Transforming Urban Education: Urban Teachers and Students Working Collaboratively

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Transformations in Urban Education: Urban Teachers and Students Working Collaboratively addresses pressing problems in urban education, contextualized in research in New York City and nearby school districts on the Northeast Coast of the United States. The schools and institutions involved in empirical studies range from elementary through college and include public and private schools, alternative schools for dropouts, and museums. Difference is regarded as a resource for learning and equity issues are examined in terms of race, ethnicity, language proficiency, designation as special education, and gender. The contexts for research on teaching and learning involve science, mathematics, uses of technology, literacy, and writing comic books. A dual focus addresses research on teaching and learning, and learning to teach in urban schools.

Collaborative activities addressed explicitly are teachers and students enacting roles of researchers in their own classrooms, cogenerative dialogues as activities to allow teachers and students to learn about one another’s cultures and express their perspectives on their experienced realities and negotiate shared recommendations for changes to enacted curricula. Coteaching is also examined as a means of learning to teach, teaching and learning, and undertaking research.

The scholarship presented in the constituent chapters is diverse, reflecting multi-logicality within sociocultural frameworks that include cultural sociology, cultural historical activity theory, prosody, sense of place, and hermeneutic phenomenology. Methodologies employed in the research include narratology, interpretive, reflexive, and authentic inquiry, and multi-level inquiries of video resources combined with interpretive analyses of social artifacts selected from learning environments.

This edited volume provides insights into research of places in which social life is enacted as if there were no research being undertaken. The research was intended to improve practice. Teachers and learners, as research participants, were primarily concerned with teaching and learning and, as a consequence, as we learned from research participants were made aware of what we learned—the purpose being to improve learning environments. Accordingly, research designs are contingent on what happens and emergent in that what we learned changed what happened and expanded possibilities to research and learn about transformation through heightening participants’ awareness about possibilities for change and developing interventions to improve learning.
Transforming Urban Education
Bold Visions in Educational Research
Volume 38

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Scope:

Bold Visions in Educational Research is international in scope and includes books from two areas: teaching and learning to teach and research methods in education. Each area contains multi-authored handbooks of approximately 200,000 words and monographs (authored and edited collections) of approximately 130,000 words. All books are scholarly, written to engage specified readers and catalyze changes in policies and practices. Defining characteristics of books in the series are their explicit uses of theory and associated methodologies to address important problems. We invite books from across a theoretical and methodological spectrum from scholars employing quantitative, statistical, experimental, ethnographic, semiotic, hermeneutic, historical, ethnomethodological, phenomenological, case studies, action, cultural studies, content analysis, rhetorical, deconstructive, critical, literary, aesthetic and other research methods.

Books on teaching and learning to teach focus on any of the curriculum areas (e.g., literacy, science, mathematics, social science), in and out of school settings, and points along the age continuum (pre K to adult). The purpose of books on research methods in education is not to present generalized and abstract procedures but to show how research is undertaken, highlighting the particulars that pertain to a study. Each book brings to the foreground those details that must be considered at every step on the way to doing a good study. The goal is not to show how generalizable methods are but to present rich descriptions to show how research is enacted. The books focus on methodology, within a context of substantive results so that methods, theory, and the processes leading to empirical analyses and outcomes are juxtaposed. In this way method is not reified, but is explored within well-described contexts and the emergent research outcomes. Three illustrative examples of books are those that allow proponents of particular perspectives to interact and debate, comprehensive handbooks where leading scholars explore particular genres of inquiry in detail, and introductory texts to particular educational research methods/issues of interest to novice researchers.
Transforming Urban Education

Urban Teachers and Students Working Collaboratively

Edited by
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and

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While Kenneth Tobin was on the science education faculty at Florida State University he was encouraged by Alejandro Gallard to orientate his research toward equity associated with social categories such as ethnicity, race, gender, and English language proficiency. In collaboration with colleagues, he began a large graduate degree program for elementary and middle schoolteachers in Miami Florida, to improve the quality of science and mathematics education. This work whetted his appetite for research in urban education.

In 1997 Tobin took up a position in urban science education at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) and began a program of research on the teaching and learning of science in urban high schools. With the support of grants from the Spencer Foundation and the National Science Foundation he collaborated with numerous scholars from the university and public schools to develop a program of research that was situated in inner-city high schools and embraced sociocultural theory. The work was designed to improve practice in the schools and classrooms involved in the research while elaborating theoretical frameworks. As well as conducting research on interaction ritual chains, identity, solidarity, and emotions the studies initiated inquiries on coteaching and cogenerative dialogue.

In the fall of 2003 Tobin joined the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York (i.e., The Graduate Center), the same semester in which a doctoral student, Ashraf Shady, coeditor of this volume, joined the PhD in Urban Education. In New York City Tobin and his doctoral students expanded on the studies undertaken in Philadelphia. Just as he did in Philadelphia, Tobin initiated research squad meetings to include colleagues from other universities and his doctoral students. At these meetings we ironed out issues of theory, methodology and research design to address the pressing needs of the time. In the decade Tobin has been at the Graduate Center the focus of the research squad, moved increasingly away from Science, Mathematics, and Technology to align more with the learning sciences, covering a broad array of curriculum topics and the science of teaching and learning. The 22 chapters included in this volume derive from this on going research program in urban education, focusing on important issues associated with education in New York City and surrounding school districts. Except for the chapters Tobin authored, each first author is a graduate from the Graduate Center. Each chapter contributes uniquely, emphasizing strengths in diversity and the value of adopting non-deficit perspectives. Whereas each chapter includes a foundation of sociocultural frameworks, there is rich diversity in the research included in the volume. The research extends far beyond hackneyed terms such as qualitative and quantitative methods to display multi-logical, multi-method, and multilevel research that embraces a wide range of styles.
FOREWORD

Transformations in Urban Education: Urban Teachers and Students Working Collaboratively addresses novel constructs and approaches. The empirical work presented here concerns teachers and students who considered research in their own classroom as necessary/essential. This contrasts radically with the prevailing stance of policy makers and administrators who fail to see the value of learning from research, regarding research as a disruption to teaching and learning rather than a core activity needed to foster improvements through emergent and contingent transformations that serve participant teachers and learners. Instead of one-size-fits-all approaches that have characterized education in an era of globalization, neoliberalism, and commodification of education, research methodologies like those featured in this book offer the potential for teachers to collaborate with students to improve the quality of learning, teaching, curricula, and schools. Instead of focusing on testing, testing, and testing it makes sense to pick up on what is being learned by researchers who have contributed to this volume.

History suggests that the research undertaken and reported here will be disseminated through ripple effects rather than a worldwide tsunami. It is unlikely that policymakers will search for a book such as this and pore over the pages to glean the knowledge to transform their schools and school districts. We should bring it to their attention! This book is likely to be read by teachers in graduate school, teacher educators completing doctoral degrees, and faculty seeking to get involved in research that builds on what has been undertaken. The transformative potential of the research reported in the book was catalyzed by the conduct of research and expanded as teachers and students used what they learned from the research to make changes in their lifeworlds (including other classes in which they participated). Similarly, having read the book, or parts of it, readers can act differently in the world as teachers and learners not only in formal institutions such as schools and museums, but also in institutions not usually associated with education – including recreational facilities, prisons, churches/synagogues/temples, and homes.

There are many ways to think about research and its representation in books and journal articles. We view this research as continuing ongoing dialogue we are privileged to join. The chapters published here are not final words, but represent scholarly perspectives that reflect careful, ongoing research. We invite critique and elaboration of our work and anticipate that the dialogue will continue as participants come and go.

Kenneth Tobin and Ashraf Shady, New York, December, 2013
1. BECOMING A SCIENCE TEACHER

Abstract In this chapter I recount my personal history as it relates both to the immigrant experience in contemporary American schools and to some of the challenges faced by students in the cogenerative dialogue I formed as a teacher-researcher in my classroom at a suburban junior high school on Long Island. After experiencing turmoil in schools in the Bronx during the 1960s and 1970s I found that my perspective of the society around me mediated the way my students, many children from immigrant families, approached their schooling. My gender and immigrant background made me empathetic to problems faced by students and teachers of science and math.

I am an immigrant, and being one has always given me a slightly different perspective on the society around me. Many of the students I have taught have also been immigrants or come from immigrant families. This is the story of one immigrant who came to teach others from backgrounds different from her own but whose experiences in an unfamiliar new world tie them in some common way to their teacher. All immigrants, both children and adults, face the challenge of determining how they will fit into their new society. They need to decide to what extent they will maintain the culture of their place of origin and how they will reconcile that with the new, American, mainstream culture. Sometimes, this can result in conflict between immigrant parents and their children as they clash over how to triangulate between their old and new environments in terms of cultural norms, mores, and self-identification. This, of course, has an effect on the way children from immigrant families approach their schooling. Even though the mainstream culture, which existed when I was growing up, has fragmented today and no longer provides a single model for my students to follow, as an immigrant, I have nonetheless faced some of these challenges myself.

In 1950 at the age of three, I emigrated from Germany to the United States. I was born in a displaced persons’ camp where my parents, both Polish Holocaust survivors, spent five years awaiting entry to the United States. I received my primary and secondary education in the Bronx, New York, and attended college there as well. I majored in science and minored in education at Hunter College in the Bronx, which is now Lehman College. Following my college graduation, I became a science teacher at a junior high school in the Bronx and later at a high school in the same borough. Years later I taught at Suburban Junior High School on Long Island.
In this chapter I briefly recount my personal history as it relates both to the immigrant experience in contemporary American schools and to some of the challenges the students in my cogen group face. Some of my students are native African Americans. In some ways, I believe that the African-American experience is analogous to the immigrant one. Their ethnicities and immigrant or non-immigrant status have played an important part in their level of success as students. In this chapter I also explain my experiences as an outsider—at least to some extent—and how my identity as a science teacher was formed during trying and often exciting times. The experience of being Black in a dominant White culture gives these different groups some common ground, but different ethnicities and the status of being immigrant or native born have played an important part in the level of success students from different backgrounds have achieved.

