

AFTERWORD: VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM

PARISA POURASAD AND DONNA HOFFMAN

When putting out the call for papers for this special issue, we wanted to ensure that the language learners voice was not absent from the conversation. To this end, I asked a colleague at the Multicultural Association of Fredericton if she could invite one of her English language learners to consider writing such a piece for *Antistasis*. Because of the nature of this particular contribution, we did not feel that the normal double blind review process was appropriate. We therefore made the editorial decision to include her submission (with a preface written by her teacher) as the afterword for this issue. I have entitled this piece, *Voices from the Classroom*, as a way of honoring the voices of language learners and teachers that may go unheard beyond their classroom walls. Language learning is a unique experience for each person. It is important to appreciate the journey of both the teacher and the student, and appreciate the uniqueness of the journey. This reflective piece enables us to hear individual voices and experiences.

Paula Kristmanson,

Donna Hoffman: As a teacher of English as a second language I have often wondered how I would manage in a new country, where I had to learn a new language in a new culture. A country where everything was different: the school system, the work environment, health services, grocery shopping, almost everything on a day-to-day basis. I don't think I would do as well as many of the adults who pass through my classroom door.

The adults I teach are hard workers who spend hours, days, months, years, learning English. It is a difficult and challenging proposition for many newcomers. I have an especially soft spot in my heart for the women who live here while their husbands remain in their home country working. These women set up a home with their school-aged children and sometimes nieces and/or nephews. They register the children in school, attend parent-teacher interviews, support homework programs, and include afterschool activities in their schedules. These mothers also learn the healthcare system, manage the shopping and finances, and the upkeep of their homes. It is quite amazing to listen to a mother describe her evening and morning schedules which in winter may include snow removal! It boggles the mind.

And yet the women I teach are positive, upbeat, happy, and thankful to be here in their new home of Fredericton. It is I who should be thankful, thankful for the opportunity to learn so much about other countries and cultures; thankful to these women who allow me to enter their hearts; thankful for my life, a life rich in love, experiences, and security.

It is a testament to their courage and tenacity as they attend English classes struggling to understand, and be understood in this their new home. In this vein, I

invite you to read a piece written by a woman who I had the pleasure to teach and learn from earlier this year.

Parisa Poursad: Learning a second language is much harder than you might think. Most New Brunswick citizens try to learn French as their second language and know how hard learning a new language is, but this task is even harder to accomplish for me as a newcomer. Personally I struggled with pronouncing and using new words, and idioms.

I think the age you start to learn a language has dominant effect. It is harder for elderly people to memorize and use new words. Proper pronunciation has always been a big obstacle in my way. It seems more difficult for elderly people to pronounce the words properly- their tongue muscles seem to be unable pronounce unfamiliar words.

All languages have hard grammar rules. Sticking to proper grammar is harder when I have to speak fast. This is one of the reasons that I'm not able to speak fluently. Another important barrier against speaking fluently is that most of the adults who are learning a second language prefer to translate the words they want to say from their mother tongue language to their second language so that it takes more time to them to speak.

In order to understand what other people are saying I need to have good listening skills. People with insufficient listening skills face a lot of difficulties every day. When you don't understand what people are saying, how are you going to answer them?

I found writing to be the hardest part of learning a new language. When you are speaking you only should have right grammar, but writing is much harder. In writing you should check the spelling of the words and make sure you have the right punctuation. I am also constantly challenged with reading. The main reason is that my vocabulary is not extended to read hard articles.

At the end, If you want to learn a new language you should be so resolute and do not give up so quickly. It is a hard process and takes time to become good at your second language.