

# Contested language, memory, and oral history as curriculum questions: A tale from Cyprus

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## Abstract

In the field of educational research, there is an increased interest in research on memory and education, invigorated by oral history projects. Oral history entails biographical and autobiographical segments and language is a central element through which messages delivered may inspire dialogue, conflict, self-reflection. In this paper, inspired by an example of a language terminology shift in everyday life, drawn from the Cyprus context, I ponder the dynamics between power and language that work toward strengthening conflict, and challenge memory and subjectivity. Taking a curriculum studies perspective, I reframe shifts in language terminology, memory, testimonies, and oral history as curriculum questions, in order to explore possibilities that a rich, authentic and subjective language can offer. This becomes a means to understand complex relations and different dynamics in contextualized situations. I also offer glimpses on the interaction of hidden curriculum, collective memory, language and implications. Archived oral histories from the Cyprus Oral History Project are analyzed based on the language terminology used, and important themes, ambiguities, similarities and differences. For the analysis I use Pinar's method of autobiographical reflection and Edgerton's reflections on 'reading' and 'writing our lives.' I suggest that considering language terminology usage is important in curriculum studies and useful in our continuous efforts to ponder curriculum and curriculum issues.

**Keywords:** language, memory, oral history, autobiography, biography, narrative, conflict, justice, reflection, currere, curriculum studies, pedagogy, Cyprus

## Introduction

In the field of educational research, there is an increased interest in research on memory and education, invigorated by oral history projects. In this paper, inspired by an example of a language terminology shift in everyday life, I ponder the dynamics between power and language that work toward strengthening conflict, and challenge memory and subjectivity. Adopting a curriculum studies perspective, I reframe shifts in language terminology, memory, testimonies, and oral history as curriculum questions, and I explore the possibilities that a rich, authentic and subjective language offers in understanding complex relations and different dynamics in contextualized situations. Such examination is enabled through the use of a case of a language terminology shift in Cyprus that lies somewhere between being culturally and ethnically sensitive and politically correct. Archived oral histories<sup>1</sup> from the Cyprus Oral History Project<sup>2</sup> are analyzed and discussed through Pinar's (1994) and Edgerton's (1995) methods of autobiographical reflection.

Oral history (Thompson, 1978) is a form of narrative research practice (Creswell, 2012) and it entails biographical and in some way, for those reading them (Edgerton, 1995), autobiographical segments. Language is a central element in oral history and can deliver messages that may inspire dialogue, conflict and self-reflection (Edgerton, 1995).

Language is a very complex issue and various debates arise based on the way language terminology is used, including, but not limited to history teaching (Nasser & Nasser, 2008; Papadakis, 2008a, 2008b; Yogev, 2012; Neal, 2013). Despite the magnitude of such debates, often the interaction of hidden curriculum, collective memory (Funkenstein, 1989; Halbwachs, 1950/1980), language and implications remain unexplored. The discussion about language and relevant investigation is important in curriculum studies field, because language is a means to convey meanings (Edgerton, 1995), which are an essential part of the curriculum and contribute to the formation and shaping of experiences, assumptions, and biases.

### **Framing language in a (post-)reconceptualization curriculum studies era**

As I turn this conversation into a curriculum question, it is pertinent that I understand it through the lenses of curriculum, including notions of embodiment, the study of experiences, and subjectivity. Using a (post-)reconceptualization-era curriculum studies framework (Gough, 2000; Malewski, 2010; Miller, 2005a; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995), language can be understood as a source of meaning making, and contested language can be viewed with a particular focus on memory, subjectivity, plurality of voices and language terminology usage, and an effort to make sense of our world (Schubert, 1997). Internal experiences (Pinar & Grumet, 1976), a focus on autobiographical and phenomenological experience (Pinar, 2007; Slattery, 2006), and the interconnectedness of all experiences (Slattery, 2006) are characteristics of the curriculum studies field in the (post-)reconceptualization era. Curriculum, then, is understood as inward journey (Pinar, 1994, 2004) that happens in our mutual experiences, as we live in the world and through our interaction with it. Further, it is “the interpretation of lived experiences” (Schubert, 1986, p. 33) and its study “invokes questions of the good life for individuals and matters of justice in pursuing life together” (Schubert, 1996, p. 169).

With this in mind, autobiographical reflections are imperative in any effort to draw meaning. Meaning is created through a process ignited from our capacity to conceptualize our autobiography, and in sharing autobiographical accounts with others who strive for similar understanding (Schubert, 1986). As individuals conceptualize their autobiographies and seek meaning amid the swirl of present events, they move historically into their own past to recover and reconstitute origins, and imagine and create possible directions of their own future. In sharing autobiographical accounts with others, curriculum “becomes a reconceiving of one’s perspective on life” and “a social process whereby individuals come to greater understanding of themselves, others, and the world through mutual reconceptualization” (Schubert, 1986, p. 33).

A field now implicated in *worldly circumstances* (Carson, 2009), a cosmopolitan curriculum “acknowledges the personification of the individual” (Pacheco, 2012, p. 13; Pinar, 2009), involves the creation of spaces in which we explore our autobiographies, often through the biographies of others (Edgerton, 1995), and an effort to understand complexities in our world. Thus, it signifies challenges and opportunities for individuals and communities in a world of ongoing social transformation, and a way of life in which individuals are participants in a pluralistic change rather than spectators or victims of such change (Hansen, Burdick-Shepherd, Cammarano & Obelleiro, 2009, p. 587). Curriculum is a complicated conversation (Pinar, 2004; Slattery, 2006; Pacheco, 2012) that needs a rich dialogue to capture our world’s experiences. Such, points toward “a primacy of the particular” (Pacheco, 2012, p. 13), “cultivates comprehension of alterity, including that self-knowledge that enables understanding of others” (Pinar, 2009, p. 7), and “promotes a dialogue” (Miller, 2005b, p. 14).