GROWING UP AS AN IMMIGRANT

As a teacher-researcher, I have found that I draw on many of the experiences I had in and out of the classroom, many of which relate to my immigrant past. My first language was Yiddish, but as a child many other languages were spoken in my home, including Polish, Russian, Czech, and German—languages my parents picked up as they survived the Holocaust in Europe. It was not until I started kindergarten that I began speaking English. Nonetheless, I was always a successful student and entered accelerated classes at an early age. As an only child, school provided me with most of my social activities. As an immigrant, I faced several challenges trying to fit in. I was not allowed to speak English at home because my parents wanted me to remember my immigrant roots. The problems I encountered while growing up have helped me to be more empathetic to my students. I found through conversations in our cogenerative dialogue (hereafter cogen) that I experienced much of what first and second-generation students still experience today in adjusting to life in the United States.

In the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, I lived in the Crotona Park Section of the Bronx. The apartment building I lived in housed Italians, Irish, Puerto Ricans, and Jews. On the street all children hung out together, playing games, sitting on cars, annoying grown-ups, and riding bikes. However, when gatherings included adult family members, all children present were of the same ethnicity and background as the parents. We did have opportunities to understand each other’s ethnicities, but only on the streets.

Neighborhoods can lead to the development of increased social networks, subcultures, and groupings that expand capital (Pitts 2007). Evelyn Gonzalez (2004) argues that Bronx residents created social areas that were composed of a street, a social block, and a neighborhood where residents socialized with family members...
and friends. The social networks that were created allowed new immigrants like myself to learn how to become part of mainstream society. I remember wanting very much to fit in with other children. Although my best friends were from families similar to mine (from Europe), I remember wanting approval from children of other backgrounds as well. I remember Chickie, whose family was from Puerto Rico but who had been born in the United States herself, making fun of my family’s green ways. Among ourselves, the immigrants, we called ourselves greeners, meaning we were new. We were learning new culture in the United States, but we were still clinging to the culture of the old country. Even being born here did not preclude misunderstanding when your parents are immigrants. When I tried to dress the way Chickie recommended, my parents were appalled. No big gold jewelry for me. Chickie didn’t understand the culture any more than I did. Although the parents of children like me had made the move to America, they were reluctant to let us explore the many cultures America had to offer us, because they did not understand them yet. I came to America when I was three years old, and therefore, I never spoke with an accent. I was White, so I was indistinguishable from the predominant groups of people in the neighborhood who were mostly White. As I grew older, I learned not to wear the immigrant-type clothes my mother picked out for me. In kindergarten and in the early elementary school years, I didn’t feel comfortable with the mainstream, although I wanted to be part of it. As my attire became more up-to-date, I was more comfortable with my American peers. My parents, however, still wanted me to keep my immigrant roots. In class I fully embraced being an American. At home, I fully embraced being an immigrant. Even today I still only speak mamaloshen, Yiddish, with my mother. On the outside I appear totally American; on the inside I am still an immigrant.

This experience has relevance as it helped me to become a teacher who understood her students who were from immigrant-families. At the time I was acculturating, many people arriving in America left behind their old cultures and mixed together. They looked to join the American mainstream culture, which may have had little in common with the country from which they immigrated. Immigrants understood that some assimilation was necessary in order to gain resources such as jobs, schooling, and improved social status, but there were often struggles among immigrant parents and children as to the best way to maintain culture from the country from which they came while embracing mainstream American culture. As I mentioned previously, I experienced this need for balance with my parents. I see similarities with my current students. My Dominican student, Krystal, told her classmates that she had to be home after school everyday to help take care of her younger siblings. She also mentioned that her mother did not want her to stay at school because she didn’t want her to have too many friends who were different than her. As I had, Krystal, too, needed to find balance.

During the 1950s as I was growing up in the Bronx, school did not prepare us very well to embrace different ethnicities. The point was to Americanize everyone. In our school at that time, there were very few Black children, perhaps 10 in a school
of 1,000. If we interacted with them at all, it was only in school. We never played together in the streets. These Black children lived only a few blocks away from us but lived in a different neighborhood and within a different culture. There was, as I’ve noted above, very little interaction between neighborhoods.

This was during the period when a great internal migration was taking place. African Americans were moving from southern to northern cities, and Puerto Ricans were moving from Puerto Rico to the U.S. Most of this migration occurred from 1930 to 1965. The migration of Puerto Ricans was precipitated by economic distress in Puerto Rico. Nearly 100,000 Puerto Ricans settled in New York City by the 1950s (Franklin and Moss 1994). Many eventually moved to the Bronx where rent was more affordable. The neighborhoods were changing, but as a child I was not aware of it.

In the elementary school I attended, I remember there being only one Black boy and one Black girl in my class, which had about 30 students. I don’t remember any Puerto Rican students there at all, although there were some in my neighborhood. From kindergarten to 6th grade, we were tracked according to reading level, and most students, including those in my class, stayed together for many years. Our progress from grade to grade together defined the boundaries of our social as well as our academic lives. The school was in a big building with seven grades (K-6). I remember lining up on the first floor of the building by class and the teachers coming to get us to bring us to our classrooms. We left the building in the same way. We all lined up on the first floor of the building at the end of the day and were dismissed from there by our teachers. On Wednesdays we had assemblies and had to wear red, white, and blue. We felt that we were important to our school and community.

In the school district on Long Island where I taught, the elementary school went from K-4, the middle school from 5–6, the junior high school from 7–8, and the high school from 9–12. The school district has many activities that help students feel important to the community as well as the school, but not all students are able to access these services to the same extent. Just as in academics, marginalized students often are not able to access the structures that are available to them. In my class only Torie took advantage of the sports program. The others did not participate in sports or in activities that involved them in the community outside of school. In the 4th grade I became an American citizen. I still remember the ceremony in Manhattan, saying the Pledge of Allegiance, and the certificate that I was issued saying that I was now an American citizen. At the ceremony the judge called all the children onto the auditorium platform. When I looked around, we were all shades, shapes, and sizes, all with smiles. I didn’t talk about it with my schoolmates. My friends at school were all born in the United States and were automatically citizens. Either their parents or their grandparents were immigrants, but they were not. I didn’t want to call attention to my situation. The experience remains in my memory for another reason. At that time, although I gained my citizenship, my mother did not. My father had become a citizen the year before me, but my mother was afraid to take the literacy tests required to become a citizen. Eventually, at the age of 90, my mother
finally became a citizen. We went together on a day that was set-aside for senior citizens at the Federal Courthouse in Manhattan. As I looked around at the people gathered there, I saw a panorama of cultures similar to the one that I remembered from so many decades before, but many of the people were in wheelchairs or on walkers. My mother, as did all the other potential citizens, had to pass the same literacy test she had been afraid of so many years ago. It was very crowded, and there were a lot of anxious faces. She passed with difficulty. My mother did not go to a citizenship ceremony but a few months later a certificate of citizenship was sent to her. I was as proud of her as I was of myself that day so many decades ago.

There is a connection between my mother’s experience of becoming a citizen and that of my students’ parents. My mother was afraid to navigate the bureaucracy just as immigrant parents are today when it comes to navigating the school system’s bureaucracy. These immigrant parents usually do not come to school to speak to teachers or administrators, and, if they do, their children serve as their interpreters. Sometimes this embarrasses parents and children.

_Housing patterns change the Bronx_

The early 1960s was a pivotal time of change in the Bronx. I lived in the South Bronx when Co-Op City opened in the northern Bronx, near suburban Westchester County. In a few short years the racial and economic composition of public schools in the Bronx changed drastically. As African Americans and Puerto Ricans moved into the Bronx, White residents who could afford to move did. They moved to suburban areas such as White Plains and Long Island and to northern sections of the Bronx like Riverdale and Pelham Parkway. I moved to Pelham Parkway in 1962.

In _The Bronx_, Evelyn Gonzalez describes how the deterioration of the Bronx began. The Mitchell-Lama law in 1955 provided low-cost mortgages and tax incentives to developers to build middle-income housing. This was meant to help families earning less than $10,000 a year who could not afford an apartment in the city. From 1955 on, the state subsidized housing for the middle class. Many of the original residents felt threatened by racial change and the slums that were spreading. However well intentioned Mitchell-Lama housing was a disaster for the Bronx. The co-ops that were built siphoned off White families from housing that was still in good shape. This left vacancies that were filled by poorer Blacks and Puerto Ricans who themselves were displaced or moving away from slums that were even worse. Gonzalez states that the best example of this was Co-Op City, which was built during the late 1960s. Its 35 buildings with 15,500 apartments encouraged many White Jewish residents to abandon the Grand Concourse neighborhood almost overnight. The Grand Concourse area was where I would begin my teaching career. As more minorities came into the neighborhoods, more Whites moved away.

Every mugging, whether rumored or true, became an incentive to leave. I can attest to this. It was the reason why my parents chose to move to the North Bronx at that time. We could not afford Co-Op City, so we moved into a public housing
project that was mostly White in the Pelham Parkway section of the North Bronx. The Cross-Bronx Expressway also created problems for neighborhoods in the Bronx. It sliced through neighborhoods and destroyed blocks of apartment buildings. Public housing, urban renewal, and highways helped to create slums. Housing created under Mitchell-Lama increased the separation of the White middle class from those who were poorer and disadvantaged. There already had been some economic segregation, but when I was growing up all the ethnicities were living together. Even though we didn’t have much contact with each other, we were all of similar economic means.

