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# Translating Learners, Researchers, and Qualitative Approaches through Investigations of Students' Experiences in School

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## **Translating Learners, Researchers, and Qualitative Approaches through Investigations of Students' Experiences in School**

There is increasing recognition that student perceptions of their learning experiences are of value to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers (Cushman, 2010, 2005; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007; Thiessen, 2007). For instance, through a project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, researchers gathered student responses to confidential questionnaire items and began to link particular pedagogical practices with added value to student learning (Dillon, 2010). While such approaches constitute one component of a much-needed shift toward having learners' perspectives inform our understanding of effective educational practice, they continue to locate authority and agency with researchers, channeling students' perceptions through adults' conceptual frames and filtering students' experiences through adults' words. Inviting students to be not only respondents but also authorities and agents in research on educational practice challenges deep-seated social and cultural assumptions about the capacity of learners, young in years or in experience with material under study, to discern and analyze effective approaches to teaching and learning. Such an invitation requires 'major shifts on the part of teachers, students, and researchers in relationships and in ways of thinking and feeling about the issues of knowledge, language, power, and self' (Oldfather, 1995: 87; Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006a, 2009; Fielding, 1999, 2004; Levin, 2000; Rudduck 2002, 2007).

I have found the interpretive framework and set of practices that 'translation' provides particularly helpful in imagining how to facilitate such shifts. In this discussion I consider how various definitions of translation and, in particular, the influence of recent feminist perspectives on translation studies, can help us transform students into authorities and agents in research on educational practice. Building on a previous analysis (Cook-Sather, 2007a<sup>i</sup>), I discuss how we can translate (1) learners into co-researchers of educational experiences, (2) researchers into partners with students in making meaning through the research process, and (3) qualitative research's approaches and modes of presenting findings into new versions of those processes and products. I draw extensively on two chapters from the *International Handbook of Student Experience in Elementary and Secondary School* (Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007) — a study of the experiences of youth in urban drama classrooms in Toronto (Gallagher & Lortie, 2007) and two case studies of research projects by and for youth in the United States (Fine et al., 2007) —

to illustrate translations of those being studied, of those doing the studying, and of qualitative approaches through which the studies are conducted. It is my hope that this discussion might be useful not only to qualitative researchers who investigate students' experiences but also to anyone interested in a different way of conceptualizing engagement in qualitative investigations.

### **'Translation' as an Interpretive Framework**

As an interpretive framework, 'translation' reveals and magnifies the language- and culture-based nature of the unfixed and ongoing processes of student experience that must be studied through similarly unfixed and ongoing processes of perception, interpretation, and representation. It captures the iterative analytical and relational work of meaning making that is qualitative research, and it reinforces the necessity of both carrying forward and transforming meaning. Recent feminist perspectives brought to bear on translation studies highlight the power dynamics inherent in translation and the importance of focusing on previously neglected people, experiences, and interpretations.

While to 'translate' is most often understood as the process of making a new version of something by rendering it in one's own or another's language, it is not primarily the linguistic dimension of the term's meaning that I am concerned with here and in other discussions of translation as a way of understanding educational processes (Cook-Sather, 2001, 2003, 2006b, 2009). Rather, here and elsewhere I emphasize the term's less common meanings and how they apply more metaphorically to the interpretation and transformation of selves and of meaning-making processes: to bear, remove, or change from one place or condition to another; 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; or to change completely, to transform (*Webster's New International Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). I am interested in translation as a never-finished process of change that enables something — an identity, an approach, or a text — to be newly accessible to comprehension and communication. I see translation achieving that transfer through preserving some integral meaning and, at the same time, altering understanding as well as the power and the position of those involved in the exchange.

Why 'translation' rather than 'transformation,' 'revision,' or 'change'? These terms inform but are not in and of themselves as generative as 'translation' for the following reasons. Although translation is a form of transformation, it insists that something of the former version is retained in the new version: in a good translation, something of the original must always remain

(see Agosín, 2000; Benjamin, 2000; Santos, 2000) albeit rendered anew. Therefore, translation highlights what is carried over from former versions of ideas, practices, and selves — a particularly important issue in educational research, since we are dealing with people and practices with lived and relevant histories and identities. Although translation is a form of revision, it is one informed not only by re-seeing but also by re-understanding and thus — because in changing what one knows one changes who one is (Dreier, 2003, in Wortham, 2004, see also Cook-Sather, 2006a) — becoming a different person. Therefore, translation has the potential to highlight not only what is seen and understood in a new way but also how that re-seeing entails redefining one's self and one's relationship to what is seen (see Hoffman, 1989; Stefan, 2000; Steiner, 1998). And although translation is a form of change, it is a specific form, one that foregrounds language, culture, relationships, and representations—the stuff of qualitative research.

