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OPINIONS OF BOARD MEMBERS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND TEACHERS REGARDING
POLICIES FOR HANDLING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN SOCIAL STUDIES
IN THE GREAT FALLS, MONTANA, JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

by

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B. S., Minot State Teachers College, 1946

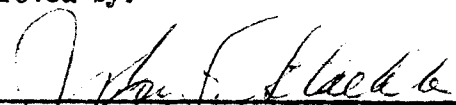
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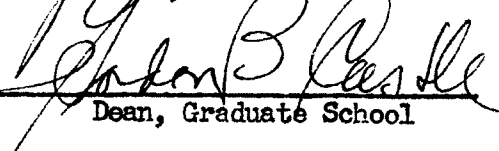
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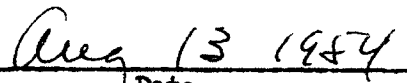
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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Many controversial issues arise in teaching social studies. Often these issues are dealt with briefly because there is no set policy as to how they should be taught, and some teachers feel insecure in going ahead by themselves.

A few school boards and school administrators have faced the problem and have adopted a broad policy for handling controversial issues and have found that a policy can be helpful in dealing with problems which may arise because of individuals' ideas, pressure groups, and also because of teachers who may use the classroom to indoctrinate.

THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The purpose of this study was to analyze the opinions of teachers and administrators of the Great Falls Junior High School and to analyze the opinions of school board members of the Great Falls school system to ascertain:

1. If pressures exist because controversial issues were discussed in the classroom.
2. What issues board members, teachers, and administrators think controversial. ✓
3. What responsibilities should be assumed by the teachers, administrators, and school board members for discussing controversial issues.
4. Whether a written policy for discussing controversial issues should be adopted by the board of education.

5. What board members, administrators, and teachers think should be included in a policy for discussing controversial issues.

Importance of the problem. The literature relating to policies for teaching controversial issues, which follows in Chapter Two, indicates that there is a need for policy. A broad-type policy would give teachers a sense of direction in teaching and would serve to protect the pupils from indoctrination. A policy could also serve as a basis for action against those persons or groups who might criticize unjustly.

If social problems are to be solved by future citizens, controversial issues must be faced realistically in schools, and adolescents must get experience in facing these problems. Any important public decision in the history of the United States has met with controversy; therefore the citizens in a democracy must have practice in formulating intelligent opinions on controversial issues.

DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

Controversial issues. The term controversial issues may be used to designate any topic or idea about which there are actual or potential conflicts of opinion. These conflicts of opinion may be local, national, or world-wide in scope. "All issues are controversial. When they cease to be controversial, they are no longer issues."¹

Policy. A policy is a statement of principles adopted by a governing body. When applied to the treatment of controversial issues,

¹Lewis Paul Todd, "Teaching Controversial Issues." Education Digest, 17:37, October, 1951.

a policy would be a statement of philosophy, stating objectives and purposes, adopted by the local board of education to be a guide to action for teachers and administrators in handling controversial issues.¹ Rules and regulations are specific procedures which may be adopted to implement such a policy.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

This study was limited to the opinions regarding the handling of controversial issues at the junior high school at Great Falls, Montana. The opinions expressed are those of junior high school teachers in the field of social studies, administrators, and school board members.

No attempt was made to set up a policy for consideration of controversial issues in the classroom.

This study will not serve as a guide that may be used by other schools. Opinions on the consideration in the classroom of controversial issues are so varied that each community may have different reactions.

PROCEDURE AND SOURCES OF DATA

The information for this study was obtained through interview followed by a free-response type of questionnaire (see Appendix A, p. 39). The interview and the free-response type of questionnaire were the two instruments used to gather opinions from the teachers, administrators, and school board members.

Related literature was found mostly in magazines and periodicals

¹Harlan D. Beem, "Developing Written Board Policies." Administrator's Notebook, 1:2-3, September, 1953.

printed within the last six years. The literature was used to form a basis for comparison with the opinions given by Great Falls junior high school teachers and administrators and school board members.

ORGANIZATION OF REMAINDER OF STUDY

Chapter Two consists of a review of related literature. This chapter is organized into the sections on the role of the teacher, the role of the administrator, and the role of the school board in handling controversial issues.

Chapter Three consists of the summary of responses and an analysis of the respondents' opinions.

Chapter Four is the summary, conclusion, and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Much has been written in recent years in regard to the teaching of controversial issues in public schools. World War II and its aftermath have brought to light many differences of opinion as to whether controversial issues should or should not be taught.

Some school boards, such as the Elizabeth, New Jersey, Board of Education, have found it desirable to establish a written policy for discussion of controversial issues.¹ (See Appendix B, p. 40).

Why controversial issues should be taught. Lewis Paul Todd writes:

The teaching of controversial issues is necessary to provide for an alert, intelligent citizenry, devoted to a free way of life and equipped with understanding and skills adapted to full and effective participation in community life.²

The framework of a democratic way of life is one in which people make decisions about controversies which affect every citizen. It is important that the educational systems provide future citizens and voters with practice and with a method by which they might reach intelligent opinions on controversial matters.

Mr. Todd further believes that there are certain elements of intelligent behavior which can result from discussion of controversial issues. Prejudice can often be overcome by fact in free and open discussion of an issue. In free, organized discussion, the art of listening

¹Elizabeth, New Jersey, Board of Education, "A Policy for Handling Controversial Issues." The School Board Journal, 123:394, August, 1951.

²Lewis Paul Todd, "Teaching of Controversial Issues." Educational Digest, 17:39, October, 1951.

and the ability to understand another individual's viewpoint may be cultivated. Perhaps the most important reason for discussing controversial issues in school is the development in pupils of skill in analyzing an issue so that they may sift the conflicting arguments and proposals and discover areas of agreement.

The American school system was established with the purpose of training for citizenship in a democracy.