In addition, landlords and tenants abandoned, vandalized, and burned apartment buildings that had been fully occupied a few years before. The apartment buildings on the Grand Concourse itself were too good to abandon, and the residents there went from being mostly White and Jewish to mostly African American. The streets radiating from the Grand Concourse, however, they were narrow and had been closely packed, with large apartment buildings and few trees. On these streets there was abandonment and arson. Making the arson more possible were the installation of a less reliable fire alarm system and the shuttering of firehouses in places where they were most needed. A delayed fire response meant that fires increased in number and severity (Gonzalez 2004).

These were the streets that sent students to Taft High School, the school where I would find myself teaching in 1969. Previously, Bronx apartment buildings provided homes for families and profits for landlords. Now, however, Bronx landlords had apartment buildings with no tenants. Tenants were sleeping in their clothes with their shoes on, because there was so much arson. I spoke recently to a retired fireman friend who was working as a fireman in the Bronx at that time. He said that people could be seen walking through the streets with their belongings after a fire had forced them out of their building. In addition, some landlords cut down on maintenance, rented to undesirable tenants, collected whatever rents they could, and left.

Living conditions for many tenants in Bronx apartments became squalid. Many of the newcomers were poorer and less educated than former residents, and newly arrived Puerto Ricans often spoke little or no English. There was frustration and a feeling of helplessness among the new residents and the teachers in the affected communities (Urban and Unger 2006). Local businesses and stores went out of business or moved elsewhere. Heroin moved in and became the friend of too many.

**JUNIOR HIGH PORTENDS THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION IN THE BRONX**

I felt all of this on a personal level, as this change was occurring as I entered junior high school. I was accepted into an accelerated class at Herman Ridder Junior High School. I traveled on two buses to get there. This was at about the time that the demographics of the Bronx began to change because of White flight. Those who had reached the middle class began moving out of Crotona Park. During junior high, my classes were mostly White, while the rest of the school was Black or Puerto Rican. All the White kids stayed together. We never met the kids from the neighborhood...
who were Black and Puerto Rican. I don’t remember even talking to one student from these ethnic groups. We traveled in bunches through the halls, keeping together. It is interesting to note that when we walked together in bunches, it was accepted, but today at Suburban Junior High the faculty is very uncomfortable with this practice.

When I was in the accelerated track in junior high school, I experienced what would later happen to most of the South Bronx, where schools came to be made up mostly of Black and Puerto Rican students. White immigrant children of an earlier period, both first-generation and second-generation, had benefited from the opportunities that schools had provided, but Black and Puerto Rican students came into schools at a time when there was great turmoil in the society as well as in education. In addition, veteran teachers in schools were unprepared to deal with the diversity that the new minority students brought to the table. I remember that in junior high our teachers told us how grateful they were to have us as students. We reminded them of the way school had been before the White flight.

*A special high school experience*

I attended the Bronx High School of Science. Then, as they do today, students came from all the boroughs to attend this specialized school and similar ones in the city system. Entrance was and still is by exam. I attended Bronx Science because it was the only special school for which I qualified. When I went there, only one-third of any class was allowed to be female. Today more than half of the student population is female. At the time I went to Bronx Science, it was mainly White. Today, the school’s demographics reflect the diversity of New York City as a whole, with dozens of ethnicities represented among its more than 2,600 students. Bronx Science was a place where students and faculty alike experienced the excitement of the motivated mind with a common goal of advancing the self and society. I got a wonderful education there. I wish that others could have had exposure to the same learning opportunities. After high school, I continued my education at Hunter College, where I graduated with a degree in biology and a teaching certificate. I chose a career in teaching because I wanted to help others. I chose a career in science education because I had accumulated so much knowledge at Bronx Science that I wanted to share.

*The New York City teachers’ strikes*

After college I started teaching at a time that coincided with the end of the 1968 teachers’ strikes. I was 20-years-old, female, White, and Jewish. The United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the nation’s largest union, led a 14-day strike in 1967 and a 36-day series of strikes in 1968, which closed down the nation’s largest public school system and threw the lives of one million students and their parents into chaos. The precipitating event that had started the longest strike in 1968 was the introduction of community control of local schools. A local school board in the
mostly Black Brownsville section of Brooklyn began firing its mostly White, Jewish teaching staff. These firings prompted the United Federation of Teachers’ strike. Both incidents stirred up racial animosity, particularly between Black parents and Jewish teachers. Members of the union were called racist for opposing the black community’s quest for greater self-determination and control over the schools. Behind the decentralization effort was a desire to give minority communities a greater voice in the school system. The strike brought to a halt the city’s attempt to decentralize the school system. Union contract protections against arbitrary dismissal were preserved; the teachers returned, and the threat of community control diminished. The Ocean Hill-Brownsville strikes of 1968 left an indelible mark on New York City.

The strike ended and students returned to school, but the issues raised by the strike—bigotry and the future of community control—remained to be sorted out. I was supposed to start teaching in September of 1968 but refused to cross picket lines to do so. When I talked to teachers at Taft High School after I started teaching there, they were haunted by comments they had heard hurled at them during the strikes. Teachers told me that they were called “white racist pigs, were asked “who’s going to protect you when the police leave?” and heard “you are the enemy of the people.”

I worked as a laboratory technician at New York University Medical Center until the strikes ended. The United Federation of Teachers comprised 55,000 of the city’s 57,000 teachers. The union had wanted to close the schools down completely during the strike, but about 350,000 students were able to attend classes, either in schools that remained open with substitutes and teachers who crossed picket lines or in makeshift classrooms set up by parent initiatives. The strike was illegal under laws at that time, and Albert Shanker, the head of the U.F.T. served a jail term for sanctioning the strike. More than 7,500 union members violated union orders by teaching outside of the union-authorized schools. In many areas parents physically occupied their schools to make sure they stayed open (Kahlenberg 2007).

How the strike was relevant to my subsequent teaching experience

The teachers who found themselves caught up in the strike fell on two sides of the issue. The strikes made it apparent that there is no easy or safe middle ground. On one side were teachers who justly denounced the education taking place in many inner city schools in New York, which they felt programmed poor children for a life of adult poverty. On the other side members of one of the most progressive labor organizations in America, the United Federation of Teachers felt it necessary to assert principles of academic freedom and due process when professionals were dismissed from their posts. This was no simple conflict of right or wrong, but a fight between two rights. No matter which side the teachers involved took, they were educators who passionately believed that they were in the right place.

I finally took my place as a teacher at W. H. Taft High School in the Bronx in the immediate aftermath of the strikes. This assignment had a huge impact on the
formation of my identity as a science teacher. I realized very quickly that I would have to choose carefully which teachers with whom to align myself, as incredible acrimony between those teachers who had crossed picket lines and those who had participated in the strikes lingered after the strike.

Because I had postponed teaching until the strikes were over, I chose sides with those who didn’t cross the picket lines, but I tried to be friendly and professional with all. The wounds never healed while I was at Taft. Colleagues who had previously been friends for decades could no longer tolerate each other’s presence, and people on both sides tried to influence new teachers by denouncing their former friends.

New York City was racially polarized (Kahlenberg 2007). During the strike many students were not being educated, but many students who attended school after the strikes were not receiving a useful education. The parent-teacher relationship had been transformed from one that seemed to represent an alliance between parents and teachers to one of bitter antagonism. After the strike inadequate schools were still the same inadequate schools, and hostility between Blacks and Whites and between parents and teachers were evident. When the strike was over, ideally those who were on different sides of the immediate issue but who shared common values and concerns should have once more come together. Without that reconciliation the only victors of the situation would be backlash and poverty. Unfortunately, when I started teaching at Taft in February of 1969 (three months after the strike had ended), I mainly experienced anger, backlash, and poverty. The only glimmer of hope was that out of the chaos some opportunities had developed for new teachers to expand their agency, utilize structures, and establish their own identities as science teachers by trying, inventing, and implementing a new curriculum.

My first day at Taft and beyond

My first day as a science teacher at Taft was not what I had expected. I had done my student teaching at my alma mater, Bronx Science, so I was prepared to deal with science questions, not questions of discipline. I had no orientation because I started mid-year. My first-period class on the first day of school had 40 students, and there were not enough seats. After students filled the available seats, others sat on the heaters. During my first break I went into the department office. There the science chairman mainly advised me to lock my door while I was teaching, as outsiders—mostly drug dealers looking to make sales—were often in the building. The rest of my classes that day were equally crowded, and I remember leaving school seriously considering not returning.

Of course, I did return the next day and for four years after that. Things did not necessarily get any better, however. Violence on the streets created by the change in the local neighborhoods had spilled into the schools, as had an epidemic of drugs. Outside, the streets were in chaos. Chaos manifested itself in our school as well. We had no guards, and other teachers as well as the department chairman advised me not to send students to the bathroom, because opening my door would expose me, and my
students to possible intruders. By talking to other new teachers, however, I realized that we could help our students and ourselves by helping each other. We were in the halls between classes and also when we weren’t teaching because the school hoped that the teachers’ presence would reduce the likelihood of intruders approaching students. We volunteered to spend time with the students in the lunchroom as well. This help was meager, but it was all we thought of at the time. Veteran teachers at Taft bemoaned how good the school had been and how the new students (Blacks and Puerto Ricans) had spoiled it. According to the teachers with whom I spoke, this school had been one of the top schools in the Bronx. Discipline had never been a problem, and the veteran teachers just wrung their hands in despair as they saw themselves losing control of the students. Although these veteran teachers had excellent reputations and thought of themselves as excellent teachers, they did not have success in this new environment.

