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Belonging or not to the group studied as researchers: how to ensure legitimacy?

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Abstract. Using the research project example that we both carried out with Lebanese teachers and Syrian refugee teachers working with Syrian refugee students in Lebanon, this article explores to what extent, whether we belong to the group studied or not, can we question our legitimacy as researchers. The *Making a Difference* research project focuses on teachers' educational intervention with refugee students in the emergency context in Lebanon. Teachers were asked to speak out and revisit their professional experience, based on a singular event linked to one of their refugee students, thus reconstructing a story of practice (Desgagné, 2005). Indeed, 10 stories of practice were collected in Arabic during the 2021-2022 school year from interviews largely inspired by the explicitation interview (Vermersch, 2017), lasting approximately 60 minutes via videoconferencing (given the impossibility of traveling during the pandemic). Thus, as a recent immigrant to Quebec, originated from Lebanon, and a white person of long-standing settlement, but whose social and personal history has obscured the indigenous presence, we will address in turn our research motivation, our relationship to the terrain, to the participants, to the stories of practice collected and more broadly to the voices of these teachers that we wish to convey. This methodological reflection about our researcher positionality as insider, outsider or in between to the group studied will allow researchers to question the status quo in research standards and norms from a critical and reflective lens and to explore different forms of allyship.

Keywords: Positionality, Methodology, Critical Reflection

Introduction

What incentives do researchers have to conduct research? Specifically, what motivates us, two academics from diverse backgrounds teaching at universities in Québec, Canada, to undertake research in a sensitive region like Lebanon? What were we seeking, and what knowledge would we like to produce and for whom? These broad questions justify the discussion on researchers' role and their ethical procedures, and encourage a reflection on researchers' positionality at different stages of the research process: before, during, and after data collection. Thus, we propose a tripartite framework of positionality, highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities each phase presents in engaging the/with participants.

The initial phase starts as soon as we begin to formulate the research proposal and its objectives, raising questions about our preparation of methodological tools (such as the interview guide in our case), and the recruitment of participants. The second phase examines our direct relationship with participants and any adjustments made in the field while collecting data. It explores how we defined our relationship to the field, participants, the corpus collected, and more broadly, to the voices of the teachers we aimed to represent. The third phase focuses on data analysis and interpretation, exploring how teachers' voices were respected through the whole process. This phase focuses also on how we carry these voices when disseminating research findings. In fact, any research stages may be subjected to methodological tools which are anchored in the professional and academic culture of the researchers without considering the participants' knowledge, language and culture. Thus, based on the concept of decolonizing research methodology, this article aims to contribute to our understanding of our positionality in the field. Using the example of a research project that we both carried out with Lebanese teachers and Syrian refugee teachers working with Syrian refugee students in Lebanon, this article aims to explore to what extent, belonging to the group studied or not, can question our legitimacy as researchers.

The *Making a Difference* research project (2021-2022) focuses on teachers' educational intervention with refugee students amid the emergency context of Lebanon, encouraging them to share and reflect upon their professional experiences linked to a specific event involving one of their refugee students, thus reconstructing a story of practice (Desgagné, 2005). As a person with immigrant background living in Québec, originally from Lebanon and a white person of long-standing settlement, but whose social and personal history has obscured the indigenous presence, we address in turn our positionality as insiders, outsiders or partial insiders to the studied group while considering the limitations of the insider-outsider dichotomy and seeking a more flexible framework. In fact, many debatable questions emerged, immersing us in complex reflections, such as who is qualified to represent whom? Whose voice is valid? Who has the legitimacy to speak for these teachers and about them? (Banks, 1998). Before we engage in these reflections, we introduce the framework that explains the

concept of positionality, followed by the presentation of the research project. The article concludes with a summary and reflective questions. Based on this methodological reflection, this article enables researchers to question the status quo of research standards and norms from a critical and reflective lens and to explore different forms of allyship developed in the field.

Researcher positionality in social science field

This section discusses the concept of positionality in research using the existing literature. This concept has been widely developed over the past twenty years (Benjamin et al., 2019) questioning the research culture and its norms. We believe that by engaging in reflection to define their positionality, researchers can better navigate the complexities and ethical considerations inherent in their work, ultimately leading to more nuanced, comprehensive, anti-colonial and culturally responsible research, specifically in a context of crises (in which we interacted). Positionality refers to the position researchers assume while undertaking a study and their self-perception and role in the field (Kitagawa, 2023). It influences how researchers develop rapport with participants and understand them, collect data, and form their own identities, which in turn affects how participants are perceived and represented (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013; Fisher, 2015; Philippo and Nolan, 2022). When researchers spend time in the field, they inevitably interact with participants and might find themselves responding to their behaviors and remarks and shaping each others' identities and actions (Benjamin et al., 2019; Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013). This opposed the positivist approach that presents researchers as only external to the research and relate the scientific rigor to a certain ideal of neutrality. This approach, which is anchored in a culture of colonial research that doesn't enhance critical reflexivity and praxis transformation, lacks reciprocity and rejects "Other" ways of thinking, is increasingly questioned and even criticized (Thambinathan and Kinsella, 2021). In fact, the traditional view of researchers as impartial, detached observers and authors of accurate, factual narratives has been challenged (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013). This means that reality cannot be perceived through a singular lens, and that knowledge production as a multifaceted process should involve the interplay of diverse perspectives and methodologies. Abu Moghli and Kadiwal (2021) stated that knowledge is influenced by political power dynamics, relations and agendas and is shaped by a specific historical context: "knowledge is seen not as objective and universal, but as political and historically contingent" (p. 4). Thus, knowledge production implies moving beyond the Eurocentric system of knowledge to represent the views of minorities and racialized people, in order to dismantle unequal power dynamics and counter the epistemic oppression developed by this system (Gani & Khan, 2024). In the context of our project, as emphasised by critical research, teachers and participants should be involved as partners in the research process to contribute to knowledge production (Kincheloe et al.,

2011) and to reshape their own narratives. This serves to dismantle the capitalist approach to knowledge influenced by market forces and power structures. This is the process of critical reflection that we aim to apply to ourselves in order to gain awareness of how to decolonize our methodological tools as well as our researcher's mindset. This reflection involves a continuous self-examination of our own biases and positions within the research context. It helps us to challenge how research may be used to justify or support harmful policies and practices (Gani and Khan, 2024) by objectifying participants and context, silencing participants' voices and normalizing the violence they endure (Abdelnour & Abu Moghli, 2021). It also enables us to develop allyship, which involves actively listening to and amplifying the voices of participants and valuing their knowledge and experiences. As Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021), "exercising critical reflexivity is a key approach to decolonizing research. Critical reflectivity is powerful for examining researchers' epistemological assumptions, their situatedness with respect to the research, and crucial in addressing power dynamics in research" (p. 3).

