

Volume 5 Number 2 (2011): 119-149

<http://www.infactispax.org/journal/>

**Fostering Social, Emotional, Ethical, Civic and Academic Learning
(SEECAL) Through Constructive Controversy:
What are the Implications for the Professional Development of High
School Teachers?**

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As teachers have a key role in organizing constructive and meaningful experiences for the students in citizenship education, it is important to explore how they make sense of this work both personally and professionally, as it affects their role as a teacher. Such understanding is important in the search for effective ways to support teachers in their work with students on citizenship issues.

- S. Adalbjarnardottir¹

High school teachers, particularly those who teach history and/or social studies, subjects where issues of civic concern are central, have an increasingly complex “explicit pedagogical responsibility for promoting their students’ social, moral and emotional growth”². This is especially so given changed national and global realities post-9/11,

¹ Sigrun Adalbjarnardottir, “Citizenship Education and Teachers’ Professional Awareness,” *Citizenship education and the Curriculum*, edited by D. Scott & H. Lawson, pp. 131-149. Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing, 2002

² Sigrun Adalbjarnardottir “‘I Feel I Have Received a New Vision’: A Developmental Analysis of Teachers’ Professional Awareness of Their Work with Children on Interpersonal Issues,” *Teaching and Teacher Education* 13(4): 409-28, 1997.

including the concomitant swell of ongoing controversy in the U.S. vis-a-vis the meaning and implications of patriotism. In their efforts to facilitate “constructive and meaningful” citizenship education experiences – specifically, experiences that foster a long-term sense of efficacy and purpose with regard to active civic engagement – history and/or social studies teachers invariably confront complex pedagogical and curriculum challenges in their work with high school students. Concomitantly, this approach to teaching demands complex pedagogical skills; because teachers who aim to foster students’ social-emotional, moral, and civic learning inevitably face complex teaching dilemmas. Such dilemmas often mirror complex systemic challenges. In this paper, I explore what the demands of this process mean to/for teachers, specifically in terms of their personal and professional development. The following overarching questions have guided my inquiry: How do history/social studies teachers describe and make sense of constructive controversy as a way to promote adolescent students’ social-emotional, ethical, civic and academic learning? What does this teaching and learning process demand of teachers, particularly in terms of their own cognitive, social and emotional competencies?

Conceptual Framework

From a developmental perspective, high school teachers’ “explicit pedagogical responsibility for promoting their students’ social, moral and emotional growth” is particularly complex, because they work with adolescent students who are developing capacity to reason in abstract ways, while simultaneously experiencing more varied and complicated sources of conflict in their interpersonal and intragroup relationships.³ At the heart of the “constructive and meaningful experiences” teachers can foster, is the cultivation of social perspective-taking, a core competency that is fundamental to the promotion of citizenship awareness and participation. This skill entails the ability to distinguish between one’s own perspective and that of another and/or others while coordinating multiple perspectives with greater self-awareness and flexibility.⁴

The process of delving into conflict is a key avenue for cultivating perspective-taking capabilities. History and/or Social Studies teachers who embrace this belief actively seek opportunities to help students approach conflict and controversy constructively in their study of history and current social and political issues; they do so by encouraging students to consider differing viewpoints, values and/or needs. This instructional practice of *constructive controversy* exists, as Johnson and Johnson assert, “when one person’s ideas, information, conclusions, theories, and opinions are

³ Sigrun Adalbjarnardottir, “Citizenship Education and Teachers’ Professional Awareness,” *Citizenship education and the Curriculum*, edited by D. Scott & H. Lawson, Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing, p. 132, 2002; W.L. Carruthers, B.J.B. Carruthers, N.L. Day-Vines, D. Bostick, & D.C. Watson, “Conflict resolution as curriculum: A definition, description and process for integration in core curricula,” *The School Counselor*, 43(5), p. 356, 1996.

⁴ Robert Selman, *The growth of interpersonal understanding: developmental and clinical analyses*. London, New York: Academic Press, 1980.

incompatible with those of another and the two seek to reach an agreement” – be it on an interpersonal, intragroup or intergroup level.⁵ In guiding students to think critically, and consider issues from multiple perspectives – by first establishing a cooperative learning context – teachers promote a process that can “energize learning” within the classroom community. As Johnson & Johnson assert, “by structuring intellectual conflict within a lesson, instructors can grab and hold students’ attention and energize students to learn at a level beyond what they may have intended.”⁶

Constructive controversy is a pedagogical approach that can promote solid social, emotional, ethical, civic and academic learning (SEECAL), and concomitant competencies, among members of a classroom learning community.⁷ Exploring the social-emotional dimensions of human behavior via consideration of multiple, divergent perspectives can foster the development of civic skills, dispositions, and knowledge.⁸ Moreover, integrated social, emotional, ethical, civic, and academic learning helps equip adolescents for “the tests of life” over “a life of tests” – via the development of core social and emotional competencies: self awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and decision-making – as a foundation for efficacious civic engagement in a rapidly changing, pluralistic democratic society.⁹

However, with the increased pressures that have come with the academic accountability movement in recent years, public schooling’s attention to the promotion of civic engagement has waned. Whilst the majority of school districts have mission statements identifying citizenship education as an overarching goal, often missing are specific objectives and accountability mechanisms for cultivating citizenship *participation*.¹⁰ What is usually emphasized instead is acquisition of *knowledge* in relation to the institutions, concepts, and rights of democracy. Cultivating the *skills* and *dispositions* of democratic citizenship (e.g. principles of equality, civil/human rights, personal and social responsibility, etc.) is generally not a priority in public high schools, particularly since the *modus operandi* in such systems tends to center on “avoiding

⁵ David Johnson & Roger Johnson, “Energizing Learning: The Instructional Power of Conflict,” *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 37-51, 2009.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁷ Jonathan Cohen, “Social, Emotional, Ethical, and Academic Education: Creating a Climate for Learning, Participation in Democracy, and Well-Being,” *Harvard Educational Review*, 76:2, 2006; David Johnson & Roger Johnson, “Energizing Learning: The Instructional Power of Conflict,” *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 37-51, 2009.

⁸ Kathy Bickmore, “*Teaching conflict and conflict resolution in school: (Extra-) Curricular considerations*,” Paper presented at Connections 1997 International Social Studies Conference, University of Sydney, Australia, 1997; Jonathan Cohen, “Social, Emotional, Ethical, and Academic Education,” 2006.

⁹ Maurice Elias, “Prepare Our Children for Tests of Life, Not a Life of Tests,” *Education Week*, 21(4), 40, 2001; Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), <http://www.casel.org/basics/skills.php>; Jonathan Cohen, “Social, Emotional, Ethical, and Academic Education,” 2006.

¹⁰ Mark Hugo Lopez and Emily Hoban Kirby, “U.S. Civics Instruction: Content and Teaching Strategies” Fact Sheet, The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), August 2007.

divisive [issues], and the teaching of critical thinking”¹¹; consequently, curricular content and teaching methods generally tend to avoid conflict as a learning avenue.¹² This is why, as asserted in Adalbjarnardottir’s opening excerpt, “teachers have a key role in organizing constructive and meaningful experiences for students in citizenship education.”¹³ Essentially, the onus is on those teachers committed to initiating and facilitating such learning experiences; yet, they usually lack adequate in-school support. Given this lack of in-school support, many teachers who aim to facilitate “constructive and meaningful” citizenship education experiences for their students rely on outside education-focused professional development programs to bolster their content knowledge and skills (initially via workshops, institutes, etc.), and to provide critical ongoing support and sustenance.

