The Examination of Pedagogical Approaches to Teaching Controversial Public Issues: Explicitly Teaching the Holocaust and Comparative Genocide

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This study reflects an examination of four teachers and their approaches to teaching the Holocaust and comparative genocide. The purpose was to address four succinct research questions that followed a conceptual framework which emerged around these teachers’ rationale, methodology, preparation, and characteristics. Analysis of the results allowed for the emergence of six themes: (a) citizenship, (b) curriculum and design, (c) teaching pedagogy, (d) influence of modeling, (e) neoteny, and (f) life-altering experiences.

Introduction

The objective of this paper is to present findings from an examination of four secondary social studies teachers in Indiana public schools regarding the teaching of a controversial public issue: explicitly the teaching of the Holocaust and comparative genocide.

According to the National Council of Social Studies (NCSS 1994), social studies instruction in public schools is primarily designed to “help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (p. 3). Logically then, it could be inferred that the introduction and discussion of controversial public issues into school curriculum should not only be prevalent for the development of American citizenship, but also so students may become familiar with a global civic culture (Titus, 1994).

The teaching of the Holocaust and comparative genocide reflects controversy from many fronts and offers a challenge for even gifted and experienced teachers. Current attitudes and perspectives, both locally and globally, have cast additional relevance and importance to the study and teaching of the Holocaust and comparative genocide. For example, on December 13, 2006, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian president, hosted a conference in Iran of Holocaust deniers and stated that Israel will one day be “wiped out.” Later, on December 15, 2006, President Ahmadinejad offered a description of the Holocaust as “a myth” (Vick, 2005).

The Jewish Holocaust is one of the most documented and researched events in history (Levin, 1994). The research about this event has been conducted in academic fields such as history, literature, psychology, philosophy, and theology. While the event’s facts are, according to some, well established (Gilbert, 1985), the ongoing publication of curriculum and scholarly works about the Holocaust’s causes and implications continue to gain attention, and with this attention, comes controversy (Riley & Totten, 2002). This is coupled with the development of new studies of both recent (since 1970) genocides as well as those that have been committed earlier giving rise to more sophisticated information, questions, analysis, and therefore, additional controversy (Smith, 2004).

The value of educators teaching children about these controversial topics and others from our history is generally accepted, but there still exists vital challenges for teachers
and school communities at large. For example, who should or could teach about these issues? Where in the curriculum do they place this study? When should these studies be interjected into the curriculum? How should the Holocaust and comparative genocide be taught? Totten and Feinberg (2001) make us aware that it should not be surprising that scholars and educators regularly debate how the Holocaust should be taught given its status as one of the seminal events of the 20th century history.

Significant to the study of controversial public issues is what students want to know. According to Smith (2004), many of his college students asked morally charged questions such as the following: (a) Why didn’t nations of the world, particularly the United States, prevent the killing of millions of innocent people? (b) What was America’s role and her moral commitment when a million Armenians were killed in Turkey in 1915? or (c) What about the killing of millions of Ukrainians in 1932-33, and what about Bosnia, Rwanda, etc.? Simply put, many students asked, how could this (genocide) have happened? While Smith’s review was of college students, it is not a large leap to believe similar questions are being asked at the secondary level in classes where these issues are brought forth for discussion.

These types of questions students posed stimulate interest for investigation of the Jewish Holocaust regarding what is actually being taught and how it is being taught. In Teaching the Holocaust, Davies (2000) offers a clear, curricular discussion of the teaching of the Holocaust along with the horrible things done systematically to so many people, people like us, which are fundamental issues that must be dealt with by the educator. The essential question remains unanswered, namely, how should we teach these controversial issues?

**Literature Review for Teaching Controversial Public Issues**

There are multiple reasons given for the teaching of controversial public issues in social studies classrooms (Harwood & Hahn, 1990). Among those most often cited are as follows: (a) preparing students for citizenship in a pluralistic society, (b) developing critical thinking skills, and (c) improving interpersonal skills. Patrick (1967) noted, in his watershed review of political socialization research, that educational programs might have a greater impact on the development and longevity of democratic attitudes “if they were conducted in an atmosphere more conducive to inquiry and open-mindedness” (p. 71).

Following this line of reasoning then, it seems particularly critical to develop an environment of encouragement in the classroom—an atmosphere conducive to the free and open exchange of ideas. When students are permitted to discuss controversial issues in an open, supportive classroom environment, there are often positive outcomes for students’ feelings of political interest, efficacy, confidence, and trust (Hahn, 1990).

Another positive result of controversial public issues discussion is that it has the ability to improve civic tolerance (Hahn, 1990; Hess 1998). Well-managed discussions also promote tolerance of diverse perspectives on a particular issue (Hahn, 1990) and a tolerance for which Martinson (2005) succinctly notes:

> Social studies instruction must be directed to inculcating in students a respect and willingness to listen to others; an understanding of why it is essential that society protect every individual’s right to speak, even when one strongly disagrees; and a recognition that the marketplace of ideas in not analogous to the battlefield or the gridiron. The key to this is assisting students in recognizing what it means—and does not mean—when one speaks
of the importance of tolerating disagreement in the context of the complex and ever evolving experiment in American democracy, in which they hopefully will become active participants. (p. 123)

If it is assumed that controversial public issues discussion in high school classrooms will enhance the significance of democratic ideals, the curriculum connection to the global society is equally important for the notion of “global citizenship” to exist (Davies, 2006). Hahn (2001) clearly discussed today’s global environment and the opportunity to expand the role social studies can play in developing democratic understanding by adopting comparative and international perspectives. Especially critical, Hahn also noted, is the investigation into the goals and practices of education for democratic citizenship in diverse nations by examining how different societies prepare young people for their roles as citizens in the global society. Hahn argued that “social studies in the United States can and should give greater attention to democratic discourse, decision-making, and civic education” (p. 14).

In a cross-national study, Hahn examined citizenship education in five Western democracies—Denmark, England, Germany, The Netherlands, and the United States (Hahn, 1998). Adolescents (14-15 year olds) were the subjects selected in 50 schools, and over a ten-year period of time, classes like “social studies” were observed, and both teachers and students were interviewed. Irrespective of which country, Hahn (1998) found that students reported discussing controversial public policy issues in an environment of encouragement where they felt comfortable expressing their opinions; they also indicated that they were more politically interested and efficacious than students without such experiences. Hahn’s study compares to another almost 30 years ago when other IEA researchers found that students who had a more didactic or rote memorization civic education were less politically knowledgeable and held more authoritarian attitudes than did students who were able to experience an open and free exchange of ideas (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schultz, 2001).

Clearly, based on these scholarly arguments, discussion of controversial issues, as well as practice in decision making, is essential to developing knowledge, values, and abilities required for democratic life. Unfortunately, social studies instruction is seldom characterized by democratic discourse and decision-making related to public issues that divide society and are of interest to our youth (Hinde, 2004). Despite this call for teaching controversial public issues in our schools, it is rare to find this happening in social studies classes (Rossi, 2006).

Nystrand, Gamoran, and Carbonaro (1998) stated that 90% of the instruction they observed in more than 100 middle and high school classes involved no discussion at all. If discussion did occur, it was short in length and did not contain the ideas of a sustained deliberation on an important issue. What teachers consider as discussion is actually recitation (Larson, 1999).