Recent developments in translation studies that bring feminist perspectives to bear offer arguments that illuminate, by analogy, interpretations and representations of the experiences of young people in school. Like women in literary, historical, and other study, students have been the objects of analysis in research into schooling, not those 'asking what is to be translated, who decides what is to be translated, and what criteria are used to make such choices' (Castro, 2009, p. 8). Feminist translation studies highlight what Snell-Hornby (2006) describes as 'the hitherto neglected factor of power in translation' (p. 164). This turn is analogous to the emphasis in **feminist research on the complex inter-relationship between social power and inequality, on the one hand, and the production of knowledge, on the other (Jagger, 2007; see also Harding, 1987). The argument I make here for translating learners takes on the** cultural hegemony and cultural identity (Liu, 2010) of students in educational research the way that feminist approaches take those on in relation to women and other marginalized or oppressed groups. Such an approach foregrounds critiques of universality and objectivity and embraces an emancipatory purpose (Gilbert, 1994).

A translation is 'at once duplication, revision, and recreation, with meaning lost, preserved, and created anew' (Cook-Sather, 2006a, p. 28). Translating students, researchers, and qualitative methods is actively engaging in perceiving differently, interacting differently, and representing what we see and how we interact differently. Those involved in such processes become new versions of themselves. Qualitative investigations of any kind, particularly in

contexts and with participants characterized by or experiencing power imbalances, can be re-understood within — and changed through — translation.

**Translating the Study of Students' Experiences: From Research 'on' to Research 'with'**

As an conceptual framework, translation deepens and complicates our understanding of research as a process of interpretation that must be particularly attentive to language, lived (context-specific) experience, and representation because the people and the experiences those people have are themselves neither fixed nor fixable — they are, rather, ever changing, like language and the contexts within which and the purposes for which it is used. Working with new cultures or making the familiarity of one's own culture strange, one must learn a new way of thinking as well as develop new language, new understandings, and new kinds of relationships and modes of engagement based on those. One's self along with one's words must be translated if one wishes actually to engage with the unfamiliar rather than simply redefine it according to the givens of one's prior outlook.

Within this framework, it becomes clear that any ongoing process of perception, interpretation, and representation of student experience that constructs students as authorities and agents must be a process of research 'with,' not research 'on': students must be active agents in not just objects of interpretation. This shift in prepositions enacts the dynamic and iterative processes evoked by translation — ongoing interpretation and re-presentation — and the changed nature of relationship called for by feminist theories of translation — addressing the power factor. The two chapters I focus on here move from 'on' to 'with' in numerous ways.

Working with 11<sup>th</sup> grade students in urban drama classrooms in Toronto and in New York City, Gallagher and Lortie (2007) investigated 'the extent to which drama education in classrooms illuminates the intersections of youth's personal/cultural lives with their school lives in the formation of their social, academic, and artistic identities' (p. 405). The focus of their chapter is the second phase of their research in a school in Toronto, in which they attempted to corroborate and/or challenge, as partners with students, the provisional analyses of student experience they had made based on the fieldnotes and interviews conducted in the first phase of the research. Also shifting from 'on' to 'with,' Fine et al. (2007) offer a glimpse of the 'subterranean movement of Research Projects by and for youth' (p. 808), focusing on two cases: Williams v. California, 'a class action lawsuit in which poor and working-class youth were, as a class, suing the state of California for inadequate schools, under-certified educators, insufficient

books and materials, decaying buildings, and less-than-sufficient intellectual preparation for college,’ and ‘a participatory action research project’ that was designed ‘to provide youth commentary on the victories and unfulfilled promise of *Brown v. Board of Education*’ (p. 808).