. . . If this purpose is to be carried out by the present day schools, pupils and teachers in our schools must be at liberty to discuss, study, and make decisions upon the controversial issues of the hour.¹

Role of the teacher in teaching controversial issues. In the study of controversial issues, the teacher's role should be that of a guide. He should not be thought of as an authority, but as one who stimulates his pupils to gather materials from which they may arrive at their own conclusions. However, the teacher should have sufficient background and knowledge so that he may guide discussion and evaluate the facts presented and the materials used.

The teacher has responsibilities both to his students and his community in the handling of controversial issues:

1. To present or to permit the presentation of significant current questions by the class. Such questions should be considered in the light of their suitability for the age level and the community.
2. To help the students obtain an adequate quantity and variety of materials representing all sides of a question.
3. To help the students form their own working questions, pursuit of which will lead to greater understanding of the problem.

¹R. E. Gross, "Teaching Controversial Issues Can Be Fun." Social Education, 12:259, October, 1948.

4. To call attention to the case for unpopular causes if necessary to assure a well-rounded consideration of the question. Points of view should be associated with their sponsors rather than the authority of the teachers.

5. To help students distinguish between fact and opinion, and to form their opinions from the available facts rather than to look for facts to support a pre-conceived opinion.

6. To help students discover common goals and areas of agreement while recognizing that the generalizations and conclusions of individual students need not be alike.

7. To encourage students to make up their minds on the issue, rather than to remain in a state of indecision . . .

8. To exemplify good social behavior in a controversial situation.

9. To keep his mind in his purpose: the development of informed and responsible citizens.

10. To "refrain from using his classroom privileges to promote partisan politics, sectarian religious views, or selfish propaganda of any kind¹."²

The National Association of Secondary School Principals lists the following steps to an adequate treatment of controversial issues: ✓

1. Define the problem.
2. Trace the historical background.
3. Explain all terms.
4. Describe the functions of the institutions involved in the problem.
5. List the arguments given by each side.

¹A Code of Ethics for the Teaching Profession. (Washington, D. C.: National Education Association, 1940).

²Committee on Academic Freedom, National Council for the Social Studies, "The Treatment of Controversial Issues in the Schools." Social Education, 15:233, May, 1951. ✓

6. Examine each argument for validity. Note faulty basic premises, inaccurate analogies, improper deductions, half truths, and evasions.

7. Seek to discover what is right, rather than who is right.

8. Examine propaganda devices and appeals to the emotions.

9. Discover areas of possible agreement.

10. Indicate resources available for further study.¹

There are limitations of which a teacher should be aware before going into a study of an issue. R. E. Gross lists the following:

1. The pupils' background and maturity.
2. The pupils' interest.
3. The teacher's ability and experience.
4. The availability of the facts.
5. The climate of opinion in the school or community.²

Edwin C. Oaks, a teacher at Slauson Junior High School, Ann Arbor, Michigan, uses a device that he calls the "Discussograph" to give his students an exercise on controversial issues and to emphasize to them the basic right of disagreement in a democracy. He believes that this plan helps to keep discussion on a thoughtful rather than on an emotional plane in his social study classes. The "Discussograph" is represented by a horizontal line divided into five equal parts. The first division

¹Carl L. Hopkins, "How Should We Teach Controversial Issues in the Secondary Schools?" The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 37:216, April, 1953.

²R. E. Gross, "Controversial Issues and Educational Freedom." The Social Studies, 42:197, May, 1951.

is for radicals who desire immediate change at all costs. The liberals follow, desiring change with safeguards. Those who have not made up their minds are at dead center of the line. To the right of center are those who are opposed to change, and they are called conservatives. At the extreme right of the line are the reactionaries who were and are opposed to accomplished changes and wish to rescind former changes.¹ ✓

Of the selected literature reviewed on the study of controversial issues, an overwhelming majority of writers favor their use in the curriculum. In a radio program, "Town Meeting of the Air," the topic "Shall Controversial Issues Be Discussed in Schools?" was discussed by John Studebaker, who favored use of controversial issues, and Harold Caulfield, president of the Board of Education, San Francisco, California, who opposed their use. In opposition, he said that the teachers had plenty to do teaching the rudiments of speech, history, mathematics, and science. He believed that discussion of controversial issues would not teach children how to live with one another, and such teaching would result in indoctrination by the teacher.² His views in opposition to the consideration of controversial issues were the only ones noted.

In summary, the selected literature indicates that teachers should use controversial issues in their teaching but should have a well-planned program in doing so. Many schools have certain days set aside for the study of current events in social study courses. To study current events without allowing discussion would be shallow teaching to many people.

¹Edwin C. Oaks, "Discussograph: an Exercise on Controversial Issues." The Clearing House, 28:523-26, May, 1954.

²Chris A. DeYoung, Introduction to Public Education. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1950), pp. 619-669.

Hubert Humphrey, a former teacher and now United States Senator from Minnesota, says that current events when applied to history result in training ourselves and children for self leadership.¹

Industry has taken an interest in the treatment of controversial issues in public schools as is evidenced by the fact that the Educational Advisory Committee and the Educational Advisory Council of the National Association of Manufacturers state:

Every teacher in America should have the unquestioned right to impart knowledge objectively concerning all matters related to the subject he teaches . . . The younger the pupil and the more elementary the instruction, the less excuse there is for deviation from objective teaching. Complete objective teaching, however, while a desirable goal, can scarcely be expected or achieved in actual practice by teachers who are also thinking human beings . . .²

Role of the administrator in a program for handling controversial issues. The administrator has the responsibility for creating the correct atmosphere in which his teachers work. This atmosphere can be one of permissiveness where teachers use their training and show their confidence in their superior to do their job, or the atmosphere can be one where the teacher has fears and experiences indecision in doing his job. In the discussion of controversial issues, the atmosphere which is created by the administration will have a marked effect upon the caliber of teaching done by the staff.