To offer students the opportunity to participate in informed and respectful dialogue and deliberation requires that social studies teachers do more than talk a good game. Social studies teachers must demonstrate the importance of internalizing a genuine tolerance for disagreement “by offering themselves as a model” (Martinson, 2005). To do so in an effective manner mandates that social studies teachers take the subject seriously, be prepared in content and technique (deliberation), and not be tied to a textbook or worksheets.

Assuming that social studies teachers are prepared and certified for basic instruction, the nature of teaching controversial public issues has caused some to question the readiness of teachers to tackle those issues that require and foster critical thinking (Noddings, 1993). Through discussions of controversial public issues, educators feel that students develop
cognitive skills, such as the examination of certain views and the search for evidence to support these positions (Hahn, 1990).

Oulton et al. (2004) suggest that many teachers are ill prepared and feel disconnected in their abilities to handle this aspect of their work. Davies (2006) reminds us of the constant constraints many social studies instructors face every day such as follows: curriculum overload and lack of resources, time, and confidence. He concludes that while there is a vested interest on the part of social studies teachers in addressing global citizenship through the discussion of controversial public issues, the curriculum direction is too abstract, thus resulting in problems for teachers.

Principles and Methods for Teaching Controversial Public Issues

One of these problems may lay in the principles and methods of relating to the teaching of controversial issues which are controversial (Oulton et al., 2004). Young people need to be cognizant of the nature of controversy and be able to see how arguments are developed and constructed to influence opinions, but ironically, this may produce additional controversy for both students and teachers alike. One of the difficult decisions for some teachers is if or how they will present their own opinions on the various controversial issues discussed in class. Kincheloe (2004) suggests that all issues are political and that teachers cannot really disguise their views even if they wish and that it would be inappropriate to try to depoliticize issues. It is important for the social studies teachers to have opinions and not hide that reality from students, so long as the teacher does so in a manner that tolerates disagreement. The vital responsibility for the teacher is to make a conscious effort to tolerate disagreement during these interactions, since the teacher is in a position of authority (Martinson, 2005).

Another issue is whether students should be required to participate. Hess (2002) discovered that both teachers and students were divided when asked if the students should be required to participate. Teachers were most concerned with fairness of speaking, as in some cases, students learn best by observing, listening, and engaging in more collaborative models. Other teachers respectfully disagreed, claiming that students will learn how to participate in controversial issues only when required. Many students believed that it might be a personal choice (to orally participate) but claimed that verbal participation is a vital skill.

Another point taken from the Hess study was the concern that some students may not have enough information to contribute to a valued discussion. The quantity and quality of information is the substance of meaningful deliberation of any public issue. If students were void of enough background, presumably through readings and research, the teachers became frustrated and resorted to worksheets and quizzes to encourage greater preparation. Often, this perceived or real lack of preparation resulted in teachers becoming the focal point of limited discussion. While these and other issues do bring about real teaching dilemmas and challenging roles for teachers and students, they are endemic to teaching. The task then is to adjust to the challenge of teaching controversial public issues and take action through a variety of models (Rossi, 2006).

Rossi outlines three models which vary in purpose, size of the group, preparation, role of the teacher, and role of the student. The three models are scored discussion, structured academic controversy, and advocated decision-making. All three are based on small group discussion as is appropriate for controversial issues to bring about a greater quality of response that teacher student interchange (Miller, 1997).

Regardless of the models and strategies used, teachers must pay careful attention to preparation for discussion, the role(s) they will assume during the conducting of the discussion, and acknowledge that beneficial discussion of controversial issues is an art that
requires skill and practice (Hahn, 1990). Furthermore, Hahn (1990) adds, “In selecting discussion issues, teachers should consider their students’ interest, experience, and expertise regarding the issue: the relevance of issues to their students’ lives; their students’ maturity level, and the significance of the issue to society” (p. 2).

The fundamental point of what is going on in the classrooms, regarding the discussion and analysis of controversial public issues, may have more to do with teachers’ dispositions and their ability to share convictions enabling their students to develop reflective and critical thinking, both for the student and the teacher. Hess (2005) identified, in her work with teachers, the dynamics of balancing students’ thinking with their own, which often resulted in more teachers taking on an attitude of neutrality rather than displaying their own committed ideals. Kelly’s (1986) call for Committed Impartiality asked teachers to develop a perspective of a public citizen with public points of view.

Clearly, to take this stance, some teachers would feel as if they were exposing themselves to great scrutiny and are worrisome that the school community may not provide them with the kind of safe and supportive environment they were trying to provide to their own students (Miller-Lane, Denton, & May, 2006). Teachers cited parental concerns about teaching controversial public issues in any form (Wilson, 1999). This may suggest reluctance on the part of some teachers to engage in an activity (instruction of controversial public issues) even if they agree in the pedagogical soundness of such practice. Other possible restrictions to the controversial public issues in the social studies domain might include, but are not limited to, the following: (a) time restrictions due to rigid curriculum, (b) standards-based lessons, (c) limitations or lack of training for specific, “active” learning programs (Dillon, 1994), and (d) teachers’ concerns about maintaining control of the classroom (McNeil, 1986). A very important point is emphasized by Shelly (2002) who reminds educators, in general, that the moral issues surrounding the Holocaust are difficult for adults to discuss and that this can make teaching about them most challenging.

This point of view is especially critical for new or non-tenured teachers. In this study, Mona, a participant in the study, plainly avoided some poignant issues in her classroom discussions out of fear. Mona reflected upon her conflict between curriculum choices she felt were important in discussing the Holocaust and the perceived lack of support for this endeavor from her school environment and local community. The awareness of academic freedom and first amendment rights are worthy of more investigation and discussion than this article can devote.

**What Is Happening in the Classrooms?**

While numerous rationales are used to support controversial public issues discussions in schools, what is lacking is a body of research on the effects of controversial public issues. Specifically lacking are studies about teachers who teach controversial public issues and how best to teach it. There is also a void in studies regarding whether or not teaching controversial public issues really does relate to a greater emphasis and understanding of democratic principles by students (Hess, 1998).

Hess noted that a purpose for this type of study is to discover how to move students to more effective learning through conversation, as well as the larger goal of improving the ability of students to become more democratic through open and fair discourse in social studies (1998). Perhaps most noteworthy for this proposed study was Hess’s final conclusion: “It is important for educators to constantly reflect on what they value, for their values influence what they are teaching and what students are learning” (p. 196). The research questions of the current study were designed to provide an opportunity to allow emerging data
provide a new source for findings that may relate to some of Hess’s inquiries.

The study and discussion of public issues has a long history, dating back to the 1916 report of the National Education Association’s Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, which recommended the development of a course that examines the problems of democracy (National Education Association, 1916). Since that time there has been a call for inclusion of controversial issues in the social studies curriculum. Many publications such as Social Education and The Social Studies have devoted editions to issue-centered social studies curriculum over the past few years. Recently, the National Council of Social Studies has offered numerous workshops and programs for dealing with controversial public issues in the classroom, including a session about teaching genocide in an Age of Genocide (NCSS, 2006).