In both these chapters, working with youth as ‘researchers rather than “the researched”’ shifts the practice of researching *on* youth to *with* youth’ (Fine et al., 2007, p. 808). Both chapters strive to make possible Spivak’s (1988) notion of ‘listening to the plural voices of those normally Othered and hearing them as constructors, agents, and disseminators of knowledge’ (Gallagher & Lortie, 2007, p. 434). Such working with and listening to youth require and constitute a change in the role of both researcher and student and a change of relationship between them. Something of the old roles is retained — students are still students and researchers are still researchers — but they become new versions of themselves, carrying and constructing new meaning. Researchers are no longer the distanced, authoritative, sole authors of the meaning derived from qualitative research approaches such as observations of and interviews with students and others, and students are no longer objects of study but rather subjects, primary actors, or what Delamont (1976) called ‘protagonists’ (see also Thiessen, 2007).

Such translations can never entirely dissolve the power relations between researcher and researched, but research ‘with’ calls upon both researchers and students to conceptualize themselves, to act, and to interact differently than what many are used to in school or in research relationships that are more hierarchical and distanced. The linguistic shift from ‘on’ to ‘with’ carries with it a change of self; learners and researchers become different versions of themselves as they form partnerships with one another and work to produce very different narratives of that work. Engaged in an ongoing process of change and exchange, they transform roles, relationships, and representations. Such transformations could be undertaken in a wide variety of research situations. I use the following particular examples of translating students, researchers, and qualitative research methods as illustrative of wider possibilities.

### **Translating Students into Co-Researchers**

The basic research questions that underpin qualitative studies are, ‘What is happening here? And what do those happenings mean to those who are engaged in them?’ (Erickson, 2005). Researchers who embrace the premise that interpretations and representations of students’ experiences must be informed by students themselves conceptualize students not only as ‘expert witnesses’ (Rudduck 1999), enacting the ethnographic commitment to the belief that

‘participants are the best informants of their own lives’ (Feuerverger & Richards, 2007, p. 556; see also Morgan, 2009), but also as co-investigators of what is experienced and seen in classrooms. Such translation seeks out and includes previously neglected people, experiences, and interpretations. Whereas research ‘on’ students ‘consists of adults seeking student perspectives and then interpreting the meaning of the student data,’ transforming student responses into ‘analytic themes and drawing conclusions from their assumptions,’ and attempting to ‘fit youth responses into preset categories’ (Mitra, 2007, p. 728, pp. 730-731, p. 731), research ‘with’ students has ‘adults and youth working together to share in the planning and decision making in their endeavors’ (Mitra, 2007, p. 731).

The difference here is that between being interpreted and interpreting oneself. Gallagher and Lortie (2007) describe the former approach as ‘our raced, classed, gendered translations of [students’] ideas’ (p. 434). By contrast, research processes in which students are co-investigators include students ‘translating student explanations into language that adults would understand’ (Mitra, 2007, p. 732). Here the ultimate translations — the representations of what is learned through the research — are co-constructed by students and researchers, and thus they are more fully informed by student interpretations of their own experiences and perspectives. Such a process directly addresses power dynamics (Snell-Hornby, 2006) by ‘interrupt[ing] traditional hierarchical research arrangements’ (Gallagher & Lortie, 2007, p. 435).

Gallagher and Lortie (2007) partnered with students as co-investigators in their drama research by inviting students’ ‘explicit understanding and artistic interpretation through the use of data as dramatic text’ (p. 406). Casting students as actors in and interpreters of the phenomena under exploration, inviting them not only to engage with the data gathered but also to develop their own final interview protocols to interview one another, Gallagher and Lortie gave youth ‘the opportunity to make their own meaning from what they see — and to have that meaning contribute to the group’s collective efforts’ (p. 424).

In one of their studies, Fine et al. (2007) blended ‘qualitative and quantitative material, gathered by/with youth, to answer large questions about social (in)justice in schools’ (p. 809). They describe how youth participants in their action research project participated in a ‘series of research camps, each held for two days at a time in community and/or university settings’. The explicit aim of this effort was to deconstruct ‘who can do research, what constitutes research and who benefits’ through immersing youth in methods training and social justice theory. The

students learned how to conduct interviews, focus groups, and participant observations; to design surveys and organize archival analyses; and they listened to speakers who discussed relevant topics. This transformation of their role was recognized and legitimated: ‘Many students received high school credits (when a course on participatory research was offered in their schools) and 42 received college credit for their research work’ (pp. 819-820). Their translation from objects of study to actors changed who they were to themselves and to others.