A multitude of curricular ideas depict the way experience lies in us, connects us to the world, becomes pathway between our past and present, and the way language is part of all these efforts and conversation. Using language that promotes embodiment and subjectivity (Grumet, 1988, 1990; Miller, 2005a); voicing and naming our experiences (Adams, Blumenfeld, Castaneda, Hackman, Peters & Zuniga, 2013); justice and inclusiveness (Taylor & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009; Thornton, 2009); the sharing of personal stories and lived experiences (Schubert, 1997; Schubert & Ayers, 1991); memory (Morris, 2001; Morris & Weaver, 2002) and testimony (Edgerton, 1995; Felman & Laub, 1992; Zimmerman, 2004); and acknowledging individual and group agency, opens up possibilities for multiple ways of knowing, multiple forms of knowledge, and “new ways of being in relation with the past” (Hendry & Winfield, 2013, p. 3). All these point toward a language which, rather than being without identity (Page, 2009), is contextualized in historical and other circumstances (Pinar et al., 1995; Slattery, 2006; Pacheco, 2012) and acknowledges the connection among the personal, the cultural, the social, and the political (Giroux, 2002, Giroux & Pollock, 2010; Greene, 1995; Ellis, 2004).

Examining language through a curriculum studies framework, I also point toward the need for a language that promotes the dynamism of the curriculum studies field through vibrant, alive, contextualized, and *worldly* conversations (Pacheco, 2012) and understanding curricula as an active force of human educational experience (Pinar, 2004). Seeing language as part of the formation of our experiences, language terminology usage, becomes part of this broader conversation, and the study of such experience becomes a curricular concern. Considering how education is the re-organization of experience (Dewey, 1916; Ayers, 2004), I also urge to see how language contributes to different understandings, and functions as a means for re-organization of experience. In this conversation and re-organization of experience, biography and autobiography, life-history research, oral history, and teacher narrative inquiry (Schubert & Ayers, 1991; He & Phillion, 2008; He, 2010; Edgerton, 1995) are meaningful concepts.

### **The context**

- About Cyprus

Cyprus is the smallest country in the European Union, and also the last divided country in Europe; Nicosia its last divided city. Winning its independence from Great Britain in 1960, Cyprus has been roiled in ethnic conflict, violence, and division almost from the start; everyone of a certain age remembers the troubles of 1963-1967. The 1974 Turkish invasion and subsequent occupation sealed the fate of Cyprus for decades.

The troubles of the last fifty years are not unrelated to Cyprus' strategic location at the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea, a place that has long attracted and continues to draw the great world powers. Today UN 'peace keepers' patrol the buffer zone between north and south, and Britain maintains a strong presence; tens of thousands of military personnel and two air bases (recently used by the US to fly into Afghanistan and Iraq) occupying 10% of the land mass. Cypriots often protest that the great powers see Cyprus as little more than a gigantic, unsinkable aircraft carrier.

While there has not been a shot fired since 1999, and while the border between the north and south was lifted in 2003, for the generation now in its sixties, memories of the early days are both vivid and raw, and, indeed, for many Cypriots of all ages, Cyprus is still bleeding. For Turkish Cypriots the bleeding began with the events of 1963 and ended with Turkey's 1974 'peace operation' on the island. For Greek Cypriots the bleeding began with the events of 1974 when Turkey invaded the island, the northern third of which has been occupied since.

Although tensions between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots are now scarce because of the partition, both sides remain pervaded by antagonistic biases, histories, and myths. Each community represents the other as the villain, and narrations of events surrounding the 1974 invasion differ. In reality, both communities have suffered losses in human lives and property. Currently, there are different political opinions as to what an 'ideal' solution to the Cyprus problem would be, with strong disagreements emerging between the opposing parties on the island. In addition, there are different interpretations, based primarily on personal experiences, upbringing, schooling and socio-political assumptions, about how the Cyprus problem began, the history of 1963–1974, and the events that led to the 1974 Turkish invasion.

- The researcher, the author

At this point I deem important to situate myself in the field. I am a Greek-Cypriot woman whose family became internally displaced refugees after fleeing the Turkish invasion in 1974. Born in Cyprus, I lived and completed Greek elementary school in Saudi Arabia where my parents sought job and opportunities to rebuild their lives. Having lost all their possessions, my parents placed a great value in education and they worked hard to help us, their children, get equipped with a good education for a better future and opportunities. As Saudi Arabia was a very different environment, culturally and religiously, from my own background, I experienced events that would have otherwise been remote

from what I had lived and known. I also lived in the United States, both in the Midwest and the South.

My worldview is thus, shaped by a multitude of varied experiences, and often conflicting cultural constructs. A kindergarten teacher, teacher educator, curriculum studies scholar, world traveler and a visionary, and a strong believer in the need for social justice, I embrace the idea and the need to 'forgive' (i.e. see analysis of Derrida's forgiving the unforgettable in Papastephanou, 2003), but not to forget.

### **Language, neutrality and meaning: A necessary brouhaha of terms?**

In Cyprus, like elsewhere, words are commonly used to describe events as if they are equivalent in meaning and significance, but this is an illusion. For example, terms used to describe the historical events of 1974 in Cyprus alternate between 'war' and 'invasion.' While 'peace operation' and 'intervention' are the terms used by Turkish Cypriots, the words 'invasion' and 'occupation' are the ones used by Greek Cypriots to describe the same events. For some, the events signify safety and protection; for others, catastrophe and loss. Other words carrying mixed and sometimes conflicting meanings are 'killing' or 'murder,' and 'missing people' or 'dead people.'

The events of 1963 have been described for decades by many Greek Cypriots as 'Turkish Cypriot riots.' Today those same events are being moderated to serve political agendas and are being referred to as 'intercommunal conflict' in an effort to spread responsibility evenly between the two communities, instead of placing the blame on the Turkish Cypriot side only.

For the Greek Cypriots, the 1974 invasion is the most important event in Cyprus' history, resulting in thousands dying, being captured or gone missing, hundreds of thousands of Greek Cypriots becoming refugees, tenths of thousands of Turkish Cypriots relocating from the south to the north and the – still ongoing – occupation of more than one third of the island. For the Turkish Cypriots, the most important date is 1963, when a violent incident took place close to the 'Green Line' in Nicosia. The incident, initiated by two Turkish Cypriots who resisted to the Greek Cypriot police, caused the death of two people. The events spread out rapidly to all areas inhabited by Turkish Cypriots and intercommunal fighting burst out. The Turkish Cypriots, sometimes willingly and other times forced by the Turkish Cypriot pro-partition paramilitary organization TMT, began moving from isolated rural areas and mixed villages into enclaves. For Greek Cypriots, 1974 was a tragic event, whereas for Turkish Cypriots it was a happy or at least a necessary event.

