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Abstract

This paper offers a poetic narrative of an international student-mother. The author seeks to address the call for more in-depth qualitative inquiries into student-parent experience in higher education. This poetic narrative is offered in the hope that humane connections are discovered that facilitate others to make sense of a similar life event as well as to challenge preconceived perceptions of undergraduate international student-parents.

Key words: poetic narrative, international student-parents, student-mothers, higher education

A student-parent international experience

Higher education is a constantly shifting, evolving and changing field with internationalism becoming embedded into the learning experience (Atfield & Kemp, 2008). There are some groups of students that might find university more challenging than others (e.g., student-parents – students who have children to care for). For the purpose of this paper, I draw on a form of poetic inquiry that Prendergast (2009) refers to as “Vox Participare” (participant-voiced poems) written from interview transcript solicited directly from an international student-mother as a way to capture the essence of her experience. Poetic inquiry, which evokes embodied responses in others, may heighten the ways in which these felt-bodily states produce affective experiences in others, and hence a more experiential understanding of others, which is my intention (Richardson, 2000).

A better life

University; harder than I expected to be
Commuting; quite tiring for me
My children are not here in this country
I have to work, work, work; send them money

My first husband; very violent man... abusive
Another woman; heartbreaking
“Well she can speak good English, you can’t”
She’s been educated; I’m not.

“No, I’ll fight and try and be educated and educate my children”
A better life; I’ll go extra mile for my education
Sacrifice for my children
Home to see them every year
Demanding, heartbreaking...

Step mum; leaving them with carer

Last year; bruises on my daughter

Scars; cane beating from her

Painted black

"You from England, you're coming over showing the children's rights"

We do beat children – our culture

Changing phone number; couldn't speak to my daughter.

Exam hall; my phone ringing

Terrible; concentrating

Police updating

So stressed, emotionally,

Through exams - half of my mind back home wondering...

Home every year to see them; access baggage

Too much stuff, too much

Their Dad denying me access

Dreaming; thinner, personal care, teeth, nails, hair...

Every month, I send money

I go extra mile for them

Not being looked after properly

Life is not right for them

Sleepless nights; sit in my car crying

"Oh god what am I doing here"

They are all that I've got in this life

Study here; achieve the best grades

Tough; it just pierces my heart.

Sacrifice, sleepless nights,

Hard; 3 jobs,

Tough; feeling lost

No one to speak to

Youngsters; they enjoy their life

I wish I could.

Overdraft; emotionally straining
Money going out is too much
Money coming in isn't enough
Education; go as far as I can

Married African man; first month,
I nearly committed suicide,
Too much for me,
Only thing that stopped me,
my children.

I stood there by the window,
High building; I stood closer to the window
A few seconds from me and dying,
"If I die now, who's going to look after my children?"

I stood there,
Memories flashing through my head like a movie,
I first saw them walking, smiling
Stepped backwards *"No I have to be strong for them,
I have to fight for them"*

"I want to go to college"

"No you can't go"

"Why", I say

"Because you're my wife" he says

"You have to stay at home, work and help me"

"No I can't, I have to get myself educated."

"I'm sorry, I'm going to college"

Bills; *"I don't care, as long as you get the money to pay"*

Cleaning in hospital; 3years to get access

It's really tough life
5 minutes to talk,
just a hug, just a joke
try... just try... focus...
Smiles; deep down we're bleeding,
Time out; cry my lungs out
I sing; that keeps me going.

That's life; tough
Hard; juggling life with children
They're not here; I have to work, work... work
Life is tough back home in Africa
Opportunities, seek greener pastures
Extra mile; parents gave us good education
Education is power...
You shouldn't give up
Pushing us "*I want you to become a doctor*"

I'd love children to be over
I can't for now; refused visa
I'm just hoping and praying
One day I'll earn 27 thousand
To bring them over
Finish my education
Or go back home and be with them

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