Teaching and Research as Blurred Translating

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TODAY, MY JOB TITLE IDENTIFIES ME as faculty member in a university school of education. But unlike many of my colleagues, the experiences that most shape how I approach both teaching and research were not in PK-12 schools or a teacher education program but in hallways, in community centers or church basements, and around kitchen tables—spaces usually not even considered classrooms. Over the past decade, I have expended enormous time and energy trying to explain how communicating across different social, cultural, and economic worlds, identities, and experiences *is* education, as much so as what happens in fourth grade social studies or high school chemistry. My shorthand for these practices: *blurred translating*.

This conceptualization has been born out of both practice and theory as I made meaning of experiential knowledges that far exceed the bounds of school; it has been a form of *currere* (before I knew the term): "an autobiographical process of reflection and analysis in which one recalls [their] educational experience and examines it…as a source of energy and direction for the journey" (Grumet, in Pinar & Grumet, 2015, p. 142). *Currere* draws on multiple tools (e.g., psychoanalysis, literature, experience) to ask "why?" about remembrances of the past and to ponder the future; *currere* requires "learn[ing] to take ourselves as data" (Pinar & Grumet, 2015, p. 23) so as to articulate individual and social understandings of the work of educational settings and to deepen agency. This reflection and analysis is part of an "ongoing project of self-understanding" to ethically mobilize "for engaged pedagogical action—as a private-and-public intellectual—with others in the social reconstruction of the public sphere" (Pinar, 2004, p. 37).

The purpose of this article is, thus, to trace my journey to understand myself as an educator and educational researcher and to outline how I approach what Freire (1970/2000) named the ontological vocation of becoming more fully human—what to me is the most important part of the journey of teaching, learning, and research. To become more fully human, we must recognize the vast diversity of humanity; this requires working through and discarding ways in which we are encouraged to see each other as less than human, based on differences such as language, gender, race, ethnicity, or place of birth. While we share a common planet, we do not live in the same worlds or speak the same words; our experiences—all education—are framed by different histories, identities, locations, and understandings of the world. To see each other as fully human, then, requires translating—meaning "to bear, remove, or change from one place, state, form, or

appearance to another: transfer, transform" (Merriam-Webster)—across these different worlds. This is rarely easy or clear—it is blurred. For me, teaching and research are about *blurred translating*[1]—ongoing, in motion, and always incomplete attempts to move and to speak across different worlds and words. These internal and inter-personal processes and moments of practice foster understanding across our multiplicity of languages, identities, knowledges, and voices, while acknowledging power and positionality.

This article could also be understood as a selected pathway through this immense responsibility, my working through of experiences from different worlds I have lived in or traversed and drawing on (educational) experiences—as articulated through poetry, essay, translation theory,[2] and more—that move me. My thinking, "intertwined with neighborhoods, errands, bicycles, antibiotics, and begonias," has also been clarified through interpretive acts with others and with theory so as to "penetrate the schemas that organize curriculum and teaching" (Grumet, 2000, p. 87).

Currere—reflecting on and analyzing such educational experiences—is about motion, but this does not mean it is straightforward—there are twists and turns, doubling back and getting stuck. A nonlinear story I tell myself about myself (and, thus, a story I live), my story has no clear beginning, middle, or end—it shifts and reshapes as I live and as the reader or hearer interacts with it. Intentionally fragmented writing decisions that leave much unsaid require that readers at times "boundary-skip between multiple conceptual and experiential worlds" (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 175) and engage in meaning-making *with* the text, thinking *with* its stories. As with language translation, my work is not linear but may require being "present simultaneously at various points of a text" (Biguenet & Schulte, 1989, p. xii). In this presentation, I attempt to live out in writing the complexity and multiplicity of teaching and research as blurred translating, practices that center social justice.

I write of my own experiences (Grumet's "neighborhoods, errands, bicycles, antibiotics, and begonias") throughout, beginning with stories about two new students: Simone in my high school and myself in graduate school. Drawing on an essay by novelist Zadie Smith (2009), ideas from educator Lisa Delpit (2006), and an article by sociologist Christian Churchill (2005), I trace the evolution of blurred translating as a way of conceptualizing teaching and research. I argue that the modifier "blurred" is essential in an era of standardized curriculum and for those with social justice commitments. Drawing on language and translation theories, I then turn to exploring how the *practice* of blurred translating can transform the distances between the languages we live (using imagery from a poem by Loris Malaguzzi, n.d., as well as Sherod Santos', 2000, writing about the Jewish story of Babel) even as it remains an impossibility, as we are always lost in translation. Ultimately, I argue that the messy risk of blurred translating enables us to engage a multiplicity of worlds and words as we work in relationship toward what Smith named Dream City.