Banks (1998) explained that values and cultural norms of mainstream researchers were often perceived as neutral, objective, and universally applicable. He added that this culture of neutrality allows researchers to support the status quo and avoid their "epistemic responsibility". Thus, they neglected the voice of marginalized and oppressed studied groups, as well as the interpretation and the representation of their history. In fact, positionality aims to create situated knowledge that facilitate the inclusion of an experience of oppression (Benjamin et al., 2019), acknowledging at the same time that the objectivity in research is not necessarily desirable. Hamisultane et al. (2021) argue that complete objectivity regarding a researcher's position is unattainable, suggesting that researchers invariably infuse personal elements into their work that clarify and influence their study. This engagement with the self and with participants is a debatable and negotiable space. More specifically, this is the tension between researcher "affected posture" and the relationship with the participants or concerning the scientific distancing necessary for data analysis that enables the co-construction of a new space with participants (Hamisultane et al., 2021). This is the fluid space co-constructed by researchers and participants, reflecting their identities and practices; it is called the hyphen-space (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013). That said, the dichotomy of insider-outsider researcher positionality must be exceeded and overcome to give way to other positions, as well as other ways of "making sense" of researchers' and participants' experiences and of the relationships they develop with each other throughout the research process.

In fact, the distinction between insider and outsider researchers has long been a subject of debate within the research community. Insiders are typically seen as subjective (Mc Ness et al., 2015), having access to participants knowledge and culture (Barnes, 2021), while outsiders are

viewed as external observers, detached, objective (Mc Ness et al., 2015) and without prior familiarity with the setting and the individuals they are studying (Hellawell, 2006). However, this binary framing oversimplifies the dynamics of the field and limits the full spectrum of positions a researcher can occupy relative to the subject of study. Moving beyond the simplistic insider-outsider classification acknowledges that researchers may simultaneously be insiders in some aspects and outsiders in others, depending on various factors and the phases of the research process. Kelly (2014) problematizes this dichotomy by considering that although insiders can offer deep insights into subtle cultural indicators, their closeness might result in the perpetuation of prevailing assumptions; on the other hand, outsiders provide a new viewpoint, but risk applying their own perspectives without critical-examination.

This means, as Milligan (2016) explained, that researchers are "neither fully inside nor outside", they are in-betweener, assuming various roles based on the context they are in, on the participants they interact with, and on their understanding of the linguistic and socio-cultural norms. Thus, it is not only about researchers "self perception" (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013), but also about the ways their role and images are defined by the participants and by how these are involved (Milligan, 2016). This flexibility in researcher positionality aligns with the intersectionality of factors that influence both the research and the researcher and the complexity of elements that interact with the broader social and cultural contexts of the field, as well as between the researcher and the field. Hellawell (2005) refers to dimensions of insiderness and outsiderness to qualify this flexibility. The status of a researcher as an insider or outsider can evolve throughout their lifetime, either due to shifts in the established knowledge and paradigms within the community being studied or because of significant changes in the researcher's own values and commitments (Banks, 1998).

On his side, Barnes (2021) evoked the term of liquid in-betweener to interpret the duality of the insider-outsider status and to overcome its limitation in order to understand the experience of research. He argued that in each interview, he experienced different degrees from insiderness and outsiderness. In order to understand the tensions and the connections in relationships between the researcher and the participants, Cunliffe & Karunanayake (2013) proposes four hyphen-spaces: insiderness-outsiderness, sameness-difference, engagement-distance, and political activism–active neutrality.

> *We call linking hyphens hyphen-spaces—fluid relational spaces in which boundaries between researcher-researched are blurred, influence is mutual, and multiple meanings articulated and worked out in different ways by all research participants.* (p.368)

The authors explain each space by a series of reflexive questions (**Note 1**) to permit researchers to reflect on their positionality. We used these

series of questions as guidelines that inspired us when developing our reflection.

To complete this framework and to delve more into the complexity of the question of the relationship between knowledge and power as well as the diversity of markers that should be considered, such as race, culture and ethnicity, we draw inspiration from Banks' typology of cross- cultural researchers (1998), without committing exclusivity. It describes four types of researchers: the indigenous-insider who endorses the culture of his native community and is recognized by community members as a legitimate representative to speak about it; the indigenous-outsider who was socialized within his or her indigenous community but assimilated into an outsider culture. He is perceived by indigenous people in his community as an outsider; the external-insider who is socialized within another culture but adheres to the community values and culture. He is perceived by the new community as an "adopted" insider; the external-outsider is socialized within a different community and has a partial understanding of its culture and misinterprets the behavior of the new community, so he is perceived as outsider.

