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Alison Cook-Sather

Bryn Mawr College, acooksat@brynmawr.edu

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Between Student and Teacher: Learning to Teach as Translation

Alison Cook-Sather

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Becoming a teacher poses a challenge unlike preparation for any other profession: to return to a context in which one has spent the majority of one's life, yet to re-enter after several years spent away and in a role presumed to be opposed to one's previous role. This challenge is intensified for pre-service teachers who pursue secondary certification at the undergraduate level. Still immersed in their own higher education and poised to re-enter the familiar/strange context of the high school classroom, they are steeped in subject-specific content and educational theory, but they are uncertain about how that knowledge will play out in practice. Cast in the dual role of student-teacher, they are expected to transition from the former role into the latter. Pulled in various directions by these complex experiences and expectations, many pre-service teachers describe a profound sense of dislocation and dissonance.

The dichotomies according to which education is organized heighten this sense. Dichotomies between the contexts of the high school classroom and college, between the roles of student and teacher, and between the discourse practices associated with each of those polarized pairs catch pre-service teachers in the middle and compel them to choose between the poles. Faced with having to choose, many pre-service teachers turn away from the theoretical and toward the practical, accept the traditional roles assigned to student and teacher, and succumb to the apparent disjunction between the languages that teachers and students speak.

This choosing and splitting is neither necessary nor desirable. In defining and redefining their roles and in learning to interact with students, pre-service teachers should not have to divide themselves and replace one prescribed role and designated language with another. As teacher educators, we should facilitate learning to teach that is about creative re-integration rather than splitting. We should help pre-service teachers explore the multiple versions of their identities and the various forms of their discourse practices, each and all of which are integral to who they are. Likewise, we should provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to learn about the people they are preparing to teach, who have equally multiple and diverse identities and discourse practices.

To help pre-service teachers prepare to re-enter the high school classroom, forge a dynamic and integrated role for themselves, and develop discursive forms through which they can both understand and be understood by their students, we as teacher educators need a generative conceptual framework to inform and guide our work. As Lakoff and Johnson have argued, our concepts structure what we perceive and how we interact with other people (1980, p. 3). And, they suggest, most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature. One way to illuminate our work as teacher educators, therefore, is to discern and develop a generative metaphor for the process of learning to teach.

In the following discussion I argue for conceptualizing the process of learning to teach as translating oneself between identities and languages “without being split by the difference” (Hoffman, 1989, p. 274). I settled on the metaphor of translation because the process of learning to teach is accomplished primarily through language-based exchanges. Backward- as well as forward-referenced, it requires a change in one's form (or role) and one's use of language. At the same time it acknowledges that something of previous versions is preserved in the change.

I use the metaphor of translation to describe the process of learning to teach within the context of the undergraduate education program I direct at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges, two small, liberal arts colleges in the Mid-Atlantic United States.¹ The curricular structure that supports the translations is a project called Teaching and Learning Together.² The central component of this project is a weekly exchange of letters between pre-service teachers enrolled in the Curriculum and Pedagogy Seminar I teach and selected students who attend a local public high school. The dialogue is a private exchange between the pre-service teachers and the high school students focused on issues I recommend as well as those that the pairs believe are relevant to teaching and learning. This written dialogue is complemented and informed by weekly conversations between the pre-service teachers and me in the college classroom and weekly conversations between the high school students and my collaborator at the high school.³ (See Cook-Sather, forthcoming, and Cook-Sather, under review, for extended descriptions of this project.)

¹ See Cook-Sather (In Press) for a different discussion of learning to teach as translation.

² The design and three years of support of this project were provided by a grant from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations. Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges now support the project without outside funding.

³ From 1995-1998, I co-facilitated this project with Ondrea Reisinger, then an English teacher at a suburban, public high school in Springfield, Pennsylvania. In 1998 and 1999, I co-facilitated this project with Jean McWilliams, Assistant Principal at a suburban, public high school in Ardmore, Pennsylvania.

I begin my discussion here with a rationale for using metaphor as a conceptual framework in teacher education and an explication of the metaphor of translation as I use it to describe the process of learning to teach. Next I discuss how the curricular model, Teaching and Learning Together, supports pre-service teachers' translations within the Bryn Mawr/Haverford Education Program. And finally, I offer examples of two ways that I perceive and facilitate pre-service teachers' translations. The first is how pre-service teachers translate what it means to be a teacher as they translate themselves into teachers, and the second is how they translate the language they use with students as they interact with students.