Ponytails, Pain, and Pressure

One year, a new student started at my nearly all-white high school. I had never been to school with a Black student before. In the locker room, a group of white girls talked about how weird—inappropriate even—it was that Simone[3] had short hair one day and a ponytail the next. Of course, I never talked with Simone about it—and I doubt anyone else did either.

A year later, I sat in a hallway in a college dormitory, having my first interracial conversation about hair: what it meant for us and what was necessary for its care. I had no idea. I

had never talked—or thought—about these differences. I was riveted—and intimidated. So riveted, in fact, that my body carries a physical reminder. Entranced in learning about hair care products and extensions and comparing how often we could (or needed, in my case) to wash our hair, I didn't notice the terrific storm brewing outside. Running to shut my dorm room window, I slipped in the rain water already puddled on the floor, jamming my toe into an immovable desk.

Perhaps I should have noticed before this writing that I have been physically marked by this foray into understanding the lives of "other people's children" (Delpit, 2006)—and that an unyielding school structure was responsible for this marking. Might there be parallels between my physical pain that night as we sat in the basement waiting out a tornado, my elevated foot surrounded by ice packs, and the pain Simone may have felt in high school as (white) others cavalierly judged her hair? While I will never know, in retrospect and drawing on innumerable conversations, scholarly writing, and popular and social media, I can guess why Simone might have stayed at our (yes, "our") school only a short time. Despite good intentions on the part of most students, faculty, and staff, I doubt anyone was attempting to translate between her life and the norms and hidden curriculum of the school. The school didn't (to my knowledge) have "ice packs"—or the language of microaggressions—to assuage the likely pain of being in an environment where something as simultaneously simple and complex as a ponytail was subjected to hostile judgment. Unlike that college hallway, there were no spaces in which those of us who were white were encouraged to "learn to be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness" (Delpit, 2006, p. 47). A ponytail was "just hair"—not a marker of unacknowledged differences in lived realities that resulted in ingrouping and outgrouping.

Years and yet only a moment later, I became the new student. I naïvely began a doctoral program not knowing how much I would be asked to leave behind and how much I would struggle to have what I knew—what I carried in my body and mind—validated in what can be unyielding structures. My first semester, floundering in new discourses, the changed landscape of a different city, unfamiliar work, and new relationships, I read Smith's (2009) lecture, "Speaking in Tongues." She wrote of acquiescing to what Delpit (2006) terms the culture of power. Thinking she was gaining something, Smith let go of her childhood voice—which had been judged as unacceptably (according to school) raced and classed—to speak with that of the culture of power: "at the time, I genuinely thought this was the voice of lettered people, and that if I didn't have the voice of lettered people I would never truly be lettered" (Smith, 2009, p. 132). Later, she regretted this change: "I should have kept both voices alive in my mouth. They were both a part of me. But how the culture warns against it!" (p. 133).

That same month, presenting in a research methods course on my work with other white people to challenge racism in informal learning spaces, another graduate student questioned my presence in our program, implying that these experiences—how I had spent the previous decade-plus, such as those conversations about hair—were not really what education was about. "If you aren't a teacher," she demanded to know, "what *are* you then?" Perhaps she was simply echoing the common conflation of education and schooling. Her narrow conception of teaching—as something that happens in particular buildings, with set lesson plans and standards, at specific times—likely reflected how she had learned to understand education in an era of high-stakes accountability, standardization, and privatization: teaching distilled into concrete, decontextualized methods and research pressed often into narrow definitions of empirical data and methods. Yet, her question jarred me profoundly.

Only months into graduate school, despite being white, raised middle-class, and

understanding the culture of power of school and, thus, able to speak—at least somewhat—with its voice, I felt some tiny part of the pressures Smith and Delpit wrote about. Did entering the academic discipline of education mean letting go of my own identities, including the ways I conceptualized teaching? Was the other student correct—was this really not a place I should be? Should I learn to "speak identically" (Smith, 2009, p. 132), to conceptualize teaching (and learning) narrowly and instrumentally? To ignore my conversations and experiences?

