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Abstract

Teachers in multicultural societies that are beset by severe rifts and political polarization encounter students who express racist and extreme attitudes. According to the students' dichotomous views, anyone who is different from them poses a threat, and teachers find it difficult to overcome this challenge solely with moralistic utterances. Anger, shock, and punishment do not help change the students' opinions; they often have the opposite effect. This article proposes, instead, that teachers use dissonance as a tool for helping students rid themselves of their dichotomous views and become accustomed to complex thinking about society. On the basis of an educational ethnographic study, the article presents various pedagogical approaches and examples of how to accomplish this by drawing on the curriculum content, facilitating a class discussion, and using the teacher's identity. The article emphasizes that reducing the students' resistance to dissonance depends greatly on teachers' using empathy, creating a feeling of identification, and building a relationship of trust with the class.

Keywords: anti-racism, teacher education, social studies, class environment, dissonance

Introduction

While talking to her 11th-grade students about the principle of equity, Ms. Singer reminded them that the law prohibits discrimination in employment on the grounds of religion, race, sex, or sexual orientation. A fierce debate ensued from one student's question as to whether it was permissible not to hire a member of an ethnic minority and to give evasive reasons such as, "We don't need more workers." Many of the students saw no problem in this case and explained their position on the grounds of fear of violence and terrorism; as one of

them said, “If you hire him, you are subsidizing the weapons they point at you.” Some of the students expressed even more extreme positions: “I think that every [member] of an ethnic minority hates us, and hatred leads to something bad”; “It’s like the way that we hate them”; “A [member of an] ethnic minority is not like any other human being.”

This incident took place in a public high school in Israel, and the ethnic minority under discussion was Palestinian-Arabs. Unfortunately, one may assume that it is not an unusual occurrence and that similar discussions involving extreme racist or xenophobic statements and prejudices take place in schools in many countries. Education scholars refer to such kinds of incidents in classroom discussions as racialized conflicts or as challenges of race-related stress (Reisman et al., 2020). Educational contexts characterized by a multicultural society, severe internal conflicts, and hierarchical power relations between various identity groups tend to be very challenging for teachers who strive for racial justice and equity. Teachers like Ms. Singer are constantly seeking tools and curricular interventions for coping with their students’ racist and extreme attitudes (Tatum, 2007). I will return to the question of how Ms. Singer responded, but first I will try to analyze and explain the challenge that she and her colleagues face and will then present a fundamental educational tool that I recommend be adopted: dissonance.

Teachers are first of all educators: They must try to contend with negative social phenomena that they encounter among their students and to engage them in critical discussions of race. Punishment and discipline cannot be the main and ultimate solutions for race-related stress, although these are often the kinds of measures that teachers adopt, certainly as an immediate response to an incident. I suggest that fundamental treatment of racialized conflicts in the classroom discourse is effective primarily when it is preventive.

Teachers know their students' characters and therefore should be interested in dealing with extreme attitudes as part of the classroom's learning routine and not only as a response to a painful outburst. Moreover, it is important for teachers to address racism directly and critically and not to be content with the positive educational components of celebrating diversity or honoring multiculturalism (Galloway et al., 2019). However, the need and motivation to educate are not sufficient. Effective educational tools and instructional pedagogies are needed to give the teachers practical options suited to the context. Teachers need to act not only on the basis of intuition but also on the basis of an understanding of the deep reasons for the phenomenon. The solutions presented below do not offer a magic formula but rather recommend ways of methodical and continuous instructional class work.

Instructional Approaches for Addressing Racism

Recent years have seen a growing interest in infusing anti-racist and culturally responsive pedagogies into schools' social studies curricula (Brown & Brown, 2015; King, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2017). Scholars have invested efforts in thinking about what a racial pedagogy content knowledge (RPCK) approach would look like (Chandler, 2015) and in creating teacher education methodologies that will develop the appropriate approaches and practices (Busey & Vickery, 2017; Demoiny, 2018; Hawkman, 2020; Hughes & Marhatta, 2021; Morrison et al., 2008). Whereas in the United States there is notable educational experience and literature dealing with racism aimed at Black and other people of color, in other countries the main lenses of racism might be ethnic, cultural, or even religious identities. The educational use of the term *racism* in the Israeli context is mainly directed to categories of ethnicity (Jews-Arabs / European-Middle eastern Jews) and religion (Jews-Muslims) and, in some other cases, to a distinct category of race (Ethiopian Jews, African

migrants). Thus, many of the extremist viewpoints of Israeli students reflect the concept of "racism without race," i.e., "a racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences" (Balibar, 2007, p. 84). Nevertheless, there is a common ground for all forms of racism and therefore also for teachers' professional development in democratic societies challenged by racial and ethnic inequalities and identity-related stress in the classroom. Teachers in many countries must contend with racism, injustice, and the systems and structures that create disparate outcomes for people of color and other minoritized groups (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Previous studies that have focused on finding practical solutions have suggested various pedagogies based on dialogical relations between teachers and their students, such as naming and questioning the phenomenon (Parkhouse, 2018), using disciplinary, critical, and racial literacy (Reisman et al., 2020) or deconstructing a comforting master narrative by using the approach of *counter storytelling* (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2021).

