starting point for these discussions and provides some fascinating new insights.

The Project

In her research, Dr. Brushwood Rose uses a method called ‘digital storytelling’ (Lambert, 2002) as a practice of community development and community-based education, as a method for gathering data in the form of first-person multimedia narratives, and as a medium for representing learning. In this project, funded by the Canadian Council on Learning and entitled *Digital Stories of Coming to Learn*, Dr. Brushwood Rose conducted two digital storytelling workshops and in-depth interviews with approximately 20 newcomer women in collaboration with two community-based organizations in Toronto (*Central Neighbourhood House* and the *Centre for Community Learning and Development*). Based on the stories and interviews, the study explores, first, the social and psychological factors that effect immigrant women’s access to community-based adult education, and second, how the digital storytelling workshop functions as a curricular space that allows for the complex negotiation of identities and experiences. What is being depicted or represented in these digital stories? What kinds of meanings and narratives are made possible in the use of multimedia? What are the limits of self-narration? What possibilities for self-expression does digital storytelling afford?

The digital stories of the women in this study offer complex insights into experiences of migration, settlement, identity and community, as well as the nature of storytelling as a method of curriculum. In their stories, these women offer narratives of experience that do not fit easily within the totalizing discourses that aim to locate ‘women’ and ‘immigrant women’ in particular ways.

The Impact

The research findings, first, illuminate the (non)material – the organizational, social, and psychological – factors that encourage newcomer women to participate in, or exclude them from, community-based adult education opportunities, and, second, point to both the limits and the possibilities of narrative and specifically digital storytelling as a curricular practice.

For more information on the study and to read articles published, please visit the project website at www.edu.yorku.ca/digitalstories.