

Teacher as Stranger: “Releasing” Imagination for Teaching Controversial Public Issues

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Abstract:

This study utilized the term “teacher as stranger” from Maxine Greene’s (1973) *Teacher as Stranger* to explore how teachers teach contemporary controversial public issues in Taiwan (e.g., national identity, sovereignty, and ethnic issues). Using a case study design, this study documents how six social studies teachers make curricular decisions about teaching controversial public issues and create possibilities for their students to imaginatively engage with controversial public issues. Findings illuminate that these teachers challenge the stereotype of Asian teachers as always following a centralized curriculum; they instead collaborate authentic curricular resources and decenter the exam-centric and curriculum-centric classroom space. In sum, this study, refracted through the national context of Taiwan, helps us understand the possibility of Taiwanese teachers’ curricular-instructional decisions and increased autonomy and authority.

Key words: teacher as stranger, imaginative engagement, controversial public issues, Taiwanese History curriculum, curricular-instructional decision

Introduction

When encountering controversial public issues, teachers in Taiwan are often hesitant to tackle such topics in classrooms; they are not completely unique in this situation. There are similarities, for example, to teachers in the U.S., where research has shown that teachers feel hesitant to teach polemical issues and have serious concerns about teaching such subjects. Hess (2009) pointed out that teachers are hesitant to teach controversial public issues (such as abortion or same-sex marriage) because they worry about causing conflict in the classroom. In line with much

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of the research on this topic, Evan, Avery, and Pederson (1999) have shown that American teachers often avoid topics that are deemed too controversial because they worry about students' comprehension, the administration's response, and parents' attitudes. Choosing not to talk about controversial public issues in schools means that teachers are making choices about what to let into their classrooms; they choose "safe knowledge" to present to their students (King, 2012). Yet research suggests that there is the necessity of having public discussions about issues in classrooms in order to develop students' democratic values: civic engagement, problem-solving abilities, and appreciating differences (Hess, 2008, 2009; Parker, 2003).

In most Asian countries, the centralized curriculum standards and guidelines employed in public schools mean that students and teachers have relatively limited space and freedom to engage with controversial public issues (Ho, 2010; Misco, 2013, 2016). Taiwan also employs centralized curriculum guidelines at the K-12 level; National Curriculum Guidelines conducted by the Ministry of Education are applied in all subjects, including high school history and middle school social studies. The National Curriculum Guidelines have also developed textbook editions, university entry exams, and teachers' handbooks, all of which have affected teachers' teaching and students' learning since compulsory education was initiated in Taiwan in 1968 (Chou, 2001). In other words, in Asian contexts like Taiwan's, opportunities to explore controversial public issues in social studies classrooms are often limited by inherited school culture, social pressure, national and centralized curriculum, and teachers' restricted freedom and space.

Teaching controversial public issues in Taiwan has been a challenge both inside and outside the classroom. Therefore, this paper, drawing data from a qualitative case study (Yin, 1994), focuses on social studies teachers' teaching of controversial public issues. Its analysis is grounded in an understanding of the "Teacher as Stranger" (Greene, 1973): teachers as agents releasing possibilities of imaginative teaching of controversial public issues within a context dominated by controversies (Greene, 1995). This paper reflects on the broader educational challenges faced by teachers who work within the context of such social controversy.

Teaching Controversial Public Issues

In scholarship related to teaching controversial public issues in the U.S., most researchers have illustrated that democratic societies are built by citizens who are able to engage in reasoned discussion (Hess, 2008; Lockwood & Harris, 1985; Parker, 2003, 2010; Parker & Hess, 2001). Some

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research suggests that talking about controversial public issues helps to develop democratic values and political tolerance within and for a democratic society, including enhancing students' ability to engage in higher order thinking and interpersonal skills (Hess & McAvoy, 2014; McAvoy & Hess, 2013). Additionally, some researchers argue that classrooms should become political sites in order to develop students' critical thinking skills required to build democratic and fundamental social values (Hess, 2009).