Research Focus

My research centers on teachers who are actively involved with two such professional development programs – as vehicles for fostering adolescents’ socio-moral and civic learning, with the goal of preparing them for effective and responsible civic engagement: *Facing History and Ourselves* and *Workable Peace*. While *Facing History and Workable Peace* involve distinctly different structures towards the promotion of such learning, what they broadly hold in common are pedagogical strategies for approaching historical and current conflicts and controversy, in ways that encourage adolescents to think in complex ways that foster the development of moral reasoning skills. To follow are introductory synopsis website excerpts that convey the essence of the respective missions and philosophies of these two programs:

❖ *Facing History and Ourselves:*

Facing History and Ourselves is devoted to teaching about the dangers of indifference and the value of civility. Our programs and resources help educators confront the complexities of history in ways that promote critical and creative thinking about the challenges we face and the opportunities we have for positive change...By studying the historical development and the legacies of the Holocaust and other instances of collective violence students learn to combat prejudice with compassion, indifference with ethical participation, myth and misinformation with knowledge...

Meaningful civic education must be rooted in a moral component in which students are taught to confront the choices about right and wrong, rights and

¹¹ Kathy Bickmore, *Practicing Conflict: Citizenship Education in High School Social Studies*. Unpublished Dissertation, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA, 1991.

¹² Kathy Bickmore, “Teacher development for conflict participation: Facilitating learning for difficult citizenship” education,” Chapter 36 in J. Arthur & I. Davies (Eds.), *Citizenship Education*, volume 3, September 2008.

¹³ Sigrun Adalbjarnardottir, “Citizenship Education and Teachers’ Professional Awareness,” 2002, p. 132.

*obligations, and fairness and justice that underlie responsible participation in democratic societies.*¹⁴

*Facing History's Scope and Sequence pedagogical method is comprised of the following five sections: Individual and Society; We and They; History; Judgment, Memory & Legacy; and, Choosing to Participate.*¹⁵

❖ **Workable Peace:**

*Workable Peace is an innovative high school humanities curriculum and professional development project for teachers and students. Using new teaching materials and strategies, Workable Peace integrates the study of intergroup conflict and the development of critical thinking, problem solving, and perspective-taking skills into social studies and humanities courses. It provides academically rigorous training and tools for teaching the major themes and key events of history in ways that enliven the imagination, awaken moral reasoning, and impart social and civic skills that students can use throughout their lives.*¹⁶
*The Workable Peace Framework presents key steps that group members need to take in order to build a workable peace. These steps synthesize academic research and practitioners' experience to make patterns of intergroup conflict and strategies for peacemaking accessible and intelligible to teenagers.*¹⁷

To be clear, the purpose of this research has not been to evaluate these curriculum projects, nor study participants' professional competencies. I chose to work with teachers affiliated with Facing History and/or Workable Peace primarily because they are solid curricular vehicles through which to explore my guiding inquiry: How do history/social studies teachers describe and make sense of constructive controversy as a way to promote adolescent students' social-emotional, ethical, civic and academic learning? What does this teaching and learning process demand of teachers, particularly in terms of their own cognitive, social and emotional competencies?

To explore these questions for my small-scale interpretive qualitative study, I conducted in-depth interviews with a sample of ten history/social studies teachers, with varying years of teaching experience (three novice teachers; four teachers with four to eight years of experience; and, three veteran teachers), and in different public high school settings (representing a demographic range in terms of socio-economics, and racial/ethnic composition of student populations). All of these teachers had been trained to use, and were actively using, the curricular frameworks of Facing History and Ourselves *and/or* Workable Peace. My assumption was/is that teachers who are actively involved with either or both programs – via participation in intensive training institutes, use of

¹⁴ www.facinghistorycampus.org

¹⁵ <http://www.facinghistory.org/taxonomy/vocabulary/1>

¹⁶ <http://www.workablepeace.org>

¹⁷ <http://www.workablepeace.org/curriculum.html>

curriculum resource materials, and on-going participation in professional development opportunities – tend to be highly motivated, and committed to fostering the social-emotional and civic learning of their students, despite myriad school system-based dilemmas and/or barriers.

Engaging in a series of three in-depth interviews with each teacher participant allowed me to carefully listen to their contextualized accounts of how they make sense of their respective work to promote students’ social-emotional, ethical, civic, and academic learning – given inherent teaching dilemmas, as well as intrapersonal and interpersonal demands. This exploration centered on a grounded theory methodology.¹⁸ Through in-depth interviewing, I elicited participants’ perspectives on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup and external context dimensions of their respective classroom teaching experiences in relation to Facing History and Ourselves and/or Workable Peace, as curricular vehicles and/or for pedagogical guidance. In analyzing and presenting this interview data, my goal has been to deepen understanding of the kinds of support history and/or social studies teachers need in their work to promote students’ social-emotional, ethical, civic, and academic learning, via constructive controversy, in their classrooms.

In this paper, I present and juxtapose the narratives of four of the ten teachers, in pairs: Ann and Cesar, then Alexa and Andre. I have chosen to focus on these teacher participants because their paired, juxtaposed interview data highlights the following two main themes of this interpretive qualitative study: First, the interview data of teachers participating in my study suggests that the different ways in which they make sense of their respective teaching experiences is guided more by varying levels of conceptual complexity than years of experience in the classroom. Along with the variations among their experiences – in terms of high school context and years in the classroom – there is a range regarding the ways in which each teacher works through the conceptual challenges inherent to the promotion of social-emotional, ethical, civic, and academic learning; this is particularly so in terms of how each approaches the “thorny question” that comes with “ethical dilemmas that arise” in their classroom teaching: “the question of what to do about one’s own opinions and beliefs,”¹⁹ as William Damon puts it. Secondly, teachers who were more forthcoming and reflective in their respective descriptions of the influence of formative life experiences, particularly those of disequilibrium-inducing nature, expressed their sense of purpose and vision as educators in greater depth. These teachers conveyed evidence of a *Relational Orientation*, the more complex awareness

¹⁸ Kathy Charmez, “Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods,” In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Second ed., pp. 509-535). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2000; A. Strauss, & J. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (second ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA, 1998.

¹⁹ William Damon, “Teaching as a Moral Craft and Developmental Expedition. In F. Oser, A. Dick, & J-L. Patry (Eds.), *Effective and responsible teaching: the new synthesis* (pp. 139-153). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1992.

dimension level in Robert Selman & Sigrun Adalbjarnardottir's developmental lens schema.²⁰ A description of this framework follows, in the next section.

Guiding Conceptual Frameworks

In this section, I provide brief overviews of the three main conceptual frameworks that have guided and informed my interpretive analysis of participants' interview data: Magdalene Lampert's perspective on classroom teaching dilemmas; Robert Selman and Sigrun Adalbjarnardottir's developmental lens; and, Nona Lyons' concept of nested knowing.

Lampert's perspective on classroom teaching dilemmas

Magdalene Lampert asserts that teaching dilemmas call to be managed rather than solved. Towards managing dilemmas well, Lampert emphasizes that teachers must "accept conflict as endemic and even useful to [their] work, rather than seeing it as a burden that needs to be eliminated."²¹ Her related research inquiry centers on the following purposes: to understand and evaluate "what teachers actually do when they manage dilemmas;" and, to understand "what kinds of resources [support] teachers need to cope with contradictions within themselves and their work."²²

Selman and Adalbjarnardottir's "developmental lens"

Building on the three fundamental psychosocial components — "understanding, strategies, and awareness of the personal meaning of events and interactions"²³ — of the Group for the Study of Interpersonal Development's Risk and Relationship Framework, Selman and Adalbjarnardottir re-conceptualized this conceptual lens for application in the domain of teaching (at the elementary level), specifically in terms of "teachers' professional awareness [in] promoting"²⁴ their students' social and ethical awareness. The following excerpts from *The Promotion of Social Awareness* (Selman, 2003) present a summary description for each of the three levels of professional awareness identified by Selman and Adalbjarnardottir, representing, in order (as listed below), less complex to more complex conceptual capacities:

²⁰ Robert Selman and Sigrun Adalbjarnardottir, "Promoting and Analyzing Teachers' Understanding of Students' Social Awareness: Lessons from Iceland." In *The Promotion of Social Awareness: Powerful Lessons from the Partnership of Developmental Theory and Classroom Practice*, by Robert Selman, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2003.

