Reconstruction after violence: how teachers and schools can deal with the legacy of the past

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Late August 1994, the Irish Republican Army announced a ceasefire after twenty-five years of armed conflict. A few days later, Michael Longley's poem, *Ceasefire*, was published in the *Irish Times*, the final lines (*I get down on my knees and do what must be done/ And kiss Achilles' hand, the killer of my son)* poignantly capturing the challenging, for many unimaginable, path that lay ahead. How do you live in peace after years of violence? What does it look like? What does peace sound like? How do you learn to trust 'the other'? How is confidence restored within communities among people who feel betrayed by their 'own'? Must the violent past be faced in order to secure peace, or coexistence, or forgiveness? And what role, if any, must there be for acknowledgement, responsibility, blame, punishment or justice?

As the authors of the Chicago Principles on Post-Conflict Justice argue, the specific context of a conflict and the way that it ends matter and should inform the development and implementation of transitional justice processes[1]. In this respect Northern Ireland represents an interesting case. It is at once a civil and an international conflict: while the main focus of attention was on the relationships between the two main communities of Protestants and Catholics, the role of the British and Irish governments was, and is, crucial, and in the final years of the peace

[1] For more information on this work, please see http://www.isisc.org/public/chicago%20principles%20-%20final%20-%20may%209%202007.pdf. The Chicago Principles emerged as a joint project of the International Human Rights Law Institute, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, the Istituto Superiore Internazionale di Scienze Criminali and the Association Internationale de Droit Pénal , 2007.

process other international actors, most notably the United States and the European Union, played an important and constructive role. International influence had other effects, at earlier times: the Irish diaspora, particularly in the United States, has longed played a role in supporting and funding political and paramilitary agitation, while other governments, perhaps most notably Libya and apartheid South Africa, have at times played a role in trading arms into the conflict. Northern Ireland is distinctive also in that while many people died, it was always a low-level conflict in comparison with other contemporary cases, such as Rwanda or the former Yugoslavia. And unlike most situations, when the violence ended it did so with all the protagonists claiming some level of victory, but with little apparent consensus on why it had all broken out in the first place and who carried the burden of responsibility.

Transitional justice in the wake of mass violence

In the wake of intra-societal political violence, it has become increasingly common for countries - and their partners in the international community - to draw on a range of tools in an effort to develop security and stability, to rebuild and repair and to promote peace and work toward reconciliation. These tools, often referred to as transitional justice processes, include: truth seeking vehicles such as truth commissions; prosecutions and other judicial efforts; institutional reforms (such as the reform and/or retraining of police); reparations and land restoration; and, monuments, memorials and other forms of commemoration.

Unfortunately, the education sector is commonly neglected, or rather the focus of attention is often on the restoration of an educational infrastructure, such as rebuilding schools, rather than on the 'stuff' of what goes on within schools, including the curriculum – it is as if the priority is attached to the hardware of education, but to the neglect of the software[2]. This oversight has both short and long-term consequences: this includes the possibility that teachers

[2] See Education, Conflict and Social Cohesion., ed by Sobhi Tawil and Alexandra Harley. Geneva: UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2004.

and schools can systematically undo or support the work of reconstruction and repair. The average teacher reaches more than 100 students each year and thousands over their career. Schools have the potential to act as sites that model and reflect democratic, non-violent practice and peaceful, respectful co-existence, or they can reinforce fear, prejudice, shame, humiliation, and a sense of victimization. Schools may also passively or actively promote violence.[3]

Increasingly, scholars and practitioners are finding that confronting the violent past is a critical step in the process of transition. In their study of civil war and reconciliation, Long and Brecke find that "extensive truth telling was a part of each successful reconciliation and absent from the three unsuccessful ones….In many instances the victimized population was clear about what abuses had occurred and who had carried them out. …Thus the importance of a truth-telling process was not only in uncovering the truth…but in acknowledging it. Aryeh Neier wrote, 'Knowledge that is officially sanctioned' becomes 'part of the public cognitive scene that is not there when it is merely the "truth."' (67). Without any preparation for this work and their role in the process, teachers find that they are increasingly being thrust into the work of 'truth recovery' and acknowledgement as history classrooms become places where official knowledge about the past is articulated and discussed, sometimes for the first time in a public space.

