Positionality as Knowledge: From Pedagogy to Praxis

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Abstract: In this article, the authors will draw from their work in the Integral Teaching Fellowship Program at CIIS, and from their interactive session in the 2014 CIIS Founders Symposium on Integral Consciousness to better understand the epistemological relevance of positionality in integral education and critical pedagogy. A critical approach to pedagogy (drawing from theorists such as Paulo Freire and bell hooks) encourages students and educators alike to recognize their social positionings and reflect on how the institutionalization of their social identities (such as the expert, the genius, the marginalized, the disabled) not only inform the lenses through which they view the classroom, but also influence how they participate in the classroom. By employing an integral learning model (variety of modalities), a learning community is transformed into a dynamic positioning field, in which students and educators interact and co-create knowledge beyond their habitual or institutionally imposed positionings. Supported by our own experiences as integral educators in training, we conclude that developing critical reflection, including previously subjugated perspectives, and gaining the ability to reposition oneself maximizes learning opportunities.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy, integral education, positionality, positioning.

A Note on the Authors' Positionalities

We feel it is consistent with the values of integral education and responsible in light of our subject for us to articulate our own positionalities as authors. Collectively we are a collaborative group of eight emerging from the inaugural semester of the Integral Teaching Fellowship Program at the California Institute of Integral Studies. With an emphasis on critical pedagogy, integral education, and liberatory teaching methods, the program aims to prepare graduate students to teach in the college classroom using innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Positionings within the group are complex. Six of us were fellows and two are the faculty members facilitating the program. Four of the fellows are doctoral students, one an MA student and one an MFA student. The faculty members both have MFA degrees. The authors are listed alphabetically not hierarchically reflecting our understanding that knowledge is co-created and socially constructed.

Earlier work together in the Integral Teaching Fellowship Program, and on the presentation at the 2014 CIIS Founders Symposium on Integral Consciousness that this article is based upon, had left a legacy of hierarchies, alliances, and tensions among us, which came to the surface early on in our collaboration, and which we have had to explicitly navigate during the process of writing this article. Writing collaboratively with even one other person can be a challenge, let alone fitting a close publication deadline into the busy schedules of seven other co-authors. We used personal and group check-ins, which had been a feature of the Fellowship, to stay in

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relation and to negotiate the hurts, conflicts, and tensions which arose. In our work together, as in the classroom, our positionings were not only present, but critically influenced our work. In this spirit, we will start this article by sharing a little about ourselves.

Individually we come from a wide range of positionalities:

Sara Maria Acevedo is a South American woman, she identifies as an immigrant "who passes." She is a disability studies scholar and a cultural anthropologist focusing on social change. Her interests in scholarship range from feminist theory, to critical geography, to postmodern philosophy.

Michael Aho is a Finnish American straight white male, who was raised by working class grandparents, who works as a manager at a graduate school.

Eri Cela is doctoral student and a somatic psychotherapist, who identifies as an Albanian immigrant in the US, a transdisciplinarian, and culturally hybrid.

Juei-Chen Chao is an Asian woman who grew up with Chinese Culture in Taiwan and migrated to the West in the US to receive higher education in her late 30s. She considers herself as a person of "in-between" because after years of immersing in the American culture, she is no longer fitting in the typical Chinese-Taiwanese culture nor becoming American. As a scholar in training, she intends to bridge differences between cultures and attempts to promote equality and diversity by raising awareness of institutionalized racism in her work.

Isabel Garcia-Gonzales is a first generation Filipina American, woman of color, mother, writer, educator, and administrative faculty member in an undergraduate program.

Alec MacLeod is an older university professor who identifies as a heterosexual white male born in the US of largely Anglo Saxon descent. He lives in Oakland with his multi-racial family. He is a faculty member in an undergraduate program.

Claudia Moutray is an Italian American woman who is a feminist with a conservative background that steered her down a liberal path that she continues to walk. She is a PhD student studying Women's Spirituality, in her other life she is a swim team coach working with kids.

Christina Olague identifies as Chicana. She was raised until the age of 15 on a farm laborer camp and this experience influenced and helped to shape her interest in public policy and social justice issues. She served for 7 years on the Planning Commission of the City and County of San Francisco and 1 year on the Board of Supervisors. Raised Catholic, she has spent much of her life exploring different spiritual practices that include Northern European mysticism and Bon Buddhist practices. Currently she is a graduate student in counseling psychology.

Our collaboration has been a laboratory for learning about the challenges of not only appropriately valuing and incorporating this extensive resource of positionalities, but also of negotiating across a range of cultural differences and personal styles in the midst of complex personal and collective histories.

We will draw from our individual and collective experiences working on an interactive session for the Symposium at CIIS to ground our inquiry into the epistemological relevance of positionality in critical pedagogy and integral education. We will also present and reflect upon the content of the symposium, as well as the planning process itself—the challenging and fruitful work of co-creating knowledge. Finally, we acknowledge that the process of writing this article, as a collaborative group of authors, each with individual positionalities and shifting positions within the group, has also informed not only what we present here, but also what we do not present. In this article, as in the classroom, some positions are explicit, some are assumed, many are invisible and unknown, but all are impactful, even if their presence is not acknowledged.