²¹ Magdalene Lampert, "How do teachers manage to teach? Perspectives on problems in practice," *Harvard Educational Review*, 55, 1985, p. 192.

²² Ibid., p. 194

²³ Robert Selman, *The Promotion of Social Awareness: Powerful Lessons from the Partnership of Developmental Theory and Classroom Practice*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2003, 149.

²⁴ Ibid,

- ❖ *The External Orientation - An external pedagogical vision of social competence tends to focus on the importance of teaching “good social behavior” so that students are able to learn academic subjects. The teachers’ aim is to “control” students’ individual behavior (impulses, attention) so that they can learn the academic content. Management strategies at this level are focused on eliminating negative behavior in a reactive way: the teacher reacts to the students’ poor behavior. Strategies to improve students’ behavior tend to be unilateral regardless of the context.*²⁵
- ❖ *The Internal Orientation — The internal view of academic and social competence is based on an awareness that learning in school must include promoting the understanding of social and societal relationships. The aim, as expressed at this level, is to educate students to ‘get along’ with one another and to provide them with life skills and the ‘inner strength’ to manage the societal issues they will face in and outside of school. Teachers with a classroom management focus work to promote students’ social understanding and skills in a proactive way. They strive to improve classroom atmosphere by using strategies that improve students’ ability to be interactive. Teachers who practice an internal pedagogy emphasize teaching students how to resolve conflicts with peers and authorities.*²⁶
- ❖ *The Relational Orientation — Teachers at this level of awareness see that strong academic and social competence is necessary in the service of educating students to be able to maintain and improve society. As they gain a broad perspective on the educational and cultural system within which students and teachers operate, teachers at this level of awareness strive to empower students to participate actively in society by fostering their capacity for autonomy and caring. These teachers focus on fostering relational competencies and skills in a transactional way. Their strategies employ their own capacity to listen to students’ perspectives on social issues (at any level) as they express their own. They also work to develop students’ competence in autonomous self-control and expression of personal concern about social issues. These teachers train students in taking collaborative approaches to debate (where developmentally and contextually appropriate) and foster communicative and relational competencies in students that enable them to develop trusting relationships beyond individual instrumental gains – in both social and societal contexts.*²⁷

These developmental awareness levels reflect “increased differentiation in teachers’ reflections”²⁸, essentially ranging from a primary focus on concrete classroom

²⁵ Ibid., p. 158.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 159.

²⁸ Ibid.

environment benefits to an emphasis on “students’ improved perspective-taking ability and conflict resolution for an active participation in society.”²⁹

Nona Lyons’ concept of “nested knowing”

Lyons’ research focuses on “the interaction between a teacher’s perspective on knowledge and knowing and students’ ways of knowing.”³⁰ This is a phenomenon she characterizes as “*nested knowing*” in that “students and teachers are considered to have nested, interacting epistemological perspectives.”³¹ This concept is informed by Vygotsky’s position that “development occurs only in and through the [inter-subjective] social interactions between people – like student and teacher,”³² along with [his] focus on “two aspects of development: actual achievements and potential development – what he calls a zone of proximal development...as an emerging epistemological capacity.”³³ Lyons also focuses on such *growing edge* movement; in her exploration of teachers’ narratives, she explores the edges of teachers’ thinking and sense making. Lyons’ focus on the “growing edges” of teachers’ thinking and sense making further illuminates the varying epistemological stances and conceptual capacities in the way teachers in my study seem to approach “contradictions within themselves and their work.”

In illustrating “how the individual and the context shape the particular nature of a dilemma”³⁴, Lyons offers the following assertion: “Practical choices, with ethical uncertainties, which can be part of teachers’ everyday interactions, may, in turn, involve their growth and development as practitioners. Here ethical and epistemological issues – issues of knowers and ways of knowing – merge in the web of teachers’ work.”³⁵ As I consider Lyons’ analysis and conceptions, I think about the link between what she posits here, and the epistemic stance toward knowledge reflected in the narratives of teachers in my study. In particular, I think about the story of Ann³⁶, one of the participants in my study. During our second interview, Ann talked about “being stopped in her tracks” in response to a provocative question posed by one of her students. In my analysis of interview data, Ann reveals a sense of “growing edge” movement in the way that she portrays her set of interactions with this student as an “illuminating” dilemma with moral dimensions. In the way that she describes being “stopped her in her tracks” Ann reveals this growing edge in terms of her thinking and meaning-making. In the words of Lyons, “[she] comes to a new way to conceive of [herself] as a teacher...in relationship to [her] students.”³⁷ Ann’s portrayal of and reflections on these particular interactions with her

²⁹ Sigrun Adalbjarnardottir, “Citizenship Education and Teachers’ Professional Awareness,” 2002, p. 132.

³⁰ Nona Lyons, “Dilemmas of Knowing: Ethical and Epistemological Dimensions of Teachers’ Work and Development,” *Harvard Educational Review*, 60(2), 1990, 162.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 174.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

³⁶ Ann is a pseudonym, as are all other teachers’ names in this paper.

³⁷ Lyons, *Dilemmas of Knowing*, 1990, p. 161.

student evidence the phenomenon of “nested knowing” – from her perspective as teacher – as an integral component of the complex endeavor and moral craft that is teaching.

To illustrate this finding more substantively, I present and juxtapose the narratives of four paired teachers in my study, including Ann in one pair, in the sections to follow. I first juxtapose my interpretations of the narratives of Cesar and Ann, and then, those of Alexa and Andre. In doing so, I integrate the above-described conceptual lenses. In the concluding section, I discuss how theories of transformational learning are implicitly embedded in my interpretations.

Juxtaposing Cesar and Ann’s narratives

Cesar and Ann’s juxtaposed narratives illustrate Lyons’ point that “the individual and the context shape the particular nature of a dilemma”³⁸. At the time of interviews for my study, both Cesar and Ann had been classroom teachers for the same amount of time (5 years), both taught in similar large urban high schools, and both were actively integrating Facing History and Ourselves’ Scope and Sequence materials/pedagogy, with the guidance of FHAO staff. Along with these similarities, both Cesar and Ann reveal, through their respective narratives, how they experience “contradictions within themselves and their work”³⁹ as they face complex and messy teaching dilemmas; the dilemmas they each describe are anchored in their use of Facing History’s resources and methodology, as content that is layered with moral questions. With the juxtaposition of their respective descriptions of identified dilemmas, the moral questions are also about how they as teachers think about responding to situations that involve their own well being, and the well being of their students, given how complex societal/systemic issues are mirrored in their schools and classrooms. While both Cesar and Ann teach a Facing History elective course – as white teachers in their respective, racially/ethnically diverse urban high schools environments - and share very similar commitments and overarching purposes as educators, juxtaposing their respective interview data reveals palpable epistemological differences.

Cesar

With the accompanying ramp up of support, and access to “a wealth of resources,” via the closer ties he reports having with the Facing History organization due to his newly assigned, “very supportive” program associate, Cesar contends that it is “like hitting the lottery” in his teaching of the Facing History elective course. In our interviews, he refers to this person’s words of affirmation and encouragement as a “validation” of his approach. He explains, “I’m self-taught in this subject. I think I’m

³⁸ Ibid., p. 166.