I still remember to this day how disillusioned I felt as I listened to the veterans as I was trying to form my own identity as a science teacher. They were, unfortunately, part of the problem, not part of a solution. Wesley Pitts (2007) suggests that these experienced teachers may have felt that their core identities as science teachers were being challenged when they were asked to find alternative ways to teach this new population of students effectively. This, Pitts notes, might have elicited a culture of resistance. From my observation, I feel that this may well have been true. Pitts goes further and quotes Richard Valencia (1997, p.8), many adults who develop educational policies for students attribute school failure to students and claim success is due to their own efforts.

The culture of activism nurtured my own will to change my teaching practices

As neighborhoods changed, so did the composition of the schools. Veteran teachers in these schools were unprepared to deal with the new students. It would take several years and a new crop of teachers even to begin to facilitate change. Taft High School became a reflection of its neighborhood. It had been a school of mostly White students and White teachers and became a school of White teachers instructing a student body composed of mostly Puerto Ricans and African Americans. This happened within a span of a few years in the late 60s and early 70s. As owners were occupying Co-Op City, I began teaching in a school that also pitted culture against culture (that of White middle class teachers against that of African American and Puerto Rican students).

In the fall of 1969, a new crop of activists entered the New York City school system as teachers. The Vietnam War had increased the number of males particularly White men entering the teaching work force in the Bronx. These activists were mainly young men seeking a way out of the draft—one way to be released from service in Vietnam was to serve as a teacher in a disadvantaged, underserved urban area (Fosburgh 1969). Many of the men who came to these urban schools were liberal-minded, did not have roots in or prior allegiances to New York, and wanted
to make a difference. Black men were less likely to take advantage of this option because on average they were less able to pay for college (a key requirement to becoming a teacher). Many of the White males who took this option were from the Midwest and ended up teaching in rural and urban communities of color. One of the most pressing problems these activist teachers tried to address was how to reach out to Black students, whom the school system had been failing in disproportionate numbers.

The new teachers were excited to be there and hoped to make changes in the culture of the school. By talking to other new teachers, however, I realized that we could help our students and ourselves by helping each other. We were already in the halls between classes and also when we weren’t teaching, and we volunteered to spend time with the students in the lunchroom as well. Here in this school that was changing and we saw an opportunity to create a community at the same time that we forged identities as science teachers. We wanted to create new structures within the school, and we tried to form social networks with other new teachers with similar ideas. We had some opportunities, because the veteran teachers (who in an ideal world should have been helping us) just wanted to be left alone. They were out the door when the bell rang at the end of the day.

*New curriculum is invited*

Because of the declining academic performance in the school, teachers and administrators were open to any projects that might bring some change. I got a National Science Foundation grant the first summer I was at Taft to attend a two-week seminar at Stanford University on new ways to teach science to disadvantaged students. After my difficult first year the summer at Stanford reinvigorated me and taught me many things that I have subsequently used in my classroom. First and foremost, one of the lecturers at that Stanford teaching seminar, Harry K. Wong, expressed the firm belief that all children could learn and that a teacher’s job is to get them interested. He demonstrated some novel hands-on experiments at which students could not fail. I returned with *Ideas and Investigations in Science* (Wong and Dolmatz 1971), which made fruitful use of these sorts of labs to teach science. My students loved cooperative learning, and I tried to encourage others in my school to pursue the program. With the support of my chairperson, soon the whole department was following this hands-on-teaching science program in the non-Regents classes.

Another way that the new teachers tried to make a difference was by adding to the curriculum. The principal at Taft also allowed another teacher and me to develop and teach a psychology class for seniors. We planned to cover college-level psychology material, trusting that the inherent interest and novelty of the topic as well as our rapport with the students would enable the class to be a success. James Gee (2004) could easily have been talking directly to the Taft High School staff of 1969 when he asked, what is it about school that manages to transform children who are good at learning—regardless of their economic and cultural differences, into children who are
not good at learning, if they are poor or members of certain minority groups? It was widely assumed by the administration and other faculty that our psychology class would be a failure. How could our students possibly read college-level articles in the field of psychology? However, our students proved them wrong, engaging with and mastering the material. The class, an elective with prerequisites and grade-point-average requirements, ran for many years as a permanent part of the Taft curriculum and was always oversubscribed.

Students came back year after year to tell us how meaningful the experience had been for them. The students, who were Black and Hispanic, were able to achieve the grade prerequisites in part because they were motivated to join the psychology class. The students saw this as an opportunity to learn in a distraction-free environment. When the opportunity presented itself, they took it and learned.

It was a turbulent time for the Bronx and for its schools. Teachers were unprepared for the changes that were taking place each day. The district where I worked in those years still remains one of the poorest in New York City. Although I left teaching in the Bronx in 1973, I kept in touch with my faculty colleagues for many years. Teachers who had been present during the White flight—the exodus of many White families from places where people of color were moving in—changed schools or retired. The school I had attended was turned into several mini-schools, which, unfortunately, to this day still rank low in the academic standings of the New York City school system.

The importance of the teacher-student alliance

Producing and sustaining solidarity involves continuous effort, not just from the designated leaders but also from the collective (Turner 2002). When I was at Taft, I formed alliances with Black female students, but I never learned their culture, nor did they learn about mine. At that time we were close in age; I was in my early twenties and they were in their late teens. I met some of these students at museums in New York City. We arrived separately, met at an agreed upon place, and we talked as we walked together. Then we went our separate ways.

The culture of urban neighborhoods is often not recognized by teachers who have lived their lives in different types of neighborhoods. In such circumstances the students’ cultural capital may be viewed from a deficit perspective. Teachers may want to extinguish the urban culture because they believe that this culture may prevent students from learning science. At that time I felt that way too. It wasn’t until 30 years later when I began using cogenerative dialogues (cogen) (Tobin 2014) that I realized there are better ways to understand my students and to help them understand me.

At Taft I started to understand that the only way for students to do science was to do what was familiar to them in their outside lives. They needed to be able to use their cultural capital to produce science culture. They could learn only if structures were in place that allowed them to learn. As a teacher, I needed to provide them with
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those structures and to be adaptive. I needed to teach in ways that were appropriate to the students in the classroom. To be an effective teacher I needed my students to have my back, and I needed to have theirs. Using cogen years later, I was able to give back and have their backs.

At Taft during laboratory experiments, I spent a few minutes talking about students’ home lives as we worked on science experiments and I walked around the room looking at the students, offering encouragement or asking questions about the experiment. I would overhear comments they were making to each other and would respond if it sounded as if I knew something about what they were discussing. For example, if I heard them talking about a rock and roll song I recognized, I would say I knew the song as well. This led to discussions about the kinds of song I liked and the kinds of song they liked. The Taft students participated in setting the curriculum for my elective courses, and they were very active during hands-on experiments. Looking for possible ways to improve science learning for my students helped form my identity as a science teacher. I realized that laboratory activities offered an excellent way for the goals of the individual and the collective to be achieved. I would continue to focus on laboratory experiments as a way to transform science education for marginalized students. I did collaborative work and had conversations with students that anticipated the research I did later. I was using some of the elements of cogen at Taft. This sort of collaboration between teacher and student is central to my research and to cogen.

THE WAR ON POVERTY LEADS TO A DEFICIT PERSPECTIVE

Responding to a racially and economically divided country in the 1960s, President Lyndon Johnson called for a national War on Poverty. Johnson believed that the poor would lift themselves out of poverty by acquiring the skills demanded by a complex society. He called this the Great Society. One of the places where the Great Society would be built would be in the classrooms of the United States. As a result of the Federal effort, Taft created an annex for college-bound students in 1970. The annex housed students who had maintained grades that would qualify them for college admissions and students who were interested in improving their grades. It had its own set of teachers, so it was similar to what is now termed a mini-school. It lasted a few years, but the budget crisis that affected New York City in the early 1970s brought about its demise.

For all its good intentions the Great Society also led to pedagogical practices across the United States firmly rooted in a discourse of cultural deprivation (Ladson-Billings 1999). This perspective explained the disproportionate academic problems among low-status students as largely being due to pathologies or deficits in their sociocultural background (Valencia 1986). At Taft those teachers who were interested in helping these marginalized students bought into this argument. These deficit-framed pedagogical practices have proven unsuccessful. I have found in my teaching experience that students who don’t conform to the dominant culture are often seen as
in need of fixing and teachers may try to replace behaviors that are not mainstream with others that are. I often tried to alter student behaviors. I recommended ways for them to enter the class quietly, talk quietly, and look me in the eye. After having conducted my research, I now realize I was trying to have them behave according to the rules of the dominant culture.

My career on Long Island begins

In 2002 I began the PhD program at CUNY Graduate Center. When looking for a topic for my dissertation I decided to do research on my school on Long Island because Long Island continues to become more racially and culturally diverse. In Suburban School District as well as in others on Long Island, rapid immigration is clearly the predominant cause of this increasing diversity. Since 1990, the Whites have declined from 84% to 72% of the population, and since 2005 the percentages of the population identifying themselves as Black, Hispanic, or Asian has edged up slightly. Hispanics are both the largest and the most rapidly growing minority group, having increased from 6% to nearly 13% since 1990. The Black population increased modestly, growing from 7% to 9% (Long Island Index 2005), but fully one-quarter of the Black residents of Long Island were born overseas (Long Island Index 2005). These data mirror both national and regional trends in terms of the general movement toward greater diversity.

Thirty-five percent of the students got free breakfast in our district at that time, and I had noticed as I stood outside my classroom that many of the students getting free breakfasts were Black. They passed by my room as I monitored the hallway in the morning before school began. I also noticed that teachers who monitored the halls constantly argued with and reprimanded those students as they passed on their way to the cafeteria. The teachers expected students to pass through the halls talking quietly to each other. Some students did pass through the halls quietly. These were mostly the White, Asian, and Hispanic students. In contrast, many Black students talked animatedly and often called out to each other across the hallways. The students were loud and traveled in groups. The teachers in this hallway were White, whereas most or all of the students passing were Black. Some teachers had a confrontational stance towards those students, and many times confrontations did occur. Female students were just as ready as the male students to enter a confrontation with a teacher or with each other. I also witnessed that Black students tended to walk in groups and to stay together as a group.

