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CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN THE
JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

by

John A. Dively

April, 1957

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

A Substantial Paper Presented to the Faculty
of the Department of Education Eastern Illinois
State College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science in Education

by

John A. Dively

April, 1957

This study has been approved by the following members of the
faculty of Eastern Illinois State College:

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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TEACHING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Throughout our history controversial subjects have taken many forms. Although they are broad, controversial subjects are those subjects upon which the opinions of people differ. Controversy exists when the division of opinions relates to something of public concern. Some of the subjects of the past that have caused controversy have been the divine rights of kings, slavery, property rights for suffrage, Protestantism, witchcraft, and free schools. Some of the more modern problems are New Deal, divorce, sterilization of idiots, insane, and criminals, tariffs, government ownership, United Nations, and segregation.¹ Although some of these do not enter into our schools, they are good examples of how public opinion can be divided.

What our children will study seems often to be decided by local pressure groups who either force one thing after another into the courses of study or allow nothing to be taken out. In many cases teachers who are willing and able to improve the course of study are allowed to do this only partially. It is indicated that teachers are handicapped by laws and local pressure groups.

It is, of course, the duty of our society to determine our curriculum, but most criticisms of our school curricula indicate the desire of

¹ Edward L. Thorndike, "Teaching of Controversial Subjects", The Inglis Lecture, 1937 (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1937), pp. 1.

critics to criticize before they can cooperate intelligently in the improvement of public education.²

This paper is designed to:

1. Present evidence that potentially controversial subjects are in the junior high school curricula.
2. Discuss methods of handling controversial subjects.
3. Indicate that they should be taught in our public junior high schools.

Involved in this discussion of controversial subjects in the school curriculum is the consideration of the freedom to teach such subjects.

It seems logical at this point to present definitions of both terms.

The Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom of the National Education Association stated in 1954 that "controversial issues are matters of present import upon which there is no agreement approaching unanimity."

By the very nature of the above definition it is evident that such issues are likely to be a part of the growing edge of social development, replete with the possibility of becoming socially dominant and full of vital interest because they are alive and significant. The fact that controversy exists with regard to an issue is prima-facie evidence that there is argument to support opposing views. Only the biased partisan should be willing to ignore or treat with contempt the beliefs or acceptances of any considerable number of sincere and informed individuals. The fairminded person, convinced in his own mind that a given view is right, must still retain a reasonable uncertainty of absolute proof as long as the arguments which appeal to him fail to be convincing to those who hold opposing views.³

² National Education Association, What Policies Should Guide the Handling of Controversial Issues?, A Report Prepared by the Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom (Washington, D. C.: National Education Association, June 1954), pp. 11.

³ Ibid., pp. 10.

Academic freedom is defined in Webster's New International Dictionary as "freedom of a teacher . . . to express the truth as he sees it."⁴

Academic freedom has taken various forms and has had numerous meanings. The problem arising from academic freedom as well as controversial issues vary

from school to school, from community to community, from age to age. It assumes different forms with pupils of different ages. The physical limitations of the school, the social status of the teachers, and the teachers intelligence and training all affect his freedom.⁵

Academic freedom does not merely deal with the sciences, but it is reaching conclusions in any field through scholarly investigation. Of course we cannot act according to our conclusions if they are against the law. Some people believe that academic freedom concerns only the universities and colleges, and most of them are surprised when elementary school teachers talk about the restraints placed upon their teaching.⁶

If this were being explained to a lay person, perhaps the following real-life comparison might make the term, academic freedom, more meaningful. "If you were to go to a physician because of vague pain, you would expect him to be unhampered as he diagnosed your case. He would want to

⁴ Howard K. Beale, A History of Freedom of Teaching in American Schools (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), pp. viii.

⁵ Webster's New International Dictionary, Unabridged Edition (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. & C. Merriam Co., Publishers, 1947), pp. 10.

⁶ Robert MacIver, "The Freedom to Search for Knowledge", New York Times Magazine, XXX (April 12, 1953), pp. 12-42.

have your confidence; he would want to study the facts and advise you in the light of his special education and experience."⁷

Everyone needs a reasonable amount of freedom to do his best work. Each occupation thrives when individual workers have "elbow room" to make better use of their skill and resources. This is academic freedom in the educational field.⁸

This study is limited to the junior high school level and to a community of approximately 2,000. This community is primarily rural with three small industries which employ about twenty people each. There are several Protestant churches, including two rather strong Lutheran churches, one Catholic church, and no synagogue. The population does most of its buying in town, supplemented by occasional trips to a larger town about twenty miles away. Since there are no movie theater or youth centers, families seem to be rather closely knit. These facts give an idea of the nature of the community with which this study deals.

Conflicts about controversial subjects grow out of the curriculum, and therefore a study of curricula and curriculum planning is basic to this paper. The typical curriculum should, according to the Elementary Evaluation Criteria, include all learning of the children within the supervision of the school. More specifically these may be defined as activities

⁷ National Education Association, Your Child Deserves, A Report Prepared by the Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom (Washington, D. C.: National Education Association), pp. 3.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 4.

within the basic skills, content subjects, esthetic, physical, and social areas of instruction.⁹

The junior high school curriculum, as set up in the Illinois Curriculum and Course of Study Guide should include language arts, social studies, mathematics, science, and fine arts. This general plan is used, with some areas stressed and other areas slighted, in the average two thousand community.

The language arts area should include reading and literature, oral and written expression, grammar, spelling, and handwriting. It is the teacher's task to select, among these offerings, those which are most pertinent in her own teaching situation and to plan and organize the detailed activities of the school day.¹⁰

The social studies area should include history, geography, and civics. The teaching of social studies varies, as do all other areas, from school to school, but in most towns in a community of two thousand population, schools use a unified social studies course for the seventh grade which includes a study of geography correlated with history. It has been the common practice for several years that American history be studied in the eighth grade, and this has been strengthened by recent state legislation.