However, most research in the U.S. has indicated that teachers choose not to teach controversial public issues because teachers lack readiness and worry about conflicts created by discussing controversial public issues (Avery, Levy, & Simmons, 2013; Evan, Avery, & Pederson, 1999; Hess, 2009; McBee, 1996). In addition, some teachers tend to avoid raising controversial political issues because of the fear of community reprisal (Hess, 2002, 2008) or lack of administrator support and assistance (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). Lastly, some teachers have concerns about students' skills and knowledge for deliberation and keeping order in the classroom (Hess, 2002; McAvoy & Hess, 2013). The difficulties of teaching controversial public issues in classrooms are reflected in the way discussion, critical thinking, democratic values, and political tolerance are disregarded in classrooms rather than developed and encouraged.

Regarding the situation of teaching controversial public issues, other national contexts—for instance, Northern Ireland and England—face similar issues of attempting and failing to teach controversy-free history courses (Barton & McCully, 2007). In Estonia and Latvia, one study illustrates that when teachers interact with controversial public issues, the complexity and multilayered nature of the challenges shape teachers' choices and ways of coping with the various demands they perceive (Kello, 2016). In other words, in the U.S. and other countries, teachers can bring powerful and authentic social studies content to their students through exploration of controversial public issues, but with certain concerns, limitations, and difficulties.

Teaching controversial public issues is further complicated through an Asian lens. In Asian contexts, different national contexts have influenced various approaches of teaching controversial public issues in social studies classrooms. For example, Ho (2010) contended that K-12 teachers in Singapore consciously avoided addressing controversial issues and intentionally did not contest the central narrative of racial harmony, meritocracy, and progress because of a climate of censorship and a regime of high-stakes tests that restrain democratic discourse within the classroom. In South Korea, research illustrates that classrooms often have a dualistic

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approach to problems, where controversial issues are treated as factual problems with two clearly delineated sides (Jho, 2008; Misco, 2016). China is quite similar to the United States, South Korea, and Japan, as one study found a lack of controversial issues confronted in classrooms and an uncritical stance toward government policy and action (Misco, 2013). In Taiwan, national curriculum makers have the authority to decide the curriculum that has employed teachers' teaching and students' learning for over half a century. Teachers in Taiwan who have relatively less curricular consciousness were not empowered to make the best use of what their classroom content has to offer (Chan, 2008). In sum, in Asian contexts, exploring controversial public issues in social studies classrooms is often limited by many factors, including national and centralized curricula, national test culture, and teachers' restricted time and space.

This paper seeks to show various forms of teaching that creates alternative pictures of classrooms (Greene, 1973, 1995) in Asia. It does not claim that practices contradicting these images are common in Taiwan now, but it shows what is possible with experienced teachers working at the front lines of one of Taiwan's most elite schools, creating possibilities for themselves and their students.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, I pay special attention to the theme of "Teacher as Stranger" (Greene, 1973), for its major premise is that teachers can create alternative views of controversial public issues and release the possibility of imaginative engagement (Greene, 1995).

The Origin of "Teacher as Stranger"

No matter which role we are playing, most of the time we preoccupy ourselves with the rules and standards of our daily lives and take much for granted without too much thinking or questioning. Maxine Greene wrote in 1973 of the "teacher as stranger" as a way of taking a stranger's vantage point on everyday reality in order to look inquiringly and wonderingly at the world in which one lives (Greene, 1973). The stranger's vantage point is a different way of seeing the world, both inside and outside of a classroom; in particular, Greene asserts, the "teacher as stranger" should know about both critical thinking and authentic choosing, about helping oneself and others see the world afresh. Critical thinking is the ability of teachers to reflect on their own knowledge and values as a way to deconstruct the "ready-made standardized schemes" in

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society. Greene's words allow us space to wander among these teachers' worlds and to imagine how we might set aside what we think we know in order to learn.