Why Metaphor?

Metaphors govern our everyday thoughts and actions in both conscious and unconscious ways (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 3). With their unexpected juxtaposition of seemingly unlike things, metaphors can surprise and delight as well as enlighten (Oliver, 1994, p. 102); they can “reorient consciousness” and “help us move from a kind of confinement to something wider” (Greene, 2000). Premised on movement — in perception, in understanding, in engagement — metaphor does not operate purely within the realm of the cerebral; it is a mode of interpretation and engagement that is more fully embodied. When one grasps a metaphor, one not only rethinks the relationships thrown into relief by that metaphor; one also alters one's participation in and engagement with the world as a result of that rethinking. Making conscious and explicit the metaphors that govern our thoughts and actions is not just a theoretical exercise; it is a matter of complicating and clarifying our understanding so that we can deliberately shape our interactions.

As a way to “reorient consciousness” metaphor has some of the same qualities as other perspective-gaining strategies, such as critical reflection on educational practice and transformational learning. Dewey argued that critical thinking is inspired by “an *unsettlement* and aims at overcoming a disturbance” in one's understanding of something (1916, p. 326). Similarly, in a discussion of his Transformation Theory about adult learning, Mezirow suggests that being “confronted with a disorienting dilemma” can serve as “a trigger for reflection” (1994, p. 223). In both cases, the unexpected or unfamiliar prompts rethinking. Advocates of fostering the development of reflective practitioners (see Colton and Sparks-Langer, 1993; Richert, 1990; Rudney and Guillaume, 1990; Zeichner and Liston, 1987; Schon, 1983; Dewey, 1933) argue that,

in the absence of reflection, “one runs the risk of relying on routinized teaching and . . . not developing as a teacher or as a person” (Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall, 1998, p. 262). The ongoing interplay of reflection and action, or what Freire (1990) calls praxis, although not generally built into the “structure of teaching” (Elbaz, 1987, p. 45), is essential to good pedagogical practice.

The conceptual framework that underlies reflective practice is a mirroring — a looking back and forth between reality and an image of it. The ideal conditions of learning Mezirow (1994, 1991) identifies in Transformation Theory focus, like reflective practice, on the intellectual requirements for clear understanding. Metaphors have the potential to take us beyond such a literal mirroring and intellectual focus. They have the potential to add dimension, richness, and depth to our understanding and engagement because their unexpected juxtapositions prompt a more thorough and integrated reorientation of the self in thought and action.

Mezirow (1994) suggests that metaphors can be particularly effective in inspiring the kind of reflection that is a precondition of learning. As pre-service teachers embark upon the process of negotiating the dissonances between their pre-teaching lives and their lives as experienced teachers (Sumara and Luce-Kapler, 1996) they engage in what Britzman describes as a “process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation — of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become” (1991, p. 8). This learning is very much of a process, yet most metaphors evoked in teacher education focus not on the process of becoming a teacher but rather on pre-defined roles that teachers can assume. Such metaphors can facilitate transformation from one state or role to another, but they do not accommodate the possibility that transformation is itself the desired state.

Representative of the metaphors available to describe the role of teacher, Fenstermacher and Soltis (1992) offer the teacher as executive, therapist, or liberationist, and Ladson-Billing (1994) identifies the teacher as conductor, coach, or referral agent, among others. Because these metaphors are predefined — invested and associated with already established ways of understanding and interacting — they run the risk of rendering “teacher” a clearly delineated and fixed role. Any metaphor that offers such prescribed and static parameters and substance is not only limiting but also dangerous; it has the potential to divest learning to teach of the need to interpret, in an ongoing way, oneself, those with whom one interacts, and one's practice.

As teacher educators, we need metaphors because they move us beyond the more strictly intellectual process of reflection and critical thinking. Furthermore, we need metaphors that do not contribute to the construction of identities and modes of expression that aim to achieve a fixed or finished state. We need metaphors that capture the dynamic, ongoing process of becoming a teacher.

Why Translation?

Using the metaphor of translation to describe the process of learning to teach adds dimension to the dialectic between reflection and action, and it requires reflexive and recursive redefinition as well as transformation. Conceptualizing learning to teach as translation calls for a continuous and embodied process of making meaning over time, across contexts, and in various pedagogical relationships.