For years, I had intentionally placed myself where I felt uncomfortable, was an outsider, or was not "supposed" to be; without having the words for it, I was developing a double image—a consciousness of how my white self was viewed and raced by people of color, situated at "the intersection of complex understandings of the historical and political context[s]" (Seidl & Hancock, 2011, p. 690) of race, racism, and racialized relationships. At times, others journeyed with me, offering insights or asking me to consider voices and identities different from my own. I *knew* this was teaching and learning. So was that storm-filled conversation about hair in which I practiced learning across words and worlds—a conversation I remember today when I hear my majority white undergraduate students' indignation upon discovering that wearing one's hair naturally violates dress codes in many U.S. schools. And, I wonder about Simone. Inside my shoes, my permanently crooked toe reminds me of the pain (and the joy) of understanding others' lives— and what happens when this comes up against unyielding school structures.

The Evolution of Teaching and Research as Blurred Translating

As a graduate student, I needed a way of articulating the knowledges of these lived experiences—and what they demanded of me in my new roles as university instructor and researcher. I wrote my way into an understanding through putting Smith's "Speaking in Tongues" and Delpit's (2006) "The Silenced Dialogue" into dialogue with my own thinking. What I had been doing—in dormitory hallways, in community centers, on buses—was translating across words and worlds, both for myself and for and with others.[4]

Translating is communicating between words and worlds—movement across different ways of understanding the world, of understanding from different vantages, of using different tools to make meaning. Yet, as translation theory argues, translating can only ever approximate— something is always lost. This might be as minimal as a word or gesture—or it can be as great as our very selves. We will of necessity lose nuances as we enter from different locations and stories. This practice is, thus, blurred. Or, as Lather and Kitchens (2017) write, translation is "a knowing disruption, dissemination rather than containment…another creation that addresses that which is untranslatable" (p. 7). As much as I try, I can only ever experience the world from inside my own body and mind—and so can every other person. Rarely clear due to the different cultural worlds in which we live, these processes are incomplete and in motion—hence, blurred.

This modifier is particularly important as public education and teachers are under assault (e.g., Watkins, 2012) with narratives of failure used to justify more standardization, "teacher proofing," and scripted curricula. Such formulaic conceptualizations leave no room for contexts, for students' lives or experiences, or for the artistry and humanity of what we do. Teaching (and research) are squeezed into neat categories that don't name the messiness (and joys) of our everyday lives. We then impose the "reality" of these categories on students and colleagues— calling them truth. These conceptualizations are violent and oppressive, denying our shared humanity as well as critical dialogue. While educational systems, media soundbites, and many

research methods frequently demand sharp edges, "blurred" implies imprecision, partiality, change, meaning-making practices that are not and cannot be fixed in position.

Further, social justice commitments require me—and, ideally, students with whom I work—to counter oppressive status quos and to be an accomplice in struggles for social and educational justice. This is not possible without attempts to understand lives and realities other than our own. Working with current and future educators, it is my responsibility to encourage these translational processes of understanding that students come from slightly or vastly differing worlds—and that these worlds are often deformed by injustice and inequity.

These processes of blurred translating are dialogical, necessitating being with each other and our stories (even though sometimes removed in time and space or continuing across printed pages or electronic screens). For example, my dismissal of Simone—participating, through silence, in talking *about* rather than *with* her—began for me a dialogue about hair that is ongoing, decades after the last time I saw her. While my later learning could not undo the violence we committed against Simone, I now challenge assumptions such as those we made through practices that translate lives and experiences—such as my students' conversations about unjust dress codes. Blurred translating is, thus, a political practice in which we can create change, cracks in the culture of power that can transform lives and knowledges.

While blurred translating began as a way of making sense of how I (could) live as a teacher, I ran into another entanglement as I began researching teaching. As Grumet (in Pinar & Grumet, 2015) wrote,

> I never knew whether to call what I did research or pedagogy. When I worked with students it was pedagogy. When I wrote about the work it was research. As I responded to student narratives with questions, the functions of research and teaching blended. (p. 226)

My participatory and critical work had no clear lines either. It all blurred, even as putting research into written words required some linearity.

