



Improving Teacher Effectiveness, Student Academic Performance, and Civic Learning

A two-year study using an experimental design provides definitive evidence that Facing History and Ourselves helps to create effective teachers who improve their students' academic performance and civic learning. Educational leaders, funders, and the federal government are looking for ways to transform education by promoting teacher effectiveness, which a growing body of research confirms is, "*the single most important factor in student achievement.*"¹

As part of ongoing education reform efforts, including significant new investments made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), states and local school districts across the country are working to dramatically improve teacher effectiveness in fostering student engagement and achievement. Facing History and Ourselves has a strong track record as a partner of choice for schools in providing ongoing, school-wide, high-quality professional development, resulting in teacher reinvigoration, efficacy, and an increase in teacher commitment—necessary conditions to reach goals for student learning.²

Recognizing that students can be better prepared for the demands of citizenship by learning to think critically, empathize, recognize moral choices, and make their voices heard, Facing History and Ourselves offers schools a set of services and tools to support this learning. These services are critically needed at a time when students are disengaged and dropping out at a record pace.³ Moreover, the drop-out rate for teachers is also alarming (half of all new teachers leave the profession during their first five years), and 40 percent of teachers report that they are "disheartened."⁴

¹ Gates, B. (November, 2008). *Bill Gates—A Forum on Education in America*. Retrieved from <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/speeches-commentary/Pages/bill-gates-2008-education-forum-speech.aspx>

² Romer, A.L. (2007). Creating the conditions for urban school reform using Facing History: a case study of a Chicago middle school. Facing History and Ourselves: Brookline, MA

³ House Education and Labor Committee, May 12, 2009.

⁴Yarrow, Andrew L. (2009) . State of Mind. *Education Week*,29(08), 21-23 .

The positive impact of Facing History and Ourselves on teachers and students has been documented in more than 90 studies over the last three decades.⁵ Teachers report that Facing History and Ourselves professional development and support services reinvigorate them as teachers, increase their commitment to teach, and reaffirm their aspirations and sense of efficacy as teachers. For students, participation in Facing History and Ourselves programs results in: greater engagement in learning; increased skills for understanding and analyzing history; greater empathy and ethical awareness; increased civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions; an improved ability to recognize racism, antisemitism, and other forms of bigotry in themselves and in others; and reduced racist attitudes and self-reported fighting.

New Randomized Controlled Experiment Results

For more than thirty years, Facing History and Ourselves has surveyed participating teachers who consistently attest that we enable them to be more effective in their classrooms. Because Facing History and Ourselves attracts teachers interested in improving their skills, some have thought the success we have seen is simply due to our working with highly motivated teachers. Now, we have new results from an independent study using the most rigorous evaluation methodology to document the impact of the Facing History and Ourselves professional development model on teachers who were not seeking the program. The results of this study affirm the applicability of Facing History and Ourselves to help fulfill the goals of leaders in the United States Department of Education and school districts nationwide who are looking to support and extend proven models.

In 2005, Facing History and Ourselves launched a partnership with university scholars and Abt Associates Inc., a highly experienced research and evaluation organization, to carry out a state of the art, randomized, controlled, experimental study of Facing History and Ourselves' lasting impact on teachers and students. The study involved 76 schools where Facing History and Ourselves had not been taught before. Sixty-six percent of these schools were underperforming based on federal criteria.⁶ Most were high poverty schools.⁷ These schools were drawn from the eight areas in the

⁵ For a more detailed summary of past research on Facing History and Ourselves, please see our Evaluation Research Summary. Facing History and Ourselves Evaluation Department. <http://www.facinghistory.org/sites/facinghistory.org/files/Evaluation%2520Research%2520Summary%5B1%5D.pdf>

⁶ Schools that have not met annual yearly progress requirements, based on standardized test scores, for two consecutive years are considered underperforming.

⁷ In one quarter of the schools, 90% or more of the students were eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL), making them eligible for school-wide federal Title I funding. In 60% of the schools, 40-89% of students were eligible for FRPL.

United States where we have offices. Across these schools, 134 teachers were selected by their administrators to participate. Half of the schools were selected at random to participate in Facing History and Ourselves professional development in the first year of the study; the other half received the program in the second year. This random assignment eliminates the effects of differences, such as teacher motivation and student academic engagement, between those who were selected to participate in the program in the first year versus the second. The study was designed to assess the impact of Facing History and Ourselves' professional development on these teachers and on the academic performance (e.g. skills for analyzing history), social and ethical awareness, and civic learning and engagement of their 1,371 students.