I witnessed an incident that occurred in the hallway involving one of the students and a teacher in the hallway in front of his room during the time students were passing from one class to another. After this incident the student was very affected and did not want to begin her next class. I feel that if a teacher reprimands a student before she enters the classroom, even if the teacher were not the student’s instructor, the student will be less willing to engage in the classroom. This type of incident was common in my school.
Teacher observation as a structure

In 2006 during my yearly observation, I received an unsatisfactory rating for class control, because I did not shut down student behaviors like walking around the classroom, interacting socially with peers, and rhythmically tapping on desks. These are similar to the practices that Elmesky reported in 2003, which were often shut down by teachers. My intuition and experience had led me to the same conclusions that Elmesky reached. The principal summoned me to a meeting and asked me to explain why these practices were not evidence of poor class control. I did not show Elmesky’s work, but I pointed out that avoiding shutdowns was a key component of the teaching methodology my research was examining. Pervasive shutdowns, I noted, suppressed important components of the cultural capital of my students, leading to negative emotions, frustration, and ultimately low interest in science on their parts. Even after that meeting and with the administration ostensibly expressing support for my research goals and methodologies, administrators watched me closely for several weeks thereafter. Had I not been a tenured teacher with an otherwise unblemished record, I might have been forced by intimidation from school administrators to discontinue my methodology. This lack of administrative support made it even more important for me to disseminate my findings to other science educators. Eventually, administrators at my school, as well as other teachers, came on board expressing the importance of this methodology, although they did not follow it themselves.

Teaching methods today

Teachers today in science classes across the country are still unprepared when it comes to teaching minority students. They still teach from a deficit perspective rather than by engaging with the cultures of their students. Shutdown strategies are still all too common in science classrooms, and, misunderstanding their students, veteran teachers as well as new teachers think that students are choosing to fail their classes. The use of cogen played an important part in my pedagogy and ultimately resulted in improved science learning in my classroom. The students in my classroom came from a diverse range of ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. My classroom provided a structure for whole-class interactions and offered opportunities for inclusion for all members of the class. Students who participated in conversations acquired more energy and self-confidence and became fully engaged in class lessons. I found that solidarity emerges gradually and involves the exchange of social capital, cultural capital, and respect, a form of symbolic capital. Goals in cogen create solidarity grounded with a respect for difference and willingness to learn from others. Cogen became a tool to build community in my science class. Students accomplished their own goals as well as the goals of the collective. As a teacher-researcher, I found ways that cogen helped to increase student engagement. There was evidence of a shared mood and entrainment as the individuals in the group synchronized their practices and shared the resources they needed to progress with
the lesson. A community of learners formed and contributed to a positive learning environment. I hoped to find that students in my cogen group were successful in my science class and advanced to AP science classes at the local high school, but this did turn out to be the case.

As a teacher-researcher, I was able to examine the talk in my cogen and in my classroom. I observed alignment and synchrony. I looked for rhythmic patterns of gestures, rocking movements of legs or heads, and stressed syllables that were produced and reproduced in synchrony by members across the classroom. Because the conversations and actions associated with a science lesson were important to me as a teacher-researcher, I used primary data from the videotapes of classroom interactions to produce the transcripts that I then analyzed. When my students communicated in conversation they varied their speaking to communicate subtle cues like energy by being loud, or spontaneity in their expressions. These cues are open to interpretation. Video and audiotapes allowed me to understand the cues accurately (often replaying the tapes over and over to get my interpretation right)

As an immigrant, I have seen that my perspective of the society around me has an effect on the way my students, children from immigrant families, approach their schooling. Ethnicity is a complex and changing notion, one that I have dealt with throughout my teaching career. My current students come from diverse cultures. Their ethnicities, complex and dynamic, and their varied experiences in school helped forge their identities.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

**Eileen Perman Baker** serves as an adjunct professor for universities. Her specialty is science and math education. In addition she serves as the writing fellow for Weekend College at Queens College, CUNY. She worked for the NYC Board of Education as a science teacher in the Bronx, and as a science teacher on Long Island. Her gender and immigrant background make her empathetic to problems faced by students and teachers of science and math.
2. GLOBALIZATION, IMMIGRATION AND IDENTITY FORMATION|REFORMATION

Abstract In this chapter, I explore the different macro structures that mediate the identities of immigrant educators, such as, globalization, immigration, and religious affiliation. I use auto/biography and auto/ethnography genres as a reflexive practice to explicate individual as well as communal biases. The theoretical framework for this chapter is based on the work of (Roth and Tobin 2007) for approaching identity and its relation to human experiences. This standpoint contends that a person has a core identity that undergoes a temporal progression that is articulated in autobiographical narratives of self. This standpoint allows me to understand the relationship between identity, activity, and auto/biography. In this perspective, events in our lives may provide us with means to unravel the complexity of ourselves differently, leading to transforming our understanding of the self with time.

COMING TO AMERICA

Globalization, and cultural appropriation

Will millions of immigrants necessitate the implementation of new rules and customs on the rest of the United States? How do you manage diversity in a globalized environment? Questions such as these endorse the current debate about globalization and immigration. Suarez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard (2004) argue that globalization engenders complexity that has challenged the geopolitical boundaries of the nineteenth and twentieth century nation-states’ doctrine of defined cultural identities of these nations. Although globalization very often used to refer to such incorporation of nationalized economies through free trade, migration, and the spread of fiscal, technical, and sociocultural artifacts, it is generating more elaborate demographic profiles, economic realities, and political processes that are shaping and reshaping our sense making process, constructing new norms.

Globalization seems to be implicated in almost all aspects of social life. Recently, I watched an Islamic TV station called “Iqraa,” which means read in Arabic (that was the first command the prophet Mohamed received from the angel Gabriel), the announcer invoked the lyrics of the Irish singer Sinead O’Connor “Nothing compares to you” to illustrate his love for God, which is Allah in Arabic. I found this cultural appropriation to be an example of how globalization penetrated many facets of life including the traditionally impermeable religious boundaries. The announcer’s
understanding of the English Language and popular culture in the Arab world equipped him to use western cultural artifacts as a transformational force that could be harnessed to deliver his message. His global approach to religion is contradicted by the long-established Islamic view of globalization, which is looked upon as a threat to many century long traditions, religious identities, and authority structures. Traditional Islamic scholars resent the notion of having to adopt a different value system from their own, and feel that globalization is a proxy for Americanization, imperialism, and neocolonization.

The criticism of globalization does not confine itself to circles of traditional Islamists, but extends to national economic policies, and grass root activists. In his World Bank Presidential Fellows Lecture, Kumi Naidoo (2003) argued that globalization has exacerbated fiscal inequality between the rich and the poor, to the extent that it appears to be driven by the advantaged at the expense of the underprivileged. The unrelenting glorification of so-called ‘free-trade’ in fact masks a set of double standards that protect certain markets in wealthy countries and deny poor and developing countries the chance to benefit from the most promising segments of their own economies. This economic disparity has produced social inequality, segregating the implicated societies into different classes.

Globalization and immigration trends

The recent trends of migration around the world seem to be driven partly by economic and social inequities. Immigration patterns have changed the demographics of host nations, producing a new set of problems, namely, how to deal with the cultural, and ethnic differences produced by immigration. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2005), the nation’s minority population totaled 98 million, or 33%, of the country’s total of 296.4 million. Census Bureau Director Louis Kincannon states, “These mid-decade numbers provide further evidence of the increasing diversity of our nation’s population.” Hispanics continue to be the largest minority group at (42.7 million) with a 3% increase in population from July 1, 2004 to July 1, 2005; they are the fastest-growing group. The second largest minority group was blacks (39.7 million), followed by Asians (14.4 million), American Indians and Alaska’s natives (4.5 million), and native Hawaiians and other Pacific islanders (990,000). Managing such diversity is becoming one of the greatest challenges to multicultural countries. Children growing up in these and other settings are more likely than in any previous generation in human history to face a life of working, networking, living with others from different national, linguistic, religious, and racial backgrounds.

As an Egyptian immigrant educator, I experienced firsthand how unprepared I was to meet the new challenges dictated by globalization and the understated identity transformations that immigrants go through by moving to a different nation. I discovered that contrary to the popular myth of America being the land of opportunity for immigrants, new settlers have never been particularly welcomed in the United States. Americans have always tended to romanticize the settlers of their
grandparents’ generation while casting a suspicious eye on modern-day newcomers. In the first decades of the 19th century descendants of Northern European immigrants resisted the arrival of Southern and Eastern Europeans and today the descendants of those once unwanted Irish, Italians, Greeks, and Poles are deeply distrustful of current immigrants from Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East.

In order to be accepted in their new land immigrants are forced to go through an assimilation process that includes the shaping/reshaping of their core identity, which I view as a fundamental self, strongly defended and unwavering. It is closer to personal distinctiveness and defines who I am as an individual. Core identity does not stand in seclusion from other social factors. It is entangled in structured social relationships governed by reciprocity, which is the underlying base of well thought-out dialectical relationships and what we elect as social bonds. The reconstruction of identity for immigrants takes place at both the conscious as well as the unconscious levels by the state authority, initially as immigrants land at the entry port, and later on by societal norms. The socioeconomic backgrounds of the immigrants, personal expectations, self-motivation, and their goals in life complicate such restructuring of identity.

