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Defining the Social Studies: An Inclusive Perspective

In 1997, *Theory and Research in Social Education* will highlight the history of social studies from a broadly inclusive perspective. The Editorial Board is interested in articles that consider the development of social studies from the standpoint of diversity (e.g., race, class, gender, ethnicity, etc.). This theme builds on recent retrospective treatments of the field during the seventy-fifth anniversary year of the National Council for the Social Studies. The aim is to publish manuscripts that examine theorists whose work could be viewed as historical antecedents to contemporary writing about multiculturalism, diversity and inclusion in the social studies. See the Information for Authors in this issue for guidelines on manuscript preparation.
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THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITY

The featured articles in this issue of Theory and Research in Social Education include S. G. Grant’s study of where teachers locate authority over their content and pedagogy, Maureen Gillette and Marilynne Boyle-Baise’s exploration of ways teachers can be assisted in gaining multicultural understandings and Neil O. Houser’s examination of how imbalances between cognitive dissonance and emotional safety in elementary classrooms affect the goals of social education. Each of these authors share an interest in exploring the nature of teachers’ thinking and practice as well as our assumptions about how teaching might be improved. Each article, in different ways, reconfirms conclusions drawn from much of the research on teacher socialization, that is: the contexts that shape teachers’ practices are in turn shaped by teachers themselves.

This dialectical relationship between teachers’ beliefs and actions and the contexts in which they work harbors a powerful, yet untapped, rejoinder to the top-down, centralized initiatives currently dominating school reform efforts. One reason for this is that teachers (and teacher educators) have traditionally understood their power to affect change as stopping at the classroom door and not extending into school-wide change, community-wide or national educational politics. True educational reform, however, involves engaging policy debates and other struggles in and beyond the classroom. As teacher Stan Karp (1994) argues,

If we recognize that effective education requires students to bring their real lives into the classrooms, and to take what they learn back to their homes and neighborhoods in the form of new understandings and new behavior, how can we not do the same? Critical teaching should not be merely an abstraction or academic formula for classroom “experimentation.” It should be a strategy for educational organizing that changes lives, including our own. (p. 24)

There are many key educational issues that are determined in the larger context of community, state and national politics (e.g., curriculum standards, voucher plans, privatization schemes). Teachers’ efforts in the classroom are inextricably tied to broader endeavors to transform our society. If social educators (and others) truly want to transform schools, we must recognize and act on connections between classrooms and society. If we can find ways to link work for democratic reforms in both schools and society, both will be strengthened.
An alternative to top-down, state-centered educational and social change is the development of a democracy of community empowerment (Flacks, 1995). In this alternative, schools would become part of broader self-determining communities with power to plan their own development and the resources to fulfill those plans. Building this kind of community power requires a combination of grassroots and governmental initiatives and resources that will raise fundamental dilemmas, which are worth tackling. There are myriad dilemmas, not least among these is the confusion of boundaries in promoting both grassroots and governmental involvement. The aim of community empowerment is to develop a legal framework for participatory democracy, programs of comprehensive community power, rules for community voice and resources to support community planning in all areas. In education matters, rather than increasing federal and state regulation of curriculum and instruction by top-down bureaucracies and restrictive auditing measures (e.g., mandated high-stakes tests), the new principle of reform would be to provide for community voice in decisions through public accountability, open hearings, etc.

Yet another dilemma involves an integral part of building community power, that is, enabling or compelling all of the constituencies of a school to participate in the process of institutional change. The demand for increased voice of teachers, students, and community members in decisions affecting schools is not intended to merely privilege these groups, because exercising institutional voice is integrally connected with the need to take institutional responsibility. This implies a democratic restructuring of school life and the reconstruction of our assumptions about the nature of teachers' work and teacher education.

This is a vision of educational reform in which the state is not the source of initiative or direction, instead it is the source of laws and capital that supports and nourishes local initiatives. One way to begin this work is by taking advantage of the space for initiatives offered by recent reforms such as site-based management and shared decision-making, which are taking root in many school districts. These reforms are not panaceas and bring with them many elements that may potentially further entrench hierarchical relations within schools and between schools and policy elites. Where site councils have real power and resources, teachers, students, parents and community members can make significant decisions about the curriculum, instruction, and conditions of schools. Site-based restructuring is underway in many school districts, including large urban districts such as Chicago and Philadelphia. These openings provide the opportunity to develop true grassroots, teacher initiated reforms. Teachers in Milwaukee, for example, challenged the district's bureaucratic textbook adoption process and its heavy reliance on basal readers. Milwaukee teachers succeeded in winning support for a whole language alternative to basal readers, as well as resources to provide professional development and al-
ternative materials. As a result, the number of teachers using whole language approaches rose dramatically.

A third dilemma for school reform through building community power is that bottom-up institutional and community change is likely to encourage more political and ideological conflicts than is produced by traditional top-down change efforts. Building community power within schools requires numerous boundary crossings, between regular and special education, across the disciplines and grade levels, across educators' work roles and the roles of students and the community in transforming schools. As an integral part of community development, this approach to school reform will require education workers to engage with other citizens and community workers in areas, such as public health and safety, unions, economic development, housing, etc. As all social educators know, there are a plethora of contradicting perspectives, opinions, and ideologies within our own relatively small community. With each boundary that is crossed we are more likely to encounter increasingly diverse perspectives and contradictory political and ideological tendencies.

Even the best and most well intentioned top-down educational reforms are easily corrupted or resisted by schools and most bottom-up reforms have historically been frustrated by bureaucracy or lack of resources. On the other hand there is a growing body of public law and rule-making that provides a foundation for community empowerment, particularly in the area of environmental protection. Approaching educational reform from a community empowerment perspective is certainly not problem-free. This vision, however, offers an opportunity for reforms to be responsive to contexts and needs of individual communities; avoids the problems of top-down reforms (such as doling out responsibility but restricting power and resources) and provides a way to integrate educational reform activities with broader efforts aimed to promote democracy. To paraphrase Flacks, we need to imagine and create modes of educational and social reform that cross boundaries, that are consciously multi-perspectival, that can encompass contradictory political and ideological tendencies, while at the same time expressing the common human need for self-determination and voice.

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References
Locating Authority Over Content and Pedagogy: Cross-Current Influences on Teachers’ Thinking and Practice

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Abstract
In this paper, I explore two questions. One asks where teachers locate authority over their content and pedagogical decisions. Here I describe and illustrate the swirl of personal, organizational, and policy factors teachers cite as influencing their instruction. The second question focuses on the nature of these factors and asks what relationships exist among them. Here I suggest that influences run as cross-currents, definable in one sense, but mixing and merging in another. I conclude with three considerations which explore the stance one takes on influences, the relationship between influence and authority, and assumptions about changing teachers’ practices.

America is in a frenzy of standards-setting. During the 1980s, social studies teachers saw recommendations by the National Council for Social Studies, the Bradley Commission on History, and the National Geographic Society. Today a plethora of national and state initiatives in history, geography, economics, civics, and social studies compete for their attention. But what do teachers hear in this buzz of standards talk? This paper represents an initial cut on a multi-year, multi-subject matter field study into the relationship between state, national, and local curricular initiatives and teachers’ classroom practices. The slice reflected here explores the influence of national, state, and local initiatives on teachers’ content and pedagogical decisions. I argue that these efforts matter to teachers, but they do so within a cross-current of influences which may push and pull teachers in multiple directions. As an urban high school teacher in the study put it, “We were going west a few years ago, now you’ve got me going east, now you’re going to have me go south.”
For some time now, researchers have attempted to describe the factors which influence teachers' content and pedagogical decisions. One early effort was by Michael Kirst and Decker Walker (1971). Their widely cited paper mapped a maze of influences located at all levels of the education system. More recent efforts have amplified the notion of multiple influences on teachers' practice. Cornbleth (1990, 1991) makes a particularly valuable contribution by setting her analysis in the context of persistent and pervasive educational reform movements.

The view that teachers work in a climate of reform and that their practices are subject to multiple influences holds promise for understanding teachers' decisions about what and how to teach. Since the early 1980s, reforms have defined the national conversation about teaching and learning. Today teachers face a blizzard of new initiatives calling for them to know and do much that is new and unfamiliar. This climate of reform has made an already "impossible profession" (Cohen, 1989) even more so. It obviates the notion that any single factor (e.g., a teacher's subject matter knowledge) or set of factors (e.g., new instructional materials) will substantially influence teachers' practices. Instead, what teachers do in their classrooms is likely to be influenced by a range of factors reflecting a variety of sources.

And yet the analyses which produced these insights go only so far. One question that emerges is: Where do teachers locate the authority over their decisions? As a rule, the policy implementation literature features the policymaker's perspective. Investigating the influences on teachers' practice from the teacher's perspective may give us no truer or more definitive account, but such perspectives do offer the advantage of richer and fuller accounts. As we attempt to understand what sense teachers make of the various influences on their practices then, we can not afford to overlook this source of data. A second question focuses on the nature of these influences and asks: What are the relationships among the various influences on teachers' decisions? The decentralized educational system which enables and encourages the development of multiple influences also ensures that those influences interact (Grant, 1994). That is, those factors which influence teachers' do not do so serially or exclusively. Instead influences are likely to run as cross-currents, definable in one sense, but mixing and merging in another. Acknowledging what teachers define as the influences on their decisions and that those influences are likely to interact should help us better understand why teachers make the instructional decisions they do and why changes in teachers' practices can seem so uneven, unpredictable, and slow.

In this paper, I take an interpretative perspective to explore the question of what factors teachers identify as influences on their content and pedagogical decisions. That question has two components. One is what teachers say influences their practices. Here I map an array of instructional influences including personal, organizational, and policy. A second
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component is illustrating how influences interact. Here I describe and examine instances where teachers talk about an interaction among two or more influences which may send cross-current messages. In and around these issues, I weave questions of what constitutes an influence and what makes an influence authoritative. I conclude with some considerations which explore the stance one takes on influences, the relationship between influence and authority, and assumptions about changing teachers' practices.

The Study

This paper comes from a multi-year study of the relationships between national, state, and local education reform efforts and school/classroom practices. The larger project explores these relationships in social studies, English/language arts, and mathematics. By exploring policy and practice relationships across multiple contexts, my colleagues and I expect to see themes and patterns emerge which might not be obvious in a single subject study.

Three questions frame this social studies piece of the larger study. One asks, "What sense do teachers make of state social studies reforms?" To address this question, we look at how teachers learn about reforms, how they interpret reforms, what (if any) changes in their classroom practice emerge, and how their responses change (if at all) over time. The second question puts the social studies reforms into a broader context and asks, "How do teachers' responses to multiple reforms interact?" Here we try to understand the array of reforms teachers may be attending to and how they make sense of multiple and possibly conflicting pressures. The third question aims to explain these various responses and asks, "What influences teachers' responses to reforms?" We consider the influence of policy factors (e.g., substance, clarity, coherence, systemic approach), organizational factors (e.g., norms/expectations, resources), and personal factors (e.g., knowledge/beliefs, dispositions, personal narratives, view of self as teacher/learner/professional).

Data are gathered primarily through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Interviews are conducted with state-level policymakers, local administrators at the district and school level, and with classroom teachers. Open-ended and broadly constructed interview protocols are developed for each group. Observations come in two forms. Teachers' classrooms are observed at least twice a year. Observation are typically done on a single classroom period over 2-4 days. Observation guides help field workers document and analyze, for example, the content taught, instructional approaches used, materials used. Finally, document analysis is conducted in several areas: state level reform documents, district and school-level policies, textbooks and other curriculum material, state and
The social studies portion of this study is being conducted in two districts, one urban and one suburban, that have undertaken their own social studies initiatives during the period of state-level policymaking and prior to the dissemination of state or national standards and curriculum frameworks. Eleven elementary, middle, and high school teachers and classrooms have been involved in the study.

The Context of Educational Reform in New York

Like their colleagues in other states, New York state policymakers have recently initiated a sweep of reforms. The centerpiece of that effort is the New Compact for Learning (New York State Education Department, 1991) developed under the guidance of former Education Commissioner Thomas Sobol. The authors contend that “gradual” changes will not suffice and that “dramatic improvements in educating our citizenry” (p. 2) are required. To that end, the Compact is a multi-focal effort to remake education in New York state with implications for stakeholders at all levels of the education system including the state, students, parents, teachers, administrators, school boards, communities, higher education, and business, industry, and labor. One of those implications is that traditional conceptions of state and local relationships must change.

We have learned that we cannot achieve the results we desire through top-down regulations alone. We know that we cannot wait for the necessary changes to well up from the bottom. What we need is “top-down support for bottom-up reform.” (p. 4)

A second implication is revision of curriculum, instruction, and assessment frameworks in all school subjects. State “syllabi” for school subjects have been published for many years. These guides, which describe a course of study for each grade, were most recently revised during the 1980s. Authors of the Compact assert that new “frameworks” will be developed. These frameworks will “state more specifically the skills, knowledge, and values students should acquire as a result of elementary and secondary education” (New York State Education Department, 1991, p. 4).

These two dimensions—support for local initiative and a continued state presence in instructional design—interact in numerous ways. One is that while the state role in developing curricula and assessments will not decline, educators at the local level are expected to assume greater responsibility for the specific instructional programs developed. According to the Compact, “The Regents will set statewide goals and desired learning outcomes...but they will not impose on schools and school districts a requirement to use State syllabi...” (New York State Education Department,
The implications of such a move are enormous. New York educators are accustomed to looking to the state for curricular direction through state developed and endorsed subject matter syllabi. The notion that teachers will be responsible for more of what happens in their classrooms and schools means new and important things can happen. It also means increased uncertainty over and multiple interpretations of the state policy may develop.

Social studies teachers, like their colleagues in all school subjects, have been waiting for the frameworks to arrive with various degrees of anticipation, hopefulness, dread, and ennui. But neither they, their peers, nor their administrators have been treading water. Instead there has been a boom of reform-minded activity at local levels. Administrators in the urban district we study encourage teachers to create authentic assessments for 9th and 10th grade students in the global studies sequence. A push toward new assessments is also underway in the suburban district as is encouragement to infuse multicultural education. These projects are interesting on at least two counts. First, they are largely teacher driven. The impetus has come primarily from district administrators. But in all cases, the project parameters are being constructed by district teachers. The second notable feature is that local reform efforts seem to be growing despite a strong continuing state presence. State efforts to influence teachers' thinking and practices have not abated. In fact, one could argue that the New Compact for Learning and the attendant curriculum frameworks suggest the state role is as strong as ever. Yet policy efforts at one level need not preclude those at others (Spillane, 1993). In New York state, local educators have generated a wealth of proposals at the same time that state policymakers are doing the same thing. If and how state and local actions intersect awaits further study.

The teachers we observe and interview know there are efforts to influence their content and pedagogical decision-making. As a group, they are more aware of local initiatives than state and they are more aware of state initiatives than national. One inference then is that while policy matters, it matters in no consistent, predictable, or prohibitive way. This claim rests on two observations. One is that the influences on teachers' content and pedagogical decisions are several and go well beyond policy of whatever source. The second is that the array of influences interact as cross-currents, pushing and pulling teachers in multiple directions. I take up the evidence for these assertions in the next section.

Cross-Current Influences on Teachers' Content and Pedagogical Decisions

What influences teachers' content and pedagogical decisions? Of these influences, which do teachers cite as authoritative? Kirst and Walker (1971) and Cornbleth (1990) emphasize structural considerations in their analy-
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Kirst and Walker focus on the "structure and process of political influence in the making of local school district curriculum policy" (p. 488) by making distinctions among national, state, and local levels. Drawing on Archer's (1984) work, Cornbleth notes that individuals and groups may wield influence, but she observes that "power resides...perhaps more importantly in social organizations, institutions, and systems..." (p. 100).

Viewing influences through a structural lens is helpful. Like all large social institutions, education can be profitably analyzed in terms of structural elements (cf. Meyer & Rowan, 1978). At the same time, however, an interpretative perspective offers an opportunity to explore structures from the inside (Cusick, 1983). This is important, for a structuralist perspective cannot illuminate a powerful dynamic—the individual construction of "structures" and the influences they may or may not have. Perceptive analysts such as Kirst and Walker and Cornbleth point out that structures are not immutable. As Cornbleth (1990) observes, "An education system conditions but does not determine outsiders' interaction with and participants' interaction within it" (p. 101). By highlighting the importance of context and the social construction of reality, an interpretative perspective can illuminate the complexity of individuals' actions within a nested set of distinct, but overlapping, arenas (Olson, 1980).

The Interaction of Personal, Organizational, and Policy Influences: An Example

In a later section, I map the range and provide illustrative examples of the factors teachers cite as influencing their content and pedagogical decisions. I group those factors into three categories: personal, organizational, and policy. These broad categories serve an analytic purpose, but they deconstruct as exclusive orders when one considers the notion of interacting influences. To foreshadow that point, consider this example from an urban elementary school:

Mr. Kite has been teaching fifth grade for three years, all in a magnet school with an explicitly traditional schooling mission. In a recent class, he constructed a lesson around artifacts—a pewter candle stick, a wooden hand plane, and hand drill stock—which might have been used in colonial America. He allowed students to handle the objects, ask questions, raise conjectures. The second part of the lesson was a KWL activity. Here Mr. Kite solicited examples of "things you know about colonial life." Students called out an array of ideas—oldest son inherits, no electricity, made lots of stuff, freedom of religion—which Mr. Kite listed on chart paper under the label "Know." Mr. Kite then labeled a second chart "Want to Know" and asked students for suggestions. Students again participated eagerly, filling the air with questions—How did they provide food? Were all the kids in the same (school)room? How did they get heat? How did
people live on so little food? Mr. Kite recorded these questions and encouraged more until the class ended.

"Colonial life" is a common curricular topic in fifth grade social studies. One might then anticipate that organizational factors swayed Mr. Kite's unit choice. He acknowledges that the state curriculum and the district guidelines figured into his decision. In the post-observation interview, however, I learned that Mr. Kite's decision to pursue this topic reflected a crosscurrent of influences which include personal and policy factors.