Northern Ireland's Transition to Peace

The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement of 1998 provided a political foundation for peace. It tried to achieve a balance between, on the one hand, shared and agreed political institutions and,

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[3] See the United States Institute of Peace, "Unite or Divide? The Challenges of Teaching History in Societies Emerging from Violent Conflict," ed Judy Barsalou and Elizabeth Cole, Special Report, No. 163, June 2006. "History education should be understood as an integral but underutilized part of transitional justice and social reconstruction. It can support or undermine the goals of tribunals, truth commissions and memorials, and other transitional justice mechanisms." http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr163.html

on the other hand, measures designed to legitimize different identities. Thus, for example, while Northern Ireland remains unambiguously a part of the United Kingdom, people born there can choose to carry either a British or Irish passport. In a further gesture towards cultural pluralism, the Agreement included a commitment of support for further developments in Irish Medium Education and support for aspects of the Ulster-Scots tradition.

While it seems obvious, it should be pointed out that teachers may themselves be bearers of traditional mores, values and prejudices rather than neutral mediums for the articulation of facts or objective analyses of events. The vast majority of teachers are from a population that was shaped and influenced by the violence, and participated in it, even if passively. Most teachers in Northern Ireland today were themselves taught in denominationally separate schools; most primary teachers will have trained in denominationally separate teacher training colleges. They most likely lived in segregated areas where the symbols of community identity were not so much overt, as ubiquitous. Furthermore, any assumption that all teachers are natural proponents of reconciliation is probably rooted in a misguided optimism. They, like other adults in their community, had anger, sadness and fear as formative experiences. Many will have held a profound sense of injustice about the violence that consumed their childhoods and young adult lives and made them and their families feel unsafe and insecure. Northern Ireland is a small place in which communities are in closely knit networks of family and friendship; while ordinarily this provides a basis for support, it also means that very many people were touched by the violence through the death of a family member or a friend. Few remained untouched or, in all likelihood, unaffected in some way. Thus, when they are teaching this history it is, in a real way, their own story, or the story of all their lives.

Teaching the violent past

"For years we were told that in order to promote peace and reconciliation, we should keep the conflict out of our schools. Now we are being told that to promote peace and reconciliation we should bring the conflict in, but we don't know how." Head of a history department at a Facing History seminar

Education sits at the intersection of several transitional justice processes. The head of history quoted above recognizes the multiple roles that she is expected to play: supporting the effort to face the violent past with evidence; creating a safe environment for discussion of potentially controversial issues; actively remembering the past; and, helping young people to connect the violent past to their lives today, hopefully in a manner which supports democracy and pro-social participation instead of re-igniting sectarianism and conflict. Recognizing these challenges, educational leaders in Northern Ireland have proposed and implemented several interventions. Over the years these interventions have taken four main forms: curriculum initiatives aimed at producing common programs or textbooks; contact programs to bring young Protestants and Catholics together; the development of Integrated schools in an attempt to recast completely the separate institutions; and recent attempts to develop collaborative networks of schools in an attempt to render institutional boundaries more porous. Inter alia the curriculum initiatives have included various attempts to create new history programs which differentiate the non-contentious and the contested issues in history, and seek to offer young people a way of both understanding why the latter are contentious, and how historians use evidence to work their way through contested analyses and interpretation. In addition, since the ceasefires and almost for the first time, significant efforts were made by government and non-governmental organizations to recognize and address the needs of victims and the legacy of trauma.