Landing in New York City

My motivation for immigrating to the United States was quite unsophisticated; I wanted to have a better life. In Egypt the rise of capitalism in the 1980s saw the diminishing of the middle class and the rise of two tiers in the country – the very rich, a status often gained through questionable business practices and the very poor, with an attitude of every man for himself. This shift in social class creation was accompanied with the promotion of luxury goods as evidence of successful life style, which in turn prompted greed at an unprecedented level. This structure provided the groundwork for the creation of a police state to protect social inequality under the guise of protecting the stability and collective good over individual freedom. Before landing in New York City I read the American constitution at least couple of times. This was my new land by choice. The Land I chose to live in over my own. I still recall how I felt as my plane was about to land in New York City. As I looked from the plane’s window and saw the statue of liberty, I started reciting Emma Lazarus’s poem (1883) entitled “The New Colossus,” which is inscribed on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, the poem tells of the invitation extended to those wanting to make the U.S. their home. “…Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free…”

My romantic vision of immigrating to the United States came to a crushing halt as I landed at JFK airport. The visa officer, a white burly guy asked me, “why are you here?” Instead of reciting the poem again, I told him the second best answer, which was I am here visit my uncle, and attend Graduate school. He asked me next what my name was, so I told him, “Mohamed Ashraf, my father’s name is Anis Oncy, and my grandfather’s name is Ali Shady.” He said, “I did not ask you to write an essay, pick
a maximum of three names, first, middle, and last.” I looked at him with surprise, and said, “O.K., Mohamed Anis Ali.” A decision I ended up regretting, because of negative perceptions that many in the American society tend to have toward names that have religious or ethnic connotations that differ from Judeo-Christian norms.

MY EXPERIENCE AS A SCIENCE TEACHER IN NEW YORK CITY

Teaching in East Flatbush

Later on, I experienced first hand, how a name, physical appearance, or national origin can be grounds for dismissal from a job, schooling and other opportunities. In an interview for a position as a science teacher in a middle school in East Flatbush, NY, the principal initially refused to hire me. Two full weeks into the school year she called to offer me the teaching position when she could not find another science teacher who was willing to work in the school. Later on, as she left the school for a better position, she mentioned that she was initially skeptical of hiring me because of her perception of foreign trained teachers. She thought they were poorly educated, could not handle classroom management matters, and expected that just because they were the teachers they should receive the students’ respect. She followed this by saying, “here in the United States the teacher has to earn the students’ respect.” Her comment left me with the profound impression that I was going to have to work twice as hard as any other teacher to be accepted in the school system, then maybe, I would be able to change the perception about foreign born and trained teachers.

My first teaching job in New York City

I landed my first teaching job at East Flatbush middle school in the early nineties (Proper names are pseudonyms unless otherwise noted). The school had an enrollment of 252 students distributed among three grades 6th, 7th, and 8th grade. The percentage of the students who achieved proficiency on the English Language Arts Exam (ELA) in the eighth grade was about 9%, and the percentage of the students who achieved proficiency on the Mathematics exam was about 20%. About 95% of the students came from conditions of poverty, based on free lunch designations. The demographic of the school was about 90% blacks (under this category fell the African American students, and the Caribbean students of African origin, such as, Jamaicans, and Trinidadians), 9% Latinos, and 1% white. In contrast, to the racial demographics of the students in the school, the racial breakdown of teachers was about 90% white, and the rest were black, and Latinos. I was the only Egyptian teacher in the school, but in terms of ethnicity, I classified myself as African American, since Egypt is in Africa, and I immigrated to America. Neither the white nor the black teachers accepted me as one of them despite my “biracial” lineage – my father was black and my mother was white. The teachers did not inscribe a racial label on me because there was not a clear correlation between my biracial background and my physical
features. Their definition of racial identity was influenced by the social construction of race and to a larger extent by the experience of colonization.

This “othering” process did not limit itself to the staff but extended to the students as well. They asked me if I was black how come I look Hispanic (they correlated race, with phenotype); and when I told them about my background they were puzzled. The variance of my cultural background placed them in an uncomfortable position – they did not know what to expect of me culturally or educationally. Based on my conversations with the students I found out that they ascribed white teachers with all the stereotypical privileges that come along with such racial inscriptions. For example, the students assumed that all white teachers lived in houses with big gardens and two-car garages. In contrast, the students assumed that African American or Caribbean teachers (i.e., black teachers – based on their skin color) were struggling economically and experiencing the same oppressive circumstances as the students’ parents. However, the students’ views were distorted as far as what actually was the case – most of the black teachers lived in the same neighborhoods as their white colleagues (Long Island), and some of them were more affluent than their white counterparts.

My students felt deep mistrust of the educational system. They felt that it ill-prepared them to achieve well on standardized tests in the elementary level, and when they got to junior high they were blamed for their presumed lack of efforts. Lackluster performance on standardized tests ended-up limiting the students’ opportunities of attending schools of their choice, and instead they had to go to their neighborhood school, which most students viewed unfavorably based on my conversations with them. Most students at this school scored very low on high stakes citywide tests for English Language Arts and Mathematics. Unfortunately many students took out their frustration on me. I was easy prey. With no back up from my colleagues or the administration, the students showed me their disrespect by refusing to listen to my instructions. Students often walked out of the room when they felt like it, and refused to do class work, take exams, and hand-in their homework.

At the end of the first quarter I was asked to assign a grade for the marking period, and without hesitation I failed them all. When the students received their report cards they were shocked. They ran to the assistant principal, who in turn came to me with an angry look on her face saying, “what am I supposed to tell the parents?” I told her to tell them the truth. The children refused to do the work although I warned them more than once. Furthermore, I tried to contact the parents but the kids answered my phone calls instead, pretending to be their parents. I sent notices home requesting conferences with parents but I got no response. I was trying to tell her how helpless I felt in her school, but she refused to listen. She asked me to change the grades and pass all the kids. At that point I felt that maybe this should not be my career. I told her, she is the boss, and if she wanted to pass the children she should do it herself. She proceeded to do as she had instructed me to do and passed all the kids. Her action sent a clear message to the students, which is: it does not matter what you do in my classroom; you will pass. As I reflect back on this experience I realize that I
A. SHADY

was mistaken in assuming that education is about doing the class work, passing the exams, and handing in the homework. My previous teaching experiences in Egypt became reference points by which I judged my students in East Flatbush, NY.

The role of my prior experience

Past and present transactions, and the environment in which these transactions take place construct an individual’s identity. The articulation of these experiences through an autobiographic framework helped me re-examine my cultural practices and understand the factors that shaped my identity. For example, it became clear that as a teacher my past experiences contributed to my current practices. The challenge with being a multicultural teacher who had to prove his educational equivalence to his peers was compounded with my formerly held Cartesian view of the “appropriate way to teach science.” I only accepted verifiable logic and facts. By moving to New York City one would expect through professional development and my interactions with colleagues and students that I would have changed my teaching methods. Despite diverse experiences and many failures from which I could learn, I remained steadfast in regard to my tried and tested teaching practices and associated schemas.

Denying the shifting world around me was my way of asserting my core identity, which was correlated to my view of myself as a competent science teacher. Believing in science became more like a religious affiliation than a topic that is constantly being constructed and reconstructed by the views of the participating stakeholders. I felt that the reliability and the presumed neutrality component of the scientific procedure would ensure its impartiality and lead to a more socially equitable world. I felt that I could assess teaching and learning in my classroom by focusing only on how successful my students were in taking pencil and paper tests. I have to admit that I did not take into account the impact of emotions, intrinsic motivations, cultural background, and interests in shaping the students’ prospects of succeeding in the educational system or in life in general. In my mind these constructs were not quantifiable. My ontology was constructed by sociohistorical interactions and teaching experiences in Egypt. I taught chemistry to the undergraduate students at the American University in Cairo in a teacher-directed method where my students looked upon me as a knowledge transmitter.

THE NOTION OF MERITOCRACY AND ITS IMPACT ON MACRO, MESO, AND MICRO TRANSACTIONS

I taught science the way I learned it – as a neutral activity. I discounted my students’ emotions as distractions rather than an essential component of developing a successful learning environment. My teaching methods discounted my students’ socioeconomic status as well as their prior experiences. I assumed that every student had his or her own room at home to study in or at least s/he would share such a room with a sibling. Also, I assumed that students having trouble in understanding any of
the topics would ask their parents. Unconsciously I projected my lived experiences on their reality, constructing a mirage that I ended up chasing alone. Little did I know that most of my students lived with their grandparents or were raised by single mothers in very crowded apartments. Their parents or guardians were caught up in searching for life’s basic necessities. I merely attributed the seeming lack of success of some students to lack of effort on their part.

I adopted meritocracy as an evaluative tool to judge my students’ performance, which could be defined as a communal structure that provides opportunities and advantages to individuals based on their abilities rather than means, or social precedence. I was not the only individual who believed in meritocracy as the foundation for successful educational outcomes, so many conservative politicians, teachers, and even parents attribute the children’s low performance on standardized tests to not putting in enough effort.

This is a perfect example of how macro structures such as meritocracy could permeate into different social settings such as the classroom, the school, home, and the street. The advocates for meritocracy tend to ignore the role of the collective in structuring the individual’s success and failure. This is likely because acknowledging that the society has a responsibility towards its citizens would require subsequent actions at the legislative end that politicians might not be willing to take. It serves them well to place the individual, and the collective in a dichotomous relationship. Their underlying argument is if accomplishments were based on an individual’s efforts it would make sense that failure must be an individual’s responsibility as well. Another commonly held opinion among the meritocrats is that the children do not attain the specified standards because their parents failed to instill the importance of working hard as a moral value. In other words the parents are the ones to be blamed for the students’ poor academic performance.