The influence of personal factors can be seen in two ways. One is that Mr. Kite's decisions reflect his understanding of history as a school subject. Mr. Kite believes fifth-graders are more familiar with social considerations than they are with political or economic. Given that this is his students' first formal encounter with American history, he focuses on colonial "life" instead of structures of government or economic outputs. A second personal factor is Mr. Kite's belief in interdisciplinary instruction. One reason he likes social studies is that it provides a site to "work it together with some of our other subject matter." In this case, Mr. Kite hopes to couple questions about colonial inventiveness with his science unit on discoveries and inventions. His students had just finished study of Benjamin Franklin's inventions. Mr. Kite hoped students would connect Franklin as colonist with Franklin as inventor.

If personal and organizational factors influence Mr. Kite's decisions, so too do policy factors. For one other reason Mr. Kite teaches colonial life is that he is required to give his students a district-developed social studies assessment and one of the questions asks student to compare colonial and present day life. The question begins, "Life is different today from the way it was in colonial America. Some things that have changed are houses, schools, occupations, entertainment, family, travel." The question is divided into two parts. Part A states: "From your list, choose three of the above six, list your choices, and for each of those choices, describe it as it existed in colonial America and describe it as it exists in America today." Part B states: "Using your notes from Part A, write an essay of about one hundred words describing the changes in America from its colonial days until today." Mr. Kite's instructional plan was to break the class into cooperative learning groups and assign each one of the designated topics—houses, schools, occupations, entertainment, family, travel. He expected each group would select relevant questions from the "Want to Know" list as well as develop their own. Students were to research these questions and present their findings to the class. The result: All students would receive the relevant information for the unit and the district assessment.

Did the district test drive Mr. Kite's decision-making? Perhaps. The match between the test question and his instructional plan would seem to support this contention. But it seems short-sighted to ignore the interaction of relevant personal and organizational factors. For one can imagine
Mr. Kite's colleagues might take quite different instructional approaches to "colonial life." It would not be surprising, for example, to observe that some teachers locate their instruction in textbooks and rely on worksheets and end-of-the-chapter questions to teach the relevant information. Others may use the textbook as a reference point, but develop a series of lecture notes which specifically outline points students could use on this question. Still others may not even address the test question explicitly. These teachers might take the position that any substantive discussion of colonial America would enable their students to do well on the exam. Each of these teachers might cite the district exam as influential. But as an example of a policy influence, testing pushes in no particular instructional direction and ultimately may hold no more authority over teachers' practices than personal or organizational considerations. Instead, each teacher's content and pedagogical decisions probably reflect a mixture of personal, organizational, and policy influences and what counts as authoritative becomes muddy.

A Swirl of Influences

The classroom lives of teachers are complicated, messy research sites. The example of Mr. Kite's lesson illustrates the difficulty of pinning labels like "influence" on any particular factor. Yet while Mr. Kite's instructional decisions reflect a complex of factors, all is not chaos. Currents and cross-currents of influence are discernible. Understanding how influences interact is important. To do so, however, requires some attention to explicating individual currents. Analysis of interviews and observations of the eleven teachers in this study generated a swirl of influences. In earlier work (Grant 1994; 1995), I use the broad labels "personal," "organizational," and "policy" as analytic constructs to categorize influences on teachers' responses to reforms. Here I further develop those constructs as a means of mapping and illustrating the currents of influence in this study. In the next three sections, I describe and illustrate several dimensions of each influence. Following that, I return to the notion of cross-currents by developing the notion of interacting influences.

Personal Influences

Though organizational or structural factors often get more attention (Richardson, 1990), personal influences on teachers' content and pedagogical decisions are widely acknowledged in the general literature on teaching. Those factors include personal knowledge and beliefs (Eisenhart, Shrum, Harding, & Cuthbert, 1988; Elbaz, 1983; Evans, 1989; McCutcheon, 1981), dispositions (Buchmann, 1986; Zeichner, 1986), professional experiences (Eisner, 1988; Lieberman & Miller, 1984; Lortie, 1975), personal and professional relationships (Dodd & Rosenbaum, 1986; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Rosenholtz, 1991), and personal history or narrative (Carter, 1993; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Goodson, 1992).
In this study, the array of personal influences cited include teacher's experiences as learners, interactions with family members, personal and professional beliefs, and the perceived nature of social studies as a school subject. A description and illustrative examples of each type of influence follow.

*Teachers' experience as learners.* Several teachers note the role their recalled experiences as students plays on their thinking and practice. Some describe learning experiences they have had since becoming teachers.

I didn't do cooperative learning until I went to the workshops. That was always the one area that was listed as something that I could improve...Well, if you're not trained to do it, you absolutely cannot come up with a way to do it properly. (#8/F/8S)

I'd been reading a lot of William Glasser's work....And I started off the year trying very, very hard to have a non-coercive environment in the classroom. Which is an interesting thing to do, because we're not in a—this school is not a non-coercive environment at all. It just doesn't operate that way. So I tried very hard not to be coercive. (#1/M/5U)

In the first quote, the teacher describes the effect of a district cooperative learning workshop. She has attended many others—learning styles, multiculturalism, multiple intelligences, conflict resolution. Unlike those, she brought the ideas of the cooperative learning workshop directly back into her classroom. The second quote is from a teacher who cites the influence of Glasser's control theories. Rather than a specific content or pedagogical influence, however, this example illustrates a teacher bucking both school norms and his own extant practice by trying to create a cooperative, non-coercive classroom environment.

Other teachers recall earlier learning experiences as influential, particularly those from high school:

In high school I think I was molded by the high school teachers who I had....Some of the guys who I liked the most were the social studies guys....I always enjoyed history; and I found that in the middle of that class we could talk about just about anything. (#3/M/8U)

I see that when it's just the content and all those facts, to me, that is the superficial short-term learning...because that's how I learned when I was in high school. I memorized my teacher's notes. We had notes everyday, I memorized [them]. I got hundreds on all the tests because I could memorize, but [if] you ask me some of those facts, I don't know....I learned it for a test. So I would like
to try and encourage and get more lifetime learning [for her students], and I think the only way you can do it is through some of this other higher-level thinking and de-emphasize some of the things about dates and places and peoples....(She continued) I think some of the activities, the debates...the group work...They had to find the facts, so they’re still getting the facts. But then they had to examine...these things. (#11/F/11S)

The first quote comes from a teacher who draws on a variety of materials and perspectives. To explain and perhaps justify his practice, he cites the influence of his high school teachers. The second quote presents a different angle on the notion of influence: the negative example. This teacher was highly successful as a student. Her instruction, however, is vastly different from that which she experienced. Upon reflection, she cites her high school experience as an impetus not to do what her teachers did.

*Teachers’ interactions with family.* Another set of personal influences revolves around family. The teacher just above describes how she and her husband, a middle school teacher, brainstormed an activity to help her students understand the affect of tradition on foreign policy development by exploring their own family traditions:

I kept brainstorming ideas of different things that I could possibly do and I started talking to my husband about it so we sort of evolved that together....I said, “I need something real quick that...that the children can come up with.” He often gives me some really good ideas....He wanted to know what exactly I wanted to do and we then sort of brainstormed it together and came up with that. (#11/F/11S)

A European American teacher suggests that his impulse to raise multicultural issues in class stems from the composition of his family:

I have two brothers; one of them lives in Tokyo and is married to a Japanese woman, and has a family that’s part adopted and part their own children. I have another brother who lives in Bangkok whose wife is Thai. I have a sister who lives in Colorado who’s married to a Mexican-American. I grew up in a very Catholic family, and I’m married to a Jewish woman. So I feel like multiculturalism is all around me. And I think it’s wonderful. (#1/M/5U)

*Teachers’ beliefs.* A third type of personal influence might be broadly described as teachers’ personal preferences. But a more useful way to think about these is as expressions of teachers’ beliefs where “belief” is defined as “a proposition, or statement of relation among things accepted as true”
Locating Authority Over Content and Pedagogy


The influence of teachers' beliefs is expressed in various ways. For example, an elementary school teacher asserts a general personal belief as a rationale for emphasizing geographic concepts:

Well... personally, I would want them to have a sense of geography. A feeling for continuance, you know, that one thing leads to another and you're building... a sense of what has been and a projection of what may result. (#6/F/5S)

Other examples are more specific. Here teachers cite particular beliefs that shape the instructional stance they take toward topics. Explaining how his personal beliefs about US imperialism influence his instruction, one middle school teacher said:

I would feel that the way my slant has been, that they see that imperialism isn't very nice. It's kind of like... taking something over. And just because you're strong you get to do it, and that's not always right. So I would hope that more [students] are against it from that point of view. So that they see that taking things isn't right.... I guess it's a moral sort of judgment value also, that I'm getting in there... and I'm perfectly OK with that. (#3/M/8U)

An African American high school teacher said her approach to teaching US history emerges directly from her beliefs about the knowledge and experiences of her predominately white students:

I'm going to often show some things that will make the white majority in my classroom angry because... some things that occurred, in my opinion, should not have occurred or some things that I feel were done wrong and [are] unjust, discriminatory. So I think you would see that if... I am presenting a 15 minute lecture, it will come out in that, or it will come out in activities that I will design, it will come out...

Asked for a specific example, she describes her unit on civil rights:

I think there's a strong angle there because I begin it with the black struggle. I really start that off with the 50s and the Brown decision, and the Rosa Parks bus incident, but... it evolves from there... it becomes inclusive of women and native Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans.... Sometimes students say that because I'm black I'm favoring the blacks.... I always start from their (blacks') perspective and really movements for civil
rights really start from that perspective [but] I never try to favor it. (#11/F/11S)

Teachers’ perceptions of social studies as a school subject. One last set of personal influences involves teachers’ perceptions of the subject matter they teach. A few teachers cited the need to “cover” content as an influence and that one could not escape what an elementary teacher called the “brutal facts.” More common, however, was the sense that, as a school subject, social studies allows one considerable content and pedagogical flexibility. One teacher put it simply: “One of the realizations of being a social studies teacher [is] you don’t have to just do it cut-and-dried” (#4/M/8U). Another teacher was more specific, citing the need to cover multiple perspectives:

The highlights of U.S. history aren’t changing...in 1831, you had Nat Turner revolting. Why? Because he was a slave and slavery is an ugly institution, it’s always going to be there. [But] you’re going to have to address it. You’re going to have to address it from all the points of view. Of the slave, of the abolitionist, of the slave-owner. (#3/M/8U)

Other teachers talked about the flexibility they assume to shape and re-shape resources based on their instructional goals. Here a middle school teacher describes how she would constrain a student’s writing on controversial subjects. As a social studies teacher, she “likes to point out both sides.” But this disposition is not universal:

...it depends on the topic. If the topic was the Ku Klux Klan, I don’t want them to see the side the Ku Klux Klan takes, that they think they’re right....If they wanted to do something on the neo-Nazis and they wanted to take the positions that they were right, then I couldn’t allow that. (#8/F/8S)

Though it may give policymakers’ chills, personal factors seem to influence teachers’ content and pedagogical decisions. Similar to others who have investigated personal influences on teachers’ beliefs and actions, this study suggests personal factors are not of a single type. Rather they encompass diverse experiences which are formal and informal, in and out of school, and current and past. Some reinforce teachers’ practices while others are a force to act against. What this means for teachers’ responses to policy is not clear. But what does seem clear is that personal factors influence teachers’ instructional practices and understanding how and why teachers think and act as they do means that these factors can not be ignored.
Organizational Influences

Teachers frequently cited the influence of personal factors on their content and pedagogical decisions. But teachers do not work in a vacuum. A second category of influences on teachers' instructional decisions then can be described as organizational.

The relevant literatures here are expansive. Some observers posit the influence of organizational cultures (Cusick, 1983; Hargreaves, 1994; Little, 1982; Sarason, 1980), organizational structures (Chubb & Moe, 1988; McNeil, 1986; Meyer & Rowan, 1978), and the nature of bureaucratic work (Lipsky, 1980). Still others cite the influence of organizational players such as teaching peers (Lortie, 1975) and school and district administrators (Spillane, 1993).

The data from this study reflect two types of organizational influence. Both center on the role teachers play within the education system. One type features the influence of individuals and groups located in a variety of sites: classroom, grade-level teams, school, district, and state. These people include students, teaching colleagues, principals, and district administrators, especially district social studies coordinators. The second type of organizational influence highlights the organizational context. This context includes organizational norms, structures, and resources. Here local factors are most obvious as teachers cite the influence of school factors more frequently than district.

The Influence of Individuals and Groups. All eleven teachers note the influence of district administrators. But their interactions with district administrators are limited. Teachers do not often cite superintendents or assistant superintendents as influential. Instead, they focus on the district social studies coordinator as representative of district policy.

The influence of district social studies coordinators is frequently mentioned. But the influences cited are not of a single form. Many of the references are general. For example, an elementary teacher said his coordinator was attempting to set an overall direction "to make social studies less multiple choice...more subjective all around" (#1/M/5U). Other teachers suggest that the coordinators play a general role in decreasing the amount of autonomy teachers held. A high school teacher notes that, before the current coordinator arrived, "There was much greater freedom....You were much less accountable, either for your students or what you taught." (#5/M/11U). An elementary teacher echoes this sentiment. She does not argue the need to tighten district content requirements, but she observes, "We've had...a lot of autonomy up until about when [the coordinator] came on board" (#6/F/5S).

Some teachers describe the coordinators as responsible for more specific influences such as encouraging attention to Black and Women's History Months. District coordinators also emphasize testing as this example suggests:
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...[the district coordinator] sent us a little memo saying, “The PET exams are coming, let’s all do well on the PET exams.” And she said, let’s make sure you know these concepts. And then, we have like 17 concepts that [students] have to know, about citizenship, and scarcity and change. And [I] go through those during the year...make sure that I throw the words out. I don’t know if I do it the way that [the coordinator] would like to see....We were talking about the Reconstruction, [and I said] now this is “change.” (#3/M/8U)

A second group of individuals influencing teachers’ content and pedagogical decisions is building principals. Here too influences are uneven. Some teachers argue that principals can have a profound influence on the classroom. One middle school teacher states simply, “Principal says, teachers do.” He continues, “It’s still a top-down system in each building, it’s a little fiefdom for the principal” (#3/M/8U). An elementary teacher who works in the same school provides a specific example:

[I was told to use] very little to no group work; very little to no peer tutoring. The principal we had at the time...[order] was his number one priority....When I found out I was assigned here and I met him for the first time...he said, “As you can see, the desks are in straight rows, and they’ll stay that way until I tell you otherwise.” So he was letting me know clearly that that’s what he expected. (#1/M/5U)

This example suggests that principals can influence teachers’ decisions. But teachers imply that much of what principals are concerned with lies at the fringes of teaching and learning. In this example, a high school teacher describes her interaction with the former school principal over grading:

He’s (the principal) real concerned, he’s always been concerned with statistics and numbers and tracking how well someone did on this exam or that exam, and...if the averages aren’t this high or whatever, he’ll send you a little note....So one year the teacher that lectures U.S. History and I, our averages were like 10 points off for a marking period. [The principal] didn’t understand why my students should have 10 points higher in their average than [her colleague’s] students did. I can see billions of reasons why....[But] he told us...that we need to meet and talk and see what we’re doing to see if we can’t get in line...[that] there’s no way you should be more than five points off in differences in averages.
Our colleagues, they didn’t appreciate it either, but ...one thing that I was told to do was that I could no longer...rate some of the other things I did as high as a test. Like they told me, the tests are supposed to be rated higher than if [students] are doing some kind of oral presentation or cooperative learning experience....I never heard of any such thing...[that in] your final compilation of grades, 2/3 should be test grades and only 1/3 for this other kinds of stuff....And like 95% of my stuff might have been the other kind of stuff and maybe only 5% [were tests].

My team leader [said this] was a school policy....So for a quarter, I had to make sure that I had enough normal-type tests so that 2/3 of my total points were test points. (#11/F/11S)

The teacher abandoned this effort after a quarter explaining, “I said, ‘The hell with it, I’m not doing that because that’s not the way I teach and that’s not the way I assess.’” She did not confront her principal with this action, but neither has she tried to hide it. She heard nothing from the principal.

One other group teachers perceive as influential is students. Every teacher in the study cites students as an important factor in their content and pedagogical decisions. In fact, students are more often mentioned as influences than any other factor. The prevailing sentiment is captured in this teacher’s assertion:

One of the things that we...have realized [is] you can’t do the same thing with every group. Because sometimes it will work. But a lot of times you find that there’s one group that just does not aspire to the same things that the other people do. So you have to work with them a little bit differently. (#4/M/8U)

Such sentiments will surprise few people. But within the teachers’ responses lies a potentially important conclusion: Students may have the most substantive influence of any group on both teachers’ content and pedagogical decisions.