Scholarship on education in the wake of mass violence has begun to get some attention. This attention, however, tends to focus on textbooks (rewriting, redacting) and higher education

(the roles of universities and the work of scholars). [4] Alison Kitson's important research on history education in Northern Ireland should be included in this recent scholarship. Kitson interviewed teachers, professors of education and others involved in teaching and researching history education. She also researched textbooks over time in order to identify trends. In an interview about her work Kitson said, "History is in a unique position to help pupils understand the origins of the Northern Irish conflict and explore why it has become such an intractable issue. It can play a powerful role in tackling social division and promoting peace by encouraging pupils to understand how different interpretations of the past have come about and how these interpretations have played, and continue to play, such a key role in the conflict. At its best, history teaching actively encourages pupils to consider conflicting viewpoints, to challenge popular misconceptions (including the 'versions' of history encountered outside the classroom) and to make explicit and powerful connections between Ireland's past and the present situation".

She continues,

> "The research shows that some teachers do an outstandingly good job in making history incredibly relevant to the needs of young people living in Northern Ireland today who struggle to understand and reconcile the troubles that surround them. However, it is also clear that many opportunities are missed. The attraction of 'playing safe' in the classroom must be a powerful one when schools act as 'safe havens' for pupils living in particularly troubled areas. The structural realities of schools – continued segregation and selection – do little to help. However, if history is to contribute to social reconciliation as intended in the curriculum, steps need to be taken to provide teachers with the kind of training and resources that will help them. Otherwise, far too many opportunities are missed."[5]

Kitson's work provides a real opportunity to push the conversation toward professional development, toward learning not only what teachers teach but how they teach and how they

[4] See for example *Teaching the Violent Past: History Education and Reconciliation,* ed Elizabeth Cole. Rowman & Littlefield, 2007. Cole offers a range of case studies that allow the reader to thoughtfully explore history education through the lens of textbooks. This text does not address professional development or how teachers learn to use these texts—an issue that Cole takes up in other writing.
[5] http://www.scienceblog.com/community/older/2004/10/20049583.shtml,. Also see Kitson's chapter in Cole's Teaching the Violent Past.

learn to teach. Further, her conclusions offer an excellent context for framing and understanding Facing History and Ourselves' work in Northern Ireland.

Facing History and Ourselves in Northern Ireland

Facing History and Ourselves' started working in Northern Ireland in 2003. Facing History's work began with meetings to understand the political, cultural, social and educational landscape and where collaboration might be possible and welcome. Meetings with individuals at the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster led to a series of one and two-day introductory workshops. Participants included library board advisors (recommended by CCEA), teachers, NGO representatives, and representatives from Queen's University Belfast. These workshops were devoted to modeling some of Facing History's content, methods and "scope and sequence."

Facing History and Ourselves has been working in secondary schools and classrooms in North America and Europe for over three decades, providing a model of educational intervention and professional development that helps teachers and their students make the essential connections between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives. Through in-depth study of cases of mass atrocity and genocide, Facing History engages teachers and students in a critical exploration of the steps that led to full scale violence and destruction, as well as strategies for prevention and positive participation to sustain democracy.

The focal case study is an in-depth study of the failure of democracy in Germany and the events leading to the Holocaust. The core resource text, *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior* embodies a sequence of study that begins with identity—first individual identity and then group and national identities with their definitions of membership.[i] From there

the materials examine the failure of democracy in Germany and the steps leading to the Holocaust—the most documented case of twentieth-century indifference, de-humanization, hatred, racism, antisemitism, and mass murder. It goes on to explore difficult questions of judgment, memory, and legacy, and the necessity for responsible civic participation to prevent injustice and protect democracy in the present and future. The language and vocabulary that are taught throughout are tools for entry into the history – words like perpetrator, victim, defender, bystander, opportunist, rescuer, and upstander. Students learn that terms like identity, membership, legacy, denial, responsibility, and judgment can help them understand complicated history, as well as connect the lessons of that history to the questions they face in their own worlds. Moreover, by exploring a question in an historical case such as - why some people willingly conform to the norms of a group even when those norms encourage wrongdoing, while others speak out and resist- Facing History offers students a framework and a vocabulary for making connections and to ask how they can make difference in the present and future.