The Educational Advisory Committee and the Educational Advisory Council of the National Association of Manufacturers state that it is the

¹Hubert H. Humphrey, "Fair Trade in Ideas." Educational Leadership, 8:326-328, March, 1951.

²This We Believe About Education. (New York: National Association of Manufacturers, February, 1954), p. 29.

responsibility of education to support and frequently to lead the necessary and continuing fight to preserve freedom of expression and freedom of inquiry. Because education has a centuries old familiarity with the human mind, an educator should stand ready to fight for his right to pursue knowledge in a scientific spirit.¹

The teachers and community look to the administrator for leadership and guidance. One of the many jobs of the administrator is to help make policy for the efficient operation of his school or schools. A policy for handling controversial issues could give teachers who are concerned with controversial issues a feeling of security necessary for an impartial and scientific approach to an issue. There are some teachers who fear that a policy established by the administrator and board of education may be rigid and restrictive rather than an instrument which permits and protects their rights as teachers. (See Appendix B, p. 40).

The greatest problem or fear that people seem to experience in having controversial issues discussed in public schools is that teachers may use their position to indoctrinate. The administrator must be aware of the fact that some teachers may indoctrinate, and he should take appropriate restrictive action in such case. If an administrator knew of any case in which a teacher indoctrinated students or any case in which a teacher was unfairly criticized for discussing controversial issues, the administrator would be wise in formulating a policy for possible adoption by the board. The policy could serve to justify the use of controversial issues in teaching and to protect all those concerned from unfair attacks

¹This We Believe About Education, op. cit., p. 16.

by pressure groups and propagandists.¹

Teachers, principals, superintendents, boards of education, and patrons of the schools in any community need a carefully authorized policy concerning the teaching of controversial issues. Individuals are often helpless in combatting pressure group action and propaganda. But a public policy which reflects majority opinion can help create a positive atmosphere within individual classrooms.²

"Public policy" connotes one which should be made known to the public. The administrator might be wise to publish the policy for handling controversial issues. Pressure groups, propagandists, and teachers who would indoctrinate would be less apt to use their influence in an informed community. The American Association of School Administrators Thirty-Second Yearbook states that a policy for teaching controversial issues, once formulated, accepted, and published, facilitates the task of the administrator in maintaining a school climate that will permit teachers and pupils to assume their responsibilities for developing a truly democratic program of citizenship education.³

R. E. Gross charges the administration to use wise leadership to build public confidence in the school program. The administrator should help bring in resource people and help to provide materials for full coverage of controversial issues which may arise in teaching.⁴

¹Chris A. DeYoung, *op. cit.*, p. 619.

²Ray Keho and Orlando Stephenson, "Free Inquiry into Controversial Issues." The Clearing House, 25:110-111, October, 1950.

³American Association of School Administrators Thirty-Second Yearbook, Education for American Citizenship (Washington, D. C.: The Association, 1954), pp. 196-201.

⁴R. E. Gross, "Controversial Issues and Educational Freedom." The Social Studies, 42:195-198, May, 1951.

Although the school board has the responsibility for adopting any policy, the superintendent often has to present the need for such a policy to be adopted or to be rejected by the board of education.

Role of the school board in a program for handling controversial issues. The school board is the legislative or policy making body of the local school district. "If controversial issues are to be used in the teaching of social studies, the board of education should adopt a written statement of policy covering that area of teaching."¹ This statement of policy for consideration of controversial issues could serve to protect the school board, administration, and teachers from unfair attacks and criticism from pressure groups. The policy might also result in a more favorable learning environment for the student by creating within the school a permissive atmosphere which is comparatively free from bias.

. . . No more important problem arises . . . than is presented by controversial issues . . . They include all the problems that are vitally important for modern living on which people in the community have conflicting views . . . Here the local board should take a stand. It should protect teachers who deal with these live subjects. Such protection does not extend to improper and prejudiced instruction.²

A good statement of policy will serve as a guide to pupils, teachers, and administrators and will remind pressure groups that the school is an agency that represents the entire community and not just a segment of it.³

¹Lawrence Elliot, "Unsettled Issues in High School." Educational Leadership, 8:342, March, 1951.

²American Association of School Administrators, School Boards in Action (Washington, D. C.: The Association, 1946), pp. 179-180.

³Ray Keho and Orlando Stephenson, loc. cit.

CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS

The opinions of teachers, administrators, and school board members presented here were obtained by using an interview schedule (See Appendix A, p. 39). The teachers and administrators were contacted personally and the problem was discussed. After discussion and questions concerning the problem, a free-response type of questionnaire was handed to them to be filled out at their convenience. Nine junior high school social studies teachers and two administrators participated. All question sheets were returned.

On the advice of the superintendent of the Great Falls Public Schools, the school board was contacted at regular meeting. The problem was explained to them and discussed with them. The seven board members were then handed the questionnaires, five of which were returned. The board members were told that questions three and four on the interview schedule did not apply to them.

In the organization of the material for the professional paper, each of the eighteen questions on the questionnaire is treated separately within the following main groups: (1) Identifying controversial issues, (2) Teacher's role in handling controversial issues, (3) Responsibilities of school administrators in handling controversial issues, (4) Role of the school board in the handling of controversial issues, and (5) Policy for handling controversial issues.

IDENTIFYING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

From your experience, what kinds of questions or problems are controversial? The nine teachers thought the following problems to be

controversial:

1. Party politics
2. Taxation
3. Religion
4. Farm problem
5. International relations
6. Race
7. Sex education
8. Personal conduct
9. Traffic
10. Philosophy of life
11. Law enforcement
12. Liquor
13. Smoking
14. Art
15. Social graces
16. Local problems
17. Subversives in government
18. School problems

The following problems were thought to be controversial by the two administrators:

1. State rights
2. Foreign policy
3. Federal aid versus state and local aid
4. Subsidies
5. Cartels
6. Price control
7. Taxes
8. Religion and its allied problems

The five school board members indicated the following as controversial problems:

1. Politics
2. Religion
3. Racial problems
4. Nationalities
5. Personalities
6. War
7. Automobiles
8. Brand names
9. Ways of teaching
10. Report cards
11. I. Q. tests
12. Theory of government

The long list of topics considered to be controversial by the sixteen respondents indicated that controversial subjects cover a large variety of topics. The length and content of the list also probably indicate the importance for including the study of controversial issues in the curriculum. It would seem difficult to teach a course in social studies without discussion on many of the subjects mentioned in the list.