In addition, authentic choosing leads teachers' curricular-instructional decisions up to the ethical stage from the surface level of any debate; it leads from surface-level concerns about content (as important as those factual aspects are) into the values that give knowledge its worth. Furthermore, the concept of "teacher as stranger" is not only about teachers asking themselves to view the world with a stranger's point of view; the teacher asks whether, through teaching, he or she may become vitally open to the students and their worlds (Miller, 2015). That is, a "teacher as stranger" embraces his or her role as a curricular-instructional gatekeeper. Additionally, by helping others see afresh, the "teacher as stranger" is kept fresh and open to new encounters, which Maxine Greene termed "the immediacy of the felt encounter," and becomes concerned with whose immediacy is felt and whose possibilities are encountered (Britzman, 2003).

Lastly, by using the stranger's vantage point, the "teacher as stranger" views the teacher's job as promoting the learning process for himself or herself as well as the student, learning to learn through learning to teach. To learn and to teach, one must have an awareness of leaving something behind while reaching toward something new, and this kind of awareness must be linked to imagination (Greene, 1995). "Learning to learn" happens when people can stand by their own choices in the high wind of thought (Greene, 1973); people use imagination to move beyond the safe places to those outside of their comfort zones, where teachers intellectually, mentally, and physically become aware of the anxiety and desirability of learning. In other words, learning to teach is the process by which teachers view their work of knowing, exploring, negotiating, and interacting.

The "Teacher as Stranger" for Teaching Controversial Public Issues

For the "teacher as stranger," the teacher, as a citizen, will want to take positions on issues that impact his or her life and community; that is, the teacher will be more vital if he or she becomes involved in the public world (Greene, 1973). By the same token, for the "teacher as stranger" engaged in the teaching of controversial public issues as a teacher involved in the public world, teaching cannot escape public issues and public discussion, and a teacher cannot move away from being a citizen acting in particular social contexts, either. As Greene (1973) mentioned, the "teacher as stranger" may even want to play a part in supporting what he or she conceives to be needed reforms.

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Lastly, when considering the concept of “teacher as stranger,” teaching controversial public issues is not just a way of representing current issues or public events; instead, such teaching is a way of releasing the imagination, a moving beyond mere fact and the cultivation of dialogical community (Greene, 2000). In particular, the imagination “permits us to give credence to alternative realities” (Greene, 1995, p. 3). John Dewey argued that imagination is the gateway through which meanings derived from past experiences find their way into the present; it is the conscious adjustment of the new and the old (Dewey, 1934, p. 272). Imagination “allows us to break with the taken for granted, and to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions” (Greene, 1995, p. 3). Indeed, when teaching controversial public issues, being imaginative is the key for deliberating. Controversial public issues unearth questions of public policy that spark significant disagreement, in this way becoming a public problem. In other words, controversial public issues are open questions, meaning that there are multiple and often strikingly different answers that are seen as legitimate across the spectrum of a society (Hess, 2009, p. 38). Imaginative engagement requires reasoned discussion and deliberation while exploring different answers and alternative truths. Indeed, democratic societies are built on citizens who are able to engage in reasoned discussion and deliberation (Hess, 2008, 2009; Lockwood & Harris, 1985; Parker, 2003).

Methodology

Given the tensions concerning the history curriculum in Taiwan, and given that teaching history is necessarily a contentious task because of the political and ideological ruptures therein, the following research question guided my study: How do teachers create possibilities for imaginative engagement of teaching controversial public issues? Two subsidiary questions frame my inquiry: (1) What guides teachers’ decision-making for teaching controversial public issues in social studies classrooms? (2) What are the created strategies of teaching controversial public issues that help teachers and students to see afresh?

Case study research is designed to focus on contemporary (as opposed to historical) phenomena and create insight into real world phenomena (Yin, 1994). I see the case study as a means for understanding the unique everyday practice of teachers. I began the study with an interest in learning how teachers function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus and with a willingness to put aside as many presumptions as possible (Stake, 1995). Also, this study focused on teachers themselves, drawing attention to their subjective and lived lives. As Stake (1995) mentioned, case

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study research is not sampling research; it does not study a case primarily to understand other cases.