Mc Ness et al. (2015) mentioned that in a context of change, the categorisation as being an insider or outsider becomes more challenging. We believe this is applied to the context of crises, war, displacement and emergency in which we get involved. The position of researcher is affected not only by internal factors but by external factors as well. Boumaza & Campana (2007) argue that in these contexts, the canons of the methodology may be compromised, particularly with regard to the neutrality of the researcher, the tools used for data collection, and the researcher's reflexive process. They added that habitus of researcher evolving in difficult field is negotiated, as well as the question of knowledge production:

> *Indeed, working on "dangerous", hostile, elusive objects, on saturated objects, which find themselves caught up in struggles of meaning, requires thinking about the position of the researcher in its methodological and epistemological aspects. It is also appropriate to focus on the conditions of knowledge production on objects widely studied in political science, such as violence in politics, the social policies of more recently integrated objects, such as the study of marginal or stigmatized social groups. (p. 7)* (**Note 2**)

Drawing inspiration from the typology of the cross-cultural researchers (Banks, 1998) and the four hyphen-spaces frameworks proposed by Cunliffe & Karunanayake (2013), we propose a tripartite framework of positionality, highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities each phase presents for engaging the participants and engaging with them as well. Although we are not ethnographers, we invoked these two frameworks to guide our reflection. In the following, we

describe the research project and the context which stimulated our interest to reflect on our positionality.

Research project. "Making a difference"

This reflective article draws upon a research project (**Note 3**) (Audet et al., 2020-2022) that focuses on teachers' interventions in supporting Syrian refugee students amidst the crisis in Lebanon. Teachers were asked to share their experiences, beginning with a narration of an unusual situation that marked their professional journey concerning one of their Syrian refugee students, thereby piecing together a story of practice. The story of practice (Desgagné, 2005) provides direct insight into practical knowledge that teachers developed during these experiences (i.e., what is being played out there, in the experience), including the meaning given to teachers' actions within and outside the situation, as well as their interpretation of the experience and how they acted with respect to a situation they had to manage. The project gathered ten stories of practice during the academic year 2020–2021. Data were collected through explicitation interviews (Vermersch, 2017) conducted via Zoom with ten teachers, eight Syrian refugee teachers (3 women; 5 men) and two Lebanese teachers (women). Teachers worked in different primary and secondary schools, public and private schools, inside and outside refugee camps. The duration of the interviews ranged between 45 and 60 minutes. With the exception of a single interview that took place in English, the interviews were carried out in Arabic, the mother tongue of the participants and one of the researchers. In fact, after interviewing the first teacher in English, we concluded that using a foreign language with teachers is a significant methodological limitation that alters access to teachers' knowledge and practices, which is why they were ultimately conducted in Arabic. This decision also facilitated our recruitment process as it was easier for us to solicit the participation of teachers without any exclusion criteria. The interviews were transcribed in Arabic, then validated by the teachers themselves before being translated into French. This aims to respect their discourse and the meaning they gave to their actions.

Reflecting on the period when we conceptualized and developed the project, our research team, with a keen interest in education in emergency contexts, opted to conduct the study in Lebanon as it has historically served as a transit country for refugees. Moreover, with the anticipation that Syrian refugees arriving in Canada might pass through Lebanon, this field became particularly relevant to our work. Despite Lebanon's severe political and economic crises, especially after the port blast in 2020, it continues to host the largest concentration of refugees coming from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc, but also the Palestinian refugees who were exiled from Palestine during Al Nakba (The Catastrophe) and the Israeli occupation and colonisation of the land since 1947-1948. Despite its history with refugee populations, the question of taking in Syrian refugees was controversial on a sociopolitical level. This had endless repercussions on their living conditions, their social

integration and their education as well. Taking into consideration the particularity of the context and its fragility, our research proposal was adapted to fit the Lebanese context and to facilitate our access to the field, being conscious at the same time not to harm the potential participants. As Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021) suggest, for those who have been oppressed by colonization, war and displacement, "research is a dirty word » (p. 1). We aimed to recruit teachers who teach Syrian refugee students in any region and schools in Lebanon. We remained flexible regarding the interview format, willing to use phone calls, Zoom, WhatsApp, or any other available means. We also agreed to conduct interviews progressively to accommodate Lebanon's frequent electricity and internet issues. Conscious of teachers' living conditions, the post-trauma they may experience, and all the severity of displacement and war repercussions, specially the Syrian teachers, we decided to offer participants resources for psychological support in case they needed it during or after the interviews. This was mentioned on the consent form they have to sign. We acknowledged at the same time that their needs are beyond a simple psychological support and that reconstructing their stories of practices would likely be difficult, and even though, to some extent, we were obliged to do it. After securing the ethics certificate from the Canadian University where we worked, we designated the Lebanese researcher on our team to recruit participants through her contacts in Lebanon and to conduct the interviews in Arabic (this will be explained later). This decision leveraged her background as a previous teacher in Lebanon and her extensive network there. Before the interviews, she briefed each participant on the research objectives, motivations, processes, confidentiality protocols, modalities, psychological resources, and the responsibilities of both participants and researchers. Consent was obtained within one week following the initial meeting.

Although our aim is not to delve into the ten stories in detail, we believe it is essential to highlight some remarks that characterized the flow of the interviews. Even though the story of practice focused on the narration of one unusual situation, we permitted the participants to engage in discussions on a variety of situations, as long as they were willing to talk about them. In this sense, we did not "impose" a topic or a specific angle for them to talk about their work and their interventions. It appears as though they possess many situations or events to reveal and feel a compelling need to confess or articulate their thoughts. We were also prepared for the possibility that the teachers might also share their political stances with us, as expressing political opinions is a common cultural practice in Lebanon. A brief examination of the stories' titles provides insight into the tone of their narratives, their concerns and the meanings behind the situations they recounted. The titles of the stories illustrate the importance of refugee education for teachers (We should educate the refugee students, Ali; We should know our students, Molhem), the hope (To develop the future generation, Afifa; Give them hope, Rania), the sense of

responsibility (Learn to live together, Marwa), the depth of affection (Having a good sense of humanity, Adel; Affection and compassion, Moreed; He tore my heart, Ayan), the importance of security (The school as a home for students, Rima), and finally the wellbeing of teachers themselves (Think about teachers' wellbeing, Nasser). More information about the research project and the methodology will be clarified in the following parts.