⁹ James F. Baker (ed.), Elementary Evaluation Criteria (Boston: Boston University; School of Education, 1953), pp. 18.

¹⁰ Robert M. Ring (ed.), Illinois Curriculum and Course of Study Guide for Elementary Schools (Springfield, Illinois: Printed by Authority of the State of Illinois, 1943), pp. 19.

American patriotism and the principles of representative government, as enunciated in the American Declaration of Independence the Constitution of the United States of America and the Constitution of State of Illinois, and the proper use and display of the American flag, shall be taught in all public schools and other educational institutions supported or maintained in whole or part of public funds.¹¹

Usually the requirements of this law are met by teaching the national and state Constitutions and Flag Code in the eighth grade social studies classes.

Mathematics, an organized body of subject matter, is taught for its practical value and because of the opportunities it affords for the developing of logical thinking and reasoning. Although texts vary and methods of teaching vary, emphasis is placed upon the "development of meaning, accuracy, and speech in both oral and written computation".¹²

Science in the typical junior high school should be taught with one essential purpose. This is to build up "through the child's observations and experiences in his own environment an understanding of man's relationships with the natural world about him."¹³ This is a subject which, like all the others, varies greatly from school to school because of facilities, teachers, and the texts that are used.

Health and physical education usually "consist of activities and experiences designed to meet health, safety, physical and recreational

¹¹ N. E. Hutson, R. W. Deffenbaugh (comp.), The School Code of Illinois (Springfield, Illinois: Printed by Authority of the State of Illinois, 1955), pp. 247.

¹² Baker, op. cit., pp. 27.

¹³ Ring, op. cit., pp. 342.

needs of children."¹⁴ These are more uniform in the schools because they are controlled by state law.

School boards of public schools and the Teachers College Boards shall provide for the health, physical education and training of pupils of the schools and shall include physical education training in the courses of study regularly taught therein.¹⁵

The fine arts program as defined by the Illinois Curriculum and Course of Study Guide should include "industrial arts, home economics, dramatization and music."¹⁶ This is one area in which schools with a population of two thousand will vary most. It appears that most junior highs in communities of this size have curricula that are rather similar except for the degree with which this program is carried out, with this exception: only in isolated cases do they include industrial arts because of the lack of facilities and the obvious expense. Home economics is included in some cases where the schools have facilities; in fact the greater percentage of schools do present some phases of home economics although the degree may vary a great deal. Neither is the music program uniform, but the majority of such junior highs do offer some type of band activity. There are schools that have elementary vocal teachers, but these schools are the exception rather than the rule.

¹⁴ Baker, op. cit., pp. 36.

¹⁵ Ring, op. cit., pp. 9.

¹⁶ Ring, op. cit., pp. iv.

It has been stated previously that any subject can become controversial,¹⁷ and although this paper deals primarily with controversial issues stemming from academic subjects, a brief mention should be made of other areas which may cause a controversy within a community or school.

Many school policies can become controversial within a community itself but usually without any serious pressure put upon the schools. One example of this is the extra-curricular activities of the school. Many community patrons have different opinions as to the extent that junior high athletics should be carried out. Another topic which often becomes mildly controversial is audio-visual aids. Controversy has arisen about the amount used, types of materials used, etc. Some questions that usually come up in communities are: Should we show material that contains advertising? Are audio-visual aids justifiable in light of the class time lost? Is this actually an aid to teaching? The controversies on these subjects usually merely involve the parents' discussing them among themselves with pressure seldom being brought to the administrators. These are only examples of how community opinion can conflict and in no way exhaust the areas where similar conflicts arise.

Another area which must be mentioned in a paper dealing with controversial subjects is subversion in textbooks which in recent years has caused a great deal of conflict. There are various reasons for this interest in textbooks but the American Textbook Publishers sum it up in these words.

¹⁷ National Education Association, What Policies Should Guide the Handling of Controversial Issues?, op. cit., pp. 4.

Textbooks are not perfect. There isn't a book on the market that hasn't been criticized in one way or another by teachers, reviewers, school officials, or laymen. In fact, it is sound sincere criticism of textbooks that is our best hope of making better textbooks.

People are taking a greater interest in their schools, and this is all good. But interest in education easily becomes emotional, particularly if it is resisted or resented by school people, as it sometimes is. And when emotions are aroused, someone is likely to be looking for a scapegoat. Textbooks are often serving as the scapegoat, and school systems are being condemned for real or fancied inadequacies of the books they are using.

Professional agitators, more interested in the cost of education than its values are taking advantage of the awakened public interest in education and of the fear of communism that has swept the country. Some of them actually appear to be opposed to education. Many of them support the view that we should do away with attempts to develop democratic attitudes and ideals in our schools and should substitute the authoritarian teaching methods employed by the Nazi and Communists.

Textbooks, particularly social studies textbooks, are written in what might be called a "climate of opinion". You would expect to find in a world history book statements about our military Russia ally, which would not be made today about Russia, our 'cold war' enemy.¹⁸

Changes have come about in recent years, and unfortunately school people have been slow to see that these books are up-to-date. The fact that book budgets are low and money goes first to buy more books because of increased enrollment, then to replace books so worn that they are unusable, and last to buy new or current books, is the chief reason that many schools are using out-of-date books. The publishers have been slow to revise books. The use of these out-of-date books makes the schools

¹⁸ The American Way of Publishing (Studies of the American Textbooks Publishers Institute), pp. 6.

vulnerable. The professional agitator knows it and makes the most of it.¹⁹

These tools used in teaching the academic subjects exert an influence upon the course content and may be considered by some as indicative of the point of view which the teacher and the school are attempting to present.