The core of Facing History and Ourselves is an exploration of in-depth case studies of collective violence in recent history, but crucially they are real episodes, of other times or places, in which universal themes of human behavior, choice and decision making are embedded.. The use of real cases, as opposed to simulations, is critical to eliciting significant discussion, analysis and reflection about others' experience. The methodology used in analyzing the materials discourages facile comparisons. Rather, the resources allow educators to engage in critical discussions and to identify universal themes, resonant historical patterns and aspects of human behavior. Thus, for example, examining the collapse of democracy in Weimar Germany and the rise of the Nazis provides a focus on the role of propaganda, conformity and obedience in turning neighbor against neighbor, and highlights examples of courage, compassion and resistance. Talking about such themes in the present provides openings to consider the same themes in other, more recent contexts.

A crucial shift that Facing History and Ourselves offers Northern Irish educators is a focus on bystander behavior and the possibilities for positive participation or upstander behavior. The victim-perpetrator dynamic is part of a vicious cycle in Northern Ireland. There is an overwhelming feeling on the part of individuals from all sides of the conflict that their victimization has not been recognized and that the other side has not adequately acknowledged or accepted responsibility. This is reinforced by what one of the authors has described as a pervasive sense of passivity and fatalism among people in which they feel that cannot affect events, and that things will normally work out for the worst. By looking at bystander behavior, it is possible to explore an aspect of human behavior that we all fall into and can claim. It allows us to explore more deeply the reasons why individuals do not intervene when they witness something that is wrong. It is not unique to perpetrators or victims. The category provides the opportunity for discussion and analysis without reinscribing familiar categories or binaries. It also highlights the importance of choice and consequence, and reminds us that passivity is another choice, albeit one with consequences.

The reading, "No Time to Think" from Facing History and Ourselves' *Holocaust and Human Behavior* is an example of a resource that facilitates the exploration of bystander behavior. The reading is based on research by the sociologist Milton Mayer and it captures the reflections of a German professor who is reflecting on why he did not act when the Nazis were coming into power and then once they had gained power. His reflections include an awareness that the genocide did not happen overnight. Rather, the Nazis took over in small steps and that those people who would eventually become victims were targeted in a range of ways, from professional exclusion to social segregation to the increasing use of violence. The text allows participants to reflect on the idea of "small steps" in a way that resonates powerfully with daily life. The professor does not provide an "excuse" for his bystander behavior; he provides a

window into his thinking and (in)actions. This window can, in many contexts, act as a mirror, for readers, allowing them to reflect on the *process* of bystander behavior. The resource also provides a vocabulary that gives readers a way to articulate their own interpretation of bystander behavior in Germany and in their own lives. For example, the professor refers to his "uncertainty." He is not sure of what is happening or how to act. The idea of uncertainty is a compelling one for most people. In discussions of bystander behavior with scholars and educators from around the world over the last thirty years, we have learned that not knowing what to do, how to do it or whether it will have an effect, particularly a positive one, prevents many people from taking action (passivity). Another element involves waiting for a leader or someone else to "do it." This idea of waiting for the moment when you should take action, a moment when what to do crystallizes and compels you is another that people around the world, from Rwanda and South Africa to New York City, London and Chicago have identified as common to their own experiences of bystander behavior. For Northern Irish teachers, the reading also offers an opportunity to look at the roles of individuals within history, rather than "states" or representatives of states. This allows for an interpretation that does not view events as inevitable, one where individuals have a role to play in shaping the past, the present and the future (fatalism).

