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Changing the world, one story at a time

Oral histories and self-reflexivity in Cypriot university classrooms

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Abstract

The chapter explores oral history and reflexivity projects in university classrooms in the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities in 1996 and 2010. The experiences are framed within Engaged Pedagogy, a synthesis of critical and feminist pedagogies stemming from the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, which encourages involvement in the world beyond classroom walls for the purposes of personal and social transformation. Dervin's Sense-Making Methodology provides a means of implementing the principles of Engaged Pedagogy. The experiences indicate that oral histories and related self-reflexive practices served to both validate and challenge personal and cultural experiences through the creation of a student base of 'legitimate knowledge.' Reflexive responses by students in Cyprus to their community interviews in 1996 and 2010 suggest that some participants experienced a transformative shift in perspective toward history, politics, and culture. Self-reflexivity is explored as a lifelong method of promoting personal and social change.

> Oral history is not necessarily an instrument for change;
> it depends upon the spirit in which it is used.
>
> Paul Thomson

1. Background

Classroom oral history projects based in the community, coupled with student self-reflexive responses, are pedagogical practices offering opportunities to transform the lives of both students and instructors. My life was changed by student reports and

reflections on an oral history assignment in Cyprus during university classes I taught in the Turkish Cypriot community in 1996 and again in the Greek Cypriot community in 2010.[1] From the 1996 stories, and students' personal reflections on those stories, it seemed clear that a meaningful communication had transpired between the students and their interviewees that caused the students to critically re-evaluate their own worldviews. The stories and student responses deepened my interest in Cypriot cultures and histories, intensified my interest in communication promoting conflict resolution, and influenced my teaching practices and pedagogical theories.[2] In the ensuing years I followed events in Cyprus from my home in the United States. When the checkpoints opened in 2003 and it became possible for Cypriots and foreign visitors to cross the United Nation Peacekeepers' 'Green Line' separating the communities after 29 years, I recalled some of the personal stories told in the 1996 oral histories. In particular, I was drawn to those stories reflecting what Louise Diamond called 'a cultural memory of peace' (1996), where elder Turkish Cypriots recalled positive memories of Greek Cypriot childhood friends before 'the troubles' changed lives and re-shaped the island nation. I was curious to know if elder Greek Cypriots might share similar sentiments about their young Turkish Cypriot neighbours and if these remembrances might affect today's university students.

Back in 1996 the borders between the two territories were still closed. I was limited to the north of the island and wondered about the nature of life, culture, and attitudes in the Greek Cypriot community in the south. Open checkpoints in 2003 meant that foreign visitors could now cross the Green Line and hear the stories in both communities, providing a more complete picture of Cypriot experiences. In 2008, 2010 and 2011 I returned to Cyprus for projects involving digital storytelling, oral history, and community-based media for peacebuilding and reconciliation. I have provided an overview of the 2010 project related to digital storytelling and community media in universities in the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities (Higgins 2011). In this chapter I will focus on the use of self-reflection and community-based oral histories by university students in the Turkish Cypriot community in 1996 and in the Greek Cypriot community in 2010. The practices, including my own reflexive analyses, are situated within the framework of critical pedagogy, with Paulo Freire's praxis at the heart (1979; 1989); the methods used are informed by the methodological guidance offered by Dervin's Sense-Making (Dervin 1998; 2003; 2008; 2009), an approach that I see as providing communicative practices to implement liberatory pedagogies. These theories are explored below.

2. Critical, feminist, and radical pedagogies

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire emphasizes the political nature of education, where the traditional method of rote memorization ('digestive' or 'banking' education) leads to unquestioning acceptance of one's place in the world and the social structures responsible for this hierarchy. The educational system thereby becomes a significant instrument in maintaining a 'culture of silence,' characterized by the feeling that a person has no influence in shaping her world, resulting in passivity, ignorance, and subservience. Freire's solution is a process of critical awareness ('conscientization') where perception of the

world and one's role in it is based on praxis: a continuing cycle of critical (social) action, (theoretically-informed) self-reflection, and further action based on this reflection. Conscientization is promoted through a 'liberatory' or 'emancipatory' pedagogical process that helps the learner question or 'read' the nature of the world and his place in it, and encourages reliance on one's self and others for questions and answers rather than on an outside 'authority.' This process of 'reflective participation in the act of liberation' (Freire 1989: 53) is aimed toward transformative personal and social action, as is the practice of critically informed dialogue. Freire's focus on communication modes both within and between people is at the heart of the projects described in this chapter: the potential of classroom practices involving oral history coupled with self-reflexivity, to impact the lives of students and their communities.

Freire has inspired scholars exploring the nature and process of pedagogy within and outside of institutional education. Two major philosophical approaches are represented by critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy. A third, radical pedagogy, is a synthesis of critical and feminist perspectives; this framework provides a pedagogy of engagement through which to view the practices described in this chapter.

Critical pedagogy is represented primarily by Apple (1982), Giroux (2011), McLaren (1989) and Shor & Freire (1987). Related approaches include 'deliberative civic education' in rhetorical studies, based on a 'critical model of deliberation' rooted in classroom dialogue and social critique (Murphy 2004: 74); and 'transformative learning theory' in adult education (Mezirow 1978; Taylor 2008), which highlights the role of reflection in the process of learning. McLaren (2000) and Kincheloe (2007) represent a 'revolutionary critical pedagogy' that reasserts a Marxist critique of capitalism as a fundamental tenet and rejects the influences of postmodernism on critical pedagogy.