My study focuses on history teachers in two public senior high schools in Taiwan and seeks to gain an understanding of their curricular gatekeeping and teaching of controversial public issues. The case study framework allows for the examination of contemporary events in its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence including documents, artifacts, and interviews (Yin, 1994). In the study, documents such as teachers' lesson plans, textbooks, curriculum guidelines, and professional development records are examined to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources, providing specific details to corroborate information from interviews. Artifacts such as Facebook posts, teachers' columns, and editorials are the main resources in this study. By examining the artifacts, I was able to develop a broader perspective concerning all of the participants and their life worlds, beyond that which could be directly captured in a short period of time (Yin, 1994).

Setting, Case Selection, and Participants

The participants in this study consisted of six senior high school history teachers in two different public schools in Taichung, Taiwan. The selected teachers, three males and three females, were qualified teachers who held master's degrees in social science fields and taught in the public schools between 10-27 years. In Taiwan, all public senior high school teachers are required to take educational foundation courses, educational methodology courses, and a one-year internship in teacher education (Teacher Education Act, 2001). Four participants were from the Middleton Senior High School and two were from the Middleton Girls' Senior High School. The Middleton Senior High School and the Middleton Girls' High School are top-ranked schools in Taiwan. Students in senior high school are 15-17 years old. The names used in the study to refer to the participants are pseudonyms.

Conducting case study research with multiple resources created a broad base and maintained a strong chain of evidence (Yin, 1994). Here, this study utilized four different strategies of data collection: non-participant observation, narrative interviews, artifacts, and document analysis. The data collection was conducted over three summers: May to July 2013, May to July 2015, and June 2016, 2018. All sets of data collection were approved by the International Review Board (IRB).

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Findings

This study of viewing Asian social studies is at direct odds with how research has tended to portray the topic (Chan, 2008; Ho, 2010; Jho, 2008; Misco, 2011, 2013, 2016). Greene asserts the importance of looking inquiringly and wonderingly at the world, and I argue that ~~to do so~~ ~~requires~~ both critical and authentic choosing. The teachers in this study demonstrate ways of critical thinking and authentic choosing, helping themselves and others see the world afresh. In particular, when teaching controversial issues as strangers, these teachers' curricular-instructional decisions create certain possibilities inside and outside of the classroom. These possibilities include: 1) teachers as citizens who are involved in the public world; 2) teachers who take responsibility for decision-making by choosing important curricular topics; and 3) teachers who seek practices that release the imagination, as the imagination is the one cognitive capacity that "permits us to give credence to alternative realities" (Greene, 1995).

In this study, I analyzed the data by putting the ~~three~~ themes of imaginative teaching into dialogue. The findings show that teachers in this study have tried to release the imagination for teaching social studies through two concrete strategies: 1) collaborating with authentic materials, and 2) decentering the exam-centric and curriculum-centric classroom space.

Collaborating with Authentic Curricular Materials

Given the reality of the strained and divisive social, cultural, and historical contexts of Taiwan, teaching history is a difficult but imperative task. Based on the interview data and observation notes, this study found that teachers seek to collaborate with authentic materials as they teach history in their classrooms. Teachers embody curriculum gatekeeping in their classroom. To do this, they often bring authentic materials and suggest the Taiwanese comparison. In fact, using other historical events as comparison is not new for the social studies field (Barton & McCully, 2005; Jarman, 1998; McBride, 1997; Walker, 1996). The desire to provide narratives alternative to centralized curricular content about controversial issues is similarly present in Taiwanese teachers.