The example of upstander behavior on the part of rescuers in the French community of Le Chambon has also had a powerful effect on the educators with whom we have worked. The people of this small village in Southern France resisted the Nazis and rescued Jews. The documentary, *Weapons of the Spirit*, captures the villagers' description of events and their explanations for getting involved and acting as they did. Most say they did what was right, what was human, what was expected. The fact that the town is a small primarily Protestant hamlet in largely Catholic France is not lost on the Northern Irish teachers with whom we have worked. Nor is the fact that the Catholic and Protestant villagers were not focused on difference—among Christians or between Christians and Jews—but are focused on doing the right thing.

Underlying Facing History's scope and sequence and approach to content is philosopher Hannah Arendt's theory of the relationships among thinking, judgment and action. When it comes to political action, Arendt's work assumes that thinking as such is insufficient. Political action not only demands public space and plurality but also the capacity for individual thinkers to exercise judgment—within themselves informed by their conscience (that is their ability to think about what is right, what is wrong, what they think about their thinking)—and with others. For Arendt, action is only possible when people are forced to think about their thinking with other thinkers. Action is informed by cognitive dissonance. That cognitive state of imbalance, according to this theory, usually results in a re-adjustment of thought and sometimes action . Thus, the practice of thinking about one's thinking, alone or with others, can provide the opportunity for this dissonance, of judgment.) Judgment, here, is the bridge between thought and action. Using an historical case study such as Germany in the 1920s and 30s provides an opportunity for the investigation, for example, of the elements that contributed to the breakdown of the Weimar Republic or the various criteria that informed the decision making of an individual in the 1930s. These cases provide opportunities for discussion, for consideration of the decisions made by real human beings in another time and place, and they allow participants to think out loud, to move from opinion to informed judgment as they begin to support their ideas with evidence and to think about their thinking and the thinking of others as they analyze and interpret.

This activity—sitting together, engaged in open discussion, thinking out loud and actively questioning self and other—allows participants to not only model a diverse civic space but to also practice acting within one. In Northern Ireland where the communities largely live separately lives, with residential segregation, separate schools and teacher training colleges, and an all-pervasive silence which shuts down conversation on controversial issues across the

religious divide even when they do meet, this practice is essential---for their work as educators within a democracy and for the possibility of coexistence within a divided democratic state.

Using resources that provide a degree of historical and psychological distance allows participants to engage in discussions about important political and civic issues with safety and greater confidence. In effect, they are learning to communicate with each other. The seminars model that space and opportunity and provide practice. Early sessions on identity and membership provide opportunities to reflect on self and then on the relationship between self and society. Being able to tease out the various characteristics that inform one's identity in conversation with others provides the opportunity for making connections and for beginning to see other people as equally diverse and complex as oneself, for seeing other people as being made up of many characteristics over perhaps the primary ones (religion, political affiliation) that are at the source of the conflict. This work provides participants with the opportunity to begin to share their own stories and observations about how identity and membership work in their community. For example, one participant laughingly recalled how she attended a retreat for Catholics and Protestants outside the city in which she grew up. At the retreat, one participant, a Protestant, said, "I came here thinking that when I saw a Catholic I would know it because their eyes are close together. But everyone looks the same." Everyone in the room burst into laughter as the Catholic participants recalled learning about—and passing on the knowledge that—Protestants' eyes were close together; and, other Protestants laughing because they learned the same thing about Catholics.

This story inspired dissonance in the thinking of the group. "If this one thing I've always known and believed is not true, then what else is not true? What else don't I 'know'?" Facing History discussions offer a similar opportunity, both to make these discoveries about the past and about oneself and the world today. Using the case study of Germany in the 1920s and 30s for

example, participants are able to explore the use of antisemitism in the rise of the Nazis. Facts such as the low number of Jewish people in Germany or the way that propaganda portrayed Jewish people as both capitalists and communists often precipitates congnitive dissonance and questioning. Questions reflect both some participants' taken for granted assumptions about the roles of Jewish people in Nazi Germany and, as they continue to tease out their assumptions, some of the ideas they have carried into the present day. In order to share such ideas out loud participants must feel safe. This does not mean that the room is free of "judgment," certainly not in the Arendtian sense. It means that we are working together to think critically and to accept the discomfort that entails. Rebecca Westerfield's work on Hannah Arendt nicely captures this dynamic:

> Thinking has a 'liberating effect' on 'the faculty of judgment….the most political of man's mental abilities,' the most political because its proper exercise, requires speech, communicability, and engagement with others. It is the faculty to judge *particulars* without subsuming them under *unexamined* general rules, laws, or customs. The faculty to judge 'particulars without subsuming them under general rules' provides reflection on the particular without reference to the general rule, in other words to see and consider the particular for itself. As Arendt puts it, the 'general rules' become unthinking 'habit,' which can be replaced with a 'new set of values' or rules because the reliance on the banisters has become habitual. [6]

In this context, Facing History's work in the seminars allows for at least two opportunities to break habits—or the reliance on old banisters. The first involves one's interpretation of history and their ideas about what happened in the past and why. By discussing particular events out loud, and thinking about their thinking individually and with others (catalyzed by journal reflections, facilitator's questions, and the questions and comments of other participants) unexamined interpretations, 'habits,' can be rethought. The second involves one's ideas about self and other, particularly in a divided society where 'general rules' often subsume understanding the particular—of the individual—for itself.

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[6] Rebecca Westerfield, "Pearlfishing: Diving for Fragments *Hannah Arendt's Contribution to the Aeshetics and Justice Connection*," Master's Thesis, Stanford University, June, 2008, p.44.

Navigating the silence

'Whatever you say, say nothing' is a famous phrase from the eponymous poem of Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney. The silence, word play and complex social negotiations that Seamus Heaney brings to life in the poem have become a signature of the conflict and one of its most powerful legacies. Teachers, like most Northern Irish adults, have found creative ways to carry on this silence which the curriculum prior to the most recent revision reinforced . Past history curricula which ended with Partition prevented and precluded discussion. But even an official blanket of silence collides with the reality that the conflict was playing out right outside the school's doors. Schools may have sought to be oases of calm, but the whirling storm constantly threatened to overwhelm the oases. One teacher recalls how she negotiated this challenge:

> I approached the subject first from the standpoint of the pupils I taught who knew basically very little but who had a thirst for finding out about the history of the conflict. The textbooks were dire at the time so I had to spend a lot of time creating our own booklets and using local newspapers as stimulus material. Often when there was an incident in the locality it was brushed under the carpet as we were afraid to broach the subject in case we offended someone. However there were times when our history lessons provided children with a stability and sense of order that was missing from their lives at home. Our goals were small ones for example to get pupils to listen to one another and to recognise that others were different and that this was ok. The content was set for us and it was compulsory to teach Irish history in all schools in Northern Ireland from Norman times up to partition in 1921.It was interesting though that while the content was set a Protestant and Catholic school could teach very different things and it was amazing to see what each side left out of history for example a Catholic school might be less likely to cover William of Orange while a Protestant school might just leave out the 1916 Rising.

Teaching and learning about "the troubles" could also be mediated by institutional separation and the use of different textbooks, although in truth the bigger consequence was likely to be the different orientation, and experience, upon which teachers drew in the separate schools

as they stood before their pupils. Most Protestants learned a British curriculum and were not exposed to "Irish" history, as the comments of these three teachers indicate:

> When I was being taught History at school we studied British History. We looked at the Home Rule Bills from the perspective of Gladstone.
>
> During my teacher training there was no consideration given to teaching the History of N.I. as it was not on any exam syllabus.
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> At school I don't think we did much Irish history specifically prior to GCSE. It was mostly British history. At GCSE we studied NI and the Second World War so it wasn't particularly controversial. We looked at Partition for A Level but it was very traditional teaching. Very much focused on results not reflection/varied teaching strategy.
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> I trained in London and again Ireland wasn't a main aspect of the national Curriculum. Issues such as Black Peoples of the Americas and slavery/civil rights were the main 'controversial' topics there. At college we were not really encouraged to take on anything too risky on teaching practice.