While scholars working within feminist pedagogy embrace the basic concept of a 'liberating pedagogy' over more traditional educational models, they contest some of the prevailing perspectives within critical pedagogy and their underlying theoretical assumptions. Represented by Ellsworth (1992), Gore (1992; 2002), Lather (1991; 2001) and Luke (1994), their critique includes the notation that critical pedagogy often reflects a male-centred perspective that inappropriately concentrates on the teacher as the agent of empowerment.

In her critique of notions within critical and feminist pedagogies, bell hooks describes a 'radical pedagogy' (1994). It describes the multiple liberatory perspectives on pedagogy that contributed to her own pedagogical practices. hooks does not dismiss Freire's model of critical pedagogy; rather, she notes that Freire builds a critique mechanism into his work, while feminism provides the space for a multiplicity of perspectives that have allowed her to both critique and embrace Freire's work: 'I have taken threads of Paulo's work and woven it into that version of feminist pedagogy I believe my work as writer and teacher embodies' (1994: 52).

My interest here is in the synthesis of both critical and feminist pedagogies, what hooks (1994) also refers to as 'engaged pedagogy'. Elements of this engaged pedagogy relevant to

the projects described in this chapter include an emphasis on learning for personal and social empowerment in order to transform the world, recognition of the political nature of education, and understanding that students learn process more than they do content in a learning situation. Engaged pedagogy rejects the gender bias within some of discourse surrounding critical pedagogy, recognizes the varied manifestations of power in the classroom, and focuses on the student as the agent of self-empowerment. This pedagogy recognizes the significance of modes of knowing that include emotion, feelings and intuition, as well as reason and rationalist thought, and considers students' experiences and perceptions as one basis of 'legitimate' knowledge from which the teacher as well as students can learn. The pedagogy requires self-reflection on the part of both student and teacher, including an acknowledgement of ideas and practices that were unsuccessful. This perspective recognizes the need to explore forms of communication other than dialogue, and identifies the contested nature of some practices involved in 'finding voice' in the classroom. An engaged pedagogy considers contexts within the creation of learning spaces, allowing for a dynamic process of engagement in the classroom and beyond. In hooks' words, 'engaged' is a great way to talk about liberatory classroom practice. It invites us always to be in the present, to remember that the classroom is never the same. […] To me, the engaged classroom is always changing' (1994: 158). The elements of engaged pedagogy inform my reflexive framework and analysis of the experiences in 1996 and 2010.

Both critical and feminist pedagogies have focused primarily on the theoretical aspects of a liberatory pedagogy rather than methods that might assist implementation of these concepts. Gore bemoans 'theoretical speculation that accompanies so much of that literature' (2002: n.p.) and the dearth of discussion related to appropriate instructional practices. In contrast, Dervin's Sense-Making Methodology (Dervin 1998; 2003; 2008; 2009; Shields & Dervin 1993; and Savolainen 1993) absorbs a vantage point of societal critique, but then attends in detail to the theorizing for communicating for useful human contact which is sensitive both to agency and to agency's place in and struggle with structure. Dervin's methodology offers application to the practices discussed here: student interviews with oral history participants and associated self-reflexive responses.

3. Dervin's Sense-Making Methodology

Developed by Brenda Dervin and in use since 1972, the goal of Sense-Making (hereafter: SMM) as a methodology is to provide methodological guidance for communication research and practice in a wide variety of contexts, including the classroom. As a theoretical structure, then, SMM focuses on a theory for the practices of communicating; as a methodological practice, SMM provides theoretically informed communicative tools that are ideally suited to the implementation of dialogic practices in the university classroom.

SMM, informed by Freire and a large number of critically oriented philosophic sources, has been designed explicitly to enable the hearing of voices of the silenced, unheard, marginalized and oppressed, and assumes all humans fit into these categories,

at least at some point in time. Sense-Making Methodology assumes that conscientizing is facilitated by SMM-guided listening and intersecting, and that a necessary prerequisite of conscientizing is reflection. As a classroom practice, SMM aids in the development of a personal set of communicative and reflexive tools for all participants: students, teacher, and interview participants in the community. Methodologically, SMM data collection builds on a structured, open-ended interview that provides the participant with a set of self-reflexive procedures allowing her to explicate a personal universe and guide the direction of the interview.

For the 1996 and 2010 Cyprus projects, Sense-Making Methodology provided a theoretical perspective in concert with the goals of engaged pedagogy, with methodologies that offered a practical means to further liberatory goals in the university classroom. In particular, SMM's manner of questioning promoted analytical, critical, and self-reflexive thought and provided recognition of self and others as repositories of 'valid' knowledge. The methodology's positioning of the participant as the focus of discourse (and, within the classroom, the student), and its inclusion of ideas, feelings and emotions as well as rational thought, are also consistent with the goals of radical pedagogy outlined above. SMM informed the questions students used to interview oral history community respondents and guided the self-reflective essays students wrote after their interactions with the participants.

4. Cyprus

4.1 Historical / political context

The island of Cyprus is composed primarily of Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities.[3] In 1960 Cyprus gained its independence from Great Britain, with security guarantees provided by Great Britain, Greece, and Turkey. From the Turkish Cypriot perspective, by 1963 the Republic of Cyprus was dead, due to Greek Cypriot violations of constitutional guarantees ensuring power sharing between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. From the Greek Cypriot perspective, the Turkish Cypriots pulled out of the power sharing arrangement. Intercommunal violence, which began in the late 1950s, increased; United Nations Peacekeeping forces arrived in 1964; still, the violence continued.