The range of different meanings of the verb “to translate,” taken together, make it particularly rich as a metaphor to describe a process that is at once duplication, revision, and recreation, with meaning lost, preserved, and created anew. To translate can mean to bear, remove, or change from one place or condition to another. It can mean to make a new version of something by rendering it in one’s own or another’s language. It can also mean to change the form, expression, or mode of expression of, so as to interpret or make tangible, and thus to carry over from one medium or sphere into another. And to translate can mean to change completely, to transform.⁴

Translation captures the challenge of carrying meaning in many realms, each of which illuminates the experience of becoming a teacher and reinforces the appropriateness of the metaphor for that process. Foregrounding the complex weave of language and self, translation is never simply a conversion of words or self. The activity of translation requires a holistic re-rendering informed by previous renderings and responsive to the context in which the new version is being produced. And with the passage of time — minutes, days, years — and the changing of contexts, new translations are required. The following examples of translation drawn from literary study, emigration, and anthropological practice illustrate how translation carries meaning and guides action.

⁴ All definitions of translation referenced here are drawn from Webster’s New International Dictionary, Second Edition.

In discussing the work of translating poems, Constantine argues that translation is not simply a matter of finding for the words already written in one language corresponding words in another. Some words have no counterparts, and meanings are not so easily transferred. The successful translation of a poem emphasizes “the total workings of a text, not just the words” (1999, p. 15), because translation is more than transliteration; it is the re-articulation of a complex human experience. A translation “carries over our realities into words which will defamiliarize them, so that they will delight and trouble us as though for the first time” (Constantine, 1999, p.14). Thus, each translation creates a dynamic tension between the familiar and the unknown, renders texts that both resonate for and surprise us, and captures some vital essence of the human experience, which we are compelled, and able, to interpret.

Highlighting the relationship between the literal practice of translation and its use as a metaphor, Hoffman argues that “you can't transport human meanings whole from one culture to another any more than you can transliterate a text” (1989, p 175). Describing the process of learning to interact with and understand others after her emigration from Poland to the United States, Hoffman explains: “I must translate myself. . .by the motions of understanding and sympathy...by slow increments, sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase” (p. 211).

The generative dissonances that Constantine describes and the link between translating words and translating self that Hoffman explores characterize as well anthropologist Dorinne Kondo's translation through her experience conducting fieldwork in Japan. As a Japanese-American, she was “a living oxymoron” (1990, p. 10) who caused both herself and her hosts significant stress as they “had to strain to make sense of one another” (p. 10). Kondo explains that “in the face of dissonance and distress,” and in an attempt to make sense of, and to make livable, the tension between the Western sense of self as an individual and the Japanese sense of self “inextricable from context” (p. 33), she learned to speak of “selves in the plural” (p. 48). Embracing an understanding of the translation of self that echoes Constantine's argument about translating poems, Kondo, like Hoffman, integrated the different aspects of her self and her relationships not into a single, monolithic whole but rather into an evolving, dynamic (id)entity in context.

These embodiments of translation of text and self, like the range of definitions of translation, are particularly appropriate for capturing the constant re-conceptualizations and re-renderings that constitute the active process of becoming a teacher. When one becomes a teacher,

one changes one's condition; one makes a new version of one's self; one makes oneself comprehensible to others in a new sphere; one is, in some ways, transformed. Learning to teach is not a one-time occurrence; it is not a single re-rendering that fixes the role and the person in it or that assigns permanent meaning to a single set of words. Translation as I use it in this discussion is both a responsive and a generative interpretive act, and it is a recursive as well as a progressive process. Within the dynamic tension between the familiar and the new, learning to teach is a process of rendering selves and interactions that both resonate and surprise. It is a process of rendering and re-rendering some vital essence of the human experience of education in relationship and in context.