³⁹ Magdalene Lampert “How do teachers manage to teach? Perspectives on problems in practice,” *Harvard Educational Review*, 55, 178-194, 1985.

okay at it; but I don't know if I'm doing things incorrectly. And, I rely on [the Project Associate] to be the content expert.”

What accentuates Cesar's sense of satisfaction and affirmation regarding his newly forged connection with this support person is linked, in a curious way, to the following teaching “pressure” he names as most salient for him, with regard to his Facing History course: curricular content about the eugenics movement, a subject that is an important component of Facing History's teacher professional development and resource support, as evidenced by one of the program's main resource books, *Race and Membership in American History: The Eugenics Movement*.⁴⁰ In reporting how “previous associates had pushed” him to attend a Race and Membership Institute, towards helping him to consider delving into the issue of eugenics in his course, Cesar emphatically states that he “[chooses] not to teach that.” In the excerpt to follow, he explains why he views addressing the issue of eugenics in his particular school context as problematic, given the demographics and racial/ethnic make up of the students at his high school, and in his classes. He expresses a sense of relief that his assigned Facing History program associate communicates what Cesar perceives as a stamp of approval, so to speak, regarding his position on this:

I shared with [Facing History Program Associate] my own theory that I think eugenics might work well in homogeneous, middle class communities, but it doesn't fly here. And, he agreed! He felt that I was probably right on, on that, and that if I'm uncomfortable with it, don't use it...It's tough to have kids of color read some of that stuff; and they see that they're bottom of the rung by many people's scientific research. That's a tough pill to swallow, when they've been downtrodden their entire existence. I just have a hard time with that. I just look at crestfallen faces, and hope being shot right out of them. I'm not going to do it.

In response to probing on my part, for specifics around his sense that particular students might experience the “hope being shot right out of them,” Cesar explains:

With I.Q., they look, and they see, you know, Asians, in America have an I.Q. average of 107; and whites in America have an I.Q. of 102; and, African Americans are around 95; that kills them. That's a stark number for them. There's no way to make that look good. When they look at people with Ph.D.s after their names, and they see some of the research that they've come up with, then they have a hard time arguing against that, you know, statistically or intellectually.

In explaining his rationale, Cesar communicates a caring and protective stance towards his students. As he talks about his refusal to delve into material he views as “a tough pill

⁴⁰ Facing History and Ourselves Foundation, *Race and Membership in American History: The Eugenics Movement*, 2002.

to swallow” for “kids of color...[who] have been downtrodden their entire existence” Cesar conveys his sense of being in touch with and sympathetic to the life situations of his African American students. At the same time, his words suggest a view that knowledge may be sanctioned as “right” by an external authority. For example, as embedded in the above excerpt, vis-à-vis “the I.Q. issue” Cesar asserts, “There’s no way to make that look good. When they look at people with Ph.D.s after their names, and they’ve seen some of the research that they’ve come up with, they have a hard time arguing against that...statistically or intellectually.” He does not frame this statement with talk (neither explicitly, nor in the subtext) about the social construction of knowledge. Again, Cesar seems palpably relieved that his position – to sidestep the eugenics movement in his teaching – is met with approval by the Facing History Program Associate, as his “external authority.”

While his words could be interpreted as merely conveying the developmental perspective of his adolescent students, and how he observes they could react by, in his words, “seeing that they’re bottom of the rung by many people’s scientific research,” it is the absence of talk about the relativism of knowledge, and the construction of race that leaves me wondering what Cesar’s resistance might be about in developmental terms. In view of Selman and Adalbjarnardottir’s third, most complex, developmental indicator, involving “the integration of [a teacher’s] own professional interests with...the long-term educational aim of promoting students’ active and effective participation in a democratic society,”⁴¹ it seems that Cesar’s resistance to delve into the subject of the eugenics movement, and therefore his resistance to engage in the “energized learning” of constructive controversy, reflects an external, rather than a relational, orientation. In bypassing the opportunities for learning via the constructive controversy realm of the eugenics movement – particularly in terms of students’ development of moral reasoning, and perspective-taking skills – Cesar’s conceptual approach, as articulated during interviews, falls short of the Relational Orientation.

Yet, Cesar’s interview transcripts, like Ann’s, are replete with evidence of sophisticated pedagogical vision which, to repeat, is defined by Selman and Adalbjarnardottir as the “integrative meta-issue” of their framework. Yet, while both teachers “take into consideration the perspective of the larger society,” they reveal differing approaches to controversy and the role of conflict in their classrooms, specifically in terms of the eugenics movement – a subject area that very palpably “raises significant ethical questions and uses emotionally powerful material [that is] academically challenging and morally profound.”⁴² While both teachers convey having

⁴¹ Robert Selman, *The Promotion of Social Awareness: Powerful Lessons from the Partnership of Developmental Theory and Classroom Practice*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2003, 149.

⁴² Sheldon Berman, *The Development of Social Responsibility*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA, 1993, p. 115.

“nested, interacting epistemological perspectives”⁴³ with regard to the students they teach, they simultaneously reveal qualitatively different epistemic commitments.

Ann

Unlike Cesar, Ann has made a decision to enter the controversial realm of the eugenics movement with her students. She explains,

Facing History has a new curriculum called Race and Membership in the U.S. I want to use that as the basis for this class...[It] is centered on the eugenics movement, and how this testing craze sort of came out of this movement...I think it'll be a good way to set the ground work...The purpose of doing it would be to have a deeper understanding and more background, and do some reading, and be able to talk about it intelligently.

During all three of our interviews, Ann speaks substantively about the meaning of this in terms of her own identity, both personally and professionally. In describing her experiences, Ann injects the following phrases repeatedly: “I’ve been wrestling” and “I’m torn”- in relation to a pressing dilemma concerning difficulty reconciling her “tendency to want to deal with issues that kids will be able to look at and learn from, and apply in their daily lives so that we don’t make the same mistakes we’ve made in the past” with her tendency to “not want a group of inner-city kids who think that the only thing they can learn about is race.”

During our final interview, with the distance from the fray of school-life that mid-summer brings, Ann includes, in her talk about this dilemma, reflections on what she recounted during our previous interview session: the experience of being “stopped in her tracks” in response to her student’s intervention via a genuine, poignant question during class (as briefly described earlier). While re-visiting the thoughts she had while reading the transcript from our second interview, Ann conveys insights gained with regard to her dilemma. This is captured in the following excerpt:

How do I help them make sense of what they see in the media; what they hear on the news; and [help them] not feel when they look at that, that it’s those people’s fault, and that black people are inherently stupid, or black people are inherently chumps; but to understand the construction of race in our country; and to understand the construction of poverty in our country, and how it has been created, and what we can do to tear it down. But, then I’m torn, thinking, ‘I don’t want them to think that this is the only thing I think that they can wrestle with.’

So, while Ann and Cesar both demonstrate having “nested, interacting epistemological perspectives”⁴⁴ with regard to the students they teach, they simultaneously reveal

⁴³ Lyons, “Dilemmas of Knowing,” 1990, p. 162.

qualitatively different epistemic commitments. Cesar communicates a seemingly unilateral choice not to delve into the issue of eugenics in his course largely because of a protective concern around the emotional dimension of this issue, specifically in terms of his African American students. During our interviews, he does not hint of questioning this assumption; nor does he indicate a sense of openness to self-challenge his position by attending, and participating in, a Race and Membership Institute. He presents his choice as a “done deal.”