Integral Education/Critical Pedagogy

The theoretical backbone of integral teaching and learning is rooted in the coming together of critical and integral approaches to education. These two distinct and often overlapping meta-approaches have developed in part as alternatives to conventional systems of education. The conventional educational models have been critiqued for practices that reduce and de-contextualize knowledge (Morin, 2001), preserve and reinforce hierarchical and dominant social orders (Freire, 1996; Giroux, 2007), and disenfranchise the knower from the production of knowledge (Freire, 1998; Shor, 1992; hooks, 1994). The industrialization of education (Giroux, 2007), organized around highly specialized and compartmentalized disciplines, produces knowledge that is disjointed and increasingly difficult to contextualize (Morin, 2001). The de-contextualization of knowledge is extended by removing the learner from the production of knowledge. Learning practices are reduced to memorization of information, acquisition of existing problem solving procedures, and to the reproduction of it all in the exact form it was served to the students (Montuori, 2006), in other words, students are reduced to the role of course takers (Lovitts, 2005). In this assembly-line approach to education (hooks, 1994), the students' lived experiences, identities, and their social milieus play little to no epistemological relevance in the production of knowledge.

In contrast, critical and integral approaches to education produce knowledge that contextualizes and connects (Morin, 2001). Knowledge is situated in the knower, socially constructed realities, and in the process involved in knowledge production. Integral education recognizes the multidimensionality of human beings and social systems (Chaudhuri, 1977) as well as the complexity in which the parts are woven together (Morin, 2001). Critical pedagogical practices challenge regressive and oppressive social orders, and encourage embodied learning, critical thinking, participation, and dialogue (Shor, 1992; hooks, 1994, 2010).

In integral education, both the learning community and its individual members are understood as complex unities. Therefore, an integral approach to education can be conceptualized as a process that invites and incorporates the lived histories of students and educators while at the same time mediating the multidimensionality of the academic setting and pedagogical discourse. An epistemological assumption of critical and integral approaches to education is that the learner's subjectivity and social positionings play an essential role in the practice of inquiry and knowledge production. The intersection of the identities and experiences produced outside the academic context with those produced in the pedagogical praxis add to the complexity of an integral learning community.

As previously stated, we authors first came together as six graduate fellows and two faculty members of a teaching fellowship program that focuses on integral education, critical pedagogy, and liberatory teaching methods. As part of the requirements of the program, we engaged in a body of literature chosen by the faculty members to develop a shared theoretical foundation for the teaching fellowship experience. Of particular relevance to our discussion here is the reading selection "How Does Your Positionality Bias Your Epistemology?" by David Takacs (2003). In it, Takacs asserted that we educators must ask the title question of ourselves and must support students to ask it of themselves. In other words, "How does who you are shape what you know about the world?" Takacs further explained, "By respecting the unique life experiences that each student brings into the classroom…we empower all students as knowledge makers. We allow each student to assert individualized knowledge that contributes to a collective understanding" (p. 28).

Takacs' assertion that positionality can play a central role in the co-creation of knowledge in the classroom has relevance to Freire's critical pedagogy; students who bring their life experiences and individualized knowledge are not "empty vessels" waiting to be filled by their professors. This allows for the democratic, participatory education that critical pedagogy aims to create. Further, Takacs' insistence that positionalities be brought into the educational process speaks to Chaudhuri's (1989) work on integral education, "which is based upon the concept of the total man and education which is based upon the total human situation, the global situation" (p. 78).

Interestingly, Takacs did not provide an explicit definition of positionality, but provided some examples, such as "ESL student," "young Mexican woman," "army wife facing financial hardship", "white students," among others. Later in this article, we will delve deeper into positionality definitions and theoretical frameworks, but it is important to start here, where we authors started, in our initial collective inquiry into the epistemological relevance of positionality in critical pedagogy and integral education. Perhaps because Takacs did not define positionality for us, our group engaged deeply in our own co-creation of knowledge to better understand and collectively define what we mean by this term. When we were invited to facilitate an interactive session in the Symposium, we knew we wanted to engage this concept of positionality and its relevance to us as integral educators interested in critical pedagogy, but we had yet to define it.

The space left by the missing definition opened up an opportunity for our group to undergo this process of bringing individualized knowledge and perspectives to create a more meaningful collective understanding. It is also important to note that the involvement in the interactive session was strictly voluntary and outside of the scope of the fellowship program. This shift from the structure of the fellowship program to an outside, volunteer collaboration shifted our internal group positions and relationships. No longer were the two faculty members the facilitators while the six fellows were the participants. While within the fellowship program the faculty members attempted to create a more horizontal learning environment (and thus model a critical approach to pedagogy) by rejecting an expert-centered model of education, now in this new formation, our roles were as eight collaborators and colleagues. This will be important in our later discussion of positionality and positioning. For now, we will only note that our group dynamic shifted, allowing for more fluidity among the participants and the roles we played in our group.

We then began the important and challenging work of collaboratively defining our terms and designing our session. Through periodic meetings and email threads that were often long, sometimes confusing or frustrating, but fruitful, we set about our collective inquiry, posing questions, adding our perspectives, affirming and challenging one another.