Reflection on the field

Our contribution to the research project in Lebanon offers an opportunity to be engaged in reflections about the research process while critically examining our positionality within the project's context. This also enables us to adopt a broader perspective on our ways of "participating" in a certain process of decolonization. Through this process, we have been able to question the configurations that shape our positionalities, influencing how we apprehend our role and responsibility. Ultimately, this process encourages us to reflect more broadly on our allyship postures in various, distinct, but also complementary and supportive ways.

The research team involved in this reflection consists of two individuals of diverse representation and a more or less significant proximity with the teachers who were asked to participate in the research. In what follows, each one of us presents her profile, as well as her motivation to contribute to the research project. Then, we introduce our reflections separately, guided by the tripartite framework of positionality we described above. Although the reflections were individually written and presented to highlight our unique positions and motivations, it's crucial to note that we engaged in collective discussions during the entire writing process, thus allowing us both to articulate our thoughts and to review the process together. It is an intellectual interchange between us as insider and outsider in which each adopts perspectives from the other (Merton, 1972).

Profile and Research motivation

A "bicultural motivation", by Rola Koubeissy.

I am a person with an immigrant background living in Québec, originally from Lebanon. Despite leaving Lebanon a long time ago, my connection to the country remains strong, rooted in family ties and friendships. I ensure to visit annually, and I continually feel integrated into its society. My bicultural identity has not diminished my sense of belonging or my understanding of Lebanon's societal, educational, political, and economic systems. Highlighting this is crucial to elucidate my positionality, particularly at the inception of our project, as an insider with an in-depth understanding of my country of origin. However, throughout our work on this article, I believe my perception of what it means to be an insider has evolved. This concept appears to have two dimensions to me: being an insider on a personal level and being an insider on a professional level. I intend to elaborate on this in the following sections. Thus, acknowledging

my positionality as a bicultural researcher encouraged me to contribute to the project.

I believe that our life experiences undeniably shape our personalities, along with our individual and professional identities. The concept of positionality in research scrutinizes the professional identity of the researcher, while simultaneously acknowledging the personal dimensions that influence this identity, such as culture, language, norms, values, interests, and aspirations. I often reflect on some authors, despite living in the diaspora for so many years, continuously integrate the Lebanese Civil War into their writings. It is evident that our professional identities are deeply influenced by our experiences. So, what motivates me to contribute to this research? This reflection led to a bi-level motivation, which I describe as "bicultural motivation."

Firstly, as a researcher at a university in Quebec, a direct professional motivation to contribute to the project and even to propose it lies in my research interest. Focusing on the questions of diversity and inclusion, on the education of students from immigrant backgrounds and refugees in Quebec and in the context of emergency, as well as on the analysis of teaching practices within these contexts, I was driven to examine teaching practices in a different context. In fact, in my capacity as postdoctoral researcher, I contributed to Genevieve's projects that involved teachers in Québec to narrate an unusual situation that happened with an immigrant or refugee student in their classes and to reflect on their interventions, thus developing stories of practices. The analysis of these stories revealed that the school system isn't always prepared to integrate refugee students, while teachers are not necessarily equipped to understand their students' realities and their migration journey. This finding stimulated the idea of investigating how teachers in other contexts manage to teach refugee students. It was also an opportunity to explore the migratory journey of refugee students arriving in Quebec. Lebanon, a context with which I am intimately familiar with since I worked there as a teacher, naturally became a focal point of this reflection.

Secondly, as a Canadian citizen living in Quebec and originating from Lebanon, the current political and economic crisis in Lebanon and its impact on the educational system, as well as the displacement of Syrian refugees due to the war in Syria and the challenges these refugee students face in accessing education, emphasize the necessity to intervene in such a context. It feels like a responsibility to unveil what these refugee students and teachers endure and how their futures are compromised. This affected me on a personal level as much as the professional level. Thus, a sense of allyship, solidarity and care were naturally and obviously developed. I oversee the necessity to acknowledge their practices, demonstrate their capacities and resistance, amplify their voices and give them the opportunity to share their stories that may inspire other teachers from other countries.

So, at this micro level, the goal was to value their work and practices, but also to develop consciousness among teachers in Quebec to understand their students' realities, to deconstruct biases, to engage in solidarity and allyship with their students and with teachers from a foreign country.

On a macro level, the objective was to analyze their practices to understand how teachers operate under challenging conditions and to highlight how populations becoming vulnerable due to war context are manipulated by an international system of oppression. In an unjust world, where fortune is distributed inequitably and where war and displacement are orchestrated by a colonial system under the guise of democracy and human rights, raising awareness about these populations' daily struggles becomes vital. This also aims to develop critical consciousness and foster solidarity among teachers in Québec and other countries, enabling them to understand mainstream international policies and the impact of the (post)colonial system on oppressed populations, and how this system contributes to the creation of marginalization. I refer here to what Ayan, one of the teachers participating in the project mentioned in her story: " I chose to tell this story to carry my voice to the deaf ears of the world. I want to tell them: "Wake up!" The rights of these children are being violated."

Additionally, acknowledging the disparity in knowledge production between the Global South and the Global North, as well as questioning for whom, how and why knowledge is generated, highlighted the importance of emphasizing another goal related to the knowledge produced by these teachers, residing in the Global South. It was vital to recognize and legitimize their narratives and life experiences to support their resistance and long-term aspirations.

A "triple outsiderness" motivation, by Geneviève Audet

I am a white person of long-standing settlement but whose social and personal history has obscured the indigenous presence. In the context of Quebec, you could say that I belong to the majority group. Even though I'm doing more and more of this "where am I from" exercise, I still find it difficult to put it into words, even if I believe in the importance and relevance of not hiding it either. What part does my native ancestry play in this discomfort? Is this a manifestation of the "reflexivity deficit" inherent in the position of people belonging to socially advantaged groups, as identified by Harding (1992, cited in Cervulle, Quemener et Vörös, 2016)? This founding figure of *standing point theory* argues that such people are incapable of questioning the effects of their position on the knowledge they produce. I continue to wrestle with these questions from both a professional and personal standpoint. The reflection we offer here bears witness to this.