How Teaching and Learning Together Facilitates Translation

Poised between two educational contexts, struggling to define their roles, and striving to integrate what they have studied with how they want to practice, pre-service teachers need forums within which to translate themselves. They need to explore their roles, they need to listen to and talk with high school students, and they need to interpret again and again both processes. Teaching and Learning Together, the project based in the methods course I teach, brings pre-service teachers into dialogue with high school students prior to those pre-service teachers' re-entry into the high school classroom. This encounter highlights the need for pre-service teachers to initiate the process of translation, and it gives them the opportunity to practice translating before they assume responsibility for their own classrooms. "Marginally situated in two worlds" (Britzman, 1991, p. 13) and speaking with students across the various different languages used in those worlds, pre-service teachers must engage in a generative struggle with complex and seemingly contradictory identities and discourse practices.

Several dimensions of Teaching and Learning Together support the conceptualization of learning to teach as translation. The weekly exchange of letters between pre-service teachers and the high school students, the weekly conversations between the pre-service teachers and me in the college classroom, and the weekly conversations between the high school students and my collaborator at the high school offer, in combination, supports and conditions conducive to translation.

In all of these forums, both the high school students and the pre-service teachers must discern and interpret the multiple components of their interlocutors' social identities. The high

school students who participate in Teaching and Learning Together are in different grades (10th-12th), issue from different socio-economic backgrounds, claim different ethnic identities, and experience school from within different educational tracks. In addition to these dimensions of diversity, the high school students have different experiences of and perspectives on school, different ideas about what good teaching and meaningful learning look like, and different kinds of questions and advice for the pre-services teachers.

The pre-service teachers also issue from different socio-economic backgrounds and claim different ethnic identities. Although they are all planning to become teachers after graduation, they are completing courses of study in different subject areas and they plan to teach in different contexts. Their backgrounds and their professional aspirations means that they also have different experiences of and perspectives on school, different ideas about what good teaching and meaningful learning look like, and different kinds of questions and thoughts to share with the high school students.

The exchange of letters between the high school students and the pre-service teachers is informed not only by this diversity but also by a range of topics and issues that are relevant to teaching and learning. The content of the letters is shaped in part by foci I suggest and in part by what the partners decide is relevant. Topics such as the role of the teacher, the qualities that make a classroom conducive to learn, the complexities of multicultural education, and the challenge of designing activities and forms of assessment that meet the diverse needs of students are among the topics I suggest. Beyond these, partners explore a set of issues too wide-ranging to enumerate here, although some of the most common are issues of fairness, respect, and engagement.

I do not read the letters the partners exchange because learning to teach is a public activity in so many ways and I believe that the pre-service teachers need a more private forum within which to develop as well. In addition, without me monitoring their words, the pre-service teachers get a taste of what it will be like to make decisions about interacting with students on their own. I know from what they share in class discussions and in their analysis papers that the dimensions of their diverse social identities, the assumptions born of their schooling experiences and expectations, and the struggles they experience as they attempt to read and respond to their student partners all become subjects for translation. Each of the forums provided by Teaching and Learning Together offers a different frame within which to translate.

The letter exchange offers pre-service teachers time each week and over the course of the semester to try out different interpretations and forms of expression. The college classroom-based conversation serves as a forum within which pre-service teachers analyze where each participant in the dialogue is coming from, where the gaps in communication and understanding are, what it takes to bridge the gaps, and what pedagogical roles and relationships can be produced through an ongoing process of reading, discussing, revising, and re-rendering. With each exchange of letters the pre-service teachers look both backward and forward, making choices about how to read the high school students' letters and how to conceptualize and embody themselves in their own. Through the exchange of letters, the ongoing oral analysis of them, and the culminating written interpretations of them, the pre-service teachers both maintain a sense of who they are and forge new identities, while, at the same time, they develop and practice ways of communicating with students.

There are many different ways to apply the metaphor of translation to the ongoing process of learning to teach. Elsewhere I offer an overview of the process of pre-service teachers preparing to teach (Cook-Sather, in press) and a reflection on how I translate myself as a teacher (Cook-Sather, forthcoming). The following discussions focus on pre-service teachers' translations regarding (1) their understanding of the role of teacher and (2) their interactions with students.

Translating the Role of Teacher

Not yet responsible for a classroom full of students, yet in dialogue with a high school student, the pre-service teachers who participate in *Teaching and Learning Together* are in an undefined, in-between position. As one pre-service teacher explains: “[M]y role was ambiguous...I was not a teacher or a student or an adult or a teenager. Here I was, trying to be myself, but not sure how much and what parts of myself to share” (Nicole Miller, *Dialogue Analysis*, December 1998).