Theoretical Frameworks on Positionality

In the review of the literature for this article we came across two distinct but overlapping theoretical frameworks on the concept subject of position. The first, positionality theory grew from postmodern feminist theory (e.g., Harding, 1991, Alcoff, 1988, Collins, 1986). The second, positioning theory emerged from social psychology (e.g., Davies & Harré, 1990, Harré & Van Langenhove, 1991). Both theories attempt to critique the essentialist construction of subjectivity and the deterministic view of social participation. Specifically, contributors of positionality theory challenged the essentialist views of identity as fixed, on-going, and rooted in dominant individual and group characteristics (Kezar & Lester, 2010). They claimed that individuals occupy multiple identities, fluid and dialogical in nature, contextually situated, and continuously amended and reproduced (Alcoff, 1988). The positions from where we make meaning of—as well as engage with—the world are informed by our identities and lived experiences. Applied to our inquiry at hand, the traditionalist would view the student's (or the educator's) identities as independent of the learning environment and constant across contexts. In contrast, positionality theory would suggest that student's identities vary across contexts and inform as well as are informed by the individuals' positions in the learning environment. As such, "positionality theory emphasizes the position of or situatedness of identity" (Kezar & Lester, 2010, p. 166).

Positioning theory emerged in part as an alternative to role theory in an attempt to better account for the complexity of human participation in social settings. Davies and Harré (1990) critiqued the dramaturgical model of social psychology in which "people are construed as actors with lines already written and their roles determined by the particular play they find themselves in" (p. 52). Positioning does not reject social roles altogether, in fact, on one end our positions are informed by the duties and expectations particular to the roles and social discourses we inhabit. On the other end, positioning allows for the subjective histories of individuals— identities, personal attributes, experiences, as well as preconceived narratives and understandings of our social locations—to play a critical function in the production of interpersonal behavior (Harré, R., Moghaddam, F., Cairnie, T., Rothbart, & Sabat, S., 2009). In other words, positioning theory suggests that we are not simply actors of predetermined scripts, but also agents and authors in our social participation.

Other Models of Positioning

When we think about our "position" in the world, and more specifically about our position in society, we reflect upon the different roles that occupy us in our lives. In other words, when we inquire into the different ways in which we participate in our various communities: in our family, in our neighborhood, in our work, in our school/classroom, in our informal gatherings and in our formal gatherings alike, we come to the realization that we are in fact multifaceted individuals; we adopt different stances as we navigate different communities of interaction.

Our position in the world, according to the above definition of positionality, is radically shaped by our interactions (or, intersubjectvity). Disciplines in the social sciences, more specifically Sociology and Anthropology, have a tendency to describe human beings as "inherently social" – and this is to a large extent accurate (and debatable in other contexts). We agree that the social and cultural spaces we navigate are shared; that the lives that we lead are at once individual and collective, and that the shaping of our social world/s happens in collaboration with others (whether such collaboration is willful or enforced). In short, social relations shape the way in which we understand ourselves as individuals and, from that understanding, how we perceive and interact with others.

Virtually, no human interaction occurs outside of a shared social context. Meaning-making is one of the most fundamental social processes impacting our communal lives; as an embodied social phenomenon, it affects our very bodies as well as the perceived "reality" of the different human groups marked oppressively by "undesirable" attributes (e.g., poor, Latino/a, woman, disabled, immigrant, and fanatic). French semiotician and philosopher Barthes (1978) identifies language as an institution of power. Speech, he argues, serves as a key instrument in social stratification processes in as much as "once uttered, even in the subject's deepest privacy, language enters the service of power" (as cited in Kearney & Rainwater, 1996, p. 366).

Other social theorists and philosophers such as Foucault (2005) concurred with Bathes: "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures…" (p. 216). Additionally, in *The Birth of Bipolotics: Lectures au Collège de France*, Foucault (2008) argued that individuals are historically subjected to different forms of social inclusion and exclusion and are meticulously boxed into different categories and subcategories of being via discourse. He termed this set of procedures 'biopolitics' (or the administrative management of life), and he insisted that conceptual arrangements perpetuate operations of inclusion and exclusion through the reproduction of hierarchies of privilege and marginalization. The latter, in turn, shapes people's experiences and positions in the world.

Conceptual stratification is often articulated around culturally assigned attributes such as gender, race, class, ability, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, political affinity, and religious/spiritual practice. These attributes are animated and brought into play in our interpersonal relations – in our relationship with our family, with our professors/students, with our employers/employees, and with people in the service industry; in the more macro-structural arrangements occurring in social institutions – our relationship with the law, and with the larger economic and political systems; and in the more overarching social sphere.

Because one of our tasks as integral educators is to explore and uncover shared social processes affecting the position of knowledge producers (especially those marked oppressively by race, class, gender, ability etc.), we wish to inquire into these processes from the "inside."

We do so, to investigate into alternative pedagogical practices emerging out of more traditional contexts in education. Integral education is not necessarily modeled after dissident practices within traditional models of education, however we believe that an exploration of existing methodologies in traditional education can help to ground our understanding and

recognize the generative value of alternative practices in the classroom. One of our goals is to facilitate co-creative learning spaces, beyond the traditional university format, in a way as to re-imagine and integrate traditionally marginalized epistemologies in research design, curriculum, and teaching methods.

To this end, we follow on Collins footsteps to include an expansive notion of the "outsider within" status. On the function of this literary trope, Collins (1986) wrote: "this 'outsider within' status has provided a special standpoint on self, family, and society for Afro-American women [and other oppressed groups]" (p. 14). Although Collins' claims are specific to the context of black feminist thought and its significance in "generating a distinctive standpoint on existing sociological paradigms" we briefly investigate into the implications of the "stranger" in traditional academic settings (p. 14). To introduce Collins' ideas into the larger context of liberatory education, we touch on the theme of reflexivity in feminist research. We incorporate a handful of Chiseri-Strater's ideas from her 1996 piece: *Turning in Upon Ourselves: Positionality, Subjectivity, and Reflexivity in Case Study and Ethnographic Research*. A thematic approach to Chiseri-Strater's various roles/positions in the academy helps us to situate the topic of positionality in the context of integral education. To further illustrate this point, we look at the author's integrative and interdisciplinary approach to research and education. Her role as a non-fiction writing and composition instructor enables her to establish significant connections between product (the finalized ethnography) and process (the ethnographer's stance-position-location as well as the influence of subjective-contextual factors such as personal life story and experiences during the data collection phase). Chiefly, there are elements in Chiseri-Strater's own situatedness (situation/awareness) as an instructor that emerge, out of experiential practice, as a teaching tool. In turn, her position as an instructor enables the author to speak critically to her own research methods.

The decision to include this piece as a part of our conceptual framework emerged out of a collective interest in exploring different approaches to positionality theory and praxis in cross-educational contexts. We are particularly interested in the ways in which Chiseri-Strater's most compelling arguments and experiences translate into our view of integral education – especially as they prioritize non-traditional approaches to pedagogy (methodological disclosure) and alternative methodologies in ethnographic research (critical ethnography). As she put it, "my gender and training as a writing teacher positioned me to resist the non-interactive pedagogies—like antagonistic debate and strict lecture format—of other disciplines" (Chiseri-Strater, 1996, p. 122). She also shared that "the ethnographic researcher has to enlist the subjects of study as partners, as posers of questions, as people who can see and change their own experiences through interaction with 'outside' but politically interested teacher-researchers" (p. 123). This last point is of particular relevance to the kind of educational experience that we understand to be fully interactive, participatory, and therefore transformational.

Chiseri-Strater's findings on gender differentials, expertise, and belonging speak extensively to the way socially assigned categories are not only embodied, but also performed in our day-to-day lives. Her remarks on the implications of biosocial elements, which are accepted as universal realities, but which are constructed, inform our own thought process and further solidify our critical stand as integral educators. We believe that there are real (embodied) implications of social stratification processes. These processes mark bodies as targets of exclusion, thereby

preventing them from fully participating of their immediate social and cultural words. We recognize that educational settings contribute to the process of social stratification, as they often times serve to "filter" through practices of knowledge-production. Historically, academic settings have been traditionally articulated around the creation and legitimization of "true" knowledge (following on the scientific method). As a result, many non-Western (ethno-communities) and Western communities of knowledge have been "denied entry" into the world of rational meaning-making. Colonialism in academia has and continues to marginalize particular groups and communities from contributing to the "collective" epistemological archive. These issues then, are not merely educational, but have a huge imprint in the way we conceive of education as a political matter affecting the lives of living-breathing human beings.

Because we believe in and practice an approach to education based on critical pedagogy and liberatory methods – giving special consideration to the work of intellectuals such as hooks, Lorde, and Freire – we see Chiseri-Strater's non-traditional insights into education and literacy research through a shared lens. Some of her observations align with our own thought/writing process on this topic. One example of this synchronicity can be found in our understanding of education as a co-creative process, as opposed to the "banking system" model that Freire describes. In other words, we prioritize a framework in which different approaches to learning and different styles of teaching are integrated. Such methodologies are purposely situated in the context of integral education as "positioning" strategies; this concept will be further elaborated upon in a later section.

We have established above that a key point in Chiseri-Strater's piece is articulated around the impact of cultural attributes (such as race, class, or gender) on the overall ethnographic process. More specifically, she examines the role of gender in shaping theoretical, methodological, and rhetorical approaches to literacy. The emphasis is placed on research strategy and includes the author's own experiences as a woman in research practice. She does so by retrospectively situating herself with respect to her informants, her context of study, and her initial choices in research design. While carrying out research on the processes of literacy and composition in courses outside her discipline (more specifically in Art History), Chiseri-Strater remarked that, "while my role as a student allowed me to rapport with my informants, my status as a graduate student in composition marked me powerless from some of the professors who saw composition as a marginalized discipline" (p. 124). Similarly, her ethnographic notes on a Political Science class, whose professor she identifies as male, revealed that his spatial positioning in the classroom came across as rather territorial, and sometimes even unwelcoming. Lastly, the author's (disclosed) field notes on a composition and rhetoric class, a field that she identifies as her own, reveal instances of sexism on the part of one of the male students, as well as emerging 'gender battles' among women and male informants.