The research project on which this reflection is based on was, initially, far from me and, by the same token, I was quite far from it too. Under Rola's impetus, this specific project was able to respond to my desire to do something different, to explore something new, after several research projects on similar themes, linked to educational intervention in a context

of ethnocultural diversity in a broader sense, and immigrant and refugee school-family relations. My "tendency" in research is to contribute to the advancement of knowledge by documenting teaching practices from a comprehensive perspective, i.e., by taking a sensitive look at them, which attempts to account for the professional know-how to which these practices bear witness, with a particular concern for acknowledging the latter.

My research projects have always taken place in Quebec. Moreover, I was not really familiar with education in emergency situations, nor with the working conditions of teachers in Lebanon. I didn't have (and still don't consider myself to have) a detailed knowledge of the Lebanese political context. I knew that the field was different for me. I was more 'accustomed' to seeing the impacts on families and students here, and I had the humility to recognize that from the beginning. So, I acted with prudence and openness to discover the new reality. I was conscious not to trivialize the violence of the context or the teachers' experiences and not to silence their voices. As Gani and Khan (2024) mentioned, the participants were 'the backdrop and vehicle' for my self-discovery. I'm not a teacher by training. However, I am inclined to believe that my initial training in psychology influences the way I approach the people who take part in my research and the way I make sense of the practices they share with me. In fact, I can say that in such contexts, I feel close to them. In this sense, I consider that I was, especially if I compare myself to Rola, "at a distance" from the object we were about to study and the people we were going to recruit. At the time, I was also unaware of the richness of the reflections and questions that this initiative would raise.

Reflections on the field: our positionality through the research process

Based on each one's positionality as insider or outsider and acknowledging these spaces' navigation, we will both discuss our positionalities throughout the research process in order to form a comprehensive vision of the process. As Merton (1972) stressed, having both insider and outsider perspectives in the "process of truth seeking" is highly important:

> "The cumulative point of this variety of intellectual and institutional cases is not-and this needs to be repeated with all possible emphasis- is not a proposal to replace the extreme Insider doctrine by an extreme and equally vulnerable Outsider doctrine. The intent is, rather, to trans- form the original question altogether. We no longer ask whether it is the Insider or the Outsider who has monopolistic or privileged access to social truth; instead, we begin to consider their distinctive and interactive roles in the process of truth seeking" (p. 36).

Our reflections consider the three phases of the research process, as we believe each phase reveals different aspects of our respective positionalities. Notably, we do not necessarily commit to reflecting on the same elements in each phase, while still acknowledging the interconnectedness and complexity of these phases. The initial phase concerns our preparation, beginning with the formulation of the research proposal and its objectives, along with preparing our interview guide and strategizing on participant recruitment. The second phase delves into our direct engagement with the field, highlighting our experiences during interviews, the adjustments made while interacting with participants, and our relationships with them and their narratives. The third phase is dedicated to data analysis, interpretation, and the dissemination of results, ensuring that the teachers' voices are honored throughout the process.

Phase 1

Navigating within the hyphen-space, by Rola Koubeissy

As Chammas (2020) noted, having insider status can be a significant advantage for recruitment purposes. So, the recruitment process went smoothly as I leveraged my network of family and friends to connect with teachers working with refugee students across various schools in Lebanon. The target number of teachers was not fixed, aiming to recruit between 6 and 12. Ultimately, we recruited 10 teachers, 8 Syrian refugee teachers and 2 Lebanese teachers, representing different schools and regions in Lebanon. The initial step involved obtaining their phone numbers, through which the first contact was made to introduce myself and to present themselves. I presented myself as a person who originated from Lebanon, residing in Québec and working there. I only communicated with them in Arabic. I choose to affirm that I am not affiliated with any of the NGOs operating in Lebanon, especially since I believed that some of them were exploiting refugees based on capitalist and colonialist agendas, under the guise of democracy and human rights. The aim of the project and my personal aim as well were to reveal their stories and change the narratives about them, so I was cautious on how to address that without our project being compared to a NGOs project. I detailed the research project, the methodology, the objectives, and the interview process, emphasizing confidentiality, the use of pseudonyms and the importance of signing the consent form, which they found particularly reassuring. As noted earlier, I mentioned that psychological resources are available, if needed although I believe that the harm extends beyond what these resources may address This allowed them to understand that I acknowledge the severity of the situations they and their students faced and the potential harm the narration of these situations could cause them. All these introductory meetings were conducted in Arabic, my first language and their first language as well. Obsessed by the question of why they would agree to participate, I stressed the significance of their contribution to knowledge production related to the refugee students' education. I explained that their practices will be shared with teachers in

Québec who need to know more about the journey of the refugee students they welcome in their classes and about teachers' practices and interventions. They were satisfied with the idea of sharing their practices and contributing to knowledge production. However, did that motivate them to participate? Did they feel that this legitimized their practices and thus, their stories and life experiences? Or was it their way to break the silence surrounding their situations? I had many reflections and concerns at that time (and still do): how can our research fit into critical approaches that lead to these teachers' empowerment? How can they contribute to knowledge production and to have their voices heard? How to support education in an emergency context without falling into a new form of colonization and without instrumentalizing the participants?

As the project involves both Lebanese and Syrian refugee teachers (two groups), I was conscious of their specific living and working conditions. This acknowledgment was also discussed within the research team. While Syrian refugee teachers are dealing with the impacts of war, forced protracted migration and displacement, experiencing loss and post-trauma, they also face, alongside Lebanese teachers, the consequences of the political and economic crisis in Lebanon. Together, they deal with the fragility of the educational system and the effects of policies on the education of Syrian refugee students. However, I didn't feel any discomfort, nor did I feel more comfortable with one group over the other. Although their vulnerabilities differ, they all suffer from systems of oppression that impacts their lives in various ways and at different levels. Based on that, and related to the first and second hyphen spaces (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013), insider-outsider and sameness difference, I can affirm that I am indigenous to the community being studied, to both, Lebanese and Syrian teachers, and I did feel at home when communicating with them and later on, when interviewing them. I am to some extent similar to their ethnicity, gender, culture, religion, values, language, etc. However, in this perspective I wondered how did these teachers perceive the project? How did the Lebanese teachers perceive me and how did the Syrian teachers as well? As an external researcher, an insider researcher? As an insider Lebanese? An outsider Canadian? At that time, I had no definitive answers to these questions (though I would find them later).