Such approaches transform students into those responsible for making meaning in the educational research process (Atweh & Burton, 1995; Brooker, 2002; Connolly, 2007, 1998; Davies, 1989; MacNaughton, 2000; Fielding, 2004; Fielding & Bragg, 2003; Thomson & Gunter, 2007). They enact in the realm of research a commitment analogous to constructivist (Davis & Sumara, 2002; Dewey, 1964; Duckworth, 1987) and critical (Freire, 1998, 1990; McLaren, 1989; Shor, 1992) approaches to classroom learning, which support students’ translations of knowledge and of themselves (Cook-Sather, 2006a). Equipped with the analytical methods they need and both positioned and acknowledged as those with not only legitimate but also essential perspectives, students experience a change in their ‘form’ and ‘place’ — they are translated into co-researchers.

### **Translating Researchers into Partners with Students**

The translation of students into co-researchers necessitates a concomitant translation of adult researchers. This is not simply the inverse or complementary process to translating students into co-researchers because the positions of researchers are inscribed with particular forms of power — and thus a set of perspectives — that need to be recast. To translate themselves, researchers must not simply be receptive to new information that fits within familiar frames but rather open to translation of and in response to students’ experiences and perspectives. To be open this way to young people as authorities and as interpreters constitutes a shift in ways of thinking and feeling about issues of knowledge, language, power, and self.

To change their own form and place, adult researchers must be willing to reconceptualize themselves as not the only ones able or even the ones best positioned to discern and construct meaning in relation to student experiences. Inviting students ‘into the room’ in their new role as researcher is a key step in this process because, as Fine et al. (2007) asserted in their chapter, ‘Once youth are in the room—youth in varied bodies, with wildly divergent biographies and experiences—questions about who is the expert, what is the problem, where are the interventions, and who is our audience are all troubled’ (p. 824). Likewise, while Gallagher and

Lortie (2007) endeavored to work with students as their co-investigators, they also offered some reflections on ‘the apparent folly of (two White) university researchers positioning themselves as co-researchers with a diverse roomful of high school Drama students’ (p. 434). They explained that they ‘never lost sight of the power dynamics at work in presenting [them]selves in this way,’ recognizing that their ‘elevated professional status and access to cultural capital (relative to the teacher and the students)’ afforded them ‘the luxury of conferring whatever title we wished on ourselves and on our students’ but that saying the research was collaborative did not automatically make it so. This is an important lesson: undertaking a translation of oneself does not ensure that everything else — context, larger social and cultural constructs, other people — can also be translated. Yet by insisting on the **complex inter-relationship between social power and inequality, on the one hand, and the production of knowledge, on the other (Jagger, 2007) one can engage in the ongoing process of re-rendering oneself in a form that is new comprehensible, and perhaps, by extension, newly informative, to others in a new sphere. Because of their more powerful position, researchers must initiate this process.**

In addition to taking up new places in relation to student researchers, adult researchers committed to revising traditional versions of themselves need to become aware of and recast the frame of reference that Erickson and Shultz (1992) critiqued nearly 20 years ago when they wrote: ‘If the student is visible at all in a research study she is usually viewed from the perspective of adult educator’s interests and ways of seeing’ (p. 467). In the excerpts above Gallagher and Lortie (2007) acknowledged the profound challenges of moving past ‘adult-centric constructions of youth’ and their experiences (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2007, p. 352), and Fine et al. (2007) offered a series of questions that researchers committed to such a shift should consider, including questions about ‘who is in the room when research questions are framed’ and ‘who is missing’ (p. 824).

Translating themselves into collaborators in an effort to be open to youths’ frames of reference, Gallagher and Lortie (2007) invited students to ‘devise their own final interview protocols, which they would then use to interview one another’ (p. 427). Thus youth provided both the frame of reference and the terms according to which their classmates responded. Fine et al. (2007) drew in one of their projects on survey and interview data they collected and ‘sought to understand how young people read existing race, ethnicity and class stratifications, as these stratifications organize the system we call public schooling’ (p. 811), explaining that ‘youth

analyses are the fundamental hinge upon which our work was premised’ (p. 809). Likewise, at the first session of their multi-year action research project in which adult and youth researchers analyzed desegregation, the young people insisted on a translation of frame as well:

the youth from six suburban high schools and three urban schools immediately challenged the frame of the research: ‘When you call it an achievement gap, that means it’s our fault. The real problem is an opportunity gap — let’s place the responsibility where it belongs — in society and in the schools’ (p. 819).