Some participants chose to use other historical events as a comparison for teaching controversial public issues. For example, Mr. W. talked about civic engagement and student movements using the history of student movements in the U.S. in the 1960s, later making the connection between

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those student movements and civic action on the streets of Taiwan, which safely brought up possibilities for students' learning about their own national context. When I asked about his practice of teaching controversial public issues, he responded:

[When I teach the 1960s], I let my students watch the documentary film *The Sixties*. By talking about this, I connected to the 2014 Sunflower Student Movement¹ in Taiwan. During the economic agreement with the PRC last year, I was a teacher, but also an administrator. I used a film about the 1960s to talk about the responsibility of protest leaders. I asked students what their arguments and statements were for protesting the economic agreement with the PRC. I asked them to think about what their responsibility is. In the film, there are some student movements and protests, and leaders have reflected on their own actions and responsibilities.

In Mr. W.'s examples, he indicated the connection between the content in the curriculum, the 1960s in America, and a current issue, the Sunflower Student Movement in Taiwan. These two historical events happened in different time periods and in different social and national contexts, but both were led by students (at least in part) and spread throughout the whole country.

During the interviews, Mr. W. shared how he made this comparison intentionally because he liked to remind students of the consequences of and responsibilities for advocating a movement. By using other historical events as a comparison, he crystallized opportunities for students' learning by bringing together current issues and past historical events in two different contexts, which he felt allowed students to be less emotionally involved regarding their own personal backgrounds or emotions. This also allowed him to claim to be teaching one topic, the 1960s, while in reality teaching another: a current Taiwanese social movement.

¹ The Sunflower Student Movement is a protest movement driven by a coalition of students and civic groups that came to a head on March 18 and April 10, 2014, in the Legislative Yuan. The activists protested the passing of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) by the ruling party Kuomintang (KMT) at the legislature without clause-by-clause review.

Later in the interview, Mr. W. also shared with me his plans for the future and said he would like to spend more time on 228², focusing on a humanities perspective on this event by not just repeating the sadness in the past. His examples for avoiding the “sadness in the past” were to examine the Armenian and Rwandan genocides. This might seem like an absurd choice, but it is clear that these events will most likely have a very different emotional resonance for his students, despite the obvious human suffering involved in these events.

Using other people’s eyes to read other people’s stories, the participants used other historical events to raise discussion points with their students to ask questions about the responsibilities of student protest leaders or to raise the question of intergenerational political conflict. This section shows how teachers use literature to invoke emotional and aesthetic responses that might lead students to become more sympathetic to competing perspectives on topics that the Taiwanese curriculum has ignored or omitted.

In the Taiwanese history curriculum guidelines and textbooks, there is a general lack of reference to fictional or imaginative literature for students to develop their historical understanding and empathy through understanding people’s stories. Throughout the course of the interviews, Mr. W. and Mr. Hsu both revealed how they share literature with their students, especially when they are discussing controversial public issues with them. For example, when I asked Mr. W. about whether his family stories impact his curricular-instructional decisions, he said,

I focus on “small history”—from a humanities perspective—to talk about the 228 event. For example, I use the text *A Letter Never Sent Out*³. I share this article with my students. We did not have any articles related to 228 in our textbooks and curriculum guidelines. Narrative is a good way to let students imagine what happened through other people’s eyes. In addition, I try to mention both sides, Chinese or Taiwanese, not particularly focusing on one side but more on a humanities perspective.

² The 228 Incident, referring to February 28, was the prelude to the era of White Terror from 1949 until martial law lifted in 1987, when dissidents and intellectuals were imprisoned or executed to assert KMT rule over the island. Chiang Kai-shek launched a crackdown on February 28, 1947, that lasted for weeks and resulted in up to 28,000 civilian casualties

³ *A Letter Never Sent Out* is a letter written by a victim killed during 228, in 1937. This artifact has been stored by the national government for 50 years and displayed in a public museum recently.

Especially when he talked about the history between Taiwan and the PRC since 1949, Mr. W. avoided addressing conflicts between the Taiwanese and Chinese. He feels that this version of history—as rigidly competing or conflicting perspectives—is overly focused on in the curriculum. Instead, he collaborates with literature. By utilizing literature, Mr. W. created opportunities for students to understand the humanities by experiencing stories from other perspectives. The purpose of using alternative literature is, first of all, to address a topic that is omitted from the national curriculum. It is also designed to help students develop their empathy and imagination through narrative. Indeed, literature creates a space for students to foster their thinking and understanding, which are essential for learning history but have been ignored in the curriculum in favor of merely addressing conflicts between the Taiwanese and Chinese.