In 1974, animosities came to a head when one faction of Greek Cypriots, supported by a military dictatorship in Greece, attempted to seize control of the Cypriot government and unite the island with Greece. This prompted an 'intervention' (a Turkish Cypriot perspective) or an 'invasion' (a Greek Cypriot perspective) by mainland Turkish troops, ostensibly to restore order as the treaties provided. Turkish troops seized the northern third of the island. During and following the brief war, 180,000 Greek Cypriots in the north fled or were forced to move to the south; 40,000 Turkish Cypriots in the south moved to the north (US Federal 1993). Negotiations have moved slowly since 1974: United Nations Peacekeeping forces continue to police the neutral 'Green Line' between the Greek Cypriot-controlled south and the Turkish Cypriot-controlled north. In 1983 the Turkish Cypriot north declared itself an independent state, which has been

recognized only by Turkey. Some Greek Cypriots refer to the north as the 'so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC),' 'pseudo state,' or 'occupied zone'; some Turkish Cypriots characterize the south as the 'so-called Republic of Cyprus', noting the Republic effectively ceased in 1963 and the internationally recognized Greek Cypriot-controlled south has no administrative power over the Turkish-Cypriot controlled north. In 2010, approximately 25,000 Turkish troops were stationed in the north (*Economist* 2010); whether they are viewed as 'occupation forces' or 'security forces' depends on factors such as from which side of the Green Line one views the issue and, in the Turkish Cypriot community, one's political affiliation.

In 2004, the Turkish Cypriot community approved and the Greek Cypriot community rejected a UN-sponsored referendum regarding reunification. That year, the European Union admitted Cyprus as a single state, including the areas where the EU laws were not enforced, and promised to help the divided communities address issues of reunification and reconciliation. Pedestrian and automobile border crossing points began opening between the two communities in 2003; the sixth border crossing, a pedestrian walkway that had been closed for 45 years, opened in 2008 in the heart of the divided capital city, Nicosia, and a seventh has been opened since. Progress toward reunification varies according to the political climate in either community. UN-sponsored reunification discussions begin and end regularly between the leaders of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities with little movement toward a solution.

4.2 Personal / educational context

For the 1995-1996 academic year I was associated with the Department of Communication and Media Studies at Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) in the north. The department faculty members were building a programme focused on the ideals of critical pedagogy distinct from the dominant model of Turkish Traditional Education previously encountered by the students in secondary school.[4]

Most students in my classes were Turkish Cypriots; a few were from mainland Turkey, and one or two were from the Middle East or were of Turkish Cypriot descent but considered themselves British. Most of the students emerged from primary and secondary schools in Cyprus or Turkey that focused on rote memorization of facts and figures, with little concern for independent, creative thinking or problem-solving. In these classrooms, the teacher provided both the questions and the answers; questioning might either be interpreted as disrespectful or an outright challenge to authority and discipline.[5] The nature of the traditional Turkish education system was discussed in the pages of the *Turkish Daily News*:

> Most troubling has been the educational system which is one based on rote memory as opposed to teaching children to rationalize, deduce and decide for themselves. Of course this system is based on Islam where pride of place went to anyone who could recite the Qu'ran by heart. Education in the Ottoman Empire until the middle of the 19th century started from the Qu'ran and related texts and proceeded from there.

> Even today young students spend their time trying to memorize answers so that they can pass examinations to go to better schools or on to higher levels of education. (Celebrating Sovereignty 1996: A5)[6]

The students attended a university in a self-declared state that was not recognized by any other than Turkey, that was under the effects of an international economic embargo, that was suffering from the impact of a rapidly devaluing currency and where memories of war and mass murder were still very close to the surface. Military troops of various nationalities – with the UN or Turkish armed forces – served as daily reminders of the global politics involved in what the world for over 30 years [in 1996] had termed 'the Cyprus problem.'

On the personal level, these factors contributed to a sense that time was standing still in north Cyprus, that the political situation could and/or would not be resolved, that 'no solution was the only solution,' and that there was little an individual or group could do to affect change in society or one's personal life. This 'culture of silence' was the context within which students and instructors entered the university classroom at that time. The situation led me to carefully review the essence of critical pedagogy and explore alternative theories and classroom practices – admittedly as tactics for my own classroom survival rather than exploration of grand pedagogical theory. Eventually I drew deeply from what I later identified as feminist and radical/engaged pedagogies, and from previous experiences with SMM.

During my tenure in 1995-1996 in northern Cyprus, Cypriots and foreign visitors were unable to cross the Green Line. Few, if any, Turkish Cypriot university students had ever met a Greek Cypriot or visited the south. In 2008, with the borders between the two communities now open, I returned to Cyprus to witness the changes in the political climate, renew acquaintances, and experience Greek Cypriot culture for the first time.[7] Returning in 2010 as a US Fulbright Scholar, I worked with the Cyprus Community Media Centre and university students in the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, developing reflexive personal digital stories that might help reduce tensions and encourage interaction between the communities (Higgins 2011).[8] The Fulbright programme included teaching the course 'Self-Reflexive Writing: Digital Storytelling and Oral Histories' in the Department of English Studies at the University of Cyprus (UCY) in the south, where I worked with Greek Cypriot, Greek, and Greek Cypriot-British students. Few of the students in the course had ever met a Turkish Cypriot university student. Many, identifying themselves as members of 'refugee families' who had been forced to move from their homes in the north in 1974 said they refused to visit the northern 'occupied zone.' The students were aware of my work in the Turkish Cypriot community and the 1996 stories that served as the starting point for the oral histories in 2012. We gradually shared our political and personal perspectives on these and other topics in concert with the trust building group 'story circles' of the digital storytelling experience (Higgins 2011). The 2010 teaching experience occurred seven years after the checkpoints had opened, six years after the Greek Cypriot community had defeated the UN referendum on reunification and was admitted into the European Union, and two

years after the south had adopted the Euro as standard currency. Despite these changes, the personal and official narratives dominating Greek Cypriot culture that had worked against peace and reconciliation were still dominant 11 years after Neack and Knudson (1999) had first described them in detail.