TEACHER'S ROLE IN HANDLING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Do you feel that a teacher is obligated to use controversial issues in teaching? Seven of the teachers thought it necessary that controversial issues should be taught. According to these teachers, controversial issues cannot be avoided in a discussion of current events, and many of the issues considered necessary in a social studies course are controversial. Controversial issues were thought by several to create a high level of interest by linking the problems of the past with the problems of the present. The opinion was also expressed that unbiased presentation of controversial issues gave the students practice in studying common problems.

Two teachers thought it permissible to discuss controversial issues. One teacher thought the issues should come from the students before they were studied. The other teacher thought that at the junior high school level it was easy enough to avoid mentioning any such issues due to a lack of interest and understanding on the part of students. He further stated, "It is stimulating to endeavor to get thought activated over controversial issues even if the thoughts presented are second-hand, but some I ignore unless specifically brought up by the student."

The two administrators interviewed thought a teacher to be

obligated in presenting controversial issues. One of the interviewees thought such teaching necessary for students to learn to resolve their thinking. "It is the very thing upon which our democracy is built."

Four of the five school board members who were interviewed expressed the opinion that controversial issues should be taught if bias and prejudice were kept out of the discussion. One school board member thought that teachers were not obligated to consider controversial issues in teaching. No reason was given for his opinion.

The respondents, with the exception of one school board member, revealed that they thought controversial issues should be used in teaching. The opinion was given that using controversial issues would supplement facts given by textbooks and also help to make democracy more meaningful to pupils.

What are the responsibilities of a teacher in the discussion of controversial issues? The nine teachers interviewed thought that their responsibilities in the discussion of controversial issues were:

1. Impartiality
2. Promote intellectual rather than emotional thinking
3. Create atmosphere for unprejudiced thought
4. Explore all sides of an issue
5. Insist on factual material from students
6. Criticize each side when criticism is necessary
7. Avoid crystallizing opinion before all facts are in
8. Do not increase friction over an issue
9. Beware of teaching one's own opinion
10. Know your students
11. Develop open-mindedness in pupils
12. See that terms used are adequately defined
13. See that the issue is clearly stated
14. Avoid personalities
15. Keep fear out of discussion at all times
16. Make sure a rational viewpoint is taken
17. Beware of distortion of facts by students
18. State clearly that a viewpoint is the teacher's,
if such is given
19. Plan and prepare properly
20. Use democratic procedures in presenting the issues

The two administrators indicated a teacher's responsibility in handling controversial issues was:

1. Do not expose personal opinion
2. Be properly prepared to present both sides of an issue
3. Do not involve personalities
4. Make a wholesome analysis of the issue

The five school board members suggested a teacher's responsibility was:

1. Present both sides of the issue fairly
2. Discuss issue from all angles
3. Provide facts from which pupil may make own opinion
4. "I do not think it necessary to teach controversial issues."

With the exception of one school board member who believed controversial issues should not be considered, the respondents revealed a knowledge as to the responsibilities of teachers in handling controversial issues. With the exception of the negative statement, the list compared favorably with the responsibilities as stated in the related literature.

Have you ever been reprimanded for discussion of controversial issues? If so, on what issues? Out of a group of nine teachers and two administrators, three teachers had been cautioned to some degree with respect to the study of controversial issues. One teacher had been cautioned by his administrator in his teaching of race problems and of politics.

Another teacher had been criticized by fellow teachers for teaching the principles of communistic government and also for, "The idea of teaching social dancing in social studies classes." This person was not reprimanded by parents nor by the administration.

Do you feel free to use controversial issues in your classes without pressures from the administration and school patrons? This

question was directed only to teachers and administrators. The nine teachers and the two administrators all felt free to present or to have controversial issues discussed within the Great Falls Junior High School. The fact that these educators feel free to teach controversial issues without restrictions is probably a reason why a policy for handling controversial issues has not seemed necessary for this school system. Another indication might be that the teachers have presented issues with an unbiased approach and that the community has been satisfied with the way controversial issues have been presented.

Should a teacher give his own opinion on controversial issues?

Two of the teachers questioned were willing to give their opinions on controversial issues if asked. They believed that a teacher's opinion should be given in a quiet and unemotional manner with the reasons for the opinion carefully stated. The opinion should not be dogmatic nor given as a flat statement of fact.

Three teachers gave the opinion that teachers should not state their views on controversial issues. They felt that a teacher should remain neutral to allow the students to make up their own minds at the conclusion of fair discussion.

Four teachers believed that teachers may give their own opinions concerning controversial issues on certain matters. One teacher gave his opinions on matters concerning social behavior, but not on those matters pertaining to religion and partisan politics. If the issue is one about which there is considerable and intense feeling in the community, the teacher should avoid giving his opinion. The teacher should use discretion, and if his opinion is given, it should follow the discussion

and be clearly stated as an opinion.

The two administrators felt that teachers may give their opinions on some matters. The important thing for a teacher would be to bring out the facts on either side of the issue so that the student could make up his own mind.

The board members' views were divided as to whether a teacher should give his opinion in handling controversial issues. Two members answered yes; one said no; and three indicated that a teacher may give his opinion on some issues. The board members who thought that a teacher may give his opinion qualified their answers, indicating a teacher should not try to influence pupils in giving his opinion. Other indications were that teachers should consider the issue in light of community opinion and if the teacher's opinion were opposed to that of the community, it would not be wise for him to express opinion.