Several teachers note instances where students influence the content taught. One urban elementary school teacher said her students’ exposure to “the raw side of life” forces her to “lower the level” of the content she teaches. Rather than pursue topics in the textbook or curriculum guide, she said she uses videos, maps, and puzzles to “try to be local, try to find something that they know about” (#2/F/5U). A high school teacher explains that he synthesizes the content of Supreme Court decisions taught during the year to help students answer Regents test questions:

They’re not used to...being that specific about anything. They think, “Well I know what Marbury [what Marbury v. Madison] was.”
Yes, but did you answer the question? That’s the key....I didn’t have time to go back and say, “Take your notebooks out, let’s go back to that case again.” What I did was I...homogenized the stuff and gave it to them. (#5/M/11U)

Yet another teacher claims he is more likely to use multicultural materials and introduce multicultural lessons based on his perception of his students’ prejudices:

I am looking at it more through my students’ eyes than I would have before I started teaching....Yesterday I was talking about my brother in Japan, and three or four kids started imitating Japanese language....For a lot of them it comes down to, you know, Ninja things and martial arts and stuff like that. I don’t have a sense that their understanding of, say, Japanese society goes anywhere beyond that. But I’m gaining an understanding of where they’re coming from...[that] there’s no comprehension that there’s even a difference between Japan and China, or Japanese and Chinese. So that’s something that you have to deal with...as you’re talking about one of the cultures. (#1/M/5U)

Finally, a high school teacher describes how she decided to abandon a prejudice reduction project after students reacted negatively:

After I went to [a] prejudice reduction workshop, I came back that next semester and incorporated a lot of that into my EPIG class. I did it on race relations in America, but it got so ugly I couldn’t do it again. (Q. How so?) I found it very hurtful. The students were resistant to hearing about it....Students said that I was creating the problem by bringing it up, and “We don’t need to be doing stuff like this”....And they made me feel so bad that I didn’t do it the next semester. (#11/F/11S)

Teachers’ pedagogical decisions are also influenced by their students. The teacher whose concern for multicultural topics has been heightened by his students’ attitudes, also asserted that he abandoned using cooperative learning groups as the year progressed and his students’ behavior deteriorated:

Probably December, January, February, we moved away from [cooperative groups] partially because we were working on these social studies projects, but part of it too was that their behavior at the end of December, January just was not real conducive to doing group stuff....They were getting out of hand and I was having difficulty managing their behavior and helping them to manage their behavior. (#1/M/5U)
Student discipline, or the lack of it, influences teachers’ decisions in other ways. Some teachers cite student maturity. A high school teacher explains that, while his eleventh grade students can handle historical simulations, his ninth and tenth graders “have a little difficulty with the reasoning process [and] sticking on the problem” (#10/M/11S). A middle school teacher notes, “A lot of it is battling for discipline instead of teaching.” This teacher said that the constant “battle” to manage his students prevents him from doing the “fun” things: “If it was a perfect world and they were just here to soak up knowledge, then we’d do a lot of fun things.” The result:

A lot of times we read out of textbook just because I know if we’re doing it in class it’ll get done. If I assign it at home, sometimes it won’t. Sometimes it will, sometimes it won’t. For certain kids, most of the times it won’t. (#3/M/8U)

One group teachers did not cite as particularly influential was other teachers. In contrast to findings by early researchers (Little, 1982; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1991), the teachers in this study generally did not note the influence of colleagues on their content and pedagogical decisions. The exception to that observation occurs in a suburban middle school where teachers work in grade-level teams. There teachers we observed did cite the influence of their colleagues. A typical example comes from an elementary school teacher who reported that, while she retains considerable instructional autonomy, the team decides what subjects each teacher will teach and what topics will be covered on big projects such as the district literacy assessment. She noted, “I can teach everything; I don’t teach everything. Because the way we departmentalize...I don’t really teach everything” (#6/F/5S). This teacher indicates, however, that team membership affects more than the subjects she teaches. She explains that her teammates, for example, have encouraged her to do more student writing, what she called “essay work,” than she has in the past.

The Influence of Organizational Norms, Structures, and Resources. Individuals and groups throughout the educational system are much cited influences. But some teachers also cite the influence of broadly conceived norms and expectations, school structures, and school and district resources.

There is considerable research into how the culture of schools influences teachers’ practices. The teachers in this sample talk about how building norms and expectations play out in their teaching. Recall the example of the high school teacher’s interaction with her principal and department colleagues around the issue of student grades. As she discovered, concern about inflated grades is not limited to the principal; she reports her department head and her colleagues hold similar views. Rather than a principal’s predilection, grading is covered by the cloak of a school norm.
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A high school teacher also talks about the influence of school norms. He teaches in a magnet school with an explicitly traditional academic and behavioral mission. He does not fully endorse that mission, but he feels bound to honor it:

Keep in mind that I feel that, since I’m working in a traditional school, that I have a responsibility to try to help carry out the curriculum of the school. Now for me to enter into some kind of open-classroom approach, that would work against the stated goals of the curriculum...I don’t think that’s right. I’m taking money for what I do here. (#5/M/11U)

This teacher claims that the traditional norms chafe. Given a teaching assignment in a less prescribed situation, he argues he would teach much differently:

I don’t belong in this kind of situation. I really have always wanted to teach in a very non-traditional, non-structured environment....And I’ve never been able to. So I—that’s why I want to leave this. I want to go somewhere where I...can just use what I believe is my talent. (#5/M/11U)

Along with organizational norms and expectations, teachers identify school structures as influencing their instructional decisions. For example, an elementary school teacher argues that his self-contained classroom is beneficial. “It’s a lot more work,” he said, “but you have a lot more flexibility.” Working in a self-contained setting, he claims, encourages him to develop peer tutoring programs and to teach in a more interdisciplinary fashion:

We’re self-contained in our classes here...The possibilities for having a more interdisciplinary or holistic classroom are...just so much stronger. And to me that makes sense. That’s how I see education. (#1/M/5U)

A high school teacher also believes school structures influence her work. But in her case, the organizational practice of allowing students to choose their courses has important drawbacks. Her classes are popular and she typically has 25 students a day more than her colleagues. Carrying what amounts to another full class of students affects her work load:

[My] class sizes are too large...to try and do things other than note taking and lecturing. It starts to become a nightmare in terms of grading and correcting and the backlog when you’re accept-
Though she perceives the workload as oppressive, she continues to make assignments she believes benefit students. In the case of student response journals, however, she abandoned the practice: "I was stopping them a lot last year because the reading was such a nightmare that I couldn't keep up. So after the first semester, I said forget it—I'm not doing this anymore."

This teacher's decision to stop requiring student journals reflects a common concern: the shortage of time. Time is perceived as a precious resource that can influence a teacher's decisions. But there are others. The availability of new technologies—computers, internet connections, audio-visual equipment—is described as influential by several teachers. The availability of and access to library materials is highlighted by other teachers. Those who have access to these resources said they help expand the dimensions of student assignments. Those teachers who lack these resources did not suggest that their instruction is fundamentally undercut for these resources generally seem of a secondary nature. Having them enables teachers and students to do certain activities. But as fundamental classroom resources—textbooks, overhead projectors, audio-visual materials—appear to be in adequate supply, no teacher said that his or her instruction is unduly compromised by the lack of physical resources available.

Aspects of this discussion of organizational influences seem surprising. One surprise involves those individuals and groups not mentioned as influential. For example, only one teacher mentioned the influence of parents, school board members, unions, and figures (e.g., politicians) outside the education system. Though principals cite these groups as influential (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995), these teachers do not. Another group conspicuously absent was teaching colleagues. Though Lortie (1975) and others report colleagues as a common influence, I found little to support that contention in this study. Where colleagues are mentioned, it is by those teachers who worked on grade-level teams. Beyond that group, teachers seem largely influenced by individuals and groups other than their peers. This last point is interesting for it seems Lortie was right on another score: The eggcrate organization of schooling remains largely intact. The data suggest that teachers' interactions are primarily with their students and that few teachers have much regular, substantive interaction with adults.

A second surprise is that resources are mentioned less often than one might think. It should be noted that urban teachers are more likely to mention a lack of sophisticated computer and networking capabilities than their suburban peers. But contrary to popular opinion, especially around urban schools, no teachers report going without essential resources.

One other point is perhaps less surprising: Teachers may interpret organizational factors as opportunities or constraints. Organizational fac-
tors are many and complex and it makes sense that teachers would perceive some influences as enabling or supportive and others as inhibiting. Other than the common concern about time, however, the data suggest no particular patterns.

Policy Influences

A third set of influences often mentioned in the general literature on teaching consists of policy concerns. Several observers speak to the general nature of policy to influence (or not) teachers' instructional decisions (Cuban, 1990; Firestone, 1989; McLaughlin 1987, 1990). Others (Cohen & Spillane, 1992; Porter, Floden, Freeman, Schmidt, & Schwille, 1988; Spillane, 1993) collapse several policy influences under the heading of "instructional guidance systems." Still others note the influence of specific policy factors such as curriculum frameworks (Grant, 1994; Jennings, 1996; Porter, 1989), textbooks (Cohen & Ball, 1990; Heaton, 1994; Stake & Easley, 1978), and tests (Corbett & Wilson, 1990; Madaus & Kellaghan, 1992).

The data in this study suggest teachers are influenced by textbook adoptions, testing programs, and curriculum directives. As with organizational factors, teachers perceive the implications of these influences across sites: classroom, grade-level teams, school, district, and state. It should be noted again, however, that the flurry of reform-minded activity at the national level is not widely perceived among the teachers in this study. Of the 11 teachers observed and interviewed, only one made mention of national reform efforts.

Textbooks. Textbooks figure prominently in teachers' talk about influences on their thinking and practice. But they do so in no single fashion. A few teachers reflect the practice of a middle school teacher who said he uses the textbook "all the time" and that "I make them read every page of it" (#9/M/8S). Most others, however, said they use textbooks flexibly, to support rather than bound their teaching. In fact, more than one teacher reports that textbook use is declining. An elementary school teacher put it this way:

I think, for a while there, we were using more textbooks — and straight textbooks — than we seem to be now...We'd read the chapter, answer the questions. Very little of that is going on now.
(#6/F/5S)

Most teachers, however, use textbooks and use them to define large portions of their instructional practice. This does not mean they do so uncritically. A high school teacher is pushing to adopt a new multiculturally-based textbook because the one she uses now is "so poor." A middle school teacher derided his textbook as "multicultural lite." He uses the supplementary texts available to augment his instruction. Both of these teachers use their textbooks more flexibly than many of their peers. But neither
imagines teaching without a textbook in hand. It would be a mistake to ascribe too much influence to textbooks, for one senses that they do not hold sway in quite the force common opinion holds. At the same time, however, there is no evidence to support a broad claim that textbooks are significantly less important now.

Assessments. Assessments also influence teachers' decisions. New York has an extensive standardized state testing program at elementary and middle school levels. The program is capped by a set of high school Regents tests which students must pass in order to graduate. Districts have also created their own assessments. The urban district, for example, has long used its own standardized tests along with the state-developed tests. This year, however, the district was selected as a field site for a state-sponsored effort at developing new assessments. These assessments have three components: multiple-choice items, essay questions, and class projects. The suburban district is also experimenting with new assessments. A literacy assessment was developed last year which requires students do a content area project. Whether test or project, assessments are frequently cited as influential on teachers' content and pedagogical decisions.

District assessments appear to push teachers in several directions. Concerned that their students do well, each urban teacher develops practice sessions on answering multiple-choice and essay questions. A middle school teacher, concerned that his students are inexperienced essay writers, said: "I'm trying to get them to be able to express themselves in a written form, [so] they have a basic idea of the setup of an essay" (#3/M/8U). An elementary school teacher gives his students sample multiple-choice questions from previous tests and discusses strategies for determining the answers.

District assessments also figure into suburban teachers' instruction. Though labeled a "literacy assessment," the project which suburban students develop must have a social studies or science topic. In the fifth grade classes observed, the teachers do projects on the US states. Each student chooses a state, creates a series of questions to answer, researches the questions, writes a report, and gives an oral presentation. As a district assessment, teachers are required to set aside class time for students to complete their projects. As one teacher explains, "The final project...is not the issue....The issue is the process they went through" (#6/F/5S). One result is that some teachers take as much as a month from the regular curriculum to do these projects.

High school teachers in both districts cite the Regents test as an influence on their instructional decisions. For example, knowing the content of past Regents tests figures prominently in the way teachers develop units throughout the year. A suburban teacher explains:

I always check the last couple years Regents to see how many questions they are asking because I don't want to overempha-
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size it (the topic). So I look at it from that point of view and then I set a balance and standard as to how important that I think it really is, whether they're being testing on it or not.

This teacher also uses the format of Regents questions to craft her own test questions over each unit:

I worded these [questions]...exactly as they would be worded on the Regents exam. I might have added some names to some of the categories, but it was like an old Regents exam question....This is another way of preparing them for essay writing. (#11/F/11S)

Another high school teacher also orients his instructional units and tests toward the Regents exam. In addition, he plans a two week review before the spring tests are administered. Much of the preparation aims at reviewing the content which will be tested. But he also devotes a substantial portion to teaching test-taking skills. He sums up his approach this way:

What I had to do is to teach them — literally, to teach them to answer the questions...What I’ve done is select problems, the 6 essays that have in some form or another been asked repeatedly. And I’ve focused on them...Every day I’ve taken one essay and gone through it and showed them how they can use the material they have before them, how to answer the question. (#5/M/11U)

The influence of Regents testing seems strong. Yet in some ways it is difficult to assess. The questions on the United States history exam, for example, typically represent the big names and events found in every textbook and curriculum guide. There are no surprises here. So while teachers appear to orient much of their instruction to the tests, other than the review sessions, it is not clear what they would do differently if the tests were not mandated.

Curriculum Policies. Another set of influences are bound up in the array of curriculum policies teachers encounter. Some of these policies come from the state. Each teacher knows about course syllabi and the New Compact for Learning. As of May 1995, however, only two teachers knew about the effort to develop new state subject matter frameworks. Other policies have local origins. Both districts, for example, created their own social studies curriculum based on the state syllabi. The urban district curriculum is K-6; the suburban district curriculum is K-12.

The teachers in this study know about state curriculum policies, but few consider them of much direct consequence. For example, though most seem to know what topics the state syllabus for their grade level requires, none cite the syllabus as a particular influence. Instead, they appear to turn first to other influences while keeping the state curriculum in the back
Locating Authority Over Content and Pedagogy

of their minds. An example is the way a high school teacher explains how she constructed a unit on imperialism and World War I. After describing the textbook units she intended to use and the activities she developed, she adds what seemed to be an afterthought: "This is part of the curriculum guide under the New York state syllabus under the five wars that we cover for the course" (#11/F/11S).

Teachers express even less sense of direct influence from the New Compact for Learning. One teacher put it bluntly: "It (the Compact) doesn't mean much to me on a daily basis, at all" (#3/M/8U). Another teacher is more optimistic. "People have been asking for some kind of direction," she said, "We can't keep doing our own thing and hoping we'll all make it at the end....This gives us a sense of that [end]" (#6/F/5S). At the same time, however, she sensed that the message of the Compact might be lost in the 'hue and cry" debate over educational issues.

One of the few teachers who claims to embrace the Compact said she uses it as a "checkpoint" when she develops her instructional units. She also believes it will push her (and her colleagues) to make fundamental changes in their content and pedagogical decisions:

I think it's going to force us to realize that students learn differently and, whether we want to or not, we're going to have to find a variety of teaching strategies so that we can meet their learning styles....There's an emphasis on problem solving and critical thinking skills for students in the New Compact, and I think to get to that we're going to also have to diversify our teaching methods. To just straight lecture, all you're asking students to do is either memorize what you've said to them, and they just spit it back out to you. To me, that is not critical thinking. That is not analysis on their part. That is not synthesizing putting things together and incorporating them into the real world. (#11/F/11S)

Teachers also cite district curriculum policies as influential. The suburban district generally expects teachers to follow the state syllabi. But a decision was made to modify that by reversing the fourth and fifth grade curricula. Now fourth graders study American history and fifth graders study the geography of Canada, the United States, and Latin America. A fifth grade teacher notes the adjustment she had to make in teaching new content: "It's a tremendous undertaking," she said, "the whole western hemisphere!" (#6/F/5S).

District curriculum policy also influences Mr. Kite, the urban elementary school teacher described earlier. He likes the district version of the state syllabi which focuses on 10 concepts. He said it represents a more "holistic" view than he had expected to find and he is not bothered that the "ten concept goals are what drive the entire [curriculum]."
The examples above suggest that, along with personal and organizational factors, policy factors also influence teacher’s content and pedagogical decisions. Teachers attend to policy influences across all three sites: school, district, state.

Sorting out which influences are more authoritative than others, however, is difficult on two levels. First, some teachers conflate state and district policies. The example just above illustrates this point. Mr. Kite avers that he teaches the 10 social studies concepts expressed in the district curriculum. He seems unaware, however, that district administrators appropriated those concepts from the state social studies syllabi. This example raises two issues. One concerns the nature of an influence. We might wonder, for example, what the influence is here. Is it the “original” source (the state) or this teacher’s conception of the source (the district)? A second question concerns the authority of the influence. Here we might ask what, if anything, would this teacher do with these concepts if they carried no district imprint? Would they carry more or less weight if he knew they came from the state?

Understanding the relationship between influences and authority is also difficult on another level. Those factors which are commonly accepted as the strongest and most authoritative—textbooks and tests—do not influence teachers in consistent or predictable directions. Teachers talk about textbooks, but they use them in various ways and to various effects. Similarly, teachers talk about tests, but other than setting aside review time, teachers differ in the sense that tests affect their instruction.

Mapping the influences teachers cite results in a huge array of factors—personal, organizational, and policy. Two points seem worth exploring. One is which influences are mentioned. Some seem obvious. School norms and resources, textbooks and tests are familiar dimensions of the school context. We should not be surprised to hear teachers mention them as influences. But other factors, especially those in the personal realm, seem more surprising, though this may be an artifact of the perspective researchers have taken to date. Also interesting is that national standards were not mentioned as influences. It is not clear what this means. But here the contrast between social studies teachers and other subject matter teachers is striking (Grant, 1994). Whereas mathematics teachers, for example, tend to be quite familiar with initiatives like the NCTM standards, only one of the social studies teachers in this sample mentioned anything about national standards.

A second point is that factors which appear to influence one teacher may not influence (or influence differently) another. The New Compact for Learning is a case in point. Where one teacher asserts that the Compact “doesn’t mean very much to me,” another said she uses the Compact now and believes she will make an array of instructional changes in the future. This point underscores the issue raised above about the difficulty understanding the relationship between influence and authority. What counts
as an influence and whether influence means the same thing as authority is not at all clear.

The Interaction Of Influences

Mapping the array of personal, organizational, and policy influences is illuminating. Teachers may act as "gatekeepers" of the teaching and learning students experience (Thornton, 1991), but they do not do so in a vacuum. Teachers assign influence to individual factors such as textbooks and district curriculum guidelines. Yet this data suggests that influences often interact, acting as a swirl of cross-currents rather than a single, coherent stream. These cross-currents may be perceived to signal different and even competing impulses. Not surprisingly, teachers react in various ways. In some cases, they seem frustrated and uncertain. In others, teachers appear to perceive cross-currents as opportunities to justify and advance their own agendas. In all cases, however, it seems that teachers have considerable control over what they listen to and how they respond. Influences then are only potential. They seem to matter, but only as teachers comprehend and decide to act (or not) on them.

Before developing these ideas, however, let me illustrate some ways in which influences interact. Consider these examples of personal and organizational, personal and policy, and organizational and policy interactions.

One form of interaction can be seen between personal and organizational influences. Personal factors include teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and experiences, their interactions with family members, and their views on social studies as a school subject. Organizational factors include the individuals and groups teachers come in contact with and the norms, structures, and resources s/he encounters. On one view, the examples above suggested that these influences can be separated. But viewed from another angle, the interaction between these influences emerges.

