Storying Literacies, Reimagining Classrooms:
Teaching, Research, and Writing as Blurred Translating

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Abstract

I theorize teaching and researching as practices of "blurred translating" that center antioppressive education (Kumashiro, 2002) and storytelling (e.g., Frank, 2010; Zipes, 1995, 2004). Based in listening, research and teaching as blurred translating are relational, contextual, and ongoing processes oriented toward transformation and justice that simultaneously recognize what connects us as humans and the separations between us. In this dissertation, I examine this unfinished (Freire, 1998a) metaphor before and after generating data as a participant-observer (using critical ethnographic methods [Madison, 2005]) in a 2012-13 sixth-grade classroom that participated in the weekly Neighborhood Bridges critical literacy and creative drama program. My work there blurred distinctions between teaching, research, and writing, and I utilized writing as my methodology of meaning-making (e.g., Colyar, 2009; Richardson, 2003) to juxtapose multivoiced genres of texts and contexts.

Using story and theatre, Neighorhood Bridges attempts to reimagine classrooms as spaces for students to experiment with experiences through playing with words, ideas, and each other. In particular, I explore how these sixth-graders successfully transformed an oral (re)telling of Hermynia Zur Mühlen's story "The Servant" into a play performed in front of schoolmates and family members. Using ideas of counternarrative (e.g., Delgado, 1989) and contexts of identity and production, I also trace and theorize the contested participation of one student, Da'uud, who wasn't at the performance because he had declared their work "too boring now." Thinking *with* "The Servant" highlighted the intertwined success and mess of the students' individual and collective labor: how

students worked—or did not or could not—to become storytellers of their own lives who changed stories and communicated meaning; how they collaborated or did not; and how they utilized tools to (re)tell stories. The success of a Bridges classroom requires risk; humor and imagination; deep listening and abilities to (re)tell stories; student production and ownership of stories and knowledge; and play as both noun and verb. Telling stories such as these as blurred translators in teaching and research can enable the collaborative pedagogical work of creating new—albeit messy and always ongoing—antioppressive educational storylines.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The truth about stories is that that's all we are. The Okanagan storyteller Jeanette Armstrong tells us that "Through my language I understand I am being spoken to, I'm not the one speaking. The words are coming from many tongues and mouths of Okanagan people and the land around them. I am a listener to the language's stories, and when my words form I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns." (King, 2003, p. 2)

Having no idea where to start this dissertation, I begin with a story. More, accurately, a brief retelling of "The Giant and His Suit of Armor" by Edwin Hoernle (found in Zipes, 1989):

Once upon a time, there was a good-hearted giant who was enslaved by dwarves. The dwarves forced the giant to cook their food and plow their fields and build their fences and carry their water and mine their iron and watch their children and on and on. While the giant was kind and hard-working, the dwarves were evil and cruel. They beat the giant, spit on him, and made fun of him; they forced him to wear heavy chains. While they lived in luxury sporting fancy clothes, slumbering peacefully in soft beds, and dining on delicious foods, the giant wore rags, slept in a windy and damp cave, and ate leftover scraps of bread.

Once, when younger, the giant had tried to escape his chains, but the dwarves used their spears and arrows to beat him senseless. When he awoke bruised and bloody from their attack, his chains were heavier than ever. When he tried to figure out why things were the way they were, the dwarves told him that this was how things had always been.

One day, a stranger passed by and told him stories of free giants on the other side of the mountain who had no masters and who lived peacefully and happily. Hearing this, the giant wanted to be free, too. No longer satisfied, he decided to build himself a suit of armor that could protect him as he escaped his evil captors. He spent many sleepless nights working on his armor, reminding himself when he got too tired: "I want to be free!" When the dwarves found and destroyed his first suit of armor, he recalled his desire for freedom and began again. He worked harder and harder, knowing that his suit of armor had to be perfect. In the meantime, the dwarves beat him harder, made poison-tipped arrows, and constructed trenches around their kingdom to ensure the giant's captivity. They became even crueler to the good-hearted giant.

From time to time, the giant heard a voice whispering in his head: "Now's the time! Be free!" But there was always more work to do on his suit of armor. Over time, he forgot why he wanted to be free and why he had built his suit, instead believing the words of his captors that he was very powerful—despite his chains that grew heavier and heavier. Instead, he considered himself free because, after all, he had a suit of armor—a suit that over time became too heavy for him to even wear. The giant never realized that the dwarves had gotten the better of him. A very foolish giant, don't you think?

Last year, Miss Adrienne told this story to Mrs. Riggs's sixth-grade class at Williams Elementary School as part of the Neighborhood Bridges critical literacy and creative drama program.[1] One student's response: "I don't like the stories like this, with a cliffhanger. Like he gave up?" Yes, in this story, despite his desires to be free, his size,

[1] The name of the school and the names of all adults and students in the classroom are pseudonyms.

and the community of giants living just on the other side of the mountain, the giant gave up. As Miss Adrienne said, “Not all stories have a happy ending.” Or, as John Dewey (1964) wrote in “The Child and the Curriculum,” “We get used to the chains we wear, and we miss them when removed” (p. 355).

In this way, stories are like “real life.” I would love to be able to say that the stories in this dissertation—the stories of sixth-graders at Williams Elementary and their teachers—all have happy endings. But while some do, others don't, and others don't have “endings” at all but are instead ongoing.

This dissertation began with my own story—specifically, with trying to figure myself out as a teacher, for I don't have either a traditional teaching story or a traditional conception of what it means to teach. Despite the countless hours I spent “playing school” as a child, as an adult (prior to graduate school), I most frequently taught in spaces that were not formal classrooms—or at least not formal schools. And most frequently, I taught about sociohistorical contexts and about differences in cultural locations and stories (especially race/ethnicity and whiteness, that too-often unnamed race) that lead people to see and interact with the world in different ways. My first semester in graduate school, I conceptualized these practices as “teaching as blurred translating,” for they were always-incomplete and ongoing attempts to translate lives, stories, and contexts so as to help people better understand our world and to work toward more just ways of living together. Frequently, in practicing teaching as blurred translating, I used story as a framework.

Several semesters into graduate school, a class introduced me to the critical literacy and creative drama program Neighborhood Bridges, a collaboration between the nonprofit Children's Theatre Company (of Minneapolis) and local metropolitan elementary schools. I was both terrified and intrigued by what this program asked of students: to use oral, student-authored, and performed stories to interrogate the world around them and to work at becoming narrators of their own lives.

I was terrified because I am completely uncomfortable with performance and with making up entirely fictional stories—and I was asked to stand in front of a class of fourth-graders and make up a story on the spot using prompts students generated. And I couldn't *not* participate in theatre games that involved facial expressions and bodily movements if, as a guest teacher, I was asking students to do so. Yet on both theoretical and practical levels, I saw this program pushing back against oppressive structures and practices of both society and school. Bridges was trying to remove or mitigate metaphorical chains—high-stakes standardized testing, learning as an individualized endeavor, the dismissal of the body from the classroom, the removal of arts or students' lives and interests from the curriculum—under which students and teachers labor. In a week-long, in-classroom introduction to Bridges, I saw how its practices of oral, written, and performed storytelling encouraged students to build collaborative relationships and to ask critical literacy questions that interrogated structures and power. And because I am endlessly fascinated with story, I was intrigued by the possibilities of how stories in the classroom could, if you will, create a type of suit of armor to protect against forces that

work to limit students and teachers. I saw a local, collaborative, and practical example of antioppressive education (loosely defined as practices and pedagogies that work against oppression—see Kumashiro [2002]).

Antioppressive education, or teaching and learning that work toward social and economic justice, looks, sounds, and feels many different ways, but I agree with Rick and Bill Ayers (2011), who wrote,

> We want students to be able to think for themselves, to make judgments based on evidence and argument, to develop minds of their own. We want them to ask fundamental questions—who in the world am I? How did I get here and where am I going? What in the world are my choices? How in the world shall I proceed?—and to pursue the answers wherever they might take them. (p. 11)

Ayers and Ayers continued, "The best teaching encourages students to develop the capacity to name the world for themselves, to identify the obstacles to their full humanity, and the courage to act upon whatever the known demands" (p. 11). In other words, antioppressive education asks that students, in collaboration with their teachers and communities, critically engage with the world around them, asking questions that situate themselves within that world. This work is both individual and communal.

Such processes echo the educational philosophy of John Dewey (1964), who over a century earlier (in his 1897 "My Pedagogic Creed") wrote that "the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he [or she] finds himself [or herself]" (p. 427). Education, Dewey

insisted, should be “a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (p. 430), and thus “the school must represent present life—life as real and vital to the child as that which [s]he carries on in the home, in the neighborhood, or on the playground” (p. 430).

Young people engage in such investigations of the lives and world around them in many arenas; too often, however, school is not one of them. Herb Kohl (2012), for instance, wrote that young people, using social media, dance, song, and acting, combine performance and electronic connection

> at the same time that their schools close down the arts; force rigid curricula that pass for literacy and math programs; promise jobs that don't exist; and turn the magic of learning about the wonders of the world, nature, and other peoples and cultures into rigid, tortuous sitting in claustrophobic rooms and constant testing that has little or no meaning for intellectual, personal, and social development. (pp. xi-xii)

In other words, school frequently consists of chains and blocks that prevent “present life” from entering the classroom. School, for many, many students, has no happy ending.

Instead, school may come to feel like the trapped and oppressive existence of the giant in Hoernle's story, as students spend their time engaging in tasks for which the ultimate purpose has been forgotten, never clear, or not relevant to their lives. Neighborhood Bridges, in my experience, can be like that stranger who appears and says: there is a different way to do this. We can labor together in classrooms to learn, to have fun, to challenge storylines that oppress us, our communities, and our world, and to build

relationships that lead to more just endings.

Of course, this is the utopian story. Mostly, Bridges is not this clean or clear. While students sometimes engage imagination, work together, and enjoy themselves, sometimes they recycle oppressive storylines, refuse to engage, and fight the process every step of the way. As Kevin Kumashiro (2009) wrote, “no practice is always anti-oppressive” (p. 3). But a deep exploration of the work of a Bridges classroom can provide insights into teaching and learning that work toward social justice.

In this dissertation, I draw on the experiences of one Neighborhood Bridges classroom to write about aspects of antioppressive teaching, learning, and research. In the 18 months I have been working with these ideas, teaching and research—including the important and too often neglected process of writing—have blurred, especially as students, teachers, and I (as the researcher-writer) use story. I write about research, theory, education, and schooling while always writing and thinking about and with story, using writing itself as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2003). Thus, this dissertation is an extended argument for the importance of writing as a methodology and for teaching and learning practices that center writing and story.

This chapter introduces this work by first exploring my approach to the dissertation's writing and structure, including how story is a “servant” in context. I introduce Hermynia Zur Mühlen's story “The Servant,” as the sixth-grade students' work with this story serves as the focal point of my analysis of Bridges. I then outline the eight chapters and several interstices that follow before considering how Bridges' pedagogies

of possibilities ask students and teachers to engage both their minds and bodies.

Writing and Structure

I wrote this introductory chapter last. I state this because I believe transparency is important, which means pointing out that writing fixes into a linear form what is for me a very nonlinear and iterative process of thinking, writing, and reading. While what follows has (I hope) some structure, the order—on the level of chapter, paragraph, sentence, and even phrase—has been through countless variations. Most significantly, this is because writing is my primary methodology (see, e.g., Colyar, 2009). As I detail further in Chapter 3, it was through writing, through thinking with words about material lives, that I came to know what this dissertation is about. In the process, I have foregone a typical dissertation structure.

I intentionally write in and include different voices, resulting in a juxtaposition of different types and lengths of (written) texts or chapters. While most are in my voice, some places (particularly the interstices—see below) are what Mikhail Bahktin (1984a) named a polyphony: "*a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness . . . with equal rights and each with its own world*" (p. 6, italics in the original). In including voices other than my own and particularly in leaving them unmerged in places, I remind the reader that my words are partial and tentative offerings of meaning; just as many different meanings could be made from the events of any classroom, so too can many meanings be made from this text. Including different formats of writing is my attempt to offer multiple avenues (although all textually based) for the

reader to enter the process of meaning-making with me or at the least, through my writing. It is also an attempt to concretely acknowledge the many voices and texts that make up the work of this Bridges classroom as well as my own thinking and writing. As Joan Didion (2006) stated, “a truism about working with language is that other people's arrangements of words are always crowding in on one's actual experience” (p. 559). Or, in Jeanette Armstrong's words (in the epigraph above), “the words are coming from many tongues and mouths” (in King, 2003, p. 2). I can't think or write about any of this alone.

Story—what Jane Yolen (2014) called “cultural respiration,” in other words, collective breathing—is also central to my work. I begin each chapter with the words of a storyteller as a reminder of the human significance of story. And while storytelling has been used as a means of control, I (and the Neighborhood Bridges program) try to use it as a “means of communication, and means of subversion and liberation, as well as a means of personal quest for identity” (Zipes, 2004, p. 56).

In fact, I frequently “get in trouble” for my near-inability to write anything without including—usually starting with—a story. I get comments or reviews such as “but I don't know where you are going” or “it's too hard to follow.” Certainly, some of this is my fault as a writer; I'm not being clear enough and the connections remain only in my head. At other times, I deliberately choose to ignore genres of academic writing. Like the narrator in Mary Oliver's (1992) poem “The Journey,” I've been trying “little by little” to leave “their voices behind” and to hear “a new voice/which you slowly recognized as your own,/that kept you company/as you strode deeper and deeper/into the world/

determined to do/the only thing you could do" (pp. 114-115). Just as I believe formulaic teaching is often oppressive, I assert that formulaic qualitative research and writing too often miss the complexity, partiality, and messiness of the world around us. I don't want to—can't?—write in those ways.

Generally speaking, then, my writing puts observation and story first and theory second. Theory is used to explain experience and story; I make stories into theory as well as shape theory in the form of story (e.g., Chapter 2). This is not to deny, of course, that I entered this dissertation work void of theory; Mikhail Bakhtin, for example, has been crucial to my academic development and his words frequently sound in my head. I could not erase his—and many others'—influence from my observation, recording, or writing. Further, a researcher's (ethnographer's) training is always present in her or his mind, and thus theory "will necessarily affect the way in which data is absorbed, understood, and analyzed" (Churchill, 2005, p. 19). Like Jeong-Hee Kim (2008), I frequently endeavor to use "a theory as an intellectual tool to interpret a narrative text that takes place in an educational context" (p. 254) or to "offer a political or theoretical foundation from which to create new understandings" (p. 254). This is particularly evident in Chapters 2 and 6. My intention is that the distinctions between observation (data generating), story, and theory blur in the writing.

These writing choices (practices) also echo commitments both of the Neighborhood Bridges program and my own epistemological and ethical stances. For instance, children's stories, voices, and bodies are part of the *curriculum* of Bridges,

which strives to counter standardized, rote learning and literacy that are often acrimoniously divorced from students' lives and languages; in Bridges, theatre serves as a container in which students make intellectual and emotional choices that can center their stories and lives. In several of the following chapters, I too place children's stories, lives, and voices center stage. Further, like Colin Lankshear and Peter McLaren (1993), I believe that (literacy) "researchers must uncover the *relational* manner in which meaning is produced" (p. 10). Examining the social relations of meaning-making in the classroom (and in stories) is complicated, requiring considering both structures and lives (what Lois Weis and Michelle Fine [2013] called critical bifocality). Thus, the (form of) re-telling that I undertake here is a moral response, an effort to be responsible in my telling of these students' sometimes brilliant, sometimes accidental attempts at meaning-making.

Story as a "Servant" in Context

Although I knew from the time I wrote the proposal for this dissertation that story would figure prominently, I had no idea that so much meaning-making would be encapsulated in one story, its themes, and the students' work with them. As a critical literacy and creative drama program, Bridges seeks "to explore how stories can assist each one of us to define what we mean to be in our communities" (Zipes, 2004, p. 68). Hermynia Zur Mühlen's story "The Servant" is also fundamentally about community and labor and is thus a particularly relevant frame for my interpretations of these students and their classroom community. In what follows, I write about and interpret the work of students, the work of story, the work of play, and the work of critical and embodied

literacies. A close examination of these various forms of work also offers insights into the program's possibilities and limitations. These themes, too, resonate with my theorization of blurred translating. While not all of the following eight chapters revolve around “The Servant,” its themes as well as themes and contexts of Zur Mühlen's life and work, such as story, translation, labor, community, and transformation, are in every chapter.

Jack Zipes (1995) reminded us that “Storytelling always takes place in a sociohistorical context, and this context shapes the reception of a tale as much as the tale or teller does” (p. 224). While Chapter 5 provides the contexts of the sixth-grade classroom that received this oral tale and then transformed it into a performance, I believe it is also important to know where this story began its journey. Here, then, is Zur Mühlen's story and the contexts surrounding her writing “The Servant.”

The Austrian Zur Mühlen was born in 1883 into wealth; while young, she traveled extensively and was broadly educated. She wanted to become an elementary school teacher, but her parents did not find this a worthy profession for a member of the aristocracy and compelled her to marry. The marriage did not work. With the Hungarian writer and Communist Stefan J. Klein, who was to be her life-long partner, Zur Mühlen later moved to Frankfurt, where they both worked as translators. Klein and Zur Mühlen were forced to leave Germany for Austria in 1938 and went to live in England in 1939. Zur Mühlen died in 1951. During her life, she translated over 150 works (such as Upton Sinclair) and wrote 30 stories, novels, mysteries, and biographies. She also became a leading writer of revolutionary fairy tales.

By the early twentieth century in Germany, literary fairy tales, building on oral folktales, had become an extremely important genre, with almost all well-known German authors penning at least one fairy tale (mostly for adults). The fairy-tale canon provided a sense of community, of shared references and symbols, connected with German culture. These utopian fairy tales and fables frequently transformed well-known tales, giving them provocative or utopian spins that intended to compel people—particularly youth—to think about the potential for change through political action:

> The purpose of all the writers was to instill a sense of hope that a new, more egalitarian society could be realized if people recognized who the true enemy was—namely, capitalism in various disguised forms—and learned to work together to defeat that enemy. The major tendencies of these tales was [*sic*] to (1) project an ideal societal organization that would bring an end to all suffering, (2) portray children whose honesty and clairvoyance endowed them with the ability to expose hypocrisy and made them into harbingers of a bright future, (3) develop exemplary heroes who bring about solidarity and collaboration in a struggle against exploitation, (4) reveal how social class exploitation worked and how it could be stopped, and (5) show the brutality of war and competition and underline the need for peace and coexistence. (Zipes, 1989, p. 20)

In the 1920s and early 1930s, Zur Mühlen was one of the many people committed to furthering class struggle who wrote and illustrated stories, such as “The Servant,” for children. (The Hoernle story that opened this chapter is another example.) This time of

financial and political instability after World War I—the Weimar period—gave rise to vast experimentation in the arts and reform, ending with the Nazi take-over of 1933 (Zipes, 1989).

The most productive of the fairytale writers, Zur Mühlen convinced other German writers to write fairy tales as well. These stories existed alongside hundreds of youth groups and efforts to reform public schooling as well as working and living conditions for children and young people. When efforts at school reform did not succeed, left-wing political parties began focusing more on oral storytelling that examined the living conditions of the working classes. “The Servant” is among Zur Mühlen's stories that assert that the future is dependent on young people learning solidarity.[2]

I (re)told this story in the Bridges classroom in November; the students chose it for their December public performance. Early in my data analysis, I began writing about their work with this story. The more I worked with Zur Mühlen's words and their transformation by Williams Elementary's sixth-graders, the more resonances and parallels I saw and felt. How appropriate that she was a translator, given that I have been working with translating as a metaphor for teaching! That the cover of her translated *Fairy Tales for Workers' Children* (1925, English version) has a group of three children gathered around a book, the word “why?” printed over and over behind them. That her emphasis

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[2] As mentioned earlier, quoting Zipes (2004), stories can be used not only to liberate, but to oppress. In Germany, the Nazis appropriated traditional fairy tales, using them to glorify Hitler and the Third Reich. After World War II,

> the association of fairy tales in general and the Grimms' fairy tales in particular with the Third Reich was so strong that the Allied occupation forces banned those tales during a brief period for contributing to the barbarity of the Nazis. Consequently, for a long time after World War II, there was little production or experimentation with fairy tales. (Zipes, 1989, p. 25)

on labor resonates with my emphasis on the work of classrooms and writing as labor. Thinking *with* “The Servant” highlighted both the successes and mis-steps of the students' individual and collective emotional and intellectual labor in the Bridges classroom. Its themes also echo my ethical and intellectual commitments as a teacher and researcher. In addition to my using the story, the story was using me—and this classroom of nearly forty students.

This dissertation might thus be conceived of as an extended example of the type of research Arthur Bochner (1997) advocated for when he wrote:

> we link theory to story when we think with a story, trying to stay with the story, letting ourselves resonate with the moral dilemmas it may pose, understanding its ambiguities, examining its contradictions, feeling its nuances, letting ourselves become part of the story (Ellis, 1995). We think with a story from the framework of our own lives. We ask what kind of person we are becoming when we take the story in and consider how we can use it for our own purposes, what ethical directions it points us toward, and what moral commitments it calls out in us (Coles, 1989). (p. 436)

Story—and the students' work with Zur Mühlen's story in particular—serves as well as challenges my interpretation and theorization of teaching and research that move toward social justice, that are practices of blurred translating. These processes are based in listening, in building relationships and community, and in transformation. They utilize story. And they are work—labor in the hope of collaboratively creating spaces of learning

that work toward more just social structures and practices. My labor with "The Servant" and the stories to which it connects takes place in the following chapters.

Chapter Outlines

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2, "Practicing Teaching as Blurred Translating," outlines my theorization of teaching as blurred translating. As bell hooks (2003) asserted, "we are not just teachers when we enter our classrooms, but are teachers in every moment of our lives" (p. 158). Building on my own life stories and teaching experiences (the framework of my life, as Bochner [1997] termed it), I offer the metaphor of blurred translating, teaching based in listening that is relational and contextual and a never-finished process oriented toward justice. In practicing blurred translating, we simultaneously recognize what connects us as humans and the separations between us. This metaphor is evolving, an attempt to create a "radical living practice" (Moraga, 2011/2005, p. 87); one of the ways this chapter represents this is through the power of the fragment. The chapter is written in seven sections that tell stories or are based in stories, utilize theory, incorporate poems or essays, and connect with research literature. These fragments each capture a piece of my thinking and theorization and together add up to something less partial than any straightforward explanation could.

Chapter 3, "The Story of My Research: First, Next, Then, Last," is my version of a methods chapter. "First, Next, Then, Last" is a Bridges writing game created to help students who are having trouble writing their own stories and is often used with younger students and with English Learners. Having trouble as my process doesn't neatly follow

typical research methods or methodologies, I took this cue from Bridges to get started in explaining what I did. In this chapter, first I write about my underlying commitments and orientations as a scholar as well as what I did to prepare to enter the Bridges classroom; next I describe my participation in a sixth-grade Bridges classroom and what I did with data generated there through critical ethnographic methods (e.g., Madison, 2005); then I explain writing as methodology; and, last, I comment on where this leaves me and what I am thinking about research.

The following four chapters and three interstices describe and interpret the work of Neighborhood Bridges, with particular attention to work with Zur Mühlen's "The Servant." My task as the writer—the storyteller—is to animate stories of lived experiences in a classroom for someone—the reader—who was not there. To do so, several pieces seem important: to understand the philosophy and structure of the Neighborhood Bridges program and to theorize the work that these particular students were doing. And because "story is the key to everything" (Maria Asp, personal communication, September 10, 2012), I have to, of course, tell stories—both some that are readily apparent and some that are usually hidden (for frequently, the stories that aren't told are as significant as those that are).

But to do this in a simple manner would dishonor the work of the students, of the program, and of my own thinking—as well as the complicated nature of teaching and learning. Sonia Kuftinec, in a performance and social change class that she co-teaches with Maria Asp, Neighborhood Bridges director, said that Bridges works to "multiply the

capacity for fracturing narrative closure" (personal communication, October 1, 2012). Thus, the juxtaposition of various genres of text—an Austrian writer's short story, theory, a transcript of a student-authored performance, expanded field notes, interpretation—is both a choice of form and a choice of meaning-making. These texts and contexts, which include some stories of some of the lives of the forty people in the classroom, are of necessity multivoiced. I am retelling stories in different patterns, as Armstrong stated (in the epigraph). I acknowledge, however, that while much of the work of this classroom was not about written texts, I here present meaning-making of the students' meaning-making solely in written form.

Chapter 4 introduces the program history and philosophy of Neighborhood Bridges, as well as what a typical session ideally or theoretically looks like. Bridges curriculum and pedagogy offer many possibilities for reimagining the classroom through experimenting with experience. Bridges aims to build community and collaboration; to focus on questioning stories through critical and embodied literacies; and to transform the self through learning. The chapter also describes how theatre and the process of transforming an orally told story into a publicly performed play provide tools and spaces for students to play with words, ideas, and each other.

This chapter is followed by Zipes's (one of the cofounders of Bridges) translation of Zur Mühlen's story, "The Servant." Given that this story is nearly a century old and translated from the German, it has already traveled and changed before arriving in this document.

Chapter 5 describes how “The Servant” became a play successfully performed by a sixth-grade class at Williams Elementary, an urban, public school in a large district in the Minneapolis-St. Paul (Minnesota) metropolitan area. The chapter describes what Bridges looked like in practice in this English Language Arts classroom, outlining what Miss Adrienne Raspberry (the Neighborhood Bridges Teaching Artist, hereafter “Miss Adrienne”), Mrs. Jamie Riggs (the classroom teacher, hereafter “Mrs. Riggs”), and I did together throughout the year in this classroom and how the students transformed and then performed their version of “The Servant” in front of other students and their families. The interstice that follows is a transcription of their public performance.

But this story of success is not the only story that could be told of this transformation; every story contains hidden ruptures. Further, a story looks different told from an ensemble or from a particular student's (character's) perspective. Chapter 6, “"It's Too Boring Now': A Neighbor Story,” thus traces one student, Da'uud, who wasn't at the performance, using ideas of counterstory and contexts. I called this chapter a neighbor story, as it exists alongside of and mixed up with the events of the previous chapter and the mess and success explored in the chapter that follows. Chapter 6 utilizes very specific writing choices, which I first explain. Then, “Contexts, Part 1” outlines theoretical constructions—counterstory, identity in schools, and the production involved in theatre—that serve to illuminate the meaning of what follows: a tracing of Da'uud's participation in this Bridges classroom from my fieldnotes, with explanation in footnotes. The third section, “Contexts: Part II,” revisits the themes of the first section leading up to a

theorization of Da'uud's contested participation in the Bridges classroom.

After closely reading this one student, Chapter 7 again steps back to consider some of what enables Bridges to be transformational (a “success”) and where it/the students/teachers got stuck in mess. I argue that this fulcrum of success or mess rests on how students work—or do not or cannot—to become storytellers of their own lives who can change stories and communicate meaning; how they collaborate or do not; and how they are able to utilize tools to tell a story or create links between literacies. This chapter also summarizes how the students revised “The Servant” with their improvisational ideas and experiments with experiences.

The interstice that follows is entitled “Make the World a Better Place,” which is the goal of Bridges and my own teaching, research, and writing. These words are from Ida Dailes's translation of Zur Mühlen's (1925) *Fairy Tales for Workers' Children*. While the language reflects the Communist movement of the 1920s, the sentiments echo my own and Bridges' educational philosophies: always question, join together to alleviate suffering, make friends with and in books, read and write—and tell and perform—“lovely stories about real everyday things” (n.p.) I was once asked what I hoped to do with my foray into educational research. I responded that it was pretty simple and echoed my educational philosophy: be better to each other and to Earth on which we live. I include this interstice because these themes echo through the years.

All throughout this dissertation, I am writing of, about, and with stories. While the previous chapters think *with* story (whether stories of theory, fiction such as Zur Mühlen,

or students' stories), Chapter 8 is an extended note on some of my thinking *about* story, particularly drawing on the work of Arthur Frank (2010). I explain what I mean by story and how the "truth" of story is that it is fact, fiction, and theory. I also outline some of the work of story in relation to classrooms and specifically Neighborhood Bridges: (re)authoring identity, fostering community and social relationships, including multiple forms of knowledge, and moving toward transformation and creation.

Finally, Chapter 9, "Revis(it)ing Blurred Translating: How Stories Are Using Me" considers research as blurred translating. My original intention with this chapter had been to *revise* my theorization of teaching as blurred translating, using what I had experienced in the classroom to work further at figuring out teaching as blurred translating. After the experiences of the Bridges classroom and the labor of writing this dissertation, I realized that what I had actually done was engaged blurred translating as a *research* practice. This chapter thus *revisits* this concept in relation to research. I consider how translating, as translation theory and lore tell us, always betrays, making it a risky practice in which story and community (relationship) are central. This unfinished metaphor both blurs artificial divisions between teaching, research, and writing and allows us—as teachers, students, and researchers—to conspire (meaning to breathe with) and collaborate in spaces of learning.

Pedagogies of Possibility: "Brains on Tiptoe"

In the introduction to her book *Teaching Positions*, Elizabeth Ellsworth (1997) told a story about creating a demonstration for a citywide science fair. Thinking about

working on this project with her dad, “a genuine mad scientist,” she wrote:

> I never fully understood what was happening, and that made me feel a little uneasy. But that was always the way it was with Dad. His explanations were always just a little over my head, so my brain had to stand on tiptoe most of the time. (p. 3)

Ellsworth's powerful image of a brain standing on tiptoe leads me to ask: what would it mean to live with my brain mostly standing on tiptoe? What if, in classrooms, students' and teachers' brains stood on tiptoe most of the time? Further, what would it mean to theorize what was going on during the process of adapting “The Servant” with my brain on tiptoe? To know that meanings are just beyond my reach? And that they might be just beyond the reach of the students, too?

Ellsworth's image, which combines a learner's body and mind, means that this work—whether teaching, learning, writing, or research—is unfinished, always just a little over our heads. This offers me hope, for something that is unfinished is also full of possibilities. And I am intrigued by pedagogies of possibility—where opportunities for learning, especially those that center collaboration and social justice, are afforded in different shapes and forms. And despite my utter bodily discomfort with it, theatre can do this, as can storytelling. Stories, whether oral, written, or performed, can cause our brains to stand on tiptoe, engaging both our minds and our bodies.

This is the source of my fascination with Bridges and my desire to champion the ways in which it successfully encourages students to question the world around them and

to become narrators of their own lives. Yet its unfinished nature also reminds us of the tensions of this type of pedagogy. It can help to explain, for instance, why Mrs. Riggs's students critiqued adults for being too busy with work, computers, and television to pay attention to children yet also expressed a desire, as workers, to be on Twitter, playing video games, or watching *Glee* rather than chained to a pizza-making factory. Such examples, success intertwined with mess, and possible interpretations fill the following pages.

In my work as a researcher, I sought to listen to the languages of the stories of students and teachers; as Jeanette Armstrong reminds us, these stories come from many tongues and mouths and lands. I then retold their stories in my own words and languages. Yet this dissertation is but some readings, not the final meaning, of what happened as students labored together and as I labored to theorize their and my own teaching and learning. There is no one story, which necessitates (re)telling multiple, simultaneous, and conflicting (layers of) stories. These words here are but part of the continuation of the unfolding of the story of "The Servant." The unfinished nature of this work and story means that the next (not final, for that doesn't really exist) word lies with the reader. But unlike the cliffhanger ending of "The Giant and His Suit of Armor" and the foolishness of a giant who came to prefer his chains, my hope is that what follows can assist in the collaborative work of opening possibilities for creating new—albeit messy and always ongoing—antioppressive storylines with students and teachers.

Chapter 2

Practicing Teaching as Blurred Translating

> *What she possesses is an ability to be at two places at once. She can hear a word and separate its literal meaning from its connotation. This is necessary, since the verbatim translation often leads to confusion. Languages are not logical. Thus an interpreter must translate word for word and yet somehow manipulate the breadth of language to bridge the gap. While one part of her brain does automatic conversion, the other part examines the linguistic void that results from such transference. It is an art that requires a precise and yet creative mind. Only the true solver knows that two plus two can suggest a lot of things before ending up at four. (Kim, 2003, p. 91)*

In Suki Kim's novel *The Interpreter*, the narrator asserts that what makes character Suzy Park a good interpreter is her ability to sit with complexity, as interpretation—the oral "conversion" of language while translation is the written—moves in and among words, meanings, and cultures, requiring both precision and creativity and, not infrequently, a series of detours. This chapter, likewise, presents my winding and unfinished, sometimes precise and sometimes creative, theorization of teaching as blurred translating. This theorization comes early in the dissertation because I argue that one of the blocks (the chains, to use the previous chapter's analogy) to antioppressive teaching and learning is teachers' struggles to translate between their worlds and learning and those of their students. Like the fictional Suzy Park, my understanding of this messy practice of manipulating the "breadth of language"—or maybe more accurately, the *breath* of languages and cultures—grew out of my lived experiences.

In both my thinking and teaching about this practice, I draw heavily on culturally relevant pedagogy (e.g., Ladson-Billings 1995, 2006, 2009) and critical pedagogy (e.g.,

Freire, 2000). But while my work could be placed within these larger frameworks, “teaching as blurred translating” is local and contextual—attempting to pay attention to what happens when we actually try to do critical pedagogy (e.g., Ellsworth, 1989; Lather, 1991). I am theorizing local, grounded work—not a method or even a theory in a traditional sense—and building an idea that helps me to practice teaching. Teaching as blurred translating is a metaphor, not a prescription.

And because, like Kim's narrator asserts, this work with words is more like an art, I present my thinking in a nonlinear fashion as well. Drawing on stories from my own and others' lives, on theory, on poems and essays, and on research literature, I build an argument through fragments—presented here in different sections—of my thinking about how I have been a teacher, engaging in practices of blurred translating. I begin and end with stories about children (students) from my own life, particularly focusing on the meaning of hurts of various kinds. The second fragment outlines where my theorization of teaching as blurred translating began: in my first semester of graduate school, using two writers to try to make sense of my struggles. The three sections that follow outline the contours or characteristics of this practice, drawing on lived experiences, on theory, and on research literature. The next section suggests that blurred translating is a way of keeping alive what Loris Malaguzzi (n.d.) called the hundred languages of children or working toward what Zadie Smith (2009) called Dream City.

Teaching as blurred translating is a messy, flawed practice; it is also a metaphor, and “metaphors do not state. They do not signify a closed, literal meaning. Instead,

metaphors *express* meaning, and enable the reader to experience that which they connote" (Barone, 1997, p. 117, italics in original). Thus, the final interpretation, whether these pieces together or this theorization in general "makes sense," whether my language bridges the gap between my ideas and the reader's absorption of them, and whether blurred translating conceptualizes a practice and practices of teaching, is up to the reader.

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Ponytails and Pain

In tenth grade, a new student arrived 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 about how weird—inappropriate even—it was that Simone[1] 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 or two later, I sat in a hallway in a college dormitory and had my first interracial conversation about hair. I had no idea. I was riveted—and intimidated—by that conversation. So riveted, in fact, that my body carries a physical reminder. Entranced in learning about hair care products and extensions and comparisons of how often we could (or needed, in my case) to wash our hair, I didn't notice the terrific storm brewing. Running to shut my open 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 early foray into understanding the lives of "other people's children."

[1] Names in this chapter are also pseudonyms.

Certainly, there are 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 must have felt in my high school. Yet I had ways of addressing my pain—not the least of which was health insurance and access to medical care. Looking back, I understand why Simone 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 ideas of the school. Hair is, after all, just hair. But what ice packs could assuage the pain of being in an unfamiliar and hostile environment, where instead of discussing something as simple—and as complex[2]—as a ponytail, it is instead subjected to hostile judgment?

Twenty years later, the memory of a storm-filled conversation about hair lingers with me, one of many lived experiences that have facilitated what I now call the practice of blurred translating. Along with my still crooked toe, I carry the recognition that blurred translating can be painful. But failing to translate has much more damaging effects.

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Translating Writing

In the fall of 2009, I was the new student. This first semester in graduate school, feeling particularly lost and floundering in new discourses, the changed landscape of a different city, unfamiliar work, and new relationships, I read Zadie Smith's (2009) lecture "Speaking in Tongues." She wrote of her acquiescence through the process of education to what Lisa Delpit (2006) termed the culture of power. Thinking she was gaining

[2] See, for instance, Jones's (1994) book *Bulletproof Diva: Tales of Race, Sex, and Hair.*

something, Smith let go of her childhood voice—a voice unacceptable due to the ways it was 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). Upon later reflection, 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!" (Smith, p. 133)

That same month, presenting in my research methods course on my educational work with white people to challenge racism, another graduate student questioned my presence in our program, implying that my work—how I had spent the previous decade, including, of course, some conversations about hair—was not really what education was about. Only months into graduate school, despite being white and raised middle-class and understanding the culture of power[3] (Delpit, 2006) of school and thus able to speak—at least somewhat—with its voice, I felt some tiny part of the pressures Smith spoke of. 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? But isn't teaching acting in pedagogical ways and spaces? Was I wrong in thinking of my work in

[3] In *Other People's Children*, Delpit (2006) described the culture of power as having five aspects: power is enacted in the classroom; codes or rules for participating in this culture of power exist; the rules reflect the rules of those who already have power; if you do not know the culture of power, being told the rules makes participating in this culture easier; and those with access to the culture of power are usually least aware of or willing to acknowledge it, while those without access are most aware of its existence (p. 24).

community centers, in church basements, on buses, and around dinner tables as teaching?

For years, I had intentionally placed myself where I felt uncomfortable, was an outsider, or was not "supposed" to be. At times, others walked those spaces with me and offered insights from their locations, exposing me to voices and identities different from my own. I needed a way of bringing to Peik Hall[4] what I knew, what I had felt and seen in these lived experiences. I wrote my way into an idea through putting Smith's "Speaking in Tongues" and Delpit's (2006) "The Silenced Dialogue" into dialogue with my own thinking. This pairing led me to reflect on how often my teaching—in those community centers and basements and buses, as well as in formal classroom spaces—has been a pedagogical process of "blurred translating." When people could not hear or speak each other's (figurative, cultural) languages or understand each other's identities, knowledges, and lives, I have attempted to translate. Rarely clear due to the different cultural worlds in which we live, these translations are instead incomplete and in motion—hence blurred.[5] This blurred translating attempts to create educational spaces that do not require any of us to surrender our voices—as Smith had done.

While learning is, of course, also a process of blurred translating,[6] I focus here on blurred translating as a *teaching* practice.[7] Certainly, schools ask—demand—that students

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[4] The building that houses the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in which I was enrolled.

[5] In my original conception, I used "blurry." But "blurry" means lacking definition or focus; "blurred" comes from the verb blur, which means to make dim, indistinct, or vague. Blurred is more appropriate due to its qualities of movement and because its connotation and denotation are less deficit-oriented.

[6] Each of us, for instance, has to find ways of reconciling—translating between—new and old knowledges.

[7] What I am calling the practice of blurred translating can be found in many classrooms and in much educational research literature (e.g., Díaz & Flores, 2001; Fecho & Meacham, 2007; Lu, 1990; Orellana, Dorner, & Pulido, 2003). It shares premises and practices with notions such as cultural brokers (e.g., Gentemann & Whitehead, 1983) or border-crossers but also incorporates other bodies of

engage in translational processes of code-switching, et cetera; students are often translators—and teachers' translational practices frequently depend on students. Focusing on teaching, however, asks that teachers, with their position of power in the classroom, take on more of this responsibility.[8] And because there is no teaching without learning (Freire, 1998a), students are at the center of this process.

I have been living my way into this idea for close to two decades. I'm not sure I'll ever complete my work with it—and I have to remind myself that completion is the antithesis of thinking and living practices of blurred translating. Relational and ongoing. I write that, say it, present it in various academic spaces. Yet both my own writing—and much more significantly, the "demands of the field"—keep asking for concrete definition. I have thus been circling this conception in writing for years now, unwilling to pin it down. My fear stems from two places.

First, "blurred translating" is not a *thing* or even a role; it is not a formula, a method for teaching, a checklist to follow, or a "right answer." In the interests of both teachers and students, I believe we need to conceive of teaching not solely as concrete, decontextualized methods, but instead think about teaching in ways that preserve complexities and tensions, that foreground the work—the practices—of teachers and students. Learning is frequently difficult. It is even more difficult to learn to glimpse the world through the experiences and words of others. Yet blurred translating necessitates

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theory. Further, learning from and about one's students is extraordinarily important to the practice of blurred translating, and much has been written about it (e.g., Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

[8] Edgerton (1996) called this "*translation without a master*—that is, translation that does not impose the usual extra burdens of translation on those with least power" (p. 8, italics in original).

this ongoing learning. Thus, blurred translating is a practice, a process, a way of being. Fundamentally, it is a pedagogy about relationships.

Second, I did not know how to place my work within educational research traditions—even as theory and educational research helped to refine and shape my thinking. Certainly, my work is partly practitioner inquiry or autoethnography, as the conception of blurred translating emerged as I attempted to understand and theorize myself as a teacher moving in complicated contexts. But ultimately, it is not about either Theory or Methodology. Blurred translating is about lives. About *my* life. It is about pain —mine and others'—and about joy. Fundamentally, it is about learning more about the many meanings of being human, of living and moving and being in the world, and about communicating with each other, albeit hesitantly and incompletely. My theorization—writing—about blurred translating is thus grounded in *both* lives and theories. Book or theory knowledge are not enough to explain what it means to teach. This knowledge combined with lived experience combined with sweat and tears and laughter may sometimes be enough. However, the academy—Scholarship—frequently has no room for such work; it cannot place such thinking. I was stuck. Until I stumbled across Laurel Richardson's (2003) consideration of writing "as a method of inquiry" and Julia Colyar's (2009) insistence that "writing is methodology." This, then, is the research tradition into which I place my work, learning from and in the process of writing.

Even then, my work isn't done. As bell hooks (1994) reminded us, "the engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute but always changing, always evolving in dialogue

with a world beyond itself" (p. 11). I thus hope it is never done, that the idea of blurred translating is constantly revised as I—and others—live it. What follows is my current thinking based on teaching, writing, reading, and living.

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Beginning with Lives

Someone called a caucus, stopping the meeting. Our anti-racism team had agreed that any time white people and people of color needed to meet separately, to process, we could do so.[9] The half dozen of us who were white went to another room. I have no recollection of the words spoken or the issue at hand. But I clearly remember Jim, tears in his eyes, trying desperately to understand how 80 years of living in the body and having the experiences of a straight, white, middle or upper middle-class male shaped the ways he saw the world and thus how he was moving within the group. In the caucus space, we practiced blurred translating of our lives, experiences, and actions, our words and our worlds. In relationship, Jim came to recognize the pain his words and actions had caused, particularly for the people of color in our group. He needed other white people, such as me, to translate how whiteness was creating rifts in our interracial group.

Such divides are structural as well as interpersonal. In the early 2000s, the ongoing effects of practices such as redlining were readily apparent in Philadelphia when

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[9] This process is termed racial identity caucusing. White supremacy has damaged all of us, but the ways this ideology has shaped and damaged white people and people of color are different. White people have internalized a sense of superiority, while people of color have internalized a sense of inferiority. Thus, sometimes working through these effects needs to happen separately. After caucusing, we return to again work together.

I facilitated a community education class at the nonprofit Project HOME.[10] When we talked about structural histories of whiteness, people in the class began to understand why their neighborhoods looked as they did. Those most affected by the legacies of legal discrimination—in this context, African-American families who had moved from the South a generation or so earlier—had not had access to information that continued to shape their housing patterns and the food deserts surrounding us. As a teacher, I worked to translate these histories into local contexts. The overwhelming feeling from those gathered in the class was relief: it is not us, but deliberate laws and structures that have led to the massive inequities we live with today.

Blurred translating has been my contextual, localized response to social injustice, both interpersonal and structural. When speaking with Jim or the class at Project HOME, I told stories from my life and from history to transfer knowledges, alternative ways of seeing the world, or a meeting, or a neighborhood. Blurred translating as a pedagogical practice is thus not separable from my work with stories. Story demands a certain complexity; it disallows formulas and the certainty of closure. Stories are ways into each other's lives, ways of experiencing each other's humanity.

Blurred translating is thus about relationships. So is teaching: "Pedagogy as a social relationship is very close in. It gets right in there—in your brain, your body, your heart, in your sense of self, of the world, of others, and of possibilities and impossibilities in all those realms" (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 6). This requires knowing others—and their stories and histories. Teaching as blurred translating can only happen when a teacher has

[10] HOME stands for housing, opportunities, medical, education.

an actual—not just assumed—understanding of other('s) cultures and lives. In other words, translating is not possible without a mutual act and the continual building of recognition.

This takes work. This work can be difficult and painful. Engaging in blurred translating requires being continuously critical and self-reflexive, working to simultaneously understand and interrogate my own power as well as my multiple identities and voices.[11] I have learned I must step back and listen (continuously) so as to glimpse the wisdom inherent in different stories, voices, and identities. I must challenge myself to sit with—not run from—discomfort and to connect with different communities. I must be aware of the values and positions others (may) assign to me based on their identification(s) of me and how this limits me as I attempt blurred translating.

Crucially, those of us with more access to the culture of power must also question our relations with it, including naming our temptations to hoard or to hide power. We must be aware of the seduction of the culture of power as it entices us to enter (further). Having gotten a taste, we may be unwilling—or unable—to fight its very existence. Hearing its echoes and voices surrounding us in the mass media, in our schools and institutions, we may come—or continue—to see the culture of power as normal and give up, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, our multiplicity of identities and voices.

This difficult work is ongoing. I thus usually use a gerund form (translating) rather than a noun form (translation). Used as either a noun or a verb, a gerund can

[11] Scholars such as Sleeter (2008) have written that self-examination is an important part of learning to teach students who are culturally different from the self and of addressing inequities inside and outside of schools.

describe a thing or an action. Teaching is both, and so is (teaching as) blurred translating. Further, at their best, both are active, contextual processes of transfer and transformation. Indeed, the word "translate" means "to bear, remove, or change from one place, state, form, or appearance to another: transfer, transform" (Merriam-Webster, 2009). Drawing on this last definition, blurred translating is not an endpoint, but a process of transformation, of building something better, something that has not yet existed. This process includes both Jim's tears and pain and the a-ha moments of Project HOME class members. It is a political practice, as we translate our lives in what seems like increasing isolation despite our constant connectedness and increasing diversity concurrent with widening polarization. Yet in blurred translating, we can create change, cracks in the culture of power that can transform lives, knowledges, and valuations. Transferring between and negotiating among different lived realities, blurred translating is a way of being with each other and of being with each other's stories.

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Translating (and) Theory

Elliot Eisner (1985) wrote that "theory is the result of our desire to create a world we can understand" (p. 29). Although my work with blurred translating began with lived experiences, I turned to theory to help me understand them and to better articulate the practices in which I was engaging. This, too, is a translational endeavor: taking ideas from literature on metaphor, translation, and literary theories has helped me to situate the contextual and cultural nature of blurred translating.

(Blurred) Translating as Metaphor

In their book *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (2003) argued that metaphor pervades our lives, not only in the language we use, but in our thoughts and actions as well. Metaphors define our lives by providing conceptual structures that nuance our experiences and shape how we navigate the world and interact with others. These metaphors both open up meaning and downplay or hide other possible meanings.[12] In terms of opening meaning, "imaginative and creative" metaphors are "capable of giving us a new understanding of our experience. Thus, they can give new meaning to our pasts, to our daily activity, and to what we know and believe" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 139). Here, I briefly survey how the metaphor of translation has been used to provide new understandings of education, teaching, and learning.

First, it is necessary to acknowledge that students and teachers bring into schools cultural, social, linguistic, and other differences and that conflicts between the discourses of home and school can impede learning (e.g., Ballenger, 1999; Cazden, 2001; Delpit, 2006; Gutiérrez, Larson, & Kreuter, 1995; Heath, 1983; Michaels, 1981; Moll, 2010; Valenzuela, 1999). Further, education means working with new ideas and understandings. Thus, in education, we are always translating in interactions between texts, teachers, and students: new knowledges intermingle with already-held ones; we take up new roles and identities; we meet and dialogue (or fail to do so) with different people. In classrooms,

[12] I am certainly not reducing all of what happens in teaching and classrooms into blurred translating nor do I want to romanticize what can be difficult, dull, or dreary work. Volumes have been written about what teaching is, and with today's emphasis on the technical aspects of teaching and testing, these other meanings are plentifully present, so I do not address how this metaphor hides other meanings.

we translate not only languages and knowledges, but our changing selves, cultures, and contexts.

For reasons such as these, Alison Cook-Sather (2006b, 2007) posited that translation is perhaps the most instructive metaphor for education. She (2007) wrote that translation is a mutual process that, when working well, “insists on attending and responding to the ever-shifting, contextual and relational, and language- and culture-based nature of identities as they are constructed and played out within various webs of power and practice” (p. 399). The role of teacher, she argued, is to facilitate students' translations both of languages and of themselves; translations are thus both literal and metaphorical or reflexive. In her conception, students are both translators and what is translated. Her reconceptualization of education as translation also emphasized how unequal power dynamics in the classroom can shift as both teachers and students (learners) translate. These translational processes, she argued, must be recreated anew with each context and group of students.