What Nicole characterizes as ambiguity results from her occupying the liminal space between student and teacher. Within this “in-between place which bridges the indicative (what is) and the subjunctive (what can or will be)...the cognitive schemata that give sense and order to everyday life no longer apply but are, as it were, suspended” (Turner, 1980, p. 159, p. 161). This space can be conceptualized as that between one kind of “confinement” (Greene, 2000) and another — a fixed definition of student and a fixed definition of student. Alternatively, it can

accommodate the kind of un-fixed understanding that both language and social roles tend to work against. If the spirit of this space is preserved, within it Nicole can “make rather than accept [her] identity” (Dialogue Analysis, December 1998), translating herself “by slow increments, sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase” (Hoffman, 1989, p. 211).

In an effort to keep this space open, I discourage the pursuit of fixed, unambiguous roles. Instead, I encourage Nicole and other pre-service teachers to try out various ways of rendering themselves. Teaching and Learning Together is a forum that “allow[s] for a great deal of role flexibility. Within each paragraph [in the letters] the dynamic of who was teaching and who was learning changed. We were both students, experiencing teachers, at the same time as I was preparing to become one” (Nancy Chadwick, Dialogue Analysis, December 1996).

If pre-service teachers can see their roles in terms of loose and flowing lines rather than as constricting lines drawn around them, they can more easily imagine such fluidity in their future as teachers. As one pre-service teacher explains: “I have come to realize that...my students will provide me with new ideas and my incorporation of those experiences into my identity as a teacher exemplifies the flexibility and constant changing of myself” (Rasheda Randall, Dialogue Analysis, December 1996).

Not only do these pre-service teachers recognize that the roles of student and teacher can be fluid and dynamic, they realize that they have the option and the responsibility to create that fluidity. As one pre-service teacher explains:

People can choose to close themselves into a role, or they can step in and out of many. Roles and knowledge are on a continuum, a spectrum of choices and expectations. [My high school partner] Vanessa and I built our knowledge [together], rather than giving it to one another, and neither one of us was ever only a teacher or student in the traditional sense. (Laura Cannon, Dialogue Analysis, December 1995)

More than twenty years ago, Rorty (1979) criticized narrow categories of learning and teaching that dichotomize the roles of student and teacher. Although the pressure to choose between the two persists, Laura refused to accept the dichotomy. Projecting into her future as a teacher, she wrote: “I want to always be thinking, interpreting, exchanging. I realize that the school system will force me into a role that is more closed than I would like it to be, but there is no reason why I cannot interpret it as I like. There need not be a dichotomy between teacher and learner. I can indeed be both” (Laura Cannon, Dialogue Analysis, December 1995). Laura realized that being a

teacher-student is not being “a living oxymoron” (Kondo, 1990, p. 10) but is rather the first of many renderings of a complex role.

The fluidity, inclusiveness, and responsiveness of the roles of teacher and student that these pre-service teachers describe do not indicate that they had or anticipate difficulties in translating themselves. Their initial attempts yielded translations that resonate, and they indicate that they will continue to translate their roles. Other pre-service teachers have the equally educative experience of producing initial interpretations that call for re-interpretation and re-rendering.

One pre-service teacher, Kate, used the following questions to frame her analysis of her dialogue with her high school partner, Biju: “[H]ow much of myself [do] I want to reveal when I teach[?] Do I want to take on a persona that differs from the one I really have, and if I do, how much different?” (Kate Maggiotto, Dialogue Analysis, December 1996). Reflecting on her struggle over the course of the semester to render versions of herself with which she felt comfortable, Kate explained that “some of my decisions concerning how I represented myself have been ones I would make again, while others have resulted in situations where I have not been comfortable” (Kate Maggiotto, Dialogue Analysis, December 1996). Although Kate experienced some discomfort in some renderings of herself, she turned this discomfort into an important lesson: that there is no “defined formula” for being a teacher and that she will have to “struggle with this issue throughout the rest of my teaching career” (Kate Maggiotto, Dialogue Analysis, December 1996). Kate recognized that she will have to translate herself anew in each teaching situation.