The federal government, policymakers, foundations, school administrators, and educational scholars have been asking for evidence produced by randomized, controlled experiments. Such studies are challenging to implement and few programs have been evaluated in this way. Furthermore, many programs that do well in ideal settings with carefully selected volunteers are not as successful when assessed in "real world" situations where, oftentimes, the programs are not fully implemented. The evaluators did not try to find an ideal setting for this evaluation of the Facing History and Ourselves program, but instead implemented the most conservative tests of program effectiveness by recruiting schools and teachers who had not been exposed to our program in the past and were not seeking out our program. The study design required that all of the data from these teachers and their students had to be included in the final analysis, even if the teachers did not implement the Facing History and Ourselves program fully (or well).

The high bar set by the research design underscores the significance of the results: the study found that **Facing History and Ourselves professional development services engage teachers, and increase their efficacy in promoting their students' academic and civic learning.** Those teachers who received Facing History and Ourselves services, relative to those who did not, demonstrated a **statistically significant increase in efficacy in promoting community and learner-centered classrooms, deliberative skills, historical understanding, and civic learning.** These findings for teachers correspond with the study's findings for students: **Facing History students reported more positive classroom climates, and demonstrated greater historical understanding, and civic skills and dispositions than students in the control group.**

Studies like this are unusual because it takes substantial resources to recruit and randomize enough teachers and/or students to be able to ascertain with reasonable confidence (statistical significance) that the observed differences are large enough to be meaningful (as measured by their "effect size"). Fortunately, Facing History and Ourselves received a grant from the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation to undertake this rigorous study.

Teacher Impact:

The teacher findings document statistically significant results with educationally meaningful effects in multiple categories of teacher “efficacy.” “Efficacy” refers to teachers’ beliefs about their knowledge, and skills in their subject areas. A teacher’s sense of “efficacy” is a critical underpinning of high quality teaching (effectiveness), and has been associated in other studies with teacher retention. Previous research has demonstrated linkages between teachers’ assessments of their own efficacy and student outcomes such as academic achievement, motivation, and confidence. Teachers with a higher sense of efficacy exhibit greater enthusiasm for teaching, have a greater commitment to teaching, and are more likely to stay in teaching. Higher teacher efficacy is also related to a positive school atmosphere.⁸

Overall, in this new research on Facing History and Ourselves’ model of professional development, the following teacher outcomes were supported:

- Participation in a Facing History and Ourselves professional development seminar and follow-up activities has a positive, statistically significant impact on teachers’ efficacy, satisfaction with professional development experiences, and satisfaction and engagement with the teaching profession.
- These **findings were replicated** with the second group of teachers.
- The outcomes for the first cohort of teachers were **sustained** in the second year.

Student Impact:

Facing History and Ourselves students scored higher than control students on all of the civic and academic outcomes that were measured.

- The findings were statistically significant for historical understanding, including skills for interpreting evidence, analyzing what leads people to make ethical choices, and thinking critically about cause and effect.
- The findings were statistically significant for civic learning, including tolerance, awareness of the power and danger of prejudice and discrimination, as well as for civic efficacy (the capacity to make a difference).
- Teachers who implemented full units in the second year of the study had the same impact on the new group of students’ academic and civic learning as they had had with the first-year students, suggesting that the impact of Facing History and Ourselves is sustained in schools as teachers engage with new groups of students each year.⁹

⁸ Henson, K. T. (2003). Foundations for learner-centered education: A knowledge base. *Education*, 124(1), 5–16; Hoy, A. W., Hoy, W., and Tschannen-Moran, M. (1998). Teacher efficacy: Its meaning and measure. *Review of Educational Research*, 68(2), 202-248.

⁹ This finding is outside of the experimental design because the students of teachers who did not implement full Facing History units were not included in the analysis.

In sum, Facing History and Ourselves can claim that its model of supplying educators with timely resources, professional development, and support addresses a key need in the field of education: making teachers more effective. More teachers who feel more effective are more likely to stay in the profession. At the same time, the Facing History and Ourselves model is successful at improving students' academic performance by increasing their historical understanding and fostering tolerance and positive civic participation. **These findings provide conclusive evidence of Facing History and Ourselves' power to transform teaching and learning in critically important and lasting ways.**