I started thinking about how translation as a metaphor applies to research. For instance, Churchill (2005) argued that the human actions an ethnographer witnesses are like an original language text whose translation the ethnographer undertakes. Making choices for written reports, the ethnographer shapes (selected) events into larger patterns, while acknowledging that "any single aspect of the data has as many possible translations as there are ethnographers to observe and collect it. There would be no point in doing ethnography if the data were not malleable and open to multiple translations" (Churchill, 2005, p. 20). An ethnographer must be "able to inhabit two vernacular territories" (p. 6).

This habitation—which I argue is more a polyphony (Bakhtin, 1984) than a binary—is not easy. For example, classroom voices might include me as a researcher, me as a teacher, each student, the classroom teacher, and surrounding contexts. All have independent vernacular territories. Further, how each aspect of myself reads, positions, and interprets others—and how they read, position, and interpret me—is relational and contextual. However, although these many voices and their vernacular territories inhabit the "data," research is (usually) written in a singular voice ("illuminated by a single authorial consciousness" [Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6]). Rather than remaining polyphonic, standing on their own, these voices, even when presented in their own words and quite possibly dialogic, are often instead blurred by the researcher as she translates action, discourse, bodies, identities, space, and more into a written text; voices from various

vernacular territories are merged by/into the researcher's. Like teaching as translating, researching as translating is blurred.

Blurred translating for me, then, describes not just teaching or research, but also the entanglement of writing, researching, and teaching. All inform each other and learn from each other; their messy, subjective blur is generative and artistic. There is no teaching without learning and "no such thing as teaching without research and research without teaching. One inhabits the body of the other" (Freire, 1998, p. 35). This also fits my own experience of education as far exceeding school; acknowledging these interrelationships, Freire (1998) argued, would make clear the import of "informal experiences in the street, in the square, in the work place, in the classroom, in the playground, among the school staff of both teachers and administrative personnel" (pp. 47-48). Lived experience and theory mingle when we welcome these interactions. Blurred translating as lived practice, thus, attempts to preserve complexities and tensions and to foreground the work—the practices—of teachers, students, and researchers. Blurred translating recognizes languages that fit with what we know, what we feel in our bodies. At other times, it requires that we stretch—pushing past what we think we know.

Transforming the Distances Between the Languages We Live: The Messy Risk of Impossible, Unfinished Practices, With the Help of Translation and Language Theories

In the middle of a meeting, someone called a caucus, stopping the conversation. Our antiracism team had agreed that any time people of color and white people needed to process separately, we could do so, and thus, the half-dozen of us who were white went to another room. The call for a caucus was precipitated by something Jim had said but didn't understand and I don't remember. But, I do clearly remember Jim, tears in his eyes, trying desperately to understand how 70 years of living in the body and having the experiences of a straight, white, middle-class male shaped the ways he experienced the world and, thus, how his words had stopped the meeting. In caucus, Jim wanted to focus on what he *meant* by his words. But translating is not solely—or even mostly—about words, but about socially and culturally situated ways of being and the ways in which meaning can be lost or distorted (e.g., Toury, 2000). We examined the valuations and nuances of Jim's words. In relationship with people he trusted, Jim came to recognize the pain his words had caused, particularly for people of color in our group. He needed other white people, such as me, to translate how whiteness—and its valuation—was creating rifts in our interracial group. This was practicing blurred translating—of our lives, experiences, and actions, our words and our worlds.

Such processes are desperately needed in schools, also a space where words and worlds are differently valued. "The child," declared educator Malaguzzi (n.d.), "has a hundred languages," but school and the culture steal 99 of them, separating the head from the body, teaching that work and play are separate and that reasoning and dreaming "do not belong together" (n.p.) In schools, this happens through refusing access to or speech in familial languages or positioning those languages as deficient; through focusing solely on written, academic language; by making school a place of silent mouths and still bodies; and on and on.

These thefts are, of course, not confined to schools—meeting spaces such as the one I shared with Jim often attempt to exclude languages of emotion, of poetry, of song. Such fracturing is an age-old human practice of the abuse of power and the misuse of language. Language, a primary tool we use to mediate our relationships and activities, is ideologically saturated and

socially constructed (e.g., Vološinov, 1973). The hundred languages of children—and of adults—are differently valued. Our words themselves are "overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist…shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 276); they may resist translation or transformation.