The words and phrases these pre-service teachers use — dynamic, interpreting, exchanging, constant changing of myself, struggle with this issue throughout the rest of my teaching career — are words that reflect the ongoing work of becoming a teacher. Nicole's choice to make rather than accept her identity, Rasheda's explanation of how her students' input will prompt her constantly to redefine herself, Laura's insistence that she can define and redefine her role for herself, and Kate's struggle to render herself in ways that are comfortable to her — all of these prefigure the kinds of ongoing translation of self these pre-service teachers will engage in when they enter their own classrooms. A practicing teacher must make herself “comprehensible to others in a new sphere” many times across her career and many times within a day — in classroom interaction, in individual conferences with students, in interactions with colleagues, in

interactions with parents. In each case, her role or the version of herself that she composes is different but it is nonetheless a rendering of herself.

As teacher educators, we need to help pre-service teachers embrace rather than be daunted by the ongoing work of translating themselves. Rather than encouraging pre-service teachers to see the roles they are assuming as fixed and monolithic, we should support developing teachers in a more dynamic and responsive interpretation and ongoing process of learning to teach. Such an approach legitimates and facilitates what might otherwise feel to pre-service teachers and teachers like a perpetual crisis of identity and an inability to make meaning. The metaphor of translation facilitates this ongoing work of translation in the realm of fostering generative interactions with students as well as constructing roles.

Translating the Language of Learning

The second form of translation I discuss here — translation of language through which to interact with students — shifts focus from the dynamic process of defining the self to the dynamic process of interacting with others. The concept of voice — the medium through which one expresses oneself and through which one interprets others — is central to this dimension of becoming a teacher. This process of finding one's own voice, and learning to hear the voices of students, should be as slow, deliberate, and dynamic as re-defining one's role.

Bartholomae describes how, when basic writing students embark upon their higher education, they must “learn to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community” (1988, p. 273). Students must engage in this process, Bartholomae suggests, before they feel the authority or have the fluency to succeed, since participation in the discourse community of higher education is required before the skills to do so are learned (p. 273).

Like all college students, not just basic writing students, pre-service teachers seeking certification at the undergraduate level have just undergone this process. With their nascent fluency in the language of the academy, they still recall what it felt like not to be able to find words. Yet they have learned to think and speak the language of theory, and, as Cohn points out, learning a language “is a transformative rather than an additive process”: learning a new language is not simply a matter of adding new information and vocabulary; rather, it initiates the learner into a mode of thinking about people, power, and relationships (1990, p. 50). To have succeeded

as a student in an academic world is to have joined the privileged realm of the theoretical. Such success is premised largely on the reinscription of existing categories cast as dichotomies (i.e., theoretical vs. practical).

Becoming successful students in college moves pre-service teachers away from the dominant discourse practices of high schools. When they turn to conversing with high school students, pre-service teachers are struck by the differences between the ways of thinking and speaking they have come to employ and the ways that students express themselves. As one pre-service teacher explained, throughout her dialogue with her high school partner, Ajay, she experienced “a struggle between [my] theoretical and idealistic perspective on students’ interests and Ajay’s experiential and realistic perspective on his needs” (Alison Ray, *Dialogue Analysis*, December, 1998). At the same time, pre-service teachers feel the pull of the practical. As another pre-service teacher explains: “In the face of our own classroom experiences as students and student teachers...theory can take a distant back seat in the teacher education process” (Jonathan Lewis, *Response to Follow-Up Questionnaire*, July 1998).

These different perspectives embodied in different discourses, which are complex and multiple within themselves, require translation. Steeped in the language of the academy, the discourse of educational theory, and the various dialects of different academic disciplines, and then confronted with the multiply-informed voices of high school students, pre-service teachers must dislocate language into meaning (Eliot, 1921). No existing language can accomplish this translation; pre-service teachers must create a shared language — a mode or a medium of communication composed between people in a particular relationship and in a particular context.

The translation process begins with the initial reading and rendering of letters the high school students and the pre-service teachers exchange through *Teaching and Learning Together*. Vocabulary, tone, and other syntactical choices are foregrounded at this point as pre-service teachers hazard initial interpretations and renderings. Discussing how best to comprehend the first letters they received from their student partners and how to respond to those letters, one pre-service teacher, Leslie, explains that she took things her high school partner “had written about in a personal narrative about herself and [tried] to formulate some of those into questions in my letter so that she could directly respond to them” (Rutkowsky, *Curriculum and Pedagogy*, September 19, 1995). Another pre-service teacher, Emily, adopted a similar approach, choosing “to make the questions interesting so [my partner] could write a letter back” (Dorean, *Curriculum*

and Pedagogy, September 19, 1995). Emily elaborates that she “tried not to overwhelm her [partner] with questions, I only asked a few questions in the first [letter], and I knew I had to ask them in a way she could respond to.” Leslie clarified her understanding of this negotiation — “So almost like reframing it” — and Emily reiterated her approach — “Trying to make it real personal” (Curriculum and Pedagogy, September 19, 1995).