One of the best examples of how textbooks become controversial is the nation-wide publicity that has been given to Frank A. Magruder's text, American Government. It is a book well-reputed among educators and widely used in schools throughout the country, a book thoroughly American, but one that compares the American type of government with others without chauvinistic bias. "The heresy hunters nosed it out. In characteristic manner the alarm was raised. The Educational Reviewer. . . . raised the war cry. A radio commentator, Fulton Lewis, Jr., gave it nation-wide publicity. In state after state the book came under fire". Among other charges the "patriots declared that it advocated a dreadful thing called 'world government'. The Georgia school system banned it. Some states in which it was attacked did not yield to the pressure. Virginia, through its Superintendent of Public Instruction, rebutted the charges against it. Attempts were made in various cities to have it removed from the schools. Sometimes they succeeded, as in Houston, Texas, and New Haven, Connecticut. And the publishers add the "further cheering information that the noisy attack has backfired and that in their fiscal year beginning May 1st, 1952, their sales have shown an increase of thirty per cent over the previous."²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 7.

²⁰ MacIver, op. cit.; pp. 38.

Although there has been some controversy from time to time concerning such things as English, writing, spelling, art, and mathematics, these are usually related to previous educational experiences of the citizens of the community. New methods, techniques, or any changes in the schools are seldom introduced without some criticism.

Inquiries reveal that controversies have arisen in numerous communities in connection with physical education classes. This is most commonly connected with some religious affiliation and does present problems for some schools. Parents are occasionally opposed to the equipment or apparel that the children are expected to wear in these classes. Also, in many communities there is opposition to any form of dancing in the junior high school. Unless the program can be set up to meet the expectations of the constituents of the community, it is probably best to avoid further controversy in this area.

Many of the controversies arising about reading are unwarranted and are usually caused by people who do not understand the problems that the school faces in teaching the art of reading.

Many children enter our public schools at the age of six years, but the chronological age for entering children does not necessarily mean the same mental age, physical development, range of experience, or the same personality traits. All of these factors influence the child's reading readiness. To a large measure they determine what the child's beginning reading program should be.

Studies show that a mental age of six and a half years is necessary for successful reading. All entering children do not have this, as an

intelligence test will show; neither are all well-developed physically. Experiences vary with each child, and when they are extremely meager, as is too often the case, there is a poor background for interpreting and making meaningful what the child reads. Personality traits and physical development influence his emotional stability, and his likes and dislikes, and his work habits.²¹ This is merely part of the story that determines when the child is ready to read. However, many parents and citizens have the opinion that every child should learn to read immediately after starting school. This, of course, is caused by misunderstanding and does bring a lot of unwarranted criticism to our schools.

In health classes throughout the state, teachers have encountered several areas that become controversial. The most common is, probably, sex education.

Although millions of American adults apparently believe that sex education is desirable, it is one of the most neglected subjects of study in the . . . curriculum. Neglect of sex education may be attributed to lack of preparation (both emotional and informational) among teachers, and to a belief among many parents that what sex education is needed is better given in the home. However, demand for sex education in the schools appears to be growing, stimulated probably by a belief that, however good their intentions, many parents fail to give children the help they need in this area.²²

Today the traditional sex ethic is under attack from many directions and on many grounds. A new sexual ethic is struggling for emergence, one which is vastly less restricting and

²¹ Ring, op. cit., pp. 20.

²² Maurice P. Hunt and Lawrence E. Metcalf, Teaching High School Social Studies (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1955), pp. 287.

which tends to regard pleasures of the flesh as natural and wholesome, and as necessary to full mental and physical health. The changes taking place in our traditional sexual ethic probably stem from a series of specific events within a framework of growing secularization of society. This is not to say that Americans are necessarily any 'less religious' than a century ago. But they have liberalized their religious beliefs; they no longer regard as law every dictate of Old Testament prophets or early Christian fathers. In addition to development of contraceptives, more effective treatment of venereal disease, invention of the automobile, economic emancipation of women, development of Freudian psychology, and changing patterns of courtship, there is no doubt that war has had an eroding effect upon the old morality. Almost all investigators have discovered a sharp break in sexual beliefs and practices occurring about the time of World War I.²³

It appears that the biggest problem arising in inspection in the junior high schools is the changes in sexual beliefs and practices of the parents, the widespread acceptance of dating in the junior high school level, and the great degree to which parents' beliefs vary. It is difficult for teachers to teach sex education without some vigorous opposition arising.

Although schools are studying sex and marriage more freely than ever, there are certain aspects that are strictly taboo, and attempts at censorship are vigorous and often successful. In spite of this, sex is steadily opening as a field of reflective inquiry.²⁴

It appears that there is really very little controversy in the science classes in the junior highs, but there are some things that must be kept in mind if the teachers are to avoid criticism. The most common thing that arises is the inquisitiveness of youngsters of this age. The teacher must either be able to cope with these questions or at least be able to lead the

²³ Ibid., pp. 289-290.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 291.

child's thinking into areas of less danger.

The rise of modern science between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries provided a renewed impetus to naturalistic philosophy. It is now common knowledge that certain scientific discoveries have tended to undermine orthodox religious interpretations, yet none of these specific discoveries are as important as the growing acceptance of a naturalistic world-view.²⁵

While it cannot be doubted that these shocks have had a powerful effect in the way of undermining religious faith, it ~~must~~ be pointed out that this is on the whole a very superficial account of the conflict between religion and science. The real antagonism lies much deeper. It is not between particular discoveries of science and particular dogmas of religion at all. It is rather that certain very general assumptions of the religious view--any religious view not merely the Christian view of the world.²⁶

Since most teachers are unable or unwilling to try to cope with these questions, the spirit of inquiry in the student may be suppressed in various ways. One of them is the practice of giving him a continuous succession of assignments to be duly learned, so many pages of text per day, and then expecting nothing from him except to recite them back or summarize them without variation or free discussion.²⁷ These methods, of course, have decreased the amount of controversy in science as well as the amount of creative thinking.