But language—through translation—also offers hope. Writing about the Jewish story of the tower of Babel, Santos (2000) asserted that

> translation begins with a story…a story which carries the unspoken belief that language contains the essential unifying element of community…and that language is a power that serves to divide those whom it originally united. (p. 10)

While language can divide, the Babel story also reminds us to dream of, to "re-imagine that place where everyone was welcome, and where everyone was understood" (Santos, 2000, p. 10). Language can also unite. Translation is, thus, about not only language, but about community, about speaking *with*, rather than against, for, or to. Like the communities dispersed from Babel, much divides us; schools and other learning spaces often recreate conditions that debar the hundred languages of children and communities, especially based on language, race, ethnicity, immigration status, and social class. Challenging these conditions takes practice. It requires the intimacy of knowing others—and their stories and histories. It requires building relationships.

Relationships encouraged Jim to learn from other white people; desire not to harm relationships with people of color pushed him through pain. In relationship lies the possibility of working across the distances between the languages we live. In teaching and research, blurred translating can only happen when a teacher or researcher has an actual—not assumed—understanding of other('s) cultures and lives, while also knowing that these are always partial.

Translating is an ethical task, always influenced by ideology and power and demanding that we make choices. Translating is "equally capable of crossing or reinforcing the boundaries" between languages and cultures and "the hierarchies in which they are positioned" (Venuti, 2000, p. 491).[5] To cross rather than reinforce, blurred translating requires understanding that who we are and how we think is a function of our cultures, social contexts, relationships, and identities, mediated by language and the practices of learning (e.g., Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Each of us is a finite, historical being who sees the world from a unique position. We do not share some or all of these positions—and we likely do not know where others are coming from until we enter into relationship. As the antiracism team did with Jim, blurred translating moves between communities to translate unfamiliar contexts and previously unshared words and meanings. As cultures and languages are not static or singular, translation is always moving, attempting to connect between changing people and knowledges. Translators must seek to reconcile these differences, while maintaining the uniqueness and situatedness of both.

While necessitating a myriad of ethical choices, translating the hundred languages is a hopeful practice that anticipates the creation of community (Venuti, 2000). Blurred translating offers opportunities to overcome clashes and power imbalances between worlds, cultures, and languages that often lead to silence or disengagement rather than self-appropriated learning. When we negotiate blurred translating, we create community that acknowledges how our histories and social positions influence how we see, hear, and understand each other. When blurred translating is a classroom practice, the community creates a space where each person is present, recognized, and heard in ways that are true to self.

Yet, because we live in different worlds, translating will always be incomplete. Consider plugging text into an online translation program: the result reflects the original meanings but is not directly printable or sayable. It's a mess—meanings blur. Blurred translating is similarly difficult to negotiate, requiring considering when and how to take on its weight. Translating requires never getting too comfortable; it requires resisting a temptation to think that fully understanding someone else's lived experiences is possible. As often as I have translated in the practice of teaching, I have fought understanding of other ways of being in the world, preferring the comfort of my own understandings and values. Or, I have been unwilling to question what I think I know or to critically dialogue between my positions and those of others. Or, I have been incorrect or assumed too much about someone else's experiences.

Blurred translating, thus, means negotiating between saying, "I don't know," being willing to change bodily, emotionally, and intellectually, and holding on to one's own sense of self. It requires pushing myself into spaces of discomfort, of unknowing. It would be much neater to compartmentalize. Yet, the more I live solely or mostly in one world—whether that world be social, institutional, or role-oriented—the more the languages I live are restricted. Perhaps, then, one of the difficulties that attends both teaching and researching is that the more comfortable one becomes with them, the less one feels acutely a need for translating. Maybe one "language" becomes prominent, and so that language is the one of comfort—and others fade away.

Practicing blurred translating, then, is not without risks, nor does it come easily. Without continual effort, we may accept that one voice is who we are; we may not push to continually renew our ability to go outside ourselves, especially when in positions of power, privilege, or authority. It may become easier to acquiesce to either speaking within the culture of power or believing in some part of ourselves that it is normal, just, and acceptable, internalizing it as *the only* discourse, the only acceptable identity, giving up or losing—voluntarily or involuntarily—our multiplicity of identities and voices. As Smith (2009) said,

> We feel that our voices are who we are, and that to have more than one, or to use different versions of a voice for different occasions, represents, at best, a Janus-faced duplicity, and at worst, the loss of our very souls. (p. 133)

We may learn that "getting ahead" (a value the culture of power cultivates unquestioningly) necessitates relinquishing a multiplicity of voices and adopting the one acceptable voice (while knowing that for some people this is not possible). We may cede space to the imperial voices of the culture of power, allowing that culture to delineate structures that contain or sanitize "Other" voices. Seduced by the culture of power, we may hide or hoard our own power and participation in these processes and claim authority as official translators; having gotten a taste, we may be unwilling—or unable—to fight its existence. Trapped in fear and uncertainty, we may become cut off from both ourselves and others: "A hesitation in the face of difference, which leads to caution before difference and ends in fear of it. Before long, the only voice you recognize, the only life you can empathize with, is your own" (Smith, 2009, p. 148). Dwelling in this discomfort is a risk— and requires taking risks.