If the teacher does not feel qualified to use a controversial issue that arises, should he avoid it? The nine teachers had varied opinions about this question. Four teachers thought that teachers should avoid controversial issues that they are not qualified to discuss. Two teachers thought that a controversial issue about which they lack knowledge could be presented by the same method any controversial issue is taught. One teacher stated that a teacher will never be fully informed on all issues. "A teacher guides in procedures, and good research is usually done where no one knows the answers. A good teacher knows how to organize and to proceed with an investigation of an issue." Another teacher suggested the use of community resources if a teacher is not fully informed on an issue. Three teachers thought that if there were

sufficient interest in an issue, the teacher should qualify himself, then present it.

One administrator thought a teacher should postpone discussion of a controversial issue until he has had time to prepare himself adequately. It should not be postponed indefinitely. The other administrator thought it would depend upon the situation and that the teacher should certainly admit that he is not fully qualified.

Four school board members gave the opinion that teachers should avoid using a controversial issue about which they do not have a knowledge. Two board members believed that the teacher should become qualified to teach the issue, then present it to his pupils. One board member voiced the opinion that avoiding an issue merely makes the children curious and they may be more susceptible to biased opinions from others.

The respondents' opinions, especially the teachers', when compared with the related literature, showed by free response that they have quite a thorough knowledge of the responsibilities of teachers in handling controversial issues. This fact may show a reason as to why a policy for presenting controversial issues has not been necessary.

Since cautioning advice was given two teachers and since one teacher was criticized by co-workers for presenting certain controversial issues, there is indication that these people are aware that controversial issues are "touchy" subjects when taught in the classroom. Possibly a policy for handling controversial issues would clarify this difficulty. A policy might state the general position a teacher should take in presenting a controversial issue and might also remove uncertainty for that teacher.

The teacher and administrator respondents all felt free to use controversial issues or to have controversial issues discussed in the Great Falls Junior High School. These responses may be another reason why a policy for handling controversial issues has not seemed necessary. Another indication might be that the teachers have presented controversial issues with an unbiased approach and that the community has been satisfied with the way controversial issues have been presented.

The questions concerning a teacher's giving his own opinion on a controversial issue and a teacher's avoiding a controversial issue because he did not feel qualified to teach it brought a variety of answers. Here again a broad policy for handling controversial issues might be the answer to clear up difficulties and misunderstandings.

✓ RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS
IN HANDLING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

What responsibilities does the administration have to its teachers in handling controversial issues? The nine teachers thought the administration's responsibility to its teachers to be:

1. None
2. Create a policy which allows ample freedom for teaching
3. See that the board adopts a clear statement of policy in writing
4. Publish the adopted policy
5. Make policy consistent with the purposes of education
6. Support teachers in conformity with policy
7. Allow freedom to explore issues impartially
8. Have confidence in the teachers the administration hired

The two administrators thought they had these responsibilities to their teachers:

1. To expect teachers to use good "horse sense" in teaching
2. Encourage teachers to present the facts
3. Discourage presentation of personal views
4. Perhaps a printed policy on the matter should be encouraged by all school people

The five school board members thought the administration to have these responsibilities to the teachers:

1. Encourage free discussion
2. Help make materials available
3. Give free reign in teaching without indoctrination
4. Have a standard policy covering the teaching of controversial issues
5. See that controversial issues are not taught nor discussed
6. Back the teacher to the limit or get rid of the teacher

What responsibility does the administration have to school patrons in the presentation of controversial issues? The nine teachers thought the administration had these responsibilities to school patrons:

1. Make sure that issues are fairly presented
2. Explain the difference between teaching and indoctrination
3. Try to please the majority
4. Reduce tension where it exists
5. Proceed no faster than public opinion will support
6. Adopt a policy to inform patrons
7. Promote democratic processes
8. None

The two administrators thought the administration had these responsibilities to its patrons:

1. See that controversial issues are presented fairly
2. See that controversial issues are presented if they have a bearing upon learning

The five school board members believed the administration was responsible to the school patrons in the following:

1. Assure the public that facts are presented
2. Encourage free discussion
3. See that controversial issues are not taught
4. Give the best education that can be given, according to the best lights of administration, keeping in mind at all times any possible prejudices or bias that may exist in a community, gradually attempting to eliminate such prejudices.

In the question referring to responsibility of the administration to teachers and school patrons, at least one of each group of respondents

suggested a policy covering the teaching of controversial issues. Also, with the exception of one teacher and one school board member, all of the opinions given by the respondents could be incorporated into a broad policy for handling controversial issues. As will be shown later in the opinions given by those questioned, there were mixed feelings about adopting a policy for the presentation of controversial issues. This evidence indicates that there were misconceptions as to what a policy is and what purpose a policy might serve.

ROLE OF SCHOOL BOARD IN HANDLING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Do you think a policy for handling controversial issues should be adopted by the board of education? In the group of nine teachers, four favored a policy; four did not; and one was undecided. The teachers in the Great Falls Junior High School feel free to present controversial issues is evidenced in the responses to question three. Those opposing a policy had some feeling to "leave well enough alone" and that such a policy could not be devised which would be satisfactory. There was expressed fear that a policy would be too restrictive and binding for adequate study of controversial issues. Those in favor of a policy thought a policy would give a teacher a sense of direction in their presentation and would result in a more secure feeling in discussion of controversial issues within the classroom. They had no fears that a policy might restrict them in their work.

The two administrators took different views on adopting a policy for handling controversial issues. One did not believe in too many written, rigid policies, but that by discussion with the board a semi-formal line of thinking should be developed without a "hard and fast

policy." The other administrator definitely thought a policy for presenting controversial issues should be adopted for the security of the teacher, students, and patrons.

Two of the five board members questioned favored adoption of a policy for handling controversial issues. Two were opposed to adopting a policy for the reason that there was probably no need for one. One school board member thought the term "controversial issues" too broad for making a policy. He indicated that better subjects for policies would be individual controversial issues, so that the various facets of each could be studied by the school board and the administration with direct reference to the impact upon the community of the particular subject.