The metaphor of translating provides a framework for reflecting on our practices as teachers and for examining the consequences—and especially the failures—of our actions and the institutions of which we are a part. I add the modifier “blurred” to emphasize that these processes are never straightforward and that the practice of teaching is imperfect, evolving, and frequently difficult. Re-imagining the practice of teaching as blurred translating opens space by explicitly acknowledging that we live, teach, and learn in social and cultural contexts, shaped by power(s)that shape our knowledges. As

teachers, this blurred translating is situated, intertwined with the power of the position of teacher as well as with each of our ideologies. Yet translating offers the possibility of creating connections and community as we labor to transfer knowledges and identities. Importantly, teaching as blurred translating is a practice that can work toward social change in our classrooms and communities. In short, this metaphor acknowledges the complexities of the work of teaching and offers theoretical grounding that transfers to the practices of the classroom.

Insights from Translation and Literary Theories

Moving beyond metaphor, I turned to translation theory for insights into the possibilities and challenges of this process.[13] At their most basic, textual translations (from one language to another) must make sense in the new language; convey the spirit and manner of the original text; be naturally and easily expressed; and produce or provoke a similar response in the audience of the translation as the source does with its audience. Further, they must consider the content or form as well as the purpose(s) of the original, the audience, and the reason for the translation (e.g., translating poetry, translating instructions for putting together a chemical compound, and translating international law are quite different tasks) (Nida, 2000/1964). Since no two languages

[13] I offer these insights with many caveats, drawing again on Eisner's idea that theory stems from desires to understand. First, translation theory refers to written communication and thus interpretation (oral communication) may be more apt; however, interpretation does not have the body of theory and literature that translation does. Second, I recognize that translation as a linguistic practice is not directly analogous to translation as a pedagogical practice. For instance, linguistic translation involves three parties (the author of a text, the translator, and the reader), but it is (often) not a shared activity and instead a one-directional negotiation by the translator, with the power lying in the hands (or words or pen) of the translator. While blurred translating of necessity involves language, it is not about analyzing variation in discourse or how meaning unfolds and also not about linguistics or language learning per se. Thus, this metaphor falls short, as Lakoff and Johnson (2003) noted all metaphors do.

have identical symbols and words carry different and localized connotations, translation is only an approximation. Translation theory thus reminds us of the nuances of this practice; translating is never simply transference or conveying information, but a value-laden, complex, and changing process that requires skill, empathy, and understanding. Translation is both utopian, filled with the hope of dialogue and the creation of community, and ideological, imbued with the power of the translator (Venuti, 2000).

Thus, translation is not simply about words—or, put another way, words are never simple. Literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) wrote that

> no living word relates to its object in a *singular* way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme, and this is an environment that it is often difficult to penetrate. (p. 276, italics in original)

Like the objects they describe, 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). Words thus enter the world tensely, their social constructions sometimes leading to engagement and sometimes to clashes. They may resist translation or transformation: "it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker. . . Expropriating [language], forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process" (Bakhtin, p. 294). Language "*is an always changeable and adaptable sign*" (Vološinov, 1973, p. 68, italics in original) whose meanings, and

hence ideological evaluations, are localized.

Additionally, language is rooted in much more than words. As Alastair Pennycook (2010) defined it, language is doing, practice, activity, situated and co-constructed in specific localities and time. Language, he argued, is about difference, rather than sameness; we constantly relocalize words, ideas, and ourselves, not only physically and temporally, but perspectivally and ideologically, mediating between ourselves, others, our practices, and our surroundings. Such language exchanges are part of markets in which we learn what is socially acceptable and its value/worth (Bakhtin, 1981; Bourdieu, 1991; Vološinov, 1973), valuations that are often unspoken.

Further, valuations of translating as well as teaching are gendered, as both practices (professions) have historically been conceptualized as feminine and thus—given a more or less ubiquitous patriarchy—considered "less than." Lori Chamberlain (2004/1988), for instance, wrote that writing is seen as producing, as original, and as male, while translating is seen as re-producing, as derivative, and as female: "the act of translating is viewed as something qualitatively different from the original act of writing" (p. 307). A French saying about translation (which is a feminine noun) states that translating, like women, should be either beautiful or faithful. Such metaphorics are " a symptom . . . of the power relations as they divide in terms of language" (p. 314). This plays out in theories of translation as well (see Chamberlain for an analysis of Steiner [1998] as an example). Further, the feminization of translation extends outside of the translation field or theory; in her book on cultural translation in novels and

autobiographies, Martha Cutter (2005) wrote that female characters are most frequently the translators, both linguistically and culturally. Madeleine Grumet (1988) has made similar arguments about the feminization of teaching. But while the "feminine nature" of both types of work has resulted in their undervaluation (as economic, social, and other valuation has been attached to administration in education and authorship in language), perhaps a strength of teaching as blurred translating is that both have been feminized, for the values of feminist work frequently work against oppressions of many kinds. Perhaps teaching as blurred translating can draw strength—if not economic value—from the gendered perception and situatedness of these practices.

Both words and people are thus situated, accented, and valuated; the words form the basis of what must be translated by people within hierarchies and societal and cultural valuations. Thus, communication is always a process of negotiation between individuals, social worlds, and ideologies (Bakhtin, 1981). This is why George Steiner (1998) argued that all communication (verbal, written, and pictoral) is translation: "To understand is to decipher. To hear significance is to translate" (p. xii). The process of translating I outline here is always blurred because of the "elastic environments" of words—and the silences between them.

An Example: Genres.

Genres are constructed categories—forms and styles—of speaking, such as greetings, ways of addressing adults versus children, or professional discourses. From the time we are children, we learn genres from what we hear around us and the speech in

which we engage; these typical and fairly stable forms of language enter both our experience and our consciousness and are strengthened as we use them in practice (Bakhtin, 1986). Genres are necessary for organizing both the world around us and our own speech, so much so that Bakhtin (1986) argued that speech would be impossible without them. They are, in effect, shortcuts. Further, they provide us with unique ways of seeing and valuing the world, speech, meanings, and intentions (Bakhtin, 1981).

So what happens when speakers do not share genres, when for instance, we cannot quickly or naturally formulate a response in a particular genre? In a standup comedy routine, Dave Chappelle (2000) (who is Black) shared an example of how genres differ—"collide," in his words—across race and culture:

> You know sometimes I'll be on a business call, right, you know, like with a—with a lawyer or something. And you know, my lawyers be white. And uh, and uh, like we'll be on a call, right, and they'll be like, "Uh, okay Dave, we're gonna, we're gonna close the deal. Is that fine with you?"
>
> I'll be like, "Yeah that's cool for me."
>
> "Great. Great. You have a good weekend, Dave."
>
> I be like, "Aright, you too man. Peace."
>
> "Uh. . . uhh alright. Bye bye."
>
> They don't know what to say, right? So sometimes, like, sometimes, I'll make up shit that's not even slang. Just to see how they handle it and shit. It'll be the same business call like, "Alright we're gonna close the deal. Is that fine with you

Dave?"

"Yeah sounds good to me."

"Great. You have a good weekend, Dave."

"Alright buddy. Zip it up, and zip it out!"

They be like, "Uh . . . aaaaalright. Zip-a-dee-doo-dah,[14] bye bye."

Chappelle pokes fun at what can happen when speech genres, such as how to end a phone call, are not shared. It's comedic—hilarious when he performs it. Our words, even those as simple as saying goodbye, position us as members of communities (or not); they reveal what we know and take for granted.

But not sharing genres can make communication difficult or even impossible. Although words provoke answers (Bakhtin, 1981), at times we, like Chappelle's lawyers (in what is a low-stakes example), may not have the words to respond in ways that make sense. Our blunders may carry much more social valuation than the odd—and racially laden—response of "zip-a-dee-doo-dah." Thus, when the language or genre spoken is not the same, when the historical, social, and cultural contexts that imbue the spoken and received words are not shared, we need translation. And as any kind of translation makes language and meaning further give way, our identities and our genres must flex as well.

The Contextual and Cultural Blurring of Translation

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[14] I do not know why Chappelle chose this phrase, but I would be remiss not to point out that "Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah" is the title and refrain of a song from the 1946 Disney movie *Song of the South*. This song, which won an Academy Award, drew from the chorus of an 1834 blackface minstrelsy song. For years, it was also part of an opening medley for the "Wonderful World of Disney" television show; the movie itself was re-released many times and spinoffs proliferated for decades (see Lensmire [2008] for more). This phrase, in other words, has a long history in the oppressive U.S. racial imaginary (particularly the Black-white binary).

Translation is not solely—or even mostly—about words, but about socially and culturally situated ways of being, values, and understandings of the world. Translators are thus tasked with determining what words mean in a culture so they can translate them into another culture. As cultures have their own norms, values, and mores, even when words can be transliterally transferred, their meaning can be lost or distorted. This is further complicated as both cultures are continually changing. Linguistic translation thus involves not only (at least) two languages, but two cultures—and their values and relationships (Santos, 2000; Simon, 1996; Toury, 2000/1995/1978).

An example can clarify this contextual and cultural blurring. Middle-school teacher Holly Pettitt (2001) wrote about insisting that her Latino student Victor call her by her given name rather than "teacher"; she did so because she had been taught that addressing adults by their formal names was a condition of respect. Thinking that Victor was being rude, she did not respond when he called her teacher. Later, in conversation with a teacher who spoke Spanish, she learned that "teacher," as spoken by Victor from his cultural location, was an honorific:

> I had created an impasse out of a mistaken notion I had about what I considered a difference—a negative one at that—that I had allowed to distance us by virtue of my inability to appreciate what might have been a more complex and thus more fruitful explanation of that difference. (p. 179)

Pettitt's inability to translate the cultural—not the linguistic—understanding of her student's word led to contention in the classroom—and certainly to missed opportunities

for learning.[15]

I too have had such failures. Recently, I guest lectured on the history of whiteness in the United States. Having spent years working with critical whiteness studies and with antiracism activists, my analysis is firmly grounded in both literature and lives. I feel confident that I can translate difficult—and painful—concepts and histories. But this day, in a classroom with students from backgrounds very different from my own, I floundered. In 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 while she and her children never do, I was made glaringly aware that my pedagogical efforts are firmly rooted in my own life experiences and that translating is never fully possible. It is blurred. I left the classroom feeling incoherent and profoundly upset with myself for getting defensive. While unable to name it in the moment, my translation of my own positionality and understandings had blurred to the point of unrecognition. My words had been too alien, too whitely valued. Further, I did not have a prior relationship with this woman that might have mitigated these effects. While such moments of missed communication occur in every classroom—indeed, in probably every conversation, interaction, and text—they became glaringly obvious when culture, social class, race, gender, et cetera were brought into the open. Again, it was a student who pointed out the inadequacies of a teacher's attempts at translation.

Translating is blurred because understanding is and always will be incomplete and

[15] Pettit wrote that it was Victor, the student, who had to translate himself to her in order to get help. She ignored his requests until the day when, "through gritted teeth he stammered, "'Tea—Mrs. Pettitt, I need help'" (Pettitt, 2001, p. 178). She was startled by this request and helped immediately.

because this process of communicating through and with differences is often difficult to negotiate. Even more importantly, though, my translating is blurred because it requires never getting too comfortable or thinking that I can fully understand someone else's lived experiences or even clearly communicate my own. As often as I have translated, I have fought understanding (as I did in that guest teaching), preferring the comfort of my own values and ideas, fighting the ways in which translating required me to change or to recognize how my beliefs are profoundly shaped by power, culture, language, and locale. Blurred translating requires admitting, as Pettitt eventually did, that other ways of being in the world are as valid as our own. It necessitates an ability to say “I don't know” or “I was wrong.”

As a teaching practice, 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, which are, of course, imbued with various power relationships (e.g., Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Indeed, translation theorist Lawrence Venuti (2000) insists that “translating is always ideological” because it is inscribed with “values, beliefs, and representations linked to historical moments and social positions” (p. 485), as in Pettitt's expectation of how students should address adults. Yet surrendering to translation—being willing to change bodily, emotionally, and intellectually—without losing yourself is difficult. As Delpit (2006) contended,

One of the most difficult tasks we face as human beings is trying to communicate

> across our individual differences. . . . This becomes even more difficult when we attempt to communicate across social differences, gender, race, or class lines, or any situation of unequal power. (p. 135)

But even always wrapped up in these relationships of power, translation offers hope. In attempting translation, there is "the anticipation that a community will be created around that text . . . . a translation projects a utopian community that is not yet realized" (Venuti, 2000, p. 485). After Victor began the translating, his relationship with Pettitt started to change and together they created transformed ways of interacting. As a practice, then, teaching as blurred translating offers opportunities to overcome clashes and power imbalances between worlds, cultures, and languages that often lead to students' silence or disengagement rather than their self-appropriation of learning. When we negotiate—not run from, as I did as a guest teacher—blurred translating, we can create community that acknowledges how our histories and social positions influence how we see, hear, and understand each other.

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Connecting with Research Literature: Characterizing Blurred Translating

At the end of the first session of our year-long professional development seminar on racial identity and antiracist pedagogies, Angela looked at my co-facilitator and me, tears in her eyes, and said:

> Why had I never heard this before? This is the first time I can wrap my head around *why*—I got goosebumps when you said how German, Swedish, Polish,

> Irish people became white. Now I understand *why* I have white privilege. I have been so angry—I haven't understand why the other white teachers around me just didn't get it.

For years, Angela, an ESL teacher, had been attending seminars and trainings on race—usually focusing on white privilege.[16] But the intellectual work of these spaces had not given her language that fit what she knew, what she felt in her body. Our session, however, provided the historical, political, and economic contexts that allowed her to translate between texts, histories, and herself.[17] She was moved.

I know that my teaching has often been a practice of blurred translating because of experiences like this one; I know that the stories I have told, experiences I have shared, and contexts I have emphasized have helped learners to change, transfer, and transform their knowledges and themselves. And I know from research literature that many teachers have such experiences. While I am loathe to pin down an ongoing and contextual process, I turned to literature to help me name characteristics of blurred translating that enable these learning experiences. Teaching as blurred translating is based in listening; relational and contextual; a never-finished process; and oriented toward justice.

Based in Listening

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[16] For more on the difficulties that can attend conceptualizing whiteness primarily as white privilege, see Lensmire et al. (2013).

[17] To extend the metaphor a bit further, consider translation software programs such as can be found on the Internet. They rely on formulas. I could enter this chapter into such a program; parts of the translation would make sense and others would not at all. I assert that, similarly, the formulaic nature of many professional development understandings of race is like this: these analyses sometimes makes sense (to people) and at other times do not. For Angela, their translations of the complicated and contextual nature of whiteness only partially made sense. Ours provided a language that helped her understand or make sense of her lived experiences and what she knew of the world.

The practice of teaching as blurred translating must be based in listening. Listening refers not just to the denotations of words, but also their connotations and contexts as well as what is *not* spoken, the silences, and the accompanying body languages (see, e.g., Schultz & Smulyan, 2007). This is analogous to linguistic translation: looking up words in a dictionary is not enough, for the translator must know what they mean in the context of the source and must pay attention to form, to tone, and to spaces (e.g., translating the line breaks of poetry).

Katherine Schultz and Lisa Smulyan (2007) wrote about this process in mentoring new teachers in Indonesia. They realized that they could not focus on words alone (words that were translated or, rather, interpreted, for them). Rather, their practice of listening extended beyond the words, necessitating that they as "teachers attend to individuals, the classroom as a group, the broader social context, and to silence and acts of silencing" (Schultz & Smulyan, 2007, p. 100). Listening involved both what students in the classroom knew and did not know as well as attempts to listen outside of their (the teachers') own perceptions and understandings to try to grasp what meaning entailed for a student. Only then could they move to developing *shared* meaning. In other words,

> Just as translating the words was not enough to help us understand and communicate effectively, listening only to the literal meanings of words in a classroom limits a teacher's ability to connect, to respond, and to engage students in thoughtful and meaningful learning. (Schultz & Smulyan, 2007, p. 105)

Translating is not possible without deep listening.

This type of deep listening involves risk and unpredictability (Delpit, 2006; Metro-Roland, 2010). As Delpit (2006) wrote, “we must 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” (p. 47). She asserted that the responsibility for initiating this type of deep listening must rest with those who have the most power. Because many teachers are white and middle-class (and most are credentialed through formal education, which almost always necessitates understanding the culture of power) and because teachers have more authority and power in classrooms than do students, teachers must initiate this deep listening and thus the process of translating, both in the classroom and with community and family members. Along with Cook-Sather (2006b), I assert that reconceptualizing education as translation—in my terms, teaching as (blurred) translating—can shift unequal power dynamics. This begins with teachers deeply listening to their students' words, meanings, and silences.

Relational and Contextual

Listening is relational. Deep listening and translating can “lead to powerful re-imaginings of pedagogical relationships” (Cook-Sather, 2006a, p. 350). bell hooks (1994) named this “engaged pedagogy”: a pedagogy deeply anchored in the lives of the students in the classroom, particularly in their differences and challenges they face due to race, class, gender, language, et cetera. In engaged pedagogy (what I might call translational pedagogy), a teacher works to create a space where each student is present, recognized, and heard in ways that are true to self; all classroom members co-construct knowledge

and are mutually responsible for what happens. Through relationships, they translate themselves and knowledge to and with each other. This process occurs from moment-to-moment, enfolding with the silences, pacing, rhythm, and timing of both nonverbal and verbal responses in the classroom.

The relational process of translating is always contextual. Each of us, teacher and student, 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:

> When we come in contact with new practices, we venture into unfamiliar territory. . . We do not quite know how to engage with others. We do not understand the subtleties of the enterprise as the community has defined it. We lack the shared references that participants use. (Wenger, 1998, p. 108)

Blurred translating entails moving between communities, working to translate the contexts of the "unfamiliar territory" or having a small or perhaps blurred grasp on the "subtleties of the enterprise" in which we find ourselves. As we move within and between, we transform and reconstitute our selves and contexts (Orellana, 2007).

An example may clarify. In *Teaching Other People's Children* (the title pays homage to Delpit), Cynthia Ballenger (1999) wrote about being the only non-Haitian teacher in a preschool. Although an outsider to Haitian culture, she spoke "reasonably good Haitian Creole," the language of the students. Yet while her words were frequently understood, her intentions were not, nor did she "always fully understand the intentions

and assumptions of the adults and children" around her (p. 6). When, for instance, her students read catalogs and cut up books (rather than the other way around), she initially felt their ways of responding to texts, to reading, or to storylines were wrong. Such evaluations also meant that she "did not know how to see their [the students'] strengths" (Ballenger, 1999, p. 3). Ballenger persisted, though, and realized that her students were using texts to understand their lives, even if their assumptions about literacy were different than hers. While her students' ways of relating to texts and to each other were unfamiliar, she recognized that they were analogous to book discussions with which she was familiar: both involved fitting texts into a reader's own life in attempts to understand and interpret. Engaging with the specific contexts of her students' lives and language helped her to cultivate relationships in the classroom, rather than labeling unfamiliarity or difference as wrong. In doing so, Ballenger practiced teaching as translating: she translated her own understandings of literacy and worked to understand how her students were translating between texts and their lives.

A Never-Finished Process

Because it is relational and contextual, translating is uncertain and tentative, never final (Cook-Sather, 2009; Farquhar & Fitzsimons, 2011). In other words, "translation of the fruitful kind is never finished, no more than is thought" (Caws, 1986, p. 61). This is especially true because blurred translating is based in responding to cultures and identities that are themselves also in process.[18]

[18] Identities are negotiated through time and space and the activities therein; identity is thus not fixed but a "constant becoming" (Wenger, 1998, p. 108).

Drawing on Bakhtin, Holland et al. (1998) wrote that the space in which we author our identities is "a broad venue, where social languages meet, generically and accentually, semantically and indexically, freighted with the valences of power, position, and privilege" (p. 191). The culture of power gives credence, privilege, and weight to certain identities while relegating other identities to specific spaces (such as outside of school) and completely devaluing yet others. Even if we have multiple identities, where the culture of power reigns, we are encouraged to become singular. Some of us are able to say and be more of who we really are, while others are less able to do so, with some identities completely dismissed. We move in the world with often unspoken understandings of these valuations, and such valuations create rifts between us.

Working through and with such separations may mean being willing to get "lost in translation," making "a commitment to engaging in a journey, to finding new meanings and trajectories, and to embracing destinations that are tentative and negotiable" (Farquhar & Fitzsimons, 2011, p. 653). As Walter Benjamin (1968) contended, as translators we may be lost from the beginning. Yet this view opens space for learning, including the failure or misunderstanding that sometimes attend learning. For instance, bell hooks (1994) encouraged her Black students to use Black vernacular—a language frequently barred from the classroom. When her white students were frustrated by their inability to understand (to translate, both linguistically and culturally) this language, hooks prompted them to think of these moments of not understanding, of being lost in translation, as spaces of learning and to recognize that "we may know in fragments" (p.

174). Being lost in translation requires vulnerability and a willingness to change in the hopes of transformation, knowing that translation is, of course, an impossible task, just as it is impossible to ever know fully. The process is never finished.

Oriented Toward Justice

But although (teaching as) blurred translating is a never-finished process, it is not directionless. It is helpful to again consider the multiple meanings of translation: "to bear, remove, or change from one place, state, form, or appearance to another: transfer, transform" (Merriam-Webster). This last definition—transformation—perhaps most applies to teaching as blurred translating.

Teaching as blurred translating can transform relationships between teachers and students; it can also change students' relationships to the knowledges of schooling. Blurred translating can help to mitigate the ways in which schooling has often been

> used to regulate and broker not just access to material wealth and the means for producing that wealth, but as well access to legally constituted "rights", to cultural and sub-cultural histories and archives, to religious virtue and spiritual rewards, and to actual social networks. (Luke, 1994, p. 310)

For many students and communities, the ways in which this occurs are obscured, untranslated, making "school knowledge inaccessible and non-criticisable" (Luke, p. 320). Teaching as blurred translating names what has been hidden through unjust practices, policies, and valuations. This requires work, the laboring for freedom about which hooks (1994) wrote. Classrooms can be oriented toward justice when teachers

provide experiences for students to use their own realities as starting places for transformation: "reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of *writing* it or rewriting it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 35, italics in original). When the practice of teaching is engaged as a process of blurred translating, students and teachers together create opportunities to name and thus transform the world, beginning with their classroom.

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Translating to Keep the "Hundred Languages of Children"

In a poem entitled "The Hundred Languages of Childhood," Loris Malaguzzi (n.d.)[19] declared that "The child has/A hundred languages/A hundred hands/A hundred thoughts/A hundred ways of thinking/Of playing, of speaking./A hundred always a hundred." But, Malaguzzi continued, school and the culture steal 99 of these, separating the head from the body, teaching that work and play are separate and that reasoning and dreaming do not belong together. This stealing happens in many ways, from refusing access to or speech in familial languages to discounting or positioning some languages as deficient to focusing solely on written academic language to making school a place of silent mouths and still bodies. The methods of theft go on and on.

This theft is, of course, not confined to schools; such fracturing is an age-old human practice of the abuse of power and the misuse of language. But language also provides hope for us humans. Writing about the Jewish story of the tower of Babel,

[19] Malaguzzi cofounded the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy and schools.

Sherod 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 human history is the history of language, and that language is a power that serves to divide those whom it originally united. (p. 10)

Thus, he argued, translation—

> that carrying across from one solitude to another—is both the expression of an ancient belief in the dream of a common language, and an activity through which we affirm that belief by enacting the means to embody it. To put it in terms of the *Genesis* story, translation attempts to restore that original city, to re-imagine that place where everyone was welcome, and where everyone was understood. When the tribes were dispersed from Babel, they left in the isolation of their individual languages, but they also left with a dream: the dream of reclaiming that first community, that common language from which they'd been debarred. (p. 10)

Translation, as both Santos and this ancient Jewish story claim, is thus about not only language, but about community and about using power—and story—to speak *with*, rather than against or for other humans. Like the communities dispersed from Babel, much divides us, of course—and schools often recreate conditions that debar the languages of children and communities, especially based on race and social class.

But as teachers, might we risk embodying blurred translational practices so as to create classrooms where everyone is welcome and everyone is understood? Dare we

dream that classrooms might be places of reclaimed community, where everyone can engage their voices, cultures, and languages? Might we re-imagine classrooms as filled with hundreds of languages of playing, of speaking, of thinking, of loving, of dreaming? Might we listen to children, who, Malaguzzi reminded us, say, "NO WAY the hundred is there" when school and society try to squelch these languages?

Despite, or perhaps due to, the loss of one of her voices, Zadie Smith (2009) envisioned such 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 a place such as Dream City, we are allowed to speak with a multiplicity of voices and to see from multiple places. Here, we understand that the claims of each voice have a piece and only a piece of the truth. This very act of speaking with or valuing multiplicities challenges the hegemony of the culture of power (Delpit, 2006), the abuse of language used to isolate. Indeed, Dream City is only possible if we work to translate differences, rather than to subsume or erase them. Dream City, a reclaimed Babel, is not based in sameness but in negotiated collectivity. For as Santos (2000) asked:

> But what if our relationship with the other . . . is *better* as difference than as unity? What if face-to-face is better than fusion? 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 that we attempt monologue that fits for all people, but that we work with an understanding that we are all shaped by multiple, intersecting cultural stories and lives. As educators, our task as (blurred) translators is to find the connections as well as the disconnections, in other words, to not only translate into our own cultures or conceptual systems, but to build connections as we work in, through, and with these multiplicities. In practicing blurred translating, we simultaneously recognize what connects us as humans and the separations between us.

This existence, claimed Smith (2009), 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 ourselves to continually renew our ability to step outside ourselves; we may 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. 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 are thus cut off from both ourselves and from others; we become trapped in fear and uncertainty: "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). "Dream City," then, can only ever be a dream without the difficult labor of translating that enables all people to claim and keep our identities and knowledges.

While risky, blurred translating can build a Dream City and reclaim a community grounded in both difference and shared humanity. Or, as Sherry Simon (1996) wrote, "translation becomes an activity of cultural creation" that "brings into being the realities which it links" (p. 152). When practicing teaching as blurred translating, we incorporate a hundred languages spoken, lived, and embodied; we remember that not just children, but we too have "a hundred worlds to dream" and that we can use these hundred to play and to labor toward and in Dream City.

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Of Pony Tails and Bruises

I stood in the doorway to the sixth-grade classroom, greeting the students walking in after lunch. As usual, Jacob half-ran, half-stumbled through the door, his shoelaces trailing behind him, 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.

I thought about 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 and mischievous child, but instead as child abuse. She also knew that her education had taught her the language of power that her mother's had not. At the hospital, she needed to translate to protect her family.

I thought of my own younger brother, bleeding profusely after a metal toy gun lodged in the back of his head during a cops and robbers game in our basement. Or the time when kids throwing rocks at the lake didn't have quite the aim they thought they did, resulting in another ER trip for stitches in his head. Yet unlike Afiya, it never occurred to my teenaged self or to my mother 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 the lives and cultures of others 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 children—like myself—who haven't been exposed to a wider world. But those I worry about result from the carelessness, recklessness, or refusal of adults to understand the lives of other people's children (Delpit,

2006). I understand now how often our lives make no sense to each other. How, then, to read—and then translate—these bruised bodies and minds, located within and among our separations in an "*imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy*" (hooks, 2013, p. 4, italics in original)? And perhaps even more importantly, how then to read—and to translate—the strengths and knowledges students carry with them into the classroom?

I think about all we cannot, do not, and will never know about our students, whatever the classroom site may be. Yet all of who we are enter these spaces. Too often, the multiplicities of languages, knowledges, and experiences that make us who we are 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 the lives of students like Jacob, when we don't wonder about their struggles to make sense of schooling, when we do not attempt to translate between our understandings, positionalities, and ideologies and those of our students and their worlds, when we do not practice these partial—blurred—translations, we fail our students.

And yet, I know something different can happen. I can intervene in conversations about ponytails; I can tell stories about brothers and ER trips; I can talk with Jacob about his family and find ways of bringing what he knows into the classroom.

At the beginning of the school year, I sat with Jacob as he struggled to pencil any words in his writing notebook, the page blank in front of him. He told me he didn't know how to start. Knowing he was struggling, a few weeks later the Teaching Artist invited Jacob to come forward. Using a dialogue form created by the Young Playwrights in

Philadelphia,[20] she asked him 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 and learning of the classroom. Beginning with putting this acted-out dialogue with a clear form—a language and topic that made sense to him—on paper, Jacob started writing.

For students like Jacob, the too-often singular language of school frequently does not make sense or is not one that invites participation. Yet oral dialogue and theatre were languages Jacob could easily "speak"; another week, he insisted, for instance, on playing the part of Cinderella, starting his group's theatre re-enactment on his knees, scrubbing the floor. He understood what was at stake in this story of familial conflict. He embodied it. And after he realized that his teachers would take his words, his ideas, his stories, his enactments seriously, his notebook was no longer blank.

Blurred translating means helping learners like Jacob—whatever their age—translate their worlds and languages into learning that schools, adults, state standards, or writing assessments might recognize; it is also about keeping multiple languages alive in our mouths, to paraphrase Zadie Smith (2009). Blurred translating is about the experiences of families like Afiya's and mine—and about the ways in which our schools

[20] This form can be found in the Appendix.

and other institutions harm people due to failures to listen and to translate. Blurred translating thus also means helping learners to understand the words and worlds of others —to reconsider what a bruised chin, broken arm, or ponytail might mean.

I have been shaped by the words, cultures, and experiences of others. For me, the task of the classroom is to attempt to translate such stories of lives and lived worlds, even when this is scary, unpredictable, or not fully possible. Even when I fail. For it is, of course, only partially possible to translate these languages and lives. It's blurred. This means that practicing blurred translating is just that—a *practice* that requires continuous engagement and the ability to recognize power while working toward social change and classrooms based in relationships.

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 the writings of Zadie Smith, Lisa Delpit, and others. I stand in a doorway, floundering between my worlds and the worlds—and words—of others, trying to enact a practice of blurred translating.

Chapter 3

The Story of My Research: First, Then, Next, Last

If the grape is made of wine, then perhaps we are the words that tell who we are. (Galeano, 1989, p. 18)

With some dismay, in the welter of files and note cards in fans and toppling stacks, Father Jude understood that to tell the story as a story was to pull a single thread, only, from the pattern of this woman's life, leaving the rest—the beautiful and brutal tapestry of contradictions—to persist in the form of a lie. (Erdrich, 2001, p. 337)

I do research wrong. Put another way, I do not utilize a clear methodology that fits into commonly-taught schemes from start to finish.[1] Like most education scholars, I am intrigued by teaching and learning, particularly by how people, frequently through relationships (or the lack thereof), make meaning in educational settings. While I could be more "scholarly" and highfalutin, in reality, the research question with which I enter a site is not much more explicit than, "what is going on here?" During, and more importantly, later, I ask why and how. I can explain what I do as well as my theoretical and ethical commitments, but these don't add up to a methodology that has a name found in most research textbooks.

I purposefully do research "wrong" because I find that strict adherence to formulas is either not possible; serves to marginalize, oppress, and/or compartmentalize people, their lives, and meaning; or makes unnecessarily clean the messy world of

[1] The exception to this might be what Erickson (1986) termed "interpretive research." He wrote that the key feature of interpretive research is the "central research interest in human meaning in social life and in its elucidation and exposition by the researcher" (p. 119). But the call for methodology is usually more precise than this. For instance, in writing about what is "considered *acceptable* educational research," Burdick and Sandlin (2010) stated that "these criteria and their potentially rigid definitions reduce educational practice and theory to the confining space of existing cultural models and vocabulary of teaching, learning, and curriculum" (p. 350).

teaching and learning.[2] Like Father Jude in the above epigraph, sitting amid piles of data, I recognize that there are many stories and that telling (and interpreting) just one or even some may quite possibly be a lie. Just as many elements of traditional school do not work for many students, many elements of traditional research do not work for me. Further, I fear that traditional (leaving aside postmodernism) research practices often work at cross purposes with the antioppressive education that I value and want to work toward; they tend to fix meaning rather than recognize its blur or partiality.

Yet I clearly have methods—systematic procedures for "collecting data"—here, mostly coming from critical ethnography. More importantly, I can tell you how I generated data and what I did with that data once it was electronically (and mentally and emotionally) archived. Most important are my ethical commitments—both personal and theoretical—to those who spend their time in the space I am researching and to what happens in that space and how it is (or is not) helping to further antioppressive education: these two commitments define the former (what I "do with data").

I therefore cannot write a straightforward methodology chapter. I've been unsure how to structure this chapter or to explain what I do in ways that follow at least some conventions of educational scholarship. So, like a clever thief,[3] I borrow from a Neighborhood Bridges writing game. For struggling writers or for English Learners,

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[2] In Chapter 8, I draw heavily upon the work of Frank (2010). My stance on research is similar to his on story or what he calls dialogic narrative analysis: that practice and dialogue are more important than a prescribed, limiting, and finalizing "method" that often neglects important forms of human meaning-making and activity and obscures "the mutual dependence of content and effects" (p. 72).

[3] Neighborhood Bridges frequently calls on the trope of a "clever thief"—the point being to "change it, steal it, make it break it" (it being a story, a game, a technique) in ways that work for the needs of each classroom community. I steal the idea here to make it work for my dissertation. For more on the good thief, see Chapter 3 in Zipes (2004).

writing their own story based on a simple prompt is often difficult. This strategy attempts to simplify writing: on a blank page, the student makes a box divided into four parts, labeled first, then, next, last. The blank page becomes less intimidating; a story becomes a sequence of events that can be described and/or illustrated. I use this model here to make sense of both what I do in my research and in this dissertation—in other words, what I did and how I am making meaning. Both attempt to answer a question common to qualitative scholars: "how we perform the magical feat of transforming the contents of our consciousness into a public form that others can understand" (Eisner, 1997, p. 4).

In this chapter, I first discuss what I did to prepare to enter the site that forms the basis of Chapters 4 through 7 of this dissertation; this includes my underlying orientations and commitments as a scholar as well as my involvement with the Neighborhood Bridges program. Then, I describe my participation in Mrs. Riggs's sixth-grade English Language Arts classroom and the methods I used to generate data. Next, I name writing as my methodology—the process of generating this text. Last, I write about where the accidents, intuitions, and dialogue of this two-year process have led me and where I am going next. This story, while bounded, is far from finished.

First: Preparing to "Enter the Field"

Orientations and Commitments

I have been obsessed with education for as long as I can remember. At home as a child, I conducted my own classes, filling my dad's unused red gradebooks and distributing to my stuffed animals and friends left-over purple mimeographs from my

elementary school teachers. While I left in my childhood the smell of mimeograph ink, I continued to "conduct classes" as an adult, again often not in formal classroom spaces. Instead, much of my work has been public pedagogies: "spaces, sites, and languages of education that exist outside of school" (Burdick & Sandlin, 2010, p. 349) or "the collection of educational activities, practices, and structures that exist in cultural spaces outside of institutions of schooling" (Burdick & Sandlin, p. 350). These included social justice organizations. Focusing especially on antiracism, I spent much time getting smarter about race and then cultivating relationships that worked to help other white people do so as well. I came back to formal schooling, to a program called "Culture and Teaching," because I believed that this work could be done in public schools, before we reached adulthood.

Education (not always synonymous with schooling) is, I believe, a process of meaning-making. For me, this process happens through pulling and putting together bits and pieces of ideas, building a story with the words and ideas of others. Further, I realized in my second year of graduate school that my pedagogy in spaces such as the above—whether my childhood home or a community education center—has often centered on telling, listening to, and connecting stories (personal, structural, and theoretical, and most recently, literary and arts-based). To get better at telling and situating these stories, I have spent time with critical theory, the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, feminist theory, performance theory, postmodern theory, queer theory, sociocultural theory, spatial theory, and translation theory (recognizing that none of these are singular); my shelves, which

tell of my research and theoretical interests and thus orientations, are cluttered with books on writing, on critical pedagogy/antioppressive education/social justice, and on race and ethnicity (particularly whiteness).

As a student, I have read and re-read, trying to get better at articulating what educational theorists and activists like George S. Counts (1932) have been asserting for what passes for forever in the U.S. imaginary:

> Like all simple and unsophisticated peoples we Americans [*sic*] have a sublime faith in education. Faced with any difficult problem of life we set our minds at rest sooner or later by the appeal to the school. We are convinced that education is the one unfailing remedy for every ill to which man [*sic*] is subject. . . . The bare fact, however, that simple and unsophisticated peoples have unbounded faith in education does not mean that the faith is untenable. History shows that the intuitions of such folk may be nearer the truth than the weighty and carefully reasoned judgments of the learned and the wise. Under certain conditions education may be as beneficent and as powerful as we are wont to think. [But] only in the rarest of instances does [the existing school] wage war on behalf of principle or ideal. (pp. 1-3)

Coming as I do from a background of peace education and activism and an obsession with words, I sit uneasily with the war metaphor, but I return again and again to Counts's assertions. I also have a sublime faith in education, in the possibilities of what might occur in schools, in the power of learning; I too think that “an education that does not

strive to promote the fullest and most thorough understanding of the world is not worthy of the name" (p. 9); I too know we live in "a system which exploits pitilessly and without thought of the morrow the natural and human resources of the nation and of the world" (p. 31); I too want schools to battle on behalf of principles and ideals of love and antioppression; I too think that teachers and schools and educators have not been willing or able to struggle as the world—as students—need on behalf of justice. Or perhaps I should say that they have not been able to do so in great enough numbers to compel the changes necessary to free schools and minds from drudgery and service to capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and heternormativity.

Yet while oppressive and violent forces weigh heavy, I know that students and teachers, in big and small ways, resist, attempting to enact and live out something different in the classroom and beyond. Teaching and learning can be transformational both individually and collectively; I know people working every day in formal and informal classrooms to make this happen. I've also had enough powerful learning moments in my own life—moments that sometimes painfully kicked my ass and other times made me laugh out loud or forget the time as I engaged passionately with ideas—to believe that education can be "as beneficent and as powerful as we are wont to think," that it can be transformational. These stories remind me that my own "sublime faith" in education may not be untenable. It is these stories I want to tell as an educational researcher.

And yet. "The educational practitioner in me screeches to a halt before the chasm

that separates my broad, lived-in world of the school and classroom and the narrow, technical world of the traditional research text" (Barone, 1997, p. 116). Telling these stories is not easy; it is not necessarily welcomed by a field that has again returned to positivism, neutrality, and objectivity as the gold standard. Like Tom Barone, I have trouble keeping my professional and political lives separate (actually, I think all educational researchers do—some of us just more readily admit it), and I am overtly concerned with moral and ethical issues and the need to pay attention to the physical, cultural, and sociohistorical contexts of students and teachers. I find it increasingly difficult to disentangle my research and my teaching; my work—both in these pages and in my days—is part of a whole in which I am attempting to live out pedagogical, theoretical, and moral commitments. Like Barone, I see "the act of research as an act of social imagination . . . and . . . as a powerful form of storytelling" (p. 124); like Joe Kincheloe and Peter McLaren (2005) and many other critical researchers, I "announce [my] partisanship in the struggle for a better world" rather than "cling to the guardrail of neutrality" (p. 305). And, as Jen Gilbert (personal communication, April 26, 2013) said, sometimes directions keep you off the track.

I entered Williams Elementary School with explicit objections to neoliberal models of education that position students as consumers of other peoples' knowledge, as objects whose main function is to produce "adequate yearly progress" as measured by high-stakes standardized tests, as essentialized bundles of labels who too often do not see their lives and interests reflected in the curriculum or the structures of power around

them. I was excited about what Neighborhood Bridges attempts to do: use oral, student-authored, and performed storytelling to question our world and to transform stale and oppressive storylines. I was curious about how public schools and a nonprofit arts organization could partner together and how the relationships theatre fosters can engage students from varied race, class, and ethnic backgrounds. I was going back to elementary school, replacing red gradebooks and mimeographed worksheets with oral, written, and performed stories and a pedagogical commitment to antioppressive education.

Involvement with Neighborhood Bridges

I first became involved with Neighborhood Bridges because of my interest in story. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I was enticed by a two-week summer graduate course with the title "Critical Literacy, Storytelling, and Creative Drama." The class pushed me way beyond my comfort zone—I hated the vulnerability of making up stories on the spot, of playing theatre games, of engaging my (gasp!) body in the classroom. But after four half-days trying out the Bridges pedagogy with a summer-school classroom of fourth-graders, I had fallen in love. I saw a fourth-grader who was too shy to speak in class share his writing—with some nudging from another student. Students questioned gender and power roles. They used their bodies and their minds; they were reading and writing and listening and acting; they were engaging in different kinds of relationships with each other and with texts. This seemed to fit my vision of what schools could be.

Thus, after this two-week plunge into the praxis of Bridges, I stayed because the program resonates with my commitments to critical pedagogy (e.g., Freire, 2000; hooks,

1994; Shor, 1987). During the next school year, I visited many Bridges classrooms and volunteered with the program to find the classroom in which I would spend the following year. I had ideas about what I was interested in observing, of course, and had reviewed literature on school partnerships, on arts education, on story, on critical pedagogy, on critical literacy, and on creating community in the classroom. While I had questions about literacy engagement, the role of creativity and imagination, and relationships in the classroom, I was mostly just ready to see what happened in that 2012-13 school-year.

Today, in 2014, I continue to be involved with Bridges. I haven't left because of my burgeoning interest in the transformative possibilities of arts-based education and research. While writing my dissertation, I have continued to attend and sometimes lead professional development with the Teaching Artists and classroom teachers and have helped to conduct program assessments (writing, speaking, and acting). I have brought what I know from educational scholarship to the program.

Then: Participating in Mrs. Riggs's Classroom

Setting

The data in Chapters 4 through 7 are from the 2012-13 school year, when I attended each weekly two-hour Neighborhood Bridges session in an urban, sixth-grade public school classroom in a large district in the metropolitan area of Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota. Approximately half of Williams Elementary School students are students of color, and approximately half receive free and reduced price lunch. In urban districts such as this—where there weren't enough chairs and so many students in Mrs.

Riggs's sixth grade sat on metal folding chairs for the first several months of the year—meaningful arts education has been especially marginalized (Holloway & Krensky, 2001). Through the advocacy of classroom teachers, Bridges Teaching Artists, and families, Williams Elementary has had the Bridges program for over a decade.[4]

Over the course of the school year, 38 students were assigned to Mrs. Riggs's sixth grade English Language Arts class. On any given day, around 35 students were in the classroom. One student, despite being registered, did not come to school (as his family moves between two different countries). Another student was transferred to a classroom with more support for him as an English Learner. One other student transferred to a different school when her family moved. One student transferred to Williams in April; another student joined the class in April for just a month (as his family travels between countries). Change was a constant in this room.

About three-quarters of these students are of color, from diverse backgrounds including African-American, American Indian, (south and south-east) Asian-American, Somali-American, and Latin@; they speak at least six languages at home. Mrs. Riggs (early in her career teaching at Williams), Miss Adrienne (a Teaching Artist for over a decade who had been at Williams for several years), and myself are all white women.

Data Generating[5]

[4] Each year, Bridges is cut from schools. Sometimes, a teacher is able to raise the money herself to keep the program in the classroom. Other times, grant money enables the program to start in different schools. Thus, each year the program is in a mixture of new and established classroom partnerships.

[5] Graue and Walsh (1998), among others, distinguish between data collecting and data generating. In the former, an objective researcher picks up pieces of data that are waiting in the field so that the researcher can make inferences. The latter views research as nested contexts in which "data are generated in a local way that represents their complex and dialectical relations . . . [data] come out of the researcher's interactions in a local setting, through relationships with participants, and out of interpretations of what

Each week before the Bridges session, I met with the classroom teacher (Mrs. Riggs), the Teaching Artist (Miss Adrienne), and sometimes other classroom teachers or Teaching Artists who were also in the school; this planning and debriefing session lasted from 20 to 40 minutes. I took notes when it was not disruptive—oftentimes, these sessions involved intense conversations about individual students and thus notetaking felt inappropriate. Following this meeting, each week, I entered the classroom with the intention of paying as much attention as I could to what was happening.

I drew on critical ethnographic methods (e.g., Madison, 2005).[6] Each week, I scribbled copious notes in a green notebook. When I got home, I typed up fieldnotes with as much detail as possible (recognizing that what I noticed was often shaped by my interests—e.g., I wrote down students' off-handed comments about race when another researcher may not have). I also wrote analytic and reflective memos on each class session. I collected student writing and other programmatic documentation (e.g., the curriculum binder, texts written by the program's co-founder); I watched video recordings of the students' public performances.[7] Finally, I conducted interviews with Dr. Zipes,

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is important to the questions of interest" (p. 73). This also emphasizes the "active, creative, improvisational process" of research (p. 91). Or, as Norris (2009) wrote, "The data cannot be separated from the research act" (p. 24). These nuances also help me to work with a question that haunts me: "What does it mean to use other people's lives as data?" (Lather, 2007, p. 52)

[6] Entire books have been written about critical ethnography, so I will not rehearse their arguments here. In a nutshell, critical ethnography is the doing or performance of critical theory, "to probe other possibilities that will challenge institutions, regimes of knowledge, and social practices that limit choices, constrain meaning, and denigrate identities and communities" (Madison, 2005, p. 5). As a researcher, this necessitates reflecting on positionality, purpose, and intentions; mitigating against the possibilities for doing harm to others; working to create collaboration; contextualizing a local story within broader stories; and considering how the work (research) will contribute to equity, freedom, and justice (Madison, 2005). While I use critical ethnographic methods and share theoretical orientations, the next section explains where I locate the primary source of my meaning-making: in the writing.

[7] Obtaining permission to conduct this research was a lengthy and involved process. Due to the school district's requirements, I was not able to audio or videotape in the classroom or conduct interviews with

Miss Adrienne, Mrs. Riggs, and Mr. Marcus (a Teaching Artist who taught another section at Williams and occasionally subbed for Miss Adrienne). I recorded details of all of this in a spreadsheet.

While my primary role in the classroom was researcher, I was also an active participant, including leading parts of the curriculum (e.g., telling an oral story each week) and assisting with teaching tasks. At some point most days I set aside my notebook so that I could focus on helping a student get some words—even just a title—on the page or be with students as they rehearsed a scene in the hallway or sat between students so they could focus on the oral stories or . . . The immediate needs of students—and my relationship with the teachers—outweighed the obligations I felt as a researcher. I prioritized relationships, believing them key to learning; by our third session, I knew the names of all the students and, over the ensuing months, tried to learn something about each person. I interacted with students as a researcher—many students were interested in what I wrote in my notebook—and as a teacher—asking questions about their learning—and as a person—talking with students about their interests in my long fingernails or the hair clip I was wearing or the antics of our pets. In other words, I paid attention to the stories I was telling and to the stories the students were telling me through words and actions. Additionally, while I tried to stay out of the role of disciplinarian, I felt responsible for the safety and functioning of the classroom, meaning reminders to students to put all their chair legs on the floor, to quit messing with the CD player, or that

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students. Families gave permission for their students to be photographed and videographed at public performances, so I have seen that footage.

getting a drink of water was fine but playing with the tap was not.

The setting—the "field"—for the following chapters is thus the Bridges sessions with this sixth-grade class. But it is informed by my contextual knowledge of the program. My understanding deepened as I attended, took notes in, and occasionally led monthly or bimonthly professional development meetings with the Bridges' Teaching Artists at the Children's Theatre Company or participated in program assessments.[8] Further, I cannot separate or isolate this program from my other thinking, learning, and living. Thus, the opening two and concluding two chapters of this dissertation bring in other venues of thinking, learning, and living, as both theory and authoethnography.[9]

Next: Writing

Data Interpreting

I began data analysis by reading my hundreds of pages of fieldnotes and memos. As I read, I highlighted important dialogue, moments, et cetera. I then open coded the data (by hand). I grouped these initial codes into themes. I further refined these themes through sub-codes. I created a file listing each code and the dates on which it appeared (either in fieldnotes or memos) so that I could easily return to specific examples.

But when I started to think about writing, I realized that I am moved not by the coding emerging from a grounded theory-like process, but by the stories of the students

[8] I gave a letter (corresponding to the type of event) and number to each entry in my dissertation data spreadsheet. I have seven letters: meetings at CTC (particularly with classroom teachers and Teaching Artists [TAs]), Bridges TA professional development meetings, Bridges classroom and planning sessions, related events (e.g., theatre class at the University to which I was invited to speak about my research), meetings at Williams, Bridges assessment sessions, and interviews. A future research project will focus on these other sites of data collection—particularly professional development with the TAs.

[9] Ellis (2004) defined autoethnography as "research, writing, story and method that connect autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political" (p. xix).

and their engagement with and transformation of oral, written, and performed stories. Further, when I thought about my year in Mrs. Riggs's classroom and re-read my fieldnotes, memos, and coding, what actually happened was more interesting to me than the initial research questions I had posed. Like Barone (1997), I knew I was not searching for absolute truths but was instead more concerned with “raising important educational questions” (p. 116).

Many of these questions were raised by the students' work with Hermynia Zur Mühlen's story “The Servant.” Since I am so interested in story, I decided to see what would happen if I zoomed in on this process. My intuition was that deeply exploring this work would answer some of my other questions (and would, of course, raise even more questions). I thus started again, pulling fieldnotes and memos specifically related to the students' work with this story. I again noted what seemed important moments or insights, particularly noticing that the students had moments of great success and moments of tension and contradiction. Outlining the students' process with “The Servant” (re-telling the story), I found several threads I wanted to follow.

I did so through writing and rewriting and then rewriting some more. I printed drafts of my writing and cut them apart to rearrange sections, paragraphs, words; I color-coded different elements. I got stuck over and over. In short, I tried multiple ways of writing or organizing the stories. My data interpreting thus emerged through the iterative process of writing, reading, thinking, and rewriting. While drawing on data collected through critical ethnographic methods, the methodology for this text is thus writing.