Some recent observational data suggests, however, that few students seriously study controversial issues, and group discussion appears not to be a prominent instructional mode (Kahne, Rodriguez, Smith, & Thiede, 2000). Despite these observations in the classroom, many social studies educators continue to promote the controversial public issues approach as a forceful process for democratic education (Hahn, 1998; Parker & Zumeta, 1999).

Newman (1989) and Parker (1996) have argued that the most important component of effective democratic citizenship education was teaching young people how to deliberate about the nature of the public good and how to achieve it. If Parker and Newman have it right, why do some teachers endorse this attitude and others do not? This is a critical question, and this study will attempt to offer possible explanations for this phenomenon. Teacher’s perspectives of incorporating controversial public issues in the classroom remain, at best, a well postulated thought, but are void of robust scholarly treatment.

Teaching the Holocaust and Comparative Genocide

The Holocaust remains one of the most effective and extensively documented subjects for an examination of basic humanitarian issues. Knowledge is the key to an intelligent understanding of such a tragic passage in human history, the key to refuting future genocide. (Calandra, Fitzpatrick, & Barron, 2002, p. 75)

As an example, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Guidelines for Teaching about the Holocaust (2001) states, “The history of the Holocaust represents one of the most effective and most extensively documented subjects for a pedagogical examination of basic moral issues” (p. 1). The preservation of legible documents, photographic imagery, film, and survivor testimony available allows teachers to create authentic student activities.

In America, some replay the story of the Holocaust to teach basic American values (Crysler & Kusno, 1997). This begs the question, what are these fundamental values? Most would concur that these values are those projecting the ideals that reflect the best in America, which are, for example pluralism, democracy, restraint on government, inalienable rights, and restriction of governance regarding religion (Crysler & Kusno, 1997). Some teachers claimed that teaching a course in the literature of the Holocaust related to the findings that students felt that studying the Holocaust increased awareness of and sensitivity to the suffering of others and to cultural diversity (Danks, 1996; Drew, 1995; Farnham, 1992).

The value for teachers to inform students of comparative genocide is supported by history scholars who have brought to light the impact of suffering to other groups of people who shared similar tragedy, yet offer unique differences (Melson, 1992). The Ustasha mass murdering of Serbs, for example, (Croatian Genocide in World War II) happened because it was allowed to happen. Yuhuda Bauers’
words relate to this when discussing the Holocaust, saying, “Events happen because they are possible. If they were possible once, they are possible again; in that sense, the Holocaust is not unique, but a warning for the future” (Bauer, 1989). Teachers need to recognize their responsibility to present different variances of human tragedy including the recognition of atrocities that may not tip the scale of power in the world order (Power, 2002).

Many view the Holocaust as a case of massive human rights violations; thus, teachers can help students become aware of the extent to which suffering was the outgrowth of individual and group decisions made in a totalitarian society whose goals were antithetical to the protection of individual rights and in violation of international law. Accordingly, teachers may be able to help students envision, through deliberation and discussion of the Holocaust and comparative genocide, the implication of a society and individual activism in which human relationships are interconnected and the protection of the rights of others becomes fundamental to citizenship responsibility (Shiman & Fernekes, 1999).

Of particular concern in the teaching of the Holocaust and comparative genocide, as scholar and survivor Henry Friedlander (1979) remarked 20 years ago in his landmark essay, Toward a Methodology of Teaching About the Holocaust, “Too much is being taught by too many without focus and this poses the danger of destroying the subject matter through dilettantism” (p. 520). This observation is still reflected today, as many lessons and units developed by teachers, curriculum coordinators, and state departments of education are in possession of incorrect facts, significant gaps in the presentation of history, and deficient in critical antecedents that contributed to and eventually determined the implementation of the final solution (Totten, 1999).

Dawidowicz (1990) and Totten (2001) have argued that the time devoted to the Holocaust is sorely inadequate, that the curriculum guides are poorly written and contain many factual errors, and that the methodologies teachers employ, such as simulations, encourage students to over-identify with the victims. Some such as Dawidowicz also declare that the Holocaust is trivialized by teachers who compare it to other genocides or fail to identify specifically the type of intolerance called anti-Semitism. Most alarming to scholars, however, is whether the majority of public school teachers possess the necessary training and preparation to teach about this most complex and emotional subject (Schwartz, 1990; Shawn 1995).

Rationale for the Study

Given the significance and sensitivity of these issues, I decided that it was imperative to conduct an extensive examination of a purposeful sampling of secondary social studies teachers. The principal objective of this qualitative study was to explore and unearth why and how these controversial public issues are being taught. This was done through an examination of best practices as described through four case profiles.

I utilized the specific topic of the Holocaust and comparative genocide in order to reveal teaching attitudes, methods, and curricular materials as they relate to the teaching of controversial public issues. Discovery of emerging themes developed through the analysis of consistent and constant comparison, as it was grounded within the data captured by this study of four expert witnesses from three different academic settings.

Guiding Research Questions

This study was formatted to compare and contrast teaching methods, styles, dispositions, purposes, and pedagogy as discovered through the expert witness sampling. This sampling process allowed themes to emerge from the grounded data through constant comparison and examination. Guiding the discovery of
emerging themes were four succinct and incisive research questions reflecting the ideas and actions of teachers:

1. What was their motivation for teaching controversial public issues? Specifically, why teach about the Holocaust and comparative genocide?

2. Why were certain specific methods, strategies, and curriculum used in the instruction of this topic?

3. What was unique about these three teachers who choose to teach controversial public issues? What characteristics did they possess? Did they all share similar traits as teachers and as people?

4. What type of preparation did these teachers receive to foster interest and/or help them to accumulate background for the teaching of these controversial public issues?

**Identifying and Selecting the Teachers**

To achieve the desired sampling of teachers required some serious investigation and inquiry. Prior to the selection of my sample, I had informally interviewed over 70 secondary social studies teachers in Indiana and found only 12 who taught the Holocaust and comparative genocide more than a few days (1 - 3). Fortunately, I was able to locate two willing participants through my experiences as a university supervisor of preservice students. I also met a graduate student who was interested in teaching controversial public issues; she agreed to participate. Another veteran teacher, who was a former colleague of mine, learned of my research and completed my search for four highly regarded Indiana secondary social studies teachers who taught the Holocaust and comparative genocide.

**Research Design**

These phenomenological questions were investigated through a qualitative research design that consisted of interviews, video tapes, audio tapes, classroom field notes, participant journals, and observations of four secondary social studies teachers.

In this qualitative study, there is no hypothesis, only a wondering idea (Glaser, 1992) of why and how these teachers teach controversial public issues in today's public school climate. Grounded theory is a constant comparative methodology that combines data analysis with data collection.

The use of grounded theory is appropriate in this study for the following reasons: Grounded theory is a qualitative method that “uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived ground theory about a phenomenon” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 24). Since grounded theory involves the understanding of complex social phenomena, it would seem to be a logical fit in analyzing the intellectual complexities of teaching about the
Holocaust and comparative genocide (Shelly, 2002).