Regarding the inside-outsider hyphen space (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013), I will introduce two points I believe are important to understand my stance navigation within the same hyphen space. Firstly, before the first interview, my initial expectations for the research project and teacher's discourse diverged somewhat from reality. Being acquainted with the situation in Lebanon, I anticipated that the existing tension and the prevalent negative narrative about Syrian refugees, coupled with the discriminatory educational policies in Lebanon impacting Syrian students' education and compromising their future, would be reflected in the teachers' discourse and comments during the interviews. This caused me to reflect on how objectivity in research might be jeopardized when

approaching the field with preconceived notions or opinions that could adversely influence the interview dynamics. Fortunately, the first interview I conducted was with a Lebanese teacher who showed proactive engagement and empathy to her students. Her position and her discourse prompted me to reflect on my own point of view and my expectations, especially the potential negative effects of my insider viewpoint.

Secondly, despite my insider status and the consideration I should have taken regarding the particularity of the language and the culture of the participants, I employed, at the beginning, the same methodology we have commonly used with teachers in Québec, which included conducting comprehensive interviews in French. The only adaptation I was willing to make was to conduct interviews in English, in addition to French. Thus, it seemed like my professional outsider position as a researcher at a university in Quebec overshadowed my insider position at the personal level, particularly in relation to the culture and language of the participants. It was only after conducting the first interview that I recognized the unfairness of employing a foreign language for the interviews with teachers. I believed this could potentially limit teachers' ability to express themselves freely and to engage in the research process. The decision was rapidly made within the research team to conduct all interviews in Arabic, validate them, then translate them to French. How can we interview someone in a language that is not their own? How can we fully engage participants and empower them if we are using a language different from theirs? It's crucial to acknowledge that once this language criterion was eliminated, the recruitment process significantly improved. Thus, I was prepared to conduct the other interviews with these two changes: one at the methodological tool level and the other on a personal level, in terms of my expectations. It was like transitioning from one stance to another, modifying my insider position to navigate through the liquid space and be involved in a critical reflection process. As Muwwakkil (2023) mentioned it, shifting stances allowed me to maintain my sense of integrity throughout the research.

Surfing the hyphen-space, by Geneviève Audet

At the very beginning of my reflections on the formulation of "Making a Difference", I was aware that such a project would require certain adjustments on my part, that it would take me out of my comfort zone, out of my research agenda so to speak. While I'm used to my research projects taking place in Quebec, in a language I've mastered, French, in a context in which I grew up and in a school system I've attended, and most of the time in school environments with which I've already had long-standing partnerships (some ten years), this project represented something of a step into the unknown for me, but also a certain displacement into the hyphen-space insiderness-outsiderness (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013). Indeed, I had never lived in a war context or been forcibly displaced, and I wasn't completely familiar with the different types of schooling for refugee students in the Lebanese context.

Given my position as an outsider and my distance from the participants and their context of practice, I was also confronted with the difficulty of imagining the stories that would be collected and the kinds of situations that would be recounted, the difficulties of recruitment (which could not be as straightforward as that for my projects in Quebec might be, in addition to the COVID context), the linguistic issues (we had initially thought that the interviews would be in French...) and even the reasons why people would agree to participate... It's worth pointing out, though, that in preparing this article, Rola reminded me that it was I who had come up with the name of the project, Making a difference. I had validated it with her, but perhaps that was already a sign of the "displacement" this project would lead me to achieve. I also concentrated on the methodological aspect of the research project, the stories of practice, since for me this was "familiar territory" (most of my research projects mobilize this methodology) and let Rola do the recruitment work, notably for linguistic reasons.

Looking back on it now, I can see that Rola's presence and the exchanges we had when formulating the project and making it "operational" enabled me to quietly "unglue" myself from my outsiderness. I was increasingly driven by a need for solidarity with the teachers we were targeting, and I sincerely wanted to "carry their voice". I lacked the tools to do so, but my commitment to it was real. What was clear to me at the time was that I certainly didn't want to position myself as an "expert", but rather as an apprentice, who didn't force things or push people around, adopting a decolonial posture in the process... At this stage, I was able to "surf" on Rola's insiderness. In retrospect, I can say that it was the complementarity of our positions that was put to good use.

Phase 2

Conducting interviews as insider or outsider? By Rola Koubeissy

As mentioned before, the interviews were conducted via Zoom. I didn't meet the teachers in their schools or in their own spaces. In addition, due to internet connectivity issues in Lebanon, the participants often had their cameras turned off, which limited my interaction with them. I conducted two interviews via WhatsApp voice service. So, how can I describe my relationship to them, to the field, and later on to their stories? In conducting interviews, my primary concern was to act in a way to overcome barriers related to the physical distance as well as the power imbalances that my position as an external researcher based in a North American country might generate. My goal was to be seen as an insider by them, especially by the Syrian teachers, so they can feel free to express themselves and fully engage in the research process without any constraints. I was conscious of the potential power dynamics, so it was essential to eliminate these, in order to conduct interviews where participants felt comfortable sharing their beliefs and practices, rather than merely providing responses they assumed I wanted to hear. This phenomenon of listening

fosters an "open dialog" between me and them incorporating emotional and trusting relationship (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021).