It has been customary to classify the following fields as social studies; (1) history (2) political science (3) geography (4) economics

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ W. T. Stace, Religion and the Modern Mind (New York, J. B. Lippincott Co., 1952), pp. 53.

²⁷ Robert MacIver, Academic Freedom in Our Times (Columbus: Columbus University Press, 1955), pp. 207.

(5) sociology (6) cultural anthropopogy.²⁸ However in junior high the social studies curriculum deals almost exclusively with history and geography.

Certain areas of history have created more controversy in the school curricula than any other field of study. This has been accentuated by such things as pressure groups, which will be discussed later. There are so many aspects of history that have been controversial that the one that probably has been foremost will be discussed.

Since the end of World War II, the problem of international understanding has become more important than ever before in our history. The movement in education for international understanding was given great impetus by World War II and the establishment of the United Nations. A vast body of literature by many professional writers and organizations bear witness to this emphasis during the past war decade. Despite these development, there have arisen within the social studies fields, hesitancy and doubt, in some areas amounting to fear, about teaching international understanding. The increase of this uncertainty, seen against the backdrop of a consistent interest and concern for educators in this area, constitutes another of the ambivalences of the last ten years.²⁹

Resolutions adopted by the National Council for the Social Studies at its annual meeting in 1946 and 1954 reflects its continuing concern.

We express gratification in the fact of membership of the United States in the UNESCO and urge all educators, individually and collectively, to lend unstinted support to the purpose of the program of this new organization. Social Studies teachers should continue vigorously to accept the responsibility of educating youth in international understanding so

²⁸ Hunt, Metcalf, op. cit., pp. 192.

²⁹ Ruth Ellsworth, Ole Sand (co-ed.), Improving the Social Studies Curriculum, Twenty-sixth Yearbook of the National Council for the Social Studies, (Menasha: George Banta Publishing Company, 1955), pp. 44.

as American citizens they may meet the problems of living in an interdependent world.³⁰

The obligation to teach international understanding is widely recognized as this trend has gained momentum. Individuals and organizations which feel that the United Nations and its associated agencies are against our national interests largely lead the opposition to education for international understanding. It would be equally as harmful to teach about these agencies according to this thinking. The UNESCO has been chosen for special attention because it deals specifically with educational matters. The Newsletter of the American Flag Committee took this position:

UNESCO, the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization is a subversive association. It is consciously furthering a campaign calculated to prevent the teaching profession of this country, and so destroy the worth of integrity of America's first bulwark of freedom--our tax supported public schools.³¹

Robert Hutchins places this interpretation upon the situation:

In Los Angeles, Houston and Powtucket, a teacher would hesitate to mention UNESCO . . . because the school authorities have made it plain that they are afraid of it. Since those who oppose the UNESCO generally oppose the United Nations, the teacher should probably not refer to the UN either. Since those who oppose the UN believe that the United States should somehow isolate itself from world affairs, the teacher would be unwise to say very much about international relations . . . It is even more dangerous for him to say what everyone was saying ten years ago, that we must all do all we can to promote world understanding. Vocal pressure groups throughout the land take the view that any kind of interest in promoting world peace is undemocratic.³²

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 45.

³² Ibid., pp. 46.

Although it seems that the small communities in Illinois have not been confronted with this problem, it has been prevalent in parts of the United States.

In the final analysis, in a democratic country, "the nature and direction of the social studies curriculum, as a part of public education is a function of its constituents--the citizenry. And teachers are citizens--informed citizens?"³³

Before the actual teaching of controversial issues can begin, the teacher should realize that he has certain responsibilities.

1. Any teacher in America has the obligation to uphold, defend, and protect the freedom stated in the history of the United States of America.
2. Any teacher should allow the students to ask questions dealing with the subject.
3. Any teacher should not answer questions if he does not know the answer. He should tell the child where to find the answer.
4. Any teacher should present both sides of the questions honestly and provide material covering all aspects of the issue.
5. Any teacher that feels a doubt about presenting a certain issue should first check with his principal and in the case that they do not agree, they should clear the issue through the superintendent.

³³ Ibid., pp. 48.

6. Any teacher should feel free to point out fallacies in statements either oral or written and to teach the students to recognize propaganda and its purpose.³⁴

The Institute for Propaganda Analysis has defined propaganda thus:

"As generally understood propaganda is an expression of opinions or action by individuals or groups, deliberately designed to influence opinions or actions of other individuals or groups with reference to pre-determined ends."

Whether propaganda is good or bad should be discussed. Groups which often use propaganda should be pointed out. Pressure groups, radio, newspapers and advertising agencies are just a few of the more obvious ones.³⁵

It seems that some time could be profitably spent on recognizing propaganda devices if the child is to be expected to weigh facts and statements against opinions. The seven most common propaganda devices are:

1. Name-calling is a device used in discrediting a person or cause which the propagandist dislikes. Examples are "Reds" and "horse and buggy statesmen."
2. Glittering generalities is a term used for a statement or phrase which sounds good to everyone, such as "our sacred honor" and "rebuild the spirit of America".

³⁴ National Education Association, What Policies Should Guide the Handling of Controversial Issues?, op. cit., pp. 14-19.

³⁵ Theodore Blaich, Joseph Baumgartner, Richard Stanley, The Challenge of Democracy (New York, Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1942), pp. 435-439.

3. Transfer device is used to carry over the authority and prestige of something respectable to something the propagandist would have accepted. Two examples are Lincoln cars and Martha Washington candy.
4. Testimonials are used, for example, in which champions testify that their success is due to a certain breakfast food.
5. Plain folks device is used to show people that an individual is just a common ordinary person. A political candidate may be shown driving a tractor or washing his car or such.
6. Card stacking is taking facts and presenting them in such a manner that no matter how a person looks at it, only one conclusion is always reached. One way of doing this would be to generalize from a single instance.
7. The bandwagon device is often effective because nearly everyone wants to be with the crowd.³⁶

The administration as well as the teacher has certain obligations in dealing with controversial subjects.