Consider this example:

I'd love to do some stuff about literature throughout history. But I see myself probably going more and more to notes and lecture, which is dull, but it is getting the material across and you keep the kids in line....In the second period class, I was having great discussions and open-ended, flying back and forth ideas, [but] not in the third or the eighth, and not very much in the first. (#3/M/8U)

This quote from a middle school teacher illustrates the interaction between his personal inclinations and his students' behavior. One might argue that "going more and more to notes and lecture" will exacerbate rather than alleviate problems keeping students "in line." But in terms of influence
this is an irrelevant point. For as this teacher makes instructional decisions, his professional beliefs interact with his perception of student reaction.

“"What we teach is pretty much set in stone by the state....The trouble is you can’t get to it all, so you have make choices” (#7/F/5S). This teacher expresses a common perception: Policymakers may issue mandates, but teachers must decide how they are enacted. Thus a second form of interaction can be detected between personal and policy influences. Here one sees instances where teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, and experiences interact with state, district, and school-level policies.

An elementary school teacher provides another example, this time around the state New Compact for Learning. The teacher embraces the state policy, but less because it is a state initiative than the fact that he interprets it as consistent with his own views. “I think from what I’ve seen and heard [the Compact is] a direction that I’d probably have been moving anyway," he said, “...I haven’t really seen...elements of it that make me uncomfortable” (#1/M/5U). This example illustrates a common observation about the interaction among influences: Teachers interpret organizational and policy influences as justifying their pre-existing beliefs.

A third type of interaction is evident between organizational and policy factors. Here one can see examples where teachers’ content and pedagogical decisions reflect intersections between organizational influences such as individuals, norms, and resources and an array of policy directives.

An example of organizational and policy influences interacting can be seen in a suburban high school teacher’s dilemma of too many students. This teacher knows that a district policy sets maximum class sizes at 25. She also believes the New Compact for Learning supports smaller class sizes. Yet because she teaches required courses and students like them, building administrators are loathe to turn them away. As a result, she averages almost 30 students a class. She said she would like to make more and more substantive assignments. But she finds the resultant workload oppressive. To keep up, she sometimes scales back assignments like journal writing at mid-semester. Otherwise, grading students’ work becomes a “nightmare.”

This example illustrates the notion that influences can push in multiple and perhaps competing directions. The teacher just above faces a complex situation. On the one hand, she works hard to engage and stimulate her students. On the other hand, she is “rewarded” with overflow classes. In effect, the more she does to enrich her students’ classroom experiences, the greater her workload increases which, in turn, pushes her to cut back on the very activities that make her classes successful.

One last example of cross-current influences illuminates how all three sets of factors—personal, organizational, and policy—can interact. Here an urban high school teacher, Mr. Reynolds, talks about a range of competing interests that figure into the way he prepares his students to take the state-level Regents test in United States history.
Policy influences are immediately apparent. Mr. Reynolds takes the Regents test seriously. He chooses subject matter that reflects exam questions. For example, he emphasizes the United States Constitution, in part, because the first eight multiple choice questions and one essay cover this material. Mr. Reynolds also studies how the essay questions are constructed. He knows, for example, that the verbs used in question stems—describe, discuss, explain, show—call for different types of responses. Finally, Mr. Reynolds schedules three weeks for review before the test administration. During that time, he reviews relevant content and test-taking skills he believes his students will need to do well.

Mr. Reynolds' concern about his students' test-taking skills reflects several organizational influences. He believes his students come to class with few skills and little confidence in taking standardized tests. He senses that the students know the material but need to learn "how to answer the question." Essay questions are broadly constructed which proves problematic. If students do not immediately know how to answer all parts, Mr. Reynolds believes, "They panic right away." As a result, Mr. Reynolds spends a considerable amount of time reviewing both the content of test questions and how to answer them. For example, he encourages students to "look for things that you know, rather than looking at the things you don't know." Mr. Reynolds says that he would like to do "more," but finds that time is against him. Covering the state curriculum would be difficult under any circumstance. Setting aside time to review only exacerbates the time pressures. For example, Mr. Reynolds would like to provide more time to practice essay writing. But, he explains, "I just don't have time for much of it."

Thus far Mr. Reynolds' situation sounds much like that faced by most high school teachers: Too much to do in too little time. But in this case, Mr. Reynolds' decisions are influenced by more than policy and organizational factors. Personal factors also figure in for Mr. Reynolds suggests that his own experience as a student taking standardized tests shapes the way he thinks about preparing his students:

I mean I used to get lost in that I had no idea exactly what I was allowed [to do]...One reason I wasn't a very good high-school student [was] I didn't have that...understanding of what was required to do well on exams. So...I teach them that. How to read, write, and study, and all of that.

Mr. Reynolds remembers the anxiety he felt not knowing how to approach test questions, what he was "allowed [to do]." In the narrative he constructs to describe and explain his practice, he cites this experience as relevant.

This example illustrates the notion that influences can push in multiple and perhaps competing directions. Policy influences—in the form of
state-level tests—figure prominently in Mr Reynolds’ instructional decisions. But also prominent are his personal experiences and the organizational context. As in the earlier profile of Mr. Kite then we can identify individual currents of influence. These currents appear to interact in myriad ways, however, such that questions of what counts as an influence and what authority influences carry continue to be problematic.

Some Considerations

Three considerations seem relevant to this preliminary analysis of influences on teachers’ content and pedagogical decision-making. One concerns the stance the researcher takes vis-a-vis interpretative and structuralist perspectives. A second highlights the relationship between influence and authority. One last consideration elevates assumptions about reforms as a lever of classroom change.

In a study of influences on teachers’ decision-making, it might seem odd to begin with a consideration of the researcher’s stance. But in an area as ripe for interpretation as this, perspective takes on added relevance. Let me say first though that, while obvious, it should be noted that the question of influence is mine, not the teachers’. Influences may be the subject matter of a teacher’s quiet reflections, dinner table conversation, and faculty lounge discussions. It is my interest in understanding the factors which affect teachers’ instructional decisions, however, which undergirds this study.

That said, let me suggest that my analysis undercuts two theoretical perspectives that drives much of the research in this area. First, there is no evidence here to privilege structuralist views. The policy and organizational structures of teaching have been much explored. But the assumption that it is structures which define teaching has not. Structures, even the “hidden” ones, are definable and identifiable. And it makes sense that teachers’ decisions are influenced by the individuals and groups, norms and expectations, bureaucratic structures and resources, initiatives and mandates they encounter. Structuralist investigations into how these factors influence teachers, however, generally ignore personal factors, the individual knowledge, beliefs, and experiences teachers bring to bear on their thinking and practice. From a structuralist perspective, Mr. Kite’s instructional decisions then would be understood in light of the relevant policy and organizational factors. Missing or sidelined would be the role personal factors such as his beliefs play.

If there is no evidence to substantiate a structuralist view, neither is there support for perspectives which promote the individual and dismiss the influence of policies and organizations. Policy and organizational factors may be less important than structuralists contend. But as a part of the teaching context, it seems naive to discount them. I take an interpretative stance throughout this paper. That stance highlights the importance of
context and the ways individuals construct meaning. This perspective would be just as short-sighted as the structural, however, if it ignored the "common" reality of policy and organizational factors. Teachers interpret school norms, district tests, and state policies differently. But the frequency with which these factors are mentioned can not fail to impress. Mr. Kite's instructional goals, for example, might well lie well beyond the district social studies test. His personal commitments to cooperative learning, non-coercive teaching, and interdisciplinary instruction appear to influence his classroom decisions. But observing how closely elements of his practice mirror the district test question suggests that the policy and organizational factors matter.

I offer a third perspective. Evidence of personal, organizational, and policy factors percolates throughout this paper. But these factors explain neither discretely, generically, nor consistently. Rather than dichotomize influence into fixed and immutable structural or perfectly relative individualistic perspectives, I suggest an interactional view. Simply put, this view holds that teachers construct idiosyncratic personal realities within a social reality of broad commonalities. I argue that policy and organizational factors influence teachers, but only as those factors interact with teachers' individual knowledge, beliefs, and experiences. What teachers know and are willing to do influences their instructional decisions. But their decisions also reflect their interpretations of policy and organizational realities. In short, teachers' content and pedagogical decisions develop in contexts which they help shape and, in turn, are shaped by.

A second consideration involves the relationship between influence and authority. I believe an interactional perspective helps describe and explain teachers' instructional decisions. But no theory explains all behavior. So we are left with some uncertainties and one of those is how the constructs of influence and authority are related. Describing what counts as an influence and assessing what authority it carries becomes more complex in an interactive view rather than less. Factors which seem authoritative in one sense seem less so in others. Rather than apply uniformly and consistently, influences are fluid, situational, and contingent. Recall the example of the suburban high school teacher who seemed to bend to her principal's will on grading. She modified her evaluation measures and values to accord with his wishes and what was explained as a school norm. Yet a semester later, she stopped and returned to her original procedure. Where does the authority lie here? In the principal's strong, but ultimately unfulfilled expectation? In the teacher's initial acquiescence or her final decision? To underline the complex relationship of influence and authority, consider this: Could we predict with any degree of certainty how this teacher would respond should the principal repeat his request?

This example raises numerous questions about if and how influences become authoritative. But it also helps illustrate two important and related points. One is the importance of context; the other is the role of con-
structured meaning. The example suggests that neither what counts as an influence nor what power an influence carries can be profitably discussed in the abstract. Instead, what teachers pay attention to (i.e., what counts as an influence) and the significance they assign it (i.e., what is authoritative) are contextualized and reflect an individual construction of meaning.

The considerations of perspectives on influence and relationships between influence and authority have implications for a third consideration: assumptions about reform as a means of classroom change. Put another way, if policies, especially those featuring new conceptions of teaching and learning, are to influence teachers' thinking and practice, what does this study contribute to understanding how that might happen?

If we put the notion of policy as ideas together with the notion that influences are individually constructed and are contextualized within a large interactional mix, then we can see both the problem and the promise of educational change. Problems seem to abound. For example, if teachers themselves construct the meaning and authority of influences, then what hope exists for policy as a means of directing meaningful changes across all classrooms? It's a thorny question. It assumes that teachers are equally as able to interpret reforms as inconsequential and/or avoidable as the reverse. It also assumes that even if teachers interpret reforms as a positive influence, their efforts to enact them may be confounded by other powerful influences which push at cross-purposes.

There may be no way off the horn of this dilemma. Among other things, the decentralized nature of American schooling virtually guarantees that what one teacher constructs as an authoritative influence will mean little or nothing to another. But it would be a mistake to see only the dark side. The "problem" created by contextualized and constructed influences can also be viewed as a possibility. For if some teachers can construct classroom lives which ignore new approaches to teaching and learning, others can embrace new ideas and approaches, constructing them as distinct and powerful influences on their content and pedagogical decisions.

The buzz of curriculum standards is loud today. Some number of teachers may well respond by listening selectively or not at all. Others may listen, but feel constrained from embracing them. And still others may interpret reforms as profound opportunities and act on them in ambitious ways. Reforms, like any other influence, guarantee no predictable or consistent result. And if we understand that the influences teachers respond to are multiple, interactive, and run at cross-currents, we may need to rethink our conceptions of and assumptions about changing classroom practice.
Appendix A
Interview Protocols

[What follows is an edited version of the initial and post-observation interview protocols used in this project. The full protocols are available upon request. The analysis for this paper, however, draws largely on a subset of questions from the larger interview guide. Those questions are listed below.]

Initial Interview Protocol

1. What does teaching and learning look like in your classroom? (Does this approach work better/worse in some subjects? Does this approach work better/worse with some topics? Does this approach work better/worse with some kids?)

2. How has your approach changed over time? (In response to what? Do you anticipate any changes in the near future? Why do you want to move in those directions?)

3. How have the conditions of teaching changed since you started? (Have those changes affected what and/or how you teach? Examples?)

4. What, if anything, is new/different in your social studies classes this year? (Is there anything new in your classes this year with the curriculum? the textbook? your approach to/method of teaching? your curriculum materials? the students you have this year? testing/assessments? organizationally in your school or district?)

5. Have you heard about the New Compact for Learning (NCL)? (What have you heard? How did you learn this? What are your impressions of the NCL at this point?)

6. What difference, if any, will the NCL make? (What implications does the NCL have for you? What have you done? What changes do you anticipate?)

7. Is there anything new/different your school is doing in social studies this year? (What, if anything, is your principal—or other administrator—doing with social studies?)

8. What, if anything, is your district doing with social studies this year?

9. Have you heard of any changes in what New York state is doing in social studies? (What have you heard? How did you hear about it? What are your impressions? What implications do these changes have for you?)

10. We have been talking about the New Compact for Learning. Are there other changes that you are responding to now or in the recent past? (What are they? Where do they come from? What implications do these changes have for you?)
Appendix (Con't.)

Post-Observation Interview Protocol
1. Please talk to us about what you hope your students will learn in this unit/topic?

[We then focus on a few activities or segments of the observed class as the basis for the next questions which we ask of each activity or segment.]

2. Where did you get the idea to do this?

3. Why did you decide to do this?

4. Have you always treated this activity/topic this way?

5. How do you think the students responded to this activity/topic?

Notes

1 This paper has profited from close and thoughtful reading by Jennifer Beaumont, Catherine Cornbleth, Julia Marusza, Dennis Mike, and Donald Schneider.

2 Funding for the research around this paper was provided by the Professional Development Network, sponsored by the Graduate School of Education at the University at Buffalo. In addition to the author, data for this paper was gathered by the research team associated with the Fallingwater policy-practice study: Catherine Cornbleth, Steve Kutno, Julia Marusza, and Kim Truesdell.

3 An edited version of the initial and post-observation interview protocols is included in Appendix A.

4 Thomas Sobol resigned as Commissioner effective July 1, 1995. His successor is Richard Mills, former Commissioner of Education in Vermont.

5 The six principles of the Compact are: 1) All children can learn; 2) Focus on results; 3) Aim for mastery; 4) Provide the means; 5) Provide authority with accountability; and 6) Reward success and remedy failure.

6 One indication is the number of variances to state mandates granted by the NYS Education Department. A Department official reports that applications for variances have increased dramatically from a couple dozen to over 800 in the last few years.

7 All proper names are pseudonyms.

8 KWL is an instructional strategy (Ogle, 1986) that calls for students to 1) list what they Know about a topic; 2) list What they would like to learn; and, 3) after the instructional unit is complete, decide what they have Learned.

9 This essay is one component of the district assessment. Of the two other parts, one is a multiple-choice examination of social studies concepts.
while the other is a project which each teacher designs individually. Mr. Kite's students did individual projects on the states of the USA.

10 A note about labelling teachers and quotations: Where my purpose is to develop mini-cases of influences on teachers' content and pedagogical decisions (e.g., Mr. Kite), I chose to identify the teachers with pseudonyms. In this section and the next three, however, my purpose is different. Here I develop analytic constructs: personal, organizational, and policy influences. To do so, I draw heavily on teacher interviews and observations. But because I am interested in constructing analytic categories, I take two approaches to labelling teachers and quotations. When I am referring to teachers in the text, I identify only those characteristics (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, grade level) that seem directly relevant. For quotations, I use codes rather than names to identify the teachers speaking. I recognize this decision may be perceived as de-humanizing. This is not my intent, but rather to focus on the constructs and make the paper more readable. Thus quotations are coded as follows: the number assigned each teacher (e.g., #8)/gender (M or F)/grade level (5, 8, or 11) and district (U-urban; S-suburban).

11 It should be noted here that the two districts studied employ individuals with specific responsibility for social studies. How teachers in districts without these individuals might talk about district influences awaits further study.

12 EPIG stands for Effective Participation in Government. It is a one-semester course required of all New York state twelfth-grade students.

13 The state first tests students' knowledge of social studies in grades 6 and 8. The high school-level Regents tests are divided into two levels. The traditional Regents test combines multiple-choice questions with essays. Passing this test has been long considered an indication of quality. In the 1980s, the Regents Competency Test also employs multiple-choice questions and essays, but it is a less rigorous test.

14 The 10 concepts are: change, citizenship, culture, empathy, environment, identity, interdependence, nation-state, scarcity, and technology.

References


Locating Authority Over Content and Pedagogy


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Multicultural Education at the Graduate Level:
Assisting Teachers in Gaining Multicultural Understandings

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Abstract
This reflective narrative explores ways in which graduate level teachers can be assisted in gaining multicultural understandings through semester-long multicultural education courses. The narrative stems from the collection of documents (e.g., questionnaires, assignments, journals and projects) and introspection by two teacher educators in different universities, one in the Midwest and the other in the Northeast USA. The authors worked primarily with White students, but the experiences of students of color are chronicled as well. The authors consider strategies that assisted in the development of multicultural understandings and raise questions for further empirical research.

This paper explores the development of multicultural understandings (i.e., perspectives and knowledge bases) among teachers within two graduate courses for multicultural education. The courses were located at different universities, intended for somewhat different teacher populations, and taught by the authors. This paper is a generative, humanistic research endeavor which seeks insights fundamental to questions for empirical research (Longstreet, 1982). It is written in a narrative, reflective format intended to encourage inferences and interpretations that respond to the complexity of the task in question. The goal for this paper is the discovery of questions in need of further research.

* The authors write together often. It is their practice to alternate names as first authors. Each author contributed equally to this paper.
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Developing Multicultural Understandings

Over the last two decades an increasing amount of attention has been paid to multicultural education. This attention responds to civil rights demands, demographic changes, and strong commitments to educating all children, including those historically marginalized by schools, to high standards of academic achievement. Originally, demands for multicultural education were generated by disenfranchised communities in order to gain more responsive, relevant, and rigorous education for their children. Over time, organized social action flagged and links between educational change and community-based interests decreased. Discussion about providing multicultural education increasingly became the province of educators (Sleeter, 1996).

Within teacher education, a robust discourse developed concerning the preparation of teachers for multicultural education. Most of this discourse is directed to undergraduate education (Grant & Tate, 1995). Given the normative course structure of teacher education programs, multicultural education usually is considered as a single course (Grant & Secada, 1990; Gollnick, 1992). A considerable literature suggests content for multicultural courses (e.g., Baker, 1983; Gay, 1977; Nieto, 1996; Sleeter, 1995; Sleeter & Grant, 1994; Zeichner, 1996). Recommendations include: (1) develop a clear sense of ethnic and cultural identity; (2) develop high expectations for academic excellence for all students; (3) come to understand society's historical responses to cultural pluralism; (4) become knowledgeable about the contributions and perspectives of the ethnocultural groups that comprise society; (5) develop respect for home-school connections; and (6) come to understand one's own discipline from a multicultural perspective. The development of these perspectives and knowledge is a long term process of personal reeducation and transformation (Nieto, 1996) that proceeds through stages of awareness, acceptance, and affirmation (e.g., Baker, 1983; Bernstein & Cabello, 1989; Grant & Melnick, 1978), ethnic development (Banks, 1987) or positive racial identity development (Cross, cited in Tatum, 1992; Helms, 1990; Tatum, 1994).