"No one has lived a day outside their own body. We, as researchers, necessarily bring that same body and its attendant histories to the research context" (Muwwakkil, 2023, p. 134). This is true indeed. It looks like researchers often find themselves balancing on the edge between subjectivity and objectivity, navigating a space that is sometimes uncontrollable, especially in contexts of crisis or emergency, where solidarity emerges naturally, and the identity of the researcher takes on a different form. There is no research without interaction with the social context and no interaction without identity reformulation, at least momentarily. Neutrality is only an "ideological phantom" (Kincheloe et al., 2011) that provides researchers with a sense of satisfaction. What if the researchers themselves are insiders or belong to the culture of the participants? What form would this interaction take, and what are the limitations of its legitimacy? I approach this phase from two reflective perspectives, the teachers' side and my side as a researcher. First, the flow of the interviews and the richness of the data exceeded our expectations, especially for the seven interviews conducted via Zoom in Arabic. The remaining three, one in English and two via WhatsApp, are less elaborated. However, I was surprised how teachers didn't give up despite poor internet connection. This displays the level of their engagement and their motivation to share their stories. These interviews showed that all teachers went beyond narrating a single situation as they were asked for. They chose to share many other situations, with some of them stating their desire to tell more. They were given the freedom to fully express their stories and those of their students. It is important to notice that they showed a link between the two stories, especially for the Syrian teachers. This ease of explaining, narrating, justifying, and sometimes criticizing may suggest that they perceived me as one of them. As Banks (1998) mentioned, the indigenous-insider is seen by participants as a legitimate representative to speak on their behalf. However, what if they perceive me as an outsider capable of conveying and sharing their messages? I was concerned about that possibility. Perhaps I will be able to address this question more clearly from my perspective as a researcher.

Second, I can't pretend that there was an engagement distance. I was emotionally involved, disturbed and concerned, yet I was keen to listen carefully, to ask and to complete the interviews properly. My insider status allowed me to refine and deepen my questions. Understanding their culture enabled me to pose contextually relevant questions and, at times, to employ classical Arabic to ensure clarity in my pronunciation. At the same time, I was acutely aware of the limits of my questions to ensure their comfort and wellbeing. I did know, to some extent, when I should stop my digging in their experiences and respect their (emerging) vulnerability that occurs as a consequence of the context of the war and their displacement. I respect their silence while also acknowledging their tendency to share their stories,

including details they voluntarily choose to disclose. Being vigilant was vital; research is not about gathering meaningful data but also promoting the well-being of those sharing their experience with me. Is it really possible for anyone to remain unengaged and emotionally detached when interacting with participants in such contexts? In a research project in Québec that I contributed to, I experienced emotional engagement and stress when analysing stories of practices related to refugee students' integration due to the brutality of their journeys and what they have endured. Teachers' stories in Lebanon were very challenging for me and stirred deep emotions. They exposed the inequity, unfairness, oppression and discrimination that these teachers endured. At the same time, the stories highlighted their resistance and their determination to support their students, as if their students are used as vehicles and allies to retrieve their strength. I surfed on Genevieve' objectivity and outsiderness to enhance my own objectivity. My goal was to find a kind of balance between objectivity and subjectivity. At the same time, these stories somehow confronted me with my position. I discovered that what I don't know about the context is much more than what I do know. Like Muwwakkil (2023), I asked myself if I had sufficient knowledge about them and their life conditions, and that belonging to the same ethnicity, culture or language doesn't mean that I am necessarily the one right person to work with them. I believe no one can be a fully insider to their participants' stories. This brings us to the concept of "hyphen-spaces" (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013) and the liquid in-betweener (Barnes, 2021) explaining how researchers shift from one position to another, trying to balance between /engagement/subjectivity and objectivity without harming the participants and silencing their voices

Phase 3
From outsider to external-insider by Geneviève Audet

Reflecting on the analysis phase of the stories of practice leads me first of all to go back to my first reading of them. Rola had told me a little about the interviews, but not about the situations described in detail, and at that point we had also said little about what these interviews were about and the emotions and reflections they generated in her. I therefore became acquainted with the corpus once it had been translated into French, still anchored by my outsider posture, but, as discussed in the section on the first phase, resolutely turned towards a liquid in-betweener posture (Barnes, 2021).

My initial reaction was of shock. I had to reread the stories more than once... What struck me first was the violence emanating from the situations described. The conditions in which the teachers had to work and live, the violence of the system, the violence of the relationships, the distress of the children and families, but also in a certain sense their own, gripped me. Then, as I read on, once the initial shock of being an outsider and all that it implied had subsided, I took another look at the stories. Indeed, I was able to "get over" the shock and let my researcher's posture emerge... More specifically, with hindsight, I think that as I appropriated the stories and

approached them with my eyes as a researcher who sincerely wishes to recognize teachers' knowledge, my "transition" from outsider to what I'll call, following Cunliffe & Karunanayake (2013), external-insider was taking place, i.e. I felt myself gradually becoming that person who is socialized within another culture but adheres to the community values and culture, in the manner of an "adopted" insider (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013). I was increasingly able to make connections between "what I knew" and what I could access through the stories I had collected. I was deeply moved by the words used by the teachers (I often asked Rola if the translations were accurate, if they were really the words the teachers had used), by the commitment the teachers showed, by the way they took on their role, even if, as you can see from the text, nothing is simple and nothing is given in advance in such a context.

This phase was tinged with a lot of misunderstandings on my part, because I felt, when I reread the stories, that I was missing some "keys" to understanding. The various exchanges we had on the stories, and the different interpretations we could make of them, helped me a lot to understand the subtleties of the school context in an emergency situation, of the task that was asked of them, and of how, through all these "conditions", they found the strength to carry on. Here, the complementarity of our postures has definitely been put to good use. In the course of my research, I always intend to "give reason" to the words of the participants who accept, often with great courage, to share a real-life situation that they consider to be instructive or to carry a message for others in similar situations. In the present project, to be able to "give reason" to the teachers' voices, we needed to reflect together to validate our interpretations and make explicit what lay behind them.