1. It is the administration's duty to be certain that the teacher is competent to handle a controversial issue.
2. The administration should be continuously aware of what is being taught in their schools.
3. If the administrators--principals, superintendents, and school board--are in disagreement with regard to the handling of a

³⁶ Horace Hix, Warren Kingbury, Truman Reed, Towards A Better World (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), pp. 219-222.

controversial issue, then the issue should be referred to the Division of Instruction.

4. It is the obligation of the administration to give their approval or disapproval to bringing in representatives to discuss with the students their opinions for or against an issue.
5. If the choosing, presenting, or carrying out of a particular study of a controversial subject is being seriously questioned by individuals or groups, it is the Board of Education's duty to provide a hearing.³⁷

The teaching profession as a whole and on all levels of instruction can do several things to prevent a situation calling for such a hearing to develop and to reduce some of the criticism directed at the schools by communities and the nation.

1. Accept some of the criticism of the school as true and just.
2. Keep and develop state, national, and local professional organizations.
3. Strive for higher standards of education.
4. Practice good employment standards.
5. Stress the need for more workshops teaching the handling of controversial questions.
6. Formulate a policy for the consideration of grievances.
7. Strengthen administrative understanding and backing.

³⁷ National Educational Education Association, What Policies Should Guide the Handling of Controversial Issues?, op. cit., pp. 15-19.

8. Improve and strengthen professional organizations.³⁸

It would be advisable for a teacher to acquaint himself with the following four principles that are important to successful teaching of controversial subjects.

1. The teacher should respect each student's views and his freedom of speech. Each student should feel free to express his views. The teacher should allow the child to disagree with him. This will also teach the child to disagree courteously and to show "respect for the personalities of those" with whom they differ in opinion.³⁹ The teacher should set the example and never vary from this principle. In this way, teachers become "silent teachers". The teacher should try to use every contribution that the students make. Especially the use of the contributions of the timid child for this will help to build up his confidence in himself.
2. Teachers should try not to allow the child to become emotionally disturbed. A careless remark or unflattering reference to "racial, ethnic, religious, political, and social groups" may do a great deal of damage to a young person. This doesn't mean that these problems should not be discussed. Children of parents on strike

³⁸ Martin Essex, "What Does Academic Freedom Mean for Elementary and Secondary Teachers?", The Educational Leadership (January, 1952). IX, pp. 237-242.

³⁹ Edward Krug, "Can Academic Freedom Survive?", The Educational Leadership (October, 1947), V, pp. 12-15.

or unemployed, for instance, often want to study labor-management problems and relief problems. It is the "symbols" which hurt the child; therefore the teacher should know the child, the home, family, personal problems, social contacts, etc. A better method of gathering and keeping this information is needed in most school systems. Inasmuch as this study is limited to a small community, the teacher should be able to have this information, or if he doesn't, he could ask someone of the faculty, and one of them would surely know the family.

3. Teacher-student planning on topics is usually rewarded by the students' more readily accepting the chosen topic. Otherwise the teacher may be tagged as a classroom dictator. This will be discussed later, and suggestions of methods of choosing the topic will be presented.
4. Teachers may express their opinions, but they should be evaluated the same as other sources--newspapers, books, radio, television, personal interviews and motion pictures.⁴⁰ These are some questions that might form the basis for deciding if the authority is valid:
 1. Is the authority competent?
 2. Is the authority prejudiced?
 3. Is the authority acceptable?
 4. Is the authority acceptable today?

⁴⁰ Ibid.

5. Is the authority in a position to speak authoritatively?

6. Is the reference to the authority clear?⁴¹

Again it should be pointed out here the importance of having a wide variety of material.⁴² The teacher should remind the students constantly to judge his views, or else they will fall back to relying on his word alone.⁴³ This fourth principle is one of the most difficult because of the "ease with which a teacher . . . can be misunderstood . . .".⁴⁴ "Children confuse what the teacher says, and when it is repeated to parents it usually is badly distorted."⁴⁵ Mitchell warns that ". . . no teacher can be the final judge of truth . . . this judgment remains for the decision and conscience of everyone."⁴⁶

Of course, there are certain limitations as to what type of controversial issues should be discussed, and these come under six general limitations.

⁴¹ Hix and others, op. cit., pp. 219-222.

⁴² Krug, op. cit., pp. 14.

⁴³ Max Carmichael, "Guarding the Freedom to Teach", Progressive Education (February, 1951), pp. 28 & 103.

⁴⁴ William Fisher, "Democracy and Academic Freedom", Social Education (November, 1948), pp. 12 & 307.

⁴⁵ Broadus Mitchell, "Teacher in the Toils", New Republic (February, 1952), pp. 9-10.

⁴⁶ Film "Freedom to Learn" produced by the National Education Association and Affiliated with the State Education Association in cooperation with the National Association of Secretaries of State Teachers Associations.

1. According to Illinois Law no issue involving the indoctrination of religious beliefs can be taught in our public schools.
2. The questions treated should be within the range of the knowledge, maturity, and competence of the students.⁴⁷
3. There should be adequate material for studying both sides of the question.
4. The issues studied should require only as much time as needed for a satisfactory study by the students.
5. The problems should be current, real, and of interest to the class.
6. The topic chosen should be an acceptable one to the Board of Education and the community.

The problems chosen should answer three questions: Is the problem of interest to the pupils? Is the problem of importance to the pupil?⁴⁸ Is the problem on the pupils' maturity level?⁴⁹

Pupil-teacher planning and choosing of the topics is very important. The pupils can decide the answers to the first two questions, and the teacher can use his influence in guiding the selection of the topic so that it will fulfill the third question.