My Writing Approach

The real work of data interpreting, then, began as I wrote. This process is more circular, intuitive, and harder to describe than the process of data generating. For me, "writing is the thinking process I do before writing" (Colyar, 2009, p. 431). It is also where the most important work occurs. I don't follow a model, and I don't know what the result will look like until I've rewritten and rearranged the words and ideas many times. Perhaps the closest I can come to description is writing about my beliefs about words.

I have always been both a voracious reader and a believer in the power of blank paper. Put concretely: I am obsessed with words. I wake in the middle of the night drafting ideas; I scribble notes onto napkins, the back sides of newspapers, random computer files, the memo function of my phone. I walk into a meeting late because on the bus I came up with a sentence that required me to write it down. For a long time, the chalkboard next to the desk at which I write proclaimed: "Words, let water from an unseen, infinite ocean/come into this place as energy for the dying and even the dead" (Rumi). I write in a room filled with books—overflowing my shelves, stacked on the table, scattered on the floor where my dog trips over and drools on them. And I need my own writing to be material. I need to feel the words, to hear them, to see their physical presence, to locate them in my mouth and in the world.

Always difficult, writing is even more so if I am not immersed in the words of other writers. Writing is for me also a desire for community (Richardson, 1997). Sitting in my blue recliner under my tattered red knitted blanket, I surround myself with more

piles of books and articles. I need these words to think about ideas, to be moved while sitting still, to try to fit pieces together to help me understand. Then, in writing, I try to connect theory coming out of my lived experiences with theory coming out of my experiences of a classroom (both texts of lives) and of others' writing (texts of written words). I attempt to put these knowledges into conversation with each other—to create an intertextual conversation between my life, the lives of others, experiences in a classroom, the written and spoken words of many people, and the intellectual labor of students, researchers, and theorists. I have begun to describe myself as structuralist in theoretical approach but poststructuralist in writing or methodological approach. I try to think with story (following Sparkes, 1996).

Writing as Methodology, as Inquiry, as Learning

I have long believed that my best thinking emerges in and through writing. I am not alone. Julia Colyar (2009) and Laurel Richardson (2003) are among those who argue that qualitative researchers must pay more attention to the process of writing and acknowledge that writing is more critical to our understanding than qualitative research often admits. Richardson called writing “a method of inquiry” (p. 499) and a “process of discovery” (p. 521) while Colyar asserted that writing is a “kind of data collection” (p. 423) and that writing is thus methodology.

Writing is “a learning tool which enables what researchers know about themselves and their topics” (Colyar, 2009, p. 421). I, too, have realized “that I don't write about what I know, but in order to find out what I know” (Hampl, 1999, p. 27; also Richardson,

2003). Like Sofia Villenas (2013), I have found myself taking notes "not knowing why are you writing and what a story is about." Those understandings come through writing about ideas and events in a process of discovering what is important, articulating a story, crafting an argument through interaction with data and theory. As Colyar wrote, "I come to know what I think because I can read it, because I can create text" (p. 426).

Yet this is not usually the way we are taught to write or to research:

> I was taught, however, as perhaps you were, too, not to write until I knew what I wanted to say, until my points were organized and outlined. No surprise, this static writing model coheres with mechanistic scientism and quantitative research. But, I will argue, this static writing model is itself a sociohistorical invention that reifies the static social world imagined by our 19th-century foreparents. The model has serious problems: It ignores the role of writing as a dynamic, creative process; it undermines the confidence of beginning qualitative researchers because their experience of research is inconsistent with the writing model; and it contributes to the flotilla of qualitative writing that is simply not interesting to read because adherence to the model requires writers to silence their own voices and to view themselves as contaminants. (Richardson, 2003, p. 501)

In her extended argument (reworked and reprinted in many places, from 1994 through 2005), Richardson argued that qualitative researchers are disciplined to follow mechanistic, quantitative-like models that make writing boring, alienating, and homogenous and suppress creativity, exploration, and intellectual thought. Further, such

"standard objectifying practices of social science unnecessarily limit [both] us and social change" (p. 500); they define what "counts" as knowledge. Instead, Richardson argued for what she called creative analytic practice (CAP) ethnography, in which writing process and product are deeply intertwined.

> We have no way of knowing where this writing will take us:
>
> Writing seems more accidental than intentional and is often produced by unintended juxtapositions: coreadings of texts on entirely different topics, the discovery of a particularly provocative word as I skim the dictionary page for another, or the memory of a dream that displaces some truth to which I have become too attached. I expect that any paper I have written could have been another paper quite easily. (St.Pierre, 1997, p. 409)

Or

> I move words around as if they were building blocks, as if they might make a solid foundation. But my mortar does not hold and my bricks, overbaked, crack. Words are all I have, but they never hold, never get it down, never get it right. (Pelias, 2004, p. 43)

Or

> When you write, you lay out a line of words. The line of words is a miner's pick, a wood-carver's gouge, a surgeon's probe. You wield it, and it digs a path you follow. Soon you find yourself deep in new territory. Is it a dead end, or have you located the real subject? You will know tomorrow, or this time next year. (Dillard,

1989, p. 3)

Like the students' work with “The Servant” in the chapters that follow, production may happen by “mistake,” by following one line of thought or sentence rather than another. This experience “never accurately, precisely, completely captures the studied world, yet we persist in trying” (Richardson, 2003, p. 500).

Further, education scholars such as Patti Lather (2010) and Jen Gilbert (personal communication, April 26, 2013) have stated that we do not often enough allow our data to pose its own questions. The writing process allows me to do this: for instance, the more I wrote about Da'uud (Chapter 6), the more questions I had, which necessitated turning to literature and returning to my own writing and thinking and going back to my fieldnotes and then thinking and writing some more. Da'uud was posing questions for me. As Adrienne Rich (2001) argued, we must “keep on asking the questions still being defined as nonquestions—the ones beginning *Why . . .? What if . . .?* We will be told these are childish, naïve, 'pre-postmodern' questions. They are the imagination's questions” (p. 167, italics in original). Rather than pretending that I understood (or could understand) what had occurred, I worked from a space of wondering (or perhaps wandering); from this space of unknowing, I was forced to pay attention to histories, localities, and possibilities.

In other words, writing as a methodology must involve social and cultural contexts, including those of the writer, and must acknowledge the partiality of truth claims. Writing is a cultural and social act in which the self writes the culture and the

culture writes the self (e.g., Harris, 1987; Park, 2005); “meaning is always contextualized in cultural and social relationships” (Park, 2005, p. 133). Further, the language that we use works to create meaning and to help construct social reality. This is a poststructuralist approach. Writing is always from somewhere and speaks to someone (rather than everyone); language is thus “a site of exploration and struggle” (Richardson, 2003, p. 508). As Richardson (2003) wrote, “working from that premise, we are freed to write material in a variety of ways: to tell and retell. There is no such thing as 'getting it right'; only 'getting it' differently contoured and nuanced” (p. 511). As we write, we create. The writing product cannot be separated from either the writer (its producer) or from the method or process of producing the writing.

Both process and product are material and embodied. Writing has a concrete materiality that for me is intimately connected with the body. First, both process and product are intellectual labor, “wrestling inside a sentence” (Dillard, 1989, p. 4).[10] It is difficult to craft a good sentence, to care for a paragraph, to follow a line of thinking. Annie Dillard (1989) compared writing to a feral mustang or a caged lion whom it is necessary to visit every day. Or a garden, which requires weeding, moving, digging. Writing is a process, hammering against the walls of the structure you, the writer, have created—and often knocking out what was a load-bearing wall: “You must demolish the work and start over. You can save some of the sentences, like bricks. It will be a miracle if you can save some of the paragraphs, no matter how excellent in themselves or hard-

[10] To tie to Zur Mühlen, I also agree with Rich (2001): “Writing and teaching are kinds of work, and the relative creative freedom of the writer or teacher depends on the conditions of human labor overall and everywhere” (p. 167).

won" (Dillard, 1989, p. 4). This labor issues from and is read by material bodies that are positioned in time and space. Writing, the product of labor, is also physical, words on a page or screen.

Further, writing can evoke physical feelings; we have a relationship with both product and process. This process requires "not flinching from where the writing takes us, emotionally or spiritually; and honoring the embodiedness and spatiality of our labors" (Richardson, 2003, p. 526). Great writing moves me or enables me to feel a relationship, a connection, with the writer, to have a sense of the living, breathing, moving, feeling person who put—labored over—the words on paper or screen.

There are many ways of using writing as a research methodology and many forms that creative writing processes take. For instance, Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) in *Woman, Native, Other* and Valerie Walkerdine (1990) in *Schoolgirl Fictions* combine text and image with their multiple forms of writing. Greg Tanaka's (1997) article "Pico College" and Patti Lather and Chris Smithies's (1997) book *Troubling the Angels* trouble form, splitting the page or placing information in different formats (e.g., text boxes); Lather (2007) wrote that she was attempting to encourage a plurality of theoretical discourses, forms, and levels of writing in this book. Regardless of the final form of a text, trying different forms and modes of writing "is a practical and powerful way to expand one's interpretive skills, raise one's consciousness, and bring a fresh perspective to one's research" (Richardson, 2003, p. 512). Writing in different ways thus enables and produces different forms of knowledge; rather than triangulation of data, Richardson

(2003) proposed the image of a crystal, which "provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic" (p. 518).

As the world of a school classroom—especially one with so many varied bodies and experiences, as at Williams—is complex, this has meant that a singular form of writing did not work for me, either. The form of this dissertation—which sometimes includes commenting in the text itself on writing or on language—is determined by my thinking about the work; ideas and examples and theory (also known as data) shaped themselves as I worked with them through the process of writing. In other words, I think about data through language, in writing. As Lather (2007) wrote about composing *Troubling the Angels,* "we needed multiple layers that folded both backward and forward, a multilayered weaving of method, the politics of interpretation, data, analysis—all embedded in the tale" (p. 41). I also believe that my work in writing must make it to the page in complex ways. In working with more open forms of data representation, the likelihood of multiple perspectives becomes more prominent—and thus, "ironically, good research often complicates our lives" (Eisner, 1997, p. 8). Additionally, my writing practices attempt to work against modernist notions of fixed and knowable subjects (whether that is myself, others, or classrooms); in the writing itself, I attempt a "reflexivity of discomfort" even as that reflexivity sometimes slips into the more comfortable (and comforting) confessional mode (Pillow, 2003).

This openness raises other challenges as well. In her study of K-1 literacies, Anne Haas Dyson (1993) wrote that

> learning to write involves figuring out how to manipulate the words on the page in order to accomplish particular kinds of social work; that social work, however, must meet the evaluative criteria of the "imaginative universe" one is in, and, in school, there are in fact multiple such universes potentially operating at any one moment, each with values not always made explicit. (p. 17)

This is no less true for academic writing than for kindergarten writing. Understandably, this makes evaluating my or any other work using writing as a methodology more slippery. I offer the following from Sparkes (2002):

> What substantive contribution to our understanding of social life does it make? What is its aesthetic merit, impact, and ability to express complex realities? Does it display reflexivity, authenticity, fidelity, and believability? Is it engaging and evocative? Does it promote dialogue and show potential for social action? Does the account work for the reader and is it useful? (p. 211)

Richardson (2003) gave five similar criteria for CAP ethnography: that it make a substantive contribution (to an understanding of social life); that it has aesthetic merit (including inviting interpretive response); that the writer engage in reflexivity; that it has impact; and that it is an expression of a reality.

I argue that writing is my methodology because it is both product and process, theory and practice, data interpreting and data generating. Like Colyar (2009), I wonder whether "my approach to the writing process should be summed up in the same phrase" I use to describe qualitative research: "Participant Observer" (p. 430). Writing is teaching

and learning—being in relationship—with people we've never met. Writing is simultaneously grand and yet intimate. Put another way, writing embodies while distancing: it is at once a profoundly personal process and one that is external, an experience of self that takes on a life outside of the self. While my writing is often profoundly personal, it is, I hope, also bigger than me—actually, it has to be bigger than me, if only because I draw on other(s') knowledges in an attempt to figure something out, something that I hope has meaning beyond its importance to me. When I write, I learn about my own life and those of others'. Like it has done for bell hooks (1989), writing can enable transformation "in consciousness and being" (p. 15). I learn—what I have lived, what others live, what theory says—from and with writing. I write myself into (an) understanding.

Last: An Unfinished Story of Intuition, Accidents, and Dialogue

I join a long history of scholars frustrated with "traditional" research methods. C. Wright Mills (my favorite sociologist as an undergraduate) stated in *The Sociological Imagination* (2000/1959) that "the most interesting and difficult issues of *method* usually begin where established techniques do not apply" (p. 72, italics in the original). Method, Mills argued, should not be used to "delimit the problems we take up"; we should instead "work on such problems as carefully and as exactly as we can" (p. 72). He critiqued methodological inhibition that leads to studies in which "the details are piled up with insufficient attention paid to form; indeed, often there is no form except that provided by typesetters and bookbinders. The details, no matter how numerous, do not convince us of

anything worth having convictions about" (p. 55). Nearly two decades before I was born, Mills articulated the frustration I felt as a graduate student in a different field.

Since the advent of postmodernism and poststructuralism, such pronouncements have grown ever stronger, as researchers and theorists emphasize indeterminancy, partiality, and subjectivity that accompany the dissolution of grand narratives. John Law (2005), for instance, wrote that "while standard methods are often extremely good at what they do, they are badly adapted to the study of the ephemeral, the indefinite and the irregular" (p. 4); in other words, "the world is not to be understood in general by adopting a methodological version of auditing" (p. 6). Law wrote that the problem is not so much the methods themselves but that they place research "in a set of constraining normative blinkers" (p. 4) that defines what researchers see and investigate, often based on "contingent and historically specific Euro-American assumptions" (p. 5). These practices are inadequate in a world that is not only complex but that often exceeds our capacity to know (p. 6). Law thus argued for "heterogeneity and variation" (p. 6), for research that is "tentative and hesitant" in its unfolding (p. 41).

Such conceptions also exist in educational research, such as Lather's (2006) "insistence on multiplicities and proliferations" (p. 35) in an era of resurgent positivism. For instance, "bricolage" is a term that describes employing, constructing, or inventing methodological strategies, tools, and materials as needed throughout the process of research in recognition of the complexity of the work (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Kincheloe, 2001; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Lois Weis and Michelle Fine (2004) call

their work in *Working Method: Research and Social Justice* a theory of method or a method of compositional studies whose power "lies in its malleability and transportability inside a world context that is changing on a daily basis" (p. 154). In 2013, they termed their examination of both "the costs of oppression and the strengths of endurance" (2004, p. xv) in which lives (both individual and group) are situated within shifting social, cultural, and economic structures and relations "critical bifocality." Such work places data (ethnographic and narrative) into social, historic, and economic contexts, emphasizing the fluid, constructed, and multiple categories of identity that "become real inside institutional life" (Weis & Fine, 2004, p. xviii). This work is contextual and relational; it examines "where the spaces for resistance, agency, and possibility lie" (2004, p. xxi).

While I did not design my study as such, I had to go there in the writing—lest my work become, as Fr. Jude feared, a lie. This is most evident in my work with Da'uud's stories. Intuitively, I knew:

> It is relatively easy to write up institutional stories as thick, local qualitative descriptions without revealing the webs of power that connect institutional and individual lives to larger social formations. Yet, if we do not draw these lines for readers, we render them invisible, colluding in the obfuscation of the structural conditions that undergird social inequities. It seems clear that researchers, as public intellectuals, have a responsibility to make visible the strings that attach political and moral conditions with individual lives. If we don't, few will.

> Rendering visible is precisely the task of theory, and as such, must be taken up by method. (Weis & Fine, 2004, p. xxi)

It is irresponsible and unethical to pretend that there is only one or a few strings. Further, Weis and Fine argued, as do I, that the composition of lives and of writing changes over time and space. It moves, in dialogue with theory, even as the writing fixes it. While not possible to make visible all the strings (or the threads, as Erdrich's narrator in the epigraph calls them), we can expose some of them.

The work of stretching methodologically has led me in new research directions, particularly to arts-based research methods. While I could argue that this is a logical outcome of my work with writing, I also think it is an accident. I was drawn to this work as I looked at the differences in themes I found in data generated in the sixth-grade classroom and in professional development for Teaching Artists. As it happened, I stumbled into work with a group of people who bring knowledges about the arts that I don't have while I bring knowledges about schools that they don't have. This happy accidental meeting will be the focus of my next work. It is helped by arts-based research pioneer Eisner (1997) who wrote:

> My conception of research is broad. I will count as research reflective efforts to study the world and to create ways to share what we have learned about it. Research can take the forms that echo the forms of the arts and humanities or those of the natural and social sciences. Its forms of data representation are open to invention. (p. 8)

Finally, the unfinished and ongoing story of my research is not complete without a mention of my desire to be an advocate for students and teachers, for activist educational research. This is of necessity a dialogue between where we are and where we would like to or could be. This dialogue again reminds me of the power of words to shape reality—or at the very least, to push back against injustice. Thus, the unfinished story of my research (methodology) is based on intuition, accidents, and ongoing dialogue with lives, people, and the world, told through mixing genres and writing formats, not knowing in advance what will happen or be used/useful. Research, Lather (2006) claimed, "becomes a stating of our stammering relationship to knowing" (p. 48). It is an evolving story. We —and the words we use to compose both ourselves and our research—might just be both the grapes and the wine.

Chapter 4

The "Ideal" Bridges Curriculum and Pedagogy:

Reimagining Classrooms through Experimenting with Experience

Think of our lives and tell us your particularized world. Make up a story. Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created. (Morrison, 1994, p. 27)

In 1997, Peter Brosius, artistic director of the Children's Theatre Company (CTC) of Minneapolis, and Jack Zipes, Professor of German and Comparative Literature at the University of Minnesota, founded Neighborhood Bridges. The program, based on theatre and storytelling work Zipes had been doing in schools for decades, aims to use story to build bridges of all kinds: between students and stories, between schools and communities/families, between artists and students—in other words, "bridges within the school, community, and theater, with children, teachers, actors, relatives, and parents" (Zipes, 2004, p. 65).[1] Today, Neighborhood Bridges works in classrooms in about a dozen schools in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. Bridges programs have begun across the country, from Hawai'i to Colorado to Pennsylvania to North Carolina; Zipes has also led Bridges workshops around the world.

In this chapter, I explain the idea (ideal) of Neighborhood Bridges—what is possible—by detailing Bridges aims for the classroom and for learning; the movement of a typical session; and how an oral story can be transformed into a play. I conclude with how Bridges aims to use theatre as a space for elementary school students to experiment

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[1] For a history of the program and its goals, see Zipes (2004), Chapter 4. This book also explains the structure of the program as well as common writing and theatre games.

with experience.

Aims for the Classroom and for Learning

Bridges emphasizes adjusting curriculum and teaching strategies based on the needs—both social and academic—of those in the room. Each Teaching Artist has his or her own style, which, when coupled with the grade level (usually fourth through sixth, but sometimes third), the classroom teacher, and the students, results in very different looks and feelings across spaces and time. Yet its aims or goals, across these varying schools and classrooms, can be grouped into three larger ideas: building collaborative community in the classroom and beyond; using oral, written, and performed story and processes of questioning to build meaningful literacy skills (particularly critical and embodied literacies); and transforming the self through these learning process, empowering students to become narrators of their own lives.

Building Community: Collaboration

Neighborhood Bridges works to build community and collaboration on multiple levels: between schools and a nonprofit organization, between teaching adults, between students, and with families and communities.

First, the program is a collaboration between public elementary schools and a local theatre nonprofit organization that also involves partnerships with a local university and a local high school. The university serves as a research partner and evaluator. For example, Bridges staff in conjunction with university researchers have developed (and are constantly revising) rubrics to measure skills that Bridges fosters; these standards

(from the Minnesota Academic Standards for Arts K-12 [2008] and for English Language Arts K-12 [2010]) include reading and writing as well as speaking, viewing, listening, and media literacy.[2] Several courses a year introduce university students to the program, including mini-internships in Bridges classrooms. A local high school has started a partnering program in which high school students take a class on performance and social change and spend the year in specific elementary classrooms with Bridges. Bridges students also visit CTC and both see a play and perform on its main (professional) stage.

Second, Bridges partners adults who teach. A Teaching Artist (TA),[3] trained through CTC, is paired with a classroom teacher (CT) and her/his students for approximately 30 weeks (September through May). The adults meet regularly to plan and assess each session. Sometimes the focus is a particular writing skill, sometimes an acting skill, sometimes a theme such as being accountable for your actions (a social focus of "The Servant"), sometimes a Minnesota academic standard for English Language Arts, sometimes a tie-in with another part of the CT's curriculum. Through such planning and assessing, Bridges TAs work to assist classroom teachers in their difficult work.

Bridges also aims to foster collaboration and community among students, to "animate learning and transform classrooms into communities where students think independently and work collectively" (Children's Theatre Company, 2013). Students are encouraged to build community as learners to solve or brainstorm solutions to problems,

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[2] These standards can be downloaded from the Minnesota Department of Education at http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/EdExc/StanCurri/K-12AcademicStandards/index.htm

[3] Some TAs call themselves "Teaching and Learning Artists," in recognition that they learn as much as they teach.

both within the class and outside. Theatre, of course, necessitates working together and listening carefully to each other. Chapter 7 explores this theme more.

Finally, Bridges aims to build community with families and communities. Students may have pen pals in another Bridges classroom (whom they get a chance to meet at CTC). Families are invited to participate, through watching their children perform, assisting with set-building for the final performance, and sharing their own stories.[4] While situated in elementary schools, this community-building is thus not limited to these classrooms but is part of a long-term process of "social and individual transformation and building bridges between people and communities through creative play" (Zipes, 2004, p. 67). For instance, the curriculum of this critical literacy and creative drama program is an always-evolving compendium of ideas from artists and teachers, children and families, that grows each year as students and teachers revise and bring in new stories and activities.

Focus on Questioning Story: Critical and Embodied Literacies

Neighborhood Bridges is a literacy program.[5] Literacy can be defined as a set of malleable social practices (something that people do, an activity), situated in historical, cultural, and ideological contexts that reflect beliefs and values (e.g., Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Luke & Freebody, 1999). Socially powerful institutions, such as schools, tend to support dominant literacy practices, which are primarily writing-

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[4] Zipes believes that relationship and community-building with families and communities are the least-developed aspect of the program (personal communication, June 11, 2013).

[5] For another example (the ArtsLiteracy Project) that links the arts and literacy, see Landay and Wootton (2012).

based. These are not neutral, for “literacy is inextricably tied up with questions of equality of educational opportunity, and with the distribution of political and social power —in short, with the life possibilities and social trajectories” of students (Luke, 1991, p. 131). The ways in which literacies (words) are taught selectively socializes students “into versions of the world, into possible worlds, and into a version of the horizons and limits of literate competence” (Luke, p. 139). Bridges approaches literacy with a recognition of these factors and an explicit commitment on helping students question both the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Bridges engages literacy through a curriculum organized by story genre; classrooms usually spend multiple weeks exploring a genre, nearly always beginning with fairy tales. Sample lesson plans provide background and historical contexts for the stories, ideas for questions revolving around a social focus (e.g., “behaving responsibly/being accountable for your actions”), writing options, story and counter-versions, suggestions for theatre games and final writing games, and more. During sessions, TAs thus place stories into social and historical contexts, as well as into contexts of students' lives and knowledges.

> The program emphasizes that stories are not fixed, but that we interact with them: By showing children, through the interaction, the diverse forms and strategies of narrative and story and how specific genres are used to address social situations, the storyteller empowers children and gives them the means to articulate their needs and wishes. In addition, by playing with genres and revealing the different

> ways one can deal with conflict and realize one's dreams, the storyteller can offer a joyous opportunity of recognition. (Zipes, 1995, p. 224)

This stance toward storytelling echoes that of Benjamin (1968): sharing wisdom with listeners in community.

Focused on processes of questioning and transforming stories, the evolving curriculum of Bridges "provides a flexible structure and guide that is not to be followed step-by-step as a set script" (CTC, 2009, "Introduction to the Curriculum," p. 2). Stories and lesson outlines provide the basis for building skills of critical and embodied literacies, beginning with questioning:

> The focus is on question – questioning of the texts that we use, questioning of the stories and skits that the children create, questioning of traditional structures and authority when it is authoritarian. The questioning leads to transformation. How do we change things to make a better world? How do we change a class and school to respond to the needs of children? (CTC, 2009, "Introduction to the Curriculum," p. 2)

Whether students are writing their own stories, listening to canonical or countertales, or performing stories, the TA encourages them to question, to interrogate how authors or actors understand reality and what assumptions and powers shape those understandings, in whose benefit decisions are made, whose voices are left out of the story and how a story might change if they were included or the story told from a different perspective, or whose interests a story serves. These are critical literacy questions.

Critical literacy.[6]

Bridges is a creative or critical literacy program, rather than a "functional literacy" program that teaches basics and rote skills. One definition of critical literacy is "a process of constructing and critically using language (oral and written) as a means of expression, interpretation, and/or transformation of our lives and the lives of those around us*"* (Quintero, 2009, p. 6). Critical literacy recognizes the world as a socially constructed text and acknowledges that texts are never neutral, that they work to position us in certain ways at the same time that we read from particular positions that are also not neutral; critical literacy thus takes up processes of meaning-making from a critical perspective that examines the sociopolitical systems in which we live and looks at the relationship between language and power, actively engaging students' cultural, linguistic, and experiential knowledges in attempts to contribute to social change as well as reflexive, conscious engagement with the classroom and the world (e.g., Janks, 2000; Vasquez, 2010; Vasquez, Tate, & Harste, 2013). Critical literacy "involves both inquiry and interrogation of our beliefs and actions" (Vasquez, Tate, & Harste, 2013, p. 11). It is therefore not a subject, but

> a call to action; a call to position oneself differently in the world, a call to take seriously the relationship between language and power as noted by Janks (2010), as well as to take seriously the relationship between other semiotic systems and

[6] There are some great texts on critical literacies in classrooms, but they tend to focus on preschool/early elementary (e.g., Dyson, 1993; 1997; or high school, e.g., Duncan-Andrade, 2004). The concerns of late elementary/middle school seem somewhat different. One possible reason for their absence at these levels could be the importance of standardized testing in the middle school grades, which may leave less room for other kinds of literacies.

power. (Vasquez, Tate, & Harste, 2013, p. 18)[7]

Critical literacy asks students to examine multiple voices and viewpoints (including dominant cultural and social discourses) and to problem solve. Bridges attempts to help students understand that texts and language do work and to question, problematize, challenge, and deconstruct a text's assumptions and values, voices, and power and then to design or transform a text, to think in terms of possibilities for change. In an interview, Zipes (June 11, 2013) argued that these critical literacy skills are multiply important: because understanding canonical literature is important as it is still the dominant culture; because these skills are necessary to read, comprehend, and appropriate a complex world; and because it is difficult for children to take permission to tell a story in a different way. The processes of questioning, using creativity in the dramatic arts and writing, enable students to interrogate the world around them while also addressing state and national language arts standards.

For instance, when assessing students' performances, Bridges looks at critical literacy as the ability of an acting group to assemble voice, face, body, focus, collaboration, creativity, and space/objects in order to probe existing storylines and/or offer alternative perspectives. In their performances, students can reproduce stories (their acting mirrors dominant storylines and cultural assumptions); reveal stories (their acting opens up the possibility of multiple perspectives and interpretations); resist stories (their acting explicitly resists aspect[s] of the original storyline); or revise stories (their acting

[7] For a summation of philosophical and critical traditions that undergird critical literacy, see Morrell (2008), chapter 2 (Western traditions) and chapter 3 ("Othered" traditions).

serves to significantly revise aspect[s] of the original storyline). Sometimes, of course, stories can be resisted or revised without critically challenging oppressive power structures. Bridges does not suggest that young people naturally know how to reveal, resist, or revise stories; further, the program constantly struggles in the tension of empowering students and attempting to guide them into understandings of critical literacy.

Embodied literacies.[8]

In Bridges, students work with texts that are, for the most part, either oral or performed. Learning is thus multimodal—with mode defined as "a regularised organised set of resources for meaning-making, including, image, gaze, gesture, movement, music, speech and sound-effect. Modes are broadly understood to be the effect of the work of culture in shaping material into resources for representation" (Kress & Jewitt, 2003, p. 1). Schools and educational research tend to focus on the modes of writing and speaking, as they are easier to record—and to write about—than those of gesture, gaze, and sound-

[8] I have not found research literature that describes embodied literacies in the ways in which I do so here: as physical enactments of texts. For instance, Johnson and Vasudevan (2012) use the term to describe how bodies are read and performed in classrooms, particularly in ways that might be considered off task or taboo (especially around popular culture texts): "students use their bodies to perform critical literacy —that is, to respond to and convey their critical engagements with myriad texts" (p. 35). Fleckenstein's (2003) book *Embodied Literacies* focused on learning as the "double play of language and image in myriad forms" (p. 6); she argued that images permeate our lives and embody meanings as much as words do—hence her double vision of literacy as "imageword." Yet her book still focused primarily on reading and writing. While I agree with the importance of images for literacy learning, I want to focus on the ways in which students take up (or don't) their literacy learning (following Barton and Hamilton [2000] who called literacy practices ways of utilizing written language) through their physical bodies, as they translate stories (which have written forms) into theatre performance. Other terms describe parts but not all of this—for instance, Fleckenstein's somatic literacy ("how we construct and participate in the world through our bodies and how we know the world as bodies positioned in specific sites" [p. 79]) or Leander and Boldt's (2013) affective literacy. While these ideas (e.g., kinesethic learning) encompass part of what I am getting at, they do not speak to the relationship between oral/written literacies and their enactment.

effect; further, school usually prefers the single medium of lettered representation, regarding other forms as feeling or emotive, rather than communicative (Kress, 1997).

Challenging such notions of literacy tied exclusively to print, Jeff Duncan-Andrade (2004) wrote that "students want a classroom culture that reflects expanded definitions of literacy. They want literacy instruction that emphasizes more meaningful learning activities that allow them to develop academic literacy skills that are transferable to their daily lives" (p. 332).[9] Generally, in research literature, these expanded literacies incorporate either the visual or the technological. Yet Pierre Bourdieu (2000) reminded us that "we learn bodily. The social order inscribes itself in bodies through this permanent confrontation, which may be more or less dramatic but is always largely marked by affectivity and, more precisely, by affective transactions with the environment" (p. 141).

More than multimodal, I argue that the literacies with which Bridges students are engaging are embodied.[10] Because all of us encounter and learn bodily every day, these literacies have the potential to be meaningful for students' daily lives. In performing stories that they heard orally, students demonstrate understanding of as well as make (and change) meanings of these texts with their bodies.

Further, theatre has its own modal conventions—some of which are more accessible to students than others. Particularly important are movement and spatial practices, which young children often have, but which schools often disregard. Yet movement

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[9] See also the National Council of Teachers of English's (2005) "Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies" as well as Jewitt's (2008) review of multimodality and literacy in classrooms.

[10] Another reason is that "multimodal literacies" is now used mostly to describe working with digital texts.

> accompanies all the elements of play. . . . Learning about self-movement creates a structure for an individual's knowledge of the world—it is a way of *knowing*. Through movement play, we *think* in motion. Movement structures our knowledge of the world, space, time, and our relationship to others. We've internalized movement, space, and time so completely that we need to take a step back (a movement metaphor) to realize how much we think in these terms. Our knowledge of the physical world [is] based in movement. . . . (Brown, 2009, p. 84, italics in original)

Learning occurs in movement, as it "fosters learning, innovation, flexibility, adaptability, and resilience" (Brown, 2009, p. 84). Bridges frequently asks students to show *with their bodies* how a character thinks, feels, moves, acts, and lives. Literacies are thus embodied.

Transformation of the Self through Learning: Becoming Narrators of Our Lives

The goal of these processes of questioning and embodying is transformation—of learning, of classrooms, of relationships, but also of the self: "the heart of our program is centered on the transformation of the self through storytelling" (Zipes, 2004, p. 67). This is done through story, as our selves (our identities) are contingent on narrative. As Morrison said (in the above epigraph), make up a story, for narrative creates us at the same time we create it. In writing, speaking, cooperating, and acting, students build confidence, trust, and appreciation of the freedom to test themselves (Zipes, personal communication, June 11, 2013). While we are often positioned as consumers of knowledge and even of identity, Bridges empowers students to become producers who,

through oral, written, and performed stories, narrate their own lives.

> In part, to become the storyteller of one's life means that a young person must learn how to use, manipulate, and exploit social and cultural codes, especially linguistic and semantic ones, so that she or he will be able to contend with the constant bombardment of signs, often commercial and propagandistic, that occur every day. (Zipes, 2004, p. 115)

Bridges asks them to do so through questioning the words of others as well as writing their own, individually and collectively, for as Zipes (personal communication, June 11, 2013) asked, “Why should they [young people] read a picture book before they read their own words?” This may be particularly important for children who face institutional oppressions such as poverty and white supremacy: “for kids from challenging or unstable backgrounds, holding onto their story is very important to them, it's the only thing they may really own” (CTC Curriculum, 2009, “Helpful Hints,” p. 16).

The Movement of a Typical Neighborhood Bridges Session

These programmatic goals are built into the structure of each session and the year as a whole. With students at their desks or tables, each weekly session begins with a writing game. At the beginning of the year, this game is “The Fantastic Binominal” (referred to as the “FB”), a storytelling prompt borrowed from Gianni Rodari (1996/1973). This writing game, introduced in the very first session as a model of improvisation as well as co-creation, gets students thinking about and transforming words and their meanings; importantly, it allows for mistakes to be productive. First, the

students generate a list of prepositions (and discuss what a preposition is). They then brainstorm words in two categories related to the day's stories, such as a predatory animal and an article of clothing with colors for “Little Red Riding Hood.” Each student chooses a word from each list as the title of her or his story, such as “The Red Miniskirt Under the Lion” or “The Shark Beneath the Green Hoodie.” These pairings ask students to imagine —to create—and also introduce themes for the day. As the students create their own stories, the CT and TA circulate throughout the room to help, focusing on ideas and plot (not spelling or grammar). After the students write silently, selected students share their stories.[11] After reading in front of the whole class, they then set aside their notebook to tell their story, frequently prompted by the TA, CT, or other students to embellish parts or to tell their story from a different perspective. This retelling is an opportunity to work on narrative voice, storytelling skills (eye contact, gestures), plot, setting, and more. As the year progresses, the CT and students gradually take over the process of setting up this or another writing game found in the Bridges curriculum.

Following this writing warm-up, the room is transformed: desks pushed aside and chairs or bodies gathered in a circle to listen to stories. Transforming the classroom is important “because we want to emphasize change and re-creation” (Zipes, 2004, p. 99). This transformation makes the classroom a different space for the oral and performed stories that follow, opening room for students to repurpose the objects within the classroom to “become whatever they imagine them to be, and—most profoundly—they

[11] The TA or CT keeps track of who shares so that all students have turns in front of the class.

themselves [to] become other than what they think they are" (Zipes, 2009, "collaboration and transformation," p. 3). Transforming the classroom "breaks down borders and boundaries. Children can trespass, and in doing so they can become acquainted with unknown dimensions of their personalities and the material conditions surrounding them" (Zipes, 2004, p. 30). The transformation of the classroom is ideally accompanied by making available other books on the theme of the week, as well as students' art and stories on the walls.

Once all participants are in a circle, oral stories begin. Stories are nearly always paired, frequently a more canonical tale with a countertale that explores complimentary, overlapping, or contrasting themes or ideas. After the TA or CT shares each story orally, students are invited to question it. Lesson plans contain ideas for sparking group discussions—not questions with "correct" answers: "We ask questions to try to get inside the issues and poke around. Our job is to question the values embedded in the stories" (CTC curriculum, 2009, "Helpful Hints," p. 5). As frequently as possible, students are encouraged to answer each other's questions, to explore together possible meanings and reasonings.

A third story is also told during the storytelling phase: the chair game. For the chair game, one of the acting groups (see below) stands or sits in a line at the front of the classroom. The TA gives two or three sentences that begin a story on a similar theme to the first two; this story starter is usually a situation that upsets the expectations of the students and raises a social issue (such as a vegetarian wolf). The first student repeats

these sentences and adds the next few; the story is passed down the line, with each person retelling and then adding until the last student ends the story any way she or he chooses.

After sitting with and questioning these oral stories, students move to action, or more accurately here, acting. Often this starts with an acting game, getting bodies moving, thinking, and reacting. Theatre games and techniques that work with movement, interaction, voice, et cetera also provide students with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to produce their own plays. As the year progresses, the TA introduces more and more theatre techniques, vocabulary, and ideas.

At the beginning of the year, the CT and TA organize students into acting groups (suggested: three groups of eight students) who work together throughout the year. Each group—which names itself—mixes students with varying strengths and struggles. Each week, these acting groups are responsible for rehearsing and then acting out portions or all of the oral stories—those told by the adults as well as those created by students.[12]

Rehearsal often looks very chaotic. Students are responsible for deciding how they will act out their story: how to stage it, how to introduce the characters, how to resolve the conflict, whether to transform the story. This process, usually between five and 15 minutes, is frequently a struggle. Each group has students who want to control everything and students who don't really want to participate, whether out of shyness, fear, or disengagement. Groups quickly take on their own tenor—whether they will transform

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[12] Groups rotate through four different acting challenges: the canonical tale, the countertale, “the chair game” (group-authored challenge), and a challenge prompt (change the perspective of a tale, a major plot point, et cetera) if a fourth group is necessary. Again, a list is kept so that each week, a group has a different acting responsibility.

the story, how characters evolve along gender lines, who will take on a lead role and who is more comfortable being a tree or the wind. For the adults, this is the most hands-off part of the day. Nearly every week, students have conflicts: they disagree about how to tell the story as a play, they argue over who gets to play what role, they can't figure out how to start. And every week, the answer the adults give is: figure it out.

After rehearsal, the class sits in rows in the “audience” while each group, one by one, takes its place on a makeshift stage, usually a cleared area at the front of the classroom. Prompted by a group “lights, camera, action,” they retell a story or part of a story (if the oral stories are particularly long). When they finish their performance, their peers give feedback, often emphasizing what they liked. If there is time, the acting group “retakes” part of the play: based on feedback from their peers and the TA, the students clean up, clarify, or reblock some section. Sometimes this relates to the focus of the day: a social focus such as abuse of power or jealousy or an understanding of the use of dialogue to provide character contexts. Sometimes it simply clarifies something that was unclear. And sometimes it calls for all the members of the acting group to participate (rather than standing off to the side).

Finally, the room is retransformed into its traditional classroom space, and the students end with a writing exercise related to the theme of the day. The Bridges curriculum contains many writing games, such as co-written stories, stories based on invented words or associated words (e.g., rhyming, words that start with the same letter), stories playing with prefixes and suffixes, stories mixing characters and scenes from

different stories, the "what if" game (brainstorming "what if" questions about one of the oral stories and then re-writing the story), and more. If students finish writing, they can illustrate their stories. If there is time, several students share their second stories orally.[13]

Each week, the students thus add stories (or beginnings of stories) to their individual writing notebooks; during the rest of the week, they can work on revising or illustrating these stories. In the spring, each student chooses a story from her or his notebook and illustrates it; these stories are copied and bound into a book so that each student has a book with a story written by each class member.

The curriculum contains additional ideas for extending the work of Bridges throughout the week, such as working with literary elements of story, reading and comparing several versions of a tale, or connecting with other aspects of the curriculum. As a compendium of the past experiences and successes of students, classroom teachers, and Teaching Artists, the curriculum also offers hints for modifying lesson plans (e.g., for English Learners or for students on the autism spectrum) and facing common challenges:

> One of the ideas at the core of Neighborhood Bridges philosophy is that the teaching artist and classroom teacher are empowered to change the lesson plans in order to respond to the needs and strengths of the class as well as the strengths of the teaching artist and classroom teacher. Bridges is a living, dynamic collaboration that looks unique in each classroom. (CTC curriculum, 2009,

[13] Aspects of Bridges echo what other studies have found to be important for students' literacy learning. Dyson (1997), for instance, wrote that classrooms need open-ended composing activities; time dedicated to sharing children's texts in the classroom; and class discussions of shared texts; these activities are "energized" (p. 180) in an environment of inclusion that is sensitive to collective exclusion.

"Helpful Hints," p. 4)

Finally, the curriculum acknowledges that it is rarely possible to do all of the activities in a session and so the CT and TA must together decide which activities will be most beneficial for their students and their development "as critical thinkers, storytellers and theatre artists" (CTC curriculum, p. 9). In other words, "if it isn't working, change it" (CTC curriculum, p. 13).

An Oral Story Becomes a Play

During the school year, once in early winter and once in spring, Bridges sessions focus on students turning stories they have heard into plays that they perform publicly. Together, a class picks its favorite story from those it has heard (including stories students have individually or collectively written). In the winter, they choose a peace tale to perform at their school; in the spring, they choose any of the year's stories to perform onstage at CTC (whose professional theatre seats over 700). The genre of peace tales was added to the Neighborhood Bridges curriculum after September 11, 2001; the peace plays function as a rehearsal for the end-of-the-year performances that take place on the bigger stage and that include student-made costumes, props, and backdrops.

While the process leading up to the public performances looks different for each classroom, the curriculum (lesson plan) for a play rehearsal focuses on the kinesthetic, vocal, and imaginative/emotional modes used to tell stories: bodies, voices, listening, faces, emotions, and minds. The curriculum suggests beginning the process with telling the students that they are all directors of the play, with a director's job including making

choices for the play and making the play better. However they create their play, students themselves are its authors, as well as actors and directors who incorporate feedback from their peers and from the participating adults. Nearly always, the story must change, if only to provide ways in which all students can participate. Critical literacy questions of transformation also arise in this process. The challenge is to change the story as needed but also to communicate meaning to and for the audience. The students must work collaboratively and listen intensely to generate ideas and translate them onto the stage.

A variety of activities can help students transform an orally told tale into an onstage performance. For instance, the TA may ask the class to retell its chosen story or to map the story's functions (coming from Vladimir Propp) or essential actions to outline the dramatic structure. Once the major points of the story are mapped, students can identify the elements (setting, characters, message) of each piece. The TA may ask the students to explore how the play relates to their community and to them or to consider what they want the audience to take away.

Frequently, plays develop from improvisation. Often, there is little or no casting; roles evolve as students improvise. Usually, there is no written script and minimal stage directions. (As the program has grown to encompass younger students and more English Learners, TAs and CTs have begun typing out a script on a smartboard so that students can see the relationship between their ideas and words as part of a story or script.)

In addition to improvising, the play can develop through writing, either in class or as homework, about the message or theme of the play. Other ideas include writing games

to help develop scenes or characters, such as coming up with five words to describe or represent each scene and then writing a poem, joke, chat, or monologue with those five words or writing out inner thoughts for your own character.

As the play rehearsal progresses, the TA may ask students to brainstorm what theatrical conventions they need to remember (e.g., face the audience; speak loudly and clearly; be quiet offstage). The TA may use reminders such as taping a "V" on the classroom's makeshift stage to help students orient their actions and audience.

The total time spent preparing a Peace Play is usually around five hours, spread over multiple sessions. The plays performed at Crossing Bridges onstage at the Children's Theatre Company in May take a little longer, as students also make their own costumes, props, and backdrops. This short amount of time is nearly always stressful, but the curriculum reminds TAs and CTs:

> Though it may not seem that there is much time to rehearse and perform, the students will manage to produce an unusual play. The emphasis is on *process* at all times, not on a final production. In fact, the "final" production is never final, but reflects the process through which the students express themselves and demonstrate their talents. (CTC, 2009, "Lesson Plan: Play Rehearsal," p. 8)

Oral stories become plays, but these plays too are always open to questioning and revision and centered around the ideas, interests, and talents of the students.

Theatre as a Space for Experimenting with Experience

Ideally, a Neighborhood Bridges classroom is a space in which students and

teachers use stories to collectively reimagine the work of the classroom, making it relevant to their lives and talents as they develop skills of collaboration, creativity, and literacy. Students draw upon their own experiences and understandings of the world to transform stories and to make them their own; they recognize themselves as narrators of their own lives. These are skills of critical literacy.

But the program is also a creative drama program, part of a movement of progressive educators who seek to use the arts to encourage students to question the harm done to them by mass media and advertising, which position them as consumers. Through the use of theatre, Bridges seeks to encourage children to question this and to "take control of their own lives" (Zipes, 2004, p. 66); their dramatic scenes are social experiments that test social conditions through exploring alternatives. This type of theatre "fuses play and reality, and allows children to become more conscious of how they can explore and experiment with forces that act on them" (Zipes, p. 243). Theatre has long been viewed in this way.[14] For instance, in Weimar Germany,[15] theatre was seen as a battlefield, a contested space. All major political parties had youth groups who experimented with theatre: "Theater was considered a weapon that could be used to win the minds and bodies of the young" (Zipes, p. 242). In Bridges, theatre is engaged as a tool to help children address concerns about the world in which they live.

Ideally, students and teachers become spect-actors, rather than spectators (Boal, 2002); as spect-actors, they are part of the experimentation of theatre rather than solely

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[14] For other examples of political and social theatre, see Augusto Boal (e.g., 2002) and Bertoldt Brecht.

[15] I give the example of Weimar Germany because "The Servant" was written during this time period.

witnesses to it. Zipes (2004) argued that theatre as spectacle results in a deep alienation of emotions; the participatory theatrical experiments of Bridges engage students instead in exploring emotions and alternatives to oppressive storylines and in experimenting with using words, bodies, objects, and ideas in new ways. Children can do this if they have the freedom to engage in such experiments. They can question stories, determine what meanings they hold, and change these meanings if they like, creating new productions.

This does not mean that theatre is an unproblematic panacea; on the contrary, "when free to explore, children will cross all sorts of lines, and they will often do so in politically incorrect ways" (Zipes, 2004, p. 243). Further, Bridges is only two hours of a student's school week and life and thus must have modest goals of helping students to self-discover and gain self-confidence (Zipes, 2004). Hence,

> We begin modestly in our program by creating space for experimentation in the classroom. Each session is similar to a laboratory experiment. Each one of us is an inventive scientist exploring stories, structures and human reactions to change. There is no one solution to the problems that we confront, but we hope that the curriculum will help us all to create conditions to find a multitude of possibilities for living a better life. (CTC, 2009, "Introduction to the Curriculum," p. 2)

Theatre, particularly in the weekly spaces in which children play with words, ideas, and each other in attempts to perform orally told stories, can provide opportunities for experimenting with experiences—their own, those of their classmates, and those of characters in stories. This echoes Dewey's (1964) exhortation that education be "a

process of living and not a preparation for future living" in which the "school must represent present life" (p. 430) as it exists at home, in the neighborhood, or on the playground—in other words, engaging students in learning through social situations. The creative drama curriculum and pedagogy of Bridges asks students to bring their lives—from home, the neighborhood, the playground, and more—into the classroom and to make them part of questioning and understanding stories in collective processes of improvisation and performance. Thinking about their lives, the narratives students create simultaneously create classroom lives, to rephrase Morrison. These experiments with experience empower students to tell their own stories—and to see that their own stories, as well as the stories of the world, are always in process. Unfinished, they can be transformed through individual and collective questioning and acting.

Interstice

"The Servant" by Hermynia Zur Mühlen

(translated by Jack Zipes)[1]

Once upon a time there was a small village at the foot of a huge mountain deep in the wilderness, somewhat isolated from the rest of the world. The tiny village was poor. Icy winds roared down from the mountain and killed everything that was planted in the region. Moreover, the fields of the villagers were sandy and unfertile, so living conditions were dreadful. Only one thing was plentiful—wood. There was more than enough wood. Gigantic trees grew on the side of the mountain, and on the other side of the village there was an endless forest. The villagers chopped down the trees, sold the beautiful thick logs to the world outside, and obtained just what they needed to exist.

However, this work was hard. When the men cut the trees in the boiling summer, the heat practically killed them. When they dragged the logs on their sleds in the chilly winter, their hands and feet froze. All this terribly hard work made them sullen and bad-tempered, and one rarely heard a happy laugh or cheerful word in the little village.

In the middle of the forest there was a cabin, the home of an old man and his son. The villagers were frightened of the man. They thought he was a magician because the cabin was filled with strange instruments, and the man worked day and night on a tremendously large thing that seemed to move by

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[1] Jack Zipes and CTC hold the copyright for this story; it is used with permission. The story can also be found in Zipes (1989). A condensed version also appears in the next chapter (Chapter 5).

itself. It puffed out steam and rumbled loudly. The children were scared of the cabin, and even the grown-ups avoided the magician, for they were afraid that he could do them some harm. But they were unfair to the magician, for he was actually a good and clever man who was touched deeply by the misery of his fellow creatures. He wanted to help them so that they would not have to work so terribly hard. He saw how much trouble it was to cut the thick logs with a tiny saw. He saw how the men had to drudge, how laborious the work was, and he made up his mind to invent a machine that would be so easy to handle that even a small child could work it.

The magician toiled many, many years in his cabin. By the time his work was finally finished, he had become gray and old. He looked at the machine with great joy, folded his trembling hands in his lap, and told his son to call the men of the village to their cabin. Since their curiosity was greater than their fear, the men came. When they were all gathered together, the son of the magician carried an enormous oak stump into the room and placed it under the large machine. The magician touched a switch, and the machine began to hum loudly and puff little white clouds. A gigantic saw fell on the clump of oak wood, moved back and forth a few times—whrrrr, whrrrr, whrrrr, whrrrr—and the clump of oak wood split apart as though it were but a thin little branch. The men were astonished, and at first they stood there speechless, but after a while they began to overwhelm the old magician with questions.