5. Pedagogical practices: Oral histories and self-reflexive responses

5.1 Cultivating reflexive practice

In 1996 and 2010, self-reflexive explorations were not merely added at the end of the oral history projects; rather, the reflective practice was cultivated throughout the term, guided by exercises based on Sense-Making Methodology. Typically, students were asked to remember a specific experience in a moment in time or across time periods; deeper 'probes' then explored thoughts, ideas, feelings and/or emotions at the time of the experience, and whether these were helpful or a hindrance in any way. Finally, students were asked whether they might consider any of their experiences a 'lesson for life.' The questions guiding the end of term self-reflexive responses provide examples:

1a. The best of what I have achieved in this course (what I am most proud of) is:

1b. What leads me to this response is [Explain in detail]:

2a. One idea or concept or experience in this course that I found invigorating/ stimulating/ exciting/ useful is:

2b. What about this concept or idea led me to find it invigorating / stimulating / exciting / useful is [Explain in detail]:

3a. One idea or concept or experience in this course that I have struggled with is:

3b. How I resolved this struggle / am resolving this struggle is [Explain in detail]:

4a. Something I experienced or learned during this course or term that I would consider a 'lesson for life' is:

4b. How I arrived at this conclusion was [Explain in detail]:

5a. Something I've learned about myself during this course or term:

5b. How I arrived at this conclusion was [Explain in detail]:

6a. Additional thoughts I have about the course or processes in the course:

The exercises throughout the semester were intended to sharpen students' self-reflexive and interviewing skills; they also provided me with insights to better understand these students, their experiences, and their culture – and adapt pedagogy appropriately.

For example, I had reservations in 1995/1996 (and still some, but far fewer, in 2010) that perhaps the principles and practices of engaged pedagogy might be a cultural imposition and not appropriate to Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot cultures. The exercises confirmed for me that the pedagogical techniques were appropriate, although novel to the students. Questioning or independent thought had not been encouraged within the primary or secondary educational systems encountered by

most Turkish Cypriot or Greek Cypriot students and a critically-based pedagogy represented a refreshing, 'modern' change toward education. Minnoş represented a common perspective of a first-year student as she reflected on her experiences at Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) in 1995 and compared them with the system of traditional Turkish education.

> I love my department and my instructors. Although my department seems to be very hard from the outside, by the help at an instructors and good attitudes to us, we can succeed in our courses. They show us to trust ourselves and to do something by ourselves. By the help of the homeworks, we can create something and have a modern education without using Turkish Traditional Education System. (Minnoş 1995 EMU)[9]

Senior level Greek Cypriot students made similar comments in 2010 when referring to their experiences with a traditional education system before entering the University of Cyprus (UCY), praising the critical nature of instruction in their Department of English Studies.

While I agree with hooks (1994) that the critical classroom is not and should not always be the safe place some pedagogists believe, as a newcomer to the process in 1995-1996 I questioned whether the self-reflexive exercises transgressed certain cultural or personal boundaries. Although I provided other options to the interview and cautioned students to discuss only items with which they felt comfortable, I was concerned at the time that the desire to please their professor may have led some of them into areas that the culture might have dictated they leave undisturbed. Reflections by students years later, following digital storytelling workshops in Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot universities in 2010 (Higgins 2011) showed me again that, while group sharing of personal reflections and feelings was not typically a part of these cultures, the participants recognized the sharing and reflection processes were valuable tools for understanding oneself and others. Indeed, many found this to be a transformative 'lesson for life' they took away from the experience, as exemplified by Theresa, a student in the 2010 class at UCY:

> A 'lesson for life' is listening to others. When in the story circle I actually listened and heard the inner message and emotions that others were sharing. I learned to give them their time and managed to keep ideas and comments until the end. I learned to respect the feelings of others more and give them the attention that they were due. […]
>
> It is important to share feelings, and listen to the feelings of others, to a point where it can be cleansing and calming. This is something I can use not only in this course, but in life generally. (Theresa 2010 UCY)

While previously accepting the notion theoretically, it was soon after my initial use of engaged pedagogy in 1995 that I personally recognized that all pedagogical practices involve power relations, particularly the imposition of self-reflection or sharing routines. I agree with hooks (1994) that there are appropriate uses of power in the context of the classroom, as long as options are provided for students to opt out and the instructor also shares vulnerable experiences with the students, which was very much the case during the 2010 'story circles.' I recognize the complexity involved in asking students to visit personally or culturally sensitive areas, but also acknowledge the possibility that

the discomfort of the students may have indicated they were experiencing what Freire (1970/1989) termed 'limit situations': times of challenge that, when surmounted, become the basis of further growth and transformation.