As Reisman (2019) and Hughes and Marhatta (2021) argue, racial pedagogy content knowledge (RPCK) "does not exist, inert, in the teacher's mind, but rather manifests in the context of enactment in the form of instructional moves, as a result of myriad decision-moments that the teacher has to continuously navigate" (Reisman, 2019, p. 9), while following a racialized social studies or history curriculum. Therefore, to deepen our understanding of ways to cultivate anti-racist teaching and to consolidate various components of the RPCK approach, the current study focuses on analyzing teachers' daily practices, rather than on teachers' reflective processes regarding their beliefs, identities, and self-awareness.

This study aims to fill the gap in the literature related to questions like those Reisman et al. (2020) raise: What can teachers who believe in the importance of discussing race actually do about racially stressful events in the classroom, and how should they attend to them in the course of instruction? What role does emotion play in racialized discussions, and how might teachers be better prepared to address the emotional dimensions of facilitating discussions about race? What would be recommended moves for teachers to adopt when they approach *discretionary spaces*—instructional moments in which they must choose among a set of discursive options, each of which has implications for student learning and can deepen or disrupt existing beliefs?

Education Toward Complexity by Means of Dissonance

Teachers' instructional decisions depend on the combination of their epistemologies, educational beliefs, and interpretations of what has occurred or might have occurred in their classrooms. Therefore, in trying to design practices for dealing with students' racist statements, one must first discover the deep causes of the phenomenon and deduce from them possible educational responses and actions.

Studies have shown that one of the reasons for the expression of racist attitudes is a dichotomous view of the world. According to social psychologists, all of us, and especially adolescents, tend to organize reality in a binary and dichotomous manner—us/them; good guys/bad guys; with us/against us—which is fertile ground for adopting racist and xenophobic attitudes (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Harrison, 1998; Leacock, 1977). The source of these attitudes is the combination of adolescents' interpretation of reality, individual and collective feelings, and deep involvement with issues of identity. A helpful response to dichotomous views is education toward complexity, an important educational

value that helps adolescents look at the world. Equally important is that it helps them develop their perceptions of themselves. To cope with students' extreme attitudes, teachers may wish to foster a complex view of reality and of the variety of social and cultural identities in it. To this end, dissonance may be proposed as both a conceptual and a practical tool.

Teachers who discover misperceptions or misconceptions about the *other* among their students are interested in causing them to reconsider their views and replace them with others. Sometimes the students' opinions are intuitive or deeply ingrained views about reality that are very difficult to change. One way is to create a conflict between the familiar and obvious views and new knowledge and perceptions (Johnson & Johnson, 1995). Often the conflict is cognitive, resulting from an encounter with new or surprising counter-information. Sometimes the conflict is emotional, resulting from an encounter with contrary or surprising feelings.

Psychologists have found that cognitive dissonance causes students to confront their misguided views, develop curiosity and a motivation to learn, and even be spurred to cognitive and social development (Nussbaum & Novick, 1982). Social science teachers use dissonance to examine their students' basic assumptions, as part of the development of a critical approach to society. However, teachers' attempts to deal with racism solely with rational means are generally doomed to failure because they do not address sufficiently the deep connection between racism and perceptions of identity (Banks, 2008). Therefore, in addition to cognitive dissonance there is another, and sometimes no less effective, option: emotional dissonance. This occurs when a student's familiar and constant feelings regarding a particular subject or person conflict with feelings regarding that subject or

person that arise in light of a momentary and surprising encounter, causing a whirlpool of confusion that may eventually lead to new insights. Thus, we may conclude that contending with racism requires simultaneous action on three levels: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral (Rosen & Perkins, 2013).

A similar approach is called *the pedagogy of subversion* (Lamm, 2000). This is a process in which the teacher constantly tries to question the students' spontaneous and ingrained views (political, social, and other) and then works with the objections that the students raise. The aim is not necessarily to rattle the foundations of the existing social order, as critical pedagogy philosophers argue but rather to bring adolescents to an awareness of their tendency to internalize this social order without questioning it. The teacher tries to prevent a premature fixation of the personality, which derives from social and environmental pressure, by affording the student the possibility of a head-on encounter with dilemmas, both emotionally and cognitively.

Another interesting direction whose aim is to disrupt extreme worldviews and racism is that of paradoxical thinking interventions (Hameiri, Bar-Tal, & Halperin, 2019; Hameiri, Porat, Bar-Tal, Bieler, & Halperin, 2014). According to this approach, attempts to reduce ingrained, extreme views by means of counter-information or meetings with the *others* often fail because of the individual's fundamental objection to being exposed to information that contradicts deeply held beliefs. Opening up to alternative thinking about reality requires great self-confidence. Therefore, the paradoxical thinking approach attempts to achieve similar results by exposing ingrained social beliefs in a way that takes them to their extreme, absurd end. Social beliefs are perceptions shared by many members of a society, especially a society that is locked in an intractable conflict, and that help them

develop a positive self-image, feelings of unity, and justifications for their ways of acting and for their self-defense in the face of a shared *enemy* (Bar-Tal, 2000; 2007). Paradoxical thinking about social beliefs can be expressed, for example, in a situation in which a student expresses a racist and extreme view after a terror attack—"All the [members of the relevant minority group] should be deported"—and the teacher asks the student to describe in detail such things as how it should be done, whether it will include all the children, old people, doctors, and scientists from this minority group; and who exactly should do it. Research on this approach suggests that people exposed to paradoxical thinking interventions subsequently reexamine their views and moderate them.