These pre-service teachers are not engaged in transliteration; they are looking for more complex ways to carry meaning. Interpreting the words of their high school partners and striving to compose responses that would be comprehensible and compelling, these pre-service teachers are attending to the voices of the high school students and experimenting with their own. As they interpret the language of their dialogue partners and teach themselves a language through which to communicate with those high school students, these pre-service teachers engage in “a transformative rather than an additive process” (Cohn, 1990, p. 50). Each exchange changes the meaning a pre-service teacher makes of the dialogue.

Recognizing that a new language has to be created, learned, and repeatedly relearned sometimes takes a considerable length of time. One pre-service teacher's experience illustrates this challenge. Throughout Justina's written exchange with her high school partner, Arthur, she struggled with how to discern in Arthur's stories implications for teaching practice and how to compose her own theoretically-grounded ideas in a language accessible to Arthur. In her analysis of her dialogue with Arthur she wrote:

I remained mildly frustrated until I realized that I was expecting [Arthur] to speak in my language. Amid our discussions of student voice and its value, I had neglected to realize that his learning, his method of articulation, was through experience and concrete examples. I had sought to give him voice while failing to hear the sound of his individual words. (Dialogue Analysis, December 1997)

This realization led Justina to recognize that not only did she need to learn to listen differently, she also needed to adjust her discourse practices, although not necessarily her ideas and expectations, when conversing with high school students. She recognized that she will have to be careful of her “tendency to use academic jargon and academic approaches” and to avoid alienating students with a strange vocabulary. She concludes her dialogue analysis paper with these insights:

Although many students may be capable of thinking abstractly, they may not have practice doing so or be comfortable with it. Therefore, if I come into a classroom assuming they can, I may immediately alienate them. I must instead associate

concrete examples with what I am teaching. Arthur offered quite a few insights, drawing on his own experience and projecting accompanying conclusions to global significance. Nonetheless, I failed to recognize them because I viewed them only as narratives of experience. (Dialogue Analysis, December 1997)

Justina might well have persisted in seeking to elicit certain contributions from Arthur — to “give him a voice” — and, in conjunction, to dismiss Arthur's insights because they were not clothed in the discourse privileged in the academy — the abstract. Instead, she realized that she needs to find a language that bridges and integrates her academic discourse and Arthur's experience-based expressions. She recognized that the translation must be a mutually informing, ongoing negotiation that leads to the creation of a shared language. She recognized in her analysis of her interaction with Arthur what Constantine asserts about the translation of poetry: “a language is a living language only in so far as it can move and change” (1999, p. 15).

Conclusion

Embracing the metaphor of translation to describe the process of learning to teach means understanding learning to teach as a continuously unfolding process of re-rendering selves and interactions. The identities and discourse practices of those involved in teaching and learning are themselves multiple and complex, and understanding learning to teach as translation helps to generate understandings and meanings within and across roles and languages. It is this translation that enables the relationships essential to teaching and learning. Like any generative metaphor, learning to teach as translation helps to open spaces of “freedom — spaces where people make choices [of interpretation]” (Greene, 2000).

These choices are neither free from history nor free from consequences. That is in part why the metaphor of translation is particularly appropriate. One of the premises we must accept if we argue for learning to teach as translation is that meaning must be made continually in education. We do not have single words that can capture the complex identities of those who participate in teaching and learning, nor do we have a single language to evoke as we endeavor to communicate. Learning to teach must be an ongoing, informed, deliberate, embodied process of discerning and rendering meanings that continually shift. The metaphor of translation illuminates the efforts, struggles, resistances, and epiphanies pre-service teachers experience as they prepare to re-enter high school classrooms. It throws into relief the process of becoming a teacher — a

process that is at once duplication, revision, and recreation, with meaning lost, preserved, and created anew.

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