⁴⁷ National Education Association, What Policies Should Guide the Handling of Controversial Issues?, op. cit., pp. 13 & 17.

⁴⁸ Chester Babcock, "Fundamentals of Citizenship Education", The Educational Leadership (March, 1951), XVIII, pp. 344 & 345.

⁴⁹ Agnus Snyder, "Place of Controversial Issues in Teacher Education", The Educational Leadership (March, 1951) VIII, pp. 330.

The problems can be selected by the students by several different techniques.

1. Students can submit individual topics.
2. Students can analyze newspaper articles and report to the class on their findings.
3. Students can analyze news commentators and report on them.
4. Students can make a survey of American trends.
5. Students can make a study of problems being covered by organizations, as the Public Affairs Committee.
6. Students can make interviews with interested citizens.
7. Students can make a public poll.⁵⁰

There is no way that this study can set up a rigid method for presenting controversial issues that will end all classroom disention, but the following list of do's and don'ts might be helpful to a teacher confronted with such an issue:

1. Don't be emotionally involved.
2. Avoid base generalities.
3. Have material available for both or all sides of the question.⁵¹

Often a teacher must use

texts chosen not by themselves but by others who are not teachers--all too often by politicians who must make their choice in such a way as to please, at least not to offend numerous pressure groups in

⁵⁰ Babcock, op. cit., pp. 348.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 347.

the community who know little about educational processes or the subjects involved and that this choice must be made from texts themselves that are either compromises forced upon scholars by uninformed public opinion or products made in accordance with public prejudice by men willing to write whatever will pay best.⁵²

4. Give the students the impression that you think that they can solve the problem.
5. Be sure that all material used clearly shows the sponsorship.
6. Allow the students time for reflective thinking.⁵³
7. Don't have the question settled at the first of the discussion⁵⁴ as this is wish reasoning and is a stumbling block to critical thinking because a person starts with the answer he wishes to reach.⁵⁵
8. Be well-informed of the issue, both the history and some ideas as to the future.
9. Establish good rapport.⁵⁶

There are four general positions that a teacher can assume while teaching a subject that may be controversial.

1. If the new idea concerning the questions is not very prevalent in the student's immediate society, the teacher could mention

⁵² Beale, op. cit., pp. 318.

⁵³ Babcock, loc. cit.

⁵⁴ Lawrence Elliott, "Unsettled Issues in the High School", The Educational Leadership (March, 1951), XVIII, pp. 340.

⁵⁵ Hix, op. cit., pp. 216.

⁵⁶ Elliott, loc. cit.

only the accepted facts and ignore the new ideas. Tariffs would be an example of this on the junior high level.

2. If the question is in the general rejection, the teacher should mention both sides but point out how poor the second or unaccepted solution is. Many teachers do this when teaching about communism.
3. The teacher could mention all views impartially, and then the students and the teacher together could evaluate each solution and finally reach a conclusion as in the controversial issue of segregation.
4. The teacher should support the new and accepted solution, but this is usually dangerous.⁵⁷

Teachers of controversial subjects should employ the methods of science rather than resorting to emotion and persuasion. There are two important and flexible methods used in science that are adaptable for use in studying controversial matters.

The first method is the quantitative treatment of probabilities. This can be set up in this manner.

Con 1	Pro 1
Con 2	Pro 2
Con 3	Pro 3
Con 4	Pro 4
Con 5	

⁵⁷ Carmichael, op. cit., pp. 28, 108-111.

Just by looking at these an impartial person may find that Pro is much more favorable than Con, though not certain. It would be better to look at each Pro item separately and estimate and compare with each Con item.

In some cases the estimates can be simplified by cancelling out certain Pro items against certain Con items. Out of this type of instructive exercise, an Alternate may show its head. Perhaps a controversial subject will show that both Pro and Con are good; then a hunt for promising Alts should be made. It is imperative that the students know that Con has a probability of thirty in a hundred of being right and that Pro has a probability of seventy in a hundred of being right.⁵⁸

This may at first seem much too advanced for the junior high students. It is in the junior high that the groundwork should be laid. The teacher would have to explain probability on the simplified level, perhaps by laying a ruler on the edge of a desk one hundred times so that it extends over the edge a constant number of inches, and demonstrating that thirty times out of the hundred it remains on the desk and seventy times it falls.

Also it seems that the cancelling out of Pro and Con and reaching Alts would be rather elementary. However if the topic were wisely chosen as to the students' interests, abilities and knowledge, it appears that a teacher could employ this method rather beneficially.

⁵⁸Thorndyke, op. cit., pp. 23-30.

Another method used in science that could be applied is the attachment of weights to facts and opinions. The child would have to determine the validity of a statement and the personal reason that an individual may have for making such a statement.⁵⁹ On the junior high level, this treatment would appear to be best applied to the more obvious statements, and gradually the students will begin to question statements more on their own and to a greater degree.

The committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom offers the following check list to use in evaluating a teacher's handling of a controversial issue. The score should be one hundred per cent.

1. May students express their opinions fully though they may be in disagreement with the teacher? Yes No
2. Are students free to express their viewpoints without hindrance of prejudiced criticism by others in the class? Yes No
3. Can the students discuss such subjects as the following at appropriate grade level without pressure from community groups:
 - (a) separation of church and state? Yes No
 - (b) socialism? Yes No (c) communism? Yes No
 - (d) fascism? Yes No
 - (e) labor problems? Yes No (f) race relations? Yes No
 - (g) policies of national government? Yes No
 - (h) policies of state and local government? Yes No
 - (i) policies of foreign government? Yes No
 - (j) international relations? Yes No
 - (k) public control and private ownership of industry? Yes No
 - (l) public housing? Yes No
4. Are all sides of these questions presented fairly in classes? Yes No
5. Are the topics handled tactfully to avoid hurtful conflicts within the students? Yes No
6. Have students learned that all ideas thoughtfully expressed are entitled to thoughtful consideration? Yes No

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 30-39.