Chiseri-Strater contributes important content to ongoing disciplinary dialogues around the issue of so-called objective and detached viewpoints (or, the view from nowhere). In addition, she opens up a space for co-reflection (one that includes the readership) in which the language of positionality (which shapes data collection, theory construction, methodological understanding to narrative voice) is understood as both rhetorical and "inherently connected with how the researcher is situated in the field, not just on the page" (p. 120). Second, and by implication, she endorses an approach to ethnographic fieldwork in which specific choices in research design are

a priori evaluated in tandem with the ethnographer's given attributes (race, nationality, and gender). As she noted, "providing methodological insights unavailable in the historical movements or legacies within the fields of composition and rhetoric where data is presented without the researcher's intellectual journey [...] demonstrates how the researcher negotiates personal and cultural preconceptions that shape scholarship" (p. 115).

Somatic and Spatial Positioning

In this piece, we have focused primarily on two types of positionalities, biographical positionalities and discursive positionings. Biographical positionings include demographic representations, such as age, gender, class, race... and some social roles like parent, educator, student, musician. Discursive positionings address how we position self and other in discourse: what kind of positionings are available within a discourse/context, how are they ascribed or 'taken on', who has the power to ascribe a position, how are positionalities challenged, and new positionalities created through discourse.

In addition to these we would like to emphasize two other components of positioning, what we call: (1) somatic positioning; and (2) spatial positioning. Somatic positionings can be conceived as bodily organizations through which we embody and enact our personal and sociocultural identities. We participate in multiple communities and contexts that support or inhibit ranges of bodily practices (Grand, 2012). Building on Bakhtin's concept of chronotope, Grand suggested that every cultural tradition or community has a particular repertoire of embodied practices, or as he calls it, somatic genre, where individuals must draw from (as well as contribute to) in the course of their participation. Conversations in our own group of Integral Teaching Fellows are a good example of negotiating and practicing somatic positioning. We deliberated on how to shape and use our bodies—how much to speak and when to speak, what to wear, where to sit, and how to carry ourselves—to fit the image and role of an Integral Teaching Fellow.

The production of social space involves spatial representations (how a space is imagined) and spatial practices (practices through which the space is lived) (Lefebvre, 1991). Our spatial positionings depend on the available spatial representations and spatial practices. One of the authors recalls that during his education in Albania "good" students typically occupied the front rows, whereas the back rows were a destination for "weak" students. Although certainly not an official rule, the spatial positioning based on academic performance was a common and generally accepted practice. That type of spatial organization created a binary identity production in the classroom as well as shaped pedagogical practices. As it has been stated already, positionings are not deterministic. In exercising agency, be that through improvisation or deliberately impacting the course of action (Holland, D. C., Skinner, D., Lachicotte, W., & Cain, C., 1998) we can create new possibilities of being and acting in the world. In the context of an integral learning community, the ideas of somatic and spatial positionings enable us to identify somatic organizations and embodied practices that are liberatory and support learning and classroom participation.

How are social discourse and our subjective worlds related to positionality? Bakhtin's (1981) concept of chronotope (time-space) is useful here. Bakhtin theorized that different literary genres

organize time and space in distinct formations that in return provide genres their particular characters and narratives. Similarly, our social interactions and lived histories are situated in different time-space configurations, each with a particular discourse and repertoire of representations. Leander (2004) proposed that certain types of positionings evoke particular chronotopes, and by doing so they call on the attributes, ideologies, practices, cultural narratives, and social identifications specific to each time-space configuration. For example, taking on the position of an educator in the classroom evokes privileges of power, however, the qualities and practices will differ if the educator is positioned in a traditional pedagogical context versus a liberatory pedagogical context, the first being more authoritarian and the second more horizontal. Another example (one which we elaborate later in the article), sharing personal stories of our names can evoke a series of time-space constructions, ranging from familial, to institutional, to ideological, to transnational. For our purpose, chronotopes can be theorized as containing personal and shared psychological, cultural, and social resources, and positioning as the practice by which these resources are utilized to make meaning, construct relationships, and shape action (Holland & Leander, 2004).

Positionality in a Learning Community

An integral approach to education invites the personal histories and imaginations of the students and educators in the process of knowledge making. The narrative worlds of the participants come in contact with classroom activities. Leander (2004) offered a useful distinction of time-space configuration to explain such contact zone of activity. Leander makes the distinction between an interactional chronotope (the immediate time-space of the interactants) and a represented chronotope (the imagined and the historical worlds of the participants). He went on to say, "when narrative scenes are marshaled in the interactive work of positioning, these narrative scenes carry with them forms of time-space that offer unique possibilities for identity and agency" (p. 189). Leander's idea of positioning resonates with Alcoff's (1988) concept of positionality. She wrote:

> [T]he position that women find themselves in can be actively utilized (rather than transcended) as a location for the construction of meaning, a place from where meaning is constructed, rather than simply the place where a meaning can be discovered (the meaning of femaleness). The concept of woman as positionality shows how women use their positional perspective as a place from which values are interpreted and constructed rather than as a locus of an already determined set of values. (p. 434)

When coupled with awareness, critical thinking, and reflective practices, the activity of positioning can be more self-directed, strategically applied, and transformative.