“I’ve created a servant for you,” the old man explained, “and this servant

will help you with your work. It's not right when people must work so hard they have no time to be cheerful. Since the servant can accomplish in a few hours what it takes you entire days to do, you'll have time to play with your children and speak with your wives. You'll no longer have to work as hard as beasts."

And then he showed the men how to use the large saw, and it was so simple that a ten year-old boy could understand everything. The men shouted with joy and could scarcely find words enough to thank the magician. However, he raised his voice in warning and spoke some serious words to them.

"I'm giving you this servant as a present, but make sure that the servant does not become your master, for he would be a cruel master and would swallow the lives of your kin and kindred."

The men laughed and cried out, "You want to make fools out of us! How could a lifeless thing made out of iron and leather become the master of living human beings?"

The old magician looked at them with concern and then spoke, "As long as this servant belongs to all of you, he will be a good servant and will help you. However, if one day he should belong to one person alone, he will become a wicked master. Thus, I want you to promise me that the servant will always belong to the entire village." He turned to his son. "You shall be the guardian of the servant. You shall allow anyone in the village to use it whenever it is needed. As long as you do this faithfully, my blessings as your father shall be with you. If the servant should fall into the hands of a single person through your fault, you

and your children and your grandchildren shall be cursed!”

The men promised the old magician that the servant would always remain the property of the entire community and that no one person would dare to keep it for himself alone. However, secretly they laughed at the old man and his warning. “He’s already become senile,” the eldest of the villagers remarked to the others. “You would think that there’s some magic power in the saw that could make it into our master. The old fool!” Even the magician’s son did not fully grasp his father’s words, and he scoffed at the old man along with the others. Still, they took good care to conceal their thoughts from the magician, for they were afraid that he might take back his present.

It seemed that the good old magician had lived only to complete his work. Just a few days after he had given the servant as a gift to the men of the village, he lay down and died. But before he closed his eyes for good, he repeated his warning; his last words were, “Beware that the servant does not become your master!”

Soon happy times arrived for the village. The work that had taken the men many days to complete was done by the servant in hours. Since the villagers did not have to work themselves to death to earn a living and could now enjoy some hours of rest, they became cheerful and were in good spirits. Laughter and joking could be heard throughout the village. The people were no longer so tired, and they no longer felt pains in their arms and legs. Consequently, they became kinder and tenderer toward one another, and their town became known to

everyone in the region as the “happy village.” Many people came from distant lands to settle there because it was more beautiful than anywhere else in the world.

The magician’s son was a good, simple fellow. He looked after his father’s present faithfully and was content because he saw how the village had become happy and prosperous, and he even laughed at times when he thought about his father’s warning. The servant worked industriously, huffing and puffing, obeying each and every touch of the hand. How could the old magician have ever believed that this mass of matter could become a master?

Many years passed in happiness. Then one day a stranger appeared in the village. He was dressed in beautiful, elegant clothes, wore a golden chain over his fat stomach, jingled gold coins in his pockets, and told stories about splendid things he had seen in the great wide world. His arrogance irritated the villagers, and they wanted to prove to him that they were not poor wretches and that they possessed something that nobody else in the world possessed. So they took him to the huge shed they had built for the servant, and they showed him how beautifully and quickly the machine worked. The stranger’s eyes and mouth opened wider and wider the longer he looked at the servant. However, he did not say a word but sat silently in a corner sunk deep in thought.

That evening he knocked on the door of the cabin where the magician’s son lived, and when he was let in, he explained that he wanted to buy the servant.

“That’s impossible,” the young man replied. “We had to promise my father never to allow the servant to fall into the hands of a single person.”

The stranger drew a handful of gold from his pocket. “Look here. With this you can travel all over the world. You can become a great man and wear beautiful clothes with a golden chain.”

The young man looked sadly at the gold. He would have liked to become a rich, stately man; however, he did not break his promise. The stranger spent a long time trying to talk him into it, but the young man remained firm and kept giving the stranger the same answer: “I can’t.” But secretly he cursed the folly of his father who had robbed him of this chance to make a great fortune.

On the following day the stranger called all the men of the village together in the large shed, and he threw two large handfuls of gold on the ground and said, “Sell me the servant!”

“We can’t!” they cried out unanimously, but some of the men looked greedily at the gold and thought, “The old magician is dead, and it’s impossible for him to know everything we’re doing now—why shouldn’t we sell the servant?”

“Listen to me,” the stranger said, “The servant will remain in your village and continue to work here. Everything will be much better for you than ever before because I’ll give you work, and each week you’ll receive a salary. You won’t have to wait until the wood is transported. I’ll take over all your problems, all your burdens, because I care for you. And every week you’ll receive your money. Don’t be fools. You see that I’m a good man and only want the best for

you.”

The village eldest scratched his ear and looked at the others. Then he walked up to the stranger, looked straight into his eyes, and said, “I see that you’re a man to be trusted, a man concerned about the welfare of our village. Allow me to shake your hand.”

And he shook the stranger’s hand tightly. When he withdrew his hand from the stranger’s, the village eldest clenched his fist, for he could already feel the beautiful hard gold coins in his hand.

Once again the stranger raised his voice. “Look, men, you are simple inexperienced people. You’ve always sold the wood for the same price. Yet because of my brains, I understand how to force people to pay much more for the wood than they do now, double, perhaps even triple.”

“But,” the magician’s son exclaimed with concern, “If you just give us the same salary all the time, what benefit do we have when you get more money for the wood?”

The stranger shook his head sadly and responded, “Oh, my poor friends, how dumb you are! The time will come when nobody will want to buy wood anymore. Then I’ll stand there with huge amounts of wood and my pockets empty. In spite of this, you’ll continue to take your salaries home each week.”

He rubbed the tears from his eyes with a silk handkerchief, and his voice trembled with emotion. “Perhaps I shall become a poor man, but I love people so much, and especially you all, that it doesn’t matter to me. I see how much trouble

you have in transporting the wood, and I want to relieve you of this burden. It pains my heart when I think that your earnings are so unsteady. I'd have to give you a steady salary: otherwise my heart would break." And the noble stranger began to shed bitter tears.

Now the village eldest stepped forward and spoke to the men. He declared that the stranger was right and that they were fools if they didn't sell him the servant. This man knew how to persuade the people, and after a short time they all exclaimed, "Let's sell the servant!"

Only the magician's son remained sadly in a corner. His good, simple mind did not know what it was that troubled him, but he was shaking from a terrible fear, and he shouted, "You can't sell the servant. I won't allow it!" And he leaped forward and tried to grab the stranger's throat.

But the stranger managed to yell, "You see now who your enemy is! I'm offering you a beautiful secure life, and he wants to prevent you from having this! Seize him!"

The men surrounded the young man and held him tightly.

"As long as this wicked man lives here," the stranger continued, "there will be no peace in this village. Send him away, and if he should dare to return, beat him to death!"

The men dragged the magician's son to the outskirts of the village and then drove him with sticks into the forest. The young man cried and screamed wildly, "The servant will become your master!"

Soon after the stranger had acquired the servant, he became a totally different person. No longer did he speak kind words. Instead, he ordered the men about, yelled at them, and never let them have their say. The work was now divided. Some of the men toiled in the large shed, some hauled the logs to the shed, and some had to carry the wood from the village. And this went on from dusk to dawn. If someone became tired or sick and informed the stranger that he couldn't work that day, the stranger would bellow, "Good, then you won't receive your salary." And the sick man would groan and drag himself to work.

At first, despite everything, the men were happy and in good spirits because they received a steady salary each week. But soon they realized that this salary was not enough to live on. The stranger had a mansion built for himself in the village, and many people from the city came and settled in the region. When the mansion was finished, one of the workers approached the stranger and said, "You're a rich man. You must certainly have sold the wood for triple the price. Otherwise you shouldn't have been able to have this castle built for yourself. Yet our salaries have remained the same, and I think that you should now give us triple our salary."

The stranger became furious. He called his twelve armed guards, whom he had brought with him from the city, and he had the worker hung from a tree. The others who saw this became very frightened and no longer dared to say a word, for they had no weapons.

The stranger had a large whistle installed in the great steel room where

the servant now stood. When this whistle piped shrilly each morning, the men had to rush to work or they would not receive their salaries. One morning when one of the men was still asleep, the whistle shrieked, and his small son shook him until he woke. Then the boy said anxiously, “Hurry, hurry, father. The master is calling!” The father looked at the small boy in dismay, for he recalled the words of the old magician. That evening he told his comrades about the incident, and the men sighed and had to admit that the servant had truly become their master, and they were his slaves.

The happy village had become sad once again. Nobody had time to be nice to anyone else. Nobody laughed anymore. Everyone was sullen and tired. The stranger had a tremendous building constructed next to the steel shed. Here matches were made out of wood, and even small children were obliged to work. The women had long since begun working because the families could not live from the meager wages of the men alone.

One day many men arrived in the village from distant places, and the stranger gave them lodging in two large houses that had been empty for some time. The villagers were astonished and asked why these men had come—they did not look for work and appeared to be waiting for something to happen. This question was soon answered. The stranger called the workers to him, made a sad face, and said, “I have suffered great losses, and because of my concern for your welfare, I’ve become a poor man. Wood now costs just half of what it used to cost. So I can only give you half your salary from now on.”

The workers were horrified and looked at each other. They could hardly live on their salaries as it was, and now they were to receive just half their pay. One worker, a young man, stepped forward and yelled so loud that he became red with rage: “We won’t work for half our salary!”

The stranger grinned and sneered. “What do you want to do then? Do you want to cut the logs with your miserable little saws? Before you’ve cut up one tree, the servant will have cut ten or more. You can’t compete against the servant —and the machine is in my hands!”

Still, the workers were aroused by their furious anger, and they yelled wildly and in confusion: “We won’t work! We won’t work!”

The stranger’s lips formed an evil smile, and he laughed. “Good, I don’t need you. The men who recently came to the village will work instead. There’s no longer any place for you now!”

The workers rushed forward and wanted to kill the stranger. But he blew a shrill little whistle, and suddenly there were many heavily armed men in the room. They surrounded the workers and tied them up. Then the stranger shouted in a mighty voice to the armed men: “Drive these troublemakers out of the village and guard the borders. Whoever comes near the borders is to be shot on sight!”

And so that is the way things happened. The men were driven into the woods with their wives and children just as they had once driven away the magician’s son. As darkness descended, they sank exhaustedly to the moist ground, and the women sobbed and cried the entire night. “The servant has

become our master! The servant has become our master!”

The next morning they wandered sadly and moved deeper into the forest. Tired and hungry, they dragged themselves the whole day long. Toward evening they reached a small cabin, and when they knocked on the door, the magician’s son opened it and let them in. He welcomed them with tenderness, gave them beets and bread to eat, and took care of the crying children. The parents relayed what had happened and complained about their suffering. “Now everything is lost,” an old man moaned. “The servant has become our master, and we and our children and our grandchildren shall be his slaves forever.”

“If only your father had never given us this unholy present!” another man cried. “We are much worse off now than ever before.”

However, the magician’s son became very serious and said, “Do not slander my father. Whatever he did, he did out of love for you, and his gift was good and useful as long as it belonged to everyone. Only when it fell into the hands of a single person did it become a curse. However, you should not lose heart even now. Think about the times when the servant helped us all. Weren’t they happy and wonderful times?”

“Yes, yes!” they all exclaimed and sighed deeply as they thought about the time when their village had been called the “happy village.”

“Why did you allow a single person to take over the servant?” a twelve-year-old boy cried. “We children would have believed the words of the magician, and we wouldn’t have done that.”

The old people became ashamed and silent, but the face of the magician's son glowed and beamed brightly all of a sudden. With a cheerful voice he declared, "During the past years I read a good deal in my father's magic books, and I constantly came across a saying that I had difficulty understanding until now. The saying goes like this:

"Whatever old people throw away, the young will pick up and keep.

"Whatever the old people do wrong, the young will do right.

"The master of the old people will become the servant of the young."

For a moment there was silence in the small cabin. Then all of the children rejoiced and shouted with their fresh young voices, "We'll make up for everything you've done wrong! Your master will become our servant!"

And the tall serious pine trees rustled softly and whispered, "That's the way, that's the way!"

Chapter 5

The Events, Situated within the History of the Classroom:

"The Servant" Becomes a Play

What's curious is that there are no statistics for oral literature.
When I raised this question at a scholarly conference once, I was told that the reason we pay attention to written literature is that books are quantifiable, whereas oral literature is not. How can you quantify something that has sound but no physical form, a colleague wanted to know, something that exists only in the imagination of the storyteller, cultural ephemera that is always at the whim of memory, something that needs to be written down to be . . . whole?
(King, 2003, pp. 97-98)

While the previous chapter introduced Bridges' ideal practices and goals, this chapter briefly outlines what Bridges looked like *in* practice in Mrs. Riggs's sixth-grade English Language Arts (ELA) classroom, including curricular, school, and classroom contexts and histories. It also describes the process through which these students successfully transformed Hermynia Zur Mühlen's story—originally told, as in the epigraph from King, with sound but no physical form, from the imagination of one storyteller through the imagination of another—into a play. While I do not argue that this play is not "whole" without writing it down, it would be impossible to share it here without written language. Hence, following this chapter is the transcript of the students' play (in an interstice) and detailed interpretations of this work (in Chapters 6 and 7), both of which, of course, are cultural ephemera at the whim of and subject to my retellings.

Bridges Curriculum in Practice

Over the course of the year, the students in Mrs. Riggs's classroom explored fairy

tales, mixed/animal tales, fables, peace tales, legends, tall tales, myths, and the students' own family tales in their Bridges sessions. Nearly all of the students had participated in Bridges as fifth-graders. They were thus familiar with the forms and activities; this meant, for instance, that on the very first day, when sharing Fantastic Binominals, they could immediately retell the story from a different perspective or add dialogue. They frequently referenced or requested activities or stories from the previous school year. This familiarity also served as a bulwark against the great challenges of attempting this pedagogy and curriculum with so many students. (For instance, getting into a circle for the oral stories took a very long time and was not actually even possible—the space was not big enough, so the "circle" often looked more like an oblong amoeba. It was hard to see everyone and easier for students to absent themselves in multiple ways from the circle or to not participate in the established culture of the classroom, such as sitting with feet on the floor, speaking in English, et cetera.)

Acting groups were established at the beginning of the year based on successes and challenges from their Bridges work the previous year. In particular, a certain cohort of boys had been a challenge.[1] With the input of their classroom teachers from fifth grade, Mrs. Riggs and Miss Adrienne divided the students into five acting groups with six to eight students each. Since the classroom was literally not big enough for all the groups to rehearse, two groups frequently went out in the hall to do so.

Miss Adrienne, Mrs. Riggs, and I generally met together each week before the

[1] I had heard this from the Teaching Artist who had worked with the students the previous year; the fifth-grade classroom teacher told me that she had on one occasion the previous year left the room crying. I also heard that the behavior specialist at the school was "unable to control" these students.

Bridges session. From the very first planning meeting, Miss Adrienne emphasized the goals of student success and support for the work that Mrs. Riggs was attempting to do in her ELA classroom. Because we wanted to integrate Bridges sessions into the regular structure of the week, Miss Adrienne and I frequently asked Mrs. Riggs questions about her classroom curriculum and culture. But the large class size and the constraints of testing made this work difficult. For instance, our first week together (the fourth week of the school year), when Miss Adrienne asked what Mrs. Riggs would normally be doing in her classroom, she said testing; because the first month of the school year had largely consisted of individualized literacy assessments, classroom culture had not had a chance to take root. Despite such challenges, through the course of the year, we did integrate various components of the ELA curriculum and state standards into Bridges sessions.

We also asked students to participate in building a culture of success. At the first session, Miss Adrienne asked the students what they did the previous year to be successful in Bridges. They responded: listen to everyone's ideas, be quiet, use your imagination, everyone think, participate and involve everyone, change the story. This level of success varied throughout the year—sometimes nearly all students were engaged and working hard; sometimes it was a struggle to have more than two or three voices and bodies in the various activities. Miss Adrienne constantly reminded the students how to problem solve—for instance, how to solve a problem while acting by using dialogue or action (rather than exasperatedly yelling at another actor to face the audience or say a line, for instance). For me, only in the classroom one day a week, it was easier to see

successes—it was harder for Mrs. Riggs, who one day said to me after a performance had completely fallen apart, “I don't know how you can be so positive.” Indeed, it was sometimes difficult to figure out what was successful in moments that looked like chaos and disengagement. “Success” depended on finding balance between freedom and fun and doing so with nearly 40 people in the room. This became even more challenging when a public performance was coming up.

How “The Servant” Became a Play

In November, I told Hermynia Zur Mühlen's “The Servant” as a counter-tale to “The Giant and His Suit of Armor” (see Chapter 1). The entire story in written form (translated by Zipes) is in the preceding interstice, but in short, “The Servant” goes like this:

Once upon a time, the men of a small, poor village deep in the woods worked long, grueling hours, logging gigantic trees to sell for their sustenance. Outside of town lived an old man and his son. Weird noises and smoke came from this home, for this man, seeing how miserable the town was, had spent years building a machine to make their lives easier.

Calling the villagers together, he showed the astonished people how this machine could cut apart a huge stump in seconds. “See,” said the magician, “I have created a servant for you, to make your work easier and give you time to be happy with your families.” The men shouted with joy, even as the magician warned that they must not ever allow the machine to belong to only one person, for on that day, the servant would

become their master. He appointed his son guardian of the servant, and the men promised that the servant would remain the property of the whole village.

As the magician had hoped, happy times arrived, so happy in fact that the town became known everywhere as the "happy village" and people flocked to it.

Many years passed, and one day a stranger appeared, dressed in fine clothes and draped in gold jewelry. He told splendid stories about all he had seen in his travels, and the villagers showed him that they too had a treasure: the servant.

Later that night, the stranger knocked on the door of the magician's cabin and offered to buy the servant. When the magician's son said it belonged to the whole town, the stranger instead went to the men of the village and tantalized them with gold. Clasping the hand of the village elder, the stranger trembled with emotion, tears in his eyes as he proclaimed how much he loved the people and wanted to take care of them. The village elder, gold now hidden in his hand, persuaded the people to sell the machine and to work for the stranger. As the magician's son stepped forward to protest, the stranger said, "He is your enemy! Throw him out of your town!" As the people dragged him away, the son repeated his father's dying words: "The servant will become your master!"

From that day forward, the stranger was cruel and distant. He built himself a mansion and lived in luxury while the people barely had enough to live on. When a worker asked for a bigger salary, the stranger's armed guards hung the worker from a tree. Soon, everyone in town—men, women, and children—hurried to their difficult labor

the second they heard the stranger's newly installed whistle blowing. Soon also, the stranger cut their wages. When they protested, the stranger brought in other workers, and, as the villagers were no longer necessary, armed guards drove them all out of town.

The servant, they realized, had become their master. Wandering deeper and deeper into the forest, they found a small cabin, into which the magician's son welcomed them and fed them. When they cursed the magician's gift for their plight, the son reminded them that the magician had given them the gift—and its warning—in love. One of the children cried out, "We children would have believed the words of the magician!"

The magician's son smiled. "A saying in one of my father's magic books goes like this: 'Whatever old people throw away, the young will pick up and keep. Whatever the old people do wrong, the young will do right. The master of the old will become the servant of the young.'"

For a moment all was silent. Then the children shouted, "We'll make up for everything you've done wrong! Your master will become our servant!"

And the trees rustled and whispered, "That's the way! That's the way!"

As always, following my telling, the students questioned the story. They did not like the ambiguous ending of this story any more than that of "The Giant and His Suit of Armor." They wanted to know what happened next, what the children did. We brainstormed a few ideas and then moved to rehearsal.

In rehearsal, three of the five acting groups worked with "The Servant," with two groups taking half of the rather long story and the third tasked with determining and then

acting out what the children did next. (In their version, which had a lot of audience involvement, the children had a dance-off after being kicked out of town, the purpose of which was never clear. Miss Adrienne stopped the performance for the sake of time.[2]) At the end of this weekly session, the students voted and chose "The Servant" as the story they would perform at their school as their "Peace Play."

The following week, we began by asking about the story's meanings and then eliciting information from the students' lives, asking what kept adults in their lives from being happy or spending time with their children, about what working too hard meant for these adults. These questions were intended to set up themes from which the students would then improvise scenes. But just as the conversation started to get animated, with students complicating stories, the fire alarm sounded, sending us out into the late-November Minnesota chill (without coats). Upon returning from this interruption, the students in their acting groups improvised scenes of adults being too busy to spend time with their children because of work, chores, lack of money, or being on the computer or TV (all ideas they had brainstormed). The students then chose the work that the adults in their story would do: a restaurant that served pizza. They improvised scenes on how to make pizza, commercials for the pizza restaurant, and what the magician could invent to help the people in their pizza making. After improvising and performing these scenes, they voted on the name of the pizza place and the magician's invention. Their homework assignment was to write two pieces of dialogue that the workers could say to their bosses.

The following week, we had two shorter sessions in which the students worked on

[2] This dance-off play is explored more in Chapter 6.

modifying some of their improvised scenes, incorporating feedback from their peers and teachers on what was unclear, and working on the next scenes in the story's sequence. Together, they generated ideas on how to clarify their evolving play, such as using a narrator to bridge different scenes. Eventually, however, as the suggestions kept flowing and the improvisation continued, we asked them to contribute new ideas via paper at the back of the classroom.

The process of performing and revising the scenes that set the basis for the story occurred several times; students took on roles based on the needs identified in their improvised scenes. Rehearsals took place in the classroom and in the hallway and eventually in the theater, where the focus was on cues, stage direction, and enunciation. Several days before the performance, their play still had no ending—a brainstorming and voting process had not clarified what would happen. Thus, as homework, Miss Adrienne asked the students to write suggested messages for the ending. Aside from these homework assignments, none of the students wrote anything down during this process. (I, however, kept a list of their general story structure from session to session so that we could build on previous sessions.)

The day before the performance, Miss Adrienne made suggestions from their written endings, which the students modified yet again. They rehearsed their entire play twice on the school's stage, with Miss Adrienne's prompts focusing on making connections and clarifying pieces of the narrative that didn't make sense.

Their story, which follows in transcript form in the interstice, can be told like this:

Everyone in the whole town knew Double Dice Pizza was delicious; it was, as the commercials declared, "the best darn pizza in the world." But for Double Dice employees—those who made the cheese, the dough, the sauce, and who assembled and packaged the pizza—life wasn't so great. They worked long, hard hours, with little time for leisure activities, such as a favorite television show or spending time with family.

And it was about to get worse, for somewhere in a rich place, with rich people getting richer, a business man learned from his advisors about a machine that could make pizza extra fast. He wanted it. But when he went to the inventor's daughter, she told him that the townspeople had promised never to sell this machine to just one person.

You see, her father had gifted this machine to the whole town, like their parks, schools, and libraries. The townspeople had promised not to sell it. And when they started to use the machine collectively, their lives got easier—making Double Dice Pizza was no longer such hard work and they had time for leisure.

But some townspeople thought they might be better off to listen to the business man and his advisors, who promised them money. Lots of money. So, forsaking their promise to the old man and his daughter, they sold the machine, swearing to show up to work for these newcomers bright and early. After all, it was all about the money, money, money.

And once again, their lives got miserable. Even worse now, they were fired or fined for small accidents, for being too encouraging of other workers, for being just a few minutes late. While Double Dice Pizza expanded all around the world, the workers'

paychecks shrunk.

Finally, they were fed up. They held a protest, declaring friends, family, and community more important than money. When the businesspeople objected, they replied that some promises—like those to their community members—are worth keeping while others—like those to business people who mistreated them—are worth breaking. After all, it's all about the family, family, family.

The day of the performance, Miss Adrienne gave a pep talk, and there was one final run-through of their creation, with reminders of places to clean up. Then the students went to the theater to perform their story in front of family and schoolmates.

Interstice

Students' Performed Adaptation of "The Servant"

Note: This play was performed at Williams Elementary School for an audience of students, family members, and community. It was performed with no props, backdrops, or costumes (anything noted, such as a microphone, is simulated). The students' play lasted just over eight minutes. Some students played multiple roles (such as a narrator and a cheese maker). The students created and performed this play entirely orally; I transcribed it after watching a video of their performance. The characters, other than the magician, were never named; they are named here so that the reader can understand.

[Notations on audience reactions are in brackets.]

(Triangle chime.)

NARRATOR 1 *(holding a microphone, walking to center stage)*: Welcome everyone to our adaptation of "The Servant."

(PIZZA SHOP EMPLOYEE is standing stage right, with five CUSTOMERS stage left.)

ALL: Click!

CUSTOMER 1: Hey, let's go get some Double Dice pizza.

Five CUSTOMERS: Yeah!

(*Five CUSTOMERS move stage right, toward PIZZA SHOP EMPLOYEE.)*

PIZZA SHOP EMPLOYEE (*over exuberantly*): Hello! Welcome to Double Dice Pizza. What can I get for you today?

CUSTOMER 1: What do you guys want?

CUSTOMERS 3, 4, 5 (*excitedly)*: Cheese!

(PIZZA SHOP EMPLOYEE *turns around and gets a pizza, which she hands to CUSTOMER 1, who passes slices to the other four customers. All start to eat their pizza, smiling.*)

CUSTOMER 1 (*crossing arms over belly and leaning backward)*: Oh my goodness, it's so good!

CUSTOMER 2: So cheesy!

PIZZA SHOP EMPLOYEE *(stepping forward, center stage)*: And now from our sponsors, Double Dice Pizza.

(CUSTOMERS 3, 4, and 5 move center stage, in a line, to become SPONSORS.)

SPONSORS *(with coordinated dance motions, first moving just the arms, then doing a Rockettes-style dance while linking arms, ending on a knee, jazz-hands style, chanting/singing)*: Na na na na na! Double Dice Pizza! Double Dice Pizza! It's the best darn pizza in the world!

SPONSOR *(stepping forward slightly*): And it's really good too!

(Triangle chime. All exit.)

[Audience laughs.]

NARRATOR 2 *(stage left)*: As you heard in the commercial, everyone loves Double Dice Pizza, but the people that work for the company don't feel the same way.

NARRATOR 3 *(stage left)*: Have you heard? Just watch and learn.

(Four groups of DOUBLE DICE EMPLOYEES stand on stage.)

CHEESE MAKERS (*Four stand in a semicircle and move their arms as if they were churning butter, far stage right*):

CHEESE MAKER 1: My arms!

CHEESE MAKER 2 (*encouragingly)*: Keep going you guys. You guys are doing great!

CHEESE MAKER 3 *(dejectedly)*: I'd rather be at home watching *Glee*.

CHEESE MAKER 2: Come on. There's only two more hours left. You guys can do it.

CHEESE MAKER 3 (*exasperatedly*): Two hours?

ALL CHEESE MAKERS: Two hours later.

ALL CHEESE MAKERS *(Holding up their arms)*: Cheese!

(Triangle chime.)

DOUGH MAKERS *(Far stage left, DOUGH MAKER 2 is bending over, DOUGH MAKERS 3, 4, AND 5 are sitting on the floor, and DOUGH MAKER 1 is standing.)*

DOUGH MAKER 5 (*rubbing her hands*): Ewww. My hands are sticky!

DOUGH MAKER 1 *(walking over to DOUGH MAKER 5)*: Go wash your hands and add more flour.

DOUGH MAKER 2 (*one arm extended, pulling at it with the other)*: Help! My arm is stuck in the dough.

DOUGH MAKER 1 *(moves toward DOUGH MAKER 2, grabs something off a shelf):* Here's some butter. *(She gives it to him, he uses it, she grabs his arm, and she helps to pull him free.)*

DOUGH MAKER 2: Oh, that worked.

DOUGH MAKERS 3 AND 4: I'd rather be on Twitter.

DOUGH MAKER 1: There's only two hours left.

(Triangle chime.)

SAUCE MAKERS *(SAUCEMAKERS 2, 3, 4, AND 5 stand in a line, rear stage right, with SAUCE MAKER 1 kneeling in front of SAUCE MAKER 2, arms wide, holding a giant pot. The other four are dicing.*)

SAUCE MAKER 3: Chopping the tomatoes.

SAUCE MAKER 1 *(moving as he says this, putting one pan behind him and getting another*): Picking it up and putting it down.

SAUCE MAKER 3: I'm getting tired of chopping tomatoes.

SAUCE MAKER 1: Me too.

SAUCE MAKER 3: I'm tired.

(All fall over onto the floor, some sitting, some lying down, except SAUCE

MAKER 5.)

SAUCE MAKER 2: I give up.

SAUCE MAKER 4: I don't wanna do this any more.

SAUCE MAKER 5: Guys, come on, I have kids!

All SAUCE MAKERS: Nobody cares about your kids!

(Triangle chime.)

[Audience laughter.]

PIZZA PACKERS *(Four PIZZA PACKERS stand in a pizza assembly line, rear stage left, standing in front of ovens, moving boxes of pizza from left to right.)*

PACKER 4: I miss my family.

PACKER 1: It's so hot by the oven.

PACKER 3: I'm getting tired of this. I wanna quit this job.

PACKER 2: My legs hurt. Someone call the ambulance!

ALL PACKERS: I miss my mommy!

[Audience laughter.]

(Triangle chime. All leave the stage. BUSINESS PEOPLE—ADVISOR 1, ADVISOR 2, and BOSS—enter and stand stage right, with ADVISORS flanking the BOSS. MACHINE 1 and 2 are center stage rear, with MACHINE 1 sitting on the floor in front of MACHINE 2, and DAUGHTER standing next to them. TOWNSPEOPLE 1, 2, 3, and 4 are stage right.)

NARRATOR 3 *(standing center stage):* Somewhere, in a rich place, with rich people trying to get richer. . .

(NARRATOR 3 exits.)

ADVISOR 1 *(flipping through the pages of a notebook, speaking to BOSS)*: So I did some research, and I found this magician—or inventor—that invented this pizza-making machine. All you have to do is buy the pizza-making machine, make them work for you, and you will only pay them one coin per hour.

BOSS: Okay.

(All three move to center stage, to the machine.)

BOSS: Hello sir. I'd like to buy your machine.

DAUGHTER: Why would I give it to you? I promised my father that I would never sell this machine, that no matter what, because it belongs to all, to everyone in the village, not just to one person. And a promise is a promise.

(As DAUGHTER speaks, TOWNSPEOPLE 1, 2, 3, and 4 lean in, putting a hand to their right ears, listening.)

(When DAUGHTER finishes, ALL move their arms in a wave motion while saying:)

ALL: Flashback!

(All except DAUGHTER, MACHINE 1, and MACHINE TWO move off-stage. MAGICIAN enters to stand by DAUGHTER. Enter PEOPLE—the rest of

the class—to stand in a semi-circle around them.)

DAUGHTER *(patting MAGICIAN on the shoulder):* My father has called all of you here today to let you know that he has built this amazing pizza-making machine that will cook pizza in less than five seconds.

(MACHINE 1 and 2 are moving like a machine, raising arms up and down in a pattern of motion.)

(ALL put their hands to their mouths, etc. while gasping and looking at each other.)

DAUGHTER: But, it will take, but it comes with a warning.

MAGICIAN: The warning is don't sell it to one person. It is owned by all of you.

TOWNSPERSON 5: Like our libraries?

TOWNSPERSON 6: And our parks?

TOWNSPERSON 3: And our schools?

MAGICIAN: Of course! Promise? *(raising his hand)*

(All put their right arms in toward the center.)

ALL *(unison)*: We promise to never sell the machine.

NARRATOR 4 *(stepping forward from semi-circle)*: Wait. For a while, things got better.

(Each of the following persons steps forward as she/he speaks.)

CHEESE MAKER 3: Click. Finally, I get to watch the third season of *Glee!*

DOUGH MAKER 5 *(holding cell phone)*: Finally I get to the Twitter! Tweet tweet.

SAUCE MAKER 4 *(holding video game console, looking at video screen in front of him)*: This video game's graphics are perfect, right?

SAUCE MAKER 1 *(also playing video game)*: I love this game!

FOUR PIZZA PACKERS (*unison*): I finally get to see my mommy!

ALL *(waving arms):* Flash forward.

(TOWNSPEOPLE exit, half to stage right and half to stage left; BUSINESS PEOPLE return to stand near the "machine" and DAUGHTER, with TOWSNPEOPLE 1, 2, 3, and 4 still listening in.)

DAUGHTER: So you see, a promise is a promise.

ADVISORS 1 and 2 (*unison*): But money is money.

DAUGHTER: But no matter how much money you give us, the villagers and I will never sell you this machine.

TOWNSPEOPLE 1, 2, 3, and 4 *(texting on cell phones):* Should we sell the machine? We could make millions. Send. *(Emphatically press send with one finger.)*

TOWNSPEOPLE *(stage right, texting):* Sell it. Send. *(Emphatically press send with one finger.)*

TOWNSPEOPLE *(stage left, texting):* Sell it. Send. *(Emphatically press send with one finger.)*

(TOWSNPEOPLE 1, 2, 3, and 4 point at each other and at DAUGHTER, making a plan. TOWNSPEOPLE 2 and 3 grab DAUGHTER from behind and drag

her offstage. TOWNSPEOPLE 1 and 4 take her place.)

DAUGHTER (*while being dragged*): But no!! . . .

TOWNSPERSON 1: We hear you were talking about money.

(TOWSNPEOPLE 2 and 3 run to join the conversation.)

ADVISOR 1 *(putting her hand on the machine):* Yes, we want to buy this fabulous machine.

TOWNSPERSON 1: Yeah, so how much money are we talking?

(ADVISORS 1 and 2 turn around and lift very heavy bags of money with both hands, setting them in front of the machine.)

ADVISOR 2: All of this.

ADVISOR 1: All of the money.

TOWNSPERSON 2 *(gesturing toward the machine)*: Yeah, we don't use it.

TEXTERS: Yeah, no, no.

MACHINE 1 and 2 *(waving arms):* Don't do it! No, no, no, no.

(ADVISORS 1 and 2 hand over the money to the four TOWNSPEOPLE.)

ADVISOR 2: Here you go. You guys have to promise. *(Raises her right hand like swearing in at court; the four TOWSNPEOPLE do the same.*) Say: “We promise that we'll go to work at 7 AM sharp and that we'll, we promise not to break this promise.”

FOUR TOWNSPEOPLE *(semi-unison, like they aren't quite sure of the words)*: We promise that we will go to work at 7 AM sharp and we promise not to

break this promise.

FOUR TOWNSPEOPLE *(lower arms, pick up the bags, leave stage left, skipping*): It's all about the money, money, money. It's all about the money, money, money.

(BUSINESS PEOPLE leave stage right, with the machine.)

(Triangle chime.)

[Audience laughter.]

NARRATOR 5 *(walking to center stage)*: Now let's see how things are now that they sold the machine for money.

(NARRATOR 5 exits. Same four WORK GROUPS enter and go back to their places on stage. BUSINESS PEOPLE stand center stage front. CHEESE MAKER 1 is missing from the cheese group.)

(Triangle chime.)

CHEESE MAKER 2: Keep going you guys. C'mon. You guys are doing great!

(BUSINESS PEOPLE *walk over to CHEESE MAKERS, grab CHEESE MAKER 2.)*

ADVISOR 2: You're fired!

(ADVISOR 2 drags CHEESE MAKER 2 away.)

CHEESE MAKER 2: What?

ADVISOR 2: You're too positive!

CHESSE MAKER 2: I was just trying to help!

(ADVISOR 1 and ADVISOR 2, clapping their hands fast): C'mon, c'mon, c'mon!

(CHEESE MAKER 1 runs in and starts stirring.)

ADVISOR 1: You're late! You're fired!

CHEESE MAKER 1: No!

(*ADVISOR 2 pushes him away.)*

(Triangle chime.)

(BUSINESS PEOPLE begin walking toward the DOUGH MAKERS. DOUGH MAKER 2 again has his arm stuck in the dough.)

DOUGH MAKER 2: They're coming!

ADVISOR 1: What's happening to the dough?

ADVISOR 2: Now you get a pay cut!

(ADVISOR 2 pulls DOUGH MAKER 2's arm out of the dough; ADVISOR 1 and ADVISOR 2 point their fingers at the workers sitting on the floor.)

ADVISOR 2: Let that be a lesson to all of you!

ADVISOR 1 (*overlapping)*: You all!

(Triangle chime.)

(BUSINESS PEOPLE begin walking toward the SAUCE MAKERS.)

SAUCE MAKER 3: I'm getting kind of tired of chopping the tomatoes, Jacob. You wanna switch?

SAUCE MAKER 1: Sure.

(SAUCE MAKER 1 gets up off the floor and changes places with SAUCE

MAKER 3, who begins moving pans. SAUCE MAKER 1 joins the others in chopping. SAUCE MAKER 3 drops a pan.)

SAUCE MAKER 5: Oh my gosh, Sadie! Why did you spill the sauce?

(SAUCE MAKERS 2 and 5 drop to their knees and start scrubbing the floor. SAUCE MAKER 1 lies down.)

SAUCE MAKER 4 (*pointing)*: You guys missed a spot.

(SAUCE MAKER 5 grabs SAUCE MAKER 4, pulling him to the floor to clean, along with SAUCE MAKER 3. Hearing the bosses, they quickly get up.)

SAUCE MAKER 3: Get down!

SAUCE MAKER 5: C'mon!

SAUCE MAKER 3: They're coming!

(SAUCE MAKERS run into each other, trying to get back into their places in line. BUSINESS PEOPLE enter.)

BOSS *(putting his finger to SAUCE MAKER 2's shoulder, wiping something off, looking at it):* What is this?

SAUCE MAKER 2: Uh, Sadie's hair drops a lot so we were testing it to see if there was hair in the sauce.

BOSS: You made a mess?

ADVISOR 2: You clean it up. . .

ADVISOR 1: You stay late.

SAUCE MAKER 4: But!

(SAUCE MAKER 3 drops to her knees and covers her face.)

(Triangle chime.)

(PACKERS are passing pizzas.)

PIZZA PACKER 4 *(looking at pizza in her hands)*: There's no cheese on this pizza.

(PIZZA PACKERS 1 and 3 gasp.)

PIZZA PACKER 3: Hurry.

(PIZZA PACKERS 1 and 4 hide the box behind their back as the BUSINESS PEOPLE enter.)

ADVISOR 2: You guys aren't working! *(Spins PIZZA PACKERS 1 and 2 around.)* You're stealing cheese?

ADVISOR 1: You come in early! You make more cheese.

(PIZZA PACKER 2 throws up his hands. PIZZA PACKER 3 sighs.)

(Triangle chime.)

NARRATOR 2: Work conditions were awful, but business was booming.

(Five CUSTOMERS/SPONSORS stand in a line, center stage rear. CUSTOMER 2 stands front center stage. TOWSNPEOPLE 5 and 6 stand stage left.)

TOWNSPEOPLE 5 and 6 *(pointing remote controls toward center stage)*: Click.

CUSTOMER 2: Double Dice Pizza is booming all *(circles arms)* around the world. *(CUSTOMER 2 joins the end of the line.)*

SPONSOR 3 *(holding a microphone, pointing it toward SPONSOR 5):* Double

Dice Pizza from Great Britain!

SPONSOR 5 *(British accent):* Hello guvn'r. This pizza's wonderful.

SPONSOR 3 *(again with microphone):* From Norway!

SPONSOR 6 *(accent):* Um, yah, yah, the pizza's sooo good.

SPONSOR 3: From Paris.

SPONSOR 4 *(waving her hands)*: Oooh la la, this pizza's fantastique!

SPONSOR 3: From Spain.

CUSTOMER 1: The pizza's fantastico!

COMMERCIAL *(Six CUSTOMERS/SPONSORS in a line, with arm motions, reminiscent of opening commercial)*: Double Dice Pizza, all around the world. And it's good too!

TOWNSPERSON 7 *(stage left)*: The rich man is getting richer.

TOWNSPERSON 6 (*stage left*): My pay check is getting smaller.

(CUSTOMERS/SPONORS move to the front of the stage and become NEWSPEOPLE. NEWSPEOPLE 1 and 2 crouch down, holding video cameras; NEWSPERSON 4 also has a camera. NEWSPERSON 5 kneels with a microphone; NEWSPERSON 6 holds one as well. CHEESE MAKER 1, CHEESE MAKER 2, SAUCE MAKER 3, DOUGH MAKER 2, and PACKER 4 stand center stage, rear. As each WORKER speaks, she/he moves to NEWSPERSON 5's microphone and then steps back.)

NEWSPERSON 3: We are outside Double Dice Pizza with a huge protest.

CHEESE MAKER 1: I got fired for being 30 seconds late!

CHEESE MAKER 2: I got fired for being positive!

DOUGH MAKER 2: I got a pay cut because I got my arm stuck in the dough.

SAUCE MAKER 3: All I did was spill the sauce.

PIZZA PACKER 4*:* I got accused from stealing cheese and I am fed up. *(Stomps foot.)* Who's with me?

ALL *(including NEWSPEOPLE, raising right fists in the air)*: We are!

(TOWNSPEOPLE all enter the stage, save the three BUSINESS PEOPLE [who stand stage right, off a little] and DAUGHTER and MAGICIAN [stage left]. TOWNSPEOPLE are singing and form a semi-circle.): It's not about the money, money, money. It's not about the money, money, money.

(Look stage left and gasp, recoiling, when they see MAGICIAN and DAUGHTER.)

MAGICIAN: Why was it so hard to own something all together?

TOWNSPEOPLE 5 and 6: We've learned that money isn't everything.

SAUCE MAKER 3: It was better when we owned the machine.

TOWNSPERSON 8: And when we all had it.

SAUCE MAKER 5 and DOUGH MAKER 4: We became greedy.

NEWSPEOPLE 4 and 6: Friends, family, and community are more important than money.

DAUGHTER: Well, what are you going to do about it?

TOWNSPEOPLE *(pointing at the business people)*: We quit!

ADVISOR 2: What? What? But you guys made a promise. *(Raises her right hand.)*

TOWNSPEOPLE (*unison*)*:* Some promises are worth keeping *(pointing at DAUGHTER and MAGICIAN)* and some promises are worth breaking *(pointing at BUSINESS PEOPLE)*.

CHORUS, RIGHT: We're sick and tired of how you treat your workers.

CHORUS, LEFT: And we're going to start our own restaurant

TOWNSPEOPLE (*unison*): Without you! *(pointing at BUSINESS PEOPLE.)*

ADVISOR 2 *(enticingly)*: But we've got money!

TOWNSPEOPLE: We don't want your money! It's all about the family, family, family. It's all about the family, family, family.

(Bow.)

[Clapping and cheers.]

Chapter 6

"It's Too Boring Now": A Neighbor Story

He looked into the water and saw that it was made up of a thousand thousand thousand and one different currents, each one a different colour, weaving in and out of one another like a liquid tapestry of breathtaking complexity. . . . And because the stories were held there in fluid form, they retained the ability to change, to become new versions of themselves, to join up with other stories, and so become yet other stories; so that unlike a library of books, the Ocean of the Streams of Story was much more than a storeroom of yarns. It was not dead but alive.
(Rushdie, 1990, pp. 71-72)

This chapter is a story of a student who was not on stage or even in the room[1] when Mrs. Riggs's class at Williams Elementary performed their version of "The Servant." This is not because he had regularly been pulled out of the classroom for academic or behavioral reasons. Rather, Da'uud chose not to participate. The previous sentence is one way of telling this story; it could be told with an additional clause: because, he said, "it's too boring now." But, of course, as critical literacy reminds us, stories—even if only one sentence—are never that simple. This chapter is thus also about discourses that surround education and particular subsets of students; it is an account of a series of events, focusing on one student, Da'uud, but placed within local, community, national, and international contexts and cultures. These contexts ground my attempts to theorize why and how Da'uud participated in Neighborhood Bridges in the ways that he did: sometimes brilliant, sometimes antagonistic, and most importantly for the work I

[1] Not all students are onstage during performances, although that is the goal, if possible. Sometimes students who are shy or scared take a different role, such as sound effects offstage. There are also different ways of being onstage: students on the autistic spectrum, for instance, may have success behind a screen operating shadow puppets that help to tell the story.

attempt here, sometimes absent.

This chapter is called a neighbor story: it exists alongside of and mixed up with the events of the previous chapter and the mess and success of Mrs. Riggs's students work with "The Servant" explored in the chapter that follows. While those chapters examine the class as whole, this chapter traces[2] one student and contexts—some of the "thousand thousand thousand and one stories"—surrounding him. I begin with explaining some of my writing choices. Then, "Contexts, Part 1" outlines theoretical constructions of counterstory, identity—including race and language and with particular attention to Somalis in Minnesota—in schools, and the production involved in theatre. These contexts serve as cultural and social background to illuminate what follows: a tracing of Da'uud's participation in this Bridges classroom. This section outlines Da'uud's first months, his participation in the process of creating "The Servant," and his participation after this play. The third section, "Contexts: Part II," returns to the themes of the first section, but this time with Da'uud's stories in mind. Contexts here, then, asks the reader to recognize that returning to these interrelated conditions and situations with Da'uud in mind may change and shift the meanings of both the contexts and Da'uud's stories. In conclusion, I offer a reading of Da'uud's contested participation in the Bridges classroom.

Comments on Writing Choices

No person or event's story is singular; Da'uud, for instance, has not just a story,

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[2] Originally, I used "trace" as in sketch or outline, but then I also realized that "trace" has echoes of Derrida; while I am not using it here in a Derridean sense, I do note that it calls attention to absence as much as presence. In another sense, re-tracing, doing a tracing again, makes something more visible, which is what my work here does.

but many stories. This is both because his story could be told in many ways and because there are many pieces—contexts (con meaning "with")—to his life. These contexts and stories interact with both the teller and the listener—and with the subject of the tale, "constituted through discourses and storylines, the constitutive power lying in the discourse and the ways in which it has been taken up. Sometimes discourses are shared. Other times they are not" (Davies, 2003, p. 26). Further, stories—yarns, as the Salman Rushdie epigraph calls them, or threads—are alive and fluid, retaining the ability to change.

Yet whether in literature, in art, or in research, stories are often presented as more bounded than they are. But they are always embedded in contexts, both told and untold, explored and unexplored, recognized and unrecognized. In schools, the contexts of each person or classroom space interact with the narratives told in and about the classrooms. Perhaps it is more appropriate to say that we have texts, countertexts, and contexts. What context makes it into a story depends on the teller; in writing, by building a story, we are also creating contexts. Contexts thus interact with our stories and our stories enter into and interact with (classroom) contexts. In many ways, it is impossible to tease out context from story. Here, I am calling "contexts" those theoretical, historical, sociological, and cultural stories that surround students and teachers in the Bridges classroom.

The separation of these contexts in this writing is, of course, artificial, but also necessary for understanding, both retrospectively and in the real-time happening of Mrs. Riggs's classroom. The meaning of "context" comes from the Latin for "to weave

together." In practice, then, the contexts might be likened to warp—the longitudinal threads in a piece of woven cloth—and Da'uud's stories, events, happenings, thinking, writing, et cetera to the weft—the horizontal threads. In practice, in the life of the classroom and those in it, it is not possible to separate the two. The story—the woven fabric—is not complete without either. Yet it is almost too much to keep these simultaneous and conflicting (intertwined layers of) stories in mind at any one moment. Thus, a study of Da'uud points to what Ellsworth (1997) has written: "Teaching is impossible . . . and that opens up unprecedented teaching possibilities" (p. 18). The work of this chapter also points to the importance of looking at both structures and lives, what Weis and Fine (2013) called critical bifocality. In doing so, we see that every story—here, the successful production of the students' version of "The Servant"—has within it hidden stories and ruptures, places in which students like Da'uud contest their participation.

Any telling of a story fixes it in some ways—and by fix, I mean both to affix, putting in place, and to smooth out rough edges, making choices to incorporate some details and to leave out others for the sake of clarity. Writing a story fixes it even more—voice and tone lose vocal inflections and intensities of emotion and facial expression that may be present in an oral telling. As a writer, I obviously had to make choices.

These choices are most apparent in "Tracing Da'uud," the second section below. This story is different first because following one student closely creates a story more like a monologue than a tale told by or from an ensemble (the perspective of the classroom, as I did in Chapter 5 and the interstice that follows it). In describing what happened in Mrs.

Riggs's classroom in “Tracing Da'uud,” Da'uud is sometimes in sync with the ensemble and sometimes not; sometimes he chooses either not to play or not to play by someone else's rules. Writing his stories—beginning with re-searching him within my fieldnotes—makes Da'uud visible in different ways. Yet as I did not pay more attention to Da'uud than to any of the other nearly 40 students while in the classroom, my notes about his participation are only a trace or a sketch. To write this chapter, I first pulled Da'uud's stories from my fieldnotes. As much as possible, I then attempted in the text itself to retell Da'uud's story as it could be told from viewing videotapes of the classroom (if they existed). In it, italicized sections indicate student-authored performance or writing, with direct quotations (either written or verbal) in quotation marks. Then, in footnotes, I do additional work of two types: 1.) briefly begin interpretations of some of Da'uud's words and actions (lengthier interpretations follow in Contexts, Part II) and 2.) contextualize (provide background information) about the Bridges classroom or curriculum, about Da'uud, or about Da'uud's acting group, the Flyers, and its members. I made this choice so that the events can be read (stand) on their own but also cannot be removed from the thinking and contexts found in the footnotes. Stylistically, this choice indicates that the footnotes, like the thinking and additional information, are embedded in—inseparable from—Da'uud's stories. They are part of the same Ocean of the Streams of Story, to use Rushdie's appellation.