What should be included in this policy for teaching controversial issues? Teacher responses included the following:

1. I don't know.
2. Purpose of the school in that community
3. Philosophy of the school in regard to life problems
4. A clear statement of what is controversial
5. A clear statement of what will be supported and what will not
6. Should be broad but eliminate indoctrination
7. Support of teacher if unfairly criticized
8. Should not be adopted

Administrator responses:

1. Responsibility of the teacher
2. Responsibility of the administration
3. Responsibility of the citizens
(One administrator did not answer this question.)

School board member respondents indicated the following:

1. Control that an unbiased opinion may be reached by the student
2. Provide for free discussion

3. "The broad policy should be to teach as much as possible on any and every subject, without creating such controversy as would detract from the value of the great bulk of the teaching, excluding the controversial issue."

Those respondents who opposed the adoption of a policy for handling controversial issues seemed to evidence the feeling that the existing conditions for the discussion of controversial issues were satisfactory, and that the adoption of a policy would create problems which could be avoided. Those respondents favoring a policy felt that a policy would protect existing freedom in teaching and provide security for the teacher, student, patron, and administration. Here again are evidenced differences of opinion as to the purpose of a policy.

POLICY FOR HANDLING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Who should develop this policy? Six teachers thought the policy should be developed by a cooperative effort on the part of the teachers, administrators, board members, and interested citizens. Although one teacher favored cooperative meetings for development of a policy, he expressed doubt that such a diverse group could come to an agreement which would be satisfactory to all. One teacher had no opinion as to who should develop this policy and two others did not want a policy.

The administrators believed that if a policy for handling controversial issues were to be developed, it should be done by teachers, administrators, school board members, and interested citizens.

Three school board members felt that if a policy were to be developed, it should be done by school board members, administrators, and teachers. One member who was opposed to the discussion of controversial issues would not favor a policy. Another board member felt that no

policy was necessary because of the existing freedom in handling controversial issues.

Would a policy for handling controversial issues, adopted by the board of education, give teachers more freedom in teaching? One teacher thought a policy would give teachers more freedom in discussion of controversial issues, providing the policy was one of assurance of support. Four teachers were opposed to a policy, expressing the fear that a policy would tend to restrict the existing freedoms in the presentation of controversial issues. Their opinion was that although a policy for handling controversial issues might result in a feeling of security for the teacher, it might develop into a closely supervised curriculum which is not desirable. Four teachers did not know if an established policy for handling controversial issues would give them more freedom in teaching.

The two administrators gave opposite opinions. One thought a policy would not give more freedom in the discussion of controversial issues because a policy might be confining. The other administrator questioned felt that a policy would result in more freedom because of the security it would give a teacher. According to him, a policy would remove uncertainty on the part of the teacher.

Three board members thought that a policy for handling controversial issues would give the teacher more freedom in teaching; one was opposed to a policy or board treatment of controversial issues in any way. Another board member thought that the teachers in Great Falls have complete freedom in handling controversial issues so a policy was not necessary.

Should a policy, if adopted, be published to inform patrons that a policy for teaching controversial issues exists? Four teachers thought a policy, if adopted, should be published; four thought a policy should not be published; and one had no comment. Those opposing the publishing of a policy for handling controversial issues thought publication of the policy would result in more harm than good by creating public wrath when it could be avoided. The policy should be made available for those individuals who might be interested, but it should not be published for public consumption.

One administrator thought a policy for treatment of controversial issues should be adopted to inform the public and also to protect the schools. The other opposed publishing a policy. He felt that such publication would be "looking for trouble."

Two school board members were in favor of publishing an adopted policy for handling controversial issues; one was not; and two board members gave no opinion. A member in favor of publishing a policy, if adopted, stated, "Any policy adopted by the administration, they should be willing to have published." An opposing viewpoint was, "Ordinarily the publication of school policies leads to controversy in the community. There probably are very few policies that would secure unanimous consent, and since this is so, it probably is not usually wise to invite argument, even though nothing that a school board does can be deliberately kept secret. All meetings are supposed to be open, and should be kept open, but the dissemination of information with respect to policies should probably be more or less restricted to those who have sufficient interest to inquire about them, or to come to a meeting about them. It is probably

true that the maintenance of peace in a school system is about as important as any other single thing to the ultimate success of the teaching, and sometimes that requires a rather delicate balance."

Would a policy for handling controversial issues serve to inform school patrons that controversial issues have a place in the school curriculum? The teachers questioned gave varied answers to this question. Three thought a policy would justify the use of controversial issues; three definitely felt a policy would not; and four were undecided. Those who opposed a policy as a means of informing the public that controversial issues have a place in the curriculum felt that a policy might develop a fear in the minds of certain people which could tend to antagonize and create ill feeling toward the school.

The two administrators had split opinions. One thought a policy would serve to inform school patrons that controversial issues have a place in the school curriculum. The other administrator gave the idea that the policy would irritate those who might stir up trouble, and the rest of the people would not care so long as good judgment is used in teaching controversial issues.

Three of the school board respondents believed that a policy for handling controversial issues would serve to inform school patrons that controversial issues have a place in the school curriculum. Two board members were undecided. One board member who indicated a policy would inform patrons that controversial issues have a place in the curriculum was not sure that informing the public of this policy would be advisable because many people cry before they are hurt.

Do you think a policy, if adopted, would serve to protect the

pupil from indoctrination by teachers? One teacher thought an adopted policy would protect the pupils from indoctrination by teachers, while four did not, and four were undecided. The opinion was given by several teacher respondents that often one does not realize he might be indoctrinating while discussing controversial issues. One teacher thought it not probable that a teacher on the junior high school level has much influence on pupils since the average student is not aware of the existing difficulties of controversial issues.

