

After thought: Why not a prism?

Miki Flockemann

University of the Western Cape.

This special issue of *Multilingual Margins* is an excellent example of how the guiding concepts of a project are put into practice. The framing of the *Re-imagining Multilingualisms* project is presented here in what can be termed an appropriately rhizomic, rather than linear structure; this is achieved through the strategic interleaving of theoretical, creative, collaborative and critically reflective perspectives. The title image of interconnected lines of coloured thread pointing to multilingual versions of the same concept, ‘beauty’, reflects this, while the title of the issue, *The Cat’s Cradle*, recalls the childhood activity where an everyday object – like a piece of string – can be transformed through skilful fingerwork and reimagined as, of all things, the cat’s cradle! But despite the intricacies of the interwoven structure created, one can still trace a single thread running through the complexity of the cradle’s lattice work, suggestive of the relationship of the *one* to the *many*. This is indicative of the ways in which the various contributions, modes of writing and perspectives offered here establish a conversation with one another. In addition, this also demonstrates the value of incorporating an affect-laden pedagogy for managing the (sometimes tricky) collaboration between students from two sister campuses with very different historical trajectories who participated in the project. At the same time, the pronoun in the handwritten heading placed above and below the title

design, “My connection with language”, prepares the ground for one of the central tropes of the collection, namely the significance of voice and location.

A case in point is Lynn Mario T. Menezes de Souza’s insistence on taking account of the “locus of enunciation”, or the space from which one speaks, as a primary emphasis of a decolonial pedagogy. This introduces a focus that runs through the volume as a critical thread. Given the crucial implications of the locus of enunciation in relation to how knowledges are framed and contextualised, De Souza’s intervention is well-placed in the introductory section of the volume, and is also picked up as a central motif in the concluding chapter (collaboratively written by the project leader, Zannie Bock, with two student researchers, Keshia Jansen and Lauren Abrahams). I particularly enjoyed De Souza’s lucid explication of decolonial pedagogies, and his foregrounding of the importance of the notion of ‘re-imagining’ as decolonial strategy, as well as the way he engaged with the students’ final exhibition of the artefacts, reflections, poems and narratives produced in response to the project. (This meant that when we encounter the students’ own descriptions of their projects, we already have a context for responding to them.) Moreover, in the way De Souza engages so directly with the students’ work, he also puts into practice the decolonial pedagogy that he advocates. Another focus introduced by

De Souza is that voice and location are embodied, which has implications for notions of subjectivity, and this focus on an embodied subjectivity is of course also imbricated in foregrounding the space from which we speak.

In the concluding chapter, the authors discuss how the Creative Writing workshop run by Kobus Moolman together with Lisa Julie and Nondwe Mpuma (both doing a Masters in Creative Writing), clearly marked a turning point for the participants, not only in terms of engaging practically with the notions of multilingualism as transformative tool, but also in relation to being able to work collaboratively. Students obviously responded extremely well to this process, which is not surprising given the value of free writing as an ice-breaking technique, as well as Moolman's description of the process as shifting attention from learning 'about' to learning 'through' or 'by means of'. Here again, the demonstration of these ideas outlined by Moolman were impressively demonstrated in the examples of creative writing developed during the project, clustered around concepts such as 'home'. Moreover, the interaction between feelings of discomfort and vulnerability (but also pleasure) involved in the writing process reiterated how appropriate such an arts-based pedagogy is in foregrounding the importance of an awareness of the place from which one speaks, and of course, the body is integral to this experience. As noted in the concluding chapter, *vulnerability* is a core attribute of the notion of linguistic citizenship since it comes with the territory when engaging with others across difference, and is a contributing factor for opening up to those perceived as 'other'. For instance, of special interest in relation to the creative writing component were the descriptions of the process of developing

collaboratively written poems, and the challenges of editing the work, as well as references to how the process of engagement with the project triggered apparently 'newly' recognised corporeal selves in relation to Others.

Although I have emphasised the usefulness of the reflective interjections and commentaries throughout the collection, these might perhaps better be described as offering 'diffractive' rather than simply reflective perspectives, given that the rhizomic structuring of the contributions means that they indirectly reflect *upon* one another, in relation *to* one another. As Bozalek and Zembylas point out (via Haraway), while reflection has been associated with 'mirroring' or 'sameness', the metaphor of diffraction is accumulative in the sense that it incorporates an assemblage of multiple perspectives which "operate as a 'means of becoming' and change" (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2016:115). The notion of change, and of new perspectives, of opening up opportunities to access, is also at the heart of the project itself, with its emphasis on redefining and re-imagining multilingualism. In addition, in terms of putting decolonial pedagogies into practice, the volume also illustrates how traditional hierarchies are deconstructed by the indirect conversations established between the voices of the students and academics throughout the collection, and on occasion 'actual' conversations taking place between them via email, putting content to De Souza's call for a non-hierarchical environment where teachers and students learn from one another. Looked at from this perspective, perhaps one can reimagine the image on the title page, not as a cat's cradle of woven threads of intertwined but distinct languages in balance with one another, but rather as a prism through which to view them as different, but equal in value.