My lack of understanding for my students’ diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds produced a classroom saturated with negative emotional energy. I inadvertently pushed their wrong emotional buttons by constantly reminding them that they were not meeting the educational standards. Turner (2002) argues that if an individual receives an indication of practices not being accepted as appropriate, their ego activates defensive mechanisms that are used to manage associated negative emotions. If defensive mechanisms are routinely set in motion, their egos build self-protective systems to preserve identity. These mechanisms change the emotional valences and hence the flow of transactions among the participating stakeholders. Whether these emotional dynamics become persistent and long term or only temporarily breach the flow of transactions, individuals learn how to function along three dimensions – blocking students’: abilities to meet their needs; capacities to manage negative feelings; and abilities to sustain stable identities.

My views of the inherent factors behind my students’ failure to achieve success on standardized tests were deceiving, and one-dimensional. They were laden with deficit perspectives of the students that I was supposed to help. My views were saturated by my conviction in the determinism of macro structures such as social
class on structuring success and failure in the classroom. I did not look at my black students and identify race and ethnicity as factors that might have shaped their views in life. I thought that the origin of their problems could be attributed to their social class. Consequently, my students were exposed to horizontal oppression that came from projecting my lived experiences on them, as well as vertical oppression from macro structures such as, meritocracy, and socioeconomic status.

Colonization, race, and social class

I had certain assumptions that were reconciled by my life in Egypt; despite my biracial lineage, growing up I never heard my mother or anyone else in my immediate surroundings mention the color of my father’s skin in any context. This background definitely influenced my view of race and class as a teacher in the United States, and as a researcher later on. On the other hand, in Egypt the society is deeply entrenched with British class-consciousness, where social class mediates a person’s chances in life, determines largely one’s chances of getting a good paying job, and even the chances of getting married within a certain class. To readily understand the complexity of my experiences with race and social class, my black students in the affluent district of Roslyn, Long Island had very little in common with my black students in East Flatbush. They attended the Quaker Academy, which is one of the most exclusive private schools on Long Island. They took classical piano lessons and during the summer vacation they traveled to Europe. I am sure that they experienced racism at a certain level but its negative impact on them was far less severe than its impact on my poor black students in East Flatbush. Their parents understood how the system functions and taught their kids how to succeed as minorities in a society governed by a white majority.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Du Bois (1903) announced that the color line would define the social agenda of the United States. Since then that line has become increasingly fluid, both politically and culturally. According to United States Census Bureau: 2000 Population Survey data, states like Texas are expected to see significant change in the Hispanic demographics by the year 2040 when Hispanics will comprise the majority (around 59% of the population). These changes in the demographics will represent a challenge to the status quo. As individuals attempt to appropriate resources based on voting tallies and educational attainment, social class is bound to gain distinction along with racial identity.

In American society there is a discursive mechanism that hinders the discussion of the role of social class as a categorical representation. The fear of being charged with “racism” or with “blaming the victims” represents a deterrent to most liberal scholars to study the decline of race as the sole stratifying social phenomena and the rise of social class as a salient category in the United States. With the exception of some authors who were deemed to be “politically correct leftist” such as Lani Guinier, the research field has been left to the more traditional researchers, who argue that the problems associated with minorities in terms of having a large subpopulation
of low-income families and whose culture stands in contrast with the culture of the
general population is a struggle of value systems.

Contrary to this belief, Guinier (2007) contends that race has been used as a
replacement for social class in the United States, because social class is an obscured
structure, while race is quite discernible. Although her argument situates race and
social class in a dichotomous relationship it provides a theoretical foundation for
the current stratification among minorities who share the same racial background.

Like Guinier, the sociologist William J. Wilson (1980) argues for the role of social
class among African Americans in his book *The Declining Significance of Race:
Blacks and Changing American Institutions*. He contends that grouping African
American families and individuals, as a unified group outside mainstream culture
is misleading, because cycles of deprivations have produced a large subpopulation
within the African American society. He labeled this group the ghetto underclass,
which is characterized with high rates of joblessness, teenage pregnancies, out of
wedlock births, female-headed families, geographically contained, and families
that have experienced long term poverty and/or welfare dependency. During private
conversation with my students about their home life, I managed to identify some
if not all of the previously mentioned characteristics. Accordingly, I was drawn
to the conclusion that they belong to a “ghetto underclass.” Adopting such deficit
perspectives structured teaching and learning in my classroom. I expected very little
of my students – assuming that it was enough for them to face major life struggles
on a daily basis. Basically I felt sorry for them.

Recently, I googled my name out of curiosity. I found a website called
RateMyTeachers.com, which prides itself on changing the way the world looks at
education by providing students with the unique opportunity to critique their teachers.
On this website students can anonymously rate their teachers and professors. When I
typed my name I found that the students used this website to rate me. Their responses
varied between feelings that I am the best teacher by stating “THE BEST SCIENCE
TEACHER IN THE SCHOOL,” or I am better as a mentor and a friend than a teacher.
Examples that show the range include: “Hes madd kool hes a good teacher, even
better as a mentor and a friend,” or I am so funny “Hes mad funny. Ah.” There is one
response that struck me with its honesty, and its deep insight to how I felt towards
my students. The student wrote “CCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCC(((((((!!!
Passed his class with 90’s without trying!!!” I felt so guilty when I read this response.
I felt that I did not do my job as a teacher; my feelings of empathy became a structure
that in reality truncated their agency because it did not provide them with necessary
tools to achieve their legitimate goals in life. My inherent beliefs in the determinism
of social class skewed my interpretations of these conversations. In simple terms, I
was what Paulo Freire (1970) described in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: “a
prisoner of a ‘circle of certainty’ within which reality is also imprisoned” (p. 39). My
views in education and life were based on my sociohistorical background, and were
detached from situational reality. Unfortunately, all the good intentions in the world
would not have helped me, simply because I undertook my teaching with incorrect
assumptions. For example, I thought that my students were in bad situations and it was my role to lead them to a better situation. This notion kept me focused on the negative attributes in their lives.

Racialization|deracialization

I felt that I was going to have to take the initiative in learning about pedagogy and the historical roots of the educational problems. I searched the different Ph.D. programs and focused on one program in particular at the CUNY Graduate Center, in New York City that offered a specialization in Urban Education. In my initial interview I asked the Executive Officer of the program what they were looking for in a Ph.D. candidate. He simply stated that since the program focused on urban education students should be interested in urban education, have a decent GPA, and preferably be a minority. I felt relieved since I fulfilled most of the criteria including the minority status. As I went further and explained my background, the Executive Officer of the PhD program refused to accept my minority status, saying that according to revisions to the standards for the classification of federal data on race and ethnicity (2003) there is a definite ambiguity if you are Middle Eastern, you would be classified as white, but not as a minority. John Tehranian (2007) describes this as “compulsory whiteness.” He argues that despite the use of race-based criteria in the hiring process, the racial status of Middle Eastern individuals remains indefinable. This ambiguity informs challenging employment practices, and undermines the advance in the struggle against racial intolerance. Being described as white perplexed me because I never thought of myself as a white. I saw myself as African American. My complexion is clearly brown and I have an Egyptian accent. It did not matter that my father was black. I was deprived of an ethnicity that I felt comfortable with and that was central to how I viewed myself in American society. Imposing a racial identity on me that I did not accept/acknowledge truncated my agency. Appiah (2006) argues that racial inscription shapes actions and life plans. Individuals are anticipated to act in ways that correspond to societal expectations, which are connected to the performance of their perceived roles. For me the problem with being racially inscribed as white is that this racial categorization is a structure that operates across different social fields, expanding my agency in some fields while truncating it in others. For example, I might not be hired, or get funded based on the fact that I am white. Lucky for me I got accepted to the Urban Education program and became a part time PhD candidate while continuing to work in my school.

Initially, I approached my study in the PhD program with the same positivistic view that I adopted during my teaching experience. This view emphasized structure over agency. I was product-oriented. It was very hard for me to take my eyes off the product in order to assess the process. My views were reductionist and naive. Even when I took a course on the structure of social knowledge of urban education I gravitated towards deterministic theorists such as that embraced by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976), who argued in *Schooling in capitalist America:*
educational reform and the contradictions of economic life that unless the structure of schooling changes, schools would remain tools for propagating injustice in American society. As time progressed and I took more courses that dealt with issues of social justice I became aware of the sociohistorical nature of science and science education and realized there could be no real “neutrality” in science because of the way it has evolved. I became aware of macro structures that I was not exposed to in Egypt, such as the roles that race, ethnicity, and immigration play in structuring individual’s goals in life.

My identity formation reformation

My newly formed diasporic identity helped me attain my immediate goals of being a successful teacher. Hall (1990) elaborated on the development of diasporic identity as the temporary positioning of identity as “strategic” and “subjective,” and then used the three presences—African, European, and American—in the Caribbean to illustrate the idea of “traces” in his identity. Finally, he defined Caribbean identity in a foreign culture as diasporic identity. The evolution of this diasporic identity occurs at the conscious as well as unconscious levels, mediated by the agency|structure relationship in which agency could be defined as the ability to act. Roth (2006) argues that diasporic identity as a concept does not limit itself to the experiences deriving from intercontinental immigration and how these mediate science learning, but could be expanded to shed light on the experiences of native students in a culture foreign to the one they experience at home—such as African American students in a school culture that only values mainstream ideals. Therefore, in order to promote student science learning, it is important for educators to attend to whether classroom structures foster identity formation in science. Without developing such an identity students will not have the incentive to acquire and use scientific knowledge in class or in other settings.

Joining the Middle Eastern diaspora

One of the turning points in my life was the day of 9/11. On that day, I went to school as usual; by around the middle of the third-period a teacher charged into my room saying, “the Muslims have attacked us.” Some students started crying and asked if they could contact their parents. I had no idea of what to do. I felt lost, ashamed, and confused. I loved my students as if they were my own children. I felt the need to protect them and at the same time I could not do anything about it. I felt a sense of guilt overwhelm me for being Muslim in a country that has been attacked by Muslims. I wanted to scream that in Egypt I fought terrorists for three years during my military service. Later on, I complained to an African American colleague, telling her about my feelings of shame, because of what happened on 9/11. She responded by saying, “now you know Ashraf how I feel every time I hear that someone got mugged or killed by an African American. It is the same feeling of helplessness—as if I am responsible for the actions of a whole race.”
The anti-Muslim sentiment became prevalent post-9/11. I still remember vividly the signs posted on the storefronts during the 9/11 period asking Muslims to go back to where they came from. One of the slogans read, “Love it or leave it!” suggesting that all Muslims hate the United States. These anti-Muslim feelings did not cease post-9/11 – they became recurring themes that constructed the current political arena in the United States. Dana Chivvis (2010) states that “Tea Party” founding member and conservative commentator Mark Williams wrote:

The monument would consist of a Mosque for the worship of the terrorists’ monkey-god (repeat: ‘the terrorists’ monkey-god.’ if you feel that fits a description of Allah then that is your own deep-seated emotional baggage not mine, talk to the terrorists who use Allah as their excuse and the Muslims who apologize for and rationalize them) and a ‘cultural center’ to propagandize for the extermination of all things not approved by their cult.

I feared that at any point the United States authorities might perceive me as an undesirable individual based on my ethnic or religious background and decide to send me back to Egypt, as they did to the Iranians during the Iranian hostage crises, and to the Japanese during World War II. As I discussed my feelings with my family and Middle Eastern friends I found that most of us shared similar thoughts. The constant threat of being uprooted or even detained became a macro-structure that connected us and seemed to contribute to longer-lasting emotional solidarity (Collins 2004). This commonality directed me to resort to a more traditional approach of identifying myself, and appropriating the resources in my community. I moved to Astoria, Queens with the other Middle Eastern immigrants who experienced similar structural features in the American society at that time.

Today’s immigrants experience different challenges as a result of technological advances associated with globalization. Immigration used to mean that one had to totally desert his or her former country and try to assimilate into the host nation to which s/he had migrated. Due to advances in communication and transportation technologies immigration has come to be more about displacement than assimilation. Nowadays immigrants are more linked to their homelands via the Internet, phones and other methods of communication, connecting them to their roots and exposing them daily to the realities of the culture of the host nation and their native land. Globalization has structured the way they experience national identities and has supported the development of diasporic identity. As I enter Steinway Street in Astoria I experience the equivalence of Middle Eastern diaspora. It is a street owned and operated largely by Middle Easterners. Arabic is the predominant spoken language – some women cover their heads with scarves. Men smoke Shisha (the traditional water pipe) in their traditional Arabic robes and watch Arabic channels via satellite television. The corner grocery store sells a score of newspapers and magazines flown in daily from the Arab world. This street represents a social as well as a political reality of New York City. It is the
hybridization of cultural practices that are unique to its environment – it does not mimic their native culture or the host culture, but represents an amalgamation of both cultures.

The role of religion

In this hybrid culture Middle Eastern immigrants confront a dilemma of how to celebrate their individuality in the face of the tendency of mainstream culture to cluster them as monolithic group (Arabs, Muslims or terrorists, and sometimes interchangeably). This places agency and passivity in a dialectical relationship. As these individuals react to passively ascribed identity inscriptions they might claim religion as an element of identity; that is a marker of identity rather than a spiritual affiliation, to distinguish themselves from other immigrants. Within the Arabic diaspora I discovered that it is hard to discern identity markers. Accordingly, sometimes religion became a salient categorical factor with which I decided to associate myself. In a recent conversation with Kenneth Tobin, he asked me: “what are you?” And without thinking twice I answered “Muslim.” Reflecting back on my answer I realized that labeling myself as a Muslim was not based on religious practices or adherences to the basic tenets of Islam. It was more of an unconscious affiliation that might assure my distinctions in the face of constant struggle to assert my individuality. Jonathan H. Turner, in his book *Face to Face* (2002), presents a compelling argument that we are not solidarity seeking emotional animals that theorists like Durkheim, Goffman, and Mead would characterize (and theorize) us. Turner argues that humans are exposed to two challenging emotions, they crave strong emotional attachments and at the same time restrain against the limitations of closed social circles. He asserts that collective actions are not the norm. Individuals aim to maintain their individuality. Hence, in order to help them become part of the collective requires work or effort to initiate and sustain solidarity. In my case emotional solidarity was structured by the fear of isolation and rejection by a society. These emotions were so intense that they structured my decision to be part of the collective.

Accordingly, as a way to preserve my identity I chose at the conscious/unconscious levels religion as a constitutive factor in defining the self and the other. Religion provided me with a position to draw dissimilarity from other immigrants who share the same ethnic background and oftentimes the same local space but have a different religious affiliation such as Christianity, or Druze to name a few. My answer to Ken is also contextualized since I would have responded differently if I were asked this question in Egypt. In Egypt tribal association, geographical location, moral responsiveness, and ethical outreach become some of the salient identity markers that replace the need for asserting religious affiliation. My constant attempts to assert my individuality and resist integration into the collective are driven partly by my previous experiences in Egypt. I have seen firsthand how social integration among Muslim Fundamentalists led individuals to lose sight of their individuality and became willing to sacrifice their lives for the group’s interests, as in the case of
suicide bombers – whereby the collective motive takes priority over the individual’s goals. Such individuals experience the equivalence of emotional solidarity, describing themselves in terms of the collective rather than aiming to assert their individuality. Emile Durkheim (1965) described their actions as a common case of “altruistic suicide.” Hence, my earlier attempt to adopt science as an identity marker and later on being drawn to have an affiliation with a religion were not contradictory in nature, but rather endeavors to draw dissimilarity from other Middle Eastern immigrants. Durkheim (1912) argues in his book *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* that it is enough for an idea to bear the stamp of science to be given a certain release from the rule of obligation, because in a modern world we have faith in science, and this faith does not necessarily differ essentially from “religious faith” (p. 438).

CONCLUSION

Globalization and education

The rise of the global economy has created structures that supported educational as well as socioeconomic inequities throughout the world. Education has the potential to play a significant role in ameliorating such economic and social disparities and provide the foundation for building a society that is inclusive. Schooling has the potential to impart the skills needed in the rapidly growing knowledge-intensive sector of the global economy. Students that thrive in schools will be better prepared to penetrate the well-compensated opportunity structure; and children who fail will be locked out of this structure. Youth in schools today, whether in New York, Egypt, Canada, or Puerto Rico will encounter a vastly different world from that of our generation. While they might continue living in local realities, these realities are constantly being challenged and integrated into the larger “Global Village.” The global transformations will require them to develop new skills that are far ahead of what mostly is being offered in today’s schools. New and broader visions are needed to prepare students to being an integral part of this changing world. Globalization’s increasing complexity necessitates a new paradigm for learning and teaching. It will require individuals to be cognitively flexible, culturally sophisticated, and work collaboratively in groups made up of diverse individuals. An education for globalization should therefore nurture the higher-order cognitive and interpersonal skills required for problem finding, problem solving, articulating arguments, respecting, and fostering multiple perspectives. This task is far from being easy, but it is attainable if we understand the underlying factors that shape our societal constructs.

Globalization and cosmopolitanism

One of the desired consequences of globalization may have been to increase the interconnectedness between people, making us citizens of the “Global Village.” In reality, humans had historically organized themselves as nations, cities, and
towns. These categories place these immigrants in a unique situation where they become citizens of the world, “cosmopolitans.” Being a cosmopolitan implies that the individual thinks that the world is his/her shared hometown, something that is disparaging upon tribalism. Theoretically speaking cosmopolitanism can be looked at as the creation of community that is theorized around sameness and differences. Theorizing cosmopolitanism around differences as well as similarities makes it more inclusive, with moral solidarity as the glue that binds the participating stakeholders.

Appiah (2006) in his book *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* states, “If we are to encourage cosmopolitan engagement, moral conversation between people across societies, we must expect disagreements: after all, they occur within societies.” (p. 46) In a society that is constantly shifting demographically, differences should be expected, and it is our role as educators to figure out a way to include all the students and not only the selective few who choose to think in terms of the plural. To expect that all individuals should share a common goal defies the underlying principles of the United States constitution, with its implicit, as well as explicit respect for an individual’s rights. These constitutional rights could be reinforced at the legislative end and through educational practices that foster multiplicity. The struggle for cultural alignment with my students became a challenge of how to navigate through cultural fields without giving up my own core identity and associated self-worth.

*Science and multiculturalism*

In view of the macro, meso structures present, in order to succeed as a teacher I had to alter my standpoint and adopt multiculturalism as an approach to reach my students. I started by adopting Sandra Harding’s (1988) argument that multicultural science education is an essential ontological and epistemological standpoint that values the students’ cultural backgrounds. I asked my students to research the historical development of indigenous science. My goal in doing this was to help my students to see themselves reflected in the history of science, rather than accepting science solely as a universal Western construct. These task-illuminated misrepresentations in the current scientific literature tend to devalue students’ indigenous knowledge and value Eurocentric main culture.

Adopting multiculturalism in science education proved to be invaluable in terms of building social capital amongst my students. My epistemology evolved into a different entity that questioned: What is a scientist? What does it mean to do science and do it well? What talents are we overlooking in our students, especially in historically underrepresented minorities that may enable them to seriously contribute to the fields of science? Are there new ways of thinking about science that may showcase these talents? I felt that my role as a teacher is not only teaching my students science, but also exposing them to the current macro structures such as globalization and how they might structure their endeavors for better life.
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GLOBALIZATION, IMMIGRATION AND IDENTITY FORMATION/REFORMATION


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