Data Collection

Typically, research on especially skilled teachers and research on the conceptions of teachers rely on multiple data types (Hess, 1998). I followed the common path of researchers who interview teachers, observe them in the classroom, and analyze documents (e.g., lesson plans, student materials, and assessments). Multiple data sources are also recommended when developing grounded theory because “it yields more information on categories than any one mode of knowing” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 66).

Findings

Six themes emerged from the data which formulated a way to interpret meaningful results from the raw data: (a) citizenship, (b) curriculum and design, (c) teaching pedagogy, (d) modeling, (e) neotony, and (f) life experiences. This resulted in a comparison framework of six major concepts formulating an initial theory. This emerging comparison also brought to light several questions for future research. Subsequently, these findings present some implications for teacher educators and teachers.

By comparing the similarities and differences among these teachers’ ideas, attitudes, practices, curriculum choices, background, and pedagogy, one can infer certain concepts and principles that synthesize what can be learned from these cases. These concepts are reflective of the discovery process induced from the data by following the rules of grounded theory methodology.

Comparison of the Profiles

There were six core concepts that captured the essence of these four profiles as teachers of social studies generally and, specifically, teachers of the Holocaust and comparative genocide. These core concepts (see Figure 1) and the relationships among them emerged from the discussions, conceptions, and practices of Tim, Jeff, Mitch, and Mona. The following abbreviations represent the pseudonyms assigned to each participant in terms of their charted activities: TG (Tim Gibson); JL (Jeff Long); MR (Mitch Russell); MB (Mona Barrett).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Curriculum &amp; design</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TG—“Good citizenship”</td>
<td>TG—prepared curriculum, Internet, literature, video</td>
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<tr>
<td>JL—“Active citizenship”</td>
<td>JL—prepared curriculum, Internet, literature, video</td>
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<td>MR—“Patriotic citizenship”</td>
<td>MR—research paper, Internet, literature, video</td>
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<tr>
<td>MB—“Global citizenship”</td>
<td>MB—text, Internet, literature, video</td>
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<tr>
<th>Teaching pedagogy</th>
<th>Influence of modeling</th>
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<td>TG—Environment of understanding</td>
<td>TG—Positive models: family, teachers</td>
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<td>JL—Environment of engagement</td>
<td>JL—Positive models: family, professors</td>
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<tr>
<td>MR—Environment of achievement</td>
<td>MR—Positive models: family, teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>MB—Environment of caring</td>
<td>MB—Positive models: family, teachers; Negative models: coaches</td>
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<tr>
<th>Neotony</th>
<th>Life-altering experiences</th>
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<tr>
<td>TG—Graduate courses, deliberation training</td>
<td>TG—Holocaust Museum visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JL—Graduate courses, deliberation training</td>
<td>JL—Holocaust Museum visit</td>
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<tr>
<td>MR—Advance placement training</td>
<td>MR—911, Vietnam War</td>
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<tr>
<td>MB—Graduate courses, deliberation training</td>
<td>MB—Elon University</td>
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*Figure 1. Comparison framework of six major concepts*
Reflecting on the Profiles

By comparing the similarities and differences among these teachers’ ideas, attitudes, practices, curriculum choices, backgrounds, and pedagogy, one can infer certain concepts and principles that synthesize what can be learned from these cases. These concepts are reflective of the discovery process induced from the data by following the rules of grounded theory methodology.

Research Question # 1

What is their motivation for teaching controversial public issues? Specifically, why teach about the Holocaust and comparative genocide?

The research questions again serve to allow for constant comparison and contrasting the findings in relationship to the teaching of controversial public issues generally, and specifically, the Holocaust. The six themes generated from the data made it necessary to examine the similarities and differences between the profiles. After investigating the findings, it became apparent that while the profiles shared certain common interests, such as a responsibility to teach citizenship, they approached it very differently. It was apparent that each teacher used the topic of the Holocaust and comparative genocide in a manner reflective of their own disposition, which was shaped by various influences.

All four profiles strongly related their involvement in teaching controversial issues as an important process for developing productive, good, and active citizens. Each profile has characterized the participant’s definition of citizenship by encouraging students to recognize their individual responsibility to society. Each also provided his or her own interpretation of the concept of citizenship (see Figure 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tim Gibson: Good citizenship</th>
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<tr>
<td>“In our discipline of social studies and civics, there is no such thing as a regular civics course” (CO, #4, p. 142).</td>
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<th>Jeff Long: Engaged citizenship</th>
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<tr>
<td>“I think that in public education that...we want students to be active members of our society. If they can give something back to society and if you want to talk about these issues, how are we going to get kids active?” (IV, #2, p. 84).</td>
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<th>Mitch Russell: Patriotic citizenship</th>
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<td>“After 911, we talked about being aware, it is an unsafe world that we live in so you have to be sure you are doing everything that you can to protect yourselves. There is some personal responsibility there” (REF, #4, p. 227).</td>
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<th>Mona Barrett: Global citizenship</th>
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<td>“I want my students to be global thinkers...we have to in a more global society. We have to be able to communicate and understand with people from all over the world, not just our little world” (IV, #3, p. 140).</td>
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Figure 2. Theories of citizenship.

Although each profiled teacher had a slightly different perspective of citizenship and the role they should play in moving their students toward this ideal, the important point is that they all shared a very strong sense of responsibility for getting their students to become better citizens through the discussion of controversial public issues. Both Tim and Jeff shared similar positions regarding the importance of gaining “durable knowledge” (Nelson & Drake, 2005) promoting students to acquire meaningful knowledge and to be able to defend their positions as opposed to simply offering a sound bite, or an opinion of the day. This was especially important when discussion centered on the Holocaust and comparative
They also shared a strong sense of earning the right to enjoy the benefits of an American citizen, especially the freedoms and opportunities in this country to challenge those with authority. This would be logical considering their challenging and often difficult pathways to their profession. Both Tim and Jeff had long, arduous, winding journeys before they settled into their role as social studies teachers.

For Tim, understanding the meaning of citizenship was an absolute, and he constantly probed students to be better prepared through research to help define their ideas and opinions. He stayed close to the curriculum outlined by the Choices Program and admitted to doing so in part, because this was his first year teaching this unit. Jeff, on the other hand, used the Choices Program, but only as a means to an end, and the end was an action plan. He wanted his students to become “active” citizens—to move them to act on their thoughts through letters to the White House, the United Nations, the United States Congress, etc.—for the purpose of helping students design a strategy regarding future genocides.

For Mitch, the catharsis for his view of citizenship was the tremendous impact 911 had on him, as well as his lingering guilt over Vietnam. He stated, on many occasions, that 911 changed his perspective of what it is to be an American citizen and that no longer did he feel secure. He recognized, in his former students who served in Iraq, the true definition of citizenship: to serve, to honor, and to sacrifice. It was the latter point, to sacrifice, that Mitch most often discussed as being lacking in America’s youth and even in his own life. He still feels the pangs of disappointment by not serving in the military during the Vietnam War. Despite the fact he was not drafted, Mitch views this as a lost opportunity to honor his country through personal sacrifice, and in his opinion, the essential ingredient in the composition for a truly patriotic citizen.