We ground this theoretical discussion on the practice of positioning in an example from our own work. In a classroom exercise facilitated by one of the teaching fellows, students were asked to explore the concept of 'borders' and 'belonging'. This exercise was linked to another learning activity in which students organized in five small groups of three to four each, based on a shared cultural community in which all the group members felt they were participants. Students were encouraged to investigate the concept of culture particular of their groups over the course of the semester. In this exercise, deep into the semester, students were asked to physically position

themselves as well as the representations of their cultural communities in the shared classroom space using colored ribbons to mark personal and group borders. Students were encouraged to evoke the characteristics of their group cultures, to call on reading assignments, and to be attuned to their personal, interpersonal, and intergroup experiences as they negotiated their locations and boundaries in the classroom space. What transpired was the authoring of a dynamic and contentious time-space formation. Students reported that their decision making process and the production of locations and borders were informed by their cultural narratives as well as by the interaction between individuals and groups. Some students reported that their newly authored positions shed new light on their explorative cultures and their participation in the learning community (e.g., a student linked her peripheral position in the exercise with the feeling of not being present in the classroom). In this exercise, the intersection of multiple layers of represented chronotopes (students' backgrounds of their group cultures) with the interactional chronotope (classroom participation) served as a medium through which students interpreted the concepts of 'borders' and 'belonging'. The practice of positioning was employed in the production of knowledge.

Challenges in Incorporating Positionality in Pedagogy

We identify two particular challenges in the integration of positionality in pedagogical practices. The first challenge is related to the increase of the learner's role in the process of knowledge production. Excessive emphasis on the function of the student's positionalities in the learning process can cultivate what Montuori (2006) has called a narcissistic approach to education. Narcissistic learning systematically privileges the learner's subjectivities, experiences and various self-positionings as sources of knowledge over academic standards or dialogical methods, an orientation that can lead to anti-intellectual stances and unchallenged self-positionings. The integration of student positionalities in the learning process needs to be accompanied by critical thinking practices (Brookfield, 1987) that encourage self-reflection, critical subjectivity, and examination of the student's situatedness in learning and scholarly communities (Takacs, 2002, 2003).

The second challenge of integrating positionality in pedagogical practices has to do with the increase in complexity of the learning community. By inviting positioning practices, a learning community becomes more pluralistic, multidimensional, and subject to new relationships and forms of functioning. As such, it must learn to embrace and cope with change. The success of a complex learning community is dependent on, among other things, the application of strategy, tolerance for the unknown, and the solidarity between its members (Morin, 2008; Schrader, 2004).

The Relevance of Theory to Practice

Neither positionality theory nor positioning theory originate in the field of education. While, as we have shown, both have been borrowed from other disciplines (adapted and, at times, conflated) for that purpose, no stable definition of "positionality" has emerged in the discourse. Like Takacs, many authors dodge the question of definition altogether while others reduced it to such traits as "race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ableness" (Taylor, Tisdell, & Hanley, 2000). Despite this ambiguity, the value of an anti-essentialist category of being that describes

positionalities and positions is evident and the term "positionality" continues to capture it for us. For the purposes of our Symposium session and this paper the term positionality has three factors: *identity*, *role*, and *power*. Identities and social categories (such as race, age, etc.) are multiple and intersecting formed by lifetimes of experience. Roles are always context specific and are either formal (student, teacher, etc.) or informal (expert, etc.) The dynamics of power and privilege are at play in terms of both recognized social categories and roles specific to the situation. Thus considering positionality in the educational framework provides an opportunity both for creating less hierarchical relationships and a greater sense of what each participant can contribute.

Our Interactive Session: Positionality as Knowledge: Taking the Pedagogue off the Pedestal

The interactive session, "Positionality as Knowledge: Taking The Pedagogue Off The Pedestal," was structured around two exercises which all participants and facilitators were asked to join, two didactic presentations, and a substantial opportunity for participants to reflect on the exercises, the subject of positionality, and their learning. In advance, we identified three learning outcomes that we hoped to achieve:

1) Development of an understanding of "positionality."
2) Deepening of our understanding of our own positionalities.
3) Exploration of what it would mean to create a learning environment that values each voice in the classroom.

True to the values of critical pedagogy we arranged the seating in a circle. To reduce the concentration of power in the circle, facilitators (also the authors of this paper) scattered their seating rather than sitting together. The purpose here is to signal to participants that we anticipate relationships in this context to be relatively horizontal rather than hierarchical.

The opening, given by one of the facilitators, was a brief overview of the subject of critical pedagogy and an explanation of the purpose of the workshop. The concept of positionality was briefly introduced along with the strategies we would be employing in the session to understand it further. The facilitators introduced themselves individually as well as collectively, positioning themselves both in their roles for the session and in their roles and ranks in the institution.

This was followed by a general group exercise in which all were invited to participate. In advance, participants were informed that the purposes of the exercise were twofold: to introduce all participants, bringing each voice into the room and to begin the process of understanding one's own positionality. The exercise involved sharing not just one's name, but also stories associated with one's name. This was modeled by one of the facilitators. In the group we had origin stories ("I was named after…"), a story of the meaning of the name, what someone feels that a particular nickname says about themselves, and the histories of names changed (through marriage, personal transformation, or migration). Things were revealed or implied about the participants that are seldom discussed with near-strangers: family history, cultural situatedness, immigrant status, class, etc. This required some risk taking on the part of participants and created

a small sense of trust, if not intimacy. Participants learned something about each person's positionality.

With this experience as a foundation two facilitators provided a more theoretical foundation of what positionality is and how an understanding of the concept and one's own positionality can be applied in the classroom. Our purpose was to deepen our participants' understanding of the concept of positionality and to situate it in relationship with learning.