However, the reader also has choices. There are many possible ways to read (to receive, take in, interpret) Da'uud's story as it appears in “Tracing Da'uud”—and just as

many possibilities for reading (performing the act of decoding the following symbols that form letters and words) what follows. Reading the footnotes concurrently with the text intentionally complicates a reading of Da'uud. This complication echoes what it is like both to teach and to research. Teachers must be simultaneously responding to what is happening in front of them and trying to decipher its meanings and put these events, words, et cetera into contexts. It means, for instance, something different when Korinna cries in the classroom than when Karim does. Researchers toggle between methods, theory, and the actual humans with whom they interact. This is messy. Further, these acts of reading a classroom, reading students, and reading texts are work. And work, like teaching and learning, is frequently hard. That said, the reader can choose to read the text first and return later to the footnotes—a process that may echo what it means to inquire into one's own teaching, when one returns later—outside of the student-filled classroom —to theorize events and students.

Contexts, Part I

"We participate in creating what we see in the very act of describing it"

(Delgado, 1989, p. 2416).

When I speak and write about Bridges, I am frequently laudatory; I can easily lift up the successes and the openings of Bridges, celebrating the work and play that take place in these classrooms, providing a familiar "success" story of an arts-based critical literacy program. I was—and am—excited about the work these students did with "The Servant." I also recognize that it was both a success and a mess (see Chapter 7). And yet,

as the storyteller of the work of these Bridges' students, I knew that this telling was contingent, partial, and self-serving (whether that self is me or proponents of such programs). As I began to write about “The Servant,” I worried that this story was too one-sided—and too tidy.

Educational scholarship often attempts to tell linear, clean narratives, e.g., these four themes emerged from all the mess and contradiction of this site. For centuries, the dominant thinking in the white, Western world has been to search for laws and formulas —“what works,” to borrow from the U.S. Department of Education. Chapters 5 and 7 take such a larger view, either that of the classroom as a whole or of broader themes. But “what works” often ignores the realities and nuances of individual lives. It is one thing to see the whole classroom, another to think about what the experience is like from an individual's perspective. No one “solution”—even a program as potential-filled as Bridges—can be applied uniformly to all students in all classrooms. We also thus need to theorize what might have happened in moments that did not turn out as hoped.

I wanted—needed—to tell another story about “The Servant.” I thought of Da'uud. Even as the class had success with this story, their work—the work of the community—was simultaneously unsuccessful because Da'uud was not at the performance, having first opted himself out and then been (assumedly) opted out by the classroom teacher.

This raised a number of challenges, though. When I began writing about the students' work with “The Servant,” I did not have Da'uud in mind. In fact, I didn't even

remember he wasn't onstage until I re-read my fieldnotes. In the classroom with more than three dozen students and only a few hours a week, it was nearly impossible to focus on just one student or to make sense of larger patterns. The sheer number of people in the room and how much was happening simultaneously sometimes made it impossible for me to be fully present as a researcher, as I instead focused on helping students or solving problems. And as noted earlier, my participant observation did not include interviews, so I do not have students' reflections on the work of the classroom. Yet in life, we are always juggling several story lines simultaneously (Bamberg, 2004). Now, then, in this chapter, I attempt to narrow the focus, thinking and writing about one student in depth through the distance of time. I began wondering if Da'uud provided a counterstory.

Counterstories in Academic Literature

Dominant stories—what might be called canonical stories in the West—and schooling both privilege certain forms of knowledge, learning, and values. Richard Delgado (1989) called these oppressive stories majoritarian stories: told by dominant cultures (in-groups), these stories remind in-groups of their identity and provide “a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural” (p. 2412). These stories can be both personal or institutional/structural. Michael Bamberg (2004), calling them “master narratives,” separated them into two categories: 1.) frames that delineate how narrators (storytellers) position themselves with their story and that an audience can follow because of the story's familiarity (e.g., a “pull yourself up by the bootstraps” tale of immigration) and 2.) how speakers are subject to—unable to escape from—larger

metanarratives that are more like sets of beliefs (many of which we are not even conscious of) than a narrative—in other words, ideology. Whether we call them majoritarian stories or master narratives or canonical tales, these stories have a tendency to normalize oppressions and hierarchies; further, small (personal) stories and the grand stories are "thoroughly interwoven with each other" (Bamberg, 2004, p. 361). These stories set boundaries for us; we are surrounded by them, hearing them in the media and reading them in schools and universities.

Speaking back to or against these stories and their privileging of certain forms of knowledges and identities are counterstories (also called counternarratives), which arose in academic literature out of critical legal studies and critical race theories such as LatCrit (e.g., Delgado, 1989; Delgado, 1993; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counterstories "aim to subvert that ingroup reality" and to challenge the prevailing sense (mindset) of domination and hierarchy (Delgado, 1989, p. 2413); their "purpose is to reveal the contingency, partiality, and self-serving quality of the stories on which we have been relying to order our world" (Delgado, 1993, p. 666). Counterstories attempt to tell more than just one clean story and more than a story of oppression and hierarchy. More importantly, they offer alternatives:

> They can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live. They enrich imagination and teach that by combining elements from the story and current reality, we may construct a new world richer than either alone. Counterstories can quicken and engage conscience.

> Their graphic quality can stir imagination in ways in which more conventional discourse cannot. (Delgado, 1989, pp. 2414-2415)

This storytelling benefits members of outgroups, helping with healing, countering loneliness, and fostering survival and liberation (Delgado, 1989); it also helps members of the ingroup:

> Members of the majority race should listen to stories, of all sorts, in order to enrich their own reality. Reality is not fixed, not a given. Rather, we construct it through conversations, through our lives together. Racial and class-based isolation prevents the hearing of diverse stories and counterstories. It diminishes the conversation through which we create reality, construct our communal lives. Deliberately exposing oneself to counterstories can avoid that impoverishment, heighten "suspicion," and can enable the listener and the teller to build a world richer than either could make alone. (Delgado, 1989, p. 2439)

Counterstorytelling both tells stories that are usually left out and challenges the dominant stories that are told; counterstories "can show that what we believe is ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel. They can show us the way out of the trap of unjustified exclusion. They can help us understand when it is time to reallocate power" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2415). Counterstories, thus, are critical for building antioppressive education and lives.

Counterstories include personal stories or narratives; other people's stories or narratives; and composite stories or narratives. Working with critical race theory to tell educational counterstories (specifically the experiences of Chican@ graduate students

and faculty), Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso (2002) argued that stories become counterstories when they begin to incorporate elements of critical race theory (e.g., they center race and racism as well as address intersectionality; challenge dominant ideology; commit to social justice; focus on experiential knowledge; evoke a transdisciplinary perspective). For instance, they (2001) wrote a composite tale of a conversation between a Chicana graduate student and faculty member. Delgado's (1989) work related the same events (a job search process) through five stories, told from different perspectives and in different languages (e.g., personal, legal).

Counterstories such as these can serve at least four theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical functions: 1.) building community among an outgroup; 2.) challenging perceived wisdom; 3.) showing possibilities for changing the story; and 4.) teaching about constructing a new world (story) (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Retelling the story of "The Servant" by focusing on Da'uud can serve multiple of these functions by challenging a simple story of success or showing possibilities for changing similar stories in the future. Importantly, this counterstory also revolves around Da'uud's intersectional identity.

Identity

Reams of paper have been dedicated to elucidating the concept of "identity." Both as a theoretical construct and as a lived practice and positioning, identity is contested, changing, negotiated, and elusive (as in the title of Daniel Yon's [2000] book, *Elusive Culture*). In other words, identity, wrote Bronwyn Davies (2003), is "a story which can

never fully be told" (p. 24). In laying out an understanding of identity, I draw from cultural studies, postmodernism, critical sociocultural theory, literary theory, cultural-historical psychology, anthropology, and more. These theories situate identity as a process that is produced through and in both discourses (the words that we use and their meanings) and practices (actions—including thoughts and behavior—in and with the material world around us).

Stuart Hall (1990) wrote that there are at least two ways of thinking about cultural identity: 1.) as a shared, collective, stable, true culture and self, based on shared history, ancestry, and cultural codes (emphasizing, in other words, similarities) and 2.) as a becoming (rather than a being) that is shaped by history and power and includes both similarities and "critical points of deep and significant *difference*" or "ruptures and discontinuities" (p. 225). In the first view, identity is a category constructed around fixed, stable similarities; such a view, however, "detracts from the possibility of engaging with the multiple identifications and affiliations which . . . are central to the ways that identities, race, and culture are made and lived by youth" (Yon, 2000, p. 132). In contrast, in the second, the theorization of identity that I utilize here, identity is an open-ended process, a becoming that recognizes differences as well as similarities. As Hall (1990) stated, "Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact . . . we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (p. 222). Both Yon and Hall called attention to the changing and contextual nature of identity as it is shaped

by and shapes interactions with and representations by others, including popular cultures. Identities are thus “the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (Hall, 1990, p. 225). Identity is undergoing constant transformation—and so is research on it.

Cynthia Lewis and Antillana Del Valle (2008) detailed how research on adolescent literacy has been shaped by these changing conceptions of identity, noting that identity is “about much more than an individual's sense of self” (p. 310). They identified three analytical waves: 1.) in the 1970s and 1980s, when identity was characterized as stable and unified, literacy research focused on cultural conflicts between home and school; 2.) in the 1990s through the present, when identity was characterized as negotiated and performative, literacy research focuses on the positional and resourceful nature of literacy practices that situate students socially or institutionally; and 3.) recently, when identity is characterized as improvisational, metadiscursive, hybrid, and spatial, research focuses on literacy practices “as part of a complex landscape that is both global and local as well as participatory and exclusionary” (p. 311). In what follows, both the second and third waves of conceptualizing (Da'uud's) identity are important.

Both these analytical frames recognize that identity is both personal and social. Identity is personal, as each of us has ways of describing or thinking about ourselves; we tell stories about ourselves that say who we are and to what groups we belong. These understandings occur as part of living in social and cultural communities (e.g., Holland et al., 1998) and thus identity is social. Identity is also social as it is imposed by others: our

identities are positions or representations based in social, cultural, and historical contexts that others ascribe (on)to us. Other people—in our lives, in media representations—tell us (what they believe to be) our stories—what Louis Althusser (2008/1972) called "hailing" or interpellating. We are positioned by these hailings, or, as Dorothy Holland et al. (1998) wrote, "When we speak we afford subject positions to one another" (p. 26).

Thus, "identity is a concept that figuratively combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 5). Identities, "the imaginings of self in worlds of action" are social products, "lived in and through activity" that develop in social practice (Holland et al., p. 5). Time changes the stories both we and others tell about our identities: "The story of who we are can never fully be told since at any future point the apparent certainties of the present can be re-visited and re-vised" (Davies, 2003, p. 24). These identities may also shift in different spaces—home, communities, school, work, et cetera—and as we navigate social, political, historical, and cultural contexts. Identity is lived through relationships that are also shaped by social and cultural authority. Identity may be theorized, then, "as a fluid, socially and linguistically mediated construct, one that takes into account the different positions that individuals enact or perform in particular settings within a given set of social, economic, and historical relations" (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007, p. 4). In other words, "identities form on intimate and social landscapes through time" (Holland et al., p. 285).

These social and cultural activities, practices, and encounters that shape and are

shaped by identities are, in Holland et al.'s (1998) terminology, figured worlds; in them, participants' positions matter. Such positions are socially organized and reproduced, situated within hierarchies of power. A figured world is “a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52). “School” functions as a figured world, and schools have often been set up to be comfortable with some identities (e.g., white, middle-class, male) and hostile to others. In the figured world of the Bridges ELA classroom, Da'uud, in words and actions, both situated himself and was situated by others by his gendered, racialized, religious, and other identities. The negotiated, spatial, performative, and improvisational nature of a theatre-based program complicated these positionalities even further.

Race in Schools

> Race is a construct used to distinguish and subordinate certain groups of humans from others. As the value of reason became paramount during the Age of Enlightenment in Europe, Europeans devised ways of classifying people based on geography, physical features, and culture, naming themselves as the highest example of humanity and giving birth to whiteness as a racial system. . .
>
> Race is thus not biological but rather a social, historical, cultural, and economic formation based in a created hierarchy. Oppression due to the construct of race is both based on and results in economic processes, ideologies, and lived

> experiences and opportunities. In other words, the material structures and experiences of daily life are deeply connected with race, so much so that in the United States in the twenty-first century, race and class are often conflated. Although racial understandings change, they are and always have been interrelated with political, social, and economic (material) consequences and circumstances. (Casey, McManimon, Lozenski, & Lensmire, 2013, pp. 274-275)

Race, as a social construction, changes across time and space; today, racial classifications in the United States—such as census data, school district data, and popular ascriptions of racial categories—currently identify as "Black" those with darker skin and relatively recent (hundreds of years) roots in Africa. This includes descendents of those enslaved in the transAtlantic slave trade, immigrants (and refugees) from (sub-Saharan) Africa, immigrants from the Caribbean (who arrived in the Caribbean because of the slave trade), and more. These ascribed racial categories may or may not coincide with how people identify themselves. Race, in other words, is not only structural, but deeply contextual and personal.

Despite the constructed and contextual nature of race, there is no doubt that schooling has different outcomes for students of color than it does for white students. These differential outcomes have deep roots that are material/structural and ideological. Racial disparities in educational outcomes (e.g., graduation rates, achievement—most often in the form of standardized test scores) are often called the "achievement gap" but more accurately are an opportunity gap (e.g., Milner, 2010) or education debt (Ladson-

Billings, 2006). In Minnesota, for example, while 77 % of all students graduate from high school in four years, only 42 % of American Indian and 49 % of Black students do (McNeil, 2012; data from U.S. Department of Education for 2010-11 school year). Black and Brown students are disproportionately referred to the office and with more serious consequences, such as suspension or expulsion, than white students, resulting in less time in the classroom and more disengagement from school—or what is called the discipline gap (see, e.g., Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010; Milner, 2013).[3]

Generally speaking, in schools, Black male students (especially those past the age of seven or eight) are "The (Visible) Other."[4] Pedro Noguera (2003) argued that to change schooling outcomes for Black male students, we must understand how cultural and structural forces shape their school experiences and their identity constructions, particularly looking to better understand "youth culture and the processes related to cultural production" (p. 452): "there is a pressing need for further research on how identities—especially related to the intersection of race, class, and gender—are constructed within schools and how these identities affect students' attitudes and dispositions toward school, learning, and life in general" (p. 454). For young men of color, school identity is certainly contested.

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[3] For local and national racial justice work in K-12 education, see The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles (http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education) and the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership (www.mmep.org).

[4] I include "visible" because, especially in the local context, other students, particularly American Indian students, may be othered and more "invisible." In Minnesota, for instance, American Indian students have the lowest high school graduation rates of any racial or ethnic group on whom data is collected.

Somali Diaspora in Minnesota

To situate Da'uud (and this classroom) requires examining identity and race on an even more particular level: the Somali diaspora in Minnesota. Hundreds of thousands of Somalis have been involuntarily displaced in over two decades of civil war, many living in refugee camps (for instance, in Kenya) or as internally displaced persons. Others have left the region. Most Somalis who moved to Minnesota did so beginning in the late 1990s; low unemployment and strong organizations that sponsor refugee resettlement programs facilitated this immigration (Abdi, 2011). Martha Bigelow (2010) called this the Somali diaspora because "being 'Somali' still matters to many who have left Somalia" and because "the notion of 'Somaliness' still has great power in the ethos of Somali communities and identities around the globe" (p. 3). Somalis in diaspora both retain unifying cultural and historical identities and change and adapt to their new geographies.

But Somali identity does not fit neatly into firmly established U.S. categories of identity; as Bigelow (2010) wrote, "It is difficult or impossible to separate identifies such as language, religion, race, and gender in the data from Somali immigrant youth" (p. 153). In Minnesota, Somali youth are minoritized in the mainstream and dominant culture in ways that are gendered, religious, and racialized, further complicated by the transnationality of many Somali youth. This, of course, occurs in schools as well; disengagement from institutions such as schools "is at least partially explained by ways minoritized youth can be discursively constrained, confined, or delimited by how they are identified by institutions in terms of racial, religious, gendered, and ethnic Othering"

(Bigelow, 2010, p. 148).

Immigrants and refugees to the United States enter into a space in which racial categories—particularly identifying "Blackness"—are sharply different from identities in their countries of origin. In other words, in North America, as Awad Ibrahim (1999) asserted, African immigrants, including youth, "enter a *social imaginary*: a discursive space or a representation in which they are already constructed, imagined, and positioned and thus are treated by the hegemonic discourses and dominant groups, respectively, as Blacks" (p. 353, italics in original); this positioning does not acknowledge differences in ethnicities, languages, nationalities, or cultural identities, even though "for the Somali immigrants in Canada or the United States, blackness does not provide a meaningful category for social understanding" (Kusow, 2006, p. 548). Race is more place, clan, and/or culturally based for many Somalis, who would not identify themselves as Black or African-American, even if, as Murray Forman (2001) argued, Somali teens may "develop a sense of cultural identity that is aligned strongly with African American sensibilities, practices, and commodities" (p. 51), particularly hip hop. Such nuances and self-understandings tend to get lost in schools, and Somali students may be seen or identified —and certainly counted—as Black, a racial category inscribed upon them, particularly in public spaces. As Bigelow (2010) wrote, "Unfortunately, race often eclipses other potentially preferred identities among Somali youth, such as religious or national identities" (p. 9). This racialization of identity

ignores the fluid nature of identity and the ways in which students are actively

> creating and contesting what it means to be "Somali." The fact that immigrant students' identities are simultaneously constructed by them and by others is of critical importance to understanding that culture and identity are framed through interaction with others. (Bigelow, p. 115)

Another way of stating this is that while racial identities are very complex, racial identifications tend to be simplified, a paradox of race in the United States: "we don't belong to simple race groups, but we do" (Pollock, 2004).

These differences are also often gendered (Bigelow, 2010; Leet-Otley, 2012). In her dissertation, for instance, Jill Leet-Otley (2012) asserted that immigrant boys experienced school as far more negative, hostile, and racist than did immigrant girls. Additionally, the identities that Somali students take up—and those that their community members fear—may differ based on gender. For instance, Leet-Otley (2012) found that fifth-and sixth-grade Somali boys in a Somali charter school in Minnesota took up some Black cultural discourses (e.g., hip hop) but resisted identifying as Black, instead creating Somali-American identities. The elders in this community, like those in Bigelow's (2010) study, worried about Somali boys' identity, particularly that they would take up styles and behaviors the elders identified as African-American. For girls, on the other hand, the concern was about acting too white—meaning sexually promiscuous and not Muslim. Further, Somali girls who wear hijab are more visibly identifiable as Somali (and Muslim) than their male counterparts.

Also important to note are recent patterns of print literacy and schooling in

Somalia. Widespread literacy in Somalia is relatively recent (the language was put into the Roman alphabet in 1972), and Somali culture much more heavily emphasizes the oral. Add to this limited formal schooling opportunities due to the civil war and a predominately nomadic society prior to the war, and immigrants may have low print literacy in Somali. This was confirmed by most Somali students in Mrs. Riggs's classroom, none of whose families returned permission forms in Somali.[5] Participants in Bigelow's (2010) research also could not think of any times when they used written Somali to communicate; they did not understand why publicly printed documents and signs in Somali existed, as many Somalis could not read them. This is a cultural disconnect or misunderstanding that places Somali text within the paradigm of Western literary norms and optimistic desires for multilingualism (Bigelow, 2010), exacerbated by a lack of Somali representation in leadership and other positions. Such misunderstandings of racialized identities follow students such as Da'uud into the classroom.

Production: Of Identity, In the Classroom, In Theatre

With the help of theorists such as Hall and Holland et al., I have argued above that identity is a process. As a process, identity is produced in the figured world of Mrs. Riggs's classroom. But because Bridges is a creative drama program, students are also producing theatre and therefore identities as performers, both individually and collectively. In authoring theatre productions, students are asked to enact identities other than their own. In their production of "The Servant," they had to negotiate responding to and in multiple figured worlds: the school culture of Williams, of Mrs. Riggs's ELA

[5] Somali is one of the district's required languages of translation for written documents.

classroom, of the Bridges classroom, of the performance space, and of the imagined town in which Double Dice Pizza was located.

Holland et al. (1998) argued that “identity responds to both the imaginary and the embodied communities in which we live” (p. 192); in this situation, both the imaginary and the embodied communities are multiple, and Bridges students were asked to play and to perform in multiple ways. Some students, of course, found taking on other positions and roles easier. If we agree with Hall (1990) that identity is constituted “not outside but within representation” (p. 236), then identity within a classroom focusing on performance is even further troubled and open to interpretation. Here, students were performing their own and their characters' identities, often without clear understandings themselves of the differences. This complicates the process of producing both identity and theatre. Davies (2003) wrote that “the acquisition of school knowledge is a twofold process of reading the signs correctly and inserting your individual self inside the scenes made possible by these correct readings” (p. 50). With the multiplicity of signs and identities in this classroom, this process was often quite complicated. It seems to be one of the places Da'uud struggled.

Tracing Da'uud

“A critical race method compels us to ask, 'What is their story, by the way?'

It also challenges us to repeat the question, 'No, what is their story?'”

(Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 477)

First Months

I was introduced to Da'uud before I ever met him: our first day at Williams, other classroom teachers and Teaching Artists told—warned—Miss Adrienne and me that Da'uud was part of a group of boys whose behavior in Bridges the year before had frequently gotten them into trouble for actions such as placing a student in a garbage can.[6] This year, the teachers deliberately separated this group of Somali boys into different classrooms.[7] Indeed, throughout the year, this warning seemed well-founded, as Da'uud was frequently reprimanded:[8] for example, for speaking in Somali, for making faces at other students in attempts to goad them into responding, or for touching the fire alarm while his group rehearsed in the hallway. One day, his actions provoked another student to tears when that student was sent out of the room for something that Da'uud actually did. Another day, as I deliberately stood near him in the back of the classroom to try to interrupt his afternoon-long attempts to get another student in trouble, Da'uud asked if he could call me mister. I asked why, and he said, "because." I told him that he had to have a

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[6] Upon hearing this, I remembered such stories from the year before, when I had been visiting different Bridges classrooms and Teaching Artists to set up my research. I had been in this school many times, as it had multiple Bridges sections and teachers.

[7] As I was writing this, I talked with the Teaching Artist from the previous year about this group of boys. Da'uud had been a follower in this group; with the two lead instigators in another classroom this year, Da'uud seemed to take on more leadership that frequently had distracting purposes. I would have identified him as the leader had I not found out that he had not been in that role the year before.

[8] I was not particularly paying attention to the Somali boys in the classroom, but Da'uud frequently appears in my fieldnotes in incidents in which he was getting in trouble. I begin with these here because they seem to mark the tenor of his relationship with the classroom, in which he frequently tried to push boundaries with the adults in the room and evidenced a conflicted relationship with school. Sometimes he was "on"—actively contributing to the work of the class—and sometimes he appeared to be watching the adults out of the corner of his eye to see what he could get away with. And while he frequently seemed to not be paying attention to the oral stories or the conversation, he did contribute to conversations. Sometimes these were in helpful ways, other times not. For example, when Miss Adrienne asked the class what they would want to study and learn in school if they could choose, while one student talked about learning about global warming and driving hybrids and another talked about learning how to prank the teachers (two very different kinds of learning, but learning nonetheless), Da'uud's contribution was that they should eat cotton candy for lunch.

good reason. He responded that he was used to being around boys and that the girls didn't know anything. As he said so, he looked directly at the two girls sitting near him. Later in the day, he told a Somali girl that no one cared about them (the girls).[9]

After class the second week, Miss Adrienne commented on how well Da'uud was doing.[10] The next week, Da'uud worked with two other Somali boys to craft a conflict

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[9] I have multiple theorizations of why Da'uud could have asked to call me "mister." He could have been attempting to see what kind of response I would give, whether I would just shut him down by saying no, which was how adults often responded to him. He could have been leading up to his later challenges to the girls sitting near him. But in my response, in which I did not just outright tell him "no," I was subverting the traditional authority of the adult or teacher. My response both was and was not an institutional one; it functioned in the same way I often felt I did—as an intermediary, a straddler. My response was also an attempt to build a more productive relationship with Da'uud, to understand why he was thinking and doing what he did. I felt like so many of my and the other adults' interactions with him were didactic: stop doing that, start writing, sit still, stop blurting. In the back of my head, I was also curious about whether Da'uud was trying to tell me something about gender. My response to him, the simple act of asking him to explain, was my attempt to subvert a gender binary. Had his response evidenced not gender oppression but something else, I may have said that he could call me mister. However, his comment that girls don't know anything was seemingly directed at other students, another attempt to provoke them. When I asked him to explain himself, he did not have much to say.

[10] Da'uud's written story this week was nearly a page long, the longest story or writing assignment that he completed in Bridges that year. (It was about a seal who loves to play football; his parents got sent to a zoo, and he went to a college so far away that he forgot them and became the best football player.) Of the 14 pages on which Da'uud wrote in his notebook—and did not tear out—throughout the year, four were stories, two were just a title, one was a homework assignment, one was a question, five were poems or other writing assignments—such as a group-written story—and one was an apology (see p. 214). Unlike some other students, Da'uud's notebook was not filled with drawings either—he drew only a few stars on various pages. Many weeks, Da'uud wrote nothing (or tore the pages out of his notebook—once telling me that he did so because it was "really personal") or only a sentence or two, which often happened only after I stood next to him and prompted him to start. As the year progressed, his writing got shorter and shorter. One day when Mrs. Riggs said, "I hope you are writing full sentences," Da'uud responded with, "I'm writing blah blah blah." He had two sentences written on his page (after about ten minutes) about video games he was good at. Perhaps some of Da'uud's difficulty was not seeing relevance in what he was being asked to write. For instance, on the day students were to write a story using a character from Greek mythology, Da'uud wrote (after trying unsuccessfully to ask a question in the large group because he was not following classroom rules about raising his hand), "*what I wanted to ask is that what the heck is greek mytholegy."* (Interestingly, though, he played Zeus in their play later that day.) These difficulties were not helped by factors such as the classroom literally not having enough pencils. The only time that Da'uud shared his writing in front of the class was the week that nearly all students shared their "peace poems." Da'uud's was about eating cheese pizza and playing video games; he had started a poem about chocolate milk but told Miss Adrienne, "I messed that one up real bad." (On the day when they were supposed to write analogies for themselves, Da'uud's consisted of four foods.) Yet Da'uud was interested in writing: another day, he looked at the notebook in which I wrote fieldnotes and told me that he felt sorry for my parents because my handwriting was so messy (a result

dialogue,[11] which they performed in front of the class. Their hilarious scene involved Da'uud as a grandpa arguing with another grandpa over an alien invasion video game that they named "Zombie Mania." Their characters complained about their aching backs and spoke with "old man voices"—lips curled over their teeth. Their scene closed with a third student protesting: "Mo-om! Grandpas are fighting over my video game again!" This scene was imaginative and well-crafted, both orally and performatively. The whole class was laughing. The following week, Da'uud stepped in for a missing student in another performance of a conflict dialogue, which was again funny and intergenerational (ending with the son grounding the dad). In these performances, both student-authored dialogues involving intergenerational familial conflict,[12] Da'uud was very committed to his character.

Occasionally, Da'uud named exactly what was happening in the classroom, for instance, complimenting a scene on amazing acting but saying that he was confused by what was happening (as the performance had no storyline). Early in the year, Da'uud evidenced understanding of theatre conventions, telling a giggling student, for instance, that she broke character onstage or showing other students how they might stagefight

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of me trying to write as much as possible and also a deliberate attempt to disguise what I was writing. Da'uud was definitely not the only student intrigued by what I was writing.) He also said, "your finger is going to fall off," I think because I was writing quickly.

[11] See the Appendix for the conflict dialogue form.

[12] In her preface to telling "Cinderella," Miss Adrienne asked if any students had stepparents or stepsiblings and if they felt they were treated differently. Da'uud was among the many students who responded affirmatively, saying, "my stepbrother kicks my butt but my stepdad doesn't do anything." He mentioned his family only on one other occasion, saying that his parents required him to wash his plate after eating. He did not share a family tale, nor did five other Somali students. All of the four stories that Da'uud wrote in his notebook throughout the year were about family, though, with three having a "parent" as a main character and another his cousin.

safely and effectively.

The Flyers[13]

Da'uud's acting group, which included two of the most vocal students in the classroom as well as two of the quietest (for instance, An, a student so terrified of speaking in front of anyone that she rarely spoke in the classroom, either academically or socially), struggled from the first week. In fact, they named themselves "the Flyers," because their first task (which was to provide a tableau representing their group) was done "on the fly." As the year progressed, they continued this pattern, frequently struggling and performing their scenes—according to their own pronouncements—"on the fly." One student in particular, Mariah, nearly always tried to direct their plays, not always with success. (One week, when they were having a lot of trouble, she said to me, "you be the boss. Tell us what to do.") Not infrequently, Miss Adrienne, Mrs. Riggs, or I had to give them time limits for wrapping up their scene, as it became apparent that their performance could go on indefinitely. One reason might be what Joel once said: "we didn't actually do [onstage] any of what we practiced. I don't know why; it just happens." Da'uud usually played a minor character in the Flyers' performances, although he was sometimes a main character with few lines. His role usually seemed to be somewhat peripheral, with Mariah or Joel frequently taking center stage.

Their scenes were sometimes brilliant retellings, often a little muddled, and

[13] This section focuses specifically on Da'uud, but as this is a theatre class, where work is collaborative and collective, it is also important to look at this acting group and how Da'uud participated within it. The other members of the Flyers were An (an extraordinarily shy girl), Dara, Joel, Karim, and Mariah. They had a seventh member who was transferred to another class early in the year where he could receive more support as an English Learner.

occasionally incomprehensible (with the brilliance and incomprehensibility sometimes going hand-in-hand). Of all the acting groups, the Flyers played the most with stories; the stories they heard and re-told in performance were alive. Frequently, they recast characters from the stories they were performing or added characters from other genres. In multiple tellings, they incorporated the story they were tasked with performing into another genre, evidencing their knowledge of format, character, and imagination. For instance, the second week, one group member was an onstage director who sat in a chair at the back of the stage, making comments (redirecting) such as "cut, cut, cut! Put more feeling into it!"[14] This same story also incorporated a trope from another common story, "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," by having a wedding ring that was first too small, then too big, then "perfect." Another time, they transformed Cinderella into "A Very Cinder Musical," performing various dance styles to popular songs, such as a choreographed dance to a Justin Bieber song.

Humor[15] was nearly always involved in the Flyers' performances, even when the original story itself had no humor in it. For instance, in acting out a story about a cruel husband who asked his wife to eat human body parts, Mariah's character exclaimed, "Is this real? Ewww. It's salty. So many carbs!" Through humor and other techniques, they frequently involved the audience in their performances, on occasion even inviting an

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[14] It was not uncommon for students to help each other onstage by reminding each other to speak louder, not to turn backs to the audience, et cetera. As the year progressed, Miss Adrienne challenged the students to find ways to incorporate such stage directions into the plays themselves, in other words, doing so while remaining in character. The Flyers, though, incorporated this technique long before Miss Adrienne used it.

[15] For more on humor, see Chapter 7.

audience member on stage or having the audience vote.

The Flyers also played with power and perspective in their retellings. For instance, in their first performance, the first week, they flipped power dynamics in a countertale based on "Little Red Riding Hood," calling a wolf a stalker and recasting the parents as dumb and their children as smart. Another day, because Joel had asked why the wolf was always the bad guy in stories, Miss Adrienne asked them to retell their performance of "The Three Little Pigs" from the wolf's perspective. Again, the Flyers transformed the story in multiple ways.

Stating that their performance would mix "hard law with a TV show," Mariah took center stage, sitting on a stool, and calling herself Judge Judy.[16] *The question was whether Joel (whom we later learned was a wolf) killed the pigs and ate them or whether the pig (Dara) killed her own siblings and brought them to the wolf to eat. Da'uud was Joel's lawyer; upon questioning, Joel insisted, "I never hunted any pigs! I'm nice. They invited me to their house for dinner—it was a roast and I brought a fruity salad." Dara said that she was a vegetarian, not a fruititarian. Judge Judy commented, "there's a hole in her story!" Dara asked, "why would I kill my own siblings and bring them to you to eat?" Karim, Dara's lawyer, asked to see Joel's eyes, to see if he was lying. When Joel open his eyes really wide, the audience responded with laughter. Then An appeared as a witness, saying, "I was there. I say she killed them." She dramatically gestured a throat*

[16] In a performance after winter break, the Flyers again transformed their story into the format of a popular television show, this one a talk show "telling a sad story that will get me [the TV star] good views." This was one of the stories that was a little difficult to understand, with a student sitting next to me asking at one point, "Is this a story?" Another performance was staged as Zeus's reality TV show.

cutting. The audience roared. An slid to the floor and covered her face with her hands, where she stayed for the rest of the play (despite encouragement from the audience). Judge Judy said that there was a hurricane, not huffing and puffing, and was Dara really a vegetarian? The characters called out, "Rewind!" and showed Dara calling herself a fruititarian, proving herself a liar and prompting Judge Judy to send her to a mental hospital, while she protested her innocence and Joel went to the judge for a pay-off.

Their story, told from the perspective of the wolf (Joel), led the audience to believe that one of the pigs (Dara) had betrayed the others, but it was really part of an elaborate plot in which the wolf framed the pig while protesting his innocence and getting others to lie for him. Their performance mixed genres and evidenced power in many forms. In debriefing this performance, the class talked about how the judge had the most power, sitting center stage and on a higher chair. One student commented on how they portrayed the wolves as a pack—they stuck together. Miss Adrienne closed the comments by saying, "I really applaud this kind of thinking in your performance. You've shown us you're good at acting on the fly, but now also that you can make a plan and execute—ha![17]—it."

The following week, Miss Adrienne introduced the chair game[18] for the first time in Mrs. Riggs's classroom, asking the Flyers to make up a story that started like this: "Heidi and Janet are on the volleyball team. Janet is the captain because she is the best. One day, Heidi tries to get Janet to skip practice so they can go to the mall. So. . ."

[17] A reference to An's dramatic "death." Both Miss Adrienne and the members of the class were very reaffirming of An's attempts to participate in the work of the class, praising her for her bravery.

[18] For an explanation of the chair game, see Chapter 4.

Da'uud was first, and he sent the two girls to the mall where they saw a giant statue. Others added going to a store, buying a shirt and a special kind of cookie, and then seeing their coach who told them that practice had been canceled because the lights had gone out. The Flyers' task was then to perform this story after rehearsing. They did so brilliantly, rewriting their own story in a way that was so sophisticated that Miss Adrienne and Mrs. Riggs both had to check to make sure they understood what was going on: again, the Flyers created a story within a story, which was based on their own original story created in the chair game. This story again portrayed family dynamics.

From offstage, Mariah[19] (Mom) called out, "Do you want some tuna fish sandwiches while you play that Clue Mall game?" Sitting in two chairs, stage right, Joel and Karim (kids) exclaimed: "No, we don't want tuna fish!"

[Blackout. The actors announced this, since it wasn't possible to darken the room.]

Mariah, Da'uud, and Dara (students) were onstage, talking about skipping volleyball practice. With An as the coach, they did volleyball drills.[20] Mariah (student) said worriedly, "Uh, this is weird. There's nobody here. Oh—cute shirt!"[21]

[Blackout.]

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[19] Mariah played two parts in this play: the mother of the two kids playing the board game and one of the students at the mall.

[20] Mariah and Dara dragged An onstage, since she didn't want to go. It was unclear here whether they were supposed to be at the mall and doing volleyball drills there, or if this got a little muddled in the attempts to get An onstage. Clearly they were at the mall, based on Mariah's reference to it being weird and to a cute shirt (the inference being that she saw it in a store).

[21] This is an example of a frequent aside made by members of this group, particularly Mariah and Joel, that were quite humorous and sometimes made sense. Her delivery here portrayed her as someone easily distracted from her worry by seeing a shirt that she liked. It was never clear to me whether these moments of humor were planned or "on the fly."

An was lying on the floor, prompting one of the students to cry out, "Oh! Coach is dead!"

[Blackout.]

Mariah (mom), from offstage, said to her children, "I'm making those tuna fish sandwiches? Do you want pickles? Mayo?" Exasperatedly, Joel and Karim (kids) replied, "No tuna fish!" as they moved pieces on their game board. Mariah (mom), from offstage, then asked, "Do you want raisin or chocolate chip cookie?" Joel responded, "Chocolate chip!" while Karim said, "Raisin!" Joel then declared to Karim: "The murder weapon was the statue of Karim!"

[Blackout.]

Back at the mall, Da'uud (as a student named Rocky) was lying on the floor, also dead. Looking at each other and pointing, Mariah (student) accused Dara by declaring, "It was you!" while Dara accused Mariah, "It was you!" Changing her mind, Mariah declared, "It was the statue!" and Dara countered, "It was your mom!"

Mariah (as the mom) said, "Oh, these cookies are so good. Are we supposed to—oh! She moved! She's a Zombie." As Mariah the mom talked, An had moved. Mariah the student moved An's arm, which flopped back on the floor. Da'uud hit Mariah (student) and Dara.

[Blackout.]

Joel, attempting to solve the game, said, "It was Rocky. In the Hollister Store with Dara." From offstage, Mariah (mom) countered with the actual solution: "I've been

listening, in secret passageways. It was in the Aeropostale store, with a hanger.[22] *And it was just Rocky. He was just pretending to be dead. Do you want more tuna fish?"*

Joel and Karim emphatically responded, No!"

Miss Adrienne's immediate response was, "whoa! You figured that out in ten minutes?" Yes, said Dara, "it was our story so we decided to rewrite it again." Because most of the people in the room had not understood, Joel explained that the figures who appeared after the blackouts were the Clue pieces that he and Karim were moving around as their mother prepared lunch. Da'uud (aka Rocky) had faked his death to cover up the fact that he was the murderer.

Da'uud and/in the Process of Creating "The Servant"

In November, the students' first work with "The Servant" (after hearing the story and asking questions) was to act out portions of it. As the students were dissatisfied with the ending of the story, Miss Adrienne tasked the Flyers with creating a new ending for the story, to figure out what action the children would take. After rehearsing in the hall,[23]

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[22] Part of the reason that this story confused most of the people in the room—students and teachers—was because of its sophisticated use of the rules and set-up of the board game Clue. You had to know that they were using stores (Hollister, Aeropostale) in the Mall of America (a not uncommon reference in the class throughout the year) instead of the rooms of a house in the board game (which were, like in the game, connected by secret passageways) and that the point of the game is to discover who the murderer was, in what room, and with what weapon. And you had to be able to follow three separate storylines: how the players (Karim and Joel) were moving their pieces (e.g., the statue at the mall that Da'uud contributed to the chair game became a possible murder weapon in their performance), that the other actors were pieces of the board game situated in a mall, and the interaction between mom and kids about tuna fish sandwiches. This was a major and extremely sophisticated transformation of their original story about skipping volleyball practice to go to the mall, a story that they had composed together just prior to rehearsal. If the goal of the Bridges program is to transform stories, these students were wildly successful, evidencing sophisticated understandings of genres, of theatre conventions, and of bringing knowledges from their own lives into the classroom.

[23] As noted in Chapter 4, the rehearsal portion is the most hands-off for the adults in the room. I often went into the hall with the students (mostly to remind them to keep noise levels down), but on this day, I stayed in the classroom. I do not know what happened in the hallway.

Da'uud's group returned to the classroom and took their seats in the audience. When it was the Flyers' turn, Da'uud stood way off to the side as the other group members performed a dance-off to determine what action the children would take. This "dance off" involved a judge, the audience, and two sets of competing students; it did not seem to involve characters from the story or provide an ending to the story. Da'uud did not participate.[24]

Yet the next week, when Miss Adrienne asked them what the story of "The Servant," was about, Da'uud gave the first answer: "a magician and a servant."[25]

"Okay, yes, but what about them?" Miss Adrienne prompted.

"Never give up your part," responded Da'uud.[26]

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[24] Da'uud was frequently a peripheral member of the Flyers (perhaps due to a few dominant personalities), but rarely did he not participate. This is the only time I noted that he did not participate in a performance, although he did not always participate in theatre games (such as sound and motion warm-up games). A possible interpretation: Da'uud might have been refusing to engage in a fight over who got to author the story of this performance. In drama, content is of necessity shared, which may lead to a contest over whose idea will "win" and make it onstage. In these power conflicts, sometimes one sensible person steps out of the disagreement. Da'uud may have chosen to do so when conflicts of ownership over the performance emerged. A second possible interpretation revolves around the "on the fly" nature of this group's performances: Da'uud may have exempted himself from this scene because he —and the others—had no idea what they would do once they got onstage. One of the vocal students set up the dance-off; the other students may have followed this lead. The scene she established only needed three people (judge, two competitors); two of the girls and two of the boys formed the competing teams. They could perform this skit without Da'uud. Of course, one of the challenges for acting groups is to figure out ways to include all group members. A third possible interpretation: From several sentences into their scene, the Flyers had the audience involved. Within seconds of starting the dance-off, probably 30 people (most of the classroom) began sharing in a beautiful, cathartic moment of engagement, laughter, and fun. Perhaps Da'uud wanted to also be involved. But it is also hard for 30 to 40 people to collaborate. Here, we may have lost sight of the thing we/the students were trying to do (come up with an alternative ending), instead participating in enjoying moments of pushing against school as not-fun, not relevant, et cetera. I could write many other interpretations. A thread that seems to run through them is that theatre is about trying to learn how to be together. Whether it was through his choice, his group's choice, or the classroom's choice, Da'uud did not have a space to do so in this instance.

[25] This is an example of how Da'uud surprised me, as he often did not appear to be paying attention when stories were told, which would have led me to believe that he would not be eager the next week to talk about the story.

[26] Is Da'uud's answer also a response to his non-participation in the scene the week before? Had there been

The discussion centered around interrogating the story and brainstorming scenes that might make up pieces of the students' version of the story. On this day, Da'uud contributed frequently to the large group, such as opining that television and computers prevent adults from spending time with their children. The Flyers were thus asked to improvise a scene to demonstrate how this happens.

Two adults, Karim and Joel—holding a "remote control"[27]*—sat in chairs, facing a "television" tuned to the news. Mariah and Da'uud were reporters on separate channels. Two children, An and Dara, came into the room.*

An: "Can I have some snacks?"

Click. Joel changed the channel, never taking his eyes off the television: "The garbage can is over there."

From Mariah, television reporter: "We have some really bad weather moving in. You might want to stay indoors!"

An and Dara: "We're bored!"

Click. Joel changed the channel, never taking his eyes off the television: "Go play in the streets!"

From Da'uud, television reporter: "Breaking news. We have a mass murderer on the loose."

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no part in the scene that was his? Or had the scene as they constructed it "on the fly" asked him to take a part that he could not make his own?

[27] Mrs. Riggs had a fairly strict "no props" rule in Bridges, with the exceptions being chairs to sit in (and occasionally stand on) and items of clothing worn as clothing. I thus indicated what would be props in quotation marks, as there weren't actually physical objects standing in for them. I think that this rule may have been an attempt to lessen the chaos in the room. Additionally, the physical arrangement of her classroom was important to Mrs. Riggs.

Joel, to his children: "I said, go play in the streets!"

Dara and An: "We got F's in math; can we get a tutor?"

Joel: "Good job. Keep it up."

Da'uud: "There is a dead body."

An: "Can we have some dinner?"

Click. Joel changed the channel, never taking his eyes off the television: "Go to a friend's house!"

From Mariah, television reporter: "There are monsters under the bed."

Dara: "Dad, there are monsters under the bed!"

Click—Joel's eyes were still fixated on the television as he shook the remote.

Joel: "Hey! The remote isn't working!"

An: "Can we go ice skating?"

Joel: "No! Hey, the remote is broken!"

An: "You're weird!"[28]

Unlike in the first improvisation (the dance-off) the Flyers created in the classroom process of retelling "The Servant," Da'uud actively participated[29] in a carefully crafted scene in which the actors built off each other, parodying a parent too concerned

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[28] While An's response here may seem to be somewhat non sequitur, it was a major success for her, as she was very active in this scene, including making up her own lines, seemingly without prompting.

[29] Da'uud played a reporter in this scene, contributing two lines, both revolving around violence. Da'uud frequently pushed boundaries of what was considered appropriate for the classroom. For instance, I heard the classroom teacher tell him on multiple occasions that students were to speak in English in the classroom (when he was speaking in Somali). Here, though, Da'uud spoke about violence in the news in ways similar to local news stations; his lines also set up some of the extreme tensions and contradictions in the adults' relationship with the children. For more on the students' conflictual relationship with violence, see Chapter 7.

with the television to pay attention to his children's persons and well-being. The Flyers got positive feedback from their audience.

For the next scene, improvised in groups other than their regular acting groups, each new group was tasked with improvising a scene about making pizza[30] (sauce, cheese, dough, or putting it together) and then a commercial for the pizza shop. Da'uud insisted that his group's idea had come from his earlier, well-received improvisational impression of a grandfather,[31] utilized now to give personal familial testimonies for a "Pizza Tack Attack" commercial. However, the audience said that this commercial was confusing; it seemed reporters were interviewing people, but whom (grandfathers?) and about what was never clear.

At the next session, the students spent much of their time working on their improvised scenes. Da'uud's group—formed the previous week—had great difficulty trying to figure out how to demonstrate that assembling the pizzas was hard work. Since humor was such a frequent part of this class, the students convinced Da'uud that it would be hilarious to end their short scene[32] with him saying, "I miss my mommy!" He said it. The audience suggested that he run toward his (imaginary) mother, arms outstretched, as he said the line. Several students demonstrated what they meant.[33]

The next week, the assembly scene was again having difficulty so I went into the

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[30] As detailed in Chapter 7, the logging work of Zur Mühlen's original story became pizza-making in Mrs. Riggs's classroom.

[31] See above, page 178.

[32] We had determined that each scene needed to end with a short, memorable line that cued the next group.

[33] Zur Mühlen's story draws sharp distinctions between the children and the old people of the town. The students' version does not. Perhaps this line harkens back to this distinction in the original story, as it is one of the only instances in which children figure.

hall with them to try to figure it out. One group member, Rona, was very assertive—she wanted to direct everything. Two others, including Da'uud, hardly participated, Da'uud instead spending his time pushing a brick (likely a door stop) around the hall.

"I don't want to do the mommy line," he said. "How about if I call for an ambulance?"

"No, we have to do the mommy line!" retorted Rona.

Eventually, Rona assigned Sabina to say the mommy line.

We went back into the classroom.

Miss Adrienne again asked Da'uud to say the mommy line, stating that it would be really funny. Da'uud negotiated, "I'll try it if I don't have to run." Miss Adrienne agreed. Da'uud tried it: "Finally, my mommy came."

"No," he immediately followed up, "I hate it."[34]

"Who thinks Da'uud should say this line?" Miss Adrienne asked the class.[35]

Most hands went up.

Da'uud shook his head no.

"What if all four of them say it together?" another student suggested.[36]

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[34] I remember feeling very proud of Da'uud in this moment, for negotiating and then trying something he did not feel comfortable with. Bridges is about taking risks, and he did so in this moment, in front of the whole class. However, maybe this is also the place of conflict.

[35] It was quite a funny line, even with Da'uud's half-hearted delivery. As teachers, however, sometimes we ask a student to take a risk or call out a student in a way that may be counter-productive or even violent. In the moment, I certainly understood why Miss Adrienne asked the class this question; I have done similar things myself. She was attempting to help Da'uud understand how this line could contribute to the play and how his classmates desired his participation. I think, however, that it backfired here.

[36] This suggestion demonstrates the beauty of the openness of this process and the student-directed nature of the work. The student was attempting group collaboration that would preserve the humor and did not single out Da'uud in a way he obviously felt uncomfortable with.

They retook the scene, with Da'uud stating, “Call an ambulance because my back is hurting so bad”[37] before all the students together said, “I miss my mommy” and cried.

After class, I talked with Mrs. Riggs and Miss Adrienne about how the play was going—and how to engage Da'uud (as well as other students who were either struggling or doing really well). In comments written on circulating suggestion papers, Da'uud's classmates shared similar concerns:

“I think when Da'uud say I finally get to see my mommy He need to really do his part because he is not showing more eamotion”

and

“I think It would be really funny if the part where Da'uud runs in slow motion to his mommy if he dose not want to do it we should maybe have a girl run (in slow motion) and trip along the way but get back up with more staminaue than before.”[38]

During the next rehearsal, in the school's theatre, when Da'uud and the rest of his group members very quietly delivered their lines onstage, Miss Adrienne asked him encouragingly, “Da'uud, you are the loudest of that bunch. Why not let it out?”[39]

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[37] Da'uud again held to his idea for the story. In the jointly authored text of their performance, the students, Da'uud included, were making choices that navigated the realities of the classroom and their lives. Dyson (1993) wrote that composing written and oral texts “is a distinctly sociocultural process that involves making decisions, conscious or otherwise, about how one figures into the social world at any one point in time” (p. 7).

[38] These were two of the eight written suggestions that day, typed here as they were written. From these two comments, it seems evident that other students wanted Da'uud to participate and thought his contributions, if he was fully present when he delivered them (as when he was as the reporter in the improvised scene about parental absence), would enhance the scene. At some point, Da'uud wrote in his notebook, “we should do were the finshed with a curmershell.” I don't know if this was his suggested ending for the play (which they had been asked to brainstorm as homework, but not in their notebook) or just something he was thinking about during the weeks of rehearsal.

[39] I don't know that Da'uud was the loudest in his pizza-making group; Rona was also very vocal. Da'uud's participation seemed much more spotty. Again, here, though, Miss Adrienne was attempting to encourage a student she knew could participate at a different level than he was.