The aim common to all the approaches presented above is to disrupt the students' initial dichotomous attitudes. Contending with this disruption can lead to opposition and even an aggressive rejection either of the new information or of the feeling that undermines previous perceptions. But it can also lead to a reexamination of the previous array of beliefs and to a moderation of extreme views. In this sense, dissonance has a constructive role in the educational process.

However, there are powerful external pressures on teachers to limit the creation of dissonance that threatens to disrupt the familiar social order (Apple, 2013). Teachers are caught between the desire to provide all students with a process that will challenge their basic assumptions and the need to ensure a supportive and encompassing environment in which students can cope with those challenges from a position of emotional security (Houser, 1996). Also, leading the students to dissonance may be perceived by them, their parents, and the school administration as criticism and even subversion, and thus may threaten the teachers' status in the system that employs them (Journell, 2017; Sondel,

Baggett, & Dunn, 2018). In light of growing anti-liberal trends all around the world, each of these approaches tries to find a different way to reduce the danger to the teachers and to provide them with defenses against potential objections. While using the cognitive dissonance approach, the teacher is protected by indisputable factual disciplinary knowledge. While using the pedagogy of disruption, the teacher is protected by the attempt to help the students, as individuals progressing toward going out into the great world, to learn how to examine it and themselves. And while using the paradoxical thinking approach, the teacher sets out from the perspective and views that are the same as the students'; that is, the teacher questions only their extreme conclusions.

Whichever way the teacher chooses, the path toward changing attitudes and adopting a complex view of reality requires educational work that does not threaten the students or generate an argument between the students and the teacher but instead comes from a position of identification. A student who is hurt (as opposed to a student who is agitated) is not open to a change in thinking and may even confront the teacher and harm the process that the teacher is trying to conduct in the classroom. The dissonance approach is less straightforward than several radical pedagogies, which seeks to challenge the students' fundamental life assumption. Instead, it offers options that derive from the context and culture in which the teachers and the students feel comfortable. Therefore, in this study, I searched for teachers' instructional tools for generating dissonance that were aimed at leading to a rethinking of students' views from a position of empathy. The main questions I raised were the following: How do high school teachers committed to an anti-racist approach infuse the dissonance tool in the instruction processes of social science

classes? What are the various ways of implementing this method, and what are the benefits and challenges of each one?

Study Context and Methodology

Data for this study emerged from a broader educational ethnographic field study aimed at describing and analyzing how civics teachers address controversial issues in their high school classes. The challenges and difficulties faced by teachers engaged in controversies with their students have aroused much scholarly interest in recent years, especially in light of the transformation of many democracies into ethnically, nationally, and linguistically multicultural, and hence, politically divided societies (Avery et al., 2013; Gindi & Ron-Erlich, 2018; Hess & McAvoy, 2015).

In the Israeli context, the intractable, violent conflict between Jews and Arabs, which has continued for decades, dramatically affects the students, the teachers, and the entire education system (Bar-Tal, 2007). The Israeli public education system has separate schools for Hebrew-speakers and Arabic-speakers, and therefore teachers in the Jewish (Hebrew-speaking) division must contend continuously with students' racist attitudes and prejudices regarding Arabs. In addition, as in other Western countries, Israeli society has xenophobic attitudes toward labor migrants and asylum seekers from the developing world. The Israeli context is unique because of the grave violence and the clash between two nationalist movements, which affects every human being in this side of the world for decades. In this extreme situation, teachers face student's emotions of fear, anger, and even hate on a daily basis, and therefore the study aims to explore whether teachers can aspire to change their students' attitudes through the use of dissonance. An embedded multiple-case design (Yin, 2013) was used to compare how five teachers addressed racial issues in

their civics instruction. The case-study strategy is based on the assumption that intensive and thorough study of a phenomenon at the local level has powerful theoretical generalizability, even if it does not purport to be quantitatively or statistically generalizable. To choose a case that is as representational as possible, I selected a large public high school in central Israel, in a city with a population of some 200,000, and ranked by socioeconomic cluster as 6 out of 10 (10 being the highest). Because the public schools are separated by language of instruction, very few Arab students study in Jewish schools, and *vice versa*. That is, the classes described in this study were not diverse in terms of ethno-national affiliation, because all the students and teachers were Hebrew-speaking and Jewish. The students and teachers were diverse, however, in terms of gender, political views, and ethnicity (that is, having different Jewish origins: for example, students whose families came to Israel from Europe as opposed to those whose families came from Muslim and Arab countries). The fact that no Arab students were in these classes gave some of the students the feeling that they could freely express their fears and anger at the absent group. The challenge for the teachers was to cope with the voicing of the extreme and racist views when there was not a single representative of the group considered the *other* in the class. This situation is different from that in public education in the United States, where diversity in the classroom is very common.

In the study, conducted between 2014 and 2017, using classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and artifact gathering, I followed closely a group of five civics teachers who taught grades 10 and 11 in the matriculation track in the school. (In Israel, being in the matriculation track is a prerequisite for college admission.) The teachers were diverse in terms of age and professional approach as well as in gender, ethnic, and political

identity. The observations of each teacher encompassed 14–23 lessons, once or twice a week, over a period of five to seven months.