Recently, I guest lectured on the history of whiteness in the United States. Having spent years working with antiracism activists and with critical whiteness studies, my analysis is firmly grounded in both lives and literature. I feel confident that I can translate difficult—and painful— concepts and histories. But this day, I floundered. This began with a Black woman reflecting back to me my own words that I have had a choice about whether or not to attempt to dismantle white

supremacy and her reminder that she and her children never do. She was correct, but rather than simply acknowledging that, I heard her words as accusation of my whitely valued words. I felt the need to justify myself. After stumbling through more questions, I left the classroom feeling incoherent and profoundly upset with myself for getting defensive. I had forgotten that my pedagogical efforts are firmly rooted in my own life experiences and that translating is never fully possible. It is blurred. While such moments of missed communication (here, heightened because I had no prior relationship with these students) occur in every classroom—in every conversation, interaction, and text—they became glaringly obvious when culture, social class, and race were brought into the open. And, it was a student who pointed this out. Years of experience, the dozens of books I could cite, I could not hide behind them.

As in this classroom, my experience of practicing blurred translating is often one of failure. I cannot answer the unanswerable:

> How does one teach when there's no way to say it—and yet something must be said? How does one employ language that knows, but does not tell what it knows—language that is *in-formed* by its ghost, by its Other, yet cannot speak that Other? (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 187, italics in original)

This feeling is probably just my encounter with the limitations—the impossibility—of translating. But, worse than my own feelings of failure, it often feels like a betrayal.

As my teaching is built on relationships, I often have opportunities to attempt to repair such betrayals or losses. In research, this may not be so. At my desk, for instance, trying to translate fieldnotes into comprehensible analysis, I am frequently aware of how writing about a learning environment is very different from participating in its lived experiences. While writing, I am scared by how students and teachers become more like characters in my head and on the page than the living, breathing, conflicted human beings they were in the social space of the classroom. My "findings" feel like a failed translation, even as I am not sure it is possible to translate a life into words on a page. What, then, might it mean for our teaching and research to actually acknowledge—to believe—that translating the hundred languages is impossible?

I return to what I have learned from translation theory: Many languages have a saying that translation always betrays. Venuti (2000) wrote that in translation, "communication will always be partial, both incomplete and inevitably slanted toward the domestic [source] scene" (p. 487). A translator (in qualitative research, a writer) always domesticates interpretation; even with the help of theory and other research literature, she or he writes from a positionality and to other, unknown positionalities. Thus, a translation of what happened in a research site by any other researcher would read completely differently; translation is always partial, resulting in space between the practice of education and the research of education. At the same time, my ethical and political beliefs impel me to write and act with integrity, acknowledging partiality, loss, and the potential incommensurability of languages.

The flawed, impossible practice of blurred translating can only ever be unfinished and ongoing—we are, as Benjamin (1968) noted, "lost in translation" from the beginning. Yet, we are not completely lost, for as Freire (1998) asserted, we can be educated only if we recognize ourselves as unfinished; this unfinishedness is "essential to our human condition" (p. 52). Thus, our teaching must acknowledge uncertainty and center questions, recognizing that "we may know in fragments" (hooks, 1994, p. 174), and our research must be conceptualized as "a staging of our stammering relationship to knowing" (Lather, 2006, p. 48).

There is hope here, too. The impossible, unfinished practice of translating does more than communicate: it reinvents (Venuti, 2000). It is "a transformation and a renewal of something living" (Benjamin, 1968, p. 73). Research and teaching are *practices* of blurred translating. I use practice in both meanings: as something we do regularly and as doing something again in order to do it "better." Both are embedded in a relational and contextual way of being that is self-reflexive and risky. Practice is required to connect research data with larger stories of theory, history, and culture; practice is required to hear the hundred languages of each learner. Both reflect a utopian hope of dialogue and community in tension with lived realities of power imbalances and ideologies. Teaching and research as blurred translating depend on the interaction of bodies, of languages, of cultures. We ask each other to experience our truths, partial and limited as they may be.