Empirical study of the development of multicultural understandings is limited. However, a growing wisdom of practice (Shulman, 1987) case study literature describes multicultural teacher education courses based on professors' reflections on their own teaching. These narratives indicate that many pre-service teachers lack foundations for learning about multicultural issues (Ladson-Billings, 1991; Sleeter, 1995), experience discomfort, and in some cases resistance, to multicultural knowledge (Ahlquist, 1992; Lesko & Bloom, 1995), and need to develop identities positive to cultural pluralism (Hollins, 1990; Tatum, 1994). These trends are especially pertinent to many White teachers who struggle with attitudes of supremacy and ethnocentrism and lack cross-cultural experience (e.g., Sleeter, 1995; Tatum, 1994). A few descriptions of graduate level courses indicate that
these teachers have similar needs and responses to undergraduates (e.g., Boyle-Baise, 1995; Dillard, 1994; Hidalgo, 1993; Sleeter, 1993). Strategies for developing multicultural perspectives and knowledge have emerged from this literature and include: autobiographical study, pluralistic curricula, student construction of knowledge, restructured field experiences, examination of culturally relevant pedagogies, and experience with expert teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This paper responds to this research. A number of the strategies mentioned in this literature were used in our classes to assist teachers in gaining multicultural understandings.

Approaches, Perspectives, Categories, and Questions

Given the understanding that gaining multicultural perspectives and knowledge is a process of personal change, we approached our teaching from a developmental perspective. We were not entirely comfortable with the stage-based notion of learning (e.g., Banks, 1987; Tatum, 1994), rather, our teaching experience indicated that the process was less linear, more uncertain, and marked by advances and retreats in understanding. We planned to respond to individual differences in the awareness, knowledge, needs, and interests of our students—one of us termed this “beginning at the beginning” (Gillette, 1996). We intended to spend a good amount of class time introducing fundamental concepts like culture and ethnicity, developing autobiographies, presenting background information related to cultural pluralism in the United States, and providing opportunities for self-directed student learning about aspects of cultural diversity. We thought of this as developing “multicultural mindsets,” and considered this foundational for curriculum development. The creation of actual lessons and units was reserved for independent research projects. We had many doubts about fair ways to approach evaluation, it seemed that we might find ourselves grading degrees of multicultural awareness. To some extent, as with developing a knowledge base, traditional evaluation was appropriate, in other cases, such as reading an autobiography, it was not. We decided to address evaluation directly with students. One of us used a contract system; students agreed to receive certain grades based on accomplishing set criteria for assignments. One of us had students develop grading formats for different assignments.

There is no definitive orientation to multicultural education. The field is marked by conceptual diversity that is debated even among proponents (Gay, 1994). For this reason, we define the orientation to multicultural education that operated within our classes. We approached our teaching from a multicultural and social reconstructionist perspective (Gay, 1995; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). This perspective advocates the transformation of schools as social institutions to promote equality and challenge inequity. This perspective aims to prepare teachers to think of themselves as cultural workers, cultural critics and change agents (Giroux, 1993). Teachers are encour-
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aged to regard schools as a cultural sites capable of promoting equality and inequality and regard themselves as mediators of this process. Teachers and students develop a stature of critique toward the status quo and attain skills for civic action toward social justice. For us, this translated into helping teachers perceive themselves as cultural beings, develop habits of critique, and gain some knowledge of the ways equality and inequality operated within U.S. society. If possible, we planned to facilitate curriculum development that integrated these ideas into the content and process of classroom teaching (Banks, 1993).

Our goals for the students were:

- to develop understandings of their cultural identities and to understand the impact of their beliefs, values, and knowledge on their teaching;
- to develop understandings of the ways their historical "places" in society determined their perspectives;
- to develop a knowledge base about multicultural education that included historical analyses of cultural diversity in the United States;
- to develop a knowledge base about historically oppressed groups in the U.S.;
- to develop understandings of the ways schools produce inequities as well as facilitate equality, and
- to begin to develop strategies and materials that applied multicultural concepts to school settings.

It will be seen from our narrative that we did not focus on all these goals equally. Our teaching tended to target the first three goals, while student projects tended to be directed toward the fourth goal. We used similar teaching strategies to accomplish our goals: autobiographical analysis, pluralistic curricula, lecture, dialogue journals, and students-as-curricula.

The examples from our teaching, described here, are not meant to serve as ends in themselves, but rather to motivate questions for further study. Along this vein, we were especially concerned about the ways in which our teaching spoke to key aspects of discussions about gaining multicultural understandings. These central domains of discussion serve as a conceptual/analytical framework for our teaching narrative.

The Meaning of Multicultural Education

Several theoretical frameworks have captured the multifaceted and complex nature of multicultural education. Banks (1993) defines five key dimensions of the field: prejudice reduction, content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school community. Sleeter and Grant (1994) define five approaches to the field: teaching the
exceptional and culturally different, human relations, single-group-studies, multicultural education, and education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist. Gay (1994) argues that all fields of study are characterized by conceptual diversity, and this should not be mistaken for conceptual confusion. Teaching about multicultural education, however, can mean very different things. For teachers who participated in the numerous short-term, sensitivity-oriented, in-service workshops devoted to multicultural education (Sleeter, 1990), this concept is likely to translate to celebratory add-ons to regular curriculum which skirt issues of racism (McCarthy, 1990). What can be learned from our teaching that responds to issues of meaning? What arenas of meaning demand further study?

Race and Ethnic Identities

What happens within multicultural courses has much to do with who is there. Ninety percent of teachers are White, most are female, middle class, and often have limited experience with cultural diversity and oppression (Garcia, 1994; Haberman, 1989; Howey & Zimpher, 1990; U.S. Department of Education, 1993). Research indicates that White teachers are not explicitly conscious of their race and ethnicity, and fail to perceive their values and behavior as culturally-grounded (e.g., Hidalgo, 1993; Hollins, 1990; Tatum, 1994). Tatum (1994) found that it was possible for White pre-service teachers to develop positive racial identities, but this required the recognition and abandonment of individual and institutional racism. Several studies found resistance was part of such identity development (e.g., Ahlquist, 1992; Lesko & Bloom, 1995; Tatum, 1994). In addition, there is some indication that teachers of color are more committed to working with culturally diverse students than many White teachers (e.g., Irvine, 1990; Sleeter, 1992). In what ways did race and ethnicity impact upon our teaching? What concerns suggest further study?

Nature of the Content

Wisdom of practice research focuses on consciousness-raising, especially related to cultural pluralism and structural inequality (e.g., Ahlquist, 1992; Sleeter, 1995), and ethnic identity development (e.g., Hollins, 1990; Tatum, 1994). It is acknowledged that teachers need to develop knowledge bases about ethnic minority groups (e.g., Baker, 1983; Suzuki, 1984), but little research addresses this aspect of multicultural preparation. Several studies indicate that background information is needed before pre-service teachers can engage in discussions about inequality (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1991; Sleeter, 1995). What does the curriculum-in-use in our classes suggest about the content for multicultural courses? Based on our teaching, what questions are raised about content that need additional research?
Knowledge Construction

To approach knowledge as constructed is to acknowledge that what is worth knowing has social, cultural, and economic roots. From a multicultural and reconstructionist perspective this means examining knowledge critically to reveal biases toward the histories, views, and contributions of one or more ethnocultural groups (Banks, 1993). Sleeter (1995) found that constructing knowledge via original research projects helped pre-service teachers discover information about sensitive issues that they might have questioned coming from the instructor. In our classes, teachers develop original research projects related to an aspect of cultural diversity of high interest to them. What do these projects suggest as avenues for further research related to knowledge construction?

Inside Multicultural Courses

Our reflections in this paper stem from documents (e.g., pre/post course definitions of multicultural education, assignments, journals, projects, and course evaluations) collected over a year of teaching multicultural courses at the graduate level. For another paper, one of us used an ethnographic document analysis technique to examine students' projects (Gillette, 1996). For this paper, we referred to the documents to stimulate our thinking and substantiate our recall as we discussed concerns common to and emerging from our classes. Outstanding examples from this data are used here to illustrate the nature of our course experiences.

Our teaching, though similar, contained differences that stimulated comparisons. We worked at two universities, one in the Midwest and another in the Northeast (USA). One of our courses was elective, the other course was required. The former course led to a certificate noting completion of the experience. The latter was part of a master's degree. In the elective course, the majority of teachers worked with culturally diverse students in varied educational contexts. In both courses a number of teachers were recruited via word of mouth by former students, this was especially true of teachers of color. However, in both cases, advanced collegiate study was related to salary advancement.

Ninety percent of the teachers in our classes were White and female, as are we. However, each of our courses enrolled several students of color, some of whom were not classroom teachers (in an average class of twenty, two students were of color). We want the voices of women and men, White teachers and those of color to be heard, and we take pains to note differences that emerged in our classes, but given the fact that males were in the minority and there were few teachers of color in our courses, our remarks are extremely tentative and strongly related to the individuals making the comments noted here.

According to questionnaires given at the outset of the classes, the majority of White teachers entered our courses admitting to being unfa-
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Familiar and sometimes uncomfortable with diversity issues. Many of these teachers had not had significant friendships or working relationships with people substantially different from themselves. Most had met people in college from different cultural backgrounds, but few reported having long-term, in-depth experiences with people of color. Most entered class unsure of the difference between multicultural and global education, and equated multicultural education with teaching about people different from themselves, most often living outside the United States.

Teachers of color usually were familiar with issues of diversity and comfortable interacting with people from majority and minority ethnic groups. However, in journal writing, many of these teachers revealed that this was the first time material written by people of color predominated the curriculum, multicultural issues (e.g., racism, oppression, power) were discussed openly, and they felt proud of their group membership.

Autobiographical Analysis

Each of us devoted a significant amount of time at the beginning of courses to multicultural autobiographies. Dillard (1994) described this strategy as one that encourages students to realize that their experiences are part of the multicultural curriculum. Students were asked to analyze their life experiences and write papers that described themselves through a multicultural lens.

In preparation for this task we stimulated self-reflection. Class discussions centered around autobiographical readings (e.g., Pang, 1988; Rodriguez, 1982; Rose, 1989; Stalvey, 1989) and videos (e.g., *The Color of Your Skin*, 1991; *Eyes On The Prize*, 1986). Questions addressed in these discussions included: Who am I as a cultural person? What are my beliefs about diversity? What are the roots of these beliefs? How do my beliefs influence my attitudes towards others? Questionnaires were completed that addressed personal, formal and informal schooling experiences (e.g., how many teachers of color did you have, what were the demographics of the schools you attended?). Students created I-culture diagrams in which they outlined important dimensions of their lives (e.g., religion, family background, first-language). Students also participated in life history activities, in which they reflected about their knowledge, values, and constructed meanings of diversity (Dominice, 1990).

From our standpoint as professors, students' autobiographical analyses often began somewhat superficially. Students tended to describe significant events, but limited the analysis of their experiences. Initial drafts of White students’ papers rarely discussed White privilege, male privilege, or power and oppression. Most students reported having worked for hours on their papers, remembering incidents and experiences that they came to examine in new ways. We believe that the process was as important as the product. In one class, students were required to submit their autobiographies twice. The first paper was considered an initial draft and
the professor’s feedback raised reflective questions throughout. An addendum, or second draft, was required at the end of the class. This required that students reconsider their experiences based on class discussions, readings, and experiences. Students reported that the autobiographical activities done in class, and the struggle to write their papers, caused them to consider the limits of their experiences and examine their tacit beliefs.

The nature of the autobiographical analyses were somewhat different for students of color and White students. For some students of color, the assignment helped them “remember my roots, get back to who I am” (G.M., 1993). For others, it meant reviewing painful racial incidents in their lives and relating them to a broader social context. A Puerto Rican male recalled the following incident:

My feelings of inferiority first surfaced in junior high school when I was bused to a predominantly White school. While many teachers hit me with psychological blows...this was not enough for some students who came after me with chains, rocks, and bottles. I was not alone though, the few other Latinos and blacks got equal treatment...These feelings of inferiority have grown and stayed with me until today...I’m finally and for the first time starting to realize that I’m not inferior, in fact, I’m superior because most people would have given up a long time ago. (C.M., 1994)

For White students, accounts revealed the beginnings of awareness about inequalities and inequities. As the courses progressed, we began to explore the idea of “whiteness” and the privileges associated with being White. We also began to investigate the notion of “otherness” and the struggles associated with being of color. The papers served as the beginning of a long process of reflecting on one’s self through a multicultural lens. The following journal comment from a White female student illustrates this on-going reflection:

In rereading my autobiography, it became apparent that I didn’t realize the many privileges that I have received by being White...By being White I received the benefits of having many doors open to me. The fact that I am a woman does not have nearly the same impact on future goals as color does...I also realize how much discrimination and racism I must have missed. The amount that I now notice makes a powerful statement to me. I find that on many television shows, in newspaper articles etc., that a discriminatory or racist idea is being expressed...It was surprising to me, that these things were left out of my autobiography. (J.M., 1994)
The autobiographical papers became quite personal and the issue of grading students was significant. We struggled with this issue and settled on a pass/fail (A or F) basis for this assignment. This seemed to calm student anxieties and foster willingness to delve deeper into personal beliefs and experiences.

**Pluralistic Curricula**

One of our goals for the course was for students to understand the role of place, voice and perspective. While we did not use all of the same materials, the primary course readings fell into two categories; readings by people of color about multicultural experiences and articles by scholars of color and White scholars about White racism. Additionally, we spent a considerable amount of time reading different conceptions of multicultural education, written by proponents, and critiques of multicultural education, written by opponents.

Sometimes this reading was assigned and completed as is traditional in college courses. At other times, students participated in “multicultural literary societies” where they read and shared novels in small groups. Students posed questions for the class based on their readings, wrote book reviews, and led discussions.

We often invited guest speakers to share personal experiences of community activism to assist students in understanding the role of activism in multicultural education. At times guests spoke in a panel/discussion format about an issue in the local community and its relationship to multicultural education (e.g., spending tax-payer dollars to build a new school in a middle-class neighborhood when one was also needed in a poorer area). At other times, individual guests spoke about diversity issues of personal relevance. As an example, an undergraduate student who was openly gay and the leader of the Student Association, and two wheelchair-bound students who had to fight for access to campus facilities shared their experiences and activism. These personal stories provided concrete examples of people who take action for equality.

We used video tapes and role play situations to provide content information and vicarious experiences. Videos provided factual evidence and the voices of people experiencing marginalization (i.e., *A Personal Matter: Gordon Hirabayashi vs the United States*, 1992; *In the White Man’s Image*, 1992). Role play offered students the opportunity to publicly apply their thinking to vicarious situations. While it is easy to agree with multicultural theory, acting out a scenario challenged students’ beliefs and assisted them in analyzing inconsistencies, thus sharpening their thinking.

For many White students, this was the first time they had been asked to read and listen to material from historically oppressed groups. A White female commented, “I could not believe the video *In the White Man’s Image*. How could that happen in our country and...I not learn about it? Long
after class, I felt sad and angry, I couldn’t stop thinking about it all week” (K.J., 1994).

For students of color, such experiences affirmed long-held beliefs that had gone unexplored. A Puerto Rican male wrote in his journal:

I just finished reading *The Education of a WASP* [Stalvey, 1989]. I read this book so zealously, at the expense of doing other school work, without understanding why...I am coming to understand that I did so because it was adding fuel to the rage that has been building up inside me. This book, written by a Caucasian, shed light on many of the points about discrimination...which I have been arguing for years. (C.M., 1994)

**Lecture**

We both used lecture sparingly and sought to relate lectures to the readings, building a knowledge base for multicultural education. Lecture was used to describe theoretical frameworks and present statistics that directly challenged status quo conceptions of schooling, society, and diverse groups. As one example, we used Sleeter’s (1995) topology of dominant and minority position perspectives on society in conjunction with Stalvey’s (1989) *The Education of a Wasp*. Students identified examples of Stalvey’s shift from a dominant to minority view, detailing the manner in which her perspectives were challenged as she developed personal relationships with African Americans. Also, we used Sleeter’s (1995) analysis of oppression framework to examine personal stories about racism in the Stalvey book. Students reviewed stories, such as neighborhood opposition to home purchases by Black families, to find ways in which popular beliefs, media, and images acted to block individual efforts or desires. For White students, this approach allowed them to analyze someone else’s experiences before examining their own beliefs. Students of color often affirmed the minority position perspectives written about in the Stalvey book. For example, a student of color described the continuing difficulties of getting home loans (later a White female reported that she went home to examine the deed on her parents’ 150-year-old home and found deed restrictions).

**Dialogue Journals**

It took time, in a one-semester course (especially when it was a program requirement), to establish an environment where students felt free to raise questions and critique classmates. One key to establishing an on-going dialogue with students was the use of journals. Additionally, we did not give exams in our courses. While this led some students to take the courses less seriously, we believed that the conversations we created with students in dialogue journals documented their thinking about the course material and allowed us to raise questions and prod thinking through private communication.
The journal took various forms. Most kept notebooks of written responses to the readings and class activities. Students also used alternative means such as audio tape, appointments to discuss the readings on an individual basis, and e-mail to complete the journal assignment. Students turned in entries in many forms; poetry, essays, and clipped newspaper articles that related to readings.

Participation in journaling was graded. Students used a self-assessment form to grade themselves based on evidence in their journals that documented their achievement of the goals for the assignment. If there was a disparity between the professor’s view and the student’s view on the degree to which goals for the journal had been met, final grades were negotiated between professor and student. This rarely occurred. It was more often the case that students gave themselves a lower grade than the professor.