In addition, throughout my long-term ethnographic field study, I collected data related to this topic, including teacher stories and comments, some of which were not during the formal interviews. The study was approved by the ethics committee of the university where I am employed. All names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

In contrast to the common phenomenon of social science teachers fearing classroom discussions of issues that involve racial conflicts (Shuster, 2018), I found that none of the five teachers avoided dealing with the Jewish-Arab conflict and any racist views that might arise in the discussion of this topic. The teachers even explained in the interviews that they viewed this as important for instilling values. Consequently it was possible to examine which methods the teachers used to contend with students' extreme and racist views that might arise.

The context from which I come as a researcher enabled me to get as close as possible to the object of my study: the teachers and their pedagogical considerations. I was a civics teacher for many years and even held the post of the Ministry of Education's national supervisor of civic studies. In recent years, I have trained civics teachers and have taught courses on civics education, including a course on contending with students' extreme and racist views. The practical and theoretical knowledge I have accumulated over these years has enabled me to understand the teachers' dilemmas and to characterize their coping strategies, even when they themselves find it difficult to explain them analytically. On the other hand, my reflective observation on my work as a high school teacher and as an educator of teachers has clarified for me that the ways I contended with students' extreme

racist views and the approaches I thought were effective are not necessarily the only or the most successful ones. Therefore, in analyzing the findings of the study that I present below, I have tried to include the diverse practices I discovered in the field study and to distinguish among them analytically.

Findings: Three Instructional Ways to Generate Dissonance

Dissonance can be generated through classroom instruction in various ways. Almost always, they combine a cognitive dimension and an emotional dimension, and teachers can select the one best suited to the specific circumstances. The data, based on the field research, are presented here according to three themes in teachers' instructional activities: dissonance as part of teaching content, dissonance through construction of classroom discussion, and dissonance in relation to the encounter between the teacher's identity and that of the students. In each example, the teacher is aiming for the Achilles heel in the students' dichotomous view in order to shake up, if only a little, their ingrained social beliefs. I note also when teachers use dissonance as a positive tool that constructs a complex worldview and not as a negative or dismantling tool.

Dissonance Through, and While, Teaching the Curriculum

The subjects taught provide many opportunities for discussing social and current issues and, consequently, for dealing with extreme and racist attitudes by generating dissonance.

1. Ms. Levin, a civics teacher, recounted a lesson she gave following a terror attack that happened in a city in the south of the country that week. A terrifying incident occurred just after that, when a few civilians beat to death an African labor migrant, whom they mistakenly suspected of being a terrorist involved in the attack. Later it turned out that this person was present at the scene innocently and was not related to the incident This event

provoked many public reactions from people who were shocked by the act. When thousands of migrant workers live in the country, a reality is that, in a state of emergency, local residents will suspect anyone who looks like a foreigner and will resort to violence against them, which for many is seen as an expression of dehumanization. Nevertheless, according to Ms. Levin, many of the students saw no problem in the civilians' beating a person after he was shot and wounded by a security officer. Ms. Levin tried to point out that their attitude was mistaken, as she recounted her experience:

> We conducted the entire discussion, and the ethical position that I presented was not convincing, so I wrote on the board "The Rule of Law," and I wrote "capital punishment in Israel—only for Nazi war criminals," and I said to them, "Listen, there is no capital punishment in Israel. There is a principle of the rule of law, and that means that we are all subject to the law. If the law does not allow . . . capital punishment, you [she emphasized] cannot carry out a death sentence. Even if capital punishment existed, you would have to go to court, but . . . you must understand that you cannot take the law into your own hands and decide." And somehow, they suddenly were able to understand that the [question of] whether or not he was [Israeli] was not relevant. These are very bright children, [but] it took them time to absorb [it], because emotionally it was clear to them that [what happened] was all right. One of them said to me at the end of the

> lesson, "I understand why I shocked you. I never thought about this in that way."

The students are used to Ms. Levin's conducting stormy discussions on current issues, in which she tries not to express her own views but rather to contribute her knowledge. In this case, Ms. Levin had a clear aim. She did not want to conduct a discussion that granted legitimacy to several positions, but rather a discussion of a moral issue, whose conclusion is clear. Ms. Levin understood that because of the tension between the emotionally obvious and the cognitive-rational views of the students, moral arguments would not succeed; the students had an emotional block against them. Therefore, she decided to switch to a legal-rational argument to make clear to them that there is a democratic principle in Israel and that the position they presented contradicted it. In this way she succeeded in causing many of the students to see the problem with their initial position. Although Ms. Levin engaged in a confrontational discussion on a controversial issue, her use of the legal argument succeeded in generating cognitive dissonance and bringing about a change among at least some of the students and thus also attained the moral objective. Despite this, she was very upset at the end of the lesson, after experiencing the moral opacity of some of the students towards migrant workers.

2. Mr. Woods recalled a research project by a group of students.

> They did a research project on racism in sports and interviewed Salim Tuama [an Arab-Israeli soccer player who played mainly with a Tel Aviv team in a league in which most of the players

> were Jewish] and it was amazing. The player described all his experiences: that they [the fans] sang derisive songs…You have no idea what a change this made in the group members who suddenly understood what this person was undergoing. I published the interview, as is, in the school newspaper.

The background to the event was the fact that Mr. Woods himself was a devoted soccer fan and often discussed soccer with his students. The positive atmosphere and the interpersonal relationship that developed from it enabled him to challenge the group of students to do the assignment that created the dissonance that led to insights that surprised them. In this case, the emotional dissonance was related to the familiar practice of stepping into someone else's shoes (Harris, 2004), which is often difficult to implement.

3. Ms. Lagg is much loved by her 10th-grade students, but she has trouble conducting discussions with them on the Jewish–Arab conflict or on political differences between the right wing and the left wing in the country without their turning into emotional outbursts. In one of the lessons, the following discussion took place:

> Eitan: I don't like left-wingers.
>
> Ms. Lagg: Why? What [do you mean] by "don't like"?
>
> Eitan: I don't think it's possible to make peace. The Arabs are…
>
> Ms. Lagg: Can I focus on something you said? You say, "I don't like left-wingers." Are all the left-wingers the same? Or are all Mizrahi Jews [Jewish descendants of communities in Middle

> Eastern and North African countries, as opposed to those of European descent] the same? For example, [are] you and I [the same]?
>
> Eitan: All the left-wingers are the same.
>
> Abraham: They're not all the same.
>
> Ms. Lagg: Why? What are the differences?
>
> Abraham: There are left-wingers who carry the Palestinian flag in Tel Aviv and there are left-wingers in economic matters.

Ms. Lagg tried to make her students think about complexity in a place where they saw a very clear and simple dichotomy. She shifted from the generalization regarding left-wingers to a generalization regarding Mizrahi Jews. She relied on the fact that most members of the group are Mizrahi Jews, as she is. Eitan was not convinced, but for Abraham, a student with no-less-extreme views, it is evident that the dissonance triggered a rethinking.

The following day, Ms. Lagg dared to go even further. She questioned every generalization that the students made and asked them to provide details for every generalization, so as to moderate them. After the discussion of "Who is a left-winger?" and "Who is a right-winger?" led to a more nuanced understanding, she tried the same approach with regard to Arabs, after one of the students expressed racist attitudes toward them.

> Ms. Lagg: …If I may have a moment, what is the definition of Arab? Am I an Arab?

> Abraham: An Arab is [someone] from an Arab country.
>
> Ms. Lagg: So am I an Arab? [Silence.] What is an Arab? … Let's think. Where were our ancestors born?

Ms. Lagg made use of the Mizrahi affiliation of most of the students, a detail that was known to everyone in the class. In the first lesson she connected generalizations about Mizrahi Jews—something the students are aware of and object to on the grounds of their affiliation with this group—and generalizations about left-wingers. At least for one student, Abraham, the dissonance that created a comparison led to the desired outcome, and in contrast to Eitan, he did not stick to the generalization but succeeded in deconstructing it. In the second lesson Ms. Lagg made sophisticated use of academic discourse, familiar to her but not to them, on the category of *Arab Jews* (Shenhav, 2006) in order to generate even greater dissonance and to disrupt the negative generalizations regarding Arabs. The answer, "An Arab is someone from Arab countries," enabled her to confront them with her cultural identity and through it with their identity, which is connected to the Arab world. In a conversation following the lesson she said,

> I felt that was something that would touch their hearts.—that we are not monolithic, all the Mizrahi Jews. We are a group made up of many people . . . and I want him to understand that Arabs, too, are not all the same. From [the students'] perspective, "An Arab equals terror," and that is what I want to deconstruct.

Ms. Lagg's ability to generate dissonance effectively resulted not only from her having a critical political awareness of the Jewish–Arab discourse but also from the fact that she is affiliated with the same ethnic-identity group (Mizrahi Jews) as the students. Her good relations with the class enabled her to dare to generate dissonance by shifting the focus of the students' discussion and asking about herself the resonating question, "Am I an Arab?"

In all the cases described here, the teachers generated dissonance regarding the content of the discussion, but what made this possible was the trust created prior to that between the teacher and the students. The teachers created the feeling that they were "*on the students' side*, *like them* and not *against them*, and therefore the students were willing to allow the teachers to challenge them to think outside the usual and safe sphere of their views.

The data reveal that other teachers used content from subject matter that they teach in order to generate dissonance in relation to the Jewish students' prejudices regarding Arabs. For example, a teacher of poetry generated dissonance similar to that in Ms. Lagg's class by reading a poem about whether Arabic language and culture cause recoil and alienation, or, alternatively, are part of the historic heritage of Mizrahi Jews. One of the teachers encountered the view, ingrained in parts of Israeli society, that religion and tradition are always justifications for conservative attitudes, xenophobia, and misogyny. While teaching sacred texts, he referred to the well-known verse, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27), and presented it in the context of gender equality and universal human rights, thus surprising the students. A teacher of Jewish philosophy referred to the writings of Maimonides, one of the greatest medieval Jewish philosophers and commentators, and his

positive attitude toward Muslim culture and the Arabic language. Another teacher generated dissonance by bringing to the class the story and philosophy of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, a scholar and a social activist in the United States who stood by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his struggle for equality and justice. A quotation from Rabbi Heschel surprised many students, because he wrote in religious language and explained racism as a denunciation of God: "Racism is worse than idolatry. Racism is satanism, unmitigated evil…You cannot worship God and at the same time look at a man as if he were a horse…*Racial or religious bigotry* must be recognized for what it is: *blasphemy*" (Heschel, 1963, emphasis in the original).

In the instances described, the teacher created dissonance between the way many adolescents perceived religion and how it relates to human rights and equality for all. For at least some of the students, this was a total surprise that disrupted the dichotomy between religious thought and democratic-humanistic thought.

Dissonance Through Pedagogic Facilitation of Class Discussion

Teachers generate dissonance also by how they construct the class discussion. The surprise that the dissonance creates can also be planned and integrated in the pedagogic praxis of the lesson, including role-play, simulation, stepping into the other's shoes, devil's advocate, and debate.

Underlying these practices is the aim of getting to know the perspectives of people with various identities and of developing tolerance for various views and empathy for those who hold them (Case, 1993). Understanding the perspectives of people of varied identities in a way that is not solely cognitive but also emotional is called *stepping into other people's shoes* (Harris, 2004) or *narrative imagination* (Nussbaum, 2002). All these are structured,

didactic tools that enable the teacher and the students to enact the *other*. Bringing the other into the classroom in this way may generate emotional and cognitive dissonance. The obvious artificiality of such situations often enables the students to challenge themselves to adopt a point of view that is different from their own with fewer objections and less emotional recoil. In debate, for example, emotional recoil is limited because of the theatrical element and also because of the structure, which ensures equal opportunity for the presentation of both sides.

To this list may be added practices that were integrated in common class discussions: for example, asking a student who expressed a strong personal attitude in an excited and unambiguous manner to try immediately after to present arguments or feelings of someone who holds the diametrically opposite view, as a thought exercise or a theatrical task. The fact that the student's attitude has already been voiced and has been given a platform may enable him or her to feel safe and to carry out the assignment, which in some cases may cause the student (and the others) to rethink the firm opinions voiced initially.

The habit of this form of discourse instruction enabled various social studies teachers to also engage with perspectives regarding minority groups: presenting a debate in a social studies lesson between local inhabitants and labor migrants regarding the laws pertaining to entry into the country; presenting the point of view of Jews, Muslims, and Christians regarding holidays and beliefs; presenting a Supreme Court discussion on the separation of neighborhoods and localities on the basis of ethnic affiliation; asking the students to role-play the conflict between characters in a literary piece dealing with ethnic conflict. All these options created fertile ground for generating cognitive and emotional dissonance, combined in a natural manner with the didactic course of the lesson and based

on planning and study, and not just on a spontaneous exchange. These means of generating dissonance can also be used with students of almost any age and with other subject matter, even if the content itself is not related to racism or equality. Examples include debate on vaccinations in a science lesson or role-play of the various figures in a story studied in the English lesson.

Analysis and reflection on the data, including interviews and conversations with the teachers, reveal two pointers on the best practice for introducing these instructional strategies:

1. This should be a pedagogic pattern and not a one-time show: The more practices of *stepping into other people's shoes* become routine in the teacher's pedagogy, the more the students will practice them, become accustomed to them, and see them as a natural part of the teacher's special, educational approach. Familiarization and continued practice make it possible, over time, to challenge the students in situations in which they will be required to step into the shoes of people who are very different from them, even those they consider not legitimate or inferior and thus the object of extreme and racist attitudes.

2. Who is on the stage—the teacher or the students? As in every other process of developing higher-order thinking skills, the more these practices are conducted by the students rather than by the teacher, the more effective they will be. Even if it is clear that the students' performance will be less good than the teacher's, handing over the responsibility and the attention to the students will ultimately enable them to be more open to dissonance and more attentive to uncertainty that may arise in the course of role-play.

Dissonance in the Encounter Between Teacher and Students

Dissonance can also develop from surprises in the encounter between teacher and students. This is an additional opportunity for teachers to demonstrate to their students the complexity of the human condition.

1. Who is a teacher? The teacher's identity, which exposes the students to various types of content and ethical issues, can have an impact on the discourse that develops in the classroom (Busey & Vickery, 2017; Myers, 2007; Washington & Humphries, 2011). If we return to Ms. Lagg, her ability to lead her students to dissonance regarding the extent to which Arab culture is a positive or negative part of their lives derived from her identity as a woman whose parents immigrated to Israel from Arab countries. For her colleague of European descent, it would probably be harder to achieve the same result without arousing objections or anger. Similarly, the experience of dissonance related to the study of sacred texts that deal with equality would be different when the teacher was an Orthodox Jewish man who identifies as a right-winger than when the teacher was a woman whom the students knew is secular and liberal, even if both teachers uttered the same words in the lesson and asked identical questions. This difference might anger a teacher because it is unfair, but it is also a tool that can be harnessed for educational purposes. Students who encounter a male Orthodox Jewish teacher expect, on the basis of common social stereotypes, certain behaviors, attitudes, and approaches.

Dissonance can arise from the very fact of the (surprising) encounter with a teacher regarding whom they expect X but who says and does Y. Teachers who understand the potential for generating dissonance through their identities and the social stereotypes related to them will be able to attain significant achievements with their students in their education toward complexity. Thus, a religious male teacher who was teaching sacred texts

and sought to arouse dissonance emphasized the importance of human rights; the secular-liberal female teacher of history talked to her students about the meaning of faith in her life and their lives; and in another class, a cinema studies teacher of Russian extraction shared with the students her love of Iranian cinema. In each of these cases, the intention was not to manipulate the students but rather to expose them to other aspects of the teachers' personalities and inclinations that would succeed in disrupting slightly the stereotypes ingrained in the students' views. Thus the teachers generated dissonance based on individual and close familiarity by creating interest and openness and by using reflectiveness that enabled them to explain to the students that every person is complex and full of internal contradictions. These findings indicate that other teachers can make intelligent use of aspects of their identities and views to generate such surprising dissonance for their students.

This approach applies also to school principals who build their teaching staffs over the years. In the long run, by actively diversifying their staffs, principals may create the possibility that the students will experience positive dissonance in their encounter with diverse, surprising, and stereotype-disrupting teachers.

In the study, I observed that fertile ground for dissonance in relation to identity was also created in encounters with people from outside, for example, in lectures, workshops, and field trips. Some of the classes in the school met with visiting lecturers in the fields of history, literature, and social sciences, meetings that exposed them to new and even surprising perspectives on familiar social phenomena. For example, a Mizrahi woman poet spoke about her desire to challenge the male European canon and the national literature curriculum that focuses mainly on male Jewish writers of European descent. Other

examples included a workshop with representatives of The Parents Circle—Families Forum, an organization of Israelis and Palestinians whose family members were killed as a result of the violent Israeli-Arab conflict, and who wanted to transmit a message of reconciliation; a meeting with a Mizrahi Israeli author who had written about the Holocaust and argued that it should not be seen as solely pertaining to European Jews; and a field trip to Bedouin villages in southern Israel that are not recognized by the state, to become aware of the problems and possible solutions. All these examples reflect learning by means of encounters with individuals and places that offer the students an opportunity to rethink their assumptions and their unquestioned views regarding various social-identity groups. However, the power of outside individuals and groups is more limited, because they require the mediation of the teachers and because it is easier for the students to ignore what happens in these encounters that are one-off events. This is in contrast to the dissonance that derives from the encounter with teachers or other students, who are permanent fixtures in their lives.

2. Personal-emotional sharing: Students are used to thinking, incorrectly, of course, that their teachers have no ethical or ideological doubts and that they always know immediately what the right thing is to do and say. Exposure to the teachers' sharing of feelings or personal stories can be grounds for generating dissonance in a situation in which the students are surprised to discover the teachers' uncertainty and reflective thinking about it. In such a case, the dissonance that the teachers experienced became a tool for educating toward complexity, because the teachers were role models. The students came to understand that dissonance also exists among the teachers and that this is a natural process and even an educational one. It is exemplified in the story of Ms. Harris:

> It's not pleasant for me to tell this, but one day after a terror attack in Jerusalem I got on a bus and saw a Muslim-Arab woman wearing a hijab [traditional hair-and-neck covering] and I was really afraid and I recoiled from sitting next to her. I felt really bad and I was uncertain, but in the end I decided not to sit next to her. I felt that I was really not behaving properly, especially because there was another young Arab man sitting there and he looked at me and saw me hesitating and that made me feel even more uncomfortable and ashamed. I came to my class and I decided to tell the students what happened to me that morning. I told them…also how bad I felt.

Ms. Harris went beyond just sharing her experiences of dissonance and her personal bad feelings and aimed to expose her students to the moral dangers in this situation. In a later conversation with her she revealed her intentions for the students to think critically about assumptions they have and prejudices they hold towards members of a different religious or ethnic group. Ms. Harris exposed her students to her weaknesses in a way that aroused wonder. Her educational aim was to show how she coped with the feelings of fear and recoiling from members of ethnic minorities. On a day after a terror attack, feelings of extreme frustration, distress, fear, and anger in school are likely to deteriorate into powerful expressions of hatred and racism. By means of her personal story, with its self-criticism and reflective sharing, Ms. Harris made use of two tools recommended for teachers' use in

confronting students' racism: honesty and empathy (Cooper, 2011; Noddings, 2012). Ms. Harris's students are used to hearing ethical and humanistic statements from her. In contrast to the expectations that her usual statements aroused, what she shared showed the students that she, too, was afraid and worried, that on such a morning she, too, had feelings of alienation and recoil. Ms. Harris shared the dissonance that she herself experienced and showed that these were natural feelings, but that it was important to control them and to understand the ethical danger in them. The students, obviously, also experienced dissonance between what they were used to hearing their teachers say in such situations and Ms. Harris's candor. It seems that the empathy for their feelings that the story created provided a basis for openness and attentiveness to her ethical statement.

Practical Discussion: Coping with Pedagogical Dilemmas

The use of various practices to generate dissonance for constructive purposes is not devoid of dilemmas. The following are a few of the dilemmas that emerged from the data and that should be considered when implementing this approach in high school instruction or in higher education.

For What Kinds of Content Should this Practice Be Applied? Generating dissonance involves a dimension of danger, because the creation of a surprise or a conflict between new knowledge or feelings and previous knowledge or feelings may arouse students' opposition. One possible conclusion is that the content should not be particularly explosive, even though it is clear that addressing racism is fundamentally a delicate matter. To cope with the dilemma, teachers may consider adapting the dissonant content to the ages and emotional abilities of the students: The more mature and experienced the students are in coping with dissonance, the more they can be challenged with sensitive content. Teachers

should take into account the class's shared past: A teacher who has just started teaching a particular class or a teacher who has had shaky relations with the class may tend to avoid introducing very sensitive content that creates dissonance, because it will be difficult for the teacher to envisage or control the students' response.

How Should Teachers Relate to Various Types of Students' Responses?