In response Fine and her co-researchers changed the name of the project to the Opportunity Gap Project.

Here students have ‘agency’, ‘competence’, and an ‘active role’ (Connolly, 2007, p. 343) in identifying and analyzing the existing conditions of school as they experience them and in making recommendations regarding how those conditions need to change. Like the translation of students into co-researchers, this form of translation requires that adults relinquish their claim to be primary knowers about and interpreters of the educational experience — i.e., the ones with all the knowledge, power, and authority. The change of students’ place and condition emphasized above carries these kinds of implications for changes in how we as researchers conceptualize ourselves, what we observe in classrooms, how we interpret and render what we see, and the changes in classrooms and schools we call for.

This form of translation illustrates what persists as well as what shifts in translation. The changes discussed above do not require or entail researchers relinquishing authority, expertise, and agency in the research process, although it well might intermittently destabilize and call these into question. Rather, it puts these into different relationship with students’ authority, expertise, and agency. Translating researchers into versions of those described above allows researchers to become different kinds of interpreters, aware of and intentional about revising power dynamics, changing and changed by the relationships and understandings made possible through that translation.

### **Translating the Basic Methods and Modes of Presenting Qualitative Research**

In the context of the redefinition of student and researcher outlined above, uses of established qualitative research methods can also be translated — become new versions of themselves appropriate to and necessary for the specific purpose of capturing and conveying student experiences of school. Similarly, ways of representing research findings can also be

translated. One of the ways such a translation is effected is through a change in proportion of text devoted to students' voices and words. In the chapters by Gallagher and Lortie and Fine et al., many pages are devoted entirely to what students have to say; their own words (not summaries or interpretations) fill the pages, and thus they themselves set the tone and offer a frame of reference through which readers of the chapters interpret what is said. Again, the adult researchers' frames are not absent, but they are situated in relation to students' frames of reference.

### ***Translating the Basic Methods of Qualitative Research***

Translating qualitative research methods is not necessarily about devising totally different approaches; indeed, a translation re-renders what already exists, as opposed to creating something entirely new. Fine et al. (2007) blended 'qualitative and quantitative material, gathered by/with youth, to answer large questions about social (in)justice in schools' (p. 809). Their efforts constituted various ways in which the adults and youth, working together, were engaged in 'deconstructing who can do research, what constitutes research and who benefits' (p. 819). Gallagher and Lortie (2007) also used but complicated standard qualitative research methods in an effort to translate themselves and students into 'interactive co-participants' in various dramatic media and in the research process' (p. 406). Through a discussion of their '(dramatic) engagement,' Gallagher and Lortie explored how 'youth are engaged in a process of theorizing or myth-debunking about their own lives' (p. 406).

Like any translation, the approach Gallagher and Lortie used magnifies the language- and culture-based nature of the unfixed and ongoing processes of student experience that must be studied through similarly unfixed and ongoing processes of perception, interpretation, and representation. They argued that working in improvised drama 'made available certain modes of communication, conduct, and embodiment' and 'opened up the possibility for critical engagement among students themselves' (p. 407). Such an opening up made possible 'the generation of theory through spontaneous talk, critical watching, and engaged action' (p. 407). Gallagher and Lortie asserted: 'Students are always living by and challenging theories; our drama work provided a context in which their theories could be articulated, tested, and reformulated' (p. 407).

A basic mode of qualitative research, observation, is translated in drama research into a new version of itself. As Gallagher and Lortie (2007) explained:

Drama as method requires that the researcher rethink the notion of observation in rather fundamental ways. This rethinking also privileges our sense of ethical responsiveness to the participants and the teachers of the classrooms in which we observe. In this way, we found it useful to shift from a concentration on observation as a method, per se, to a perspective that emphasizes, as Angrosino and de Perez (2000) describe it, ‘observation as a context for interaction among those involved in the research collaboration’ (p. 676). (p. 408)

Gallagher and Lortie initially used transcripts from the first phase of their research (fieldnotes and interviews) as ‘pretexts for scenes’ (p. 409) that the students would create on a chosen topic. Troubled by the way that students’ scenes ‘reinscribed a liberal, hegemonic notion of stereotyping as anti-social behavior on the part of unfeeling individuals, rather than a systemic bias’ (p. 409), Gallagher and Lortie then invited students to write about their own experiences with stereotypes (in response to the prompts ‘Nobody knows I’m ...’; ‘People think I’m...’; and ‘Because I am..., people think I...’) and then developed an extended improvisation activity to invite ‘students to imaginatively enter into a created world that would ask them to both improvise and reflect upon their understandings of, and responses to, this imagined world’ (p. 412). Their strategy was to get students to address the questions, ‘Why do we stereotype?’ and ‘What do stereotypes accomplish?’ In a kind of real-time process of translation, their approach was to ‘expose the dynamic interrelation between our sense of ourselves and what we think of others’ — a process that intentionally embraced feminist thinking with regard to ‘how the Self/Other dialectic informs our idea of what is possible and limits, or regulates, personal freedom’ (Gallagher & Lortie, 2007, p. 409)

In another kind of real-time process of translation, Gallagher and Lortie and the students with whom they worked engaged in ‘interview’ processes during which students thought ‘diligently about what, in their experience, is relevant to this scene and what responses they could have’ (p. 420). They argued that within a sustained improvisation, “‘interviewing’... allows the researcher to consider carefully what “listening to” might mean’ (Gallagher & Lortie, p. 420). A standard feature of a qualitative approach — listening — takes on new meanings, manifestations, and results when the listener and the speaker occupy different positions than they usually do and when a relationship and dialogue that generally do not exist are suddenly brought

into existence. Listening itself becomes a form of translation both of what is heard and of the hearer.

The interpretive framework translation provides makes research approaches into more ongoing, indeed unfinishable, interactive processes as opposed to contributing to the conceptualization of a study as improving vision and practice once and for all. In other words, translation provides a way of dealing with the necessarily ongoing nature of observing, listening, and interpreting by making them conceivable as more conscious, deliberate, and continually revised processes. In this sense, a study, rather than seeking to generalize or offer a definitive version or representation, seeks to offer a translation as a platform for the next study or intervention. The methodological translations in which Gallagher and Lortie and Fine et al. engaged render some of the basic practices of qualitative research different versions of themselves. Both the methods and those using and participating in them become different versions of themselves — generated within different relationships and productive of different identities.

### ***Translating the Modes of Presenting Qualitative Research***

Translating research methods also calls for translating representations of what is generated through the research process. Having student voices fill the pages of such studies, not to ‘prove’ researcher claims but rather to make claims of their own, also shifts how the findings are presented. Employing various, less traditional media also effects a translation of presentation.

Gallagher and Lortie (2007) ‘aim to make theoretically and contextually rich the experiences we had with the youth in our study and to let their words not simply illustrate but also interact with the complexities of the research, the philosophical dimensions of our inquiry, and our own theoretical constructions as researchers’ (p. 408). In ‘an empirical/performance experiment that bridged over time, geography, culture, and generation,’ Fine et al. (2007) ‘plaited political history, personal experience, research, and knowledge gathered from two generations building lives on both sides of *Brown*, and to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the court decision [they] performed *Echoes of Brown* for an audience of over 800 on May 17, 2004’ (p. 821). In addition, they published a DVD/book of the work that included ‘all the elder interviews, a video of the Social Justice and the Arts Institute, youth spoken word, detailed commentary by the adult and youth researchers and educators working on educational justice in desegregated schools, and a summary of the research, *Echoes: The Legacy of Brown v. Board of Education*,

*Fifty Years Later* (Fine, Roberts, Torre, Bloom, Burns, Chajet, Guishard, Payne, & Perkins-Munn, 2004)' (pp. 821-822).