Teachers in this study used alternative methods to teach history, using other historical events as comparison and using literature to help students see peoples' stories through others' eyes. Collaborating with other national content and literature has become unexpectedly common in these teachers' classrooms. For the participants in this study, these strategies helped them to not only be consistent with their rationale, to be relevant without being ideological, but also to create possibilities for the release of imagination as students learn about the past.

Decentering the Exam-Centric and Curriculum-Centric Classroom Space

Because social studies often describes historical events and because those events can sometimes be controversial, social studies, at least in the context of the Taiwanese education system, exists within a cultural context that makes it difficult to escape from engaging difficult knowledge. As discussed in the last section, the teachers in this study exemplify and embody the implicit presence of controversial public issues in the classroom, and then make a specific effort at also exemplifying the implicit dynamism of social studies by attempting to cover controversial public issues beyond what often exists in textbooks.

Breaking classroom norms through after-school study groups and flipped classrooms

A major struggle for these participants was the fact that they have less time to discuss and explore controversial public issues but more time for structured content to be taught in the curriculum—a common concern of social studies teachers in many countries across the globe. In this study,

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Mr. Chen, Mr. Hsu, and Mrs. Yu all started to advocate another format of teaching: after-school study groups.

Mrs. Yu is an example of a teacher who led a study group with her students. According to Mrs. Yu, she has been running a study group with her students for years, and she invited students to choose the topic for the study group for the first time during this study. She chose the topic of the study group—pop culture and history—with her students, and then they selected one book about baseball’s development in Taiwan during Japanese colonization (1985-1945), which not only explored the history of baseball in Taiwan but also discussed the consequences (negative and positive) of Japanese colonization. This topic seems like a pop culture focus, but indeed, it includes the discussion of a current controversial topic: unclear national identity and weak cultural identity in Taiwan after 50 years of Japanese colonization. Mrs. Yu uses an alternative topic, baseball, to address a controversial issue, breaking traditional modes of instruction that directly addresses a particular topic.

Mr. Chen is another participant who has tried to de-center the typical classroom space. Mr. Chen has tried different formats like field-based learning, study groups, civic engagement activities, guest speeches, student workshops, and field trips. He has been working to develop different learning experiences for students, and flipping the classroom is one of them. In my observation of Mr. Chen’s classroom and through his reflections, I noted how he valued flipping the classroom, and how he has created space for unique learning experiences for students.

Using after-school study groups, author talks, and the flipped classroom model has formed possibilities for students’ learning: creating space beyond the centralized curriculum, reworking the classroom for teachers’ and students’ autonomy, and creating the possibility for the release of imagination and creativity for students’ learning about the past in Taiwan. In this study, the findings show that teachers have awareness of the lack of imagination and possibilities for students’ learning under the centralized curriculum and schooling, so they made their own curricular-instructional decisions for generating chances for themselves and for their students in social studies classrooms.

Creating alternative projects for student learning

Developing independent projects or alternative assignments is another way teachers approach developing students’ learning about controversial public issues. For example, Mr. Chen started

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an alternative assignment for freshman students: Students' Life Stories. Mr. Chen designed this assignment to develop his students' own self-reflection and sense of self. He shared with me in a later interview that his former students have mentioned to him the importance of this assignment for them when they were in university because it gave them a chance to practice rethinking their self-identity.

In sum, with alternative assignments, Mr. Chen has shaped the potential for his students to learn knowledge and values beyond the textbooks and curriculum by conducting research projects and self-reflection projects that not only generated alternative learning opportunities for students, but also created the possibilities for students to believe alternative truths and stories. These strategies have the potential to create a new perspective on what students have habitually considered real, so that controversial public issues teaching may make them people vitally open to their world (Greene, 1973).