7. Do students have respect for minority opinions? Yes
No
8. Do students listen courteously to those who are unskilled in presenting their ideas? Yes No
9. Do students realize there may not be one right and final answer to a controversial question? Yes No
10. Are students being taught to
 - (a) gather and organize facts? Yes No
 - (b) discriminate between fact and opinions? Yes
No
 - (c) evaluate information? Yes No
 - (d) recognize insufficiency of facts to draw conclusions?
Yes No
 - (e) support conclusions with valid evidence? Yes
No
11. Are materials expressing different points of view made available to students? Yes No
12. May students pursue questions that seem important to them?
Yes No
13. Do students take part in dealing with practical problems of the school and community? Yes No
14. Are textbooks scholarly and well-balanced? Yes No
15. Are textbooks carefully chosen by teaching personnel? Yes
No
16. When textbooks are so chosen, are they free from pressure groups who wish to have only their particular viewpoints taught?
Yes No
17. Do teachers express their own viewpoint in class without being dogmatic? Yes No⁶⁰

The term "pressure groups" was used in the evaluation list and has also been mentioned several times before in this paper. Before a teacher can deal intelligently with controversial issues, he should be aware of the pressure groups since the censorship of these groups is becoming more frequent either openly or secretly.⁶¹

⁶⁰ "Annual Report of the Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom", National Education Association of the United States presented to the Delegate Assembly of the National Education Association, New York City, June 27-July 2, 1954, pp. 23-24.

⁶¹ Ruth Gavin, "Freedom to Learn", The Educational Digest (February, 1953) XVIII, pp. 21.

Freeman Butts lists three general organizations that he feels exert pressure on education. He states that we need freedom from:

1. tyranny of arbitrary government. There is a great deal of disagreement as to how much freedom should be allowed.
2. tyranny of the majority of the community. There should be the freedom for the minority of the community to express their opinions. This usually means political and religious views. "Schools and educators aren't the property of local majorities".
3. tyranny of organized minorities in the community.⁶²

Morris lists some of the organizations that he feels wish to present their views to the exclusion of all opposing views.

1. The press which is largely owned and controlled by rich and conservative men who favor interests.
2. The politicians who make election issues of educational policies.
3. The business interests which tend to dominate most boards of trustees, issue propaganda in favor of private ownership, and attempt to control industrial education.
4. The radio, the services of which are not easily disassociated from advertising for the sponsor.
5. The educators who are under obligation for some favor granted.
6. Labor which tried to find favorable consideration from one class of people.⁶³

⁶² Freeman Butts, "Freedom and the Responsibility in American Education", Teachers College Record (December, 1952), pp. 54, 118-124.

⁶³ Russell Morris, "Freedom of Teaching in the Schools", The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals (October, 1951), pp. 35 & 53.

Robert MacIver lists four general organizations which he feels are engaged in a campaign to control or influence education or educators.

1. Legislative committees aren't pressure groups in the usual sense of the word. Examples on the federal level are Senate Internal Security Subcommittee and House of Un-American Activities Committee. The Broyles Commission in Illinois would be an example on the state level. These committees and commissions do not concern themselves too much with lawmaking as they are concerned with inquiries into "subversive individuals".
2. Patriotic organizations are "antiliberal groups not otherwise specified are prone to fly at the masthead the banner of patriotism". MacIver cited the DAR and the American Legion as examples.
3. The third category, certain special-interest organizations and lobbies, "make the education of the public and above all of the educators one of their major operations" to protect their own interests. The National Economic Council, Conference of American Small Business Organizations and the American Business Consultants are examples.
4. The pseudo-educational associations are rather similar to the previous group, but they direct their official "attention entirely to bringing their influence to bear on genuinely educational institutions. Examples are Guardians of American Education, American Education Association, and the Friends of the Public Schools in America.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ MacIver, Academic Freedom in Our Time, op. cit., pp. 45-63.

These writers were discussing pressure groups in general. Educators in the average small community aren't usually directly connected with some of them, for in most cases in a small school system the controversies are started by individuals or groups of laymen that have a direct interest in the issue: that is, religious groups are usually concerned with activities not approved by various sects; patriotic groups are usually connected with issues involving communism. A few of these groups want attention or have personal grievances but the majority are sincere and often poorly informed.⁶⁵

Perhaps the main thing to remember in dealing with a controversial question is that the teacher should be certain that he has adequate support of the board and of the community because it enables the students to learn in an environment which is relatively free from biased opinions and it protects the teacher.⁶⁶

These questions have been asked educators many times, "Why teach controversial issues at all? Why not just stick to the three R's? Teachers should have plenty to do if they did a good job teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic? After all, the parents can teach the kids at home about such stuff."

They do not ask, "How many parents have the knowledge, interest or time to teach such things?" If the training in controversial matters were left to the average parents, then it would merely be a matter of that parent's convincing his children that his opinions are correct, and that the

⁶⁵ National Education Association, What Policies Should Guide the Handling of Controversial Issues?, op. cit., pp. 15.