Mitch believes strongly in freedom of speech and works to instill a concept of “free exchange” of information as his fundamental responsibility to help his students reach their own ideals of citizenship. His use of literature to help project this open venue of discussion and debate is viewed through his selection of reading assignments as well as his acceptance of a wide array of opinions, so long as there is support and validation of source material.

In comparing these three experienced teachers, I found it interesting to compare them to Mona who is relatively young and has only six years of teaching experience. Her perspective of citizenship revolves around taking her students to another level of thinking—to that of “global thinkers.” She used her caring attitude to invite students to participate as they felt “comfortable” and stressed the responsibility of students to recognize and appreciate that they are a part of a larger world and to see man’s inhumanity to man as a global issue, wherever and whenever it occurs.

Mona was very careful not to force discussions and consistently allowed her students to move the conversations according to their questions and interests. She did interject her own questions and inquiry but rarely, if ever, presented her position on issues. She preferred to stimulate the discussions with excerpts from literature reflecting real lives and real experiences from the Holocaust and German history. In comparison to the other three profiles, Mona was much more reserved in terms of challenging students or asking for details or supportive evidence. However, in terms of the sheer amount of time used for student interactions and participation, Mona’s class generated the most deliberation of the four.

Mona never required participation from her students, preferring to gently guide them into conversations, and she talked openly about not forcing anyone to participate in discussions concerning a controversial issue. She noted that often adults struggle to deal with some of these problems. Mona was very sensitive to all students but especially to any who came from another country, detailing her concern for their
“comfort” in discussing issues they might have faced themselves in their native country.

I asked Mona several times if this cautious attitude with her students was a reflection of her philosophy of teaching or her genuine concern for students who may be reserved, or did the fact that, as a non-tenured teacher, she might be more conservative now than in the future affect her ideas. Mona indicated it was a combination of all of these factors, but clearly she was concerned with the school culture and climate. Surrounding her in this school was a new principal, intense contract disputes, and constant awareness of tenure expectations. None of the other teachers had any reservations concerning what they could do or not do in class regarding the teaching of controversial public issues. The three veteran teachers felt that teaching controversial issues was, by nature, the responsibility of the social studies domain. They actually welcomed the controversial nature of topics to the point of challenging students to defend positions and ideals that might invite lively discourse and disagreement.

Research Question # 2

Why were certain methods, strategies, and curricula used in the instruction of this topic?

Multiple types of materials were used by all four teachers. The selection of these curriculum texts, deliberation guides, literature, and videos were motivated primarily by their desire for authentic assessment; although three of the profiles mandated participation and designed their rubric to include penalties for those who chose not to participate in the deliberation and presentation processes.

Tim and Jeff utilized the Choices Program, as mentioned earlier, but Jeff was much more inclined to steer away from the standard format. I attributed this to his prior experience using the Choices Program and the availability of a great deal of technology. Part of this rationale was Jeff’s “maverick” view of education, that is, one who rarely does things traditionally, and specifically, one who never does it the same way twice. Tim was very focused on getting all involved and working together. He mentioned a number of times that getting students to work together in random groups is a great way to model democratic thinking and also contributes to the greater good, a quality of “good” citizenship.

Jeff and Mitch utilized the Internet throughout the course, while Mona used it early on in her unit. Tim did the least with the Internet, he noted often that his equipment and access was limited. Often Tim’s computers did not work, and because he was a mobile teacher who did not have his own classroom, the logistics involved often prevented his students from working effectively with the Internet.

Mona used her United States History textbook and a few of their supplemental materials but relied heavily on the Internet. She also prepared her students for discussions by designing a timeline activity. Since Mitch was an English teacher who had used the subject of the Holocaust and comparative genocide to demonstrate to his students how to compose a research paper, he was much more in tune with the mechanics of writing and the collection of data. All the teachers informed their students of the importance of valid and reliable source material. Each teacher discussed at length the responsibility of good journalism, but Mitch was clearly the most prepared to illustrate bad references, to detect erroneous statements, and to warn about the consequences of plagiarism. He was also very thorough in his discussions about how to paraphrase and to explain other technical aspects of writing for research.

In all cases, the teachers made a connection between being able to support and defend cited positions. This concept of integrity was described as an essential aspect of citizenship. Each teacher dealt differently with decisions made about the assessment of their students’ participation in class discussions and presentations. Decisions about why and how to assess their students’ participation were somewhat shaped by tension between authenticity and
accountability. All four teachers held value in student participation, but only Mona did not penalize her students for non-participation. For Tim and Jeff, students not only must participate in discussions but it was also an essential part of their grade. Mitch felt that students would be less prepared as citizens if they were not participatory (refer to Figure 3).

Tim Gibson: Motivator for thinking

“Critical thinking and deliberation teaches students to compromise and it works with some of those gray areas in foreign policy that we need to be aware of” (CO, # 2, p. 73).

Methodology: Facilitator/moderator
Assessment—Authenticity and accountability
Curriculum—Choices Program, Capital Forum, The Sunflower, Hotel Rwanda
Technology—Supplemental

Jeff Long: The activist

“We can come together and deliberate and find out if the acts going on are leading up to genocide and put something together and send it to the White House and see what happens” (CO, # 2, p. 131).

Methodology: Teacher centered/moderator
Assessment—Authenticity and accountability
Curriculum—Choices Program, Capital Forum, Night, Hotel Rwanda
Technology—Primary

Mitch Russell: Promoter of free expression

“It’s a place of education, and so it is again a free exchange of ideas and I don’t want to indoctrinate or prophesize. I want to hear what people are saying” (IV, #2, p. 69).

Methodology: Teacher centered/facilitator
Assessment—Accountability and authenticity
Curriculum—A crime without a name, Black like me, What’s good about America
Technology—Primary

Mona Barrett: The moderator for discussion

“I think the comments students bring up really do guide the conversation, I don’t want to force feed them information” (REF, # 1, p. 113).
Methodology—Student centered/facilitator
Assessment—Authentic
Curriculum—Text, supplemental materials, Night, Hotel Rwanda
Technology—Primary

Figure 3. Comparing profiles: Methodology, assessment, curriculum, and technology.

Research Question # 3

What is unique about these four teachers who choose to teach controversial public issues? What special characteristics do they possess? Do they share similar traits as teachers and as people?

Each teacher in this study created an environment for learning controversial public issues in their classrooms. They did this primarily through their attitudes and general pedagogy as they studied the Holocaust and comparative genocide. They promoted learning and effort as an integral part of being a well-rounded citizen and believed it was their responsibility to model certain democratic principles for students to become successful citizens. Clearly, they demonstrated their styles of instruction according to their philosophy of education. They shared a common attitude in the power of one to make a difference. This was illustrated by the videos shown in their classes, Rwanda and Schindler’s List, which offered examples of individual choice and values that stimulated student discussion. They gave evidence of this belief in making a difference by their testimonies of their own lives, as well as demonstrating the influence of individuals as defined by specific events and people throughout history.