Journal entries were characterized, for the most part, by honest and deep personal reflections, the nature of which varied among White students and those of color. White students often expressed a range of emotions (e.g., amazement, anger, uncertainty) associated with realizing there was much they did not know. Students of color frequently used the journals to remember, acknowledge, and analyze experiences of discrimination. Students reported that keeping journals was work intensive, but the practice assisted them in synthesizing new knowledge. As a final journal entry, an African American female wrote:

In all my time at the college I never enjoyed a course more...I’ve taken a look at society from a different perspective and I’ve grown a little. Not a day goes by that I have not verbalized something I’ve gotten from the class, although I admit the work load was heavy. (M.Y., 1993)

Students as Curricula

Listening to the personal experiences of other class members was one of the most powerful interactions within the class. It was helpful to have some degree of diversity in the class to offer a range of experiences and foster a willingness to understand the perspectives of others. The safe space required for sharing personal experiences was modeled and built through respectful listening over time. As the semester progressed, the students become more willing to speak openly and honestly about their experiences. As an example, an African American female stated in class that she could empathize with recent guest speakers, one of whom stated that sometimes he woke up in the morning and wished he were not in a wheelchair. She stated, “You know, some days I get up and think, I don’t feel like being Black today. I just don’t feel like dealing with all that comes with it” (S.D., 1995). A White male responded with sudden realization:
I never thought of this but not one day in my life have I woken up and thought, I don’t feel like being a tall, White male today. I guess that’s power of privilege. I want to thank Sheila for saying that because until I heard her say that, I never thought about how it feels to be me and...how it might feel differently to be someone else. (M.H., 1995)

The next two strategies describe self-selected student assignments. One is the pursuit of a “Why?” question (Sleeter, 1995). The other is the development of an original project. Both assignments helped us meet the diverse experiences, needs and interests of the students in our courses. Also, the assignments helped us model a constructivist approach (which is also considered an important aspect of multicultural pedagogy) in which students design and take charge of their own learning. Students selected a topic that stimulated them to ask why, and developed a project relevant to their levels of multicultural understanding and personal interests. We served as guides and facilitators for the projects, often directing students to more critical views of their topics.

The why paper has been discussed in detail by Sleeter (1995); we describe a variation of it here. For this assignment, students posed a why question related to an aspect of diversity and answered it through literature written by members of the group relevant to the question. Students could also interview members of the group(s) studied, but this needed to be approached with caution so that students did not ask strangers to tell all.

As an example, a White male student in one of our classes posed the question, “Why is the Native American high school drop-out rate so high?” To answer this, he attempted to use traditional library search methods (e.g., ERIC search and on-line catalog searches) and came up with virtually no material. He then went to state agencies that supported Native issues and located some pertinent documents. His next step was to phone federal agencies for copies of reports and documents pertaining to his question. The results of his work were three-fold: he developed an in-depth, historical analysis of American Indian education in the United States; he developed a bibliography of materials and resources to share with the class; and he began to question the mainstream literature found in the library. He began to understand that the concept of privilege went beyond personal experience into academic knowledge.

The development of original projects required students to put their developing understandings of multicultural education into visible forms. Projects were conceived by the students and sharpened into focus through individual meetings with the professor. Project ideas were shared with the class in order to foster a communal response and sharing of ideas. Students were required to present their project results at the end of the semes-
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ter in some type of formal presentation. The criteria for evaluation of the presentations were determined by the class.

These projects were mixed. Many students used them as opportunities to learn more about single-groups. Examples of single-group studies included: studies of the elderly, gays and lesbians, and American Indians. Three students designed projects that focused on their own ethnic backgrounds, conducting oral history interviews with elderly family members and researching immigrant experiences in the United States. Students actively teaching often developed school-based projects. Curricular projects included: researching diverse women in science and rewriting a traditional male-dominated science curriculum to include the contributions of these women; developing a nutrition unit based on traditional foods found in Latino communities for a school with a large Puerto Rican population, developing video pen pals among students from mainly White and Black inner city schools, and creating a bulletin board display about notable African American women.

Many of our students did not move beyond multicultural education as human relations (Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Proponents for this approach advocate tolerance and harmony and speak about celebrating cultural differences. Often, this translates to cultural “add-ons” to the regular curriculum in the form of special days or units of study. However, when students started from their knowledge base and perspectives, we saw significant shifts in perspective, even when the project began superficially.

As an example, one White male, a self-proclaimed conservative Southerner who avoided examining race, class and gender in class discussions and assignments, proposed to investigate ageism (an ism that was not discussed in class prior to his project proposal). When his project was discussed in an individual meeting, it became clear that the topic for his work was elderly, White people. The professor strongly encouraged him to do a race, class and gender analysis of fixed-income living for the elderly in relation to food, clothing, shelter, and medical expenses. A meticulous researcher, the student found what to him were shocking statistics about poverty levels, health care access, and life expectancy of non-White and female senior citizens. His data supported a conclusion that he readily presented to the class, people of color and women were often left unprotected in their later years due to the cumulative effects of discrimination. It is fair to say that had these conclusions been presented by the professor, the student might have resisted incorporating them into his thinking.

It was often difficult for graduate students to accept these types of assignments. The culture of schooling tells students that the professor determines the assignments, sets the grading criteria, and evaluates the final result. Many students spent several weeks agonizing over the selection of questions and projects. Some students intimated that the professor was abdicating professional responsibility. Once over this initial reaction, we found that students worked hard on topics that were personally relevant.
and increased their knowledge base, usually about one aspect of cultural diversity.

Learning from Students and Ourselves

Earlier in the paper we raised a number of questions with probable merit for empirical research. We now return to these questions, consider our teaching in light of them, and suggest avenues for further research.

The Meaning of Multicultural Education

What can be learned from our teaching that responds to issues of meaning? What arenas of meaning demand further study? Pre- and post-course definitions of multicultural education indicated that students were able to make a clear distinction between multicultural and global education, and that their overall conceptions of multicultural education fell within the parameters of the human relations approach (Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Most students focused on people of color as the primary recipients of multicultural education, used platitudes and buzzwords (i.e., appreciate diversity, celebrate differences) without defining their meaning, and wrote about appreciating culture as opposed to challenging inequality. The idea that curriculum should represent multiple perspectives was a common theme, but only a small number of students provided examples of what this meant. It was difficult for some students to write their own definition. Instead, several used quotes from the text saying, "I agree with Nieto when she says...." with no further elaboration. In contrast, a few students focused on the need for systematic, collective social action and saw themselves as change agents in their definitions.

Assisting teachers in gaining multicultural understandings means different things for different people. In our experience meaning-making seemed idiosyncratic. It depended on prior life experiences, especially experiences with cultural diversity and inequality. For example, the student who developed a nutrition unit from a Latino perspective was a mature, White woman who had experienced parenthood, divorce, job-related sexism, and cross-cultural relationships. She was eager and motivated to learn more about cultural diversity. In our classes, people of color were receptive to the construction of multicultural knowledge bases. It is quite likely that people of color, who have attained the status of graduate students, have succeeded in their own cultures and the dominant culture, and have bicultural adeptness. They have achieved the philosophical and experiential grounding necessary for developing multicultural understandings. In comparison, many White teachers in our courses had only begun to recognize themselves as members of ethnocultural groups and realize that all groups are not treated equally. At the end of the course, most of these students indicated positive attitudes toward multicultural education; in their final presentations and addenda to autobiographies, they spoke and wrote
about intentions to gain more cross-cultural experiences and knowledge about cultural diversity. They perceived themselves as taking the first steps toward multicultural study.

We know that a few students went much further, often on their own, to deepen and extend their knowledge and perspectives. Several students elected to complete Master's theses on topics such as gender equity, multicultural literature for adolescents, and community leadership from a multicultural perspective. A small group became members of The National Association for Multicultural Education and attended national conferences. Some of these students formed a multicultural coalition to continue learning together and offer support to like-minded colleagues (Boyle-Baise & Washburn, 1995). One student wrote a letter to the local newspaper defending multicultural education in response to an editorial critique of the state's multicultural curriculum. Another joined the campus Black and Latino Student Association, and picketed the college president to make the campus more conducive to diversity. Some students elected to take further multicultural courses.

Our teaching indicates that meaning-making may relate more to the students as individuals than our courses per se. Some students have life experiences that incline them toward equity issues. Others seem more willing to swim against the tide or "rock-the-boat" of traditional education (Sleeter, 1992). The process of coming to understand multicultural education seems quite developmental, dependent on the characteristics of students. In our classes, the bulk of time was spent constructing foundations for understanding cultural diversity and confronting inequality. In what ways is the development of multicultural understandings dependent on prior experiences and knowledge? What can be learned about the ways that students from different racial, ethnic, gender, and social class backgrounds construct meanings of multicultural education? How should multicultural education courses be structured to allow for the development of multicultural understandings? These questions suggest areas for further empirical research.

Race and Ethnic Identities

In what ways did race and ethnicity impact upon our teaching? What concerns suggest further study? Although we used a variety of methods, readings, and inquiries, it seemed that we barely scratched the surface of White students' understandings of themselves and others, and barely explored and extended the understandings students of color brought to the class. It was fairly clear that most White students left our courses with a new awareness that their experiences were different from those of people of color in complex ways that represent the interrelatedness of ethnicity, class, and gender. Also, it seemed that students gained more explicit understandings of their own ethnicities, and this ameliorated resentful feelings held by some students toward those with strong ethnic affiliations.
For students of color the course was often painful, yet affirming. Most talked openly and honestly with their White classmates about personal experiences with racism. As seen in the quotes provided in a previous section, being in a course where the perspectives of people of color were privileged supported students of color. They were encouraged to speak out in class and regard their ethnic identity positively.

In these courses, and similar courses we have taught over time, we had a few White students who expressed anxiety about self-examination, remained staunch in their arguments that the “isms” of schooling and society were remedied in the Civil Rights Movement and resented having to read so much material by and about people of color. It is not within the scope of this paper to fully address these forms of resistance, however, our experiences, especially in required courses, were similar to those discussed by Ahlquist (1992), Ladson-Billings (1991), and Lesko and Bloom (1995). We noticed that those who expressed doubt about course work often dropped out of elective courses, but those in required courses sometimes became resentful. “Resisters” denied group-identities and attributed differential experiences to individual racism or sexism. They clung tenaciously to traditional views that marginalized people should “pull themselves up by the bootstraps” because “we are all Americans.” To some extent these views were changed through the experience of doing original research projects. However, the projects of resisters tended to contain the most superficial analyses of inequality.

We recognize the limitations inherent in being White and teaching a course in multicultural education (Boyle-Baise, 1995). We are ourselves “outsiders” to the perspectives of people of color and cannot lay claim to experiences of racism. We teach from a position of privilege, yet we are able to share similar journeys of discovery to those we initiate with students. We have spent years developing our own ethnic identities, understanding our positions of dominance, and seeking positive White racial identities. We share our struggles and successes with students and encourage them to see reeducation and transformation as long-term processes for all of us.

Race and ethnicity impacted upon our classes in multiple ways; they were dimensions of identity that each of us brought to class and confronted on the road to multicultural understanding. We wonder how the composition of multicultural classes influences what is taught there. In what ways does the race and ethnicity of the students and the instructor influence what happens in multicultural teacher education courses? How are issues of race and ethnicity addressed in these courses? We suggest these questions for empirical research.

Nature of the Content

What does the curriculum-in-use in our classes suggest about the content for multicultural courses? Based on our teaching, what questions about
content need further research? Students' journal entry data is fairly consistent in describing the influence of initial class activities (i.e., autobiography, readings, and videos) on raising students' consciousness about ethnicity, gender, class and sociocultural equality. The why papers and original projects gave students the opportunity to focus on an aspect of cultural diversity meaningful to them. In essence, the content in our classes responds to what Sleeter and Grant (1994) term the "single group studies" approach. This approach involves studying the histories, contributions, issues, and perspectives of single ethnocultural groups and examining the struggles of these groups toward sociocultural equality. As our teaching examples indicated, and as the research projects demonstrated, students seemed focused on singular experiences of difference. In comparison, a more interrelated orientation to race, ethnicity, class, and gender characterizes multicultural education (Sleeter & Grant, 1994).

Given the backgrounds of our students and the expansion of multicultural education to include the concerns of multiple marginalized groups, we grow increasingly frustrated by how much there is to cover and the institutional constraints of traditional course structure. We debate the single group studies approach. We wonder if a course on race and ethnicity alone would facilitate deeper understandings on the part of more students (Tatum, 1994). What kind of structures are amenable to the study of complex issues related to equity? Should there be a sequence of multicultural education courses devoted to various types of equity issues? Is there a way to think about multicultural education that goes beyond traditional course boundaries? These questions are suggested for further research.

Knowledge Construction

What do original research projects suggest as avenues for further research related to knowledge construction? Our experiences with student projects and why papers helped us trust students as the best indicators of their own "places." For us, it was futile to attempt to move students to levels of understanding deeper or more complex than they were ready or willing to accept. As students submitted proposals for their projects and verbalized their rationales and designs, gaps between espoused and actual multicultural beliefs were illuminated for us. Through individual meetings and collective, collegial sharing of project ideas students began to articulate and defend their beliefs. "Give and take" between student and professor, students and students seemed to assist class members in sharpening their ideas and considering a fuller range of diversity issues related to their projects. Ultimately, the projects were completed by individuals and reflected the student's current thinking on a chosen aspect of multicultural education. We have, at times, been disappointed with the results (e.g., curricular units that contain stereotypes, or surface examination of important issues); however, we have come to recognize that, despite our best
efforts, students bring different viewpoints and experiences to the course that affect their understandings and interpretations of course content.

Working with original research projects has strengthened our understandings about multicultural education as a developmental process. For our students and ourselves, a lifetime of monocultural education cannot be reversed in one course. What can self-selected research projects tell us about gaining multicultural understandings? What does a developmental approach mean for the notion of content coverage? What content is appropriate for an initial multicultural education course? These questions beg further research.

Going Further

The intent of this exploration of our teaching was to generate insights that could lead to further research. Our multicultural teacher education courses were primarily foundational. We think that a good deal can be done in these courses to achieve goals such as: understanding and placing oneself in an historical, sociocultural context; and developing a knowledge base about multicultural education that includes historical analysis of cultural diversity in the United States. Initial steps can be taken toward learning about historically oppressed groups and questioning social and structural inequities. However, there is a good deal of differentiation among students in the achievement of these goals. As we re-examine our courses, students, and teaching we find ourselves continually asking, is this the best we can do?

What approach to multicultural education is most appropriate for introductory multicultural teacher education courses? How can we encourage students who differ by race, ethnicity, social class, gender, and experiential background to come to fuller understandings of multicultural education? In what ways can the different interests and needs of students be engaged in multicultural studies? What alternative course structures better facilitate student understandings of cultural pluralism, equality, and equity? We charge ourselves and encourage other scholars to pursue these questions, especially through the kind of empirical research so needed to inform the discourse about multicultural teacher education.

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Negotiating Dissonance And Safety For The Common Good: Social Education In The Elementary Classroom

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Abstract

Effective education requires a balance between cognitive dissonance and emotional safety. This relationship is particularly important in the social studies, where the broad goal of societal improvement necessitates the contemplation of sensitive social and personal issues. Nonetheless, dissonance and safety are often decontextualized, unintentional, offered without adequate support, or unidirectionally applied to some situations but not others. This paper draws from a variety of sources, including data from a recent investigation of the social studies in the state of Delaware (Houser, 1995a; Thornton & Houser, 1994), to analyze existing imbalances between cognitive dissonance and emotional safety in the elementary classroom. I explore the relationships needed to promote social development for the common good within our pluralistic society and suggest that an affectively safe classroom environment can and should serve as a necessary backdrop for addressing controversial social issues even in the earliest of grades.

Education involves a balance between cognitive dissonance and emotional safety. This relationship is particularly important in the social studies, where the broad goal of societal improvement necessitates the contemplation of sensitive social and personal issues. Nonetheless, the literature from a variety of sources, including a recent investigation of elementary social studies in the state of Delaware (Houser, 1995a; Thornton & Houser, 1994), suggests that dissonance and safety are often decontextualized, unbalanced or isolated in classroom practice. For many teachers, these goals are viewed as mutually exclusive. Emotional safety is given greater priority, and the dissonance that does occur is often unintentional, offered without adequate support, or unidirectionally applied to some situations but not others. This paper draws from a variety of sources, including data from a recent investigation of the social studies in the state of Delaware (Houser, 1995a; Thornton & Houser, 1994), to analyze existing imbalances between cognitive dissonance and emotional safety in the elementary classroom. I explore the relationships needed to promote social development for the common good within our pluralistic society and suggest that an affectively safe classroom environment can and should serve as a necessary backdrop for addressing controversial social issues even in the earliest of grades.
out adequate support, unrelated to the students' lives, or unidirectionally applied to some situations and students but not others.

This paper examines the nature of existing imbalances between cognitive dissonance and emotional safety and considers the kinds of relationships and processes necessary to promote social development for the greater good of society. First, I explore the concepts of cognitive dissonance and emotional safety and discuss their relevance for social education. Next, I examine current relationships between safety and dissonance in the classroom. I conclude with a discussion of implications for practice.

Cognitive Dissonance, Emotional Safety & Social Development

Although social educators differ over specific goals and approaches, most agree that promoting the greater good of society should be the primary focus of the social studies (Banks, 1987; Barth, 1984; Hertzberg, 1981; Newmann, 1975; Stanley, 1985). Thus, one way to think about social education is to consider the extent to which classroom practice promotes social development (i.e., the development of social understandings, sensitivities, and identities) conducive to broad societal improvement. At minimum, such development would require increased understanding and identification with a broad cross-section of sociocultural others, critical social and self-examination, the construction of knowledge, skills and convictions needed to advocate equal opportunity, and a willingness to regulate one's personal actions for the greater good of society (Banks, 1987; Barth, 1984; Giroux, 1985; Greene, 1988; Hartoonian, 1991; Houser, 1996; Noddings, 1992a).²

Like other forms of psychological growth, social development involves a balance between cognitive dissonance and emotional safety. The importance of this relationship to the social studies is profound. To better understand the processes and functions of dissonance and safety in social education, it will be useful to begin with a discussion of the interactionist assumptions developed by Piaget and others.