Discussion

Creating the Possibility for Imagination through Creative Curricular and Instructional Gatekeeping Practices

Teachers seeking practices that release the imagination collaborated with authentic resources that direct students to discover the past through content not written in the official curriculum. In this study, the participants illustrated various strategies, collaborating with authentic resources that help students to see alternative realities in terms of historical events, understanding, knowledge, and value. As John Dewey (1934) said, imagination is the gateway through which meanings, derived from past experiences, find their way into the present. The participants' choices indicate that at least some Taiwanese teachers wish to release imagination by providing stories and authentic resources that encourage students to understand the past from nuanced perspectives.

In addition, as Hess (2009) pointed out, teaching controversial public issues needs creative and novel forms of political talk and deliberation among a diverse public; indeed, being imaginative is the key for deliberating. In this study, participants have shown that teachers create numerous strategies for developing students' dialogue building and discussion. In this study, teachers created imaginative engagement of controversial public issues with students by collaborating

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with authentic resources and creating opportunities of deliberation. As Greene (1995) mentioned, the imagination is the one cognitive capacity that “permits us to give credence to alternative realities.” Indeed, through using other historical events as comparison, reading people’s stories, and creating alternative chances for students to encounter controversial public issues, releasing imagination of controversial public issues helps students to see an alternative side of the historical past and develop their own deliberation of issues. Such a release of imagination encourages students to have not only a better understanding of controversial public issues but also to construct their own knowledge through dialogue.

Challenging the Stereotype of Asian Teachers through Breaking Classroom Norms and Centralized Curriculum

When Maxine Greene (1973) argued for the teacher to become a stranger, she argued, at least in one sense, that teachers should make decisions as citizens. In this study, I have explored the boundaries that teachers face as they attempt to become influenced more by their position as citizens rather than simply as teachers. As Greene (1973) illustrated, the teacher as a citizen will want to take positions on issues that impact his or her life and community; that is, the teacher will be a more vital teacher if he or she becomes involved in the public world. Above, we saw Mr. W., Mr. Chen, and Mrs. Yu encourage their students to put their knowledge into action and not be limited by constraints such as limited classroom space, structured time periods, and centralized curriculum standards. They created after-school study groups, alternative assignments like research projects that allowed students to interact with people outside of schools, to value people’s stories and to reflect on themselves, care for others, solve social issues, and become citizens in a democratic society involved in the public world.

All of these possibilities, these teachers asserted, have been ignored in Taiwanese schooling; civic engagement and citizenship have not been emphasized by the national curriculum and other teachers. However, the participants in this study challenge the stereotype of Asian teachers, who have been identified as ones with limited power and autonomy in classrooms (Chen, 2004). Moreover, in this study, we saw how participants have worked through different formats in order to develop students’ learning about controversial public issues. Each of these strategies reflects a reality where teachers cannot help but encounter controversial public issues. These teachers challenged the stereotype of Asian teachers with limited autonomy and authority, limited space and time to interact with controversial public issues; however, these teachers are not

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representative of all teachers in Taiwan or in other Asian contexts. By the same token, these teachers are exceptional, but they also represent the possibility of being a stranger in the classroom in order to release imagination about controversial public issues.

Conclusion

In this study, given the teachers' data, the findings show how participant teachers chose curriculum resources and developed instructional strategies that release a sense of collective imagination in their classrooms. I brought three themes of imaginative teaching into dialogue with two concrete strategies employed by the participants in this study: 1) collaborating with authentic materials, and 2) decentering the exam-centric and curriculum-centric classroom space. Through Maxine Greene's concept of the "teacher as stranger," teachers in this study illustrated the difficulties and rewards of instructional practice, particularly as they relate to the possibility for releasing imagination through controversial public issues teaching. The teachers in this study show not only the possibilities for themselves to release imaginative engagement with controversial public issues, but also to create alternative possibilities for themselves to break the stereotype of Asian social studies teachers. Indeed, these teachers have revealed the moral imagination that unlocks us from the nation-state binary and provides new thinking about identity and the human community.

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