The next time his group got onstage, they again had trouble. Sabina had to be prompted to say her line to kick off the scene. This time, Da'uud closed the scene by saying, “my legs hurt” before everyone chimed in with, “I miss my mommy” to close the scene.

And yet, while Da'uud seemed reluctant to participate, his facial expressions were of fright in later scenes with the owners of the factory—Miss Adrienne, in fact, publicly complimented him on his nice expression.

The day before the play, we again rehearsed in the theatre. Da'uud spent much of his time goofing off with another student.[40] At some point, Da'uud left the stage and laid down on the theatre steps, close to where I was sitting. When I asked him why he wasn't in the scene, he said, “it's too boring now.” He refused to say anything more.[41] Mrs. Riggs eventually brought him out of the theatre.[42] He didn't return; the next day, another student[43] stepped in[44] for Da'uud—even saying the “I want my mommy” line. He got a big laugh.

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[40] This student was on the periphery of the group of boys who had been named as potential troublemakers.

[41] I really wondered what Da'uud meant by calling it boring. Was this a response to the fact that at this point, Miss Adrienne was attempting to guide the students into finalizing their scenes so that they could be performed the next day? Was he not happy with the part he had been asked to take? Or with his group—and his somewhat contentious history with Rona?

[42] I saw Mrs. Riggs take Da'uud out of the theatre, but I did not ask where they were going. (After I questioned him, I did not do anything else. He was not disrupting the scene, and there were more than 30 other students on the stage.) I noticed that the next day, the day of the performance, he was not in the theatre. I assume he was in the office of the behavior specialist, but I do not know for certain.

[43] Also a Black male (but African-American), this student had a very conflicted relationship with this classroom as well; he was, in fact, one of the four students most frequently kicked out of the classroom or told to take a break. He pushed boundaries frequently.

[44] Miss Adrienne emphasized frequently that anyone had to be ready to step in for anyone else—especially in the cold and flu season. Stage fright also affects many students when actually in the theatre with an audience, another reason this is important. At nearly every Bridges performance I have seen (which is dozens), someone has stepped in for another actor.

I didn't see Da'uud again until after winter break.

After Winter Break

Da'uud did not get kicked out of the classroom after winter break. Three weeks after the break, he played the main character in the Flyers' play, with more lines and action then he had yet had in any play, evidencing a solid knowledge of the story but also adapting it. But his relationship with the Bridges program and the classroom continued to be troubled. The following week, Mrs. Riggs asked Da'uud to sit at the table next to her. Rather than sending him out of the room, she wrote him a note that asked, "Do you want to be here?" He wrote back, "yes." This began a written conversation about what Da'uud needed to do to stay in the Bridges classroom.[45]

In March, the Flyers performed a Fantastic Binominal. They chose a story about a student getting detention for chewing gum.[46] Part of the performance involved Da'uud as a creature standing at Joel's shoulder, trying to talk him into chewing gum, while Karim stood at the other shoulder, trying to talk him out of it.

Karim: "Don't."

Da'uud: "It's cool."

Karim: "I'm the good one here."

Da'uud: "Shut up, white guy."[47]

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[45] For the rest of the year, it seemed that Da'uud often tried to balance pushing boundaries with staying out of trouble. He did almost no writing, though.

[46] During the year, several of the most brilliant performances, with the most committed acting, involved retellings of school stories in which students got in trouble for breaking the school rules.

[47] This was the only time that I heard Da'uud specifically mention race—particularly interesting here since it was directed at another Somali boy, but one who was playing the "good guy" trying to talk Joel out of doing something that was banned at school.

Miss Adrienne chose this section for a retake,[48] after a student commented that he liked how Karim and Da'uud were telling Joel to do things. Miss Adrienne asked them each to think of three specific things to say to Joel about gum. While Karim's lines became much more specific, Da'uud had only one specific reason not directly countering Karim's thinking:

Da'uud: "Chew gum!"

Karim: "You'll get cavities! Don't!"

Da'uud: "But it tastes good!"

Karim: "You'll get detention!"

Da'uud: "No, you won't!"

Karim: "Your teeth are going to go black."

Da'uud: "They're not going to."

Joel looked confusedly back and forth between the two of them.[49]

Unlike the Peace Play, Da'uud was present for the class's final performance in the May "Crossing Bridges Festival" at the Children's Theatre Company. Toward the end of the year, as it became clear that the Somali boys in the classroom would be the entertainers on the ship in their play and they thus needed to come up with a song to perform, it was Da'uud who asked, "does it have to be clean?" Miss Adrienne guided them toward a choice. The day of the performance at CTC, Miss Adrienne was not sure if

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[48] For a description of "retake," see Chapter 4.

[49] In this scene, as in so many others, Da'uud pushed boundaries as he seemed to be trying to decide between forces urging him to break the rules and forces inviting him to participate in class-sanctioned ways.

Da'uud would be there, but he was and played two parts (both non-speaking). As an entertainer on the ship, he sang and danced—and was the most in character of any of the entertainers. He also was in charge of an important, moving prop (waves to show the storm that would take the ship down); while a little late getting in place, they were there for the most important parts. He thus successfully contributed to the class's performance. And yet, as the other classes performed, I had to sit between him and another student as they kept talking and looking around the theatre rather than watching the plays.

Contexts, Part 2

"There is a war between stories. They contend for, tug at our minds"

(Delgado, 1989, p. 2418).

Countertales in Bridges; Da'uud as a Neighbor Story

In Bridges, stories are paired (ideally, actually, three stories—the third being the chair game, a story co-authored by students). The first is often canonical, important because these stories are all around us, from commercials to movies to storybooks to how we narrate our own stories and lives. The second is a different telling of the tale: from a different culture, author, or time period. Its themes may be similar or counter to the first —for instance, challenging gender roles. This tale is frequently called a "countertale." Overall, the goal of telling these stories is to expose and challenge injustice and to promote social justice. This necessitates examining how power plays out in stories, asking questions such as who benefits or whose voices are heard and whose are missing in a story.

In Bridges, there are challenges to these tellings and retellings. As Delgado (1993) wrote, counterstories "are always interpreted and judged in terms of the old. One that differs too drastically from the standard account will strike the listener as extreme, false, or unworthy of belief" (p. 667). In Bridges, this happened even with canonical tales, as over and over, students charged that the oral stories we told were not "the real story" (which usually meant the Disney version). Canonical tales, then, in these students' lives, are most frequently those told through corporate movies; even the work of telling canonical tales—with all their oppressive gender norms, stereotypes, et cetera—is interpreted in terms of what the students know to be "how the story goes."

And at another level, this Bridges classroom is retelling a story of school. School, according to the canonical story, is not a place for fun or collaborative learning. Thus, the Bridges program is itself a counterstory, for it counters a majoritarian story about urban public schooling and about literacy; lifting up the successes of these students can serve to "jar, mock, or displace a tenet of the majoritarian faith" (Delgado, 1993, p. 670), challenging the dominant story about what teaching and learning are like in these schools. In Bridges, students who struggle with passing standardized tests reinterpret, in class sessions spread out over several weeks, an orally told story and transform it into a play with room for all students to participate. Student-authored theatre reallocates power both in the classroom and regarding received wisdom about may author stories. On an individual level, a student who is too shy to speak plays the role of a volleyball coach in a classroom performance. A student who has been labeled a troublemaker and frequently

sent out of the classroom steps in for another student so that their school performance makes sense. Every week, at least one student entered the classroom at a fever pitch, excited about the acting or the stories or the writing they would do that day, whether it was Korinna asking when we were going to tell Greek mythology or Layla wanting to know what acting they would be doing or Joel and a group of boys negotiating to include slapstick in performances. In Bridges, students—and their teachers—laugh in the classroom. And dance. And write.

"Never give up your part."

Da'uud's story above follows the same events and attempts to tell another side—piece or thread—of the story of a successful performance. Following Solórzano and Yosso (2002), Da'uud provides a counterstory, as tracing him centers race and addresses intersectionality, challenges dominant ideologies around schooling, and focuses on Da'uud's experiential knowledge. Further, I tell his stories out of my commitment to social justice. Spending time with Da'uud (both in the classroom and in this writing) has quickened and engaged my conscience (Delgado, 1989). But perhaps this tracing of Da'uud is not a counterstory. I don't know that telling Da'uud's stories helps with healing, counters loneliness, or makes it easier to survive a Bridges classroom; while this telling challenges some perceived wisdoms, I don't know if it helps build community or teaches about constructing a new world. Rather than a counterstory, maybe my tracing of Da'uud is better termed a side-by-side story, a neighbor story.[50]

[50] With so much separating me from Da'uud and this writing being my theorization, I am also prompted to ask: how important is it who tells the counterstory?

Then again, Da'uud's stories may be a counterstory to (the counterstory of) Bridges itself, as they in some ways challenge dominant ideologies of the program. The "shared reality . . . seen as natural" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2412) is that students want to be in Bridges, that it is fun—not that it is "too boring now." Telling Da'uud's stories leads me to ask whether in teaching or writing I or the Bridges program have normalized oppressions or hierarchies. For instance, what parts—identities—might Bridges be asking students to give up? Certainly, Bridges, like all curriculum, privileges certain forms of knowledge, learning, and values. When Da'uud implicitly and explicitly—"*what I wanted to ask is that what the heck is greek mytholegy"*—questioned such privileging, he did not receive answers that worked for him. It seems that for Da'uud, Bridges was not a safe, successful space to tell and revise his or others' stories or to take on different identities in performance. Da'uud's stories thus challenge both the personal and institutional story of Bridges.

This examination forces me to ask if Da'uud is dealt with in Bridges in the ways that Bridges is dealt with in school. To many people, Bridges is of questionable value: What is the correlation with test scores? Why do the students have to be so noisy? Their work in the hallway is interrupting my students. Maybe we should just kick it out. Maybe we should just kick Da'uud out. Maybe, instead, we should ask: How do Da'uud's identities and his positioning at the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and social class influence both his participation and the telling of his stories? The meaning Da'uud took from the story of "The Servant" was that you should "never give up your

part"—don't allow others to entice you to go back on your word. Looking back, I see that at times Da'uud was being asked to do so.

Such questions—ones with no or possibly infinite answers—are, of course, bound up in my identity as the asker and answerer. In their response to Delgado's (1989) work on counterstorytelling, Daniel Farber and Suzanna Sherry (1993) argued that if scholars of color write in a different voice, it should be a common voice. But Delgado (1993) rebutted:

> Voice is a false issue. The best evidence of storytelling's usefulness lies in the stories themselves. One could argue as well that wolves do not howl, since some howl in a high key, others in a low one, and still others not at all, while some creatures that are not wolves howl as well. The point is not to impose some requirement (of dubious relevance) of uniqueness with respect to howling or legal storytelling, but to learn something about or from the behavior itself. (p. 667)

So what can we learn? The "key" in which I tell Da'uud's stories in this writing is certainly different from that of Da'uud's telling (either through his words or his actions). But I take permission both from Delgado and from students Joel and Pao, who asked, at different points during the school year, why wolves are always the bad guy in stories.

One way of telling the story above is that Da'uud, like the wolf, is the bad guy: the one who refused to participate. But what happens if we question how the wolf is positioned in the story?[51] What happens if we think about it from another perspective?

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[51] A number of children's books retell fairy tales, such as "The Three Little Pigs," from the wolf's or other perspectives. See, for instance, Scieszka and Smith (1989) or Trivizas and Oxenbury (1993).

What might we learn about Bridges curriculum and pedagogy? What might we—academics and teachers—learn about ourselves? What if reconsider what each student's "part" could look like? Perhaps this is the function of the writing—that examining Da'uud's story with some of the contexts surrounding it provides ideas for possibilities of changing a classroom story for future students like Da'uud. I turn now to some of these possibilities.

(Gendered) Identity

Telling Da'uud's stories—recognizing that Da'uud also stands in for all sorts of differences that exist in today's classrooms—necessitates focusing on both definitions of identity that Hall (1990) outlined. We cannot understand Da'uud without examining specifics of Somali, male cultural identity (particularly early adolescent identity) in the context of Minnesota and specifically, urban Minnesotan elementary schools in the second decade of the 21st century. Certain shared aspects of culture are important to recognize, especially as they differ from those of others in the school—particularly those with power and cultural capital. Again, as Hall (1990) wrote, "cultural identity is *something*—not a mere trick of the imagination. It has its histories—and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects" (p. 226, italics in original); these histories position us as we construct them "through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" (p. 226). We must also acknowledge that even examining these shared cultural codes and histories runs the risk of essentializing and making dangerous assumptions about identity. Da'uud's identity—as well as those of every other student in the classroom—is certainly a

"becoming," shaped by what happens in his life and in the classroom itself. Da'uud is both positioned by the other students and adults in the classroom (and the school) and positioning himself within the narratives of the classroom. In writing about Da'uud and in teaching in classrooms with Somali (male) students, I and other teachers and researchers must be careful both to recognize the uniqueness of Somali cultures in Minnesota and to avoid essentializing what are changing identities situated in very specific times and spaces. Immigrant youth are "multidimensional and ever-changing works in progress" (Bigelow, 2010, p. 148).

"I don't want to do the mommy line."

Some students in Mrs. Riggs's classroom had no trouble blurring gender identities or advocating for less oppressive gender roles. For instance, Chandra played what had been the son in "The Servant," changing the role into a daughter. Jacob played Cinderella in his acting group's retelling. The students' choice to perform the tall tale "Annie Christmas" at the Crossing Bridges Festival in May revolved around the girls' collective desire to portray "girl power," power that they used in the classroom to convince the boys to retell and publicly perform a story of a strong, empowered female character.

Gender, as well as age, seems to have something to do with Da'uud's clear desire, expressed in the hallway and in the classroom, not to say the line about wanting to see his mommy. Calling on his identity as a humorist and as a "tough guy," both the other students and the TA repeatedly prompted Da'uud to say this line anyway, stating it would be really funny to have him call out for his mommy. Multiple times, Da'uud offered

alternatives. He was not objecting to participating, to closing the scene with a memorable line, or to playing with humor. Da'uud's decision not to say this line may be because it conflicted too much with his understanding of what it means to be male. He may also have been rejecting how this line positioned him as a child. For instance, a previous day, when another male student did not want to participate in a theatre game, Da'uud called across the room to him: "Be a man!"[52] As when asking to call me "mister," Da'uud positioned men as tough, as knowing things—not with needing an adult female, particularly not a "mommy." Da'uud seemed unable to separate his conceptions of gendered, aged identity from gendered, aged identity as performed in a theatre character. There was too much distance—too much conflict—between his conceptions of gender and/or age and what this line asked of him.

In other words, identity—how we relate with the world and construct ourselves across time and space—was at stake for Da'uud. While we work to author our identities, we do so within spaces "where social languages meet, generically and accentually, semantically and indexically, freighted with the valences of power, position, and privilege" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 191). In this case, this difference, this positioning, whether related to gender, age (adult/child), or both, was not acceptable to Da'uud. His offering of alternatives demonstrates that his refusal was about this specific positioning, not a difficulty in taking on another identity through theatre; it was related not to

[52] In a review of literature, Amy Kyratzis (2004) noted that gender is a frequent concern of children's construction of peer cultures; adolescents, for instance, use speech events such as Da'uud used here to "do gender." Resisting adult cultures is also a concern. She wrote that "peer talk is an essential device for displaying identities and ideologies and for resisting them" (Kyratzis, 2004, p. 641).

participation in general, but to a specific kind of participation. When composing texts such as this theatre performance, the authors—students—move within the confines of sociocultural spaces and relationships, both of which foreground and background certain aspects of identities—or, as Dyson (1997) wrote, "our texts are formed at the intersection of a social relationship between ourselves as composers and our addressees and an ideological one between our own psyches (or inner meanings) and the words, the cultural signs, available to us" (p. 4). The cultural signs available—and more importantly, acceptable—to Da'uud were not those suggested by his classmates and teachers.

A challenge, then, that this reading of Da'uud's words and actions offers to the white, female teachers in this—and many other—elementary school in Minnesota is to consider different constructions of gender. This is, of course, complicated by what may be viewed as strict or oppressive gender norms. Some Somali male youth—particularly those for whom Muslim religious identity is very important—just a little older than these students, for example, may not touch or date female youth (and vice versa); this cultural norm was already evident in this classroom. As in all classrooms, students bring in cultural norms from their families and communities and attempt—or are forced—to reconcile them. In this case, had I (or another adult) recognized in the moment the gendered implications of what this line, this identity, was asking of Da'uud, how would I have challenged patriarchal gender assumptions while also respecting cultural and religious identities and traditions?

This concern extends beyond the classroom as well. In her research with

Minnesota Somali communities, Bigelow (2010) found that the greatest worry of respected Somali community and religious leaders about Somali teens moving to adulthood was identity—specifically, negotiating dilemmas or struggles between multiple cultures, religious beliefs, and locations. Somali youth resolve conflicts such as those between different ideas of gender in many ways; these ways may, of course, shift through time and space, as each of us have "multiple identities within the self that emerge through discourse and representation" (Bigelow, 2010, p. 8). In this instance, though, Da'uud had no space to explore this identity. He attempted to resolve the choice by offering alternatives that were rejected by his peers—and his teachers. While his eventual decision to opt out of the play entirely did not immediately follow this identity crisis, perhaps it is attributable to his unsuccessful—because unsupported—attempt to participate in a humorous way that was not so age- or gender-laden.

Race in Schools

Gender is, of course, tied up with race, particularly with (negative) perceptions of Black boys (e.g., Noguera, 2003). An alternative explanation for Da'uud's troubled interactions in the Bridges classroom relates to his positioning as a Black boy in an elementary school whose adults are mostly white and female. In this and other schools, Black boys are frequently placed in remedial and special education, labeled with behavior problems, and more frequently (and severely) punished. Take, for example, Miss Adrienne calling out Da'uud for not being loud onstage (leaving aside the question of whether he actually was the loudest of those students). Miss Adrienne's comment could

be read as negatively racially charged: Black boys are loud, so live this out. (Context is also important here: this class was constantly told to be quiet, to stop blurting.) Such negative adult perceptions of Black (male) students are well documented—and have academic consequences. Noguera (2003), for instance, wrote that while Black males may participate in behaviors that contribute to underachievement, such as acting out behaviorally and avoiding academic challenges (thus being "active agents in their own failure" [p. 437]), the adults around them are likely also to discourage them from challenging themselves. Further, Noguera (2003) cited literature suggesting that Black males may have "particularly fragile egos" that lead them to treat minor slights as affronts to their dignity and self-respect (p. 454). Was an accumulation of minor slights to his person and identity, such as this calling out, what eventually resulted in Da'uud's declaration of boredom?

On the other hand, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009/1994), among others, argued that African-Americans may be largely influenced by social support and encouragement from teachers. Miss Adrienne's comment, then, could be read as an attempt not to stereotype a Black male student, but to encourage him to be more involved.[53] Knowing Miss Adrienne, I believe this was what she was attempting. That does not mean, however, that Da'uud interpreted her comment in this way. Da'uud may have perceived that Miss Adrienne was criticizing rather than encouraging him, yet another negative interaction with a (white, female) teacher. This again points to the importance of understanding contexts and

[53] Scholarly texts that discuss structural and cultural contexts (and identity constructions, both self and other) and ways of empowering Black males in particular in schools include Harper and Davis (2012), Milner (2007), and Noguera (2003).

histories: “when educators are aware of the social and cultural pressures exerted on students, the need to choose between one's identity and academic success can be eliminated” (Noguera, 2003, p. 447).

“Shut up, white guy.”

A third read on Da'uud's racialized interactions relates to fears of aggression by Black male students and Da'uud's positioning and understanding of the role of “troublemaker.” Noguera (2003) wrote that in schools, adults, “especially women, may be less willing to assist a young male who appears angry or aggressive” (p. 455). “Appears” is important: Da'uud's request, for instance, to call me mister, could be interpreted as aggressive—as could his comments to female students, some of his writing, and many of the characters he brought to the stage. His positional identity (Holland et al., 1998), shaped in and through his interactions and the assumptions and positionings of teachers and classmates, was as a troublemaker or aggressor. His actions were thus likely to be read as such—and he was also likely to embody these readings and positionings by pushing boundaries. As Holland et al. (1998) wrote, the “formation of identity in this posture is a byproduct of doing, of imitation and correction, and is profoundly embodied” (p. 138). Da'uud most concretely embodied this in his scene with Karim, who played the archetypal good angel on the shoulder trying to talk a student into not getting in trouble. Calling Karim—also Somali—a “white guy” may refer to the stereotypical portrayal of this angel as dressed in white or may be a reference to “goody goody” norms that encourage going along with school rules, norms that are read as white. In this role,

Da'uud took on an opposing—opposite to what he labeled “white”—troublemaker/bad angel identity.

In many interactions, white adults certainly asked Da'uud to play by what are, after all, fairly arbitrary—albeit common—rules: don't blurt, don't chew gum, walk in straight lines. Da'uud sometimes, but not always, complied. This then raises an interesting question of what we do when our pedagogy fails: do we fall back on marginalizing youth, such as Da'uud, who are “usual suspects”? When Miss Adrienne asked him to be louder, she was attempting to provide supported spaces for student involvement in ways other than usual patterns, yet it did not work. Da'uud was not only not louder, he was not even present to say lines. His voice was entirely absent.

The pedagogy of Bridges attempts a “both/and” stance: invite students to participate and have them define their own participation. But this does not mean that an unlimited number of pathways are available, particularly within the rules and container of the classroom. An important question is thus: what does Bridges do to offer alternatives? Are the options limited to the metaphorical white and black—or what Da'uud seemed to be calling conformity (following the rules, being the “white guy”) or enjoyment (because the gum tastes good and is pleasurable)? Both my and Miss Adrienne's responses, then, would have benefited from thinking concretely about ways to empower Da'uud, in contrast with the ways he and other boys viewed as Black are frequently positioned.

(Somali) Language

Chris Weedon (1997) wrote that “language is the place where actual and possible

forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet [language] is also the place where our sense of ourselves, or subjectivity, is *constructed*" (p. 21, italics in original). More lyrically, Delpit (2002) wrote,

> Our language embraces us long before we are defined by any other medium of identity. In our mother's womb we hear and feel the sounds, the rhythms, the cadences of our "mother tongue". . . . Our home language is as viscerally tied to our beings as existence itself. . . . It is no wonder that our first language becomes intimately connected to our identity. (p. xix)

We construct ourselves with language.

To understand Da'uud, we must thus examine the place of Somali language within this classroom. Specifically, there was no place for Somali, as the classroom was "English only," a policy that obviously does not support additive multilingualism for Somali students. While Da'uud (and most of the Somali students in this classroom) were fluent in English, disallowing Somali cut off certain forms of knowledges: "Among the most radical, surest, and best hidden censorships are those which exclude certain individuals from communication" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 648). Forman (2001) argued that U.S. (and Canadian) public education systems "serve a particular function in the transformative ideological project that attempts to revise or realign Somali youth identities" (p. 34), namely, assimilation or acculturation. Disallowing Somali, in both formal and informal speech acts, means denying and denigrating Somali students'

identities and instead asking them to assimilate to English-only.

This has particular implications for a storytelling program like Bridges. Culturally, Somali is important in oral storytelling; further, orality is important in Somali culture:

> It seems that one of the most important cultural artifacts of Somalis in the Diaspora is their ongoing and exuberant sense of orality. Oral language in the form of stories, dramas, jokes, riddles, proverbs, and poems are centuries old and this love of the spoken word has transferred to English. (Bigelow, 2010, p. 35)

For instance, for two participants (sisters) in Bigelow's research, “storytelling was a literacy practice located in a particular time and place, which took on the added function of supporting a sense of family unity and safety in very dangerous times” (p. 38). In the family tales unit in the Bridges classroom, the students had to interview a family member and to share family stories with the whole class. Yet Da'uud—and most of the Somali students—did not do so. Was this because such stories would be in Somali, which was not allowed in the classroom? Was it because the forms of knowledges (e.g., the worksheet prompts for these stories) conflicted with their pre-existing relationships with the language of their families? On the other hand, I am not suggesting that allowing Somali would be a simple answer. The prior year, when students had shared in Somali, a female student reported that the males' use of Somali included cursing and other epithets that would certainly not be allowed in English, but would not have been detected without this female student, since none of the adults spoke Somali.

“I'll try it if I don't have to run.”

Language is intertwined with ways of being in the world—and also with our ideas about community. Reading Bigelow's (2010) book, thinking about the imagined community of Somali diaspora, and realizing that Somali students did not share their family tales led me to wonder if Da'uud's declaring the play “too boring now” responded to the imagined community being created in the students' version of “The Servant” and in the classroom. Was this community a majoritarian story? Did it not resonate with Da'uud's idea of community? Certainly, it did not allow the language of Da'uud's community. Pierre Bourdieu (1977) stated that language varies according to speakers and their habitus as well as production relations (the speaker's power positionings).

> What is said is a compromise (like dreams) between what would like to be said and what can be said, a compromise which obviously depends on what the speaker has to say, his [*sic*] capacity to produce language, assess the situation, and euphemize his expression, and on his position in the field in which he expresses himself. (p. 663)

Another read on Da'uud's stories, then, is that how he was positioned by language did not fit with either his cultural conceptions of language or of community. In producing “The Servant,” he wanted to participate in the community—to call for an ambulance—but not to position himself as a child in need of his mother. He wanted to try, but on his own terms, in his own language, both verbal and embodied.

Production (of Disengagement)

For Da'uud, the Bridges classroom produced disengagement (one-sentence stories

in his writing notebook, absence from the performance of "The Servant") as frequently as engagement. Another read on this has to do with cultural norms and values, which are produced (and reproduced) by Williams Elementary School and this specific classroom as well as by Bridges. Languages—the norms, values, skills, syntax—are different in the everyday English Language Arts (ELA) classroom and in the Bridges classroom; some students excel in Bridges even as they struggle in the ELA classroom because Bridges calls on different skills. Participating (or not) in the Bridges classroom means deciding (consciously or unconsciously) about whether participation is worth the "cost" to one's identity. In an article about language acquisition and social identity, Bonnie Norton Peirce (1995) stated that the effort spent acquiring cultural capital—in her research, acquiring another language, and here, acquiring the language and norms of the ELA or Bridges classroom—must be worth the student's investment, as learners have "a complex social identity and multiple desires" (pp. 17-18). On multiple occasions, Da'uud's contributions to the language and theatre production of the classroom were not engaged by his classmates and teachers.

"Call an ambulance because my back is hurting so bad."

For Da'uud, a theatre identity might have been the source of conflict in the production of "The Servant." Karen Wohlwend (2009) wrote that

> children learn to mediate the world by collaborating with peers or teachers who help them to use systems of signs and symbols to interpret and represent meanings that make sense within the cultural context. The meanings as well as the means for

> mediation are ultimately internalized. (p. 230)

Theatre is itself a form of language, and

> mediational means such as language attach meaning to action by connecting a mediated action—a specific physical act with material objects that results in a product such as an artifact or performance—to the universe of existing histories of social practices among a group of people. (Wohlwend, p. 230)

Signs and symbols are different on the theatre stage, but this is not readily apparent to all students. For Da'uud, there may have been, on those occasions he chose not to participate, too little space between performed (lived) and performance identities. He did not have help interpreting and representing meanings, placing theatre practices into context. The specific physical and linguistic acts in which he was asked to participate conflicted with his understandings of social and cultural practices—in other words, his identity. Contesting the childlike identity that his classmates and teacher were asking him to take on (were attempting to place on him), he very specifically told the teachers and his classmates a way out of his hurt: "call an ambulance because my back is hurting so bad." His call was not heard.

We must ask, then, what identities—what figured worlds[54]—the theatre curriculum of Bridges asks to participate in. More importantly, we must be careful that the fun and participatory work of such theatre classrooms does not take place on the backs of students who might already be marginalized in the classroom. For some

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[54] Chapter 4 in some ways describes the ideal figured world of a Bridges classroom: socially generated and culturally figured.

students, theatre offers a place to try out and take on different identities in school. If, as Bigelow (2011) argued, “youth identities and investment influence how they use language and for what purposes” (p. 17), what spaces might theatre open up? For instance, “How can learning climates and cultures make it possible to contest other-imposed identities in hallways, lunchrooms, on the bus, and in class?” (Bigelow, 2011, p. 40) As importantly, what might theatre close off—and what are the consequences when it does? If figured worlds are “formed and re-formed in relation to the everyday activities and events that ordain happenings within it” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 53), what happens when there are conflicts in this process, when the meanings or negotiations of thinking, speaking, and moving are not shared? For students such as Da'uud, there may be too much conflict between figured worlds—between that of the everyday ELA classroom and the Bridges classroom, between that of the school and the theatre. Due to cultural, social, and historical factors—including power, status, rank, and social position—these students may not be able to reconcile the figured world of Bridges—what is expected of them—with the figured world of the classroom.

Significant in this, I believe, is the role of imagination. Bigelow's (2011) questions might thus be reframed in a theatre context: “How is a person's potential for imagining shaped by contrary or more powerful imaginations? Is one's own imagining powerful enough? Does it matter whether identity is legitimized by others?” (pp. 27-28) As Bridges is theatre, there is certainly a changed aspect to how one performs (self) in the public sphere. Bigelow (2011) argued for the importance of collaborating with youth to create

spaces within schools for new identities, as “youth often create new ways of being through great acts of agency, as well as feelings of ambivalence in their efforts to adapt to their worlds in and out of school” (p. 28). How might Bridges teachers encourage this type of identity production, rather than the kind that leads students like Da'uud to shut down?

Contested Participation: “Does it Have to be Clean?”

“Our texts are formed at the intersection of a social relationship between ourselves as composers and our addressees and an ideological one between our own psyches (or inner meanings) and the words, the cultural signs, available to us” (Dyson, 1997, p. 4).

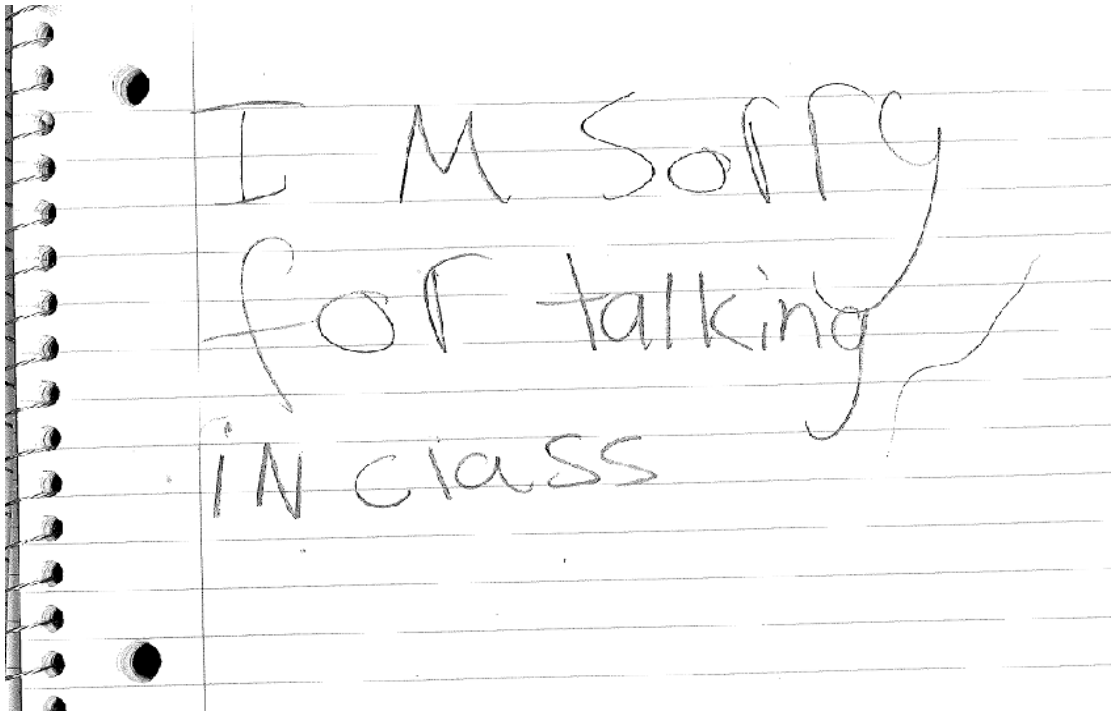

Figure 1. From Da'uud's writing notebook.

> Paul Willis (1977) asserted that the
>
> ethnographic account, for all its faults, records a crucial level of experience and through its very biases insists upon a level of human agency which is persistently overlooked or denied but which increases in importance all the time for other levels of the social whole. (p. 194)

My tracing of Da'uud's participation throughout the year, with particular emphasis on his work with the process of creating a student-authored retelling of "The Servant," offers a different view of the jointly produced meanings in this classroom. Multivoiced, as it is Da'uud's participation in my written words, it complicates a simple story of student success. It is not a clean story.

While an ethnographic record and subsequent interpretive writing allow access to understanding experience and agency that are likely not possible in the moments of classroom interactions, they too are incomplete. These retellings are partial as my fieldnotes capture only traces of Da'uud, leaving large gaps in his stories. And this tracing is further complicated by the stories (and histories)—social and cultural—of surrounding contexts. Further, each of the 40 people in Mrs. Riggs's classroom is enmeshed in contexts; each—and the over 100 more who saw the students perform "The Servant"—has their own story of "what happened" and its importance or relevance. Or maybe each also has multiple versions, as stories change over time and space. The acts of interpreting and writing also take place across time—here, over 18 months of conscious and unconscious reflection that have allowed me to apply and construct new learnings to and

with Da'uud's stories. Any of these multiple tellings both opens up and closes off meanings.

The interpretive retelling here has highlighted some tensions, conflicts, interactions, and relationships that would be hidden in a simple, singular story; approaching Da'uud's stories as counterstory highlights contexts of identity—including language, race, gender, religion, and nationality—and how they are produced in society and co-constructed in the classroom, sometimes pointing to academic success and social justice—as with the students' production of "The Servant"—and sometimes failing to do so, as with Da'uud's contested participation in the classroom and his absence from "The Servant."

Like "the lads" in Willis's (1977) study, Da'uud often used his agency to express opposition to the power, authority, and social organization of the classroom, opposition "lived out in countless small ways . . . instantly recognised by the teachers, and an almost ritualistic part of the daily fabric of life for the kids" (Willis, p. 12). Like the lads, "having a laff" and getting out of assignments or certain activities seemed to be high priorities for Da'uud. He challenged the boundaries of the classroom and his own participation, such as asking if the song they performed onstage had to be "clean." Yet unlike the lads, Da'uud at times surprised me and the other teachers with his engagement, his changes to storylines, and his group participation. With his acting group, Da'uud produced sophisticated retellings of stories that blurred genres, interrogated power, and engaged the audience. Importantly, a singular focus on his tensions—e.g., his

proclamation of boredom—with the classroom would miss these instances of brilliance and engagement.

Da'uud's contested participation and the contradictions inherent in any classroom are encapsulated in the above page copied from his notebook. I imagine this apology for talking in class was written at Mrs. Riggs's prompting, as she had asked other students to write an apology to Miss Adrienne (and to me) for blurting or side talk. Sometimes this talk was related to the critical literacy and creative drama work of the classroom—talking about a story, making connections, or figuring out a performance—and sometimes it was not. And yet, especially in a theatre classroom, a language arts classroom where the focus is on words, wouldn't we rather have students talking together than listen as teachers to proverbial crickets? What does it mean to ask a student to apologize for talking in school —especially during a program attempting to engage students individually and collectively in interrogating the world and acting out stories?

I write this knowing very well how chaotic and frustrating this classroom and these students could be at times; for as many days as I left the classroom marveling at the work of the students, I left exhausted, annoyed, and angry at the impossibility of meeting the needs of 40 sixth-graders. And I was only there one afternoon a week. Regardless of what offense he had committed, Da'uud's apology, while not entirely voluntary, was because he did want to participate in Bridges—as he had expressed in his written notes with Mrs. Riggs. Yet he could not always do so successfully—a failure which was hidden from the viewers of “The Servant” as Da'uud was not even in the theatre.

I started writing this neighbor story to suss out what Da'uud was saying in proclaiming “The Servant” “too boring now,” to think and write through the work that his words did and to proffer possible meanings that he made of the events, experiences, and interactions in this Bridges classroom. At a very basic level, his words resulted in his being removed from the classroom and the public performance, thus exempting him from a scenario that he had multiple times contested—to the point of exclaiming “I hate it.” In one telling of this tale, his proclamation is a way of speaking back to the dominant discourses of a school and classroom that positioned him—with evidence from his own interactions—as a troublemaker. Back to that one sentence story: Da'uud chose not to participate. But he was also pressured into this choice by social cues, power relations, and identity constructions that attempted to position him in ways with which he was not comfortable. He had, in fact, offered an alternative on at least three occasions, but the social pressures were too great. His attempts at collaboration were dismissed. Da'uud's identity—albeit a performed one—was being constructed through visual and spoken texts in ways that did not seem to fit with his identities, and he used his agency to exempt himself. Examining the contexts of various aspects of identity teases out multiple versions of Da'uud's stories and recognizes that his conflicts in the classroom likely stem from multiple sources and interactions.

This contextualization also reminds us that the Bridges—or any—program or curricular practice cannot meet the needs of every student all—or even most of—the time. Each student brings into the classroom a lifetime of experiences and contexts as

well as personal and cultural agencies; each of us swims in Rushdie's “Ocean of the Streams of Story” with its thousand, thousand, thousand and one tales—texts, countertexts, and contexts—weaving in and out of each other. As educational researchers in this “breathtaking complexity,” we must practice what Lather (2007) called a double(d) science—asking and answering and writing both/and and constantly questioning our practices, recognizing that our readings are both a critique and a complicity and that we gain insight from not knowing. In this chapter, I have attempted to weave my own creation—through descriptions from fieldnotes and theory—of Da'uud's story. Or, more accurately, Da'uud's stories. There are many ways of telling this neighbor story, messy ways that may conflict with each other or with my thinking as the writer or with Da'uud as the agentic social actor, sixth-grader, Muslim boy, et cetera. Although I have traced many possibilities, this tale has no resolution; it is, as the Ocean of the Streams of Story, not dead but alive. Along with Solórzano and Yosso (2001), I leave with the same question I started with: “No, what is Da'uud's story?”

Chapter 7

Success and Mess: "Perfectly Imperfect"

> *Of course that is not the whole story, but that is the way with stories; we make them what we will. It's a way of explaining the universe while leaving the universe unexplained, it's a way of keeping it all alive, not boxing it into time. Everyone who tells a story tells it differently, just to remind us that everybody sees it differently. Some people say there are true things to be found, some people say all kinds of things can be proved. I don't believe them. The only thing for certain is how complicated it all is, like a string full of knots. It's all there but hard to find the beginning and impossible to fathom the end. The best you can do is admire the cat's cradle, and maybe knot it up a bit more. History should be a hammock for swinging and a game for playing, the way cats play. Claw it, chew it, rearrange it at bedtime it's still a ball of string full of knots. Nobody should mind. (Winterson, 1985, pp. 93-94)*

What are the Children Saying?

Hermynia Zur Mühlen's story "The Servant" closes with the children saying to their elders, "your master will become our servant!" and the trees whispering their encouragement. The sixth-graders in Mrs. Riggs's classroom at Williams Elementary were completely unsatisfied with this ending, wanting to know what the children did next. So of course, Miss Adrienne asked what might happen.

"They told the history to the other workers."

"They told the rich guy that the magician made the machine and would come back and get revenge."

"I saw a Youtube video where people were like dominoes, and they just kept falling, but then one person stopped it by stepping out of line, so possibly the children could be like that."

Possibly the children could stop violence or oppression. Over and over in their improvisations, the students played with this possibility—for instance, going to their mother's boss to ask that he give her time off so she could spend time with them rather than being overworked all the time. The boss said no; the mother responded to their attempts to help by grounding them. Even in their imagined world, the students were living with the realistic constraints of being a young person.

At other times, students suggested storied revisions that simply re-enacted equally or alternatively oppressive stories. For instance, in Zur Mühlen's “The Servant,” the magician dies of old age after finishing the machine. But when an acting group performed the first part of this story following my oral re-telling, the students violently killed the magician after he had gifted them with the machine and then ran the son out of town. Their story continued with the oppression of the townspeople.

The open-endedness and student-centered nature of the Bridges process leaves room for such possibilities—which are also possible because adults (intentionally) are not usually privy to the work of the acting groups in rehearsal. In their work, the students continuously pushed boundaries, for instance making a scene about pizza “flavored like old people's feet and burnt poop.” They made choices for improvisation and performance that named what was important to them, including having fun in the classroom and speaking and acting about normally taboo topics.

When I began to write about the “The Servant,” I realized I could, as Winterson's narrator asserts, tell different stories. I found myself, like the students, stuck between

possibilities and realities, between championing their successes and mucking about in their messes.[1] The story and corresponding lesson plan are full of empowering ideas: how to critically question stories, how students can shape stories with their own words and actions, how we as humans can make choices for what really matters, how we can begin to speak back to oppressive powers. The possibilities for building a performance around this story and its themes are limitless—for instance, the students' final performance that advocated for community and family over money and exploitation. And yet the realities of this process were constant interruptions, confusing retellings, and the near-continual chaos of 40 bodies in a classroom using a curricular process designed for half that many. To echo Winterson, the only certainty was "how complicated it all is."

If I focused on the possibilities and championed the successes of these students and the Bridges program, what of the realities of the ever-present messes? What would be lost if I cleaned up imperfectly enacted moments of possibilities and erased the contradictions? While I want these stories and choices to be neat and tidy, that is not what classrooms are—or what history is, as Winterson's (1985) narrator states. The students' process of creating their version of "The Servant" was an ever-moving work in process, powerful moments of connection and meaning coupled with chaos and disconnection. And perhaps that is the point. This process, like most stories, is about (classroom) lives

[1] I of course don't mean this literally—this is sixth grade, not kindergarten, so we didn't have "accidents" to contend with. But, as I write later, scatological humor—Bakhtin's (1984b) "grotesque body"—made its way into more sessions than not. Also note that a "mess" is different from "failure." In a traditional binary, success would be paired with failure. But while there were certainly moments of failure (pedagogical, communicative, interpersonal), I believe that we should never characterize learning as a failure. If it is a mess, we have opportunities to clean it up and to learn from it. Success may even necessitate this mess. "Failure" tends to close off the story.

lived within constraints. In both Zur Mühlen's version of “The Servant” and in Mrs. Riggs's classroom, children are powerful actors who are also constricted—by other stories we tell and enact about teachers and learners, by what schools are “supposed” to be, by what is and isn't considered worthy of our attention and time. Perhaps our process with “The Servant” simply re-affirms this reality, demonstrating how students and their teachers push against the limits of agency, attempting to figure out in practice freedom versus structure and freedom within structure. Further, considering how these limitations are the conditions that thwart potentialities means that it both is and is not about the particular individuals who inhabited this classroom space. Success or mess are not (necessarily) about the teacher, the Teaching Artist, or the students. Rather, this framing —lives lived within constraints—allows me, as the researcher, to stand in solidarity with teachers (and students) and to together imagine pathways out of damaging practices that may—intentionally or not—be constraining possibilities for these young people, both in the classroom and in their lives. I thus write with the intent of advocating for an imperfect process with unlimited potential that exists within a limited system.

The students' work with “The Servant” is a microcosm of their work throughout the year; further, it is not be a stretch to say that all of what Bridges attempts is also contained within this story. Bridges attempts to be a servant belonging to all members of the classroom community (including teachers, students, families, and communities) that transforms the work of classrooms and enables students and teachers to live out antioppressive ideals, to build community, to laugh and have fun, and to labor (here, to

build skills of critical literacy). In other words, there is a relationship between the story itself, the students' work with the story, and my work with their work.

And while these stories and the ideas they convey are bounded by how we hear them, what we know, and the space we believe we have to transform them, part of what I attempt to figure out in this chapter is what enables and constrains the shifts, particularly those that try to speak back against oppression. What are the conditions that enable movement, shifting between limitations (realities)—mess—and (hopefully toward) possibilities—success? In a critical literacy or arts-based classroom, what activities tip the balance toward success?

In this chapter, I argue that this fulcrum rests on how students work—or do not or cannot—to become storytellers of their own lives who can change stories and communicate meaning; how they collaborate or do not; and how they are able to utilize tools to tell a story or create links between literacies.[2] The following section offers pieces that might serve as parts of the fulcrum on which success and mess balance; acknowledging them is part of the work of Bridges and, I would argue, many critical classrooms. Finally, I conclude with a summary of how the students revised "The Servant" with their improvisational ideas and experiments with experiences, acknowledging that this work, as all learning, was unfinished.

What are the children saying? Perhaps only the trees whisper answers, but these pages, born of trees, attempt to continue their unfinished work.

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[2] I mean this in multiple ways: how to connect (link) literacies and literacies that link together knowledges.

“The Servant” as Intertwined Success and Mess

One way of telling this story is as follows: The students in Mrs. Riggs's classroom, working under the direction of Miss Adrienne, were successful in translating an orally told version of Hermynia Zur Mühlen's story “The Servant” into a play performed in front of students and families. They were successful because they changed the story to better fit their understandings and experiences of the world and in doing so, communicated meanings containing important messages that advocated social and economic justice; because they collaborated to generate ideas and helped each other; and because they used their bodies, voices, minds, emotions, and knowledges to tell a story.

Another way of telling this story is to emphasize its tensions and contradictions: In Mrs. Rigg's classroom, working under the direction of Miss Adrienne, the students' attempts to translate an orally told version of Hermynia Zur Mühlen's story “The Servant” into a play performed in front of students and families were a mess. Their attempts to change the story and communicate meanings were marked by fears of “getting it right” and a simultaneously easy and uneasy relationship with violence. Their collaborative work was punctuated by interruptions, conflict, and clinging to improvisation at the expense of a coherent story. Not accustomed to using their bodies to tell a story, they had trouble remembering theatre conventions and frequently went to acting for its entertainment value. While they changed the story to better fit their understandings and experiences of the world, this process was messy and marked by these tensions and contradictions.

Both of these versions are correct; both are incomplete. Instead, the success and mess were simultaneously present—and are here separated only to help us understand them more fully.

Changing the Story and Communicating Meaning: Morals and Messages

Bridges aims to help students analyze, question, and challenge dominant social and cultural storylines; Bridges Teaching Artists continually emphasize that students can and should change stories. With "The Servant," the students posed solutions to questions of social and economic justice; they generated meanings and morals. This began immediately after the story was told, when a student asked how the servant had become the master, and another student responded that what had once served the people now controlled them, because they had to work all the time, "with the whistle and everything." Through discussion, improvisation, and brief homework assignments, the students crafted a story that portrayed what they had articulated as important messages and evidenced understandings of conflicted relationships based in inequitable power dynamics.

Much of the work of changing the story to convey morals and meanings happened through improvisation and collaboration in class. Individual students also contributed key pieces through several homework assignments. Miss Adrienne, in consultation with Mrs. Riggs, gave these homework assignments when it was clear that there would not be enough time in class and when it was evident to her and me that the play needed some clear points of dialogue to anchor the story and provide cues that began and ended scenes. The first homework assignment was thus to write two pieces of dialogue about what the

workers could say to the boss. The second was to think about the ending of the play, specifically giving ideas for what the rich people say about their workers and a lesson or message that the students wanted to leave with the audience. The messages—morals—that the students conveyed through their play coalesced around two themes: promises and how money can distort community and create discord. These ideas are both in the Zur Mühlen story, but the students amplified them.

Not only in "The Servant," but throughout the year, the students returned to the idea of promises. In their version of "The Servant," the townspeople first made a promise to the magician to hold the machine in common and then made a promise to the businessman and his advisors to be at work. The first promise was "signed" with all the townspeople putting their arms together—a modified version of the "arms in the center" huddle commonly seen at sporting events. (The large size of the class and the small stage made an actual huddle physically too challenging and messy.) The second promise was literally signed by some individual townspeople, as the advisors handed them paper, asking them to "sign here and here and here" and then raising their hands as if swearing in a court of law. They had to promise both to be at work and promise not to break their promise. With their bodies, their actions, and their staging, the students had thus begun to signal the differences between these promises: the first, a verbal commitment made by all members of the town in community (following on the commitment of the magician's daughter to her father), and the second, a signed, official document made by some on behalf of all. The students talked about different ways of making decisions and what

happens when a few make decisions on behalf of all the people. At the end of the play, the entire town distinguished between these two types of commitments: “some promises are worth keeping and some are worth breaking.” The students stuck to their message of the importance of staying true to your word, but they distinguished between promises. In other words, a promise is not worth keeping when it hurts the community.

The students thus distinguished between promises for the community (not to sell the machine because it belonged to the whole community, for their benefit, like parks and libraries) and promises whose motivation was money.[3] “Money talks” was how one student put it—so “don't be hypnotized by it.” In their discussion of this as the message they wanted the audience to take away, they stated that money is not the only thing, that it doesn't make you happy. Instead, as they stated, “friends, family, and community are more important.” The students, as townspeople, made a choice to stand up for what they believed in: community. This was a choice against unequal relationships that benefited the rich man at the expense of workers—not only monetarily (“the rich man's business is booming but our paychecks are shrinking!”) but in terms of life and health (a worker not being able to feed her children). Their initial brainstorm on how to rectify the inequity of this conflicted relationship between workers and bosses[4] included chasing the businesspeople out of town and starting their own company—while singing “We are

[3] Students also commented on labor and wealth, although these themes did not make it into the final version. An interesting improv scene, for instance, portrayed poor people milking cows and rich people shopping while singing, “We're rich! We're rich! So call us right now, and we'll give you money for free.” The students did, however, add significant detail to the story about the nature of the difficulty of the work they did to make pizza, both before the machine's creation and later for the bosses.