In a Doorway, Practicing Reclaiming the Hundred Languages of Dream City

At a research site, I stood in the doorway to the sixth-grade classroom, greeting students after lunch. As usual, Jacob half-ran, half-stumbled through the door, his chin bruised, his lower lip cut and swollen. The classroom teacher commented that he liked to wrestle with his siblings and consequently, this week's collision with a coffee table. I sensed an uneasiness from the other adult in the classroom—something about this story didn't sit right with her. I knew she was wondering if something else was happening in Jacob's home.

I remembered a conversation with my friend, Afiya, early in our relationship. She told me how she learned as a teenager to accompany her mother to the hospital when her youngest brother did things like break his arm while jumping on the bed. She knew that multiple ER trips for her Black family with state health insurance might be interpreted not as the accidents of an active child, but as child abuse. She also knew that her education had taught her a language of power that her mother's had not. At the hospital, she translated to protect her family.

I thought of my own younger brother, bleeding profusely after a metal toy gun struck the back of his head during a cops and robbers game. Or, the time when kids throwing rocks at the lake didn't have quite the aim they thought they did, resulting in another head wound, another ER trip for stitches. It never occurred to my teenaged self or to my mother, unlike Afiya, to worry about what translation might be necessary in my family's ER trips.

I considered Jacob's swollen lip, Afiya's brother's broken arm, my brother's bleeding head, and then, less visible wounds, those caused by outright failure to try to understand other lives and cultures or the assignation of blame, shame, or judgment—like that of my high school self in talking about Simone's ponytail. Sometimes, as with Jacob and with Afiya's and my younger brothers, these hurts are accidents; sometimes they are caused by those—like myself—who are considering only the world directly in front of them. Those I worry about come from the carelessness or refusal of adults to understand the lives of other people's children. I know now— the more worlds in which I travel or skirt the edges of—how often our lives make no sense to each other. How then, to read—and to translate—bruised bodies and minds, located within and among our separations in an oppressive world? And, even more importantly, how then to read—and to translate—the strengths and knowledges students also carry into the classroom?

I return to where I started this theorization. Despite, or perhaps due to, the loss of one of her voices, Smith (2009) envisioned a "Dream City": "a place of many voices, where the unified singular self is an illusion…. In Dream City everything is doubled, everything is various. You have

no choice but to cross borders and speak in tongues" (pp. 137, 138). In Dream City, we speak with a multiplicity of voices and see from multiple perspectives. Here, we understand that everyone does this and that the claims of each voice have a piece and only a piece of truth, and also that many truths have been deliberately silenced. This very act of speaking with or valuing multiplicities challenges the hegemony of the culture of power, the abuse of language used to isolate.

Whether in the classroom or in research literature, Dream City is only possible if we work to translate and live in differences, rather than subsume or erase them. Dream City, a reclaimed Babel, is not based in sameness but in negotiated collectivity. For, as Santos (2000) asked:

> What if the real value of our relationship to the other resides in the *impossibility* of reducing the other to ourselves, of two subsiding into sameness?... The ideal model for translation becomes that which creates the simultaneous experience of both proximity and separateness, intimacy and alterity. (p. 14, italics in original)

The dream of claiming classrooms as profoundly communal and connected spaces means not attempting monologue that fits for all people, but understanding that we are all shaped by multiple, intersecting cultural stories and lives, a polyphony that must also make its way into our research and writing. In teaching and research, the practice of blurred translating finds connections as well as disconnections or separations, to not only translate into our own cultures or conceptual systems, but to build connections as we work in, through, and with these multiplicities.

This takes work—difficult and painful work. Blurred translating requires being continuously critical and self-reflective. I have learned to listen so as to glimpse the wisdom of different stories, voices, and identities and then to choose when and how to use my voices. I challenge myself to sit with—not run from—discomfort and to connect with different communities. I am on guard against the material and spatial realities of a faculty position and social identities that trap me into forgetting my own living curriculum more often than I want to acknowledge. I must be aware of values and positions others (may) assign to me based on their identifications of me and how these might be limiting.