In contrast, a former history teacher, now a library board advisor, recalls her history education as a Catholic. She writes,

> I learned up the age of eighteen the received wisdom and narrative of Irish history which belonged to the Catholic community into which I was born. We used textbooks that had been produced and printed in the south and often written by priests and nuns as they were considered to be the only ones that would give the correct version i.e. the Nationalist one .I was taught at school to look on events as the famine through the eyes of a victim who as at the mercy of the English government who controlled Ireland and its people. I remember visualising Mother Ireland as a simpering ,weak dependent woman with about fourteen children and rosary beads in her hands who had an external locus of control and whose moral compass came from the Catholic church . I actually heard people from my community condemn England for destroying the land of Ireland and even   the English football team were demonized and presented as bad or something that you would not aspire to support even though we fancied half their footballers. A typical lesson was a traditional one where the text was read out and we were told what to think – discussion and enquiry were not part of my educational experience. Two things saved me one an inspirational history teacher who taught me to challenge everything I received that was not based on reason and evidence. She encouraged our class to think for ourselves and question the role of the church in our lives and her version of events in the past were totally different to the one in the textbooks. Secondly I came from a home background where there was fierce debate around the dinner table about everything and where my

> father modeled independent thinking and a value system based first and foremost on family/education and then church.

Reflecting on her own education in primarily Protestant schools, a history advisor commented on the recent murders of two British army officers based in Northern Ireland and a police officer just a short time later. In an email to one of the authors, she wrote:

"My generation had grown up with it [the violence] as reality. I didn't discuss what had happened until I went on the Facing History course. It isn't that a conscious decision was made you just carried on from day to day."

Creating balance: teaching "both" sides

As the post 1921 period began to be integrated into the curriculum, some teachers tried to provide "balance" and safety by looking at "both" sides of the conflict: but even this path raised its own dilemmas, not in the choice between a nebulous 'middle-way' or the articulation of parallel perspectives. As one NGO youth-worker recalls,

> When we entered Year 10 (aged 13-14), we started to cover the topic of the conflict, and I remember our teacher telling us that because we would be starting to look at potentially contentious issues, it would be appropriate for us to leave our personal feelings at the door and look at the material with a "historian's perspective", i.e. without bringing our own baggage into the context. Looking back, it was an easy thought for me to process because I had no such baggage, but I'm sure that others in the room had experienced conflict across interfaces, and we were all experiencing contact with non-Catholic school pupils on our way to and from school in our blue uniforms that clearly marked us as "Catholic" and therefore different from the other schools' students.
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> Our lessons were from textbooks, and occasional worksheets and overheads. The homework was a series of unbearable comprehension questions, and there was one year when we did a piece of research on a figure. I remember researching Louis XIV, but I still struggled to grasp the context of the research.
>
> Outside of the Key Stage 3 History work, there was almost no discussion of the issues around the conflict, even in subjects such as Religious Education, Geography, Current Affairs or English.

A history teacher reinforces this perspective and its limitations, saying "I think at first we tended to distance ourselves and try to teach a 'middle ground' being politically correct as it were. I know I did back when the conflict was still happening."