Piaget's basic epistemological perspective is well known. He began with the premise that humans are cognitively active beings who, throughout life, experience, interact with, and interpret information within the environment. As these interpretations are accumulated and interrelated, they form a cognitive structure, or schema (Piaget, 1972). When humans encounter information inconsistent with their existing beliefs, they experience a sense of uncertainty, or cognitive dissonance. Psychological development results from the mental activity used to address this dissonance. As prior understanding is reconciled with the dissonant information, the schema is gradually elaborated, refined and otherwise modified (Anderson, 1985; Neisser, 1976; Piaget, 1972).

According to Piaget, the modification of schemata occurs through the processes of assimilation, accommodation and equilibration. Assimilation
involves altering information picked up in the environment and adapting it to existing schemata. Conversely, accommodation consists of the modification of existing schemata to make room for new, additional or discrepant environmental information. Equilibration provides a balance between the processes of assimilation and accommodation, effectively checking the dominance of either. The larger point is that psychological development, including the development of knowledge about self and society, is a continual, often taxing process that involves interaction with new experiences and ideas and the interpretation and reconciliation of those experiences and ideas with previous understandings.

Social Criticism & Critical Self-Reflection

Although cognitive dissonance can result from many kinds of experience, the dissonance perhaps most relevant to social education involves the struggle that occurs when individuals critically examine their assumptions about themselves, their social surroundings, and the relationships therein. Based on the premise that social improvement requires thoughtful analysis rather than the unquestioning acceptance of prevailing conditions, many have argued that citizens within a democratic and pluralistic society need to develop and maintain a deep and pervasive attitude of social criticism (e.g., Apple & Beane, 1995; Fine, 1987; Giroux, 1985; Giroux & McLaren, 1986). Others add that since society is ultimately comprised of individuals, personal development through critical self-reflection is equally important (e.g., Baldwin, 1988; Houser, 1996; McIntosh, 1989).

Advocates of critical social theory maintain that social critique, a search for positive alternatives, and societal improvement are highly interdependent. For example, Giroux (1985) argued that a critical social orientation (characterized by ongoing examination of the ways dominant norms, institutions, processes and relationships perpetuate social inequalities) should be balanced with an equally rigorous search for more just and equitable alternatives. Similarly, Greene (1988) noted that in order to determine the actions needed to establish a balance between personal freedom and social responsibility, it is necessary to recognize and name the potential obstacles.

In addition to social critique, societal improvement also involves the critical examination and transformation of self. Since societies consist of individuals, social change ultimately requires the modification of individual views and actions. Such modification involves critical self-reflection.

Neisser (1976) noted that cognitive activities related to psychological growth are "not just operations in the head, but transactions with the world." He added that "these transactions do not merely inform the perceiver, they also transform him" (p. 11). In social education, where the goal of societal improvement necessitates the development of critical, caring, self-reflective citizens, it is important to recognize that critical analysis of the relationship between oneself and others, and reflection upon the underlying motives and social implications related to one’s personal views
and actions, can facilitate profound personal transformation (e.g., Houser, 1996). As Baldwin observed more than a quarter century ago, "to ask questions of the universe, and then to learn to live with those questions, is the way [one] achieves his own identity" (1988, p. 4).

Recognizing the importance of interpersonal relationships and self-development to social education, Barth (1984) claimed that "in social studies the really important questions have to do with the quality of life" (p. 9). According to Barth, such questions include "Who am I? Who are you? How are we related? How did we get this way? What was the past? What is the future? Shall we live for the present?" (1984, p. 9). These questions suggest that humans have the capacity to interpret their existence and to actively construct rather than passively accept their personal and social conditions. Since we are cognitively active beings, we have the ability to consciously and systematically identify the various conditions, relationships, problems and possibilities that exist within our environment, and we have the capacity to modify our actions accordingly.

Among numerous other things, humans participate in the construction of relationships between themselves and others, in the responsibilities implied by those relationships, and even in the construction of their own self-identities. In his classic work on the relationship between mind, self and society, Mead (1934) emphasized the significance of the human capacity to conceive of the self as a self. This ability, he argued, permits us to actively and "self-consciously" participate in our own self-development. Since personal actions are influenced by one's sense of self-identity (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Mead, 1934), and since the actions of individuals ultimately influence broader societal conditions and relationships, the ability (and willingness) of individual citizens to participate in their own self-development is essential for social education. This capacity means that, in addition to Barth's questions about the past and present status of self, it is also possible to contemplate the kind of person one wishes (or needs) to become and the actions required to become that person.

Although positive social change may require a critical orientation toward self and society, such perspectives are often discouraged rather than encouraged in public education. Part of the problem is that social critique and personal reflection are not valued and practiced equally by all members of society. Too often, the burdens of personal compromise and cultural assimilation are unilaterally imposed upon women, members of under represented ethnic and cultural groups, and so forth (e.g., Nieto, 1996; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). These practices violate the premise that within a democratic and pluralistic society such as our own, if any individual or group is expected to examine and modify its existing beliefs and actions for the common good, all groups and individuals should do the same. Nonetheless, such norms and practices continue to exist. To the extent that they are reflected in our public and private institutions, they help insulate
the most privileged members of society from assuming shared responsibility for critical self-reflection for the greater good of all.

Like other academic areas, social studies has often been trivialized in order to avoid addressing controversial issues (e.g., Banks, 1987). For example, our national history has traditionally been written from the perspectives of the conquerors rather than the conquered (Zinn, 1980), and our social norms and institutions have been presented as models to be uncritically perpetuated rather than experiments to be continually assessed and improved (e.g., Houser, 1995a). By minimizing the cognitive dissonance needed for social development, such approaches perpetuate a false sense of superiority among European Americans (Banks, 1989; McIntosh, 1989) and help maintain the long-standing gap between our national ideals and social realities (e.g., Banks, 1987, Bullivant, 1986; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). The challenge for social educators is to continue to identify effective ways to create meaningful cognitive dissonance in spite of the broader constraints that mitigate against such efforts.

The Need for Emotional Safety

Although cognitive dissonance is essential for social improvement, dissonance must be supported within a broader environment of emotional safety. Dissonance of any kind can be uncomfortable, and even in relatively decontextualized educational endeavors, dissonance offered without a backdrop of safety can lead to frustration or fear. When feelings of fear—including the fear to risk substantive social analysis and self-examination—result in the rejection of new ideas before they have been fully considered, these feelings preclude further learning. Thus, the need for an affectively safe environment is imperative when addressing the personal and societal issues related to social education.

Within an "emotionally safe" classroom, cognitive dissonance exists in a broader context that affirms the child as a whole person (Atwell, 1988; Houser, 1996; Nieto, 1996; Paley, 1992). In such an environment, dissonance is provided in manageable increments, and authentic questions are valued rather than being dismissed as "irrelevant" or "stupid." An emotionally safe environment encourages students to take intellectual and affective risks by discussing personal perspectives even if they differ from those of their peers or teacher. Such an environment is also "child-centered" in that the students' interests, experiences and emotional needs provide the necessary beginning for further development (e.g., Atwell, 1988; Brodhagen, 1995; Dewey, 1964). Finally, an emotionally safe classroom cultivates an ethic of caring (Noddings, 1992b) and embraces a norm of pluralism in which cultural diversity and societal well-being are considered mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive. It affirms not only a diversity of bodies, but also a diversity of ideas (Ellsworth, 1989, 1992; Greene, 1988, 1993; Nieto, 1996; Noddings, 1992a, 1992b).
Again, the relationship between cognitive dissonance and emotional safety is particularly important in the social studies. Many personal concerns and social issues are emotionally charged, and contemplating the possibility that one's own beliefs and actions might actually be part of the problem can be especially threatening. Therefore, although it is essential to maintain a critical orientation toward self and society, this stance must be balanced by an equally active search for possibility (Giroux, 1985; Greene, 1988) and affirmation (Nieto, 1996; Noddings, 1992b). On the one hand, we need to establish an environment that will challenge the views of all our students. However, we must also provide each student with the necessary support to meet those challenges.

Dissonance and Safety in the Elementary Classroom

Although optimum learning requires a balance between dissonance and safety, such a relationship is difficult to establish and maintain in the classroom. The literature suggests that emotional safety is often emphasized at the expense of cognitive dissonance, that cognitive dissonance may be stressed without adequate attention to the emotional environment, or that both may be lacking simultaneously (e.g., Anyon, 1979; Cusick, 1973; Goodlad, 1984; Kohl, 1988; McNeil, 1986; Paley, 1992; Philips, 1972; Willis, 1977). Moreover, since a diversity of experiences, perspectives and opportunities exist even within seemingly homogeneous classrooms, a source of safety for one student can be a source of dissonance for another. Thus, negotiating the relationship between dissonance and safety is a complicated matter that requires careful attention to numerous, continually changing factors and dynamics.

Consistent with findings in other reports, imbalances between emotional safety and cognitive dissonance were evident in a recent study of the status of elementary social studies in Delaware (Houser, 1995a; Thornton & Houser, 1994). To better understand the nature of these imbalances and their consequences for social education, it will be useful to describe the Delaware project and to present some of the relevant data collected during the study.

The Delaware study was a statewide investigation that analyzed teacher interviews, school and district surveys, curriculum materials, and state census and demographic data to gain a better understanding of the elementary social studies. The purpose of the project was to investigate practitioners' definitions of social studies, their goals and practices, and their views on the value and status of the social studies relative to other subjects.

The investigation concluded that social studies was under represented and undervalued within the overall curriculum, that it was often reduced to isolated disciplines such as history, geography and economics, and that socializing the individual child into broader society was a pervasive un-
derlying objective. Although some attention was given to "multicultural education," these efforts often trivialized the study of culture rather than seriously addressing the need for equity education within a pluralistic society. Finally, even egalitarian goals calling for "cooperation," "self-esteem," "getting along" and "respecting others" often served to assimilate marginalized students into the sociocultural mainstream while leaving dominant perspectives and practices intact.

The Delaware data suggested that social studies was considered uninteresting and unimportant by students and teachers alike. A primary cause of the low status was that vital issues affecting the students and teachers were omitted from the curriculum. While many teachers sought to provide safe, comfortable learning environments, few addressed personally relevant social issues or utilized critical instructional approaches necessary to generate interest and facilitate meaningful social development.

Many of the teachers were reluctant to confront controversial topics, particularly those issues that challenged the sociocultural mainstream or that threatened their own social, professional or personal security. Although some teachers modified their practices through critical reflection and social analysis, these teachers received little support for their efforts. Indeed, those who questioned prevailing social and educational norms often experienced intense resistance from outside the school (e.g., from parents seeking to preserve the opportunity for their own children to excel) as well as within (e.g., from fellow educators concerned with maintaining control and authority and otherwise preserving the efficiency of the organization).

One of the most significant findings in the Delaware data was that elementary teachers often treat safety and dissonance as if they are separate—perhaps even mutually exclusive—factors. Greater priority was typically given to emotional safety than to cognitive dissonance, and in some cases, safety precluded dissonance altogether. The cognitive dissonance that did occur was often unplanned, stripped of meaningful context, offered without adequate emotional support, or unidirectionally applied to some students but not others. To emphasize the significance of these practices for social education, the following sections examine data from the Delaware study in combination with other relevant sources.

**Safety in the Classroom**

Many elementary teachers recognize the importance of emotional safety. However, in some cases affective safety precludes the cognitive dissonance needed for substantive learning and development. In the Delaware study, for example, emotional safety, unlike cognitive dissonance, was frequently identified as an educational priority. Words like "safety," "comfort," "fun," "hands-on," "risk free," "getting along," "making learning positive," and "building self-esteem" were used by practitioners at all levels to describe their broad educational goals. As one teacher said, "I want them [my students] to feel comfortable. I want to create an atmosphere
where they like to learn and they feel nurtured and loved." Other Delaware teachers sought to promote "cooperation" and "respect" in order to reduce stress and conflict. For example, one of the teachers in the study noted that "If parents aren’t teaching kids how to show respect—how to get along with others—then teachers have to do it."

Although safety-related goals such as these are certainly important, they can be counter-productive if they preclude the cognitive dissonance needed to promote substantive social development. This was evident in the Delaware study, where many well-meaning practices designed to promote "comfort," "love," "cooperation" and "respect" nonetheless failed to adequately consider the complex, reciprocal nature of the relationship between safety and dissonance. As a result, these practices were frequently unidirectional and uncritical. For example, the Delaware data provided little indication that students were encouraged to consider that not all perspectives (e.g., bigotry, greed) are equally deserving of "respect" or that "getting along" is always best for society. Moreover, when social change was discussed, attention was typically focused on the need to alter those who deviate from the dominant social system (e.g., those who do not "respect" others, those who do not "get along" in society) rather than changing the system itself.

Uncritical approaches such as these perpetuate a "sanitized" curriculum in which the cognitive dissonance needed for social improvement is either socially and emotionally decontextualized or eliminated altogether (e.g., Banks, 1987; Fine, 1987). This was the case with a fourth grade teacher in Delaware who was asked about the definition and purpose of the social studies: "It means to know about ourselves, about our nation, about our country...I feel like the kids need to be aware." While few would question whether knowing about oneself and one's nation is an important educational goal, the interview with this teacher suggested that the "awareness" to which she referred related to map skills, computer literacy, and other relatively benign matters. Controversial social issues were addressed only in response to direct and persistent questioning, and when these topics did arise, they were soon dropped to return to safer matters. Thus, when asked to further consider whether there was any real value or need for social studies, the teacher responded:

Well it's important in how you do things in life, you know. If you don't know what's happening in the Persian Gulf—if you don't know a war is coming it might catch you by surprise! Those kinds of things. And I feel like that the kids have to know about our country and they have to know about where things are in our country—I mean the maps, very heavily and I think it's important for them to be able to tell me where Washington is or Oklahoma is or Delaware is on a map, and the world if I can get that far.
This teacher worked in a large school with an ethnically diverse student population. Approximately 20% of the students lived below the poverty line. Considerable dissent existed within the school and community. These tensions were exacerbated by recent incidents including a handgun in school, charges of sexual harassment, and highly publicized Ku Klux Klan activity in a neighboring community.

Given these immediate conditions and the current status of society in general, it is difficult to justify reducing the social studies curriculum to the sanitized study of map skills, historical facts, and the like. Although teachers might understandably wish to avoid the difficult issues confronting their students, such avoidance is educationally unsound. Neither the students, their teachers, nor society in general can afford to ignore such matters. The need for student-centered instruction does not diminish simply because the students' experiences are socially volatile.

Dissonance in the Classroom

Unlike emotional safety, which appears to be an explicit goal for many teachers, encouraging meaningful cognitive dissonance for social change often seems a relatively low priority across grade levels and social settings. For instance, in an ethnographic study conducted in a low-income, African American and Latino high school setting, Fine (1987) found that students were consistently silenced by teachers and administrators when seeking to address the controversial issues and social conditions most relevant to their immediate lives. Similarly, Willis (1977) found in his study of working class boys in England that those who believed they were resisting traditional forms of domination by sabotaging their teachers' agendas were actually, unwittingly, helping perpetuate the very system responsible for their oppression.

In yet another study, involving five elementary schools in contrasting socioeconomic settings, Anyon (1979) reported that working class students were seldom challenged to perform anything but low level cognitive activities. There was little evidence that the students were challenged to think analytically, and there was even less indication that they were permitted, much less encouraged, to critique their existing social situations or to question their teachers' approaches. Conversely, Anyon's upper class students were encouraged to think analytically and creatively and, occasionally, even to question their teachers' decisions. However, not even these students were encouraged to think self-critically or to challenge norms and institutions dominant in today's society. Anyon concluded that these differing educational experiences help perpetuate our existing system of social stratification by preparing some students to perform menial tasks without questioning authority and other students to be creative, to make educated decisions, to manage and control material goods and resources, and to supervise others.
Consistent with the findings of Anyon, Fine and Willis, cognitive dissonance was also conspicuously lacking in the practices of the Delaware teachers. In spite of occasional references to "critical thinking," the teachers' descriptions of their goals and practices provided little indication that critical social and personal examination were considered educational necessities. While some of the teachers helped their students develop knowledge (e.g., mental mapping) and skills (e.g., critical thinking) that may have been cognitively challenging, these practices were nonetheless stripped of social and personal significance. There was scant evidence that the Delaware students were asked to question existing social structures, to imagine more just and caring alternatives, or to contemplate their own roles in maintaining those structures and facilitating those changes.4

Even when dissonance did exist in the Delaware data, it was often unplanned, applicable to some students but not others, or unmediated by emotional safety. This was the case with a fifth grade teacher who described why she used "mini-society," an elaborate simulation approach that teaches the principles and processes of capitalism:

I believe that the kids need to know about real life. We have businesses. We buy and sell, and we have to learn how to cooperate with each other when we do businesses together...(W)e had a child write a bad check. That was a bad experience. He had to pay. It's just a good learning experience.

Such activities can create cognitive dissonance insofar as they introduce previously unknown economic principles, elicit mathematical and management-related calculations, and so forth. They can also create dissonance for students who have to "pay" if they are caught writing "bad checks" or committing other violations against the established system.5 However, without adequate concern for emotional safety, such dissonance can be counter-productive. Consider the further comments of this teacher:

The value of social studies, I think, is the idea of real life and learning to cooperate with others...It's building not only self-esteem but skills that you need to get along in the world...Like in real life you can do your job really well, but if you cannot get along and cooperate and follow the rules of the business and the society, you can get fired.

Approaches like this can help students better understand certain economic principles and processes; however, they can also be educationally unsound if they admonish those who are unsuccessful within the prevailing system (e.g., those who get fired or write bad checks) while neglecting to critique the system itself. To this extent, such approaches fail to anticipate the dissonance that exists for students whose life experiences (created
in part by the very system "mini-society" seeks to simulate) prevent them from envisioning themselves as potential benefactors of the existing system. Nonetheless, among the 20 personal interviews and 96 total surveys in the Delaware study, only one participant indicated that critical assessments of the "free market" system or discussions of alternative economic approaches were admitted into classroom practice.

Uncritical approaches such as these are also unsound for those who assume the existing social system is beyond reproach. In the absence of any perceived need for change, those groups and individuals most responsible for perpetuating existing social conditions are released from the responsibility for critical self-examination (e.g., Baldwin, 1988; Banks, 1989; McIntosh, 1989; Nieto, 1996; Ogbu, 1987). When this occurs, social development is minimized for members of the dominant culture as well.  