[4] Another example of the students portraying conflicted, unequal relationships is in Chapter 6, when the Flyers performed a humorous scene about parents—adults with power—not paying attention to the needs, health, and well-being of their children.

family. I got all my pizzamakers and me."[5] Another idea was to find the magician's child and to stop the machine with a remote control. They finally settled, through voting, on a protest, with a song.

Ideally, all decisions that went into the performed version of the "Peace Play" were entirely student-generated: from blocking to scripting to characters. Miss Adrienne encouraged the performed story to emerge organically through a series of improvisational exercises and homework assignments; there were no auditions and no script, with students instead stepping into parts based on their improvisations and thus writing their own script (with prompts). In Mrs. Riggs's classroom, however, this process was punctuated by frequent fears about "getting it right." Despite repeated reassurances—"It's no big deal; put it in your own words"—that this was *our* story, *our* words, and *our* meanings, students got upset when they stumbled. Most often, this was not because they were not communicating their meaning, but because they had ideas that it needed to be "right." For instance, in introducing the play in the last practice, Layla got flustered and said she didn't know what to say or the right words; saying, "oh, I messed up," she put her head down and threw up her hands. Another time, Isabel forgot something she had planned to say and called out, "oops," looking embarrassed. The result in such instances was confusion and missteps that were very apparent to an audience. This was likely amplified by the students' discomfort with ambiguity, particularly with the ending of Zur Mühlen's story. At times, the students seemed unable to sit with the discomfort of creating

[5] "We are Family" is a 1979 hit song by Sr. Sledge. It's been covered many times and in many television shows and movies, but it is nevertheless interesting that this song, from several decades before these students' births, came up multiple times throughout the year.

their own version of the story. Miss Adrienne attempted to coach them through these changes, telling Isabel for instance, “I didn't know you messed up until you said that you messed up. So just go with it. That is for all of you. You're amazing. Be loud, proud, and strong!”

Miss Adrienne asked students to communicate their own meanings of this story to the audience while also asking questions that pointed them toward social and economic justice and more equitable power relationships. But throughout their work with this story (and others), the students evidenced a simultaneously easy and uneasy relationship with violence. After my original telling of the story, for instance, one student was concerned about the violence, asking if the hanged man was really dead. Later that afternoon, the members of the acting group that violently killed the magician seemed to delight in this increased violence, which prompted the first comment from the audience: an affirmation of “so much death” in this version. In the theatre several weeks later, Miss Adrienne prompted several students to be more descriptive in what they would rather be doing than the hard labor of the pizza factory. The students playing video games added more descriptions, saying “we can shoot the people we don't like!” Miss Adrienne told the students that they needed to remove this line, saying that “we can't talk about shooting in a school.”[6] Throughout the year, the students seemed both troubled by violence and delighted by it.

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[6] This small scene was particularly hard to watch. While the students did not know, the four adults in the room (Mrs. Riggs, Miss Adrienne, Mr. Marcus—visiting for part of the afternoon—and me) had heard that just a few hours earlier, a gunman at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut had killed more than two dozen teachers and students. I had been listening to the news reports as I drove to Williams to spend the afternoon with the students.

This uneasy relationship, of course, echoes larger cultural and societal relationships with violence in which mass violences such as war and poverty are celebrated while zero tolerance policies are enacted in schools. Bridges at times attempted to be a place to have discussions about this, rather than to leave it ambiguous.[7] For instance, the first week of Bridges, Miss Adrienne asked the students what concerns they had about the world, about school, and about the city they live in. The most frequent answer was stories about shootings in their neighborhoods or finding bullet casings. The students were concerned about—and scared by—this violence. Yet, when they wrote or acted out stories, they frequently invoked violence or revenge. Perhaps these responses were attempts to work out ideas about violence through story, which is better than doing so through actions.

Like many of the Bridges TAs, I found such not-unusual turns to violence disturbing; these are not the changes to stories or communication of meaning that we usually identify as successful. However, this reading is complicated by the work of Thomas Newkirk (2002), who wrote that educators may be misreading violence in children's—particularly boys'—writing. Three of his findings are relevant here. First, as concerns over violence are usually about popular literature or media (not "classical" literature), such fears may actually be about the audience for whom violence is imagined.

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[7] An example of this ambiguity at Williams was in October. During one of our Bridges sessions, an announcement came over the school loudspeaker that students were allowed to dress up the next day for Halloween. "You can wear costumes, but nothing violent. No weapons. If your costume has weapons, leave them home. You can wear hats, but nothing with a mask. No masks. This is for safety. Also, no violence and no fake blood." A student next to me named the problem with this statement: "what does violent mean?" There was no answer from the school.

Concern over violence is then a matter of social control. This was echoed in the Bridges classroom, where such concerns were more often directed at boys of color—in other words, the audience of concern was gendered (boys), raced (students of color), and classed (low-income students).[8] Second, students about whom Newkirk wrote nuanced the violence in stories and their writing; in particular, they saw violence as suspense, action, or excitement—in other words, as narrative structure and the movement of a story. They explained violence in writing *"within a system of comprehensible rules*" that related to story structure (p. 103, italics in original). In Bridges, an understanding of this nuance would open up avenues for questioning violence not necessarily on its own terms, but as part of narrative structure—or what Propp called functions. Finally, Newkirk asserted that violence in stories and in writing often serves as a mode of friendship for boys, who "regularly collaborate *through* combative play" (p. 121, italics in original); due to the socially constructed nature of gender, boys' writing constructed friendship through violence in their stories. This also was evident in the Bridges classroom. Newkirk's arguments that adults, particularly educators, might be "misreading masculinity" in considering (especially boys') written stories containing violence, suggests that we need to pay more attention to adults' conflicted relationship with violence and attempt to understand students', particularly boys', potentially nuanced use of violence in stories.

Whether the conflicted relationship with violence stemmed from adults, children, or both, this was not the only place where students mixed messages in conveying

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[8] Interestingly, students Newkirk (2002) interviewed echoed some of these same contradictions, stating, for instance, that violent video games might promote violence, but for others, not for themselves.

meaning. Despite their final message that "family, friends, and community are more important than money," in their improvisations, the students did not evidence this. For instance, they seemed incapable of having good relationships with parents, not wanting to do anything fun. For instance, one group of children told their parents that "digital is better" in response to the parents' suggestions that they would now have time—because of a new invention at work—to have a party with their friends or to go to Disneyland, Burger King, or the playground. Another time, students said that husbands, wives, and kids keep adults from being happy. And a third time, after a grandfather died in an improvisation, the children celebrated by having a party. So despite their words that family was more important and their complaints that parents were too busy with television and computers to spend time with them, when asked to act these scenes out, the students turned to digital activities and to *not* wanting to spend time with their families.

Collaborative Work to Generate Ideas and Help Each Other in the Midst of Interruptions, Conflict, and Never-Ending Improvisation

Neighborhood Bridges attempts to engage "the power of story to share wisdom and build a meaningful sense of community" (Zipes, 2004, p. 14). This is most powerful and practiced during the theatre portions of the class, in both improvisation to generate ideas and helping each other in performances; simply put, it is not possible to successfully create a performance without collaborating, which makes this form of art different from some others—or at least makes the collaboration more visible. At the same time, there were constant interruptions and the near-continual chaos of having 40 bodies

in the classroom. Sixth-graders are much bigger than first-graders, but the classroom is the same size. The Bridges process was continually challenged because we could not all fit in the classroom: there was no way to form a circle for storytelling, for instance. (We tried a few times to do so by sitting on the floor, but the classroom was nearly always quite dirty, so no one wanted to sit on the floor.) There was no way that five acting groups with six to eight students each could rehearse in the classroom, so two groups always went into the hallway, which meant that time was spent in transit and there were more opportunities for distractions, such as talking with students from other classes while they were at their hallway lockers. The large size of the class also made it harder to include everyone and to pay attention to what everyone was doing; on some days, I moved from distracted student turning the water fountain on and off to distracted student watching students at recess to distracted student turning on the CD player. There were also the usual school interruptions: the need for a conversation about assessment during our classroom teacher/Teaching Artist planning session, a fire drill in the middle of a great conversation, a hospitalization in Miss Adrienne's family requiring the presence of another (unfamiliar) Teaching Artist the week before the Peace Play performance, the school's theatre stage being used for storage and thus requiring heavy lifting and a smaller performance space. These spatial and size challenges made attempting to collaborate as a whole group quite challenging.

The goal of the improvisational exercises in the process of creating their version of “The Servant” was to listen intensely to each other and to generate ideas

collaboratively. This is not easy work for many reasons; it requires constant training and practice. Schooling is often about individual effort (silent reading, taking a test, completing a worksheet). Further, in Mrs. Riggs's classroom, listening was made more difficult by the large class size, which meant less time for individuals and for groups to share—and more opportunities for frustration when this couldn't happen.

In guiding the students through this process, Miss Adrienne emphasized, through both words and action, the collaborative nature of the work. For instance, early on, in brainstorming scenes, her prompt was, "what would *we* like to have in our play?" Some of the final production thus came directly from the original story, some from various rounds of improvisation (e.g., the cheese scene in the final version was set on the second day of working with the story), and some from "mistakes" in improvisation that students liked. The process was messy and uncertain until the day of the play. Miss Adrienne also encouraged students to take ownership of the story and of their roles: "It's your responsibility to create a scene you want to perform. Make your part something you want to do."

But students also *really* took to improvisation, forgetting that, as Miss Adrienne said, "the idea of theatre is to communicate, not to confuse." Despite their discomfort with ambiguity or uncertainty in oral stories, when acting, many students seemed to forget that their collaborative actions onstage were meant to be a narrative. This messiness was amplified by a set performance date. The goal was to have a student-generated story and performance, but it also needed to make sense to the audience. The

day before the performance, students were still improvising onstage, seemingly caught up in individual play with words and ideas, rather than thinking about their contribution to the collective story or the meanings the audience would take from their story. As a result of this continual improvisation, the story had no ending the day before the performance and some important pieces of the story were completely missing. Miss Adrienne stepped in more than she would have liked to give the performance a shape that the audience could read and to remind students that they had to tell the audience, for instance, about how unhappy or happy the townspeople were at different points in the story. The students had difficulty moving from improvisation to focusing on a story that they would tell the audience through theatre.

A second crucial piece of this process was how students helped each other. In their small groups, some students took on the role of a director. Onstage, students frequently helped each other remember lines, positions, or theatre conventions—such as moving someone's shoulders with the reminder, “don't turn your back to the audience!” Theatre allows students to work together and to help each other, with or without assistance from the adults in the room. For instance, Miss Adrienne realized two days before the show that two particularly shy students didn't have specific parts—they were in several scenes but had no lines or roles that moved the plot forward. Through the final homework assignment (what message you want the audience to take away), Miss Adrienne and I selected and combined some ideas and asked different students to contribute to the chorus. These two girls, who rarely had speaking parts, linked arms and stepped forward

from the semi-circle of townspeople to declare, “We've learned that money isn't everything.”

After the performance, back in the classroom, Miss Adrienne asked the students to tell each other what they'd liked about their performance. Several students complimented these two girls for stepping up. Sabina thanked another student for telling her to be more forceful. Sadie, who frequently forgot to go onstage at the correct times, thanked another student for helping her with cues. This sharing echoed the sharing that frequently occurred after in-class performances, but it was deeper and more heart-felt. It helped to create community. Performance fosters this collaboration and appreciation of each other. For instance, students were often the ones who called attention to appreciating each other. When the classroom forgot the ritual of “five claps and a snap” after a performance, Sadie reminded the room: “we have to clap for them; we didn't clap.” Such rituals and reminders helped to create a meaningful sense of community in which students together generated ideas, helped each other do difficult things, and then shared their appreciation with each other for their successes, big and small.

However, there was as much unproductive conflict as productive compliments. The collaborative work of theatre necessarily involves conflict; conflict is not bad, as it is a necessary part of relationships and of the work of theatre, especially student-generated theatre. But many times students could not work through their conflicts. This had several outcomes. On occasion, a fight—mostly verbal—resulted in detention for students; I do not think that these fights were related to the work of Bridges, but they occurred during

Bridges classtime. More common, however, were acting groups who could not work together, instead spending their (very short amount of) time complaining about each other and/or asking the adults for direction. At other times, the students did not know what they were supposed to be doing but did not ask anyone—meaning that once rehearsal time was up, they had nothing. While the Flyers acting group seemed able to overcome this and usually pulled something off while onstage, other groups got onstage and just stood there, unable to perform. For as often as a performance was brilliant, it was convoluted and muddled as students vied for space or time or refused to participate.

Tools to Tell a Story: Voices, Bodies, and Knowledges

In their work in the Bridges classroom and with "The Servant," the students engaged many tools to tell a story: bodies, voices, minds, emotions, and knowledges from their own lives and interests. Bourdieu (1977) argued that "linguistic capital is an embodied capital" (p. 660), and Benjamin (1968) wrote that storytelling is not for the voice alone, but is also sensory and bodily. In this classroom, in addition to their voices, students worked to use their bodies to tell this story. They used their faces and their bodies to express relationships of power; they engaged the theatre concepts of staging and blocking. For instance, during one improvisation rehearsal, I overheard one student tell another: "use your body. We should just show it [rather than tell the audience what we are doing]." When asked to make machines to show the tasks involved with making pizza and the difficulty of this work, three of the five groups created machines that moved faster and faster and then broke down; all groups incorporated sound and motion in their

machines. To show that they were tired, workers closed their eyes, weaving back and forth as if they were falling asleep on their feet and leaning on each other.

Onstage, though, students frequently struggled to use their bodies as tools to tell the story. They frequently had trouble with theatre conventions, especially when translating to the stage. This was obvious in the classroom, when the "stage" was a cleared area at the front of the classroom, facing rows of chairs for the audience. In such a crowded classroom, it is easy to understand that it would be difficult to tell offstage from onstage. But the difficulties from the classroom transferred to the theatre stage as well. The first time we were in the theatre, Miss Adrienne had the students just spend time on the stage, getting used to the stage lights and to the large auditorium they faced. Yet even when rehearsal started, many students shaded their eyes against the stage lights. With flat emotion or with happy, laughing expressions even when their characters were upset or sad, they seemed to be going through the motions, rather than acting. Students seemed either not conscious of other actors or what was going on around them or too conscious—spending their time watching each other or watching the play, even when onstage, rather than in character. They were noisy when leaving the stage or offstage, walked in front of a character who was talking, turned their backs to the audience, and disregarded the tape on the floor that was to guide their blocking onstage (tape was also used in the classroom). Rather than sticking to their lines, they continued ad-libbing or asking to insert dialogue, leading to missed cues and confusion. They failed to project their voices or trailed off at the ends of words or sentences—even with me at the back of

the auditorium, prompting them to speak up while Miss Adrienne exhorted them to "get your loud back!" Fearing that the performance would not take shape, the day before the show, Miss Adrienne engaged in very specific directing, including involving students who were not participating much. Both of us were worried that with over 100 people in the audience, the students would have even more trouble remembering to use their bodies and theatre tools to tell their version of "The Servant."

The students also used their minds to create dialogue and involve humor. They brought their own lives and interests—their knowledges—to this process, making connections between the text of the story, their lives, and the academic constructs of narrative and theatre. In this way, their work was culturally relevant. For instance, they frequently used the narrative frame of a commercial or news report to convey the events of a story, such as having a reporter show the relationship between action and relationships. They incorporated knowledges from their lives and from the world around them. They often played with the idea of family relationships, portraying children trying to play their parents off each other or having an older adult family member exclaim, "kids these days!" Current events also showed up in their plays. Their work was happening at the same time as a major labor dispute in the area—which prompted Miss Adrienne to ask what this meant about work. One of the national lotteries was also at an all-time high; it made an appearance in an improvised scene: after a worker was fired by the rich man, the worker bought a lottery ticket, wishing to make money without working. The students brought in dance and music and drew parallels between objects in their fictional town and

objects in the world around them—their improvised scenes included references to checking the Promethean board (the name of the smartboard in the classroom) and to the new and improved Woodchopper 9000 and Double Dicenator 3000. The students thus successfully incorporated their own knowledges and interests to change a story written many generations before them.

At the same time, their great ability to bring in their own lives and interests to their theatre scenes created difficulties that obscured their storytelling. Frequently, students used these interests for entertainment value, rather than for telling a story; I see this as a tension between scenes that are great because they work to tell a story and scenes that are trying to be clever. The latter, such as attempts to do parody, often resulted in plays that did not make sense to the audience. When questioned about their performance, for instance, one student said that his group's play was in the style of *Saturday Night Live*, although this tone was not apparent to the audience. Another example occurred when the students were tasked with improvising a commercial to advertise Double Dice pizza. One group came back with a “Family Feud” game show with Steve Harvey as host. The student playing Harvey did great impressions, the students effectively blocked their performance, and the audience was laughing and involved. However, Layla pointed out the difficulty: “How does this contribute to Double Dice Pizza?” The dance-off by the Flyers also evidenced this problem: charged with figuring out how to end “The Servant,” some of the group performed a dance-off whose main role seemed to be to get a laugh.

The Interplay of Success and Mess

Any classroom—and any production of a play—combines success and mess; in the interplay, the give and take, learning can take place. In this section, I reflect on some of the factors that might help tilt the balance in a Bridges classroom toward success: listening and (re)telling; production and ownership; and play (both verb and noun forms, often functioning as carnival [Bakhtin, 1984a, 1984b]).

Listening and (Re)Telling

Success in a Bridges classroom requires deep listening in order to first question and then to retell stories. Except for the first time that students share their own written stories (e.g., the Fantastic Binominal, first read from a student's notebook), stories are told orally. Conversely, insistence on the written versions of stories may fix them in place. For instance, Zipes (1995) argued that classical fairy tales have been frozen

> in Western society in ways that often belie their own richness and the actual possibilities for girls and boys to realize their potential. This “freezing” of a tale often happens in ways that reinforce negative gender roles and an ideological thinking that stabilizes the hierarchy of a class and race. (p. 39)

This is why counter-tales and retellings are so important.

Oral stories of necessity involve retelling: most of the stories in the Bridges curriculum were oral stories before they were written down, meaning that they have been retold countless times before making it into classrooms such as Mrs. Riggs's. These retellings have added rich layers to the story: “Each retelling of a story permits the

articulation of deeper possibilities that exist because they were *not* explicitly expressed in the original telling" (Kroeber, 1992, p. 48, italics in original). Without deep listening, retelling—which includes questioning and reshaping—stories, the heart of Bridges, is not possible.

As an example, the day that I first told "The Servant" I had attended a morning session of Bridges in which another Teaching Artist, Mr. Marcus, also told this story. In the afternoon, when I told it, I found his words coming out of my mouth, along with Zur Mühlen's, my own, and who knows who else's.[9] Rather than Zur Mühlen's "stranger,"[10] I told of Mr. Marcus's "fancy man," who later became the students' "rich man" (and "business man" in my transcription of their play). Later that afternoon, when the students performed the first two versions of "The Servant," both had scenes of the people of the town doing labor for the "rich man" in his house, a detail not present in the Zur Mühlen story or the one I told, but something the students likely know about from their own lives or from television and other stories.[11] These tellings—Mr. Marcus's, mine, the students' performed versions—were both bounded by the stories we had received and shifting, based on our own experiences and lives and the meaning we make of all of these.[12]

The stories we tell—fictional and nonfictional, about our lives, about schools,

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[9] Bakhtin (1986) called this appropriation: transforming the utterances of others for our own purposes.

[10] I had completely forgotten until I wrote this chapter that Zur Mühlen called the man simply "the stranger."

[11] I did not observe either of these group's rehearsals, so I don't know if the two groups independently added this scene or if the second group improvised this on the spot, following the lead of the first group. It was quite common for this type of on-the-spot repetition and reshaping (like a version of Andy Warhol's serial art in which images repeat, with slight variations) to occur as the students performed.

[12] For another example of how an elementary student appropriated both a novel and classroom peer cultures in her own writing (including character names, themes, story lines, words, and statuses), see Lensmire and Beals (1994).

about our communities—both cite each other and morph; we mix and match words, frames, and details. As we change or don't change the stories we retell, we are communicating meanings that we—individually and collectively—make from those stories. In Bridges classrooms, meaning-making travels from improvisation and students' lives through stories and on to the stage; in their retellings, “other children are pervasive and significant influences on most children's lives” (Lensmire & Beals, 1994, p. 422) and thus words, situations, and meanings are retold over and over, in ways that are “often sophisticated, strategic, and complex, with sometimes questionable intentions” (p. 424).

These retellings are important from a critical literacy perspective. In her book about critical literacy in elementary classrooms, Vivian Vasquez (2010), drawing on the work of Hillary Janks (2000), wrote that

> critical analysis without action seems to keep us in the same place as when we started. In other words, it is the action piece, doing something with what we discover through critical analysis of text, that helps us to participate differently in the world. (p. 17)

In retelling the story in their own words and silences, actions and gestures, these students were acting on their analysis of their text (what the New London Group [1996] labeled design).

This is made more difficult, though, as many students and teachers have little experience with these processes—or little experience with these processes as school curriculum. Classroom teachers, for instance, frequently find it very difficult to tell an

oral story—just like the students, they are afraid they won't "get it right." I had experience telling stories in Bridges classrooms before this year, but it still took me a few weeks to get comfortable with this process. Bridges storytellers don't memorize stories but practice telling them and making changes until the story is their own (Zipes, 1995). This emphasis is in direct opposition to the focus on data-driven instruction and "scientifically based research"[13] that permeate schools today. Listening to and telling oral stories is a skill set not often present in schools and that industrialized, white, Western cultures do not value as they used to[14] or as other cultures do.

Yet telling stories orally fosters skills in both tellers and listeners. As a teller, I had to become more adept at changing stories—for instance, when I forgot an important plot point and needed to figure out how to insert it later into the story. As a storyteller, I had to constantly monitor the classroom, checking that the students were engaged in and following the story; I used different vocal patterns and intonations and silence and pauses for emphasis; if it worked with the story, I invited input from the listeners, incorporating their ideas into the story or asking them to tell a repeating line or motif from the story. Listeners thus have ways of entering the story as it is being told; further, they practice being present to the story as it unfolds, as it is not possible to go back to a written text later to check for understanding.

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[13] The phrase "scientifically based research" occurs 111 times in the "No Child Left Behind" legislation (Barone, 2007).

[14] Benjamin (1968) argued that the art of storytelling has been lost because "there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to. . . When the rhythm of work has seized him [*sic*], he listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of retelling them comes to him all by itself" (p. 91). Benjamin explicitly linked storytelling to work in the form of craft, arguing that storytelling thrived in these environments. Written over 40 years ago, what does this then say today in our highly digitalized cultures?

Production and Ownership

This emphasis on retelling and performing orally told tales demands that students take ownership of the stories. Usually in elementary school classrooms,

> formal ownership of knowledge is assumed by teachers—they have the authoritative codes for interpreting meaning and their task is to give children access to these codes, or rather, to subject them to them. This is an obviousness about teaching that is not usually attended to by teachers. . . . (Davies, 2003, p. 40)

Students are not asked to produce knowledge or to internalize it as their own.[15] Bourdieu (1977) tied this ownership of knowledge and language to structural market forces that make education a site of struggle: "The educational system is a crucial object of struggle because it has a monopoly over the production of the mass of producers and consumers, and hence over the reproduction of the market on which the value of linguistic competence depends" (p. 652). Zipes (2004) argued the same of stories: "For us, stories have become commodities, and they are used to market the interests of big corporations and politicians or to promote ourselves" (p. 14). It is necessary, then, to critically analyze and challenge how both stories and education (schooling) are tools that turn teachers and students into consumers of knowledge whose goals "should" be to enter the consumer marketplace, make money for others, and make money for selves in order to purchase

[15] Kress (1997) wrote that we need theories of language that treat speakers and writers not as language users, but as language makers whose actions express their interests and their experiences of making meaning, which are constructed through many social and cultural factors. Further, he wrote, different ways of making meaning involve different bodily engagements with the world.

more products.

Bridges asks students, however, to be not just consumers of knowledge, but its producers and owners. This is but one of the many layers that made the students' production of "The Servant" so fascinating: just as the entrance of the stranger/rich man turned the townspeople from producers or owners (of logging or pizza) into workers no longer in control of their time or the products of their work, so the students' work with the story itself and its production as a play asked them not just to consume and regurgitate the story, but to take ownership over producing its meanings. In this classroom, the students were wrestling with ownership of the story, ownership of the machine in the story, and ownership of bodies and minds in the classroom.[16]

This is particularly interesting in light of Dyson's (1997) argument that popular writing pedagogies developed in the 1970s and 1980s stopped with advocating the importance of ownership as important for children's writing production (i.e., if students feel ownership over their topics and texts, they will learn to write). Instead, she argued, based on her two-year study of a second and third grade classroom, that it was not ownership that encouraged the use of written media, but a desire to participate in community. Students, she argued, must learn that they cannot own meaning, "because meaning only exists in the *meeting* of voices" (p. 180, italics in original). Based on Mrs. Riggs's sixth-grade class's work with "The Servant," I argue that it is the collective, rather than individual, ownership and, more importantly, production of words that was

[16] What I am here calling production is similar to what the New London Group (1996) called "Design, in which we are both inheritors of patterns and conventions of meaning and at the same time active designers of meaning. And, as designers of meaning, we are designers of social futures" (p. 65).

significant.[17]

Play: As a Verb, as a Noun, as Carnival

Bridges attempts to bring (a) "play" into the classroom: beginning with playing as a verb—fun and unstructured—and leading into play as a noun—a performance (acting group performances in the classroom each week as well as the Peace Play and Crossing Bridges festivals in front of larger audiences). Not infrequently, this work—importantly, not only in individual writing but especially in collective performance[18]—ventured into the carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984a, 1984b).

Play as a verb occurs in the Bridges classroom most often during rehearsal, which (often) has the following properties of play:[19] providing freedom from time, a diminished consciousness of self, and improvisational potential (Brown, 2009). The frequent requests for more acting time and the joy, shrieks, and laughter that accompany rehearsal time suggest that for (many) students, this form of play provides enjoyment and a desire to continue. These experiences of play engage students in imagining and experiencing new situations; foster trust, empathy, skills, talents, and creativity; and make complex social groups—and their successful interactions—possible (Brown, 2009). As a verb, play, in short, can make school a site of fun, of pleasure. Indeed, Bridges should be a source of

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[17] Importantly, collectivity is also the basis of "The Servant."

[18] This makes Bridges somewhat different from Writing Workshop, which Timothy Lensmire (1994b) also analyzed through the lens of carnival. Because of an emphasis on individual writing and because the Workshop seldom linked critiques of the classroom to suggestions for broader social change, Lensmire argued that Writing Workshop is an orderly, individualistic carnival. Bridges, on the other hand, incorporates both individual (writing) and collective (play) performance and emphasizes social justice as an underlying theoretical orientation (see Chapter 4). Still, as in Lensmire's study, teachers frequently struggle with carnivalesque practices, particularly those of abuse or profanation.

[19] This, of course, is not true for all students, some of whom especially struggle with this type of play. I would have been—and am—one of these students.

deep pleasure and satisfaction: “the two hours fills them, fills needs, provides food” rather than just opportunities for consuming (Zipes, personal communication, June 11, 2013).

Yet rehearsal time frequently looks like mass chaos: some students talking quietly, others crawling or rolling on the floor, others heatedly arguing, others wandering to get a drink or look out the window. In other words, there is a type of *“free and familiar contact among people”* (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 123, italics in original) in which the usual physical and social distances of the classroom are lessened and students take up new relationships with each other. The open-endedness of rehearsal time echoes what Brown called play's improvisational potential:

> We aren't locked into a rigid way of doing things. We are open to serendipity, to chance. We are willing to include seemingly irrelevant elements into our play. The act of play itself may be outside of “normal” activities. The result is that we stumble upon new behaviors, thoughts, strategies, movements, or ways of being. We see things in a different way and have fresh insights. (p. 18)

The openness of play, stumbling into new ways of thinking, acting, and telling stories, occurs in Bridges classrooms when students are given time and space; Lensmire (1994b) —reading Bakhtin—called this attitude or practice a *“playful, familiar relation to the world*” (p. 374). As in *Rabelais and His World*, (Bakhtin, 1984b), in this atmosphere of carnival, common items are repurposed or clothing is worn backward as everyday items —including speech—are manipulated. And as with carnival, the purpose is

transformation, or, as Zipes (2004) wrote, “at the heart of children's play is the reformation of the world” (p. 245).

Yet it is precisely the freedom of this space that means that “play,” in the classroom, can lead to discomfort. This is in part because “play, by its very nature, is a little anarchic. It is about stepping outside of normal life and breaking normal patterns. It is about bending rules of thought, action, and behavior” (Brown, 2009, p. 193). This type of play, then, may be likened to carnival, an escape from the routines of the life of the official classroom. But in this process, students and teachers may be unclear about the program is asking them to do and to be—and what “rules” apply. While more often than not, the open spaces for play—and for questioning—result in the construction of some production or story, this also often resulted in two kinds of discomfort in Mrs. Riggs's classroom: tensions over what was “appropriate” and the use of scatological humor.

For instance, early in the year Miss Adrienne told the story of Bluebeard (whose castle has a locked room in which hang the bodies of wives he murdered). Sadie's immediate reaction to this retelling was to ask, “Is this appropriate for school?” She is likely right: tales of murder may not be “appropriate.” Yet every day, stories of violence make it into school curriculum, both official and hidden. Zipes (2004) contended that we usually say things are “not fit for children's ears” if they contain cursing or disturbing events; however, he continued, this idea of protecting children from what is deemed inappropriate has not always been the case. Further, “exactly what is appropriate and harmful has always been a matter of taste and a matter of social class, just as the mastery

of language, spoken and written, has been subjected to taste and class" (Zipes, 2004, p. 23). Students have been very well schooled in determining what is considered appropriate or not—and programs like Bridges, with their emphasis on play, embodied learning, and questioning, encourage (both explicitly and implicitly) students to ask questions about these boundaries and to push them. In other words, Bridges may deliberately call for carnival—and "when free to explore, children will cross all sorts of lines, and they will often do so in politically incorrect ways" (Zipes, p. 243). Thus, this atmosphere "loosen[s] the grip of established norms and relations and allow[s] alternatives to emerge in their place" (Lensmire, 1994b, p. 373). Importantly, the program's emphasis on transformation of oppressive structures enables TAs and students to push that this be a social sphere championing freedom and equality, even with carnival's ambiguities, tensions, and contradictions (Bakhtin, 1984b).

The tensions inherent in these boundary explorations can be uncomfortable, especially for the adults in the room. The inclusion of scatalogical humor, violence, or sexuality—all very present in folk and fairy tales and important elements of carnival (Bakhtin, 1984b)—in the elementary school classroom is fraught with tensions that adults must navigate. For instance, the written version of one story I told had young people both getting high and an emphasis on the large bosoms of the female characters. Prior to class, Mrs. Riggs, Miss Adrienne, and I talked about how I should tell this story. We settled on leaving out the part about the large bosoms—as it was not necessary to the story—and changed the getting high to smoking, as the young people disobeying their elders in very

specific ways was important to the story. Many of the students intuited, however, that the young people were getting high, not just smoking cigarettes—and they incorporated this into their discussions and play. Despite what many adults want to think about children, many children have personal knowledge of topics considered “adult” and hence taboo and explore these ideas in the classroom if given opportunities. This, of course, creates pedagogical dilemmas—such as whether to allow students, as characters, to pretend to smoke or be high in a performance.

For the students, this occurred most frequently in the contexts of scatological humor—what Bakhtin (1984b) labeled the grotesque body. Students latched on to these images when they existed in stories and created them when they did not—like the pizza that smelled of old feet and burnt poop. Sometimes, this humor was solely for play—and sometimes it served to create community, to allow students to bring their lives into the classroom, and to think about power in stories. Again, these are features of carnival, of upending social hierarchies, for “stories told by underdogs are frequently ironic or satiric; a root word for 'humor' is humus—bringing low, down to earth” (Delgado, 1989, p. 2414).

This use of humor, a focus on the grotesque body, is evident in the Tambuku (Bantu) story “The Boy and His Dogs,” written down by Mwizenge Tembo. The story is about an evil man who has killed and eaten each of his children and is attempting to kill the remaining child, who is hiding up a tree, protected by his dogs. With his deadly farts, the father kills three of the boy's dogs before the final dog is able to kill the father. The

boy uses herbs to revive the dead dogs, and they return home, freed from the father. As in the stories Bakhtin related from Rabelais and folk cultures, in this story “both the earth and the lower body . . . functioned as a grave for the old and a womb for the new” (Lensmire, 1994b, p. 382).

And the students—and teachers—used this as an opening to talk about what is normally censored in classrooms, disallowed from official schooling. After the story, Miss Adrienne asked, “Okay, so what about the farting? Look at Mrs. Riggs's face. [Pointing to Mrs. Riggs, who was in the corner of the room, grimacing.] Who can relate to deadly farts?”

After raising his hand and being called upon, Pao said, “Maybe it's because the father eats the kids; the farts are from his diet.”

Joel, part of the group of boys very into slapstick, said, “I lost four brothers and a sister because of my dad and his farts,” prompting Miss Adrienne to respond, “Maybe you need to drive in a convertible when your family is together.”

Mrs. Riggs, despite the face she had made when farting was first mentioned, jumped in: “Dads have really bad ones; something about being a dad.”

“Old ladies too,” Da'uud amended.

“Like my grandma after taco night,” said Layla.

Several very important things are happening in this brief interchange. First, Pao offered a very sophisticated reason for why the dad's farts are so deadly in the story: his diet has consisted of eating his own children. Second, Joel immediately related “deadly

farts" to his own life—and was followed by Mrs. Riggs, Da'uud, and Layla. Mrs. Riggs rarely participated in the group conversations following oral stories, but here she did. Out of the scatological humor, a sense of community was being formed that connected a story from formal curriculum to (one sentence) stories from the lives of both the classroom teacher and students. Like Bakhtin's carnival, this space allowed for the participation of all, for "*free and familiar contact among people*" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 123, italics in original) rather than maintaining the usual hierarchical separations (here, both teacher-student and peer relations). Carnival was a collective response. Further, despite the face that Mrs. Riggs initially made, piety and etiquette were suspended and the body made visible. The play made possible by the story- and drama-based nature of the program enabled this humor to enter into the classroom in ways that related to the content of the day and allowed the entire room to laugh. It then enabled a great deal of play with how the students acted out performed retellings of this tale. Rather than banning biological functions from the classroom, the stories encouraged play with them. As in Rabelais, laughter and irreverence, emerging from a discussion of the earthy and grotesque, created moments of play, of carnival.

It is perhaps this play, the verb form, that enables the noun form, play as performance. Zipes (2004) wrote,

> Theater demands space for constant experimentation with the world of objects and for self-experimentation with one's body and mind. . . . For them [children] to appropriate these scripts means they must have the freedom of space and time to

> investigate the nature of the texts; how they were produced, received, and distributed in their time; and whether there might be meaning leftover for their lives. If so, it is this leftover signification that will form the basis of the children's play and production, if they even want to produce anything. (p. 255)

This quotation refers to children's theatre more broadly; in the Bridges classroom, there often isn't this extended time and space to deeply explore texts and their contexts. Yet the play with words, ideas, and humor throughout the school year is what makes performing onstage at the end of the year possible. The success of a Bridges classroom frequently rests on how students are able to translate the stories they hear into stories they perform. This success is built on collaboration, which playing helps to foster. The co-constructed social practices established through the play of questioning and rehearsal build trust and group accountability that enable a play as a performance.

This blending can also enhance literacy practices, as Wohlwend (2008, 2009) has written. She argued for expanding our notion of text to include play-integrated practices as literacy (2009), as, for instance, kindergartners in her studied both wrote to play and played to write (2008). “When literacy and play practices combine, they support and strengthen one another, proliferating ways for children to 'do school' and increasing access for diverse learners” (Wohlwend, 2008, p. 332). In the Bridges classroom, play as a noun and play as a verb can both work to enhance children's literacies and make school experiences enjoyable. As Freire (1998b) asked, “Why not put into practice in the classroom the school [students] dream about? . . . Why not emphasize their right to

imagine, to dream, and to fight for that dream?" (p. 51)

This is not to say that this is easy. The tension that Teaching Artists, through both curriculum and pedagogy, attempt to navigate is freedom *versus* structure and freedom *within* structure. In many classrooms, particularly those such as Mrs. Riggs's at Williams, with close to 40 students from many backgrounds and with wide variation in literacy skills, the emphasis is on the former: structure and management become paramount and freedom (of students—but no less of the teacher) is antithetical to such structure. Bodies are tightly controlled, assignments are tightly controlled, ideas are tightly controlled. Bridges attempts a different formulation: freedom *within* structure. As I laid out in Chapter 4, students and teachers can rely on a structure, a rhythm, to each class session that is developed through curriculum and through creating specific rituals, such as how to transform the room after the first writing game. Teaching Artists work in concert with classroom teachers to determine what might work for each particular group of students—for instance, what type of acting game provides enough room for imagination but not so much room that students get lost. This varies according to grade level, the number of students, their skills and knowledges, et cetera. The adults work together to create a container in which students have safety to explore but are not overwhelmed or lose contact with the subject matter—in the farting discussion above, for instance, there was just enough room to provide humorous examples from students' lives without devolving into uncontrollable hilarity. This attempts to provide a container in which both students who struggle with freedom *and* students who struggle with structure can flourish.

Finding this balance is difficult, and establishing structures is important. For the adults, control and discomfort are at the center of the risks necessary to foster freedom within structure. For the students, the challenge is to have fun within the structures of this freedom, or as Miss Adrienne told them, “Bridges gives a lot of freedom, but you have to earn it.” Zipes (1995) wrote that this type of storytelling is “animation and self-discovery, storytelling that uses models, ethical principles, canons of literature, and social standards to *play* with the prescribed models, principles, canons, and standards to see if they are worthy of the children's respect and useful in the community” (p. 4, italics in original).

Revising Story: Improvisational Ideas and Experiments with Experience

In this and preceding chapters, I have focused on the students' work with “The Servant.” While this process was less than a month of the eight months of the Bridges program in Mrs. Riggs's classroom, it encapsulated themes that characterized the year. In Bridges, students asked questions about what was appropriate or belongs in school; in their writing and performances, they pushed boundaries and brought in their own knowledges as they questioned, played with, and enacted ideas of violence and scatological humor. They learned that success sometimes requires risk—whether that means sharing your writing or participating in a performance. Through play, humor, and imagination, they engaged in communal practices in a time when schooling is often individualized—and success measured by standardized test scores. In embodied performance and practice, they used retakes and retellings to take on different roles, thus changing the nature of participation and engagement in the classroom; these retakes and

retellings were of both orally told stories (canonical and countertales) and their own stories and performances. For instance, “a promise is a promise,” which featured so prominently in their version of “The Servant,” was first spoken the second week of class as a line in a performed retelling of the story “Mathilde and the Frog”; this line was not present in the original story, but the students used it to describe a bargain about Mathilde to which she was not party and did not agree. And they used story to struggle over structure and transformation, particularly questioning—and sometimes refusing to question—identities, especially raced and gendered identities.

In Chapter 4, I wrote that the Bridges classroom aims to build collaborative community; focus on questioning story through critical literacy practices; and transform selves through learning. In these endeavors, undertaken through generating ideas in improvisation and experimenting with experiences, the students' work with “The Servant” was both a success and a mess. At times, they built community that enabled collaboration—such as linking arms to say a line when frightened or shy, complimenting each other after a performance, or building off each others' ideas. At other times, the students didn't—or couldn't hear—each other's requests, such as Da'uud's desire not to say the “mommy line” (which led either directly or indirectly to his absence from the class community as they performed their play) or continuous improvisations that detracted from a coherent storyline.

In formal assessments of a Bridges classroom, assessors attempt to determine what an acting group collectively does with a story. I would characterize the students'

performance of “The Servant” as revising, as it significantly revised aspects of Zur Mühlen's story. These revisions can be grouped into four categories: revised choices, actions, or emphases; changes to characters or contexts; changes to narrative structure; and omissions (present in the written/oral version but not the performed version). Table 1 outlines these revisions, with those I find particularly significant in italics.

Table 1: Sixth-Graders' Performed Revisions to Hermynia Zur Mühlen's “The Servant”

Revised Choices, Actions, or Emphases	Changes to Characters or Contexts	Changes to Narrative Structure	Omissions (Not Present in the Performed Version)
Stranger's business advisors found out about the machine and recommended he buy it (rather than villagers wanting to show him to brag about it)	Gender dynamics: in the original story, only men worked at first; in their version, all worked in the three time periods; some changes to character (son becomes a daughter)	*Use of flashbacks rather than a linear time narrative*	Strong sense of place in a rural village (changed to an assumed but unspoken city)
More explicit definition of what consequences were for workers (bad labor conditions such as pay cuts, firing, overtime)	*Logging became pizza business; division of labor*	Addition of a narrator (although this echoes the omniscient narrator of the story)	Demonstration of the original poverty of the people
Emphasis on “booming business,” including stating “in a rich place, with rich people trying to get richer”	Armed guards become business advisors	Repetition of structure: showing the different groups of workers multiple times; two commercials	Fear of the old man/magician and his years of labor on “the servant”
Added emphasis on the importance of “promise” and thus	Group of townspeople asked the rest of the people	*Inclusion of song, dance, and humor (e.g., getting an arm*	*Role/presence of young people*

Revised Choices, Actions, or Emphases	Changes to Characters or Contexts	Changes to Narrative Structure	Omissions (Not Present in the Performed Version)
the contrast between a promise and money	(in a text) about selling, so it was a group decision, rather than one made mostly by a village elder	*stuck in the dough, the attempt at repeating the promise of business advisor)*	
Added emphasis on importance of family	Group of townspeople plotted to get rid of magician's daughter, rather than rich man declaring her (him) the enemy	Changed role of magician's child, who is more of an apparition with her father at the end than a rescuer in the woods	Stranger/rich man pretending to care deeply about workers (e.g., shedding "bitter tears" for the plight of the people)
Changed ending: protest, with news coverage, drives out the businesspeople, rather than the stranger with armed mercenaries driving the people out of town	*Addition of contemporary forms of communication, such as television, commercials, tweeting, video games, news reporters*		No mansion, armed guards, hanged man, or whistle

These sixth-graders revised this story in structure, in genre, in contexts, and in resolution. In terms of structure, they changed a linear storyline through the use of flashbacks, demonstrating their understanding of multiple forms of narrative construction. They also used structured repetitions of scenes; while this was largely through the prompting of Miss Adrienne (as an attempt to help provide stage and audience cues), this also evidences the students' awareness of the need for structure in a performance genre—ways to anchor the story, to provide cues for their peers, and to tell

the story to the audience with minimal use of a narrator. Their frequent additions of humor also changed the genre of the story; humor—a form of play—was very important to many of these students, so it makes sense that it frequently entered their improvisations and thus their performance. They significantly altered the contexts of the story, making it fit their own lives and contexts with which they are familiar: pizza, technology, news reports, the use of protests. They demonstrated their understandings of the world of business and its consequences for workers. Most significantly, they changed the ending of the story. Interestingly, they left out the agency and advocacy of the young people in Zur Mühlen's story, who promise to right the wrongs of their elders. However, these students are themselves young people, so perhaps it did not seem as important to state this aspect of the story. Instead, they wanted a clean resolution. They provided this by holding a protest, kicking out the business people, and emphasizing that friends, family, and community are more valuable than money.

At the same time, however, while the students questioned and transformed "The Servant," for instance, demonstrating a nascent anti-capitalism that argued for friends and family above money and "big business," they simultaneously contradicted their own critiques of technology getting in the way of family interactions and naively asserted that families are always good. Further, while they argued for the importance of "friends, family, and community," it was a group decision to sell the machine and to exile the magician's daughter—rather than a more singular decision as in the original story.

It is also important, however, to keep in mind that the students never read a print-

based version of this story. They heard it orally just once—and then began their reconstructions of it. Much of the revision of the story came about through how improvisation was structured and through the use of homework assignments to create messages and dialogue. In some ways, this makes their revision of the story even more remarkable.

Finally, in many ways, the students did work on transformation: they were empowered to produce their own version of a story that incorporated knowledges from their own lives. Yet at other times, they did not seem to transform storylines that had been written both by and for them—such as Da'uud's positioning as a troublemaker. Most importantly, if the goal of Neighborhood Bridges is to empower students to become narrators of their own lives who have the ability to question stories and institutional oppressions and to transform themselves, the "results" are unknown. It has taken lifetimes for these storylines of oppression to develop; we have been socialized into them for all of our lives. This socialization includes many aspects of schooling and classroom practices that are incommensurable with the aims of Bridges—evidenced in big and small ways, from the impossibility of teaching such a program with nearly 40 students to continual struggles over practices of hand-raising and turn-taking. Certainly, two hours a week cannot change oppressive societal, cultural, political, and economic practices either at large or on the small scale of the classroom—but it can plant seeds. Sometimes these will flourish—a student will participate in a theatre scene who formerly had been too shy to speak in front of the whole class—and sometimes they will be smothered by the social

space of the classroom. Bridges, in other words, if utilized as a servant belonging to all and centering the hopes and experiences of students (children), can transform the ongoing labor of the classroom. And like Zur Mühlen's “The Servant,” the story is not resolved.

Throughout the year, Miss Adrienne emphasized that how we express ourselves—and our talents—is also unfinished, as are theatre productions. She spoke often with the students about the continual possibilities for improvement in theatre. One day, Joel characterized this as being “like the sky: you can't get to the top.” In this chapter, I have demonstrated how the students' work with “The Servant” was simultaneously a mess and a success—like Winterson's string full of knots that can nevertheless be admired. Their process was, as Mariah once called the attempt at forming a circle in a too-small classroom with too many bodies, “perfectly imperfect.” It is these perfectly imperfect moments of wonder as well as the minutes of madness, chaos, and missed opportunities that constitute a critical literacy tied to the realization and the negotiation of our full humanity—as students, as teachers, as artists, and as community members.

Interstice

Make the World a Better Place[1]

You have read many fairy tales, some of them very beautiful and some that frightened you with their horrible giants and goblins. But never, I am sure, have you read such lovely stories about real everyday things. You see poor people suffering around you every day; some of you have yourselves felt how hard it is to be poor. You know that there are rich people in the world, that they do not work and have all the good things of life. You also know that your fathers work hard and then worry about what will happen if they lose their jobs.

Comrade zur Mühlen, who wrote these fairy tales, tells us in a beautiful way how these things can be stopped. All of us who work must learn that we can make the world a better place for workers and their children to live in if we will help one another. She shows us that the rich people who do not work but keep us enslaved are our enemies; we must join together, we workers of the world, and stop these wrongs. . .

Paul [a character in one of the stories] learned that he must not stop asking why things were wrong in the world, but that he must make comrades of all the workers and teach them also to ask why, until millions would be asking that question and seeing to find the answer to it.

When you read these stories, I am sure you will want to lend the book to all your friends, so that they too many spend some happy hours with the new friends you have found in the book.

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[1] From Ida Dailes's translation of Zur Mühlen's (1925) *Fairy Tales for Workers' Children* (no pagination).

Chapter 8

Storied Learning

When Lucía Peláez was very small, she read a novel under the covers. She read it in fragments, night after night, hiding it under the pillow. She had stolen it from the cedar bookshelf where her uncle kept his favorite books.

As the years passed, Lucía traveled far. . .

Lucía walked a long way, and in the course of her travels was always accompanied by echoes of the echoes of those distant voices she had heard with her eyes when she was small.

Lucía has never read that book again. She would no longer recognize it. It has grown so much inside her that now it is something else: it is hers. (Galeano, 1989, p. 22)

The Master gave his teaching in parables and stories which his disciples listened to with pleasure—and occasional frustration, for they longed for something deeper.

The Master was unmoved. To all their objections he would say, "You have to understand, my dears, that the shortest distance between a human being and Truth is a story."

(Anthony deMello [1985], in Reasons & Hawkins, 1988, p. 79)

The children in Mrs. Riggs's classroom demonstrated, like most people I've ever known and like Lucía Peláez and the Master in the epigraphs above, that story matters. The students remembered stories they had heard the year before in Bridges. They remembered stories they had read or seen in TV or movie form. They knew stories from their communities. They made connections between or drew attention to differences between these stories. Stories had grown inside them and taught them truths.

It might seem odd that I am only now writing about story. After all, this whole dissertation is about story—about stories from a classroom and from my life, about thinking of myself as a teacher who uses stories in a process of blurred translating, about

a critical literacy and creative drama program built around stories and storytelling, about students' work with and transformation of a specific story, about the stories of students' lives and schooling. In the previous chapters, I have relayed many different stories—how the Neighborhood Bridges program came to be and what it ideally looks like, a fictional story by Hermynia Zur Mühlen, one classroom's transformation of an orally told story into a collectively performed version, stories of one student's involvement with "The Servant" and the Bridges program set in contexts of his life, and a story about how these students' work was simultaneously a mess and a success. While these stories made it to the final pages in specific forms, my work with them involved thinking *with* these stories.

This is one of the strengths of the Bridges program: it encourages students and teachers to think *with* stories, to question and retell them, to make meaning, and to recognize how stories are always bound up with power that shapes their tellings and retellings. Through working with them, students can come to see that stories are malleable—and that so too are some of the ways that they tell their own lives.