Personal Reflections on the Practice of Positionality in Research

Below are the personal reflections of two of the co-authors, who shared their own understanding of positionality at the symposium workshop:

It is not easy for me to describe my positionality in brief. As a person of color who grew up in the Chinese culture in Taiwan and migrated to the western culture of America, I have found my positionality is complex and in flux, constantly changing and moving, depending on which position I would like to take at the moment. I grew up in a traditional Chinese culture where obedience to authority and consideration of the goals of the group were considered the most valuable quality for being a student. In the classroom, there was no room for individual opinions; critical thinking and taking personal stands was not encouraged or allowed. However, as an Asian living and receiving higher education in the US, I was forced to learn to think and speak like a westerner, and sometimes I have to abandon or disregard the Taiwanese-Chinese side of me in order to fit in to this American education system to survive.

After learning and exploring my own positionality, I realize that mine is multidimensional and has different layers. I can either think and/or speak from a point of view of being a minority from the East who is marginalized and experiences the institutionalized racism of the American culture, or I can also think and/or speak from my higher educational background of the West, being assertive to discuss issues with my intellectual and rational mind. By being aware of this lived experience of "in-between", it makes me more cross-culturally sensitive. I have found that I have no choice but to be open-minded to whatever I see, hear, learn and experience both positively and negatively, because I started to understand that there is no single truth for anything in the world. When I accept the multi-facets of the truth, my view has widened, and empathy has naturally matured and deepened. Most importantly, I have become appreciative of my unique experience of learning as a source of knowledge and a contribution to community.

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Let me begin with my position—my standpoint: I am a forty-year-old white woman who calls herself a feminist. I grew up in Oklahoma, the daughter of middle-class parents, and surrounded by conservative fundamentalists, which I call some of my dearest friends. I am a liberal-thinking Italian-American woman who is assertive when I believe an injustice against people and nonhuman animals has occurred. Growing up in Oklahoma offered me a chance to live outside my comfort zone, and because of that I had to learn how to get

along and rely on those who thought differently than I do. I moved from Oklahoma to San Francisco because I wanted to be in a bubble of like-minded thought, however I am vigilant about keeping one foot outside of this bubble. I believe that it is necessary for my own wholeness of being to have friends and family who differ from me politically, spiritually, and religiously. Of course there is much more to who I am, but this is the foundational lens in which I view the world, and this lens colors how I approach the work I do.

When I pick up a paper or begin to read a book the first question I ask is who the author is and what is their position. It is necessary to know this because it allows me to see how the research that I am reading is held. If I pick up an article about the causes of gun violence in teenagers and discover the author is a card carrying member of the NRA, I may find what I read to favor guns not being the cause of the surge in school shootings. In any article or book it would be hard to find an author who possess the power of neutrality; this is why positionality within a book or paper is so important. I need to understand the author's position so I can create my own theories and questions.

When someone reads my work I believe they need to know I use a feminist methodological standpoint, which incorporates my own experiences into the subject being explored. The use of a person's standpoint can offer the reader an alignment with the story being told. To explain this methodology further I look to the book, "Feminist Research in the Sociology of Religion" by Jones (2002), she wrote:

One uses standpoint theory when one reflexively analyzes one's own inquiry or another's experience by taking into account the dimensions of gender, race, and power. The use of standpoint theory demonstrates how these social variables inform all aspects of the research project, including the selection of research topics and the cognitive framework within which a research problem is interpreted. Using a feminist standpoint, researchers inquire into the subjective experience of groups often overlooked in traditional analysis, and, in the process, uncover a multiplicity of subjective truths. (p. 78)

I interpret this to mean that all my social variables are influencing how I examine and write about a subject. I believe it is impossible to not be biased when researching something I feel compelled to write about. Using the feminist research methodology, I am allowed to state clearly who I am and where I stand within the topic, which gives the reader valuable knowledge. In the essay, "Writing Feminist Research" by sociologist Charmaz (2012), she stated, "Authors who reveal their starting points and standpoints—and concerns and commitments—permit readers to assess both their approach and the quality of their content" (p. 477). By the author revealing their position it creates space for collaboration between themselves and the reader. I stop seeing the author as an expert and more as someone sharing information that I then get to add on to with my own thoughts and questions. Positionality starts by describing who you are and that in turn affects how you see the world.

Using my standpoint—my position, I show the reader who I am and why my work is important, the reader is seeing the whole lens in how the material is presented, not just

from an expert centered perspective. The reader can then create their own theories and use what I am giving them as a starting off point for their own possible research. Stating my standpoint humanizes me as the researcher and tells the reader that there are other angles in which to gain knowledge about the subject I am writing about—not just mine. Knowing the researchers background, I am privy to untold biases that may appear and I am then free to agree or disagree with their approach to the subject.

After two of the facilitators shared their personal understanding of positionality, we then moved into the next full participation exercise, our variation of the classic anti-oppression activity typically termed the Power Shuffle. In this exercise typically facilitators ask group members who fit certain descriptive categories or criteria to cross to the opposite side of the room, away from the full group, then stop, and turn to face the group they left behind. The two parts of the group are given a few seconds to observe one another silently and to notice their feelings. The facilitators then instruct those who have crossed the room to return to their original place with the full group. (Simms, Vasquez, & Sherover, 1992)

We adapted the structure to our needs in a variety of ways. Rather than form a line and step over and back, we elected to form a circle and as each category was described, those who identified with it stepped into the circle. Rather than step out of the group, participants stepped into the middle and made eye contact with each other. The instructions were: 'step into the middle if you identified with a phrase, notice who is with you (in the middle) and who is not, notice how it feels to be in the center of the circle, and then step back to their original place.' Having a circle rather than a line was intended to create a greater feeling of connection.

The original exercise had 41 categories, and we knew we did not have time for all them, plus we wanted to illustrate positionality in an educational setting rather than exclusively highlight power and privilege. So we started out by asking each of the seven co-facilitators to choose ten categories. Then the two co-facilitators of this exercise met to discuss which we wanted to include. We made sure to include at least two from everyone's list, and either combined or modified those that were very similar until we had 21 remaining, to allow plenty of time for discussion and debriefing.

Our own positions and that of our co-presenters no doubt had an impact on our decisions of what to include or discard. For example, we were both from working class families, so we changed the original category "you were raised poor," to "you were raised working class" and then added "you were raised with economic privilege" to have more of a balance. Another similar category we later added was "you have educational privilege" to which, not surprisingly, every single person stepped into the center of the room.

Sometimes we combined multiple categories into a more inclusive and broader category, for example "you identify as a person of color" rather than including the original eight specific racial or ethnic identifications. Then we made the category broader, changing multiple age based categories into a single "you feel like you don't have a voice because of your age." Also, we changed some of the language to be gender neutral, for example "you have been discriminated against because of your gender" rather than using language such as "you earned less than a man for doing equal work" or "you have ever been afraid of a man's anger." We left out those

questions which we worried could be too emotionality triggering in such a short exercise, such as those regarding sexual violence or physical abuse.

We started out the exercise asking for confidentiality and emphasizing that participation was voluntary. We made sure to build in plenty of time for the discussion questions afterwards and for group sharing as part of the closing. This was intentional, as a central part of integral pedagogy is the notion that students are not blank slates and that key aspects of the learning come from the participants themselves, rather than exclusively the facilitators. Allowing extra time for discussion was also important because the circle exercise was conducted in silence.

Having engaged the two exercises, and heard the mini-lectures and sharing on our subject, we provided a series of reflective questions for the group to engage. "What was your experience of this exercise? Did anything surprise you? What would it mean to view the diversity of life experience in the room as educational assets? What voices are still missing or that you would like to include?" We started with these open-ended questions, and made sure that everyone had a chance to share if they chose to. The discussion was lively and suggested that the concepts were understood.

We closed with one of the facilitators sharing a quote from a 1996 interview of Freire (LiteracyDotOrg, 2009):

If you asked me, Paul, what is in being in the world that calls your own attention to you? I would say to you that I am a curious being. I have been a curious being, but in a certain moment of the process of being curious, in order to understand the others, I discover that I have to create in myself, a certain virtue without which is it is difficult for me to understand others. The virtue of tolerance. It is through the exercise of tolerance that I discovered the rich possibility of doing things and learning different things with different people. Being tolerant is not a question of being naive. On the contrary, it is a duty to be tolerant, an ethical duty, a historical duty, a political duty, but it does not demand that I lose my personality.

Summary/Closing

For us the concept of positionality is important in understanding the role of experience in the learning process. Positionality acknowledges complex differentials of power and privilege while simultaneously identifying the value of multiple ways of knowing and being that arise from our multiple identities. The goal of revealing individual and relative positionality is to de-center dominant ways of thinking and expose multiple ways of thinking as diverse assets for self-knowing and collective-knowing.

In our workshop we both shared this concept and engaged in the process for all participants to share their complex positionalities. The process was interactive and participatory in structure. We did not follow a standard lecture model; there was not one "expert" on stage and participants were not a passive audience. Participants and facilitators both spoke deeply and personally. We learned from the stories everyone shared, informed as they were by their unique perspectives.

We are not suggesting that participants walked away from our presentation with a sophisticated understanding of positionality, much less its pedagogical value. Nevertheless, we feel confident that by using personal disclosure, participatory exercises, group discussion, and action methods of teaching, participants were able to experience some of the complexity and importance of positionality in the context of integral education.

As we close, we feel that it is important to collectively reflect about our process of coming together as a team to produce this article; this is our summation: Before even considering the task of writing up the Symposium session, we had said goodbye at the end of the Teaching Fellowship. It seemed we all ended on a high-note. It was a busy semester and each of us relied on the others to make it through. It felt like each of gave a *resounding sigh of relief*, yet when the opportunity to further develop our symposium work came up, each of us *jumped* at the chance and agreed to do it.

However, in collaborating again it felt like we were trying to *put the band back together* and recreate magic that was once there. Scheduling problems, interpersonal and intellectual tensions, and deadline pressures caused conflicts. Also, there was a shift in all our positions — no longer were we Fellows and Faculty, now we were co-authors, and this was a role we had yet to explore with one another. What carried us through the rough patches was respect and trust, excitement in creating something publishable, growing through the challenges in working through tensions and shifting positions, and a commitment to be present. And once again, there is a collective *sigh of satisfaction* as we reach completion.

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