Dissonance may lead to various student responses, on a continuum from curiosity and openness to opposition and anger. The responses to dissonance, including cognitive dissonance, generally derive from feelings, and therefore it is recommended that students' responses be addressed in a way that takes their feelings into account. Teachers may realize that it is important to cope with negative responses and to attempt to soften them, and it is essential that this be accompanied by empathy and acceptance ("Your angry response is very understandable. I, too, was angry in a similar way when I first thought about this"; "I understand that it is hard for you to hear what has been said and to think about things in this way, but let's give ourselves a moment for an opportunity to think together"). In addition, it is important to arouse positive feelings and to support them ("You are offering us an interesting way to think about what we just heard. Let's try to explain it to the whole class"; "Tell us what surprised you or what didn't sound logical to you in what we said? How is it different from what you thought or knew about the topic until today?"). In addition, teachers may think about how to lead the students in a reflective process in light of the dissonance. Some teachers are of the opinion that one must try to resolve the students' dissonance, whereas others prefer to leave them in suspense and not lead them to clear conclusions.

Reflecting the Teacher's Uncertainty.

The example involving Ms. Harris presented above also raises a dilemma. Teachers may be divided regarding the use of dissonance that reflects their own uncertainty. They may not agree that it is desirable to work with the students only on a dissonance that the teacher has already resolved. Some will make the decision contingent on the students' ages and the nature of the teacher's relationship with them. There is also a pedagogical view that is not consistent, but instead is contingent on the goal: A teacher may argue that in the case of legitimate attitudes regarding a particular topic, it is preferable to share the teacher's unresolved dissonance, but that in other cases, the teacher must conduct the students toward an unambiguous moral statement (Geller, 2020).

Dealing with Risks and Discomforts for the Teachers

Using one's background or identity while applying the dissonance approach is a challenging instructional tool. It requires the teachers' willingness to be exposed and also an awareness of the privileges that their identities carry, which may be especially uncomfortable for teachers who belong to hegemonic identity groups. Therefore, discussions between teachers and students related to their own identities and not merely to the abstract themes of race and equity may require significant preparation, not only theoretically, but also emotionally and pedagogically. Teachers will need special training in order to feel comfortable in using this approach.

Conclusion

The use of dissonance and the demonstration of its existence may contribute to a positive change in students' racist and extreme attitudes. A reflective process regarding dissonance invites the students to free themselves from dichotomous views and enables them to observe social situations in a more complex manner. Accustoming oneself to the existence

of dissonance and contradictions—as facts of life—can be a key goal of education toward complexity and of maturation in general.

Dissonance is not the only tool for contending with racist statements, especially when the teacher must respond to an unplanned event. If we return to the case of Ms. Singer, with which this article began, we will see that she used several types of responses. Some of the students saw no problem in not hiring a member of an ethnic minority and explained it on the basis of "fear of terrorism": "If you hire him, you are subsidizing the weapons they point at you"; "All of them hate us"; "He's not like any other person."

Ms. Singer followed a very clear line in her lesson, namely, that a person cannot be rejected solely on the grounds of ethnic origin or race, and used various justifications:

> Every person is first of all a human being, before he is a Muslim, a Christian, a Jew, tall, short…Every time we generalize about people on the basis of their ethnic origin, that is racism. Will every Muslim blow you up?...If 90% of them are good, what are you afraid of? …What is the source of the information you are relying on? I remind you of statements made in Europe regarding Jews a century ago. It's the same thing. Am I, too, afraid? Of course. But does this mean that every Muslim is a bad person? No.

The teacher's first statement was based on a clearly humanistic-ethical rationale, but evidently she sensed that it was not sufficient. The second and third responses relied on types of cognitive dissonance: a confrontation with contrary information (data) or thought-provoking information (historical comparison) and an attempt in light of it to change the

initial thought pattern. The last response reflects emotional dissonance, accompanied also by the teacher's empathy and exposure of her feelings and the dissonance she still felt. Therefore, dissonance can be one tool among many in a larger toolbox for contending with racism. It works better when the teacher is aware of its advantages as well as its disadvantages.

Dissonance is a tool that should be used carefully and on safe ground. Whether a teacher can disrupt, even a little, the students' intuitive and dichotomous perceptions of the *other* depends on the degree to which they feel secure in that the teacher is on their side and is acting for their benefit. Only if they have this sense of security will they enable themselves to move a little from the social views that protect them in their turbulent everyday environments. The data showed that teachers can, and should, make broad use of the tool of dissonance in situations in which they are very familiar with the class and the students, and not out of anger, but rather out of affection and good personal relations with them. It can also be concluded that teachers should avoid lofty intentions and a supercilious approach—that they know what is right and ethical—which will lead to overriding the students' objections and imposing change. Instead, teachers should aim to bring about an internal process of change, even if it appears to be slow, inconsistent, fragmented, and sometimes even failing. Learning through the encounter with dissonance requires emotional openness. Therefore, teachers need to develop relations of trust with their students. This will enable the students to open themselves to the teachers' proposal that they view reality—which they perceive as dichotomous—in a more complex manner, without being preoccupied with self-defense and counter-attacks. The students' feeling that the teachers identify with them, coupled with trust and closeness, will ensure that the

ethical message underlying the teachers' activities will be received and that the students will allow themselves to budge a little from their familiar and secure comfort zones and open up to changes in their preconceptions.

The research presented in this article was conducted in Israel, a country that suffers from a deep social divide and is in a state of violent intractable conflict. Nevertheless, the conclusions and proposed approach for dealing with extremist positions through dissonance are relevant to other countries, including the United States. At a time when political polarization has become a widespread scourge, the dissonance approach may help teachers, throughout the school system and in higher education, become proactive and offer their students different perspectives on a dichotomous view of society.

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