It's a stage that researchers always have to go through, but the specificity of the way it took place in this project lies in the idea that we both had to "enrich" (rather than compare) our interpretations with those of the other, thus allowing, on the one hand, Rola to distance herself from her strong emotional commitment and closeness to the teachers and the situations recounted, as well as her detailed knowledge of the Lebanese context, while at the same time not erasing the leverage represented by the keys to understanding that she held and still holds on these stories. On the other hand, in this move to "reach us" through the analysis of the stories by rendering reason to the participating individuals, I also had to pursue my movement towards what I consider to have become an external-insider posture (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013). To be able to carry the teachers' voices, therefore, we had to reach out and find a meeting point between someone who understands too well and someone who doesn't, somewhat along the same lines as Crossley and Vulliamy (2006, cited in Kelly, 2014, p.247) when they mention: "Insiders bring potential insights into nuanced cultural signifiers, but their familiarity may lead to the recycling of dominant assumptions; outsiders bring a freshness of perspective, but may impose their own worldviews uncritically". At the time of writing, we had

submitted three articles in French, English and Arabic, taken part in three colloquia and organized a symposium on teacher training for dealing with inequalities in Quebec and in other national contexts and/or contexts of crisis or instability. The compilation of collected stories of practice is available online, in French, along with a pedagogical guide designed to raise awareness of the realities faced by teachers in emergency situations, as well as the pre- and peri-migratory realities of students and families who may find themselves in Quebec classrooms and schools.

Conclusion: What forms of allyship to amplify participants' voices?

Taking up Le Gallo and Millette's (2019) invitation to decentralize the notion of ally, we now wish, in the light of what has been presented, to take a reflexive look at the "different facets and implications of the status of ally" (p. 2). Indeed, to go further than respecting the participants' word, our wish to keep our word to them throughout the research process (Audet et al., 2022) and our intention to share their stories, to what extent can we claim ally status in such a sensitive context?

Is the role of ally necessarily negotiated on the basis of a desire to "speak for" or "speak about"? Doesn't this approach sometimes risk reinforcing the absence of certain populations' voices? Why choose to "speak for" them or "about" them instead of seeking to destabilize the systems of oppression that affect them, as well as questioning research methodologies that sideline and instrumentalize them? Could "speaking for" and "speaking about" amount to another form of colonization, in which researchers use their relationship to power and power to their advantage? However, aren't we sometimes obliged to speak for certain populations in order to open closed doors and give them access to the world, to share their knowledge and life experiences, while respecting and recognizing their local knowledge?

Aware of the fact that the people concerned don't always want, recognize the relevance of, or want to be allies, it is perhaps difficult to identify oneself as such, because recognizing the epistemic violence (Vickers, 2020) this can represent and the fact that "the person who wishes to be an ally must accept that the status is granted to him or her by the people concerned" (Le Gallo and Millette, 2019, p.12). Perhaps it would be more appropriate here to propose, as Lallab (2017) does, that this status, rather than being envisaged as a fixed identity stable over time, be apprehended more as the result of a relationship (Le Gallo and Millette, 2019). It seems to us that we have inscribed our status as allies, in the manner of Le Gallo and Millette, in the research they report on in their article *Se positionner comme chercheuses au prisme des luttes intersectionnelles: décentrer la notion d'allié.e pour prendre en compte les personnes concernées*, in a "speak to" (p.13), while at the same time being compelled to "speak for". "Speaking to" because, on the one hand, our research intention and our methodological tool (stories of practice) allow us to do so, and, on the other, our initial positions as researchers, insider and outsider with all the flexibility of our position. We say "speak for" because, in this moment, what

their stories have revealed to us has led us to stand in solidarity with them, each in our own way.

At the same time, why not say that we, as researchers, are seeking to have these teachers as allies themselves? This research has not only allowed us to become aware of our privileges but also to begin a continuous reflection process in order to decolonize our methodologies and our mindset as well. Through the whole research process, our liquid in-betweener positionality (Barnes, 2021) and the transition from one stance to another, reflects different levels of allyship we aimed to develop with the participants to convey their voices.

Finally, to answer the questions related to the fourth hyphen spaces (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013), activism-neutral, although we acknowledge our intention to disrupt existing norms by using both our strengths and those of the participants, we have not reached this level of activism as allies, nor has any researcher. Nevertheless, it's crucial for us to keep our promise and maintain our direction in the sense of remaining consistent with the motivations that guide both of us, which are both similar and distinct, yet complementary.

Note 1:
Insider-outsider
a) Is the researcher indigenous to the community being studied?
b) Does the researcher have an ongoing role in the research site or work primarily outside the site?
c) Do respondents perceive the researcher as 'one-of-us'?
d) Does the researcher feel 'at home' in the research site?
Sameness difference
a) Is the researcher similar to respondents in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, language, meanings, values, identity, symbolically, etc.?
Engagement distance
a) Is the researcher engaged with participants in their activities?
b) To what degree is the researcher emotionally involved?
c) What part do respondents play in generating knowledge?
d) Are any elements of the research created between researcher-respondents?
Activism-neutral
a) Is the researcher involved in the agendas of respondents?
b) Does the researcher intervene and/or play an active role in the struggles of respondents?
c) Is the researcher oriented toward social/organizational change or political action? (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013)

Note 2:
Our translation. This is the french citation : « En effet, travailler sur des objets « dangereux », hostiles, fuyants, sur des objets saturés, qui se

retrouvent pris dans des luttes de signification, nécessite de réfléchir à la posture du chercheur dans ses aspects méthodologiques et épistémologiques. Il convient aussi de s'attacher aux conditions de production de la connaissance sur des objets largement étudiés en science politique, tels que la violence en politique, les politiques sociales des objets plus récemment intégrés, comme l'étude des groupes sociaux marginaux ou stigmatisés » (Boumaza & Campana, 2007, p.7)

Note 3:
[Faire une différence - enseignant.e.s en situation d'urgence au Liban, 2022 - Récits de pratique en contexte de diversité (uqam.ca)](uqam.ca)

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