Tim was always creating ways for his students to think and getting students to probe
deeper and to develop more profound responses. He made a connection between a vibrant democracy and a citizenry that can think and participate in discussions of controversial issues. While all the teachers desired interaction, their styles differed in how they modeled discussions and how they interacted with students. Tim used humor to help motivate students to think critically and reminded them that the greatest achievement of the framers of the Constitution was their ability to compromise. His intense love for history fits well with his style as facilitator and moderator. He loved to interact and to challenge students to view things from other’s points of view. He modeled this role when he participated as the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during the culminating congressional hearing activity he utilized. This role playing was developed within the curriculum of the Choicest Program. This gave him the liberty to be involved yet to help facilitate student learning through the processes of deliberation and debriefing. Teaching students to think about what has happened in the world was vital to Tim. And in this unit, he was especially focused on getting his students to understand what happened historically during the Holocaust, as well as comparing subsequent genocides.

Jeff was not able to withdraw for long periods of time from the interaction of his students when discussing various issues related to the Holocaust and comparative genocide. He sometimes apologized for his interruptions and clarifications. He put a premium on what was produced, what could be accomplished, and what plan of action would be created by his students. To Jeff, what matters most in a democracy is how people can create new options or new ways of looking at things and most importantly, new solutions. For this unit, this meant the goal was a new solution to the issues surrounding genocide. Jeff’s own inquisitive nature became infectious to his students, and they all explored through the Internet and wrote questions and comments on the board together. In addition they created a plan of action that was put up on the Smart Board and examined and changed and finally produced to the satisfaction of the whole class. It was then reviewed, printed, and discharged to the United Nations, the United States Congress, and to the White House. Jeff moved his students to experience what he believed is the essential component of citizenship: to act.

Mitch presented a model that, at times, was lecturer and teacher-centered, but he also led student-focused discussions and conversations. He was a combination of all the other teachers: informing yet inquiring, open yet opinionated, friendly yet firm. Mitch certainly had the with- it-ness that allowed him to venture into most any area and that was vital for him: Free exchange of ideas was the substance of life for this teacher.

Mitch was motivated by the lessons learned from his father and realized that he was trying to pass on to a new generation the lessons of his past. Clearly, Mitch was the most frustrated of all the teachers, because of student apathy. All those profiled had discussed student apathy as the most detrimental issue to their teaching effectiveness. Mitch brought to the classroom an abundant amount of material and information to challenge his students, including literature from his sociology curriculum. Mitch believed that education is an open forum for ideas and connects this philosophy to his responsibility for teaching students to respect the views of others, even those who have opposing perspectives. For Mitch, that open and free sharing of ideas was fundamental to democratic citizenship.

Mona most closely depicted the role as a moderator in most class sessions. She viewed her responsibility as a teacher to guide others to discover meaning and knowledge. She carefully positioned herself to avoid being viewed as dogmatic, or controlling. She rejected the notion of lecturing and used a variety of sources for information and inquiry. Her ability to utilize technology reduced the necessity for informing students about basic information, class instructions, and procedures. The use of
technology was viewed by Mona as a major way to interest her students in controversial issues, particularly global issues, such as the Holocaust and comparative genocide. To help conceptualize the environments of learning for each profile, I created a diagram to illustrate their uniqueness through their own words (see Figure 4 below).

Tim Gibson: Environment of understanding

“I want students to think, and I have been focused on that and hopefully when they get up there you can see the wheels turning and you see them think” (CO, # 1 , p. 96).

Jeff Long: Environment of engagement

“Now we have a model that we can follow...It may take some action of the class to fire off some letters and just see what happens. I would like you as a class to write this up in a coherent paragraph or two with outlines of a plan of action” (CO, # 3, p. 146; CO, # 7, p. 146).

Mitch Russell: Environment of achievement

“Well, a learning experience is what I see from my point of view and from the kids. They learned a whole bunch, but I did also” (IV, # 3, p. 224).

Mona Barrett: Environment of caring

“I just want to be a phase of their lives so that hopefully is a motivation for them to care about people outside other than themselves” (IV, # 1, p. 17).

Figure 4. Environments of learning.

Research Question # 4

What type of preparation did these teachers receive to foster interest and/or help them to accumulate background for the teaching of these controversial public issues?

A finding of great concern, especially for teacher educators, was the lack of meaningful preservice training for social studies teachers in dealing with controversial public issues. Mitch related that preservice teachers today are much more prepared than he was to go into the field of teaching. Mona contested that premise, as she felt her education classes were lacking in quality and more directed to theory than practicum, which, in her opinion, is ineffective and boring. Jeff and Tim recently finished their Master’s degree programs online and hold a similar view that there could be more value in their classes for helping teachers handle class discussions and issues related to the real world.

All four profiles revealed that they learned most of what they know about teaching controversial issues, specifically the Holocaust and comparative genocide, and deliberation in general, by attending workshops and seminars that were not related to their college education classes. Some of these teacher education sessions included programs for teaching deliberation sponsored by the Capital Forum (created and sponsored by the Brown University’s Choices Program), competition at Indianapolis, and the Ashland University Institute for History Seminars at Ashland, Ohio.

Each of the teachers in this study indicated experiencing a strong influence from the modeling of others during their life, especially from members of their families and teachers they had in their own educational life. Tim and Jeff stressed the importance of specific teachers because of the way they handled their classes and especially the ability of these teacher role models to relate knowledge to the real world. The influence of their role models throughout their lives clearly aided in the creation of Tim’s environment of understanding and Jeff’s environment of engagement.

All teachers had both personal and professional mentors and role models who stressed the importance of open forums and critical thinking, both traits they professed to be beneficial to the teaching of controversial issues. Mitch found he would come to appreciate more and more his father’s modeling of what it takes to be successful and held in great
appreciation the mentality of never quitting, regardless of the obstacles. Mitch also referred to his high school basketball coach, who was his sociology and psychology teacher, in glowing terms. This coach was someone who Mitch indicated he would like to emulate as a teacher—a person who would welcome all issues into classroom discussions.

Mitch focuses his teaching philosophy on establishing an environment of achievement. It would seem plausible that this is a direct influence of his father’s spirit for accepting nothing less than success. This attitude came into conflict with some of his students who did not share his enthusiasm for deliberation and discussion of the Holocaust and comparative genocide. Student apathy presented an unacceptable position for Mitch, especially when discussing the Holocaust and the implications for today’s society if no one is willing to step forward and speak out against genocide.

Mona also was moved by her high school coaches who taught social studies, but in a negative manner. She had great disdain for them as she felt they had their priorities in the wrong place by emphasizing their coaching duties above their role as a teacher. She vowed never to follow in their footsteps. She was especially adamant about developing class interaction and deliberation, which she noted was totally lacking in her high school experience. I found it interesting that Mona would eventually come to find mentors at Elon University who would stimulate her thinking and motivate her to find different ways to look at the world, not just within the context of one narrow perspective.

This global context is reflected by her teaching pedagogy today and is in concert with her creation of an environment of caring. These life lessons have helped shape Mona’s attitudes about teaching controversial public issues through deliberation and discussion. She especially was concerned about allowing all of her students to have a voice in the discussion of how and why the Holocaust and recent genocides occurred. I have included some statements from each profile to support what they view as the influence of others in their educational and personal lives. Many of these models have helped promote some of their teaching and personal attitudes, as well as creating a background of preparation for teaching controversial issues in social studies. From their own words, I recognized the vast shaping these models have had on the profiles in their careers and lives, especially in their teaching the Holocaust and comparative genocide (see Figure 5).