The word 'settlers' used by Greek Cypriots to denote the population brought by Turkey after 1974 to inhabit the North are to Turkish Cypriots 'the people who came from Turkey.' Similarly, the territories that Greek Cypriots designate as 'occupied' and 'free' are the ones Turkish Cypriots call 'North' and 'South' Cyprus, respectively. Further, the words 'Green Line' and 'Buffer Zone,' first established in 1964 and used to indicate the dividing line between the south that is governed by the Republic of Cyprus, and the Turkish-occupied north, governed by the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, have been replaced with 'Dividing Line,' mirroring a range of contemporary political interests.

Until the beginning of 2000, 'Greeks' and 'Turks' were the words used to describe Cyprus' two largest communities, whereas now the emphasis is on strengthening the Cypriot identity, which is mirrored in the use of the terms 'Greek Cypriots' and 'Turkish Cypriots.' It has traditionally been accepted that before the dispute started in 1964 Greek Cypriots formed up to 77%, Turkish Cypriots 18%, and Christian minorities including Maronites, Latin Catholic and Armenians, 5% of the Cypriot population (Solsten, 1991).

Furthermore, certain words carry nationalistic meaning, such as 'liberty' and 'liberation,' which are seen by some groups as part of a nationalist agenda, and thus the word 'reunification' is adopted instead.

### **Meaningful terms and politically correct language**

The significance of language use in conflict situations has been stressed in various ways in the literature. For example, in constructing South Africa's post-apartheid curriculum, known as Curriculum 2005 (DOE, 1997), "debates focused on the language of the curriculum and selection of what was to be taught [and] language surfaced as both a policy and a knowledge issue" (Chisholm, 2005, p. 196). Often, what to some is complexity and jargon to others re-naming signifies new approaches and habits of thinking (Chisholm, 2005). In places with contested past a language policy can be promoted in hopes to break from the colonial past and start afresh (Sharkey, 2012), or for purposes of commemoration (Hlongwane, 2008). Yet, vernacular histories or counter-memories, which are strongly linked to particular visions of group identity, have often arisen in response to official history (Weldon, 2009). Studies have revealed that linguistic and cultural policies are associated with linguistic ideology and socio-cultural relations in the society (Bryce, 2013), and such illustrate "layers of state power and the rising authority..." (p. 207). It is suggested, however, that the depth, direction and pace of curriculum change in post-conflict societies must be done in a way that does "not work against the spirit of reconciliation by breaking too radically with the curriculum inherited" (Weldon, 2009, p. 118).

Language has also been examined in the context of politics, and the 'we-referencing' language leaders are using to win elections (Steffens & Haslam, 2013); often such leaders' efforts depict a collective identity that is shared with followers. In sociocultural-political contexts, such language shifts, i.e. using a new "we" versus "them and us," has been viewed as an indication for the need to adopt a new language that illustrates acceptance of diversity as an asset and consideration of a shared future together (Ramadan, 2013). Nevertheless, there has been little research on language as a means of causing conflict or as a means of overcoming it, and the role of political correctness in this process.

In the following paragraphs, I explain what political correctness is. Firstly, political correctness submits to a framework of sociological differences. In essence, political correctness is the use of culturally neutral terms by the speaker and the writer in an effort to eliminate the prejudices inherent to cultural, sexual and racist stereotypes (i.e. see definition in [thefreedictionary.com](http://thefreedictionary.com); for examples of such terms see Beard & Cerf, 1993). Secondly, political correctness is beholden to a framework of power relations and national interests, in which

official language—including curricula language—shifts. Yet, terms can easily trigger opposite meanings: ‘national interest’ in one context speaks to something that feels benign and generally good for the nation; in another it implies or disguises the benefit of the elite; ‘peace’ can mean the end of conflict, the creation of balance, but is used repeatedly for projects that involve mass crimes (Chomsky, 1997).

Political correctness has raised many debates in the sociopolitical sphere. The advocates of culturally inclusive and gender-neutral language deem such language shifts necessary, so that, stereotypes and labeling do not contribute to the discrimination of people, whereas the challengers commonly oppose the identification of such social power disparities. Within the political strata, between the left and right wing, radicals and conservatives, political correctness has been criticized as thought police, as well as “censoring conservatives, politicizing curricula, and imposing a new ‘McCarthyism...’” (Wilson, 1995, p.1), often used by mainstream media and political leaders to blind people to certain realities, as they promote a particular understanding of reality (Feaman, 2012).

Using language in a way that changes reality is often a deliberate activity that distorts and limits understanding, since by underestimating language one underestimates thought (Chomsky, 1997; Cooley, 2010). As argued, we often construct a “world in which language swallows up everything” (Bordo, 1993, p. 291; Giroux, 2002). Some theorists consider that reality does not exist outside of language, and others that language makes reality meaningful, prioritizing meaning over reality (in postmodern theory) or vice versa (Giroux, 2002).

Underestimating and simplifying language may contradict the memory and thoughts mainly of those who have lived and experienced particular events. This can initiate conflict. For example, in the political history of Arabisation in Sudan and Algeria it was observed that a nationalistic state-led effort to rationalize language, imposing standard literary language at the expense of other local languages in hopes to break from a colonial past, did not succeed in eliminating multilingualism in practice (Sharkey, 2012). Although such effort promoted the use of literary language at an official level, it simultaneously “[stimulated] oppositional identities” (Sharkey, 2012).

In educational contexts political correctness is represented by censorship, a set of rules aiming “to screen out language and topics that might be considered controversial or offensive” (Ravitch, 2003, p. 3). This censorship that often governs curriculum material, in “stripping away everything that is potentially thought-provoking and colorful from the texts that children encounter” and narrowing “what children are exposed to” (p. 8), has the “power to dumb down what children learn in schools” (p. 3).