Ann, on the other hand, conveys a sense of “the relativism of all knowledge, that is, that all knowledge is a human construction”⁴⁵ in the way she talks about addressing the history of and issues relating to the eugenics movement with her students. She communicates a sense of responsibility to guide students to “see the construction of race in our country, and to understand the construction of poverty in our country, and how it has been created, and what we can do to tear it down.” She wants them to delve into “this muck” in order to face it, and move through it towards “not feeling...that black people are inherently stupid, or black people are inherently chumps.” At the same time, with her demonstrated willingness to engage in practice-based reflection, she reveals a complex growing edge – seemingly on the threshold of transformation – in the way that she presents her dilemma, not as a “done deal” choice, but with a sense of profound internal “wrestling” that reflects a Relational Orientation.

Juxtaposing Alexa and Andre’s narratives

Viewing and analyzing the narratives of Alexa and Andre side-by-side offers a compelling example of how the teachers in my study who were more forthcoming and reflective in their respective descriptions of the influence of formative life experiences also expressed their sense of purpose and vision as educators in greater depth, in a way that reflects a Relational Orientation. Besides the fact that both Alexa and Andre teach in urban schools that are, as they each describe, organizationally dysfunctional in similar ways – and that both teachers articulate commitments to foster student civic learning – they have differing perspectives. This is so not only in terms of background, years of experience, and teaching approach, but also, perhaps, in terms of their awareness dimension levels; this seems particularly so vis-a-vis their respective epistemic stances in relationship to/with their students. In juxtaposing the narratives of Alexa (a Caucasian female in her mid-forties who has been a classroom teacher for thirteen years, and has actively integrated Facing History and Ourselves in her teaching/curriculum), and Andre (a Latino male in his mid-twenties who as a new classroom teacher was/is and actively integrating Workable Peace in his teaching/curriculum), I aim to highlight how they each talk about formative experiences; in doing so, I present the palpable differences I see, regarding their respectively conveyed epistemic stances.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 163

Alexa

Alexa's narratives reveal an approach different from what the other teachers in my study communicated, in myriad different ways, in terms of "putting [oneself] out there every day" in addressing the social, emotional, and moral dimensions of students' learning. Unlike the others, Alexa did not indicate openness to self-reflection during our in-depth interviews. According to my across data analysis, her guarded interview responses have a qualitatively different tone than all of the nine other teachers.

Her extensive use of Facing History materials and methodology seems linked to pragmatic External Orientation type teaching goals. Concomitantly, based on my interpretations of her interview reflections, Alexa brings herself into her teaching in a more pragmatic way. Along these lines, she stresses that she is a "reliable role model" for the urban students she teaches, given her business background, and the fact that she "was the first person in her family to attend college." Her emphasis on self-reliance is a key part of her overarching teaching purpose for her students "in the urban environment." For example, Alexa describes her overarching teaching goals as such:

To help kids become self-reliant, and to train them to take on responsibility for their actions, and for the choices that they make, and to feel confident and competent about the choices that they make in their lives... I'm going to try my best to get them ready to be functional, and participatory.

Consistently, in various ways throughout our interviews, Alexa boils down "what Facing History is about" to "choices and decision-making." She asserts that Facing History's materials influence her pedagogy in a way that "allows kids to think about all the different choices that can be made, and think about all the possible consequences of those choices." Yet, her interview descriptions convey a sense of guardedness in terms of presenting multiple viewpoints, delving into controversial issues, and "bringing herself into her teaching." Rather than "fostering [students'] relational competencies and skills in a transactional way"⁴⁶ – a key component of a Relational Orientation, Alexa consistently evidences (across all three interviews) an approach more focused on "providing students with the tools to function in society."⁴⁷ This is indicative of an orientation that falls short of being "integrated and context-based" as a Relational Orientation in Selman and Adalbjarnardottir's schema. Two examples stand out from our interviews. One is connected to Alexa's description of her response to two students' respective commentaries during a class period. The second has to do with her communicated resistance to address issues concerning U.S. involvement in wars, in the Middle East, with her students.

⁴⁶ Robert Selman, *The Promotion of Social Awareness: Powerful Lessons from the Partnership of Developmental Theory and Classroom Practice*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2003, 149.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

First, in response to my open-ended question about the ways in which she approaches conflict with her students, Alexa depicts a specific situation that transpired in one of her classes. She describes how two African American students, after reading the assigned first two sections of Michael Patrick MacDonald's memoir, *All Souls: A Family Story from Southie* (1999), joined each other in declaring, in their respective ways, "[The author is] a white racist!" Alexa explains that she responded by telling these students: "You need to be able to learn how to put yourself into somebody else's shoes, and see what is happening in that person's life at the time...to help understand where that person is coming from." Comparatively interesting, is her subsequent commentary on the sequence of events that followed:

Like, after section 4 [of *All Souls*], they finally got it. I didn't hear anything else about him being racist...I kind of made their thinking a little bit straighter, and to be more receptive to the work...they totally had like a 'slap across the face.' It kind of woke them up a little bit; how awful this guy's life had been...And, we didn't talk about him being racist ever again kind of thing.

While she does describe encouraging her students to engage in perspective taking in this instance, she indicates that the main purpose in doing so – in a more one-dimensional way as indicated – was to "make their thinking a bit straighter." Alexa does not hint at, in any way, being "stopped her in her tracks" in the way that Ann described experiencing what she viewed as "illuminating," albeit "loaded" student interventions. Instead, Alexa describes responding to her students' remarks in a way that essentially short-circuited potential for a related discussion, generated by questions, with consideration of *multiple* perspectives.

Again, the second example has to do with Alexa's candidly communicated resistance to address controversial issues pertaining to the role of the U.S. in war – in Iraq and Afghanistan – with her students. When I invite her, during our first interview, to elaborate on how she approaches conflict with her students, and in particular how she had addressed the controversial war in Iraq, given evident nation-wide tensions, felt at almost every level, she unabashedly expresses her view that "it is not the place in [her Law and Justice classes] to have those conversations about war:"

It is not the place in my classroom to have those conversations about war. I mean I'll give a class period to enlighten these guys [so] everybody's clear about the players, and the issues. But, really, there are so many other things that are more pertinent to the content at hand, and [this Law and Justice class] is not a place for it...I have too much that I am more interested in, and things that I need to cover specifically, to get through the content that I deliver.

During our final interview session, Alexa elaborates further on her stance vis-à-vis controversy surrounding the war in Iraq:

I don't think it was a political issue for me; why I didn't talk about the war. It was more content driven...I wasn't anti-war. I wasn't pro-war. It didn't seem to me that it was the place to have the conversation about it. My politics don't enter my classroom. I try to give them whatever issue we're studying; as many sides of that issues, or as many perspectives about this that I can give them. I allow them to draw their own conclusions, but be able to tell me why.

Based on Alexa's explanation of her approach in the above two excerpts, it seems clear that her position on this issue – specifically, “it is not the place in [her Law and Justice] classroom to have those conversations about war” – is driven by her own persuasions. This is evidenced in the following embedded statements: “I have too much that I am more interested in;” “I would rather use my materials in other ways;” and, “I didn't go into a whole lot of stuff, because...it wasn't on my radar screen.” While it can certainly be argued that a course focused on Law and Justice is a fitting arena for discussions – however limited, time-wise – around the legal and justice dimensions of the war in Iraq, the superseding issue for Alexa seems to be resistance to delve into this particular controversial inter-group conflict, laden with palpable social, moral, and political dimensions. As she explains several times during our interviews, “My politics don't enter my classroom.”