Thus, emotional safety and cognitive dissonance are often unbalanced in the elementary classroom. While emotional safety was a priority for many of the Delaware teachers, and while it existed at least for the more affluent students in Anyon's investigation, cognitive dissonance for substantive social development was minimized across grade levels and social settings. When cognitive dissonance was observed in Delaware, it was often unintended, one-sided, or offered without a backdrop of emotional safety. In some cases, cognitive dissonance was socially and emotionally decontextualized (e.g., it focused on map skills or mathematical calculations rather than personally significant issues related to the students' everyday concerns), and in other cases it existed for some individuals but not others. Although the lack of balance between dissonance and safety may sometimes be unintentional, the results of unintended conditions can be just as damaging as if they were created by design.

Explaining the Imbalances Between Dissonance and Safety

There are several possible explanations for the existing imbalances between emotional safety and cognitive dissonance in elementary classrooms. Perhaps the simplest explanation is that teachers view these goals as mutually exclusive. It is possible that cognitive dissonance is considered a direct and irreconcilable threat to the "more important" goal of promoting emotional safety. This view would help explain why the fourth grade teacher in the Delaware study who focused on something as benign as map skills did so even when the need and opportunity to discuss more serious issues existed all around her.

Another explanation is that teachers may not consider promoting social change part of their professional responsibility. For example, when asked whether the teacher's role involves changing society in general, a Delaware kindergarten teacher replied, "I would say no, I don't think that's part of my role...I can't see myself changing society." This explanation would help account for activities like "mini-society" that focus more upon
perpetuating existing social systems than contemplating substantive so-

Yet another possible explanation for the imbalance between safety and
dissonance is that teachers fear a loss of control and respect. For instance,
in Kohl’s (1988) classic account of his first years of teaching in Harlem, he
described his persistent fear that he might lose personal authority and con-
trol. Others have documented similar fears among teachers in middle
schools (e.g., Houser, 1995b) and high schools (e.g., Cusick, 1973; Fine, 1987;

It is not difficult to understand teachers’ concerns for maintaining
personal authority in the current educational climate that places a premium
upon classroom management and behavior control. However, one of Kohl’s
most important conclusions was that the teacher’s influence upon academic
learning has more to do with communication, critical self-examination, and
negotiating a meaningful, student-centered curriculum than with the rigid
imposition of external means of behavior management. This conclusion is
consistent with other findings (e.g., Brodhagen, 1995; Paley, 1992), and it is
strongly supported by educational theorists who hold that social order is
less a function of external control than of self-regulation nurtured by genu-
ine participation in collective decision-making (e.g., Dewey, 1938).

An honest and revealing account of one practitioner’s fear for loss of
personal authority was provided in the Delaware study by a European
American teacher who described an incident in which one of her African
American students publicly charged that she was “prejudiced”:

Then this boy raises his hand and he says,“You know, I have two
friends who were fourth-graders a couple of years ago and both
of them said that you and this teacher and this teacher, all three
of you, were prejudiced.” There’s this hushed silence that kind
of covered the room as this boy said this. The kids were all kind
of looking around and most of them were just wide-eyed with
terror that I was going to just kind of let go on this kid because he
more or less just called his teacher “prejudiced.”

The teacher acknowledged that the dissonance created by this experi-
ence was as real for herself as it was for her fourth-grade students:

Part of me still wonders in the back of his mind if he is not think-
ing to himself [that I am prejudiced]...I’m not trying to defend
myself—although I guess I am trying to prove something to
him....It’s always in the back of my head. Part of me is saying,
you cannot treat him or respond to his behavior differently just
because you have this fear.
This kind of fear may help explain the reduction of social studies (and education in general) to socially and emotionally safe topics. Time-consuming memorization of geographical locations and historical facts leaves little room for discussions of racism, prejudice and other threatening social issues. Similarly, activities that presume the infallibility of existing political and economic systems minimize embarrassing questions about the potential inequities of those systems. To the extent that being perceived as "prejudiced" (or even simply being perceived as "wrong") threatens the foundations of classroom authority, the kind of fear described by this teacher provides a plausible explanation for many existing imbalances between emotional safety and cognitive dissonance in the elementary classroom.

**Reconciling Dissonance & Safety in the Social Studies: Implications for Practice**

Whatever the causes may be, imbalances between cognitive dissonance and emotional safety clearly exist in classroom practice. While emotional safety is often considered essential, many teachers are reluctant to address controversial social issues. This is particularly detrimental in the social studies, where promoting self-development for the common good requires attention to vital personal perspectives and social relationships.

Decontextualized awareness of geography skills and historical facts, uncritical acceptance of dominant norms and institutions, and the preservation of sanitized curricula have little to do with promoting the greater good of society. Rather, education for social improvement requires an understanding of the history and causes of social inequity, greater appreciation of those who have quietly struggled to improve the lives of others, knowledge of one's constitutional rights and responsibilities, and skill in the use of "voice," political representation, social solidarity, compromise, resistance and imagination to narrow the gap between our national principles and social realities.

Fortunately, it is possible to negotiate satisfactory relationships between cognitive dissonance and emotional safety in the social studies. Concern for the affective well-being of one's students does not have to preclude attention to controversial issues. Nor does one's fear of loss of control have to prevent critical social analysis or self-examination. Indeed, the degree of social development students are likely to experience may be severely restricted by limiting attention to the difficult issues most relevant to their lives. Similarly, the safety students can truly experience may depend, in large part, upon the teacher's ability to mediate rather than avoid such concerns. The point is that cognitive dissonance and emotional safety are not mutually exclusive, and they should not be addressed separately.

Dissonance can be gradually introduced in numerous ways. There is little reason, for example, that meaningful geography could not begin with the study of the students' own neighborhoods. By beginning with a rela-
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tively benign subject (e.g., map skills) based upon the students' existing experiences, both the topic and process would contribute to the affective safety of the lesson.

This initial backdrop of emotional safety could be utilized and extended as the class addressed increasingly substantive issues influencing the local community. The students' familiarity with their own neighborhoods could be used to explore connections between the local environment and broader societal factors. These factors might include the unequal distribution of resources within communities, states and nations, the increasing focus on individual comfort rather than the common good, or the growing distrust and rejection of those who are “different.” Beginning with the students' own experiences and perspectives, it is possible to develop greater understanding not only of their geographical locations, but their social locations as well.

The mini-society activity in the Delaware study indicated a need for dissonance that is socially contextualized and as challenging for those who perpetuate the prevailing social structure as for those who resist unidirectional cultural assimilation. Creating this dissonance may involve little more than permitting students to discuss the limitations as well as the possibilities of the simulated system. For example, regularly scheduled “town meetings” might provide a forum for students to relate their personal observations to the vital issues (e.g., poverty, greed, the relationship between unlimited wants and finite resources in an increasingly populated world) and basic assumptions (e.g., that competition is necessary for excellence, that financial reward is necessary for motivation) of “free market” economics.

The opposite is true as well. Just as emotional safety does not have to eliminate cognitive dissonance, dissonant experiences need not preclude emotional safety. One way to increase affective safety in the classroom is to provide dissonance in reasonable increments. While the harsh realities of the holocaust, the genocide of Native Americans, and the brutal dehumanization of African slaves can and must be addressed, teachers might begin by focusing on playground discrimination or classroom oppression. Once students understand the basic concepts in terms of their immediate experiences, they will be better prepared to consider more vivid examples and the complex underpinnings of these pervasive social dilemmas.

As increasingly controversial situations are presented, and as students are asked to consider the extent to which their own views and actions may actually contribute to the problem, it is essential that they feel affirmed as human beings. Without such affirmation, critical self-examination may be rejected outright. Although uncomfortable issues and personal responsibilities must not be ignored, neither should they be presented in ways that lead to premature dismissal or outright rejection.

One way to affirm cognitive dissonance is to recognize that there are multiple ways of viewing the same situation (Blumer, 1969; Davis &
Woodman, 1992; Ellsworth, 1992). Individuals’ actions usually make sense from their own perspective, even if they are not understood by others. Nor is there any guarantee that one perspective is ultimately more correct than another (Belenky, et al., 1986; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Thus, teachers should not assume that their own understandings and moral perspectives are inherently superior to those of their students. Recognizing this fact can help teachers affirm their students’ overall thinking and being while reserving the right to continue questioning the social impact of their particular views and actions.

The approach used by the Delaware teacher who was called “prejudiced” addressed both dissonance and safety. Rather than “letting go” on the student or dismissing his accusation outright, she spent the next 30 minutes discussing the issue with her class. In the process, she challenged her students’ specific thoughts and conclusions while supporting their right to have and to express perspectives that contradicted her own.

Although this teacher was fearful of being perceived as “prejudiced,” she refused to sidestep the issue. Nor did she manifest her fear in the form of avoidance or anger directed toward her students. Taking seriously the charges leveled against her, she modeled a willingness to expose herself to the same kind of examination she expected of her class. In so doing, she helped create the necessary emotional conditions for her students to take risks of their own. She provided a forum for those students who believed they have been ill-served by the existing social system, and at the same time she communicated to the rest of her class that no system or individual should be beyond reproach.

Finally, since social change requires personal development, and since people are able to conceptualize both the person they wish to become and the actions required to become that person, it is possible for individuals to consciously, systematically and even passionately participate in their own self-development for the common good. This is as true for teachers and teacher educators as it is for the students we educate.

In conclusion, effective citizenship education involves classroom practice that promotes individual social development conducive to broad societal improvement. As such, optimum social education requires a balance between cognitive dissonance and emotional safety. This is especially true in a democratic and pluralistic society such as our own, where promoting the common good requires serious analysis and critical self-examination by all the people.

Although emotional safety is vital, decontextualized lessons that provide little meaningful dissonance related to self-examination or social critique minimize opportunities for personal growth. On the other hand, dissonance unmediated by safety can result in frustration, fear and refusal even to contemplate alternative possibilities. Since cognitive dissonance and emotional safety are highly interrelated rather than existing in isola-
tion, they must be understood and addressed in relation to each other rather than in mutual opposition.

Education for social improvement will best be served by teachers who recognize that dissonance and safety can be mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive, that promoting social improvement is an inevitable aspect of the teacher’s role, and that confronting one’s own dissonance can help create the necessary conditions for students to take risks of their own. As our understanding of the relationship between dissonance and safety increases, and as we learn to more fully appreciate the centrality of this relationship to self-development for social change, teachers and students alike will be better prepared to participate in the processes of learning and development for the greater good of society. The ultimate task is to challenge the perspectives of all classroom participants while providing each with the emotional safety necessary to meet those challenges.

Notes

1 The Delaware study was originally reported by Thornton & Houser (1994) and Houser (1995a). This paper includes information presented in those reports as well as data not previously reported. The focus of the original study was to examine practitioners’ perspectives on the nature and status of elementary social studies in the state of Delaware. The data were gathered through a statewide survey of district level social studies supervisors, a statewide survey of elementary teachers and principals, formal interviews with twenty teachers, and the collection of state and district curriculum guides, state census information, and other relevant documents. A qualitative methodology and interpretative theoretical framework were used to collect and analyze the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Jacob, 1987; Lofland & Lofland, 1984; Mishler, 1979).

2 Of course, there are different conceptions about what constitutes the greater social good and how it might best be promoted through classroom practice. While this paper is based upon a particular conception of the common good, contemplating the relationship between dissonance and safety would seem equally important for any approach concerned with learning and development for social change.

3 It is important to distinguish between “critical thinking,” which is commonly characterized as a decontextualized mental process presumed to facilitate mental growth, and critical thought that is by an actual person, about a specific issue, and for a particular purpose. It is entirely possible to engage in the mental exercise referred to as “critical thinking” without increasing one’s ability or willingness to contribute to the common good. “Critical thinking” as a decontextualized exercise is inadequate for the goals of social education because it does not facilitate self-development within meaningful social contexts. Another negative consequence of relying on decontextualized “critical thinking” for social improvement is that it reinforces assumptions of “social reductionism” (e.g., the belief that a society
composed of people who can think critically will think critically; the notion that a critical or caring society consists of nothing more than the sum of its individual critical or caring parts). This is quite different from the goals of critical social theorists who envision critical thought as a more just and equitable way of being, and it is different still from the arguments of those who criticize even critical social theory for neglecting personal ownership and social location (e.g., Ellsworth, 1989).

4 There were a few notable exceptions. See Houser (1995a) and Thornton and Houser (1994) for specific examples.

5 It is tempting at this point to distinguish between cognitive dissonance and emotional dissonance. However, such a distinction is unnecessary for the larger purposes of this paper and may ultimately be nonexistent, except in theoretical terms.

6 The terms "dominant culture" and "dominated cultures" are used by Nieto (1996) to distinguish the European American "mainstream" and sociocultural groups that have been systematically dominated by the ideologies and actions of that mainstream. However, it should be noted that there is no absolute demarcation between dominant and dominated cultures. To some degree, "dominance" is relative and context specific.

References


Negotiating Dissonance and Safety


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Molding Bad Citizens?


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The volume’s title may or may not be deliberately ironic. In any case, the authors are convinced that the history texts they characterize as the “prayer-books of the United States’s [sic] civil religion” (p. 1) are not, in fact, serving the function the title suggests.

*Molding the Good Citizen* is the latest in a long tradition in American education of alerting the public to any biases in the textbooks that happen to be other than one’s own. If nothing else, the volume demonstrates that the criticism of history textbooks may be no less political than history textbooks themselves.

Lerner and his colleagues assume throughout their study a pretense of objectivity, and uphold a similar ideal of political neutrality for history instruction in the schools. Their complaints about the recent politicization of American history textbooks and the authors’ professed commitment to impartiality notwithstanding, their own study is not untainted by politics. The authors’ underlying concerns are those commonly identified with the neoconservative movement. They call attention, among other things, to what they believe is an anti-capitalist slant in textbooks and an associated animus against limited government, to a putatively divisive brand of multiculturalism, and to “filler feminism,” the practice of including “unimportant” women on the basis of their sex alone.

Less comprehensive than its title might suggest, the study is primarily a content analysis of leading textbooks for eleventh-grade American history. The authors examined three textbooks from each of the five past decades. They found patterns of increasing (and increasingly positive) attention to women and to individuals of non-European extraction, changes in the way the initial European and Native American cultural exchanges have been portrayed, and a decline in respect for the American presidency. The treatment of capitalism and of prominent late-nineteenth-century capitalists, they claimed, was fairly constant and relatively negative throughout the period studied.

In addition to the largely quantitative content analysis of the texts, the authors attempt a brief historical explanation of their findings. In doing so, they rely heavily on secondary sources, especially Richard...
Hofstadter and Diane Ravitch. The authors believe that the contemporary trends to which they call attention must be seen in the context of a long tradition of dominance in American education by a “liberal-Progressive” elite. Early in the twentieth century, thanks to John Dewey and his disciples, the schools came to be seen as an instrument for changing society. Educational leaders accordingly came to feel justified in imposing on students their own beliefs and values, irrespective of the will of the majority or of the schools’ traditional mandate. Temporarily stifled in the 1940s and 1950s, educators in this liberal-Progressive tradition re-established their hegemony over the schools during the 1960s and following years. The prominence in textbooks since the 1970s of, for instance, a strongly feminist ideology, may be understood accordingly.

With respect to the political ideology of contemporary educational leaders, especially in history and the social studies, it may be difficult to refute the authors’ characterization. In Leming’s recent sampling of CUFA members (1993), for instance, the liberal preponderance is even more extreme than the skewed political sympathies reported by the authors for publishers (pp. 48-49). In Leming’s survey, only four percent described themselves as conservative, as opposed to sixty-three per cent liberal. Rhetorically, at least, many social studies educators do indeed—as Lerner et al. imply—perceive themselves as the ideological heirs of Dewey, Rugg, and Counts.

If the authors are not entirely mistaken in their characterization of the politics of contemporary educational elites, their analysis nonetheless clearly exaggerates the degree of consensus and uniformity among educators historically. As Kliebard (1986) and others have demonstrated, progressive education was never the kind of coherent or monolithic movement that Lerner and his colleagues portray it to have been. And even if this presumed liberal-Progressive vanguard had achieved the coherence and prominence the authors have claimed, Lerner et al. considerably underestimate the mitigating influence of countervailing forces in American education and society. Granting the changes in textbooks reported by the authors, and granting even for the moment the legitimacy of their ideological concerns, their alarm over current trends is probably premature. As Frances FitzGerald (1979) has aptly observed, the schools’ “superficial sensitivity” to change often masks a more fundamental stability in what “is, after all, one of the most conservative of American institutions” (p. 190).

The authors’ undue alarm over current trends and their simplistic historical analysis aside, their discussion often suffers from a failure to explore the underlying premises of their observations and conclusions. They link recent changes in history textbooks to reported downturns in achievement tests in the field—neglecting to ask what constitutes “achievement” in the field in the first place. They com-
plain of the relative coverage in texts of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Harriet Tubman, or of Paul Revere and Crispus Attucks—insisting in both cases that the figure of greater “actual historical significance” merits proportionately more attention. At the same time, they fail to explore adequately the full range of questions that impinge on any discussion of historical significance. They assert that “knowing who Sybil Ludington was does not contribute to the development of a shared common culture” (p. 66), without acknowledging the problematic nature of the latter ideal or the extent to which it might be modified.

This book went to press just as controversy broke out over the national standards developed by the National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA. The authors refer briefly to evidence in Lynne Cheney’s (1994) initial critique of the standards to bolster their case concerning the overwhelmingly liberal bias of the nation’s educators.

Lerner, Nagai, and Rothman clearly share the political convictions of Cheney and kindred critics of the standards. They share with the standards’ critics, moreover, a possibly disproportionate concern for the content to which students are exposed—apart from developing students’ ability to critique the history to which they are exposed for themselves. Both Cheney and the authors of this volume have inordinately little faith in the ability of teachers and students to interpret history independently.

If, as the authors tell us, teachers (and by implication their students) are prone to treat textbooks uncritically, their concern and our concern must not be directed merely to altering the content. In a crusade against bias, after all, perhaps the most successful strategy is to equip students to identify it for themselves.

References
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Corrections

Jo-Anne Dillabough's name was incorrectly listed on the cover and in the table of contents of Volume 24, Number 3, Spring 1996.

The following items were omitted from the reference list of "Studying Colonization in Eighth Grade: What Can It Teach Us About the Learning Context of Current Reforms?" by Bruce VanSledright, which was published in Volume 24, Number 3, Spring 1996:


