TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES WITH A CONSCIENCE: A TWO-MONTH CONVERSATION WITH BILL BIGELOW

Mark T. Kissling, Penn State University

I believe I first met Bill Bigelow – the curriculum editor of Rethinking Schools *magazine and co-director of the Zinn Education Project – at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in New York City in 2008. Bill was staffing the Rethinking Schools booth within the conference's exhibit hall. I was in my first year of a doctoral program in social studies education, having spent the prior three years teaching social studies at Framingham High School (FHS) in Massachusetts.*

Meeting Bill was awe-inspiring, not because he was a larger-than-life celebrity or anything like that; his (and his colleagues') writings in various Rethinking Schools publications had been my teaching-lifeblood since halfway through my first year at FHS when I was gifted a subscription to the quarterly Rethinking Schools *and a copy of the first edition of* The New Teacher Book. *Then and now, few teachers and writers have influenced my pedagogy as much as Bill.*

Bill taught high school social studies for almost 30 years and during much of that time he wrote about what he was up to in his classroom – and why. In addition to numerous pieces in Rethinking Schools, *he is the author or co-editor of many Rethinking Schools books,* including A People's History for the Classroom, The Line Between Us: Teaching About the Border and Mexican Immigration, Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World, Rethinking Our Classrooms - Volumes 1 and 2, Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years, *and* A People's Curriculum for the Earth: Teaching Climate Change and the Environmental Crisis. *He is also the author or co-author of the curriculum guides* Strangers in Their Own Country *and, with Norm Diamond,* The Power in Our Hands, *the latter of which I was fortunate to have and use in my FHS classroom.*

From 1986 to 1994, Bill co-taught a course at Jefferson High School in Portland, OR with Linda Christensen – another Rethinking Schools *writer-extraordinaire (and you'll see Bill reference this course with Linda in the conversation below). He began writing for* Rethinking Schools *in 1987 and he has been its curriculum editor since 2004. When I asked him to describe what Rethinking Schools as an organization has meant to him personally, he responded that it*

> *has been a home for educators – and for me – to tell stories about how we try to teach for social justice. Rethinking Schools reminds us that we are not alone, that we are part of a large community of educators of conscience who are joined in our commitment to serve the students we teach and to make the world a better place. Rethinking Schools recognizes that this is hard but joyful work, and we need each other for inspiration. I discovered RS in 1987, when it was a year old, but just knowing there were others trying to align our social justice values with our practice was a profound source of comfort.*

I discovered RS in 2004–and in doing so I found a dynamic collective of justice-oriented educators seeking to better the lives of all students, teachers, and communities through schooling. It's now an annual honor to introduce my teacher education students to this collective and it was an honor to

participate in the protracted exchange with Bill below, created online between early March and late April.

Mark: As I type [in early March], Russia's invasion of Ukraine is in its second week, causing countless deaths, significant destruction, and over one million people to flee into neighboring countries. The day after Russia's overt aggression began, Joe Biden nominated D.C. Court of Appeals judge Kentanji Brown Jackson to fill Stephen Breyer's spot on the Supreme Court; notably, Jackson would become the first African American female justice in the Court's history. Three days later, the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released the second part of its sixth Assessment Report, which further detailed our climate emergency.

These are all "current events"—and certainly there are many other current events taking place as well. How do you think about the responsibility of schools and teachers to educate students about current events, perhaps particularly within the subject boundary of social studies?

Bill: Yes, your question underscores the impossibility of being a social studies teacher! We could spend all our time lurching from crisis to crisis. I suppose our first responsibility is to help students care about a broader world, to introduce them to some of the people whose lives are at the center of the burning issues of our time. Our students need to know that social studies is not about memorizing dates and chronologies, or simply becoming conversant in the perspectives of dominant groups. Partly that means showing them that we care about people's lives, that as social studies teachers, we are concerned not simply with "the facts," but with humanity, that we hope to make the world a better place.

Your question highlights competing challenges. On the one hand, we need to help students make sense of the issues that are roiling the world, that fill social media and the headlines. On the other hand, the teacher of every social studies class needs to pause and articulate for themselves the key concepts they seek to impart and attempt to lay a foundation so that students can begin to sort through the confounding issues of a given week. You bring up the new IPCC report. This shows the importance of equipping students to recognize the roots of the climate crisis—first, an economic system that prizes profit above all else; and distributes rewards and disasters especially on the basis of race, class, and nationality. A deep climate justice curriculum should alert our students to the long history of the Earth being treated as a site of extraction and pollution—and to the centrality of fossil fuels in the development of U.S. capitalism. As we ask students to look for patterns in history, one of these is the simultaneous exploitation of humanity and nature—think, for example, of the Ludlow massacre of striking Colorado coal miners. There is much more to be said here, but my point is that we need to straddle the line between the urgency of immediate crises and the historical framework that can help students grasp the roots of these crises, anticipate new ones, and respond intelligently.

Mark: Thinking about this line-straddling and how challenging it can be for teachers

(as well as, I'd add, invigorating, daunting, rewarding, etc.), what do you see as the impact of the long history of carving U.S. schooling into individual, ordered grade levels and separate subject areas? This isn't the case in all schools, of course, but so many remain structured around the singular, sequential K-12 grades and traditional, non-integrated subject areas of English/Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Do we need new schooling structures or can our common long-standing practices serve us well in years to come? (I'm mindful that so many teacher education programs are 'grade-banded' [i.e., elementary, middle, high] and 'subjected' in similar ways. Additionally, embedded in this line of questions is a wondering about the inertia of grade-level and subject-area curricula, not just organizational structures.)

Bill: This question reminds me of when I first began to teach about the climate crisis in my global studies classes. I felt like a trespasser—that any time I said the words "carbon dioxide" I was invading Scienceland. Of course, teaching global studies, I was constantly aware of the silliness of a class that was aimed at understanding the nature of the world and yet was premised on the notion that this inquiry "belonged" to social studies. I was dealing with issues of biodiversity and species extinction, genetic engineering, food sovereignty, water and air pollution, and, yes, climate change. The curriculum chopped up social reality in a way that the world did not. Every day, I wished that the class was a joint science/social studies course. And, of course, I miss the Literature and History class Linda Christensen and I taught together for so many years, where there was no boundary between reading, writing, and making sense of our history and the world today. Pulling down those curricular walls between language arts and history was joyful, and when we no longer taught together in the same classroom, I still carried with me so many of the strategies we used in our joint class—from personal narratives to interior monologues to poetry.

Back to teaching the climate crisis: I think that these artificial boundaries you mention have been especially harmful when it comes to equipping students to grasp the enormity of the climate emergency. Our curricular apartheid has led to a game of hot potato with the climate. No one regards it as fully theirs. Social studies teachers often see it as a science issue. Science teachers know it kind of belongs to them, but also regard social causes and consequences, as well as policy choices, as outside the borders of their discipline. And usually, teachers of language arts, math, art, business, health, and other disciplines don't want anything to do with it. So here is arguably the greatest existential threat to life on Earth—with the possible exception of nuclear war—and no discipline wants it. Of course, individual teachers don't necessarily control which disciplines are assigned which subjects, but as we rethink schools, teachers should have a healthy disrespect for the boundaries that school authorities want us to obey. We should all color outside our curricular lines.

Mark: Reading your last sentence, I can't help but think of Michael Stern's "Coloring Outside of the Lines,"

particularly one verse (though the spirit of the whole song resonates):

> She was a first-year teacher trying to get things right
> And she thought it was best to just toe the line
> But her principal said to get through to your kids
> You got to teach outside of the lines sometimes

And your mention of "curricular apartheid." Wow, that paused me, I needed to sit back for a few moments. What seems so commonplace—basic, given, natural—in schools (and society) is always in need of thoughtful consideration.

I appreciate how you've taken us a bit into your experiences co-teaching across traditional curricular lines. And, in so much of your writing, I appreciate how you explore and reflect on and wrestle with your experiences as a teacher and as a student. One of my favorite pieces of yours is "How My Schooling Taught Me Contempt for the Earth," the first version of which came out in *Rethinking Schools* magazine in the mid-1990s and a second version is in the 2014 book *A People's Curriculum for the Earth* that you co-edited with Tim Swinehart. For some years now, each fall, I ask my middle-level social studies teacher education students to read the article and respond to two related questions: "What did your schooling teach you about the Earth? What might 'good' social studies teach students about the Earth?" The next class session, then, usually takes place at Penn State's arboretum.

These writings tend to be some of the most provocative and probing of the whole semester. With her permission, below is Meredith's response from 2015:

> For the first ten years of my life I grew up on a dairy farm and the next ten years of my life I lived on a horse farm. I grew up in the "middle of nowhere" with a huge yard surrounded by woods and my nearest neighbor was over a mile away. My sister, my cousins, and I played outside all seasons of the year. We loved playing in the grass and mud, swimming in the creek, climbing trees, and sledding in the snow. We had a good understanding that the earth gave us crops that kept the animals healthy and therefore producing the milk our daddies needed to sell. We learned that, even though it seemed sad to kill deer, hunting kept the population of deer healthy overall. We learned that even though it seemed sad to kill chickens or beef cows or pigs it was the circle of life. I think very early on I learned that the earth had a lot of power that deserved respect. I also learned from witnessing many cycles of planting, harvesting, fertilizing, rotating crops, etc. that the earth needs care.
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> I grew up in a community of people with similar lifestyles and beliefs and then began school in this same community. My school took many field trips to farms and to the nearby state park. However, the "big deal" field trips were the ones to Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., and New York City, sending the message that cities are important and better than where we lived. I don't think I would have described my home as the "middle of nowhere" before I began my formal education. That expression doesn't make any sense when you think about it. I grew up in the middle of nature, woods, fields, and farms and loved it. I had to have been taught to reduce my home to this word "nowhere", a word that means "nonexistent". As Bigelow says, "We were taught [in school] that the important work of society—which would be our work—occurs indoors…" and indoor work occurs in the cities that we were taught to idolize.

> And in teaching us that cities are important we were implicitly (and possibly explicitly) taught that our rural homes were not important… so not important it's like they are nonexistent in the grand scheme of things.
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> My elementary and high school had the perfect location and the perfect student body to really dig into the "ecologically responsible curriculum" principles suggested by Bigelow because the students already had an awareness that the "earth [is] a living web of relationships that includes—and sustains—humanity." But because of the pressures of our society they did the opposite. "Good" social studies teaching would have used the location and lifestyles of these students to impress upon them the importance of a "deep ecological consciousness", allow them to critically think about ways to improve agriculture and other relationships with the earth, and encourage them to question the unsustainable consumerism that is made out to be the norm, especially in urban areas.

What surfaces for you as you read and ponder Meredith's words?

Bill: I love how you use this article with your students. It's a question that everyone should attempt to answer for themselves. You must get wonderful responses. Meredith works with it so brilliantly to consider basic aspects about her schooling, but also to imagine how it could and should have been different. She writes: "I don't think I would have described my home as the 'middle of nowhere' before I began my formal education." Wow. That is a sad and important statement. It underscores how the curriculum taught her contempt for her home. It was a curriculum of erasure.

Meredith describes growing up on a dairy farm. I grew up in a neighborhood called Little Reed Heights, but I had not known until recently that the neighborhood was named after the dairy that had been there, Little Reed Dairy—displaced by a 1950s housing development. So part of my curriculum of erasure was the invisibility of the history of that place: a dairy, tended by mostly Portuguese-speaking Azorean workers.

But as I wrote in "How My Schooling Taught Me Contempt for the Earth," another form of "not thinking"—of erasure—was my school's failure to engage students in considering who was here before us, and before the Portuguese-Azorean dairy workers. I lived on land that had been Miwok, that had been colonized first by Mexico, and then seized by the United States in its war against Mexico, between 1846 and 1848. Part of being taught contempt for the Earth, was being taught contempt—or at least taught to not think about—the original inhabitants. What were their lives like? How did they "story" the land? Not only did we never get an answer, teachers never encouraged us to even pose the question.

In reading Meredith's reflection, I wonder what she would have wanted her curriculum to teach about the Indigenous people who first inhabited that land that became Pennsylvania. One of the challenges all educators face today is how we story the Indigenous context of the places where we teach. And this is not just historical inquiry. We need to search out Indigenous people who the curriculum tries to relegate to a long-ago past. As we try to reverse the curriculum's long-standing contempt for the Earth, we also

need to reverse the curriculum's contempt for the Indigenous peoples who understood and understand their relationship to the Earth in profoundly different ways from the colonial settlers who came later.

Mark: Mindful of this challenge we educators face about teaching humbly and inquiringly about the Indigenous past, present, and future of where we live and learn, I want to ask you about patriotism and patriotic schooling. In Joel Westheimer's edited 2007 book *Pledging Allegiance: The Politics of Patriotism in America's Schools*, you have an essay powerfully titled "Patriotism Makes Kids Stupid." You write about a role play that you created and taught focused on the North American Free Trade Agreement. As the role play unfolded in your global studies high school classroom, "students began to recognize that 'us' and 'them' do not slice neatly along national lines" (p. 88), a troublingly uncommon lesson in U.S. schooling. You end the essay with a call to action: "In an era of wagon-circling patriotism, we [i.e., educators] need to have the courage to challenge our students to question the narrow nationalism that is so deeply embedded in the traditional curriculum" (p. 88).

Certainly patriotism, with its Latin roots and center-stage seat in all presidential campaigns, is a term of the West. It has been—and often is—weaponized, made synonymous with nationalism, used by 'us' to kill, colonize, exclude, and oppress 'them.' But, unlike nationalism, there are sentiments in what I conceive of as patriotism that are truly loving and earthen, value wholeness and coherence ("integrity"), are founded on justice and inclusion, commonality and collaboration. When I first started making arguments for inquiring into—teaching and learning—the complexities of patriotism, Howard Zinn was my guide and, through Zinn, Emma Goldman. Since then, I've found direction from Aldo Leopold and Wendell Berry, Vine Deloria and Daniel Wildcat, bell hooks and Vandana Shiva, Nikole Hannah-Jones and Jose Antonio Vargas, and many others. I've played around with "matriatism" and "place-based patriotism"; I've considered banning patriotism from my lexicon though I've never found I could actually do so. My teaching every semester, regardless of the course, has become a persistent interrogation of what it means to be members of our many communities and friends to others' many communities.

Do you see any hope for something we might call "patriotism" and "patriotic schooling?"

Bill: This article of mine originally carried the title "Patriotism: 'Us' and 'Them,'" when it was published in a special issue of Phi Delta Kappan. I can't remember why we went with the more provocative title — "Patriotism Makes Kids Stupid"—when it was published in Joel's book. For me, it is hard to separate nationalism from patriotism. So patriotism does not feel like a useful word to hang onto. In Howard Zinn's foreword to *Pledging Allegiance*, he quotes Emma Goldman, who lectured about patriotism: "… conceit, arrogance, and egotism are the essentials of patriotism. Patriotism assumes that our globe is divided into little spots, each one surrounded by an iron gate. Those who

have had the fortune of being born on some particular spot, consider themselves better, nobler, grander, more intelligent than the living beings inhabiting any other spot." I know that it is possible to define patriotism and to feel patriotic without notions of nationalistic superiority, but that idea of the globe being divided—divinely?—into separate spots seems to lend itself strongly to notions of us and them.

What I sought to do in the NAFTA role play you mention (included in *The Line Between Us*), was to engage students in a classroom experience in which they could see how national categories—the United States, Mexico, Canada—made no sense when asking questions like "who benefits" and "who suffers" from a policy like the North American Free Trade Agreement. In this instance, social class is a more meaningful category of analysis than one's nation. Students discovered this not from my lecture, or me offering my opinions, but from taking on the roles of different social groups and then analyzing post-NAFTA data from both the United States and Mexico—for example, after NAFTA took effect in 1994, huge numbers of poor farmers in Mexico were thrown off the land and poverty there skyrocketed; and yet Mexican elites grew richer, as did U.S. corporations who sought cheap labor in Mexico. And students saw why this would happen, given the roles they played in the role play. "Mexico" was not a useful category of analysis.

You probably saw the recent article in the *New York Times*, indicating that it appears the Pledge of Allegiance was not written by Francis Bellamy, as everyone thought, but more likely by a 13-year-old Kansas student, coincidentally named Frank Bellamy. Apparently, kids in Victoria, Kansas, pledged allegiance to the U.S. flag with almost identical language, months before Francis Bellamy claimed he wrote the Pledge. What was left out of the story was that in the original iteration of the Pledge, disseminated as part of the 400th anniversary of Columbus's arrival, students ended by chanting in unison, "One country! One language! One flag!" It is a good example of how this kind of patriotism sought to erase immigrant identities. It's a circling-the-wagons thing, affirming an "us" and "them."

So I am OK to abandon the term patriotism, as I think language is social, and we don't get to create alternate definitions for words that have such problematic meanings for so many. However, I love the teaching aspiration you articulate—that every class you teach is "a persistent interrogation of what it means to be members of our many communities and friends to others' many communities." That's exactly right. It makes our curriculum an exploration of how we are all connected—to each other and to the broader biotic community—and how we can live responsibly and in solidarity with others.

Mark: A pleasure of interviewing you is being able to ask you versions of questions that I've been grappling with. Here's another I've been thinking about for a long time, having to do with teacher positionality and societal privileges. In recent years, I've added a section to the syllabi for my teacher education courses titled, "Placing Myself: Some Things About Me That Might Be Helpful to

Know." In a list of bullet points, one reads:

> I possess a number of societal privileges—white, male, cis-gendered, upper-middle class, straight, Christian, tall, U.S.-American, Ivy-League and graduate-school educated, etc.—and I believe it's my responsibility as a member (i.e., citizen) of many different communities to interrogate these privileges and utilize them to the benefit of all, not just myself and those close to me.

Of course, anything in a syllabus doesn't mean very much if it isn't lived out in and through the course but I want my students knowing from the get-go, including in the 'official' place of the syllabus, that I'm on a long-term, if not unending, journey seeking to understand what it means to be a community member and work to better my and others' communities. I want my students to come to experience that this journey structures my pedagogical thinking and doing.

As you think across your career as an educator, how have you understood, negotiated, challenged, etc. your societal privileges?

Bill: There is so much I like about how you present yourself as an educator to your students. One key point is that you acknowledge your various privileges, but more importantly, that you commit yourself to "interrogate these privileges"—that you announce to your students that, like them, you are a learner, that you are on a journey to figure out what your responsibility is. You have not arrived. Another point—and maybe it is obvious—is that you point out that your role as an educator is not just to impart knowledge but to "better my and others' communities"—to change the world. That, itself, must be startling for some students. Not all students begin their teacher education program with this political commitment.

Of course, for so many of our students, the challenge is in some ways the opposite of what you articulate here: We are not so much seeking to surface privileges, but to get students thinking about how they can link their pain, their oppression, their grievances to each other's and to look for broader patterns of exploitation. Linda and I write about getting students to "read the collective text" in their personal narratives—to search for patterns and to probe the ways their stories connect with one another. I guess what I'm suggesting is that as we acknowledge some of our privileges as educators, we stay alert to all the ways that our colleagues and our students do not share these privileges. Let me stay with this point for a moment. You ask how I have "understood, negotiated, challenged, etc. [my] societal privileges." I'm not sure it is helpful to work only from the presumption that we teachers bring privileges to our classrooms. I think that we also bring traumas, social class, and other forms of subordination—complicated lives that are not just composed of privileges.

My teacher education program at Reed College focused heavily on lesson planning and the content we sought to teach. It was not as narrow as the banking metaphor that Paulo Freire famously articulated of filling empty containers with our knowledge, as our Reed professors encouraged us to think imaginatively about pedagogy. But we were not asked to reflect on our race, class,

gender, or linguistic positions and the implications of these for how we approached our students. I think that for the beginning years of my time in the classroom, this led me to neglect the wholeness of the students in my classes. Too often, I saw my students as intellects I was working on—yes, offering them information, but also getting them to question, to challenge, to appreciate resistance. Still, I failed to invite their lives into the classroom as fully as I did later, when I began teaching with Linda. Linda and I sought ways to link our full history/language arts curriculum with our students' experiences—through personal narratives, poetry, and "essays with an attitude," as Linda called them in *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up*. We completed every writing assignment we asked students to complete, and shared these in class. So our privileges—but also our scars—became evident through the stories we shared.

Mark: You have me thinking about a three-panel sequence from Bill Ayers' and Ryan Alexander-Tanner's 2010 graphic book *To Teach: The Journey, in Comics* (p. 26). In the first panel there's a picture of Teacher Bill standing and talking before a seated Student Quinn. In the next panel, their roles are reversed: Now-Teacher Quinn stands and talks before Now-Student Bill who is crammed into a desk. Text above the picture reads: "All teachers must become students of their students." In the third panel, Bill, Quinn, and all the others in the room are on the ground, circled around a turtle, perhaps mimicking the turtle's movements as a form of inquiry. The accompanying text reads: "The students become teachers as well as learners. The teacher attends to the students in order to support growth and learning—we are side by side working in concert to know the world."

Ayers and Alexander-Tanner urge us to see our students, study them, be and learn with them. As you wrote of teacher traumas and scars above, in addition to teacher privileges, I read you urging us, as teachers, to see and study and open up ourselves alongside of our students, as we encourage them to do the same.

I want to turn to a final question set that connects directly with the call for submissions for this themed-issue on sharing and complicating lessons and lesson-planning. You have written so often in Rethinking Schools publications of lessons and units that you taught in the classroom. I can only imagine, for example, how many teachers like me engaged their students in versions of your mixers (or role-plays)!

How do you think about what a "lesson" is or can be—and what it isn't or shouldn't be? Over the course of your teaching career, how has your process for crafting lessons evolved? What advice do you have for teachers who want to write about and share their lessons with others?