Tim Gibson: Positive models—Family, teachers, & peers

“Mom was always good about making sure we always got books and reading and were doing well in school. I had this uncle that was a teacher, and we would go down to visit, and he would always be quizzing me on hard words” (IV, # 1, p. 14).

Jeff Long: Positive models—Family, college professor, & peers

“I probably learned more from this professor of Romans, I mean it was just incredible, he taught us knowledge without application is crap. I thought wow, this is teaching!” (IV, # 1, p. 5).

“My mentor, while teaching special education, was probably one of the best teachers I’ve ever met in my life” (IV, # 1, p. 6).

Mitch Russell: Positive models—Family, teachers, & peers

“My folks really pushed us academically...my high school sociology teacher, we had a lot of good conversations” (IV, # 1, p. 8; IV, # 3, p. 242).

Mona Barrett: Positive & negative models—Family, teachers, & peers

“Very negative social studies experience as they were taught by coaches who did not see their significant role as a teacher” (IV, # 1, p. 11).
“At college, my professors had open discussions, and they were very poignant and powerful” (IV, # 1, pp. 15-16).

**Figure 5. Profile models.**

**Neoteny**

An overriding theme that permeates throughout the research was the teachers’ willingness to learn to learn or neoteny (Bennis & Thomas, 2002), and thereby, they have been able to stay current with new knowledge and technology. All four profiles demonstrated, through various educational classes, workshops, professional development, and personal quests, this desire to continue learning to learn. This spirit and interest in learning were reflected by how these teachers worked with their students in the examination of material related to the Holocaust and comparative genocide.

Mitch exemplified it best through his philosophy to allow students to explore and have free investigative powers and to bring fresh ideas and information into the classroom to share. This provided for an open arena to express ideas and also a challenge to determine what is an acceptable argument. One of Mitch’s students, who offered that there may be occasion for genocide to be a positive event, brings this dichotomy to life. I realized early on in Mitch’s classroom that not only was he learning as much as his students, but also they all were having a fun time while examining the very sensitive subject of genocide.

This is supported by the literature reviewed (Hahn, 2001; Hess, 1998) that indicates students often do enjoy the deliberation process, specifically when the issues are controversial. Mitch is a 30-year teaching veteran, yet his greatest enjoyment at the present time is his Advanced Placement training, while teaching a full class load, serving as the school’s senior project coordinator, and participating in the school’s new program for advanced placement classes for college credit. This power derived from a willingness to learn to learn is something we all would do well to recognize.

**Life-Altering Experiences**

Two of the profiled teachers give credit to visiting the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C., as a life-changing experience, both personally and professionally. Tim and Jeff were both very quick to point this out in my interviews. Tim was more subdued when discussing the visit but recognized that his teaching about the Holocaust would now take on new meaning, a more personal meaning. He insists that the state of Indiana did not need to tell him to teach about the Holocaust by passing a new law; he viewed teaching the Holocaust and comparative genocide as a rationale to helping students understand the complexity of man’s capacity for inhumanity. By teaching the stories of these people involved in genocides, he may help his students develop an empathy and appreciation for those who are “the other.”

Jeff, in his typical enthusiastic fashion, told me that after his first visit to the museum: “I came out a changed man” (JL, CO, # 3, p. 1). This serious event moved Jeff to become more motivated to help do something about genocide, to get his students to move toward changing the world. He remarked to me that his greatest goal in education is to get some student to become a major player in the political world—someone who could help challenge the way things are done politically, and perhaps that student or students could really make a difference.

Mona’s life-changing moment came over a period of time, but without question, she felt her college professors at Elon University molded her and challenged her to explore the greater world and to believe in herself and her ability to change others. Mona also shared that they taught her about the power of one: the ability of a single individual to change peo-
ple’s attitudes, or to motivate someone to greatness, or perhaps just to get a student to think about the big ideas. Her life changed forever when she decided to attend this university where she found professors who helped her foster a great appreciation for discussion and interaction as a model for teaching controversial public issues.

For Mitch, 911 brought home a reality of the world that would alter his perspective of his personal life, as well as his life as a teacher. Mitch reveals an inner side of himself that has changed dramatically. He now believes that the American way of life, as he has known it, is in serious danger. The ability to have freedom to question and ponder why things are done in the world and what is right and what is moral pushes Mitch to seek answers the only way he knows how: to talk, to hold conversations, to seek a better understanding of the world through knowledge. And he does this through his passion, reading for conversation.

Mitch holds dearly to a powerful responsibility he feels for his students—to move them to recognize that they live in a very great country whose ways of life are no longer guaranteed. Whether it is based on experience or wisdom or a combination, Mitch is confident he knows what social studies should be about (free and open discussion of controversial issues) and what it should not be about (indoctrination of the ideas of others). Mitch’s desire is to bring students and teachers together to become more informed and aware citizens for the preservation of his country’s democracy, even if it means the ultimate sacrifice.

The Essence of a Good Social Studies Teacher

Perhaps a fitting summary would be to revisit the statement from the National Council of Social Studies. Social studies instruction in public schools is primarily designed to “help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (NCSS, 1994, p. 3). The four teachers I profiled viewed this definition as their mission, and I saw this played out in their class sessions when they taught about the Holocaust and comparative genocide. While each teacher profiled developed his or her own individual approach to teaching about the Holocaust and comparative genocide, each of the teaching styles was born out of his or her overall teaching pedagogy. They utilized material and methods that helped them create an environment of learning they felt was appropriate and effective for their students.

The study revealed the importance of various life experiences and how these can alter and change each teacher’s pedagogy. The importance of modeling on teacher behavior and attitudes was clearly demonstrated. This influence on these teachers not only came from professional teachers and coaches in their past and present, but also from personal contacts, such as family members or friends. And as discussed in great detail, each teacher profiled had at least one life-altering moment, when something they experienced changed their perspectives and moved them to act in a different manner.

All four teachers viewed their life-altering moments as influential in the way they handled issues with their students while teaching about the Holocaust and comparative genocide. The presence of neoteny, the ability to stay current or to learn to learn, is a fundamental finding of this study. The trait of neoteny has been suggested as an important trait that allows leaders to remain purposeful regardless of the era they live in and the age of the leader (Bennis & Thomas, 2002). Each of these four teachers exhibited a vast array of activities and training which promoted their ability to stay current and informed while teaching about the Holocaust and comparative genocide. They all demonstrated a with-it-ness in the classroom and extensive technology skills, as well as an ability to bring students to a level of understanding about current genocide issues, par-
tic
ularly the bureaucracy of international politics.

Their application of modern technology enhanced the presentation of material utilized for examining the Holocaust and comparative genocide, by both students and teachers, according to their own testimony in electronic journals and interviews. The fact that all four teachers have received professional training recently for the purpose of teaching deliberation and discourse (which included sessions specifically related to genocide) is important to note. It is also significant to point out that no such training was a part of their pre-service undergraduate or graduate programs.