Political correctness involves much more than a restriction of speech. It represents a broad cultural transformation, a shift in the way people understand things and organize their lives; a change in the way meaning is made (Schwartz, 2010). As argued, words have become separated from meaning, which becomes private and increasingly inchoate (Kuran, 1995). We often observe, for instance, that the language we use to justify the structure of our society has changed, although the structure itself has not (Alexander, 2012). “In all this, the capacity language offers to compare and share our experience of reality becomes lost” (Schwartz, 2010, p. 47), and “language...is simply an invocation of the grandiose,

primitive self of whoever has power, and does not recognize the existence of independent others” (p. 47). However, conflicts can be turned to positive account, “by transforming a scene of hatred and anger into one of educationally productive debate” (Graff, 1992, p. 4). In this way we can help to teach the conflict (Weldon, 2010).

While political correctness is widely understood as language applied to avoid insulting marginalized people, in the context of Cyprus there is a peculiarity; what is perceived as politically correct in one community may offend the other community. In addition, when neutral language is applied to reach common ground, it is often perceived as an insult to the community and to people’s experiences and living memories. Within each community, the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot, politically correct language is expected to reflect experiences, living memories and emotionally and value loaded backgrounds. When this happens, however, the other community is often insulted, and sometimes perceives ‘politically correct’ language as propaganda.

There are three key elements that determine our understanding of the concept of political correctness in the context of Cyprus: firstly, the language used within each community to describe historical events is value, experience, evidence, and sentiment loaded, rather than just a matter of being either nice or rude. Therefore, terms like ‘invasion’ and ‘peace operation’ are socially, politically, experientially, essentially and existentially meaningful in that community. Secondly, certain terms are used to such an extent by the governing bodies in both communities, that they are seen as politically correct, but only within that community. Thirdly, trust, dialogue, and shared understandings are inexistent between the two communities (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2008). Therefore, political correctness has been viewed as a way to mute experiences and living memories of people in each community. The ideas of muting the voice of the non-western, colonized real and knowable other, of accounts being told by those who hold the power, rather than those involved in an event, and the ethical problems of investigating a different culture based on ‘universal’ concepts and frameworks has been challenged in the literature (Spivak, 1988).

My argument is that there is language that is acceptable within each community. While this language is used as official language and is widely accepted within the community (Table 1), it offends the other community. In the Cypriot context, then, language terminology shifts occur for the purpose of political correctness, or because terms are fully loaded with meaning for a particular community, or because neutral terms encouraged by outside organizations is a way to reach a common ground (Table 1). Risking to open Pandora’s box for using the term political correctness, I feel that this discussion is relevant, because I often hear people—usually those resisting to participate in intercommunal discussions and see the other’s point of view—opposing or disliking the use of particular terms, whereas we also need to consider that there maybe more in these words rather than merely propaganda and the effort to refine language.



Table 1: Ways political correctness is used in Cyprus: Examples of terms being used and shift in language terminology

| <b>Terms and Language Perceived as propaganda... i.e. used by people</b>   | <b>Terms and Language loaded with meaning for a particular community... i.e. used at an official level within each community</b>   | <b>Fully meaning for a i.e. used across communities and internationally, and also by NGOs</b>   |
|--|--|---|
| <p><u>Example 1</u><br/>To define the events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greek Cypriots usually say 'Invasion'</li> <li>• Turkish Cypriots usually say 'Peace operation'</li> </ul> <p><u>Example 2</u><br/>To depict the two parts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greek Cypriots usually say 'Occupied' and 'Free' Cyprus</li> <li>• Turkish Cypriots usually say 'North' and 'South' Cyprus.</li> </ul> | <p><u>Example 1</u><br/>'War' – 'Invasion' – 'Peace operation'</p> <p><u>Example 2</u><br/>'Free' / 'Occupied' – 'North' / 'South'</p> <p>These terms are being used within each community, because they make sense and are embodied. There is some understanding and tolerance and interchangeable use intra-communally and inter-communally.</p> | <p><u>Examples</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Cypriot ethnical identity'</li> <li>• 'Greek Cypriot community'</li> <li>• 'Turkish Cypriot community'</li> </ul> <p>...In contrast to 'Greeks and Turks' used in the past</p> <p>These terms are being used in order to be politically correct, not to cause conflict across communities and internationally.</p> |
| <p><b>What needs to be done in this case:</b><br/>Deliberation, interaction and dialogue to understand and challenge such perceptions.</p>   | <p><b>What needs to be done in this case:</b><br/>There is need to discuss and understand the meaning and the perspective, and what the terms mean for each person and why, so that there is mutual understanding and embracement of terms.</p>  | <p><b>What needs to be done in this case:</b><br/>There is need to understand why they need to be used, as neutrality is something that is detached from the person and also may cause oppositions.</p>   |

### **A grassroots sound: a cadre of voices and living memories**

The Cyprus Oral History and Living Memory Project<sup>3</sup> sought to record the voices and words of the people of Cyprus themselves, folks from every community, to capture their memories from the period 1960-1974, before and after, in Cyprus. Fifty interviews were recorded on audio and video from people of a wide variety of backgrounds, perspectives, capacities and ages (inhabitants, soldiers, refugees, students, relatives, friends); all were Cypriots who wanted to narrate their personal stories, first-hand or vicarious experiences, and living memories from that era and/or their aftermath through the memories and stories of others. The aim was to understand their specific meaning as an approach to create spaces to 'teach the conflict' and promote peace education. Although oral history entails subjectivity, the subjective stories contribute toward the illumination of an objective story. These stories make up the contemporary history of Cyprus that changed the course of the life of many people and of many generations.

Oral history was used to record the lived experiences of the persons, a form in narrative research practice that consists of gathering personal reflections of events and their causes and effects from one individual or several individuals (Creswell, 2012; Plummer, 1983). Oral history stands alongside other forms of narrative study, namely biographical study, autobiography (Ellis, 2004), life

history (Denzin, 1989), all of which are about writing and recording individuals' lived experiences (Creswell, 2012) in the form of testimonios (Beverly, 2005).

I analyzed two of the personal histories for the purpose of this paper; the narratives of two women, a Greek-Cypriot and a Turkish-Cypriot, of almost the same age, who shared their personal experience of the years 1960-1974. Penelope<sup>4</sup>, a Greek Cypriot woman born in 1950 in the Kyrenia district, described vividly and in detail her experience on the day of the Turkish invasion in 1974. The catastrophe, devastating and incomprehensible actions, brutality of the invaders, forcing out of homes, houses given to others, and the lies told from the new to original home owners, were some of the topics she described, or pondered. Her entire argument focused on the occupation of their homes and villages. She was mostly preoccupied with injustice towards those who had to abandon their houses and villages and run away to save their lives. There was no reference to any injustice towards others. Aysel, a Turkish Cypriot woman born in 1955 in the Nicosia district, vividly described events and experiences from 1958-1974. She began by emphasizing that the troubles in Cyprus started in 1958 or 1959, long before the invasion. The travelling, sometimes because of her father's job but mainly due to the fights and burnt homes, becoming multiple times refugee, British police curfew, 'bitter experiences,' 'natural' division in 1963, unfair treatment, Annan Plan, demographic changes, and human rights in the North, were some of the topics she discussed. She became a peace activist, she said, in order to contribute to the solution of the problem.

Employing oral history research within the broader framework of narrative inquiry (Creswell, 2012), I placed the texts next to each other and read them multiple times. As assumed in a transactionalism and subjectivism procedure (for an exploration of these ideas see critical theory and constructivism in Guba & Lincoln, 1994 and experientialism and social reconstructionism in Schubert, 1986, 1997), findings were created as the investigation proceeded. Four themes emerged from an initial careful reading of the narratives: the run away, the meaning of photographs, injustice and division as a main concern, unawareness about the 'other'. Through these themes, I juxtaposed the experiences shared and the language used. While reading the passages, I kept wondering: What is it that we hear from this language? Is it about the lost bonds that make us essentially human? This is what Pinar (1994) calls "the lost language of cranes" (p. 267). The idea that "we are in search of lost languages" signifies that we are in search of love, family, and passion, that is, those bonds that make us essentially human. Reading and writing such stories may move us "beyond the surface of memory, requiring us to dismantle habitual self-defences" (Dunlop, 1997, pp. 94-96).

### **Applying an autobiographical lens to analyze the testimonies**

Pinar's concept of *curre* is a four-stage process of autobiographical reflection: regressive, progressive, analytical, synthetic. The first step is the regressive moment when one returns to the past as it impinges on the present. Because the past is manifested in who we are and what we do in the existential now, we unveil the present as we delve in the past. "Pinar proposes that we enter

the past, live in it, observe ourselves functioning in the past, but not succumb on it" (Slattery, 2006, p. 63). In this phase, "lost languages are recovered, recalled from the unconscious..." (Dunlop, 1997, pp. 94-96). Autobiographical studies are envisioned as windows (Dunlop, 1997), which permit us to see more clearly, to speak in the 'lost language of cranes', "to see again what was outside our windows, and to become...in unison...with ourselves and with those around us" (Pinar, 1994, p. 267); to see again that which we loved before, and in so doing, see more clearly what and whom we love in the present (Slattery, 2006).

The second step, progressive moment, directs us to go forward and look at what is not yet present, that is, imagine a future, envision possibilities, and discern where our meditative images may appear to be leading us. The third, analytical, moment describes the biographic present, exclusive of the past and future but inclusive of responses to both; that is, "bracketing what is, what was, and what can be, one is loosened from it, potentially more free of it, and hence more free to freely choose the present" (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, p. 60). This bracketing "allows one to juxtapose the past, present, and future and evaluate the complexity of their multidimensional interrelations" (Slattery, 2006, p. 63). Lastly, the synthetical moment puts the three steps together to help inform the present. Time and history are understood as "the confluence of past, present, and future" (Slattery, 2006, p. 64).

Edgerton's discussion and understanding of autobiography and biography, interpretation, language, and memory enhances our understanding about the process of *currere*. Whereas Pinar unveils nicely the steps to the autobiographical method of *currere*, Edgerton (1995) provides another layer of thinking about *currere*, understanding the self, and hearing the lost languages; why it is important to read others, that is, how through biographies or other texts, we examine our selves and lives through the lives of others, and how this is accomplished more effectively via a rich language. Oral history and biographies are texts through which we can think and write our autobiographies. Besides, "one reads/writes one's autobiography only through others, and through 'theory'" (Edgerton, 1995, p. 338; see also Felman, 1993).

What is of utmost relevance, is the connection Edgerton helps us to make between the narrators' depth of knowledge regarding their lived experiences and how they feel and understand things; what they say and how they say it using the language and terminology they use, the interpretations they open us up to and how they are related to our individual lives; and how the others' (auto)biographies help us read our lives and work on writing or rediscovering our autobiographies. It is almost as the language and images of art, "which make perceptible, visible, and audible that which is no longer, or not yet, perceived, said, and heard in everyday life" (Marcuse, 1977, p. 72; Greene, 1995).

Pinar's method of *currere* enables me to zoom in the past, by delving into the experience, and read closely the narration. Then I try to see glimpses or references to the present and future. Edgerton's reflections are useful for the discussion points.

### **The testimonies**

Tragic, devastating, torturing experiences... The run away

Penelope:

1974... What it brings to mind? The invasion, the destruction of Cyprus, being forced out of our homes, the breaking up of families and their scattering across what's left of Cyprus. Many people left Cyprus a year or two after 1974. They were trying to make a living, to feed their families... We had left [during the invasion] with no clothes, shoes, or money because we left thinking that we would return... It was July. We left Lapithos in August. We didn't think that there was any chance that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century a brutal – to my opinion – nation would come and drive home owners out, on a small island, half of which they ended up taking over... Up until now, we were still hoping that we would return. They're passing away one by one [the refugees] and we are unfortunately still displaced.

While I was thinking to myself, 'where should I go? What should I do?' – because my parents, my mother-in-law, were at least 2km away from my house – the planes started attacking us. I started running in terror, trembling and shouting 'Wake up.' I called for the child, to take him into my arms and go somewhere, I don't know where. Where was there to go? I grabbed the child – he was still half asleep – and I started running. Next to my house, my sister's house was under construction, and there was a semi-underground garage filled with moldings, planks, iron bars... I took the child and sat there, curled up in a corner, trembling, not knowing what to do. At that time, the police were shouting, warning us not to leave our houses because... an air raid by the Turks was underway. I started crying. I was 23 years old then, not even 23... While I was panicking [and while] there was no one there to ask... to find out what to do, I heard my mother-in-law's voice shouting from the street 'come quickly, take the child, we need to go.' I grabbed the child...