One administrator felt that a policy would protect pupils from indoctrination. He went on to state, "However, a teacher in a democracy has a patriotic obligation to protect and defend the fundamental freedoms as set up in the Constitution. I believe in indoctrination of youth in patriotism." The other administrator thought a policy would not protect the pupil from indoctrination.

Two board members indicated that a policy would serve to protect the pupil from indoctrination by teachers, and one did not. Two were undecided. One board member expressed doubt that there has been a great deal of indoctrination of pupils by teachers except in schools that are deliberately designed to indoctrinate pupils in certain fields. He continued, "Public schools, in general, are probably as free from indoctrination as it is possible to achieve, and I doubt if the adoption of a policy for the handling of controversial issues would have any particular bearing upon this."

Would a policy, if adopted, serve to protect the administration and teachers from unfair criticism? Five teacher respondents believed a policy would probably protect the administrators and teachers from unfair

criticism, while three did not. One teacher had no opinion. There was an indicated feeling that a policy for handling controversial issues could be basis for support against unfair criticism, but also that even with an adopted policy there could be unfair criticism.

One administrator thought a policy for handling controversial issues would protect the administration and teachers from unfair criticism, while the other administrator respondent did not.

Two school board members thought a policy, if adopted, would protect administration and teachers, and one did not. Two board members had no opinion. One member thought there could be protection in a policy if the public were properly informed. Another member expressed, "There is no such thing as protection against unfair criticism except the following of a course of action which one's own sense of responsibility leads him to believe would be generally acceptable. There are always those who will seek to criticize and in doing so will not be fair. This is one of the necessary evils of a democracy. The only answer is to maintain a constant position of readiness to repel it."

The respondents revealed a democratic attitude for development of a policy, indicating that if one were to be adopted, the policy should be developed cooperatively by interested citizens, teachers, administrators, and school board members.

The final five questions of the interview schedule which concerned a policy for handling controversial issues showed a wide variety of responses. The responses could be divided into three categories--those who favored a policy, those who were opposed to a policy, and those who had no opinion.

The respondents favoring a policy for the presentation of controversial issues felt that a policy would give assurance of support to teachers in case of criticism and would remove uncertainty in handling controversial issues. A policy would also protect the student from indoctrination.

Those in opposition to a policy expressed doubt that the patrons would accept a policy without antagonism. The teachers felt that a policy would be restrictive and would result in a closely supervised curriculum. There was also the feeling that teachers are now free to study controversial issues, and since there have been no unpleasant experiences, a policy was not necessary.

The conflict of opinion here again showed the difference in thinking as to what a policy is and the purpose a policy would serve.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted to discover the opinions of board members, administrators, and teachers regarding policies for handling controversial issues in social studies in the Great Falls, Montana, Junior High School. The expected outcomes of the study were (1) to determine if pressures existed because controversial issues were discussed in the classroom, (2) to determine what issues board members, teachers, and administrators thought controversial, (3) what responsibilities should be assumed by the board members, teachers, and administrators for handling controversial issues, (4) to determine whether a policy for discussing controversial issues should be adopted by the board, and (5) to determine what board members, teachers, and administrators thought should be included in a policy.

The problem was discussed with the board members, teachers, and administrators concerned, and a questionnaire was given them, upon which their free responses were written.

The responses of the teachers and administrators indicated that little pressure existed in the Great Falls Junior High School because controversial issues were being studied in the classroom. All of the teachers and administrators felt free to discuss controversial issues in classes. Three of eleven respondents had been cautioned by their administrators and fellow teachers in discussing certain issues, but there were no complaints from the school patrons.

Although the teacher, administrator, and board member respondents gave a wide scope of topics they considered to be controversial, there

was a core of issues which most of the respondents seemed to think controversial. The issues most often mentioned by the respondents were race, politics, religion, nationalities, international relations, and a number of problems pertaining to social development.

In answering the questions on the questionnaire, the respondents were divided almost equally as to whether or not there should be a policy for handling controversial issues. The respondents thought that if a policy were to be adopted, this policy should be developed cooperatively by teachers, administrators, and school board members. Several respondents indicated that interested citizens might also be asked to help develop a policy. The respondents who favored development of a policy for handling controversial issues indicated that the policy should be one of wide scope so that it would not be restrictive to teachers in presenting courses, but the policy should provide protection for students against indoctrination by teachers, protection for teachers, administrators, and school board against unfair attack by pressure groups and propagandists. The respondents in favor of the development of a policy felt that an adopted policy would be basis for support in case of unfair criticism.

Those respondents who opposed the adoption of a policy for handling controversial issues indicated the feeling that a policy would tend to antagonize certain elements of the public. Respondents felt that controversial issues are taught adequately under the present system so, "Why create a problem where none exists?" Several indicated feeling that policy would result in closely supervised curriculum which would be restrictive to teachers and would hamper the teachers' effectiveness in conducting class work.

The results of this portion of the study are inconclusive because the free responses of the respondents indicate that the people questioned in the study did not reveal the same opinions as to what a policy is and what purpose a policy might serve.

This study further indicates possible need for understanding among teachers, administrators, and school board members as to need and value of written policies in the Great Falls Junior High School.

Those favoring adoption of a policy for handling controversial issues seemed to agree that a policy is a statement of philosophy of a school, stating objectives and purposes, adopted by the board of education to be a guide for teachers and administrators in teaching controversial issues.

Those respondents who opposed the adoption of a policy for teaching controversial issues indicated the belief that a policy would be more of a rigid set of rules and regulations which might hamper rather than facilitate the educational process. The policy for handling controversial issues adopted by the board of education in Elizabeth, New Jersey, (See Appendix B, p. 40) does not seem to support the arguments against a policy which were indicated by the respondents who opposed adoption of a policy.

In order that complete conclusions on this study be reached, further research is necessary. The respondents would first have to reach agreement as to the definition of policy as related to public schools. Then, by following the same procedure as was used in this study, more complete conclusions should be possible.