Literary critic George Steiner (1998) has argued that any act of communication is a translation. In his words: '*human communication equals translation*' (p. 49, emphasis in the original). The presentation of research findings is thus also a form of translation — a change rendered in the form of something so as to interpret or make tangible in an essentially language-based form. The translated research processes discussed by Gallagher and Lortie and by Fine et al. enact a different process of observation, interaction, and interpretation and strive to produce words and selves that 'will have a meaning. . .will have a sound' (Agosín, 2000, p. 57) but will also capture these in a way newly accessible and reflective of new relationships. Representations of research findings within this framework reflect our understanding of our informants, co-interpreters, and students as ever changing, and the alternative formats for presenting research findings that Gallagher and Lortie and by Fine et al. employ challenge their audience to engage self-consciously in a process of interpretation — of translation.

### **Implications of Translating Students, Researchers, and Qualitative Methods**

Translations of learners, researchers, and qualitative research methods — like any translation, according to Rabassa (1989) — are complex, indeterminate, unfinishable processes (p. 7., see also Cook-Sather, 2006a). By conceptualizing students as co-meaning-makers in the educational research process, we move both students and researchers from one 'place' or condition to another; both student and researcher are re-placed within the research process with different versions of themselves — mutually informed transformations of identities, roles, and responsibilities. This change must be accompanied by a shift in the interpretive frame and focus of analysis — from the researcher's beliefs and intentions to the students' experiences and interpretations. This shift requires that as adults we relinquish our claim to be the sole or even primary knowers about and interpreters of students' learning experiences. In the context of these changes, youth and adult researchers can translate established qualitative research approaches into versions of those methods appropriate to and necessary for the specific purpose of capturing and conveying students' experiences of school, and we can seek ways to represent both the processes and the products of research into student experiences such that the presentation reflects in form as well as content the different approaches taken and the different understanding generated.

These translations challenge traditional identities as well as processes and raise complicated questions of authenticity, representation, and potential imposition. ‘How authentic is [student] voice and how do we know?’ query MacBeath, Myers, and Demetriou (2001, p. 80). The related question of who gets consulted or studied also arises in such work: Are only certain students’ experiences accessed and documented and therefore are representations of students’ experiences of school skewed? ‘Translation’ offers an interesting way forward here: It is not simply or universally representational; rather, it is inflected by the translator’s sense of action, as well. Finally, the more radical or transformative forms of translation can find resistance or rejection among students who do not necessarily embrace the kind of empowered place advocated for them by some of these researchers. This ironic situation may not be a result of students who are used to their more passive place in the system being unable to rise above their historically subservient lot in (school) life. Rather, some students consciously choose this more conservative location (based largely on their view of schools and teachers). In these circumstances, then, researchers who are faithful to researching ‘with’ may be constrained in their more transformative intent by their commitment to negotiate a shared interpretive space; their views would be tempered by the need to find some kind of agreed perspective with students who may not share their more democratic and equitable goals. This challenge and potential conflict are analogous to that posed by some theorists: that liberatory pedagogy can be impositional (see Cook-Sather, 2007b) and culturally bound.

If we strive to enact these translations of learners, ourselves as researchers, and the qualitative research methods we use, and if ‘translation’ is extended to analyses of and practices within other research contexts, it must be with an awareness of the choices we have regarding how much of former versions to keep as we forge new versions. Such processes of translation can be a source of rejuvenation, growth, and development, as they build on critiques of the transmission model of learning and the external expert model of researcher and tackle issues of **power in the production of knowledge (Jagger, 2007; Lather, 2007)**. Lather (1986) has argued for measures of validity in research according to “the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it” (p. 272, quoted in Gallagher & Lortie, 2007) — a criterion particularly relevant to efforts to critique universality, to embrace an emancipatory purpose, and to nurture vitality. Poet and translator David Constantine’s claim about language holds true for any vital thing: it is living

‘only in so far as it can move and change’ (1999, p. 15). Translation facilitates just such movement and change of learners, researchers, and qualitative investigations of which all three are a part, and it has potential to guide other qualitative investigations of **inter-relationships among social power, inequality, and the production of knowledge**.

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<sup>i</sup> For an introduction to the notion of translation in relation to some of the studies cited in this paper, see the final chapter, “Translating Researchers: Re-Imagining the Work of Investigating Students’ Experiences in School” in the *International Handbook of Student Experience in Elementary and Secondary School*, co-edited by Dennis Thiessen and Alison Cook-Sather (Cook-Sather, pp. 829-871).