Whilst Alexa asserts, at the conclusion of the above excerpt, that she “tries to give as many sides of issues, or as many perspectives that [she] can give them, [to] allow them to draw their own conclusions, [and] be able to tell [her] why,” it seems that such a process tends to be controlled, according to her bounded purposes. The following excerpt, from our second interview, is illuminating in terms of her underlying, pragmatically focused approach:

I'm much more of a leveler, and a reality check for them. I'm not a bleeding heart liberal. I'm like a socialist. I'm like a very hard core...I'm like a very liberal republican! I'm a big conservative. But, I try not to let my politics enter into the classroom. I just try to be tough, and have expectations for them, because nobody has any expectations of them. And, nobody has any guidelines, or rules or regulations at home.

In terms of formative experiences in connection with Alexa's approach, and her guiding philosophy as an educator, she is markedly more guarded than the other participants. When I invite her, in different ways over the course of our interviews, to talk about such formative experiences/influences vis-à-vis her shift into the field of education (after five years in the business world), and her decision to teach in an urban environment, she responds with a variation on the following statement, at every turn, “That's a really interesting question; because I really don't know...I really can't say.” After furthering probing, she asserts,

You know, people will ask me, ‘Why did you go work in this urban environment? Do you have some great passion to commit yourself to the urban student cause?’ And, I’m like, ‘No! Not really.’ I don’t know if I thought I could make a difference. But, I knew I had experience that I could bring to the table that could be of some assistance to them. They’ll be the first ones to tell you that I have high expectations, and I work them to the bone. I don’t have a social justice bleeding heart, at all.

When I ask Alexa to explain what she means by “a social justice bleeding heart,” she responds via continued elaboration on her self-perceived role as a teacher in the same urban high school over the past ten years:

There’s so many people that go into education because they think that they want to, you know, solve the problems of urban blight and poverty ...and the unheard, and the downtrodden, and stuff like that. And, I’m like, if you create excuses, and you create experiences, or you want to save somebody, then you immediately victimize them...I have kids who love to tow the color line, the poverty line any chance they can get. And, I’m like, “This is the land of opportunity. You know, what kind of opportunity are you going to make for yourself?” I’m not going to listen to the complaints. So...I’m not a bleeding hearted liberal.

Andre

Unlike Alexa, Andre spoke forthrightly and substantively about his background and direct life experiences during our interviews; in doing so, he identifies what most influenced his decision to move into high school teaching. While the profound influence of his parents, certain teachers, and his high school Upward Bound program provided nurturing guidance towards this pathway, it was the weight of his direct experiences with racial discrimination, conflict and violence – both in and outside of formal schooling – that have informed, and drive, his overarching goal to “empower [young people] to have agency” through teaching. Knowing first-hand, through his own painful experiences, about the “calamities...of inner-city schools” he expresses a deep commitment, as a “young man of color,” to work with adolescents in urban areas, because he believes he is “needed there.”

I had already been in and had heard about all the calamities with schools, especially inner-city schools; about how poor they are, and about how we don’t have good teachers, especially teachers of color, and young men of color. So, I figured, well, I’m needed there. I mean, I’m needed there to...because there are few people that are like me, that are in these situations, and few people who feel that education is the key to empower to youth, not just to like have them memorize content and data; I mean, it’s about empowering them to have agency...And, so I decided to teach.

Andre talks reflectively about his purposes as a teacher, including his draw to Workable Peace, with depth and a sense of passion. Coupled with his overarching goal “to empower [young people] to have agency” is his commitment to guide his students to approach conflict constructively, in terms of their self-awareness and skills, in the realms of both social interactions and academic discourse. This commitment is deeply rooted in his own painful, personal experiences with violence, and his own journey towards self-realization and agency:

So, violence was always like a very real thing. It wasn't like an imaginary thing. So, I could see how it can happen. I had been engaged in several fights, and several friends of mine had been in fights. So, I saw my friend die, and I had my own life threatened. And, I think by then I was also just maturing more and more, and just having more self-awareness of my own self, and feeling more confident, and being able to talk about conflict, and to talk about altercations, and being comfortable in my own voice.

Throughout Andre's interview transcripts, there is ample evidence of how his commitment to the socio-moral and civic dimensions of learning and teaching are rooted in his own life experiences, and are integral to his sense of purpose as an educator. The following excerpt captures the essence of this multi-layered and deep-rooted driving purpose:

The goal to me of being a teacher is to allow the person to really be able to understand the society around them, and that meaning like the laws, that meaning what the responsibilities are as a citizen – not only to their families, but their communities, and to the nation as a whole. And, if they should choose to do so, be able to have the ability to act ... Well, I think along with that, I think it is also important for them to develop a social consciousness; in other words, understanding what their social location is in relation to, in relationship to other people, and what kind of...having them understand, in their own way, what those responsibilities are to other people. And, you really can only do that by understanding what your political rights are, and understanding what the social-political system that you live in... So, as a teacher, how can I develop that understanding of society and politics that's engaging them on a daily basis? How can they develop that consciousness? And, then, secondly, how can they develop the skills that will give them the agency to act within that sphere, within that circle, within that world?

In “the kind of classroom [he wants] to have” Andre leans towards experiential learning where students have the opportunity to “take on the role of the different perspective, or different person” because “it becomes more emotional” and “allows for greater depth of understanding.” This is what draws him to the Workable Peace curriculum. Yet, regardless of whether it is Workable Peace or other “kinds of activities and teaching methodology” Andre reveals a strong commitment to encourage his students “to have

some sort of struggle with some ideas” through “exposing [them] to other perspectives.” Quite dissimilar from what Alexa suggests evidence of in her interview responses, Andre believes it is important, in terms of his philosophy of teaching, to “let his perspective come out” as part of the process:

I have no issue with the fact that my views may not be the most popular ones or they may be very strong. I think I can only express to them that this is my personal opinion if they ask me, sometimes even if they don't ask me, I'm going to say it, but it's all in the context of having them be exposed to other perspectives as well. If not then, even if I say it's my opinion it's still going to dominate, I think, what they think about these issues because they are going to respect me and they're going to look up to me so that would once again, to me, be a responsibility.

Andre's statements in the above excerpts are actually part of his response to my questions around how, if at all, issues surrounding the war in Iraq were addressed in his classes. Unlike Alexa, he explains how he delves into this controversial subject with his students: “In so many different ways...just talking about historical conflict. I mean, these were the questions that the students would pose. So, it went many different ways.” He posits that this ongoing situation is an “obvious example” of a “teachable moment where you can really connect with something that is contextual and really in your life.”

In his view, addressing this current conflict on the world stage “has to do with [a teacher] *wanting* to find a place for it.” On this point, Andre asserts, “A responsible teacher would try to find a way in which you can interject at least some of the reasons why something [e.g. the war in Iraq] is happening within the historical time period, which is what I try to do.” Moreover, in his view, “not shying away from conflict,” but instead, “working through issues” – whether in terms of current issues or the realm of intra-group social interactions in the classroom – “allows [his students] to grow more in the long run.” He elaborates:

I guess what I'm talking about is just patience...in other words, like keep coming back to the same issues, not avoiding them. And, because the initial reaction from a lot of students who deal with issues that they're uncomfortable with, or that they feel will cause trauma in the class choose to not speak, and say, “Okay, if we're going to talk about race, then I won't talk today.” And, I think, just continuing to encourage them to still wrestle with it. And, even if it is uncomfortable, to be all right being uncomfortable with it, and keep wrestling with that topic. And, you do that by continuously bringing it up, and not shying away from it; not shying away from conflict in other words.

In our second interview, while elaborating further on this point, Andre adds, “it goes back to your own values and your own understanding... You have to be comfortable with

making students uncomfortable, I think, sometimes. [This] goes hand-in-hand only if you are supportive and only if you already have a good relationship with them.”

Though Andre is a neophyte teacher, with just one full-time teaching year under his belt, his interview narratives consistently evidence a deeply reflective Relational Orientation. In contrast, Alexa, who has been a classroom teacher for thirteen years, consistently evidences in her talk, a less reflective, less complex orientation – specifically in terms of Selman and Adalbjarnardottir’s schema, and Lyons’ “nested knowing” conceptualization.

Making sense of juxtaposed narratives

In comparing the narratives of Cesar and Ann, as well as Alexa and Andre, I illustrate how in relation to different degrees of “nested knowing” awareness, there are concomitant differences in terms of “professional awareness” complexity. Again, the teachers in my study who were more forthcoming and reflective in their respective descriptions of the influence of formative life experiences also expressed their sense of purpose and vision as educators in greater depth, articulating a commitment to foster socio-moral and civic learning in transactional, “nested knowing” ways. This is most clearly illustrated via the juxtaposition of Alexa and Andre’s interview data.

The juxtaposition of narratives I present also conveys teachers’ differences with regard to their approaches to conflict and controversy in the classroom. Ann and Andre both suggest (albeit in their own particular ways) a view of “accepting conflict as endemic and even useful” in their descriptions around experiencing “contradictions within themselves and their work.”⁴⁸

Cesar and Alexa, in very different ways and for different reasons, suggest a tendency to view classroom, curriculum-oriented controversy – at least in terms of the specific controversial issues they respectively name and describe – more as “a burden that needs to be eliminated.”⁴⁹ This is particularly so for Alexa, especially in terms of her approach to the following “thorny” issue of whether or not to be transparent about her own beliefs and opinions. In Alexa’s case, her assertion that her “politics don’t enter [her] classroom,” and her stated refusal to address the controversial war in Iraq evidence her view of such conflict as a burden.

Essential Implications for Teachers’ Personal/Professional Development

My study findings point to the critical importance of professional development that supports and encourages teachers to manage teaching dilemmas, and controversy, in constructive ways – in relation to and for the benefit of their students. Indeed, the

⁴⁸ Magdalene Lampert “How do teachers manage to teach? Perspectives on problems in practice,” *Harvard Educational Review*, 55, 1985, p. 192.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

complexity of the challenges that come with teachers' work to foster social-emotional, ethical, civic, and academic learning are not "technical challenges" to be confronted via "informational learning," but "adaptive challenges"⁵⁰ that "require not merely knowing more but knowing differently."⁵¹ It follows that such teachers "are in need of supports to transformational learning."⁵²

When transformative learning occurs, according to Jack Mezirow, "we transform our frames of reference through critical reflection on the assumptions upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based"⁵³. It effects changes, as Kegan elaborates, not only in the behavior of a person, and "not just the way he feels, but the way he knows – not just what he knows but the *way* he knows"⁵⁴. Such a profound consciousness shift involves one's understanding of self as well as one's self-locations in the broader community/world. The import of a transformative learning process is reflected in Mezirow's following assertion: "in contemporary societies we must learn to make our own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings of others...Transformative learning develops autonomous thinking."⁵⁵

The development of – including, importantly, the movement towards – "autonomous thinking" is essential for teachers who strive to approach with competence the complex nature of the myriad challenges and teaching dilemmas they face in their work. The "multiple and competing role expectations" that come with the complex dilemmas inherent to the "moral craft" of teaching – particularly for those committed to fostering students' social-emotional, ethical, civic, and academic learning – "demand" as Kegan asserts, "something more than mere behavior, the acquisition of specific skills, or the mastery of particular knowledge. They make demands on our minds, on how we know, on the complexity of our consciousness."⁵⁶

Therefore, professional development approaches should provide teachers with a "holding environment" that offers a balance of support and challenge,⁵⁷ such a

⁵⁰ Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.

⁵¹ Robert Kegan, "What "Form" Transforms? A Constructive-Developmental Approach to Transformative Learning," In J. Mezirow (Ed.), *Learning as Transformation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000, p. 65.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Jack Mezirow, "Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice." In: *Transformative Learning in Action: Insights from Practice. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. no. 74, edited by P. Cranton, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1997, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 17.

⁵⁵ Mezirow, "Transformative Learning," 1997, p. 5.

⁵⁶ Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Transformational learning is nurtured via a "holding environment" – a learning environment that provides a balance of challenge and support (Winnicott, 1960; cited in, Kegan, 1982:115). As Kegan asserts, this environment "provides both welcoming acknowledgment of exactly who the person is right

support/challenge balance can nurture teachers to competently and “readily express the capacity to reflect on how the psychosocial needs of both students and teachers relate and interact”⁵⁸. To be effective, intentional professional development “holding environments” need to consider teachers’ varying tendencies towards reflection, and differences in terms of self-complexity, vis-à-vis conceptual capacity.

Such varying tendencies are illustrated in my study, particularly via the qualitatively different approach of Alexa in comparison to others, such as Ann and Andre’s. Whereas Alexa’s narratives focus more on “providing students with the tools to function in society,”⁵⁹ Ann and Andre’s are more “integrated and context-based” as a Relational Orientation in Selman and Adalbjarnardottir’s schema. While Ann’s narratives are presented as viewing classroom issues/interventions that “stop [her] in [her] tracks” as illuminating, and conducive to an interactive exploration of multiple perspectives, Alexa instead describes responding to loaded student interventions in a way that essentially short-circuits potential for such discussions.

Professional development programs such as Facing History and Workable Peace need to also take into account these varying tendencies and capacities. This is particularly so for Facing History and Ourselves, given that this program transparently purports the following key aspect of its philosophy: “teachers are adult learners who creatively construct the specifics of what and how they teach”⁶⁰. Concomitantly, different teachers experience the program’s content, resource materials, and methodology differently. Indeed, this is illustrated by the described experiences of the teachers in my study. The clearest example is found in the juxtaposition of Cesar and Ann’s narratives regarding their different approaches to the subject of the eugenics movement via the Race and Membership Scope and Sequence. Again, Cesar communicates a seeming unilateral choice not to delve into the issue of eugenics in his course largely because of a protective concern regarding the emotional dimension of this issue. Ann, on the other hand, conveys a sense of “the relativism of all knowledge, that is that all knowledge is a human construction.”⁶¹

Such are the different epistemological stances that professional development programs such as Facing History and Workable Peace need to approach intentionally – for all teachers who participate in their respective summer institutes, ongoing workshops,

now...and fosters the person's psychological evolution. As such, a holding environment is a tricky transitional culture, an evolutionary bridge, a context for crossing over” (Kegan, 1982:115).

⁵⁸ Sigrun Adalbjarnardottir, “Citizenship Education and Teachers’ Professional Awareness,” *Citizenship education and the Curriculum*, edited by D. Scott & H. Lawson. Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing, 2002, p. 132.

⁵⁹ Robert Selman, *The Promotion of Social Awareness: Powerful Lessons from the Partnership of Developmental Theory and Classroom Practice*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2003, p.149.

⁶⁰ www.facinghistory.org

⁶¹ Lyons, *Dilemmas of Knowing*, 1990, p. 162.

and one-on-one pedagogical support. Such intentional awareness, among supporting program associates can provide essential “holding” – with a *balance* of support and challenge – for teachers according to their different awareness level orientations, à la Selman and Adalbjarnardottir’s developmental lens schema. Such awareness can help programs to distinguish between support that enables less complex awareness levels, and that which is conducive to transformational learning and development.

Concluding Perspective: Transformational Learning Potential

*This [professional development] course has been emotionally challenging and intellectually stimulating...[It] has pushed me to redirect many of my personal and professional goals. It has begun a change in who I am as a person, which will inevitably transform what I do in my classroom.*⁶²

- Facing History online course participant

In the above quote, this cited anonymous teacher points to the transformative learning potential fostered by professional development programs like Facing History and Ourselves (and certainly Workable Peace, one can infer). More specifically, this statement, particularly the “it has begun a change” part, points to the threshold of transformational learning potential for teachers, in terms of their epistemological growing edge. In other words, as conveyed in the above quote, there can be a palpable feel of shifting in terms of “frame of reference” – towards a teacher becoming “more critically reflective of [his or her] assumptions and aware of their context”⁶³. This critical reflection component is at the heart of transformational learning. So, how can professional development programs more effectively support teachers to engage in “transformational reflection” as they work to transform what they do in their classrooms? How can these programs better recognize and support teachers at the growing edge of their thinking and meaning-making?

Echoing the above teacher’s excerpt, the findings from my study palpably point to the need for qualitatively more effective professional development support for teachers who engage in the “moral craft” of fostering social-emotional, ethical, civic, and academic learning. The complexity of the multiple challenges the high school teachers I interviewed describe experiencing point to the inextricable cognitive and emotional demands that come with teaching to foster social-emotional, ethical, civic, and academic learning among adolescent students. Furthermore, the interview data from my study also points to a range in how teachers a) make sense of these demands, and b) whether they “see” and interact with these demands in ways that promote transformational learning. As Sprinthall et al. assert, teachers’ professional and personal “competence will grow through qualitatively distinct stages when there is positive interaction in a supportive environment;” yet, as they continue, new teachers “as well as experienced teachers will

⁶² www.facinghistory.org

⁶³ Mezirow, “Transformative Learning,” 1997, p. 19.

vary in their capacity and ‘willingness’ to engage in reflection.”⁶⁴ Therefore, professional development programs that aim to foster “positive interaction in a supportive environment” in order to promote transformational shifts among teachers, must be mindful of this capacity-for-reflection range, along with the epistemological dimensions of teachers’ learning.

In his chapter, *What “Form” Transforms? A Constructive-Developmental Approach to Transformative Learning*, Kegan clearly delineates the core distinctions between learning processes that are transformational – with focus on epistemological change - and those that are informational, while at the same time recognizes the value of each. He underscores this distinction for the purpose of countering the all too frequent misuse of transformation language to denote any change process:

Learning aimed at changes not only in what we know but changes in how we know has an almost opposite rhythm about it and comes closer to the etymological meaning of education (“leading out”). “Informative” learning involves a kind of leading in, or filling of the form. Trans-*form*-ative learning puts the form itself at risk of change (and not just change but increased capacity)...Both kinds of learning are expansive and valuable, one within a preexisting frame of mind and the other reconstructing the very frame⁶⁵.

Kegan explains how learning shifts such as “changes in one’s fund of knowledge, one’s confidence as a learner, one’s self-perception as a learner, one’s motives in learning, one’s self-esteem,” while any/all are certainly important, and worthy of being facilitated, they do not necessarily involve transformation, “because they could all occur within the existing frame of reference”⁶⁶.

The complexity of the challenges that come with teachers’ work to foster social-emotional, ethical, civic, and academic learning are not, in the words of Heifetz, “technical challenges” that can be confronted via “informational learning,” but “adaptive challenges” that, as Kegan asserts, “require not merely knowing more but knowing differently”⁶⁷ – with need of “supports” for transformational learning. Such transformational reflection “supports” are key in helping teachers to confront, rather than avoid, the inevitable conflicts, ambiguities and tensions, and contradictions within

⁶⁴ N. Sprinthall, A. Reiman, and L. Thies-Sprinthall, “Teacher Professional Development,” In *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education* (2nd edition), New York: Macmillan, 1996, p. 689

⁶⁵ Kegan, “What ‘Form’ Transforms? A Constructive-Developmental Approach to Transformative Learning,” 2000, p. 47.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

themselves and their work”⁶⁸ – towards working through “conceptual issues...in order to assume an effective stance towards ethical dilemmas that arise in the classroom.”⁶⁹.

Conclusion

Who is the self that teaches? ...This is the most fundamental question we can ask about teaching and those who teach – for the sake of learning, and those who learn.⁷⁰

- Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*

This “most fundamental question” is an essential one for history/social studies teachers who have an increasingly complex “explicit pedagogical responsibility for promoting their students’ social, moral, and emotional growth.”⁷¹ As asserted at the outset of this paper, such teachers “have a key role in organizing constructive and meaningful experiences for students in citizenship education.”⁷² Indeed, those who hold an intentional commitment to reflectively promote their students’ social-emotional, ethical, civic, and academic learning are persistently summoned to a place of inner exploration.

This is particularly so with regard to conflict, a perennial and critical dimension of teaching to promote social-emotional, ethical, civic, and academic learning. Again, the process of delving into conflict and controversy is a key avenue for cultivating perspective-taking capabilities; and, the cultivation of social perspective-taking –a core capacity for citizenship awareness and participation – is at the heart of “constructive and meaningful experiences for students in citizenship education”⁷³.

As evidenced by the narratives of the teachers in my study, delving into conflict and controversy is complicated and challenging. Palmer writes candidly about how dealing with conflict in the classroom is an “ancient angst” that he himself still sinks into, despite the fact that his “stockpile of [teaching] methods is substantial.” Regarding this pivotal phenomenon, he offers the following admission:

⁶⁸ Magdalene Lampert “How do teachers manage to teach? Perspectives on Problems in Practice,” 1985, p. 194.

⁶⁹ William Damon, “Teaching as a Moral Craft and Developmental Expedition,” 1992, p. 145

⁷⁰ Parker Palmer, “The Heart of a Teacher: Identity and Integrity in Teaching,” In *The Jossey-Bass Reader on Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003, p. 7.

⁷¹ Sigrun Adalbjarnardottir “‘I Feel I Have Received a New Vision’: A Developmental Analysis of Teachers’ Professional Awareness of Their Work with Children on Interpersonal Issues,” 1997, p. 409

⁷² Sigrun Adalbjarnardottir, “Citizenship Education and Teachers’ Professional Awareness,” 2002, p. 132.

⁷³ Ibid.

The techniques I have mastered do not disappear, but neither do they suffice. Face to face with my students, only one resource is at my immediate command: my identity, my selfhood, my sense of this “I” who teaches – without which I have no sense of the “Thou” who learns.⁷⁴

Palmer’s admission reveals a profound, sage insight; it is one that resonates with many of the narratives shared by the teachers in my study, as variations on a theme. While there is a range of consciousness among them, with regard to this “I” sense as a “resource...at immediate command,” all of the teachers in my study convey growing edge movement, albeit in varying ways, in relationship to this fundamental, vital resource.

In this paper, I have attempted to illustrate the different ways in which the teachers who have participated in my small-scale interpretive qualitative research study all communicate deeply held commitments to engage in the complex and moral craft of guiding students towards personally/socially responsible citizenship awareness and participation. In presenting the complex interplay of issues and choices that these teachers describe encountering, as dilemmas with conflict and morally-laden dimensions, I also portray how, in Lyons’ words, “practical choices, with ethical uncertainties [as part] of teachers’ everyday interactions... involve their growth and development as practitioners”⁷⁵. Again, as asserted at numerous points in this paper, a teacher’s potential “growth and development” hinges on his or her capacity for engaging in reflective practice.

⁷⁴ Parker Palmer, “The Heart of a Teacher: Identity and Integrity in Teaching,” 2003, p. 4.

⁷⁵ Nona Lyons, “Dilemmas of Knowing: Ethical and Epistemological Dimensions of Teachers’ Work and Development,” 1990, p. 161.

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