Aysel:

And later, when we were in Paphos, my father asked to be sent to our village's district. And there was a police station very close to Linou. It was Evrychou, and he asked to be sent to Evrychou, as the only Turkish Cypriot policeman out of twenty police stations. And, we managed to live one and a half years there. And I started to go to school again in Linou. I studied the first year of elementary school in Paphos. And, the second year in Linou. At the beginning of my third year in elementary school, we were again with travels. It was around 1963. Linou was a mixed village. It is a very nice place in the valley... I used to love the smell, especially, of my village. But we had to leave, again. And we moved to Lefke. And again, one day, there were flames behind the mountain. And all the people from my village, of course they knew where the flame was coming from, because of the geographic place. They said, 'Our houses are burning.' So, again, like in Linou. We were living in Lefke this time and we had to leave the village again. Our houses were okay when we left. After one month or two months, they burnt them. Our villagers or somebody else came, burnt them, I don't know.

Running to be saved, escaping, destruction, are the common themes described by the two women in these excerpts. The first narrative provides a vivid description of the terror, the uncertainty, the unsafe and precarious condition the woman had experienced. The second narrative illuminates the continuous moving and displacement from one place to another. The intensity of the events

experienced by the two women was seemingly different partly because of the different depictions and partly because they experienced them at different ages and thus they felt different. In the first case it was 1974, whereas in the second case it was ten years earlier. In the first case the woman had to care for a family; in the second the woman was still a school student. We can place both women's descriptions in Pinar's regressive phase: the bombing, the burning, the smells. The women succeeded in entering the past and the tension was evident as they recalled traumatic and intense experiences. Although, entering the past is important, exiting is equally important (Pinar, 1994; Slattery, 2006) so that we can read and interpret it. We do not have indications in these excerpts of how the two women exited that phase.

The meaning of photographs... The past in the future and objects of power and empowerment

Penelope:

...my grandmother told me that the Turkish woman had the photographs on display in my house. My grandmother said to her, 'these are my granddaughter's, you should hand them over to me to take to her.' The Turkish woman then said to her 'these were your granddaughter's before. Now they belong to Turkey! You will not take anything!' I had a lot of photographs of my wedding and of my son... When the borders were lifted and we visited, the only thing I asked of the Turkish woman was... the photos she had inside the house. She denied having found any photographs. 'I didn't find anything,' she said, 'they took everything, the house was empty when I arrived...' But I am still bitter because the Turkish woman refused... She said she found nothing inside, no photographs, no nothing. But the Turkish woman told me the exact same story my grandmother did, the one with the dog. That they found our dog, the Turkish woman had the dog, the dog was pregnant and then it attacked ... some soldiers and they had to...kill it. So I knew that she was the same Turkish woman occupying the house, and she was lying about the photographs... I don't know why she refused me [the photos]. I know of many Turks that would look for the owners to hand them their photographs.

Aysel:

And, there was another incident. And, some of the Turkish Cypriot homes were burnt. And afterwards, there were some places, immediately, to rescue the good, etc. But I have a memory again from all this, since some of my childhood photographs were burned, and which we managed to keep. But they have the burning edge. So, it is a memory from all my childhood, until now... I still have it. Sometimes I talk about this as a bad example. It was a bitter example actually.

Opening of the borders. As you know, suddenly, one day, the borders opened and the people, immediately, started to go and come back for work [crossing the borders back and forth]. And, especially the Greek Cypriots, they went back to their homes 30 years after they left them. And it was really, very emotional and shocking to see that almost all Turkish Cypriots kept the photographs of the [Greek Cypriot] families, who were the owners of the homes. And they didn't even tell to each other that they did this... The Turkish Cypriots who... lived in the houses of the Greek Cypriots—[but remember that Turkish

Cypriots] were also refugees, because there was exchange of population between Turks and Makarios, and so Greek Cypriots went to the South and Turkish Cypriots came to the North. And all Turkish Cypriots were given a Greek Cypriot home to live. Turkish Cypriots came from Limassol, Paphos, etc. But Turkish Cypriots didn't tear up or burn the photographs. They kept them, but they didn't say anything, maybe because they thought it would be harmful for them. Maybe the authorities would think that they were friends with Greek Cypriots etc. So, they didn't say anything, but at the same time they didn't tear them. And, almost all the Greek Cypriots who knocked the door of their homes, they found some memories from their past. Turkish Cypriots shared the photographs...

In these passages the photographs are symbols of a transition from the regressive to the progressive phase. Photographs are texts; they provide the narrative and evidence of a past life that we carry with us in the future. The photographs connect the past moment to the future as we look at them in the present. Their absence indicates a gap and a disconnection between past and future, and creates an empty space in the present. Photographs allow us to have a journey from the past to the present, and possibly to the future: that is, to enter the past, live in it, observe ourselves in it, and then imagine a future (Pinar, 1994). The above excerpts illustrate the need to hold on to the past, and photographs are important means to do so and a required condition to allow us to continue to the future.

Both women talked about photographs, but each from a different standpoint and in different ways. In the first case we have an example of refusal to return the photographs to the original owner. In this case the photographs became an item of ownership and power. The current tenant used them to keep away the real owner from the past and as a way to cut relations between the past and the present; a way to withhold their owner from the past they could unfold for her. The second woman said that some chose not to return the photographs to their original owners for safety reasons, that is, to hide what could prove encounters with the other community. In the second example the photographs are objects of empowerment. What the woman managed to take with her and keep as an amulet for the burnt, and, thus, destroyed lives, was a lesson for what she did not want to see happening again in the future.

The present is only a state of being: it is this moment. Yet, this is always a transitional point, one that always leads us to the next moment, and then to the next and the next, which is the future. There is a vivid bitterness in the women's descriptions about the events, yet in different ways: in one case it is due to the disconnection from the past because of the absence of the photographs, and in the other it is due to the memories the burnt photographs bring to mind, which create a vision, connection with, and agency for the future. In both cases the photographs were items of ultimate importance to the original owners.

#### Glimpses on what they were concerned about... Injustice and division

##### Penelope:

My thoughts? I was twenty-three years old. That it wasn't fair. It couldn't have happened just like that, I could not conceptualize what had happened...

Inside I was hoping that we were leaving for a few days, that it would settle down and then we would go back. But it's been thirty-six years we've been waiting to return. My grandmothers, grandfathers, in-laws, my mother, many parents passed away longing to return to their homes. We don't want strangers' properties, we want our own. The Turks should have theirs, and we our own...

Aysel:

Unfortunately, the 2003 referendum was an upset for us...because, you know, the Turkish Cypriots said a very big 'yes.' And the Greek Cypriots said a very big 'no.' And, maybe the time was not enough for the Greek Cypriot to see that also there are good opportunities in the Annan Plan; that with time it will be better, it can be revisited, improved. But it couldn't be realized. And now the situation is, again, very difficult. The demography in North is changing. And, I hope this will be our last chance, or a good chance, that these negotiations are still continuing. And there is this willingness of the United Nations and the EU to solve the problem. I hope it will be solved. And our children and grandchildren will live in a better condition. Because Cyprus is a very beautiful island. We love our island. We love our country...

In these two excerpts the women describe the injustice, unfairness and loss. The first woman described the injustice of having lost a home, a stolen home, in her words, and belongings in an unspeakable way. The second woman discussed the injustice accompanied with a lost opportunity, as she saw it, to solve the Cyprus problem. She also talked about how for one community the time that passed was not enough for them to recognize the good opportunities presented currently, toward a viable future.

The women are moving from the regressive to the progressive phase, yet, they are still trapped in each of them: pondering solely the loss of properties, or the rejection of a promising opportunity toward a viable solution. In the first case the 'viable future' seems to be an issue as the woman cannot really connect the past to the future; she considers this an injustice that shouldn't had occurred in the first place, and time alone is not enough to cover the trauma and the wounds of the past. In the other case, the woman regards the present opportunities as a way to fix the suffering, because of the injustice in the past; that is, a lesson to learn from the past for improving the future that lies ahead. In the first case, the injustice is regarded in relevance to the loss of homes, and in the second as one that started way before that, with the inter-communal mistreatments.

Unawareness about the situation of the other community and about what happened to the lives of 'others'...

Penelope:

We know that in Lapithos, there was the Tourkogitonia (Turkish neighborhood). I remember when I was young, the Turks used to come to deliver baby animals... We had a great time. They would come [the Turkish Cypriots] to buy lemons, almonds, the products the Greek Cypriots produced... They would also buy flowers from the Greek Cypriots, daffodils, tie them into bunches and then sell them at the market in Nicosia. They would sit and drink their coffee.

They would often help animals experiencing difficulties giving birth, because each house back then either had goats or cows or both, depending on how rich one was and how many plots they owned. And the Turkish Cypriots were no different from us. I don't know... I don't remember them, young as I was, having any disputes. Nevertheless, I don't know exactly what happened in 1963. We found out that they had bombed Massoura and they gave orders to the Turks, the Turkish Cypriots of Lapithos, their own, ... I don't know, from Turkey maybe? I don't know where the order came from...to abandon their homes. And they all left. They abandoned their homes, I don't know where they took them, and the Tourkogitionia became deserted.

Aysel:

No, I didn't know [any Greek Cypriots], because we were living in Lefke. And in those years there were six Turkish Cypriots. And, in Lefke there was only one of them. So in Lefke, there weren't any Greek Cypriots. Only Turkish Cypriots were living there at the time... And, uh, on the 20<sup>th</sup>, when the Turkish troops landed in Kyrenia, it was first announced on the radio that 'Turkey is here now to restore the government again. To bring peace to the republic,' because Makarios was off from his duty, etc. And for a few moments, we thought that, 'well, it is not going to be anything with us.' But, unfortunately, the Greek Cypriots immediately began to attack the town, as well. And Lefke was also in a valley, and there were very high mountains out there. And, it is very easy to attack the town. So, after a while, there were fire guns also. Fire bombs. And it was all within the grape and orange yards, so they began to burn.

And it was a bitter, a very bitter experience again. Because, since we had lived this situation in '63, we knew how it felt to leave your family, leave your house, and go away [what Greek Cypriots were forced to do in 1974]. Especially for my father... I remember that he was saying, he asked his commander, the person in charge, to put him only to the night shift. Not to work on the day shift, because in the day shift, they had to patrol the Greek Cypriot villages. And they couldn't bear to see those sceneries...where the houses were opened, abandoned...that the people [Greek Cypriots had] left everything. Because it was like being forced to immediately relive the same situation of '63.

These excerpts illustrate the two women's unawareness about the happenings in the lives of the people in the other community. Their young age when the division between the two communities began did not allow them to recall any real interaction. Penelope remembered some interactions from people who were offering their services and produce, but in no case there is memory of leaving together; only stories shared by others about an often harmonic co-existence. Penelope said that if there was inappropriate treatment they were not aware of it, or involved in it. In her opinion, at the area where she lived there were opportunities for everyone who wanted to work and succeed; it was the politics and interests of the greater powers that created the bad conditions and not the people per se. The 'we and they' or the 'us and them' is evident in the language of both women. Whatever was not about 'us' it was not something to be concerned about. In their descriptions there are glimpses of hope for a harmonic



living together as they used to do in the past. There is also evidence of empathy, as Aysel explained since they felt sad for the Greek-Cypriots when they became refugees, because Turkish-Cypriots had experienced refugee-ness previously.

These descriptions are representative of what was happening on the island: people were living at the same place, yet they were not aware of the on goings; they were already divided. Not searching “for the lost language of cranes” did not allow people to look for what was important, such as trust and relationships that mattered for a viable present and future; the consequences, then, were unavoidable. Being trapped in the past, the two women could not provide analytic descriptions of it. Yet, these descriptions may become the basis for others, us, to analyze attitudes and implications, and for synthesis.