Yet, while risky, blurred translating can build a Dream City and reclaim a community grounded in both difference and shared humanity. When practicing blurred translating, we can incorporate a hundred languages spoken, lived, and embodied; we can remember that not just children, but we too have "a hundred worlds to dream" (Malaguzzi, n.d., n.p.) and can use these hundred to play and to labor toward and in Dream City, educational spaces where everyone is welcome and everyone is understood in their multiplicity of voices, cultures, and languages and research is filled with hundreds of languages of playing, of speaking, of loving, of dreaming.

Again, I think about a student like Jacob. In September, I sat with him as he looked at the blank pages of his writing notebook. He told me he didn't know how to start. A month later, knowing he was struggling, a teacher invited Jacob to imagine a conflict with his mom over playing video games. Invited to take on a character, Jacob's body language changed; he became a person I hadn't seen in the classroom. He stood at the front of the room, arms crossed, posture stiff and defiant, re-enacting—re-voicing—an argument with his mother. He knew how to start; he knew how to use language for expression. The teacher had found a way to translate—albeit blurrily—between Jacob's knowledges and experiences and the work of the classroom; pedagogically, she asked him to "to bear, remove, or change from one place, state, form, or appearance to another: transfer, transform" (Merriam-Webster) his life experiences from home to school and from the

language of acting into the language of a written story. Beginning with putting his acted-out dialogue—a language that made sense to him—about video games on paper, Jacob filled his writing notebook.

Blurred translating, in the work I have done—or fallen short of doing—is about accessing the hundred languages and worlds of all learners, regardless of age. It is about what students are telling us they know, worry about, or are attempting to figure out. Blurred translating means helping students like Jacob translate their worlds and languages into learning that schools, adults, and state standards might recognize; it is about keeping multiple languages alive in our mouths (Smith, 2009). Blurred translating is about the experiences of families like Afiya's and mine—and about the ways in which schools and other institutions harm due to failures to listen and to translate. Blurred translating challenges structures that keep people like Jim and me from understanding how our languages (even when unintentional) cause harm in meetings and school locker rooms, on buses and around kitchen tables. Blurred translating helps learners of all ages—in classrooms and in research journals and presentations—to understand the words and worlds of others, to reconsider a ponytail or video game.

Still, I think about all we cannot and do not know about our students, whatever the classroom site may be, even as all of who we are enters these spaces. Too often, these multiplicities of languages, knowledges, and experiences are silenced, even as they inform what happens in the classroom. When we as teachers don't ask questions (and try to let go of preconceived notions) about students' lives, when we don't attempt to translate between their knowledges and school knowledges, when we don't wonder about their struggles to make sense of schooling, when we do not attempt to translate between our positionalities and ideologies and those of our students and their worlds, when we do not practice these partial—blurred—translations, we fail our students. My responsibility as a researcher and teacher is, I believe, to translate stories of lives and different lived worlds and to build relationships, even when this is scary, unpredictable, or not fully possible. Even—and maybe especially in those times—when I fail. Practicing blurred translating is just that—a *practice* that requires continually engaging and recognizing power while working toward social change and relational classrooms.

I think of—no, worry about—Jacob's swollen lip and bruised chin; I worry about how his life and knowledges are or are not translated in public spaces such as classrooms or nurses' offices; I worry about how to translate what I have learned from and with Afiya, from and with students and teachers in classrooms of both school and my life, from and with engagement with writing and theory. I am, as the saying goes, lost in translation, in the infinite distances between my worlds and the worlds—the words and hundred languages—of others. I am practicing blurred translating. Trying to reclaim the hundred languages of Dream City, I am always in between.

Notes

1. Translating is in process—a gerund rather than a noun (translation).
2. While much of what I write about here may be more analogous to the practice of interpretation than translation, I draw on translation as it has its own body of theory. Further, I am using "language" expansively, as the poet Malaguzzi (n.d.) does in "The Hundred Languages of Children." Language is not solely linguistic, but also encompasses ways of understanding and moving in the world—in other words, the languages we live, not just those we speak.
3. All names are pseudonyms.
4. Education as translation (e.g., Cook-Sather, 2006) is not a new concept; many others have conceptualized similar educational processes or roles, such as code-meshing (e.g., Young & Martinez, 2011), cultural brokers (e.g.,

Gentemann & Whitehead, 1983), or dialogical education (e.g., Sarid, 2012). Further, education is awash in metaphors that make sense of teachers' work, beliefs, identities, and knowledge (e.g., Sabah, 2006).

5. See Venuti (2000) for more on the ethics and politics of translating.

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