I know from my own experiences, from listening to others, and from voracious reading that humans are storied creatures, that we tell stories in attempts to understand the world and our places within it and to create our identities, our communities, and our cultures. I have spent much of the last years thinking and reading about story—examining historical, theoretical, sociological or cultural tracings of storytelling or narrative (e.g., Benjamin, 1968; Langellier, 1989) or how story can be used in research (narrative inquiry, e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013). I find

it very easy to conceptualize much of teaching as a form of storytelling and believe in the power storytelling—especially personal narratives—can have in classrooms, particularly those working toward social justice.[1] I frequently use stories as a pedagogical tool (sometimes consciously, sometimes not); I also learn with stories. And, of course, research is storytelling—exemplified by what has been called a "narrative turn." But this chapter is not about any of these things.

While the previous chapters attempt to think *with* story (whether stories of theory, fiction, or students), this chapter is an extended note on some of my thinking *about* story. Because story is so ubiquitous, I explain what I mean by story and how the "truth" is that story is fact, fiction, and theory. Finally, I outline some of the work of story in relation to classrooms and Neighborhood Bridges: story involves identity, community and social relationships, multiple forms of knowledge, and transformation and creation.

Stories as Powerful, Limited, and Dangerous Tools, Companions, and Exchanges of Experience

As with any construct, scholars and writers have spilled much ink (and breath) defining story—for instance, delineating between narrative and story.[2] I am not interested

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[1] See, for instance, Bell (2010) on storytelling for social justice—specifically antiracist teaching—in high schools, teacher education, and professional development; Eder (2010) on students' cultural responses to stories and using stories to explore ethics with children and to strengthen community; Hynes-Berry (2012) on a constructivist approach to using literature and story to guide inquiry in early childhood education; Ingram (2009) on using personal narrative as a pedagogical method to teach diversity and social justice; Razack (1993) on storytelling for social change with a specific focus on law; and Witherell and Noddings (1991) on story as a teaching and learning tool and an approach of care and dialogue. Again, I note the gendered nature of this work—all of these examples are women, although the examples I use of theorizing story (e.g., Benjamin, 1968; Bruner, 1996, 2002; Frank, 2010) are men.

[2] For instance, Frank (2010) wrote of Harrington's distinction that stories are "'living local, and specific,' referring 'to immediate, concrete events, people, scientific findings, and more' (24)" while narratives are

in adding to these debates. As Frank (2010) wrote, “I make no attempt to define stories. The emphasis is on watching them act, not seeking their essence” (p. 21). Further, again like Frank, I have the “humbling realization . . . that no one can ever say anything new about stories or storytelling” (p. 17). That said, I still think it is useful to lay out some ways of conceptualizing story: as tools or toys; as actors or companions; and as the exchange of experience.

In his book-length exploration of stories in which he resisted defining story, Frank (2010) wrote that “stories, like tools, may be best understood by what they are able to do” (p. 167). As tools, stories help us to understand the world, to make sense or meaning from and with it; they offer counsel (Benjamin, 1968). Gianni Rodari, the children's author upon whom Bridges draws heavily, said this of his work with stories:

> They are toys of words similar to those of wood, plastic, or metal. Even if they are placed inside something. In short, I consider myself a “manufacturer of toys” and find that this definition of my work is the one that satisfies me the most (37-8). (in Zipes, n.d., pp. 2-3)

Most of the rest of this chapter explores this work further.

A second way of thinking about stories emphasizes that they are alive, as they take on work as actors or companions in our lives: “people seem unable to resist talking

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larger genres or templates, “resources from which people construct the stories they tell and the intelligibility of stories they hear” (p. 14). Polkinghorne (1995) wrote that narrative can be both prosaic discourse (a narrative answer as opposed to a numerical scale, for instance) or story (with a plot). In yet another definition, Ewick and Silbey (1995) emphasized the social nature of the production and performance of narrative—in other words, contexts and audience matter. Similarly, Everhart (2004) wrote that narrative in research traditions “is reflexive—meaning that the who, how, and why some person(s) tell a story are important dimensions of the story in that such elements shape the narrative and the text that narrative is meant to relate” (p. 298).

as if stories were living things, probably because people have fairly regular experiences of stories acting on their own" (Frank, 2010, p. 25). Stories are alive because in some respects they are out of our control:

> stories breathe their own breaths; they are organic and dynamic. They are as primal to us as the organs in our body, and they evolve as we do. We can control stories to the extent that we choose them and the times we tell them. But even when we punctuate, reframe, retell, or edit, we cannot but let them escape. (Chawla, 2007, p. 19)

We not only read, write, and tell stories, we live them (Davies, 2003); through stories, we both create and discover meaning. This is why Frank (2010) called stories material semiotic companions.

These companions are exchanges of experience (Benjamin, 1968; Delgado, 1989); Patricia Hampl (1999) wrote that we have been entrusted with experience and must do something with it, so that "a story, we sense, is the only possible habitation for the burden of our witnessing" (p. 18). Zipes (2004) thus stated that storytelling is "the frank presentation and articulation of experience and knowledge through different narrative modalities in order to provide a listener with strategies for survival and pleasure and to heighten one's awareness of the sensual pleasures and dangers of life" (p. 21). Presenting experience and knowledge in the form of a story means that "traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel" (Benjamin, 1968, p. 92). Stories become *ours*.

Lest this sound too utopian, it is important to remember that stories are also limited—and dangerous. As stories are heard, read, or seen, they are filtered through the reader, listener, or viewer's experiences; stories thus always work in contexts and provoke responses. They may work independently of the storyteller or her or his life or experiences; they "have a capacity to act in ways their tellers did not anticipate" (Frank, 2010, p. 35). Stories are powerful, which means they can be used in many different ways—for disconnecting and oppressing as well as for connecting and empowering. As Frank (2010) wrote, "the power of stories is the problem with stories: they are far too good at doing what they do, which is being the source of all values" (p. 69). Frank's solution to these dangers is to "increase the number of stories that are allowed to act" (p. 52). In another caution, Peter Reason and Peter Hawkins (1988) drew on Martin Buber to "suggest that storytelling becomes propaganda when the story is treated as It rather than Thou, in Buber's terms, and we seek to impose a meaning onto it, rather than allow its meanings for us to become manifest through dialogical relation" (p. 98). This dialogue between and with stories, along with questioning them, is what Neighborhood Bridges attempts to do.

Story's "Truth": Fact, Fiction, and Theory

Recently, I told "The Boy and His Dogs" to a friend and her two children. Echoing one of the most common questions following a Neighborhood Bridges story—indeed, a story told anywhere[3]—her oldest son immediately asked, "is that true?" My

[3] I remember, for instance, a passionate discussion in narrative inquiry class about whether Barone's (2000) story of Billy Charles Barnett was "true" (meaning written after interviews and sticking to the "facts")—and whether it mattered.

simple answer to this question is always yes, it is true. That is not, however, what I told that seven-year-old, nor what I or other adults involved with the Bridges program would tell a student. In the Bridges classroom, I usually turned the question back on the students: what do you think? Why?

We so want to know if stories are true because they tell us about the world we live in. If we buy the assertion that stories are alive, we want to know what kind of companions we are journeying with; we want to know how they might shape our own lives or provide new or provoke changed experiences. We want to place their (truth) claims.

Story fascinates me, my friend's son, and students in Neighborhood Bridges because of the claims it makes to truth. Stories can be personal(ized)—they can be from our own lives and experiences—or our lives and experiences as felt, remembered, or retold—or they can be understood in light of the same. Stories can also be fiction—entirely products of human imagination or based more or less loosely on events or ideas that happened in the "real world." Thus far, I have not distinguished between these, although this distinction is the basis for the age-old question about truth as well as the frustration of people like the Master's disciples in the epigraph.

The classroom stories I told in the previous chapters are true: in the 2012-13 school year, I saw and heard the students I write about. Video evidence shows, for instance, that they performed their own version of "The Servant"; dozens of people could verify that this story happened. And they are also not entirely true, because they are told

and interpreted through my words and thinking, which are, like those of all humans, limited and biased. These stories are thus a telling of the story, versions shaped by me and by my interests and the knowledges and experiences I have had access to; despite recorded evidence, including my fieldnotes, these stories also depend on memory and are cobbled together and recycled from bits and pieces as they are tailored for an audience. Like the story Lucía Peláez read in the epigraph from Eduardo Galeano, they are echoes of echoes that have grown inside of me and in computer files. Stories are always contextual—regardless of how closely they abide by "facts" that could be verified. In other words, stories are not the best format for providing a definitive, singular truth (Frank, 2010). Or, as Kamler (2001) wrote, "stories do not tell single truths, but rather represent a truth, a perspective, a particular way of seeing experience and naming it" (p. 45).

Yet "is it true?" is a worthy question to ask of nearly all (good)[4] stories. Whatever we call them—true, fiction, embellished, folk, fairy—stories, meaningful ones, anyway, distill something that is true. Sometimes this draws on imaginative tellings—ones we as adults know are not "true" in the sense of scientifically verifiable or historically accurate, like "The Boy and His Dogs." But these stories too draw on truths—for instance, that dogs provide faithful companionship or that some parents abuse their children. They are alive because these themes resonate with us; the mother hiding her child in this Bantu story, for instance, may call to mind the Hebrew story of Moses' mother and sister hiding

[4] "Good" here meaning a story "that people become caught up in because it holds them in suspense, engages their imagination, and calls for interpretation" (Frank, 2010, p. 145), rather than good as in ethically good.

him in a basket on the Nile to protect him from harm.

A more nuanced question of these, or any stories, if you buy the argument that we as humans are storied creatures who live in and through narrative, is thus "What is true about that story? And why does it matter?" Put another way, "what kind of truth is being told? Stories never resolve that question; their work is to remind us that we have to live with complicated truths" (Frank, 2010, p. 5). These truths relate with what we already know about the world—whether to verify, conflict, nuance, or change it. In writing about a favorite childhood (fictional) story and its interpretations, Davies (2003) thus asserted,

> What is important here is not to ask which is the true reading of the story, since there are always multiple possible readings of any text. More important is to ask how it is that our lived fictions and the fictions in texts intersect and (in)form each other. The multiple layers of writing can be compared to the multiple layers of lived experience. In reading the texts of our lives, or in reading written text on a page, we have learned to divide, the "real" from the "fictional", imposing yet again the limitations of binary thought. We divide the world thus as if there really were linear, singular truths separable from the multiple layers of possible readings of events, of emotions, of texts. (p. 153)

Whether or not a story is true in relationship to verifiable facts is less important than whether it is true for the listener or reader in some way. This idea about truth, Cherríe Moraga (2000) asserted, extends to how we tell the stories of our own lives: "the fiction of our lives—how we conceive our histories by heart—can sometimes provide a truth far

greater than any telling of a tale frozen to the facts" (p. 4).

Further, the power of stories is that they

> have the capacity to balance multiple truths that have respective claims to expression. The more *dialogical* the truth—or the more *POLYPHONIC*, in Bakhtin's sense of blending multiple voices into a harmony in which they never entirely merge but retain some distinctiveness—the greater the capacity of stories to tell the truth that there are multiple truths. (Frank, 2010, p. 41, italics in original)

What is true is not singular; when it comes to stories, truth is not neatly divided into fact and fiction, especially as "stories *become true* as they are told" (Frank, p. 41, italics in original). Story truth is an interdependence of fact and fiction, situated within the contexts of tellers and receivers.

"Is that true?" also raises a question about the relationship between story and theory. Just as modernist notions posit that fiction and fact are a dichotomous binary, story and theory have been viewed as irreconcilable: story as the realm of fancy and fiction, emotion and aesthetic, theory as the realm of objectivity and analysis. This, too, I believe, is a false dichotomy. Bochner (1997), for instance, contended that

> there is nothing as theoretical as a good story. The split between theory and story is false—and it's not false. It's not false when theory is viewed [as] . . . objective, scientific, detached, value-free, beyond human consciousness. Described in these terms, theory becomes an end in itself, divorced from its consequences, politics,

> and uses. . . [but] theorizing is not an activity devoid of context or consequences. (p. 435)

Both theory and story are "social and communicative" activities that open "possibilities of dialogue and collaboration" (Bochner, p. 435). Both theory and story are set in contexts—and both have claims to truth.

There are multiple ways of enacting the relationship between story and theory. Story can be used to translate theory; theory can be used to explain story. Theory can be enacted in story, as Minnie Bruce Pratt (1995) wrote in her memoir: "We cannot move theory into action unless we can find it in the eccentric and wandering ways of our daily life. . . . [Stories] give theory flesh and breath" (p. 22). Or story can be a theory, meaning that "what we tell and how we tell it is a revelation of what we believe" (Carter, 1993, p. 9). With our stories, we choose what to tell; we impose structure and meaning; we construct versions of our lives, replete with spoken and unspoken assumptions, understandings, and values. In other words, we theorize. And with stories, we can make theory more explicit.

The Work of Story

Stories, of course, do a great deal of work in addition to theorizing. For instance, Frank (2010), outlining socio-narratology, wrote that stories have the following capacities: to deal with and make trouble; to display and test people's character; to involve point of view, suspense, and resonance; to be open to interpretation; to be out of control as well as symbiotic, shape-shifting, truth-telling, and performative; to contain an

inherent morality; and to engage and necessitate imagination. Through stories, we (can) attempt to understand the world through the experience or from the body of someone else. Through stories, we understand similar or disparate pain—and joy. Through stories, we transform, we change, we move.

In a classroom, storytelling can be even more powerful if students put their own stories in conversation with other stories, whether the stories of their classmates or curricular stories. When we work to understand how stories are grounded in sociopolitical, economic, and ideological contexts, we can begin to engage in praxis—action and reflection to change the world. Some of the work stories can do for and with students is to complicate simplicity and to interrogate power and perspective (explored in Chapter 4 as part of critical literacy); to empower students to author themselves; to enable students to own knowledge and to use their own knowledges; to build community and relationships; and to work toward transformation. Quite simply, stories teach.

Identity Work: Authoring Selves

Stories situate us culturally and say who we are, including our values and ways of living and creating meaning (Dyson & Genishi, 1994; Eder, 2007); stories are not simply individual, but ideological, cultural, and social—in other words, contextual. "Stories are a bridge between individual experience and systemic social patterns" (Bell, 2003, p. 4); a story is a "thread that binds our memories, our selves, our social partners, and our culture together" (Nelson, 2003, p. 20). The stories of our own lives enable us to learn about ourselves and to explain and represent ourselves to others. As Jerome Bruner (1996)

stated, “It is through our own narratives that we principally construct a version of ourselves in the world, and it is through its narrative that a culture provides models of identity and agency to its members” (p. xiv); in other words, each of us makes a self through telling a self (Bruner, 2002). Because stories have plots, characters, and timelines, they

> may be able to offer something to the presentation of selves (and others) that other speech genres don't do so eloquently and directly. As such, narratives provide the possibility of a format that has become the privileged way of fashioning self and identity, at least in “modern times,” which is open to a certain fluidity, to improvisation, and to the design of alternatives. (Bamberg, 2004, p. 354)

Stories provide space for empowering students to author themselves, to interrogate, affirm, and/or challenge their own identities—as in Bridges goal to empower students to become narrators of their own lives. However, while we both create ourselves through telling stories about ourselves and draw on other stories to create our own storied selves, our cultures limit the possibilities and sources of these stories. The resources on which we draw and the ways we shape these stories “are usually guided by unspoken, implicit cultural models of what selfhood should be, might be—and, of course, shouldn't be” (Bruner, 2002, p. 65). Stories and their tellings (including verbal and narrative patterns and linguistic devices) are culturally specific.

Frank (2010) called these culturally specific patterns a narrative habitus. Following Bourdieu, he wrote that stories are embedded in our bodies and that our

cultures and environments lead us to desire certain stories or stories of a certain type, even though these tastes are often tacit or unconscious. These patterns shape both what we listen to and how we listen; they tell us what stories we should reshape or tell our lives by as well as ways we think that stories should end (such as the students' desires to hear the Disney version or to have a neat resolution). Our narrative habitus tells us which stories are for us or not for us and which stories we can be a part of.

It thus makes sense to heed Frank's (2010) advice about increasing the type and variety of stories available to us. Davies (2003) stated that,

> Who we take ourselves to be at any one point in time depends on the available storylines we have to make sense out of the ebb and flow of being-in-the-world along with the legitimacy and status accorded to those storylines by the others with whom we make up our lives at any one point in time. (p. 43)

Neighborhood Bridges works to do this through both telling multiple stories and through asking students to retell stories.

Work Utilizing Many Forms of Knowledge

Stories tap into multiple knowledges—embodied, lived, relational. In the Bridges classroom, practices of writing, telling, and retelling stories enable students to own knowledge and also to use their own knowledges. Some of these are frequently not allowed into schools, such as those from popular culture or emotional knowledges. Yet as Delgado (1989) wrote, “Telling stories invests texts with feeling, gives voice to those who were taught to hide their emotions. Hearing stories invites hearers to participate,

challenging their assumptions, jarring their complacency, lifting their spirits, lowering their defenses" (p. 2440).

A program that links story to creative drama also centers knowledges of the body. Bridges students are challenged to think about how to tell stories not only with words, but with bodies, including faces. They practice, for instance, saying the same words, but with different vocal inflections, facial expressions, and body languages—and discover how our bodies invest words with different meanings. Story, Frank (2010), argued, is always intimately connected to the body: "stories are as much physical as metaphysical. As stories tell people who they are, those people are embodied as much by stories as by their flesh. Stories, like bodies and in symbiosis with bodies, are people's dignity and their calamity" (p. 146). Storytelling, in other words, whether oral or performed, "materializes the semiotic" (Frank, 2010, p. 44) as the human "body embodies the story, which consummates the experience of the bodies participating in the storytelling" (Frank, p. 44).

Community Building and Relational Work

Story also holds the possibility of strengthening communities; its work is relational, as it is the sharing of experiences in community, building a common culture, ethics, or shared understandings (Benjamin, 1968; Delgado, 1989; Zipes, personal communication, October 29, 2012). Stories are "cultural respiration" (Yolen, 2014); they share group norms that are remembered and passed on. This is why stories have similar themes and plots; they order themselves for us (Zipes, personal communication, October 29, 2012). Through story, students can also connect with diverse sociocultural landscapes.

Stories move us together; they provoke us to tell other stories and to relate them to our own knowledges of the world. This is why we tell stories in spaces in which we desire learning (and teaching). We want to know and be known by the other people; we trust that they can hold our stories. And, hopefully, we trust that they can question our stories. And affirm our stories. And trouble our stories. Yet this relational work is risky, for it requires openness to—and quite possibly discomfort with—the lives, words, and emotions of others. Story creates openings for this type of risk—it shows that people throughout time, both living and fictional, have faced similar challenges.

The Work of Transformation and Creation

This brings me to my last point about the work of stories: they can be transformative and liberating. This refers to both self and community. On the level of self, Zipes (1995) wrote that "the process of learning how to tell a story is a process of empowerment" (p. 4). Stories can change our bodily habitus, encouraging us to consider new ways of being in the world, to "know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable" (hooks, 1994, p. 12), to cross boundaries that may separate us from ourselves, from each other, and from creating justice. On the level of community, "storytelling is perhaps humanity's primary tool for *changing* reality" (Kroeber, 1992, p. 13, italics in original). As Zipes argued, many stories contain what we wish for our communities but don't (yet) have: "radical social justice that suffers no excuses" (personal communication, October 29, 2012). Stories offer us changed ways of thinking about the world—and the way the world and our lives could be: "Stories do not just have plots. Stories work to *emplot* lives:

they offer a plot that makes some particular future not only plausible but also compelling" (Frank, 2010, p. 10, italics in original). Through stories, we (can) attempt to understand the world through the experience or from the body of someone else or from our own experience, removed and changed by time and place. Through stories we can work out new ways of living, of creating a new story. Students, for instance, are moved by oral histories, movies, or literature because they are stories, stories that offer different possibilities for living. And when these stories do the work of building community and social justice, they are constructive and solidarity-building. They can become *ours* and teach us truths.

Chapter 9

Revis(it)ing Blurred Translating: How Stories are Using Me

Take [this] story, for instance. It's yours. Do with it what you will. Make it the topic of a discussion group at a scholarly conference. Put it on the Web. Forget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard the story.
You've heard it now.
(King, 2003, p. 60)

Once (okay, probably more than once, but that is a good start to a story), early in the morning, my mother couldn't find my youngest brother Kieran, who was two or three years old. At first she wasn't worried, because he liked to play hide and seek. (His first full sentence was "one-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight-nine-ten-ready-or-not-here-I-come"—this after she had taken him to a doctor, concerned that he wasn't speaking.) When she didn't find him, though, my father looked out the window and discovered that he'd put on a denim backpack and tagged after his older siblings, Ryan and me, who were headed to school. Although Kieran was as tall as many elementary school students, the bus driver knew that he wasn't supposed to be getting on the #16 (hat) school bus and so was waiting for my parents.

Like most small children, Kieran wanted desperately to learn. I have multiple memories—maybe actual, maybe not, for childhood memory is notoriously unreliable—of Ryan and me trying to teach Kieran what we knew: how to do jumping jacks (a complicated coordinated physical activity) or how to pronounce "towel" (one of many words he had difficulty with due to chronic ear infections and thus hearing problems).

I also remember trying to teach him to read silently. We grew up in a house of

many books, supplemented by frequent trips to the public library. Our parents read to us nightly, so we knew the relationship between words on a page and stories. But when Ryan and I tried to teach Kieran to read silently, he couldn't figure it out. How do you "say words in your head" rather than voicing them out loud, without moving your mouth and emitting sounds? It didn't make sense to him. His eyes saw words and his mouth formed sounds.

Kieran was on to something. Just as stories such as canonical fairy tales began their lives as orally told folk tales, so too reading was not always a silent, individual act. In Europe, silent reading began around the 11th century; before then, silent reading

> made no sense, since, without the voice's mutterings, without transport on the breath, without the spirit performing the text, the text remained dead and useless and meaningless. To read required that the text be inhabited by the breath of the one reading. (Jardine, 2008, p. 12)

With silent reading, the individual, the I, the self became "increasingly more singular, purged, less haunted by the ghostly voices of others. Knowledge became 'out there' as I became 'in here'" (Jardine, p. 12). With silent reading, knowledge absorption could become a solitary matter, rather than one of community and relationship. The relationship between words printed, spoken, and otherly voiced changed, although people also gained other avenues for fulfilling their desires for learning. In more recent decades, in schools, a shift to silent reading (from oral recitation) reflected the power of ideals of scientific management; silent reading is often used as a form of social control and bodily discipline

(Newkirk, 2002). Reading, in whatever form, is a cultural process immersed in power.

Without realizing it, perhaps I have been inhabiting these ancient—and new—fears over singularity and meaninglessness and social control, for in my research, I turned to a learning experience that centers performing texts. As a storytelling program, Bridges recognizes that *reading* a story (by oneself) is not the same as *telling* a story. As storytelling and theatre are collective endeavors, the success of the Bridges classroom, requires risk; humor and imagination; deep listening and abilities to (re)tell stories; student production and ownership of stories and knowledge; and play as both a noun and a verb. Texts—whether student-authored, canonical or counter tales, or performed—are "inhabited by the breath" of many people.

As I began the solitary process of writing about and with the words and actions in Mrs. Riggs's classroom, I found ways to push against the singularity Jardine (2008) wrote about. For the first time, I began sharing drafts of my writing with others, asking for their feedback and interpretation. I also continued my usual practice of reading my writing aloud. Perhaps these were attempts to keep the words—and the people who breathed them—alive in my mouth, to keep them from becoming "dead and useless and meaningless." Richardson (2003), in her work on writing as method, expressed her frustration that much academic writing bores her. I recognize that no matter how much care I put into crafting this text, *reading* this dissertation is still far removed from the experience of living the classroom or even my experience of writing of those experiences. This is frustrating, because to me teaching and learning are fundamentally about

relationships, about the conspiracies—from "con" and "spire," meaning to breath together—of the classroom.

My intention for this concluding chapter—and for the dissertation overall—was to return to teaching as blurred translating, to think about where and how blurred translating occurred or didn't and how this theory fell short—in other words, to see how my experiences in the Bridges classroom provoked me to *revise* my theorizing of teaching as blurred translating.[1] But I found myself instead thinking about how *research* is blurred translating—and how this blurred translating involves other people. In other words, the solitary process of writing (and researching) is "dead and useless and meaningless" if I am not translating interpretations of the work of the classroom that speak with the lives and experiences of other people. Once again, words and actions transfer and transform, are born, removed, or changed "from one place, state, form, or appearance to another" (Merriam-Webster, 2009, definition of "translate").

Thus, instead of revising my theorization of the practice of teaching, in this chapter I *revisit* blurred translating as a practice of research. I first briefly summarize how, as a researcher, I saw teaching as blurred translating enacted in a Bridges classroom. After a quick look at some other researchers' considerations of research as translation, I then examine how this translating takes time as well as the times at which it occurs.

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[1] In Britzman's (1991) words, I would

> consider the process of theorizing not as an isolated activity separate from the experience of teaching . . . but rather as a lived relationship, grounded in the practical existence of persons and dependent upon the process of interpretation and change. Seen in this way, theorizing is a tentative and potentially transformative instance of practice. To theorize about one's experience means to engage one's reflective capacities in order to be an author of that experience. (p. 64)

These times of translating betray—fail—though, so translating is a risk. For me, story and community (relationship) are central to this risk. I close by returning to this unfinished metaphor that, through play and practice, may allow us—as teachers, students, and researchers—to breathe together and to keep alive many voices.

Blurred Translating as a Bridges Pedagogy

In Chapter 2, I characterized teaching as blurred translating as based in listening; relational and contextual; a never-finished process; and oriented toward justice. Although midway through the school year I realized that I almost never thought about blurred translating while in the classroom (even though it was happening, such as when Jacob acted out conflict with his mom over video games), all these characteristics are at work in Bridges. They are both strategies of teaching and goals for the collective work of the students. Listening occurs as stories are told and performed. The work is relational and contextual as Teaching Artists and classroom teachers tailor stories and activities to the students in the room. Theatre also necessitates relational work as performance is both an individual and a collective endeavor, and, as Miss Adrienne frequently reminded the students, performance is a never-finished process. Finally, as a critical literacy program, Bridges is oriented toward exposing inequitable power relationships and working toward justice.

This happens as students try out other identities and think about the world through different characters. Students have opportunities to reauthor stories, to make them more heteroglossic (Bakhtin, 1981), to ask questions, and to challenge them—all parts of a

process of translating. By emphasizing improvisation and "going off script," students and teachers engage in translations with their bodies and knowledges. Additionally, students write their own stories, which often reflect experiences they had, did not have, or wish they could have; these fictional stories come from their understandings, ideas, and wonderings. In responding to and enacting stories, students show what they know, translating knowledges from their lives into the classroom.

Bridges also allows popular and peer cultures to become part of the classroom, particularly as part of performances. Popular songs, dances, video games, sports, movies and television, Internet memes, and technology references entered stories and performances, sometimes at the center or used to explain the story—as happened with commercials and dances in the sixth-graders' version of "The Servant." Youth culture can provide teachers with knowledge of and relationships with students (Duncan-Andrade, 2004); this certainly occurred in this classroom, such as when Miss Adrienne and Mrs. Riggs looked up popular songs and dances for the students to incorporate into their plays. (Not that the students couldn't do so themselves, but the school both blocked access to many Websites and there was a concern about whether or not they were "clean," as Da'uud put it.) These types of incorporation begin to work toward a "more intellectually rigorous literacy curriculum that employs youth popular culture as a bridge to traditional literacy skills" (Duncan-Andrade, 2004, p. 330)—in other words, a tool of translation.[2]

These Bridges pedagogical processes are in motion and imperfect; they are

[2] This, of course, is not to imply that popular and peer cultures are unproblematic in the classroom; literacy studies which explore this further include Lensmire (1994a) and Wohlwend (2009).

blurred. And sometimes they fail. Over a year removed from Da'uud's declaration that "it's too boring now," I have had time to reflect on how I might have translated in the moment, rather than allowing his words to die between us. I know it is not possible to be all things to all students. But experiences and relationships help us to know students and to know how to translate the work that classrooms ask of them. Story can help with this too, as in a Bridges classroom, stories themselves also blur, as they are retold, given new endings, or shifted in storyline or character or setting. Thus, while not always obvious to me in the moment, teaching as blurred translating was occurring. Yet as I had trouble clearly separating teaching and researching, I realized that research as blurred translating also aptly describes my work then and now.

Research as Blurred Translating

I am certainly not the first to think of research, and particularly ethnography, as translation. James Clifford (1988), for instance, wrote that "participant observation obliges its practitioners to experience, at a bodily level as well as an intellectual level, the vicissitudes of translation" (p. 24). Ethnography, he wrote, is "enmeshed in writing" that "includes, minimally, a translation of experience into textual form" (p. 25), complicated by the identities of many people as well as power relations. Or, as Deborah Britzman (1995) wrote, "the ethnographic text intends to translate, even as it is meant to stand in for, social life" (p. 229). Additionally, in connecting data to theory, "we learn to tell our version of the lives we study by translating the terms ordinary people use into the categories and jargon that comprise our field's theoretical language" (Bochner, 1997, p.

423).

The most explicit articulation of research as translation I have found is an article by Christian Churchill (2005) entitled "Ethnography as Translation." Churchill argued that the human actions an ethnographer sees are like an original language text whose translation the ethnographer undertakes. Making choices for written reports, the ethnographer shapes 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). This is a flawed process, just as all human communication is:

> For the communicative exchange between isolated selves is nothing more than one individual translating for another his or her internal language as best as he or she can or as poorly as he or she chooses. In other words, if ethnography as translation is flawed, it is only as flawed as the exchange of words and gestures between any two human beings. (Churchill, p. 23)

Yet the ethnographer must be careful and attentive; those who write about their awareness of their position and their choices "offer the clearest examples of the process" (Churchill, p. 8). Like translators of written texts, the ethnographer must understand participants and their contexts. Like a translator who has access to a written text in its original language, the ethnographer, not the reader, has the first-hand knowledge of the action and must be able to switch between the two:

> the ethnographer [must] be able to seamlessly shift between his or her own native dialect—which includes bodily gestures, dress, gender assumptions, and language itself—and that of his or her subjects without feeling a sense of strangeness and distance. That is, the ethnographer must be able to inhabit two vernacular territories. (Churchill, p. 6)

I, however, argue that there are many more than two "vernacular territories."[3] To me, data generated during research is more like Bakhtin's (1984a) polyphony: the voices include me as an academic, me as a teacher, each student, the classroom teacher, and the Teaching Artist, as well as the surrounding contexts. All have their own, independent vernacular territories. Further, how each aspect of myself (e.g., teacher, researcher, woman) reads students, positions them, and interprets them—and how they read, position, and interact with me—is different and is relational and contextual, based on identities and positionalities as well as the interaction between individuals and the collective. However, although these many voices and their vernacular territories inhabit the "data," research is (usually) written in a singular voice (in Bakhtin's [1984a] words, "illuminated by a single authorial consciousness" [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

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[3] This is one way that my analysis of research as translating differs from Churchill's. Another is that Churchill (2005) (as a sociologist) argued that there are usually three levels of ethnographic translation. The first is between a researcher and her or his chief informant; the second involves these two but also adds the entire community as the chief informant vouches for the researcher (the informant translates the research to the community and the informant translates the community for the researcher); and third, between the researcher and the reader. The first two did not occur in my study (nor, I would argue, in many classroom or educational studies).

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.

Time and Times of Translation

My ethnographic research, like teaching, was about being with the people in the room and about breathing texts together. Research is blurred translating: attempts, based in listening to students and their teachers, to relate my interpretations of contextual, relational work with story. For me, research, too, is an ongoing, incomplete process oriented toward social justice. And as writing is its methodology, my work here strives to keep multiple languages and voices alive in my mouth—and on the pages.

Reflecting on this, most evident is how much time translating takes. First, it took time to be in the classroom with these students—and to recognize that sometimes I needed to do what felt like neglecting my research so that I could teach, or even just *be* in the room. I realized, for instance, that it was nearly impossible to facilitate the dialogue after telling a story and still be thinking about my research—and sometimes even to be thinking about critical literacy. Often, I chose to be with the students, rather than with my notebook. Then, outside the classroom and after typing seemingly endless fieldnotes and memos, it took even more time to write, read, and think, to ask different questions, look for answers, and come to alternate versions of a story. It took me over a year to work my way through some possible interpretations of the students' work with “The Servant.” In a classroom of three dozen students, time felt even more limited—and interpretation could

almost never occur in the moment.

Conceptualizing research as blurred translating also raises important questions of what is translated to whom. The what (the text) is the data and lives of research participants (here, the culture of one classroom engaging in the Neighborhood Bridges program), while the researcher translates for a reading audience (frequently, the culture of academia). Because there is a reader separate from the translator, research as blurred translating may more closely parallel transliteral translation than teaching as blurred translating. I am engaging in blurred translating because I am telling these stories in a printed text, to a reader who is not breathing these stories with me in person, who wasn't there to breathe them with me as they occurred—or even, as in the case of Miss Adrienne, was breathing the stories differently. My translating of what happened and some interpretations of it are infused also with my ideologies; these words then enter dialogue with the ideas and texts, experiences and beliefs that a reader brings to this text. Thus, this research is translation, multiple times removed from the students and teachers who breathed words and actions together.

Importantly, researchers don't know where these translations might lead. This past week, for instance, a computer science Ph.D. candidate told me my writing about imagination in the Bridges classroom had prompted him to read Dewey's *Art as Experience*. Far outside the contexts of his work and study, my translations resonated with him. He then told me that in Sanskrit (and other Indian languages), the word “student” means “one who begs for knowledge.” This conversation, which involved

multiple forms of translating, was significant because I believe another level of translating involves communicating across different languages about and experiences of school. My work prompted this other researcher to think about his own educational experiences, about university classrooms, and about the work he does with undergraduate students. I'm thrilled to be part of such translating.

Further, I have seen how the research process—including documentation or discussion—can help teachers. For instance, I transcribed Bridges classroom sessions (not in Mrs. Riggs's classroom or at Williams) as part of an assessment process. After reading the transcription of his class, one Teaching Artist told me that he hadn't realized how he directed these conversations. Seeing his words in print made him think differently about how he would facilitate such discussions, as the point was not to direct students to critical literacy but to provide spaces for them to begin their own interrogations of stories. In other words, assessment—a form of re-search—helped him to reflect on his teaching.

Yet at other times, I've felt like a complete failure (even though I recognize, in theory, that perhaps this feeling is actually just my encounter with the limitations of translation). I've wondered if languages, ideas, or understandings about education are so different that translating is not possible, or if I just have not (yet) found ways of translating. During this dissertation process, I bumped into greater barriers and disconnects than I realized I would, which, of course, necessitated translation. At my most frustrated moments, I lost track of whom I was even trying to translate for. I thought many times about giving up. I forgot that what I ultimately desire is learning

environments that work toward social justice and that engage students' lives and knowledges. That focus was hard to remember when confronted with questions about whether I had the right methodology or rubric or measurement. Or when I was asked, understandably, to explain how this research would benefit students and schools, but the only language my answer could be understood in was that of measurement, causality. Validity, reliability, generalizability. I am not saying these are not worthy questions to ask of research—and I am definitely not saying that researchers shouldn't ask how students and teachers might benefit from their work. But the language of positivism is not the only worthy research language. I didn't know what to do with the reality that some educational languages are *not* the same—nor do such languages, writ large, and my own theories on education draw on the same foundational concepts.

Maybe part of the work of research as blurred translating is thus also about communicating ways in which varied forms of knowledge, research, and writing can help us to translate lives, to figure out how students make sense of their worlds, lives, and selves, and then to translate that into student learning. As a colleague wrote when I was discouraged, “We're in an era where they are trying to commodify learning, to encapsulate it into numbers and scores. . . what you are doing is trying to legitimate a different kind of knowledge construction that is more kid-centered and culturally relevant: advocacy.” This type of knowledge construction also needs translation.

Which makes me think about my new knowledge: that the Sanskrit word “student” means “one who begs for knowledge.” The power of the Bridges classroom

seems to hinge on providing moments—always limited—in which (some) students beg for knowledge, for understanding. They ask that their knowledges—about popular culture in the form of song and dance, about families, about stories—be incorporated into the work of the classroom. They ask, too, that the classroom not require them to be someone they are not, that the classroom respect them. Sometimes, it takes time for these requests to be heard and understood. Maybe it requires blurred translating.

Translating as Betrayal

Yet writing (or reading) about the classroom is very different from participating in it. Reading my fieldnotes and then theorizing and interpreting the work of the classroom and its students was completely unlike my lived experiences there. While writing, I have, for instance, been scared by how students, such as Da'uud, have 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 "results" or "findings" thus feel somewhat like a failed translation, even as I am not sure it is possible to translate a life into words on a page. Many languages have a saying that translation always betrays. Similarly, Jardine (2008) argued that translation

> betrays because our very act of being human is already to be handed over, betrayed, visible and audible, presumed-upon, witnessed, not just witnessing, known, not just knowing. We don't begin as self-determining subjectivities but, as already having been handed over to the ways of things (our language[s] and culture[s] and so on, all mixed and multifarious and, to the extend that we belong

> to them, often deathly silent and presumed), we are already betrayed by our belonging. (Jardine, 2008, pp. 12-13)

Jardine's words are a reminder of the humanity of translation—and of its ethical and political nature. My ethical and political beliefs impel me to strive to show integrity toward students and teachers and to honor their humanity, as I don't want to be a translator for violence or for nonsense. But I know too that the translator (in research, the ethnographer and hence writer) always domesticates interpretation; even with the help of theory and other research literature, she or he writes from a positionality and an understanding of the world, even when knowingly trying to communicate in other languages. Thus, a translation of what happened in the Bridges classroom by any other researcher would read completely differently than what fills the previous chapters; translation is always partial. There is always space between the practice of education and the research of education. Or perhaps betrayal is too strong. Maybe it is just blurred.

Risky Stories and Risking Relationship

Betrayal or blurring aside, as a novice researcher, I was, of course, nervous about the whole undertaking. In August 2012, I wrote:

> I think I need to let the stories find me. They are always there, of course. The research is actually a matter of being literate enough to read them—and the literacy, of course, has many sources and variations. It is then not a matter of what the interview questions are or your observational protocol or the fact that you wrote down or recorded *everything* that happens in a classroom, an interaction,

> etc. It is a matter of paying attention and of seeing patterns and of recognizing moments of (potential [of/for]) learning. I am curious, though, to know if I have enough practice to be able to see those moments, to begin and to connect those stories. For instance, is [*sic*] the important words or phrase or action apparent in the moment so I either remember it or write it down? Or do I only recognize these patterns after looking at much more, including much more that is not the story, a distraction from the story even?

Nearly two years later, I don't know the answers to these questions. I know that I remembered important moments—and am sure I forgot or completely missed others. Others were available to me only when I began working with the notes or formed patterns I recognized after reading or talking about ideas, texts, and experiences.

But while I don't know if there are answers to these “hows” of research, I am thinking differently about story. Frank (2010) asked readers to consider how stories use us (in addition to how we use stories). With this in mind, research might be conceived of as an undertaking in which stories use me, the researcher. My attempts were thus to translate the stories of Neighborhood Bridges, of this sixth-grade classroom, and of these students' lives and interests, to transfer meanings from their stories. And as with teaching as blurred translating, research as blurred translating is intimately bound up with both story and relationship.

Blurred translating is fundamentally about about humanizing relationships (relationships that humanize and in which we work together on our ontological vocation

of becoming more fully human [Freire, 2000]). I mostly only know how to engage in blurred translating in relationship. Relationship-building takes time. And in a classroom of nearly forty people, time with individual students is elusive. Further, the boundaries of formal classroom space don't always allow for or encourage the risk-taking that relationships require. Yet in the three dozen afternoons I spent with those three dozen students, relationships—and learning—were also why research sometimes took a back seat: in some moments, sitting with a student and working through a story was just more important. Their stories—of their lives and of their fictional creation—were using me.

Lawrence Venuti (2000) argued that translation is always ideological, always filled with utopian hopes of community—or bonds of relationship. To reiterate what Santos poetically argued:

> translation attempts to restore that original city, to re-imagine that place where everyone was welcome, and where everyone was understood. When the tribes were dispersed from Babel, they left in the isolation of their individual languages, but they also left with a dream: the dream of reclaiming that first community. . . . 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. (pp. 10, 14)

These ideals—community through difference, simultaneously close and yet irreconcilable or translated only blurrily—are what I believe pedagogues and thinkers

like Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and Gloria Ladson-Billings are after. And what storytellers and story theorizers like Thomas King and Arthur Frank attempt.

Re-reading Chapter 2 in preparation for writing this chapter, I was drawn to the words that reminded me of moments when I felt like I was embodying—or failing to embody—blurred translating: lost, in motion, incomplete, intimidated, hesitant. But also riveted, joyful, and relational. The words risk and labor also seemed critically important. It felt risky for me to become involved in something with which I am profoundly uncomfortable: performance. It felt risky to write in ways I wanted and need to write, rather than ways researchers are "supposed to write." It feels risky to write that what my research is really about is relationships and about how story and collaborative performance can do what we say we want: engage students in learning together—and having fun.

Breathing Together with an Unfinished Metaphor

Of course, in all of this, I am writing about actual lives, actual bodies in classrooms, breathing the same air and the same words, yet interpreting them differently. This is not (solely) a naïve fantasy or a play on words. Cherríe Moraga (2005/2011) asserted that the task of writers "is to create metaphors of meaning that can shape and change consciousness . . . to use language that matters in a way that matters" (p. 87). The test, she continued, "the measure of the political efficacy of a metaphor is if a radical living practice emerges from it" (p. 88). Has blurred translating changed my living practices, either as a teacher or as a researcher?

As I thought about my year in Mrs. Riggs's classroom, I began to wonder if blurred translating was too big—it can be used to describe too much—and too small—I was not "seeing" it in the classroom. When I conceptualized the metaphor, I was thinking specifically about times in my life when I engaged in these practices and how to explain these moments as teaching. This metaphor was firmly rooted in my own life; my theorizing is "a form of engagement with and intervention in the world" (Britzman, 1991, p. 69). Kim (2008), drawing on Conle (1999), wrote that story and theory can blur when they are rooted in lives:

> When lived experience becomes lived theory, we are theorizing the lived experience of the protagonists. Thus, lived theory grounded in the protagonist's lived experience promotes dialogical relations between reality and theoretical concepts. . . Lived theory is organic and ontological; it is not bound to a metanarrative. It is constantly in the process of evolving and recurring while *traveling* from place to place and person to person. (Kim, 2008, p. 258, italics in original)

As I was trying to figure out how to think of myself as a teacher, I theorized my teaching as blurred translating. In Mrs. Riggs's classroom, I was trying to apply a concept as it traveled to a context very different from my work in community centers and on buses and at dinner tables. And this lived theory traveled yet again as I began the labor of writing—and as I tried to figure out myself as a researcher. It is living. Whether I am aware or not in the moment, the potential for a living practice does exist in this living theory.

I am in good company in conceptualizing both teaching and research as arising from many lived experiences of education. Freire (1998a) asserted that there is no teaching without learning and that

> there is no such thing as teaching without research and research without teaching. One inhabits the body of the other. As I teach, I continue to search and re-search. I teach because I search, because I question, and because I submit myself to questioning. I research because I notice things, take cognizance of them. And in so doing, I intervene. And intervening, I educate and educate myself. I do research so as to know what I do not yet know and to communicate and proclaim what I discover. (p. 35)

Knowing these interrelationships, he argued further, would make it clear to us 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" (Freire, pp. 47-48). Reality and theory meet and mingle when we allow these experiences to interact.

Yet I also wonder if one of the difficulties that attends both teaching and researching is that the more comfortable one becomes with them, the less one feels acutely that need for translation. Maybe one "language" becomes more prominent and so that language is the one of comfort—and the other seems less important. But we need both—and we need teachers who can see the importance of research translated and researchers who know the importance of students' and teachers' lives, again translated.

This work of interpreting is a necessary and necessarily blurred translating.

Thus, this work, as theory and practice, as reflection and action, as *praxis*, can only ever be unfinished and ongoing. After all, we are, Freire (1998a) asserted, capable of being educated only if we recognize ourselves as unfinished; this unfinishedness is "essential to our human condition" (p. 52).

Further, like the students' insistence in their version of "The Servant" that "friends, family, and community are more important than money," I want to insist on an unfinished—a living—pedagogy and research that may have no value to or for measurements or traditional economies. Instead, I want to argue for the currency of relationship and story, knowing that with this economy, "We teach, with no knowledge or certainty about what consequences our actions as teachers will have. . . . Pedagogy, when it 'works,' is unrepeatable and cannot be copied, sold, or exchanged—it's 'worthless' to the economy of educational accountability" (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 17). There is, however, value to (and for) human lives.

Play With It: It's Yours Now

In his book *The Truth About Stories,* Thomas King (2003) closed each of the five chapters and the "afterwords" with a variation on the epigraph that opened this chapter. His words capture the work that I imagine Hermynia Zur Mühlen dreamed of for her story:

> Take [this story]. It's yours. Do with it what you will. Tell it to your children. Turn it into a play. Forget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have

lived your life differently if only you had heard the story.

You've heard it now. (King, 2003, p. 151)

Turn into a play. Play with it. I am sure that Zur Mühlen, writing in Weimar Germany, was not thinking about sixth-grade students in 2012 in a school in the Midwestern United States hearing her story and collaborating, more or less as a community, to transform it into their own play performed in front of their peers and families, with all of the crises and missteps that attend working in community and with dozens of people from many different interests and identities. I certainly don't make any claims that years from now, these students will live their lives differently because they heard and worked with this story. But maybe they will.

And I can assert that the story—and the students' and my work with it—has changed my life. Or at least changed the ways I think about identity, about performance, about social justice in classrooms, about research. And given the number of people who resonate with my stories about Neighborhood Bridges, perhaps it has other effects as well. I believe this interest is about something that we yearn for in classrooms: that they be spaces to tell stories, to work collaboratively, to play, to write, to bring students' knowledges, interests, and lives into the classroom.

And for research to bring students' lives beyond the classroom and into spaces where people are trying to figure out teaching and learning. In my teaching in other spaces, I endeavor to translate using stories of students' lives and theoretical stories, just as I have done here.

The stories certainly aren't neat and tidy. I easily believe, along with bell hooks (1994), that “learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility” (p. 207). “Paradise” doesn't happen nearly as often as I want. But I do know that it can. When the students in Mrs. Riggs's class stood in a circle and complimented each other on how they successfully undertook a very difficult act—transforming an orally told story into a performance that incorporated most, although not all, of their classroom members—magic happened.

Powerful practices of Bridges pedagogy occur in relationship, through sharing stories with each other, whether canonical or countertales voiced by the Teaching Artist, classroom teacher, or me as researcher; student-authored stories shared in front of the class (like Jacob's conflict with his mother or Da'uud and his classmates' story about grandpas); or performed plays. These experiences are opportunities to breathe together; they remind me of Zadie Smith's wish that she “had kept both voices alive” in her mouth. I also think about Jardine's (2008) words:

> Something happens when we read something aloud. The voice is asked to experience the truth of the words in uttering them, and that truth is carried on a voice full of perishing and mourning and lostness, even when, perhaps especially when, the words sounded speak to a truth that will outlast the breath of that frail voice itself. The voice and its sounds “pass by” like texts do not. The voice and its breathing pass away into silence. The airs stop moving, even while the written text remains, now the corpse of the vanished breath. (p. 15)

Teaching as blurred translating depends on the presence and interaction of bodies, of voices. We ask each other to experience our truths, partial and limited as they may be. Something happens, as Jardine said, when we allow others' words to touch and transform us, when we are moved by others' stories and by seeing what students can do with a story when given space and assistance to transform it. And yet, as Da'uud's stories remind us, this is also not the whole story—something is always lost; silences may yell louder than we acknowledge. The words of the classroom are inhabited by the breath of many; blurred translating asks that we risk allowing the stories to use us, as they become ours.

After living with these concepts and lives for years now, I realize that I am writing about research and teaching as *practices* of blurred translating. I use practice in both senses: as something we do regularly and as doing something again in order to do it "better." Both senses of practice are embedded in a relational and contextual way of being that is critical, self-reflexive, risky, and always in process. Further, practice is required to connect classroom stories with larger stories of theory, history, and culture. And, crucially, I envision practices of both teaching and researching—or teaching as researching and researching as teaching, in all their variations and blur—as about transfer and transformation. Hope of transformation was what compelled Kieran to follow his older siblings to the school bus and Zur Mühlen and Hoernle to write their fairy tales about servants and giants; transformation is what words set into written text, whether read silently or spoken aloud and breathed together, can do. Working toward social justice, I practice and play with blurred translating as both a teacher and a researcher,

jumping into relationships and lived experiences as my toddler brother did: “one-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight-nine-ten-ready-or-not-here-I-come.”

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Appendix

Collaborative Writing Using Natural Dialogue Rhythms

Worksheet: Collaborative Writing Using Natural Dialogue Rhythms

Based on a game from Philadelphia Young Playwrights

Conflict or Disagreement_____

Character A_____ Written by Playwright 1_____

Character B_____ Written by Playwright 2_____

A: (two to four words) _____

B: (two to four words) _____

A: (two to four words) _____

B: (two to four words) _____

A: (two to four words) _____

B: (one to two words) _____

A: (one to two words) _____

B: (one to two words) _____

A: (one to two words) _____

B: (one word) _____

A: (one word) _____

B: (one word) _____

A: (twenty or more words) _____

B: (twenty or more words) _____

A: (four to six words) _____

B: (four to six words) _____

A: (four to six words) _____

B: (one to two words) _____

A: (one to two words) _____

B: (one to two words) _____