### **Re-conceptualizing language, meaning, and memory**

Language terminology usage is important in curriculum studies and in our continuous efforts to ponder curriculum. The stories presented above are part of a complicated conversation: not only one that happens at political level, but also an internal conversation. It has the potential to create spaces for critical reflection and help the two women and others see experiences, living memories, and injustices deeper, and possibly use them to reinvent the self (Pinar, 1994) and transform the future (Edgerton, 1995; Felman, 1993; Pinar, 1994). The rich, embodied language Penelope and Aysel used to share their personal stories offers us, too, glimpses on the happenings, hidden and unhidden. In this, we can examine the interaction of hidden curriculum, collective memory (i.e. the way they remembered), language (i.e. the way they narrated what they remembered), and implications.

Rich experiences and situations are better portrayed in rich, embodied language. In the oral histories / (auto)biographies above, the two women inspired dialogue, conflict and self-reflection on the four themes depicted. The description became living itself, both for the narrator and the listener, the reader and the writer. Edgerton (1995) reminds us that a rich translation of memory, which becomes testimony through utterance, expressed through rich language, is living itself. And whereas translation of memory to language “can be rich or poor, revisionary or compulsive,” it is only a rich, revisionary translation that “moves us to laughter and/or tears, convinces us, compels us, teaches us, engenders our empathy. It enters our bodies and changes us” (p. 342). On the contrary, “a poor translation of memory is easily read as...lying.” Testimony born of rich translation can become “equipment for living” (Burke, 1957 cited in Edgerton, 1995, p. 342).

And whereas language is a code that we may forget at some point, the meaning we depict cannot be forgotten (Edgerton, 1995). Likewise, the meaning we pick out of the women’s (auto)biographical accounts about the runaways, the lost and saved photographs, the injustice and the division that became a concern, and the unawareness about the happenings in the lives of the others remain with us. These meanings become ways of experiencing, observing, understanding, positioning the self, and acting. All these shape our experiences, our inward journeys and become part of the curriculum. The importance of a rich language in the curriculum that contributes toward rich meanings shall then be apparent.

In using embodied language to express personal experiences in an (auto)biographical way, the oral histories of Penelope and Aysel and their translation(s)/interpretation(s), “offer revisionary ways of telling stories that can better affirm life in the midst of what is often a terrorizing and traumatizing world” (Edgerton, 1995, p. 339). The narrations of the two women create openings for critical re-examination of events, views, and actions. Pinar, in arguing that, “the ‘architecture of the self’ constructs humanity, reshaping history and life as the self becomes embodied in the world” (Dunlop, 1997, pp. 94-96), reminds us the deep connection between the self and the world and how this constructs the self, the world, and the curriculum.

While language terminology usage and its politics may unfold dynamics and power that challenge memory, subjectivity, and strengthen conflict, the autobiographical reflections proposed connect curriculum and instruction, theory and practice, to life, promote immediacy and complexity of relationships between individuals (Pinar, 1994; Dunlop, 1997), and challenge educators “to begin with the individual experience and then make broader connections” (Slattery, 2006, p. 64). Using embodied language in teaching is important, as it becomes a process of sharing, exchanging, and encountering (Edgerton, 1995) among the story, the reader, the writer, the author, and the interpreter.

In the stories above, one may wonder what the essence and meaning of the photographs is and why the two women depicted particularly this object. Also, one may ask if all original owners were denied the return of their photographs. Another issue may be the inconsistency between the stories told about the fate of the photographs, with the story about the dog functioning as a point of reference that triggered the memory and eventually uncovered a lie. Here a conflict arises as to why the current tenant chose to lie and withhold the photographs. Aysel justified such instances calling them an issue of personal security. Although a generalized statement may not reflect the women’s individual truths, the way they talked about the photographs may give us glimpses into the truth. However, reaching the truth is not always the intention in educational settings; rather the intention is to create spaces for critical reflection and transformation. Often, things presented through political and impersonalized language become assumptions, overstatements, and generalizations that hide our individual truths, and how experiences are felt and embodied. Although, individuals, too, may use language that is overstated, political, and affected by traditional views, in examining the what, how, and why they say something we may be able to identify patterns, similarities and differences that are important for fresh and deeper understandings that we would not be able to get outside of that context.

The possibilities for empathy and provoking a crisis turn complicated conversations, rich language, testimonies and oral histories into powerful pedagogy. While one can recognize problems of accuracy as “all writing of history and all testimony is translation of events past and passed,” still “calling upon necessarily ‘unreliable’ memories and possibilities for multiple perspectives, ... the possibilities for empathy and education are multiplied” (Felman, 1992 cited in Edgerton, 1995, p. 347). And although “the most difficult and uncomfortable discussions center around versions of history, memory and forgetting,” that is,

“various orders of trauma,” “these are clearly the most important issues...to grapple with” (Edgerton, 1995, p. 339).

Educators have the responsibility to “use language and story that teach” (Edgerton, 1995, p. 359), probing to dig deeper, reread and rewrite; “to think, to learn new languages, to discover why” (p. 341); to look for works that demonstrate “how that language teaches...within the works [and] the lives of characters” (p. 359), and invite teachers and students to translate, introduce them to new parts of their selves and others, and teach them “to read differently, and better, more care-fully” (p. 359). Educators’ responsibility is “not to be caught in an understanding of symbol systems,” but rather to seek language that “can lead us somewhere else, to the place where we live, to the world, and to the world as it might be” (Grumet, 1988, p. 132). As we read we begin many times over “to sense [our] own places in these histories” (p. 349), and in this “what goes on is identity-making” (Leonard, 1992, pp. 706-707 cited in Edgerton, 1995). Here is where the potential of oral history lies, that is, in its capacity for rich language and conversations, contrary to the use of a disembodied, empty of meaning, solely political language.

### Notes

1. The oral histories can be found in electronic form here [www.frederick.ac.cy/research/oralhistory](http://www.frederick.ac.cy/research/oralhistory).
2. The Project was hosted by the Frederick Research Center at Frederick University and was funded by the Cyprus Research Promotion Foundation (PROSELKYSH/0609, 2010-2012).
3. The full stories are featured on the Project's website: [www.frederick.ac.cy/research/oralhistory](http://www.frederick.ac.cy/research/oralhistory). The Oral History Archive, where the stories, experiences and living memories of the people of Cyprus are preserved, in audio and text, is freely accessible from the website.
4. The names of both women, Penelope and Aysel, are pseudonyms.

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