⁶⁶ Elliott, op. cit., pp. 15.

child should think and feel about the matter as he does. But both parents and teachers have the responsibility of training the child to be broad-minded, and they have a great job to do in setting up a lasting example of tolerance and broadmindedness.⁶⁷

Each child is a unique personality whose home and background differ from those of the other children he plays and works with in school. The homes represented in any grade in a public school today vary in one or more factors such as mores, religion, politics, traditions, social status, and ideals. Naturally there are many subjects that will cause a difference of opinion. But if the school is forbidden to study issues that are changing our society today, teachers are limited to those subjects that have already been solved.⁶⁸

Dr. John Dewey has said, "It is naively assumed that we can teach, by some hocus pocus, how to think without permitting our pupils to think about anything. They must be introduced to reality. Education is essential to democratic survival."⁶⁹ "Sidestepping controversial issues in class, knowing that young citizens will have to face these problems soon, is not education", says a dissatisfied teacher who left the teaching field.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ National Education Association, What Policies Should Guide the Handling Of Controversial Issues?, op.cit., pp. 13.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁶⁹ Hubert H. Humphrey "Fair Trade in Ideas", The Education Leadership (March, 1951), XVIII, pp. 326.

⁷⁰ "I'm Not Coming Back", Social Education (November, 1953), XVI, pp. 320.

Since controversial issues are issues upon which there is no general agreement, then this is evidence that there are arguments to support both sides of the problem. Parents and teachers share the responsibility of displaying a tolerant attitude toward all debatable questions. "It must be kept in mind that the citizen, who is most valuable to his country, is the one who has learned to arrive at opinions by thoroughly weighing the evidence on all sides of any question."⁷¹

Ruth Gavin upholds academic freedom in this excerpt from her article, "Freedom to Learn".

When discussion is limited to the presentation of ideas that are generally accepted, and new or unfamiliar ideas are refused a hearing, the group is prevented from reaching a new consensus of opinion. This defeats the democratic process of adjusting differences to arrive at a conclusion.

If young people are to learn to participate in the democratic process, they must have an opportunity to practice it. The school, more than any other institution, exists to provide this opportunity.⁷²

Dr. Newlin defines the school as:

'a social institution whose processes are social and whose function is not only to develop the innate capacities of each individual . . . but to provide that type of experience, that allround thoroughgoing education, that will best equip him to take his place as an effective member of society.' Assuredly, the willingness to consider judicially questions for which no generally accepted answers have been determined, a tolerant hearing of arguments in oppositions, and a habit of withholding decisions until one has studied the facts available before action must be taken as fundamental qualifications for a citizen in a fast and changing society. The question

⁷¹ National Education Association, op. cit., pp. 10.

⁷² Gavian, op. cit., pp. 21.

is not the desirability of the school as an instrument of social control, but rather of the type of mind that the school shall seek to produce.⁷³

Every pupil has the right to study any controversial issue which has the political, economic, or social significance about which (at his age) he should begin to form an opinion; the right to all information; the right to study under competent instruction in an unbiased and unprejudiced atmosphere; the right to express his opinions without being ridiculed by his teacher, classmates, or school.⁷⁴

There are four reasons that sum up why the schools should teach controversial issues.

1. Recognizing current problems. If a seventh grade boy thought of communism as a part of a far, distant and unreal country, would he be able to cope with the dangers of communism? To advocate communism in the schools is treason, but to learn about it is essential in alerting youth of its dangers.
2. Locating, collecting, and organizing material.⁷⁵ "Training in decision-making is not so much in reaching conclusions as it is in training in the processes of decision-making. This is one of the most important lessons. The study of controversial matters should be considered a tool."⁷⁶

⁷³ National Education Association, What Policies Should Guide the Handling of Controversial Issues?, op. cit., pp. 11.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 21.

⁷⁵ Babcock, op. cit., pp. 344.

⁷⁶ Humphry, op. cit., pp. 326.

3. Evaluation of material.⁷⁷ Referring again to John Dewey's statement, it does seem foolish that children are expected to think but not about anything.⁷⁸ The evaluation of material is a good way to develop reflective thinking, both as a group and as individuals. It gives reality to problems and to neglect this is to neglect the duties of a teacher.⁷⁹ Edward Thorndike in a quotation from his book, The Inglis Lecture, 1937, states that the goal in delving into controversial issue is to "replace most of its controversy with science."⁸⁰
4. Arriving at objective conclusions.⁸¹ This often is the least important reason for studying controversial issues. In problems, such as New Deal, United Nations, and religion, the conclusion is not important, but in the field of communism, it is a necessity that the student reaches a decision. "Snap judgment and hasty conclusions lead to wrong convictions, and they in turn lead to prejudices and actions" that do not strengthen the foundation on which a free society rests. The classroom is acting as a forum and not a committee for adopting resolutions,⁸² but "knowledge stemming from academic freedom is power".⁸³ Each individual may

⁷⁷ Babcock, loc. cit.

⁷⁸ Humphry, loc. cit.

⁷⁹ Krug, op. cit., pp. 12.

⁸⁰ Thorndike, op. cit., pp. 39.

⁸¹ Babcock, op. cit., pp. 344.

⁸² National Education Association, What Policies Should Guide the Handling of Controversial Issues?, op. cit., pp. 20.

⁸³ MacIver, "The Freedom to Search for Knowledge", op. cit., pp. 44.

or may not reach a conclusion, but the group has no responsibility for deciding the truth. No single solution should be accepted as answering all the needs to any matter. When this happens the issue is not any longer being treated as a controversial one but rather as propaganda. What better place is there to experience the American right of free and open discussion than in the schools?⁸⁴

Perhaps a statement from the Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom booklet on "What Policies Should Guide the Handling of Controversial Issues?" sums up the school's responsibility . . . "The schools do not teach controversial issues but rather provide opportunities for their study."⁸⁵

In conclusion Howard K. Beale expresses his opinion on the necessity of teaching controversial subjects in these two sentences.

After careful weighing of the factors pro and con, with full realization of all the difficulties involved, the author has ceased to ask whether freedom is possible, how much of it can be allowed to teachers, whether it will be abused. The really important question is: Dare society face the consequences of not permitting the teachers . . . complete freedom.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ National Education Association, loc. cit.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Beale, op. cit., pp. 778.

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