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APPENDIX A. QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you think that a teacher is obligated to use controversial issues in teaching?
2. From your experience, what kinds of questions or problems are controversial?
3. Do you feel free to use controversial issues in your classes without pressures from the administration and school patrons?
4. Have you ever been reprimanded for presenting controversial issues?
5. If so, on what issues?
6. What are the responsibilities of a teacher in handling controversial issues?
7. If the teacher does not feel qualified to use a controversial issue that arises, should he avoid it?
8. Should a teacher give his own opinion on a controversial issue?
9. What responsibilities does the administration have to its teachers in presenting controversial issues?
10. What responsibilities does the administration have to school patrons in the handling of controversial issues?
11. Do you think a policy for handling controversial issues should be adopted by the board of education?
12. What should be included in this policy for handling controversial issues?
13. Who should develop this policy?
14. Would a policy for handling controversial issues adopted by the board of education give teachers more freedom in teaching?
15. Should such a policy, if adopted, be published to inform patrons that a policy for handling controversial issues exists?
16. Would a policy for handling controversial issues serve to inform school patrons that controversial issues have a place in the school curriculum?
17. Do you think a policy, if adopted, would serve to protect the pupil from indoctrination by teachers?
18. Would a policy, if adopted, serve to protect the administration and teachers from unfair criticism?

APPENDIX B. A POLICY FOR HANDLING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES,
BOARD OF EDUCATION, ELIZABETH, NEW JERSEY,
ADOPTED IN JUNE, 1950.¹

Specific Considerations

A. Definition

A controversial issue, as herein understood, is one in which there exists conflicting opinions among the citizens of the community, of the nation, or among the nations of the world.

B. Criteria for determining appropriateness of controversial issues for the school curriculum

1. The issue must not involve the indoctrination of religious beliefs, a practice prohibited by law.
2. The treatment of the issue in question should be within the range of the knowledge, maturity, and competence of the students.
3. There should be study materials and other learning aids available from which a reasonable amount of data pertaining to all aspects of the issue may be obtained.
4. The inclusion of the issue should require only as much time as is needed for a satisfactory study by the class, but sufficient time should be provided to cover the issue adequately.
5. The issue should be current, significant, real, and important to students and teacher. Significant issues are those which, in general, concern considerable numbers of people; are related to basic principles; or, at the moment, are under consideration by the public, press, and radio.
6. The proper avenues by which arguments on controversial questions reach students in school are through qualified teachers, by the students themselves, and the other curriculum channels approved by the board of education.

C. Responsibility of the teacher

1. A teacher in a free society has the obligation to uphold, protect, and defend the fundamental freedoms as documented in the history of our American democracy.
2. The teacher is responsible for creating in the classroom an atmosphere of freedom for students to raise questions dealing with critical issues of the time and for maintaining an atmosphere conducive to the free, spirited, and friendly interplay of ideas.
3. If the teacher does not feel qualified for an exploration of a controversial issue, he should guide the pupils to the proper sources and qualified persons who can help them in arriving at their own opinions based upon fact.

¹Board of Education, Elizabeth, New Jersey, "A Policy for Handling Controversial Issues." School Board Journal, 123:394, August, 1951.

4. It shall be the duty of teachers to see that all facts, evidence, and aspects of an issue are presented honestly.
5. The teacher should acquaint pupils with books, newspapers, and other materials which present data on all aspects of a controversial issue under decision.
6. Statements presented and opinions expressed during discussion on controversial issues are to be carefully scrutinized by the teacher to make sure they are based on substantiated facts or credible evidence. The teacher should exercise special care to avoid misunderstanding.
7. The importance of the authenticity of facts and the purpose for which they were gathered must be stressed. Propaganda, in any form, should be clearly identified as such by teachers and students, and its intent should be clearly understood.
8. Although it is the teacher's responsibility to bring out the facts concerning a controversial question, he has the right to express his own opinion, providing his students understand that it is his own opinion and is not to be accepted by them as an authoritative answer.

D. Responsibility of the administration

1. The following assumptions are basic to the administration of a policy which provides for the inclusion of controversial issues in the school's curriculum:
 - a. That the teacher is competent to handle controversial issues within the classroom within the fields of his preparation and training only.
 - b. That the principal, as the administrator of his building, bears a major responsibility for the administration and supervision of the curriculum, selection of materials, and methods of instruction, and, therefore, is alert to and continuously aware in general of what is being taught in his school.
 - c. That citizens have the right to suppose that controversial issues are being presented fairly, and to protest to the board of education if convinced that unfair, biased, or prejudiced presentations are being made.
2. A teacher who is in doubt concerning the advisability of discussing certain issues in the classroom should confer with his principal as to the appropriateness of the issue. If the principal and the teacher are unable to establish agreement, the issue shall be referred to the Division of Instruction. The Division shall refer the matter to the superintendent of schools if necessary.
3. No individual or group may claim the right to present arguments to students in schools. Such a "right" would make the schools battlegrounds for all kinds of controversies. The teacher, with approval of principal and/or superintendent of schools, should feel free to invite representatives of various viewpoints to discuss issues with classes in order to inform students on all aspects of controversial questions.

4. The board of education shall provide a hearing in accordance with American principles of justice, whenever, in the judgment of the board, materials of instruction or the work of an individual teacher if seriously attacked by individuals or organized groups in such manner as to interfere with the normal administration of this policy.

E. Selection of materials

1. At the direction of the superintendent of schools the Division of Instruction shall establish and maintain proper procedures for review and approval of educational materials, including textbooks, visual aids, library books, and other supplementary aids to teaching.
2. Whenever publications or materials which are suspected of not clearly, fully, and truly presenting the truth are received by teachers, administrators, principals, or librarians, such materials shall be submitted to the Curriculum Advisory Council for review and consideration. The council will make recommendations to the superintendent of schools concerning what shall be done with these materials. In serious cases of this nature, the superintendent of schools shall present the materials in question and the recommendations of the Council to the Committee on Educational Management of the board of education for decision.