This practice of "balancing" views and seeking not to offend anyone was brought home to one of the authors in a training for heads of history in Belfast in 2006. The session involved placing black and white photographs of various events of the region's past on large pieces of paper scattered around the room. In small, randomly assigned groups, participants were asked to focus on a set of images, discuss them and leave comments. The photographs included images of individuals such as John Hume, David Trimble, representatives of parties and paramilitaries that had gained prominence (the Irish Republican Army, the Ulster Defence Force, etc.), the Hunger Strikers, including a lone, famous photograph of Bobby Sands, and events such as Bloody Sunday, the arrival of British troops, civil rights marches, the Shankill Bombing, declaration of the ceasefire in 1994 and of the Belfast Agreement in 1998. While talking to a participant, the author's co-facilitator began putting the photographs on the pieces of paper. By the time that the author came into the room, the co-facilitator had finished. She had carefully placed two photographs on each page, pairing a Catholic and a Protestant or an IRA-focused event or action with one from "the other side." The author asked her why she had set things up this way and she said, "for balance." She did not want to upset anyone as they came into the room, nor did she want to suggest that she had a particular view on the events. If for example, a page showed the Shankill Bombing (in a Protestant/Loyalist neighborhood by representatives of the IRA), shouldn't there be an image of an attack by Protestants/Loyalists of Catholics/Nationalists)? When asked her if history really "happened" that way, in balance, and could we not just scatter the images and let people experience them as they will? She agreed but said it did make her feel uncomfortable.

The participants came in and spent nearly an hour looking at the photographs, telling each other stories, sharing their feelings. Some participants talked about the fear they felt seeing the Hunger Strikers while others said they saw the photographs and immediately felt proud. Some talked about how they missed certain events because they were sent to school or to live in England. Others talked about how sad it was to see what felt like a series of failures, one after another. When the participants returned to the main room, they were asked to write in their journals about the session and then discuss it together. No one raised the issue of how the photographs were placed, so the author raised it . Many of the participants laughed. One of the things that they had learned was that they had to teach the past in a "balanced" way. One way to do this was to carefully consider who and what you were talking about and then making sure you addressed "the other side" in the same way. Heaney's poem referred to above includes the section: 'Where half of us, as in a wooden horse/Were cabin'd and confined like wily Greeks,/Besieged within the siege, whispering morse.' When we saw the teachers acting in this way, carefully creating balance in order to avoid giving offence, or perhaps creating balance in order to avoid discomfort, it was if we were watching a room full of people 'whispering morse'.

CONCLUSIONS

The twentieth century was the bloodiest in human history and as the century progressed the characteristic form of violence shifted in two important ways: first, there was a shift from

inter-state conflict to intra-state conflict; and second the proportion of civilian casualties steadily increased over time. Many lessons have been learned in processes of reconstruction after political violence and education has come to be seen to play an important role. But the opening theme of this paper is that educational efforts in reconstruction have tended to focus on the bricks and mortar of the educational infrastructure. Important as this undoubtedly is, we have suggested that it is at least equally important to focus attention on the curriculum, the 'stuff' of education that goes on in classrooms and engages with what we know and feel and understand.

We have both worked on one specific approach arising from this perspective which addresses one way we can engage with the past in order to better understand and engage with choices in the present. This approach is rooted in the exploration of historical case studies in order to explore the dilemmas and choices faced by real people, and to examine the consequences of their responses. Key historical case studies are provided by examination of antisemitism and the rise of the Nazis in Germany. This allows for an examination of the possibilities and fragilities of democracy, and the power of propaganda and the abuse of media. It provides a focus on those who played an active role in promoting hatred, including schools and teachers. Most tellingly, perhaps, it also illustrates the role of bystanders, who sought solace from passivity, but whose actions had consequences that both dreadful and real. And it illustrates the role of upstanders, those who, by choosing activism and resistance, remind us that we are not mere pwans in the power-play of others, but active citizens who can affect change, if we choose to do so.

Using illustrations from work with educators in Northern Ireland we have tried to illustrate how we can use these experiences to challenge passivity and fatalism in the present, and restore a sense of activism, with a more finely tuned sense of the moral consequences of the choices we make. Once learned these are lessons we hope that will take on to their students who

in turn, we hope, will feel empowered to become the architects of a better future as Northern Ireland works it way out of and away from violence. This is, inevitably, a long and slow process, in which care and empathy is needed on the part of facilitators. But our experience of doing this work in Northern Ireland is a reminder, if it were needed, that there are few better ways to engage with the present and future, than to engage with the past.

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[i] Margot Strom, *Facing History and Ourselves Holocaust and Human Behavior* (Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, 1994)