I found support for this perspective years later. While the benefits of the self-reflexive assignments may not have been readily apparent to some students at the time, in at least one case this changed over the years. In a 2008 visit to Cyprus, I spoke with Metin and asked him about a comment he had made in his 1995 response as a second year EMU student. Commenting on the process of self-reflection, he had questioned whether the self-interview was appropriate to his class:

> I think this interview is very useful in exploring people's feelings. With this interview, you can understand someone's feelings very clearly, because when someone gives answers to these questions, they automatically explore all his feelings about the event. [. . .] On the other hand, I believe that this interview has no visible relationship with our course. (Metin 1995 EMU)

The last part of Metin's comment stayed with me for 13 years, and I was curious if he had changed his mind about the relevance of the process. During our 2008 visit, Metin smiled and said,

> The Turkish Traditional System didn't force you to believe something – it just didn't have you question the material. It was in a book, the guy was smart enough to write a book, so who are we to question? But [EMU 1994 department founder] Dwayne Winseck said, 'The Traditional Turkish System has you count bricks. We don't care about counting bricks. Instead, we want to give you bricks [. . .] and sand, water, mortar – to see you make something. (personal communication, November 2008)

Metin identified the characteristics of the critical pedagogy upon which faculty in EMU's Communication and Media Studies operated in the department's early years. Such a pedagogy is intended for lifelong learning and processing, rather than the short-term acquisition of knowledge. It would seem that the process was successful in the case of at least one student, judging by Metin's comments.

Students in the 2010 UCY class expressed familiarity with the concepts of critical education and provided examples indicating classes and faculty at the Department of English Studies were fully engaged with critical pedagogy. The discussions took place during what is typically the first step in classes I teach with a self-reflexive component: reading Freire and a reflective article related to Freire's theories and life work (Higgins 1997). The readings provide a base in Freirean concepts and related practices in SMM that guides interviews and self-interviews throughout the term.

5.2 Turkish Cypriot oral histories and reflection

In 1996, EMU students compiled oral histories from older family members and neighbours regarding their experiences before, during, and after the 1974 war. Cypriot university students in 1996, as young adults and teenagers, were born after 1963 and did not experience first hand the intercommunal violence, the 1974 war, or the population exchange following the war. Older Turkish Cypriots referred to those of student age

in 1996 as 'the lost generation'. The students did not have to struggle for survival and independence; to the older generation they also seemed to be a bit adrift. The oral history project was a way to address these concerns and have the students engage with their families, communities, and social history and issues. Students conducted interviews with family members, neighbours, and villagers, using these interviews to record elders' experiences. Each student selected interview topics from one or more of the following situations: Life during 'the troubles' from 1963 and 1974; life during the 1974 war; life during the 1974-1975 forced migration; life after 1974, living in the Turkish Cypriot north since 1983; or pleasant experiences with Greek neighbours.

The interview responses and reflections are discussed below; the project was successful in its goals of connecting students to their families, communities, and history while learning communication research methods and exploring reflexivity. These oral histories eventually came to serve purposes beyond the primary goals as well. The Cypriot students often complained about what they perceived as the world's negative perception of Turkish Cypriots and Turkish culture in general. There was a general sense that nothing could be done to address the situation, an attitude characteristic of a 'culture of silence'. To address this, students read Freire, reflected on their own cultural norms and practices, and discussed possibilities of breaking beyond this 'limit situation' – to action. The class eventually developed a website as a means of allowing Turkish Cypriots to present their own views of the situation on Cyprus without the filters provided by the international mass media, reaching a global audience through the then-emerging World Wide Web. Turkish Cypriot students provided the oral histories from elders in their communities while Turkish students and I hand-coded the HTML necessary to create the site. The website, 'Voices of Turkish Cypriots' (Higgins et al. 1996) provided gripping accounts of the personal experiences of Turkish Cypriots from the time periods mentioned above.[10]

Of those respondents asked to recall favourable memories with Greek neighbours before the war, most were unable to remember any stories. However, Asli, a 75-year-old housewife, recalled positive interactions with Greek neighbours before the war; she told this story to Dürüm, the student interviewer:

> I lived in Aygasyona which is located in Nicosia. Before 1963, Turks and Greeks lived together. Their relationship was good and there wasn't any border before 1963. Both Turks and Greeks lived together in the same street. […] All the Turkish children and Greek children grew up together. They were good neighbours. The Greek people were always ready to lend a helping hand to people. They learned each others' language. I thought Greek people were hard-working. […] My best friends were Greek. They were sincere, and we had a good relationship. […]
>
> My opinion is that if peace was to be declared, relationships regarding the Turkish and Greek people would be the same as before. If there is to be peace, I want to meet with my best friend and resume our friendship as before. (Asli 1996)[11]

While some other interviewees recalled instances of kindness or friendship with Greeks before or during the war, many were left with the conclusion that it was simply not possible for Turks and Greeks to ever live together again. During their discussion,

Gül, a 76-year-old housewife, explained to the interviewer, Feral, the reason she was willing to relive painful memories: 'It was a very difficult interview because these were very bad memories for me and I do not want to remember them again. But I want to give information and my experience for young generation' (Gül 1996).

The oral histories were successful in helping Turkish Cypriot and Turkish students make a personal connection with the experiences of their families and neighbours. One such example was provided by Damla's interview. In describing the death of his cousin during the 1974 war, Rose, a 67-year-old retired teacher, said, 'It was the worst event that I have experienced throughout my life. Even today from time to time I wake up screaming, because I had a dream where I was an officer, and later I saw my death' (Rose 1996). In a reflexive self-interview after the project, Damla described her reactions during the interview:

> When I talked to Rose sometimes I looked his face and I saw that he was crying and his eyes were wide. When he explained this war he was excited. I think the basic reason of this was that he felt that he was not in his home, but that he was in the war again. I think I am very lucky because I did not live during this war. Before the interview I didn't know all of these terrible events but now I know and I think we are a very lucky generation. (Damla 1996 EMU)

The 1996 oral histories fulfilled the project's pedagogical goals: it provided older Turkish Cypriots the opportunity to share meaningful events and emotions with the younger generation, and the project encouraged students to connect with their cultural history and critically examine their own values, assumptions, and expectations.

5.3 Greek Cypriot oral histories and reflection

In contrast to the questions guiding the 1996 interviews, the 2010 Greek Cypriot oral histories with elder family members and neighbours focused specifically on positive moments with Turkish Cypriots when growing up, developing a collection of 'cultural memories of peace'. During one self-reflexive exercise before they began their oral history assignment, students in the University of Cyprus class read a personal story about a Greek Cypriot whose father 'disappeared' during the 1974 war after being taken from his village by Turkish forces – and a while after he had helped bring food to starving Turkish Cypriots (Hadjittofi 2005). The young Hadjittofi himself was saved by a Turkish soldier who argued with another soldier that Hadjittofi was a boy, not a man and therefore was not to be taken away with his father. Years later, Hadjittofi went on to become the executive director of the Cyprus Fulbright Commission, active in bicommunal activities promoting peace and reconciliation that honoured his father's memory and values. The students reflected on the story and wrote responses they later shared with Mr. Hadjittofi. This effort prior to the interviews was intended to help students recognize that Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots at one time did share friendships and common human concerns, and that Cypriots who had suffered loss at the hands of 'the Other' might still work toward peace and reconciliation – facts not generally recognized or appreciated in the wider culture.

Some Cypriot students expressed concern that their interviewees would not be able to describe any pleasant encounters with Turkish Cypriots from their childhood before 1963, since they had never heard their elders say a positive word about Turkish Cypriots. Indeed, one interview participant who began talking to students about the peaceful life Turkish and Greek Cypriots shared in her village addressed most of her story to her sense of betrayal as her former Turkish Cypriot friends became distant and withdrawn starting with the events of 1963 (Ms. Maria 2010).[12]

As it turned out, most interview participants provided stories not shared very often in the charged political climate of 2010, as exemplified by Delf's exclamation after the project, 'I've heard all my grandfather's stories many times, but this is the first time I ever heard him tell this one!' The story described a situation when a Turkish Cypriot neighbour saved Mr. Mario's brother from death, told to Delf, Nefeli, and Thomas:[13]

> Another incident … took place during the … invasion in 1974. One of my brothers remained in the village along with some other people. One day, a group of Turkish Cypriot soldiers from Chados were asked by Turkish generals to gather the people of Marathovounos. They wanted to judge them and make them pay for the pillages they committed against the properties of Turkish Cypriots of Chados during the incidents of 1964. […]
>
> However, when the Turkish Cypriot soldiers saw who these people were, they said to the generals that they had captured the wrong people, because with these people they used to live, work, eat, and have fun together. One of them said: 'These people are our brothers. They never hurt us.' […] Also, one of the Turkish Cypriots secretly put a packet of cigarettes in the pocket of a captive. Finally, they convinced the Turkish generals to let them go and thus my brother and the others were spared. (Marios 2010)

Marios' story was a narrative not often heard in the Greek Cypriot community, as evidenced by Delf's response:

> When he told us this I was a bit surprised. Who could ever imagine that relationships of brotherhood existed between people of the two communities and that they would protect each other due to the fact that they had shared so much in the past? […] I wonder whether I would ever say something like that one day, or if a Turkish Cypriot would ever say such a thing about me. I was even having doubts about what he said to us and I remember talking to myself, saying 'could this actually be true?' As it seems, it was indeed very much true. (Delf 2010 UCY)

Nefeli responded similarly to the interview:

> Through our interviewee's story, I realized that both Turkish and Greek Cypriots had the same aims and concerns. As my mother always says, 'It was their homeland. How is it possible not to care about it?' This story also indicates how harmonized the two communities were. (Nefeli 2010 UCY)

Effie's response to Mrs. Anna's story, told to and translated by Effie and Natalie, reflected Delf's tone of disbelief:

> Mrs. Anna was telling us about a Turkish-Cypriot woman, called Eminet. […] In 1963, when the conflicts between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots started taking place, that woman moved to Nicosia, for her husband was killed. As Mrs. Anna suggested,

> Eminet's husband was probably killed by some Greek-Cypriot members of EOKA because he was politically active. In addition, she told us that the killings of Turkish-Cypriots were not uncommon but they were simply silenced by the Greek-Cypriots.
>
> This fact caught me by surprise […] for I was not aware of it. […] I realized that all these years I was living in a lie, for I believed that the Greek-Cypriots were not responsible for what had happened back then and that they were just victims of the whole situation. Mrs. Anna pointed out to me that the Greek-Cypriots had a share of responsibility as well.
>
> Once I heard about this, I became even more curious to listen to what she had to say and the more she was telling us the more fascinated I was by her story and by her attitude towards this matter. (Effie 2010 UCY)

Marios' and Mrs. Anna's stories run against the dominant narrative of unprovoked victimhood in the Greek Cypriot community (Neack and Knudson 1999); Delf's and Effie's comments are typical of the student responses to the information provided by the histories. Even the respondent noted previously who described feelings of betrayal by her Turkish Cypriot friends, Ms. Maria, evoked this response from Jasmine:

> Her ideas and thoughts made me think of the article titled 'Peace Profile: Paulo Freire and Social Transformation' [Higgins 1997] which refers to the idea of making people go beyond themselves, making them discover a new self that would lead them to a transformation. I felt being in this position since my views on Turkish Cypriots have always been negative. I had never spoken to someone who had something positive to say, thus my views had all developed negatively concerning the Turkish Cypriots. I was never able to understand and accept the fact that both the Turkish and the Greek Cypriots could actually live happily together as neighbours.
>
> However, Ms Maria was able to change my negative views and through the interview I was able to understand things that I never did before. […] I was never in the position that Ms Maria was, I never had any interaction with Turkish Cypriots, thus it was hard for me to understand if any such relationship was possible between the Turkish Cypriots and the Greek Cypriots. My surrounding environment was always constituted of refugees who had always something negative to remember. (Jasmine 2010 UCY)

Jasmine seems to have been affected more by Ms. Maria's positive memories rather than the more numerous negative references to life with Turkish Cypriots in the interview. This may be because Ms. Maria's positive experiences stand out from the negative narrative Jasmine typically encounters within the Greek Cypriot community, or perhaps it stems from Jasmine's role as an exceptional student attentive to course objectives and classroom power issues. In any event, the responses suggest that the students may have encountered moments involving a critical reformation of their worldviews, a significant element of reflection noted by Marsick et al.:

> The quality of reflection is central to the way in which a person makes meaning of what is occurring. People are often guided in reflection by internalized social rules, norms, values, and beliefs that have been acquired implicitly and explicitly through socialization. These internalized perspectives can distort one's interpretation of an experience. To learn deeply from experience, people must critically reflect on the assumptions, values, and beliefs that shape their understanding. (Marsick et al. 2006: 489)

The 2010 oral histories fulfilled the project's pedagogical goals: they provided a connection between elders and students in the Greek Cypriot community and encouraged participants to give voice to experiences typically stifled in the culture. The experience made available perspectives to younger Cypriots that encourage them to rethink values, beliefs, and worldviews both personal and social, possibly leading to a change in themselves and society. The stories were added to the revised website, 'Cypriot Voices' (Higgins et al. 2010).

6. Discussion

The aims of the projects described in this chapter went beyond teaching communication theories, methods, and writing. Both projects attempted to engage students with their families and communities, to train students to listen deeply to stories of personal transformation relayed by close relatives and neighbours, and to encourage the students to reflect on these stories. Students were encouraged to forge connections between the stories and their own lives and worldviews, particularly noting when stories and experiences clashed or agreed with the dominant perspectives of their larger cultures: family, community, political, media. The projects attempted to create spaces for students to engage in critical reflection on their values and beliefs, providing them with a lifelong context in which to consider action that might change their personal and social worlds.

The use of oral histories as a method of facilitating student engagement with their communities is not novel; Stucky (1995) notes how oral history projects promote dialogue between an educational institution and the broader community. Gabriel identifies the use of oral history as a 'tool of community engagement' (2008: 268) when describing its use within refugee communities in London. Paul Thompson, a pioneer in the modern oral history movement, comments on the potential of oral history to affect change within a variety of social venues:

> [O]ral history certainly can be a means for transforming both the content and the purpose of history. It can be used to change the focus of history itself, and open up new areas of inquiry; it can break down barriers between teachers and students, between generations, between educational institutions and the world outside; and in the writing of history [. . .] it can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place. (Thompson 2006: 26)

In Cyprus, where memory and history are often contested along political and cultural divisions, oral histories and reflexive practices are appropriate to peace and reconciliation efforts. Cypriot civil society organizations engaged in oral histories emphasize the social construction of history/histories and the need to collect, preserve, and understand oral histories as reflective of a wide spectrum of Cypriot experiences. Histories provide a way of 'teaching the conflict' in education under shared curricular (as well as cultural and political) goals. As stated by the Cypriot bicommunal Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR), one of the organization's aims is: 'To nurture a critical understanding of the linkages between perceptions of history, attitudes and behaviours towards the 'other' and history education' (AHDR 2012).

The practice of oral histories by students as an educational method is consistent within the framework of engaged pedagogy. Reinharz (1992) describes the use of interviews and oral history as appropriate to the principles of feminist social science research, while Nelson (1989) discuses the benefits of structured interviews and notes theoretical and methodological perspectives feminist research shares with phenomenology, including a grounding in lived experience (Nelson 1989: 224). Parkes, Gore, and Elsworth note the transformative opportunities available through critical classroom practices:

> Pedagogy in its broadest form is the sociohistorical process through which we have become who we are, and through which we may become other than who we are. If it is the case that pedagogy is implicated in the historical process of subjectivity formation, than at least one ethical position an educator can adopt is to engage in teaching as a practice of freedom. (Parkes, Gore, and Elsworth 2010: 178)

As evidenced by the projects in this chapter, critical self-reflection on the interview experience is crucial if students are to forge connections between the stories they hear and the critical processing of that information. The use of SMM in the context of oral histories and self-reflexivity provides a means of implementing notions in engaged pedagogy discussed earlier in this chapter: encouraging self-reflection, recognizing the multiplicity of ways of knowing and experiencing the world, and incorporating students' experiences as a body of legitimate knowledge. hooks comments on the radical potential of personal experiences in classroom practices:

> Again and again, [we] are saying that different, more radical subject matter does not create a liberatory pedagogy; that a simple practice like including personal experience may be more constructively challenging than simply changing the curriculum. That is why there has been such critique of the place of experience – of confessional narrative – in the classroom. One of the ways you can be written off quickly as a professor by colleagues who are suspicious of progressive pedagogy is to allow your students, or yourself, to talk about experience; sharing personal narratives yet linking that knowledge with academic information really enhances our capacity to know. (hooks 1994: 148)

The importance of self-reflection to engaged pedagogy parallels similar practices in peace-building:

> When people stop to examine what they are doing, how they are doing it, why they are doing it, what they hope will come out of it, and what is helping or hindering them from achieving their goals, they are effectuating the most powerful tool of self-regulation available to a social system. […] The power of feedback from within the system is of equal if not greater value than that from the outside, for it involves a self-consciousness that builds awareness, and awareness is the first step in any change process. (Diamond & McDonald 1996: 9)

7. Conclusion

A critical framework presupposes the significance of personal and social context on the interpretation of the experienced phenomenon. Accordingly, within this discussion I have employed self-reflexivity as a process and method essential to the critical project, as discussed by Lunt and Livingstone (1996) and Dervin (1998).

Engaged pedagogy encourages student (and teacher) involvement in lifelong learning beyond classroom walls for the purpose of individual enrichment and social change. Student experiences and perceptions – in a variety of modalities – are accepted as one basis of 'legitimate' knowledge from which both students and the teacher can learn when aided by a process of self-reflection on the part of students and the teacher. Consideration of power and context, including gender-based structures and processes, allows for a dynamic process of engagement in the classroom and beyond. The principles of engaged pedagogy translate into concrete classroom practices as described in this chapter: oral histories and self-reflexive responses. In particular, Dervin's Sense-Making Methodology provides a perspective and methodology consistent with the goals of engaged pedagogy and a means through which to implement the theories.

The evidence presented in this chapter supports findings that the goals of a liberatory pedagogy can be addressed through the classroom practices of oral history and self-reflexivity, and that these aspirations and practices are appropriate across cultural boundaries. Recognizing the problems as well as the potential, oral histories and self-reflexive responses as engaged pedagogical theories, with their implementation through the methods described herein, certainly offer the ability to concretely touch and transform human lives.

> [L]earning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine was to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.
>
> (hooks 1994: 207)

Beyond pedagogical theory, the practices described in this chapter indicate an ability to transform lives and, through that transformation, influence society. Interviewees typically gain additional personal insights into their life experiences, aided by the self-reflexive tools within Sense-Making Methodology and evidenced by a phrase often repeated by participants: 'I hadn't thought of [the experience] that way before now.' Students engaging in oral history projects and self-reflexive analyses of these experiences describe aspects of 'transformation,' as determined and described by the participants themselves. As an educator and aspiring life-long learner, I recognize how the people, experiences, and educational practices in Cyprus have helped shape my life, attitudes, and world view.

If we believe that education should have some personal and social meaning beyond the acquisition of facts, educators need to provide tools and cultivate space for transcendence to occur – inside the classroom, and beyond. Oral history projects, coupled with self-reflexive analyses, link the classroom with the larger community and provide students the opportunity to gain and share knowledge from and with their families and neighbours. From these small steps, individuals and societies transform themselves. One story at a time.

Notes

1. As a US Fulbright Scholar visiting Cyprus, the 2010 project was aided by support from the University of Cyprus Department of English Studies and Professor Andreas Papapavlou, and the exceptional assistance provided by the people at the Cyprus Fulbright Commission. I am grateful for comments provided by Brenda Dervin of Ohio State University.
2. Portions of this chapter draw from 'Critical/Feminist Pedagogies in the Context of Turkish Cyprus,' presented at the conference of International Association for Media and Communication Research, Participatory Communication Research Section. Glasgow, Scotland, July 1998.
3. This section draws material from the US Federal Research Division (1993), US Central Intelligence Agency (2012), Economist Intelligence Unit (2010, 2012), and United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (2012).
4. I am grateful for the help of colleagues in 1995-1996: Mashoed Bailie for spirited discussions involving the nature and implementation of a critical media pedagogy, Anber Onar for insights into Turkish Cypriot culture, and Chris Miles for lessons in Turkish Cypriot bureaucratic procedures. For a discussion of Eastern Mediterranean University in the Turkish Cypriot community and the University of Cyprus in the Greek Cypriot community during this period, see Watzman (1994).
5. In 2010, Greek and Greek Cypriot students also described their experiences with a traditional education system in primary and secondary schools, as well as their appreciation of the more critical methods used by faculty in the Department of English Studies at the University of Cyprus.
6. The Turkish Cypriot educational experience is somewhat different from Turkey as it also reflects the influence of eight decades of British rule. This influence is also reflected in the Greek Cypriot educational experience when compared with Greece.
7. I am grateful to Anber Onar and Johann Pillai of Sidestreets Educational and Cultural Initiatives, Ltd. in Nicosia for support during my fellowship at Sidestreets in 2008 and in 2010 as a Fulbright host institution.
8. Stories are available at http://www.youtube.com/CyprusStories.
9. Reference indicators refer to the student, year of self-interview, and institution. Students chose a pseudonym for use in the project.
10. The site was originally named 'Voices from Turkish Cyprus' but was renamed and edited in 2008 to reflect reconciliation efforts between the island's communities. With the addition of the 2010 Greek Cypriot histories it was renamed 'Cypriot Voices.' http://www.CyVoices.org
11. Responses excerpted in this chapter are available in their entirety at the Cypriot Voices website, http://www.CyVoices.org.
12. According to Neack and Knudson (1999), the dominant narrative of the Greek Cypriot community includes an idyllic peaceful island life before 1974; mainland Turks began instigating intercommunal violence in 1963 and alienating Turkish Cypriots from their Greek Cypriot neighbours; the 1974 Turkish invasion was unprovoked and the starting point of current problems in Cyprus. The search for stories reflecting a time when Cypriots lived together in peace is sensitive, in that there is the possibility of reinforcing this dominant cultural and political narrative – or, at the other extreme, whitewashing the real differences of the past and present.

    The pedagogical framework in the project described in this chapter attempts to build a forward-looking 'cultural memory of peace' based on a critical self-reflection and critical examination of events, policies, histories, and attitudes in Cyprus.
13. Students chose their own pseudonym for the project report and website.

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