**School Climate and Culture**

The school climate and culture made a difference in how each teacher profiled approached and taught their classes about the Holocaust and comparative genocide. For example, in Mona’s case, she was very sensitive to the nature of her standing as a less experienced, non-tenured teacher. While she was teaching in an environment of supportive administrators and a community that clearly emphasized high academic standards, she was much more cautious regarding curriculum choices, discussion expectations, and time spent on the subject. Mitch felt completely free addressing any issue and was at ease with using the Internet and selected literature to guide and prepare his students for discussion and deliberation about the Holocaust and comparative genocide.

**Context**

The context of the classroom was most impacting on Mona, who represented an average Indiana high school class. She taught a required United States History class and had curriculum restraints in terms of time and material. She followed more closely a conventional textbook and supplemental material that it provided, although she did mix in some Internet activities and readings from selected books. Mona also elected to cut out her culminating activity, showing the video *Schindler’s List*, in part because she felt the students should move on to other required curriculum. But she readily admitted to being concerned how this viewing would be accepted by her administration. This class also met for less time than any of the others in the study, both in terms of days and the time for the specific class period. Tim had issues related to student apathy and technology equipment that was not always available, and at times, not functional. His class period was structured as a block (90 minutes every other day) with the last thirty minutes meeting after lunch. This created some problems in conducting deliberations and discussions on controversial issues. He met with a series of interruptions, and this made planning and executing his lessons on the Holocaust and comparative genocide challenging. Meeting every other day was a factor he had to contend with, especially when there was an interruption in the day-to-day schedule such as a fog delay. Mitch also had a block schedule (73 minutes every day), but this seemed to be very manageable for his teaching style and pacing, and he balanced many activities during the block, which often included a segment reserved for discussion of his students’ findings and questions about the Holocaust and comparative genocide.

Jeff Long had the same schedule as Mona, but because he taught an elective class, he had the freedom to expand his unit to four weeks, two more than Mona, and the same as Mitch and Jeff. This expanded time allowed for greater student inquiry and discussions as well as viewing complete films, not just short clips as Mona chose to do. Debriefing of the film through discussion was also important for all the teachers and their students. Once again, Mona was limited in this activity because of her time limitation. For Tim and Jeff, they selected the *Choices Program* as the main curriculum. They had the liberty to design additional assignments, such as Jeff’s action plan,
that contributed to their overall effectiveness in teaching the Holocaust and comparative genocide. They also could alter or adjust the Choices Program to suit their students’ backgrounds and needs, while allowing some flexibility in the selection of genocides that they studied. For Mitch, his curriculum really became the Internet, and his students structured their own research about the Holocaust or a comparative genocide. For all the teachers profiled, the issues of validity and accountability of the Internet sources became an important factor. Mitch was especially focused on the issues of plagiarism and source reliability, possibly a reflection of his training for teaching English.

Creating Learning Environments

Each profile created an environment for teaching controversial public issues. Tim had very strong opinions about what “good citizenship” consisted of and was adamant that it should be taught at all levels. He felt one way to accomplish this “good citizenship” was to utilize four weeks to help his students understand their responsibilities as citizens to think and formulate supported opinions. He accomplished this through the deliberation process he learned to facilitate by going to workshops and training sessions provided by the Choices Program. Tim created an inviting environment for ideas and critical thinking as he led his class in discussions about the Holocaust and comparative genocide.

Jeff worked with an understanding that citizenship must contain a component of action. He designed his teaching of the Holocaust and comparative genocide around the motivation of getting students to construct a plan for future genocide and then act by sending it to various political and governmental agencies. He drew inspiration for this type of “environment of engagement” from his early mentors in education, former professors, and fellow peer teachers. His appreciation for their teaching disposition came from what he perceived as a connection of citizenship roles and responsibilities to how that relates to the real world. Jeff reminded me and his students about the critical part of teaching, to make controversial public issues relevant and real. He did both by using a curriculum designed to stimulate thought and action through the topic of the Holocaust and comparative genocide, using an environment of engagement as the catharsis.

Mitch was also greatly influenced by his teachers and parents. He particularly was focused on creating an environment of achievement, believing that every student should do their best because that is an important value in becoming a vibrant citizen. He used the opportunity to teach about the Holocaust and comparative genocide to encourage his students to ask questions, to engage in research, and to try to discover meaning through deliberation. Adjusting his students’ responsibilities for an English class by assigning a research project on a social studies topic, demonstrated a sincere desire to help his students to achieve knowledge about these controversial public issues.

While Mona clearly had less time, less academic freedom, and less experience, she was dedicated to teach about the Holocaust and comparative genocide. Based somewhat on her negative experiences in high school social studies classes, Mona was focused on providing an “environment of caring” and shared her interest for student-centered discussions through the examination of the Holocaust and comparative genocide. Even though Mona was cautious about some issues, such as her students who were from Sudan and Germany, she led her students into many discussions about controversial public issues. She reminded her students that to be aware of global issues was a responsibility of all students in America. While highly motivated to encourage discussion from her students, Mona never pressed them to respond and often did not call on those she thought would be uncomfortable. The research noted in chapter two supports the division between teachers who require all students to
participate and teachers who prefer to allow for choice. This was something she felt worked best for her and for her students and modeled her professor’s style that she witnessed at Elon University.

All participants utilized the Internet, and all participants have been in recent training for deliberation. Another comparison that was consistent was the lack of any preservice training, either undergraduate or graduate level, for the facilitating of deliberation. All have learned this technique through workshops or training conferences beyond their university teacher training. The teachers profiled exhibited an ability to adapt, to change, to learn a fundamental pedagogical element that reflects a common trait of leaders. This is demonstrated by the literature reviewed about neoteny.

**Future Research Questions**

This study has created an interest in additional topics to study in the future. One of the areas that I felt was conspicuously absent was an analysis of assessment tools and processes that each teacher applied. The teachers studied were somewhat vague about assessment, specifically involving student discussions, and there was an existing tension between authenticity and accountability. The data that I collected illustrated that all four subjects leaned heavily on authentic assessment, but one subject did not endorse a universal accountability specifically for discussions.

Little is known about how teachers determined what controversial public issues are and which are appropriate for their classes to study. Teacher competency in dealing with teaching controversial public issues also has potential for further investigation.

Also, nowhere in my notes or tapes that I reviewed, did I find where any students asked their teachers for their opinions regarding the Holocaust or comparative genocide. The most common questions from all the students I observed were “How the Holocaust could have occurred without the rest of the world knowing about it, and why nothing was done?” This does present the question: Should teachers present their views and make them known? This is an essential question that I find critical to the study of how to teach controversial public issues.

The exploration and discovery of credible sources about the Holocaust and comparative genocide is an area that has called for additional research. While a bit on the outside of this study per se, all the subjects in this study had a different perspective of what is acceptable and what is the proper method for searching the Internet for viable information and what to do if it is not a reliable source. This begs for further examination and study.

And what about preservice and professional development programs—what is their role in preparing teacher educators for these challenges? What are higher education programs doing in the social studies methods classes to prepare future teachers for instruction of controversial public issues?

These are just some of the results from this paper that hopefully will evoke conversational sparks to help foster ideas for furthering a sound pedagogical approach to teaching controversial public issues in schools throughout the United States. Since the reality of genocide is still with us today, new and effective teaching models for this controversial public issue cannot happen soon enough.
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