

Northwest Journal of Teacher Education

Volume 17
Issue 3 *Confronting Teacher Preparation
Epistemicide: Art, Poetry, and Teacher
Resistance*

Article 15

11-22-2022

The Wrong Side

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Recommended Citation

Zucca-Scott, Laura (2022) "The Wrong Side," *Northwest Journal of Teacher Education*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 3 , Article 15.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15760/nwjte.2022.17.3.15>

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The Wrong Side

Abstract

This poem is an interpretive poetic transcription describing the experience of a young immigrant child. Being on the “wrong side” becomes a symbolic representation of an internal and external conflict between different ways to know. Schools are not always a safe place for children whose lives have been uprooted unless teachers become advocates and allies.

Keywords

Education, Interpretive Poetic Transcription

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Cover Page Footnote

For those who choose to be on the “wrong side” and the teachers who celebrate them.

The Wrong Side

Laura Zucca-Scott, Minot State University

I still remember that day in fourth grade
I am standing at the board proud
I can finally show my perfect math work.
My teacher pauses and softly says,
“You have your operation signs
on the wrong side of the equation.”
I had noticed they wrote the signs
on the opposite side here in the US
I did not think it mattered that much
I can solve problems, and math means
finding your way back even when you are lost
But my teacher tells me to fix my work

I do not want to. I want to scream,
“They are not on the wrong side
They are on the other side
They are just placed differently.”
This is how my grandfather taught me,
long before I had to learn it for school
during those hot summer days laughing
and playing games with numbers until sunset
Those games always made sense to me
and math was part of a world
where knowing was talking with your neighbors
and family: Problems could be solved
if you were creative and brave enough
And being different was being who you are

I want to say the signs are not on the wrong side
They are where they need to be
But, of course, I quietly fix my work
holding back tears of embarrassment
while the other kids look indifferently
and my face is burning, and my heart is pounding

I go back home and tell my mom
I don't want to go to school anymore
She is surprised and asks me why
I explain they don't know how to do math here
This is the beginning of my resistance