Bill: Thanks for reminding me of Bill and Ryan's book, which we excerpted in *Rethinking Schools* back when it came out. It also reminds me of Ryan's illustrated version of Greg Michie's *Holler If You Hear Me,* about Michie's teaching in Chicago, which I love. Yes, the image of students and teacher in a circle, learning together, is exactly right. When Linda and I produced a class book of our students' writing after our first year of teaching together, 1986–87, our students titled the book *Circle Up*,

because that's how we began every day. For me, there is magic in a classroom when we are sharing our writing—personal narratives, interior monologues, favorite sections of an essay, poetry—with students calling on each other to offer their thoughts about what they love in a piece, and then followed by our "collective text" discussion, hunting for patterns that surfaced in people's writing. Yes, that's when it is best: "side by side working in concert to know the world."

In terms of what a lesson could or should be, of course, there is no one thing. But when I am designing an activity, I have a number of aspirations I am trying to align into something coherent. I start with a concept or an episode or a dilemma that I hope I can bring to life with students. I know how I want my classroom to feel—students alive, engaged with each other, curious. Let me give a couple examples. I wrote a role play, "Reconstructing the South," which asks students to try to imagine the perspectives of formerly enslaved people, newly freed. The role play poses questions for students about what they would need in order to achieve real freedom. For example, who should own and control the plantations? What do freed people need in terms of land and the capacity to be independent of white control? Who should be allowed to vote in the new South? How should formerly enslaved people be protected from the wrath of the people who had enslaved them, and had initiated a war to keep them enslaved? These are all real questions, but they are also questions without easy answers. The "instructional objective" of the lesson, so to speak, is not for students to arrive at any particular "correct" answer, but for students to appreciate the huge stakes for African Americans. I could lecture about this, or find a chapter from a book—and, no doubt, there are excellent readings—but I want students to experience the difficulty and importance of these choices, as much as possible. Of course, none of us can arrive at a true understanding for what formerly enslaved people confronted at the dawn of Reconstruction. But I want to design lessons where students reach for empathy. I see empathy not as a place where students arrive, but as a verb—as a process of seeking connection with others. That's a key aim I have for this, and many other lessons.

One more example. In teaching about the climate crisis, I wanted to design an activity in which students could confront, experientially, how capitalism collides with climate stability. Again, there are lots of readings that explore this contradiction, and I could offer statistics and charts to students. And all those are fine. But what stays with students is experience, and so I wanted to find a way for them to discover for themselves how capitalism's rewards and punishments lead inexorably toward climate chaos. I created the Thingamabob Game, in which small groups of students become thingamabob corporations and compete with other corporations. As in the real world, they will be rewarded—with chocolate in my classroom—based on profitability, not on how well they treat the Earth. The problem, of course, is that as they frantically produce, carbon dioxide parts per million are going up and up. In the game, there is a tipping point, and past this point, everyone loses; but no group knows what the exact number is, so they continue to profit their way to

catastrophe. The aim of the lesson is not despair, but to highlight a central fact of life in a society—in a world—where production is animated by the quest for profit, not ecological sustainability. We have rich conversations about the implications of this fact, which they grasp clearly from their classroom experience; but the lesson is no mere polemic. Students themselves have to wrestle with what we should do in the face of this calamity-in-the-making.

The other day I got a Facebook message from a student I'd had in 10th-grade U.S. history. This was in the 1980–81 school year. Unprompted, he said that he still remembers our Organic Goodie Simulation—more than 40 years later. It's an activity where students—divided into workers and unemployed—confront the monopoly ownership of our society's means of production, and of everyone's survival—in the person of the teacher, the owner of the Organic Goodie Machine. And as the teacher drives wages lower and lower, the students as workers and unemployed have to figure out how to respond. There is no script, but students always organize, and afterward we have intense conversations about how they responded or could have responded.

The point is that we want to create curriculum that attempts to engage students as fully as possible—that respects them as intellectuals, thinkers, artists, writers. And potential activists. We want a curriculum that is problem-posing, choice-rich, and is about things in the world that matter. But we don't have to create curriculum all by ourselves. We can collaborate on lesson-development, and we can build on social justice lessons at Rethinking Schools and the Zinn Education Project. Yes, most of the time teachers are alone in a classroom with our students, but we can—and should—create curriculum together. This work is too important to think we have to do it by ourselves.

About the Author:

Mark Kissling is an Associate Professor of Education at Penn State Univeristy. He can be reached at mtk16@psu.edu.

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