

EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS WITH TEACHING
CONTROVERSIAL PUBLIC ISSUES IN THE CLASSROOM

By

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For Karen

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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By

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This constructivist study investigates the experiences of veteran social studies teachers with teaching controversial content in north Florida classrooms. The subject of controversy in the social studies is of particular importance in the contemporary context of curricular narrowing and challenges to public educators' academic freedom. At the same time, this dissertation research project supplies evidence that internal factors such as individual teacher's educational background, political and religious worldview and teaching philosophy have as much, if not more, influence on teaching practice as these external factors. The investigation gives voice to veteran practitioners who are often lost in the discussion of social studies teaching and learning practices. Over the course of 2 interviews, these teachers addressed the meanings that they have constructed from their years of experience in the classroom. They spoke candidly about their hopes, fears, and frustrations in regard to the field, while providing rationales for individual lessons that address controversial issues. In order to examine the interviews at the heart of this project, I employed a narrative analysis methodology that allowed the authentic voices of these practitioners to emerge. These narratives speak in prophetic ways about the positions that social studies teachers take when approaching the use of controversial public issues. In the current climate of political and social reaction, secondary social studies teachers might be forgiven for

questioning the necessity for and relevance of research in their daily struggles. However, it is precisely within the current political mood in education that research can and must play a role in clarifying the needs and goals of teachers. In this study, I hope to provide the rationale for research that situates itself on the solid theoretical ground of the constructivist tradition and seeks to empathize with and provide documentary evidence of the day-to-day reality of teachers' experiences. The insights gained from this process, therefore, can provide a template for an innovative teacher training process that focuses on the possibilities of student investigation of issues of controversy.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The protruding nail gets hammered down
-- Japanese proverb

I first became aware of the issue that has motivated my primary research interests at the University of Florida on a bright afternoon in the fall of 2004. I was teaching in a high school in Jacksonville, had recently begun my doctoral studies, and was making one of my many pilgrimages to Gainesville. During these long drives, I consumed a wealth of audio books, iPod music, and talk radio. On the afternoon in question, I was surveying the local political talk shows in order to get a sense of the atmosphere surrounding the Presidential election. I happened upon Sean Hannity's nationally syndicated radio show on a local AM station and was surprised when he took a call from a listener in Jacksonville. I was even more shocked when the caller identified herself as a parent of a Jacksonville magnet school student who had just watched Michael Moore's documentary film *Fahrenheit 9/11* in her media issues course. As Hannity began to call for the heads of the teacher, principal, and superintendent involved, I remember having this one thought running through my head: "Please don't let it be my school!"

Of course it was my school, and after interviewing the teacher in question about the intentions behind his lesson plan and the subsequent disciplinary actions taken by the school district, I began to wonder if this was merely an isolated incident or part of a more noteworthy pattern of ideological pressure being brought to bear on teachers and university faculty. Within a few days, I had collected information about nearly two dozen incidents that had occurred from Washington state to North Carolina, spanning middle school settings right up into community colleges. In these cases a pattern emerged: first, the challenges to an individual teacher's use of *Fahrenheit* came during a narrow band of time at the height of the final leg of the 2004

Presidential election. Second, challenges did not follow the typical pattern of a parent contacting the individual teacher or school administrator; rather the first phone call went to a local or national media outlet, typically one connected to the Republican Party. Therefore, and finally, a political agenda emerged; that is, education seemed to have become a wedge issue very much like stem cell research, gun ownership, or gay marriage. It seemed to me a ripe issue for investigation.

Statement of the Problem

Social studies educators who wish to have the freedom to address controversial public issues in their classrooms face a gigantic conundrum at the beginning of a new millennium. On the one hand, the scholarship related to the issue is clear in the proposition that discussing public controversies in the classroom has a particular imperative within a democratic society. Kelly (1986) argued that, “schools, particularly those publicly financed and state supported, in a democracy have a moral responsibility to develop in their charges the understandings, competencies and commitments to be effective citizens” (p. 116). These include the abilities to make reasoned decisions about controversial public issues based on evidence and to debate these positions in a reasonable, if passionate, manner. Engle and Ochoa (1988) testified that “citizen problem-solvers in a democracy are best educated by the continuous inclusion in their schooling of real-life situations that require the making of informed and morally-responsible decisions (p. 27). Gutman (1999) concurred that societies in which the people are presumed sovereign require an educated citizenry with certain abilities and practices such as critical thinking skills and regular engagement in public debate. She commented:

When citizens rule in a democracy, they determine, among other things, how future citizens will be educated. Democratic education is therefore a political as well as an educational ideal. . . . Education not only sets the stage for democratic politics, it plays a central role in it. (p. 3)

Many social studies researchers have spoken over the years about the efficacy of teaching methods that incorporate controversial subject matter and materials (Banks, 1990; Grant, 2003; VanSledright, 1997). Barton and Levstik (2005) noted in their work with elementary school students that, “High quality academic discussions not only prepare students for participation in democratic debate and negotiation, they also support important aspects of historical thinking, including better understanding of historical agency” (p. 139). Hahn and Tocci (1990) showed that engaging students in debates on provocative issues in history has the effect of stimulating their interest in the electoral process. Furthermore, Oakes and Lipton (2007) found that students in social studies classes eagerly look forward to debates on hot-button topics. They commented that the happiest classrooms are those presided over by a teacher “who deals openly with his (sic) values of treating others with respect and dignity, and who frequently engages students in democratic participation and decision making” (p. 194). Claire and Holden (2007) remarked that, “the controversial issues with which children wish to engage are potentially far more dangerous and they need education and strategies for managing them without violence” (p. 6). The National Council for the Social Studies (2007) recently updated its statement on academic freedom and the teaching of controversy, remarking that social studies teaching “involves controversial issues, and thus, the necessity of academic freedom for social studies teachers and students” (p. 282). From this brief survey of the research in teaching and learning, one might then imagine that teaching controversial public issues would be a standard practice in secondary social studies classrooms.

On the other hand, however, the political leaderships of even those societies, such as the United States, long committed to representative democratic structures have often exhibited nervousness over this potential for educators and education to stimulate individual enlightenment and even grassroots political action. Rury (2005) noted that disenfranchised groups, such as

women and the working class, were explicitly forbidden from entering educational institutions in the early decades of the United States republic. In the case of African American slaves in the Antebellum period, for example, the prohibition against literacy was bolstered by the threat of death (Anderson, 1988). For the past century and a half, there has therefore been a delicate balance between the imperatives of the market, fostered by the social efficiency school, and the more child-centered approaches of pedagogical progressives. Spring (1992) connected the various national security crises to witch hunts against teachers, pointing to the periods of the First World War and Cold War competition with the Soviet Union as acmes of censorious activity directed against teachers. There is a wealth of material (Carleton, 1985; Foster, 2000; Schrecker, 1998), for example, detailing the pernicious effects of McCarthyism on education at secondary and higher education levels in the 1950s. In recent years, critics of progressive education have attacked what they have termed political correctness among the teaching faculty and professoriate and have argued for an objective teaching stance in the classroom (D'Souza, 1991; Ravitch, 2000; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

Social studies educators thus have entered the 21st century facing an existential crisis in the field. The study of social studies is today threatened by both the increasing narrowness of the American public school curriculum as well as the demands of the accountability movement that has centered its quest for increased standards on improving test scores on mandated state examinations in reading and mathematics. As Hursh (2001) noted, the field of social studies has largely been disdained by the conservative regimes that have controlled education policy from the Departments of Education at federal, state, and district levels over the past 25 years, largely because of its identification with the progressive movement and institutions such as Columbia Teachers College, home of radical educators such as George Counts, Charles Beard and Harold Rugg. Ravitch (2003) exemplified this stance when she bemoaned:

Over the past century, the teaching of chronological history was steadily displaced by social studies. And for most of the century, the social studies establishment eagerly sought to reduce the status of chronological history, in the belief that its own variegated field was somehow superior to old-fashioned history. (p. 1)

Consequently, as Symcox (2002) noted, conservative policymakers have, in the past generation, striven to define the social studies more narrowly as history education, which, in their eyes, must be presented as a patriotic narrative (often termed “the story well told”) of uninterrupted progress and democracy.

While this conflict has often been portrayed in the literature as mere partisan bickering (Hunter, 1991; Tyack, 2003; Zimmerman, 2002) that could easily be solved with more compromise from all sides, it is at heart another chapter in an age-old epistemological debate about how students can best learn about the world around them. Traditionalists in the field such as Adler (1998) and Bloom (1987) argued that students can best understand what they described as our common heritage by casting an eye back toward history, especially what has traditionally been framed as the history of Western civilizations. Schlesinger (1992) argued that this project has particularly urgency within a diverse society, such as the United States, which he fears will become Balkanized by the entrance of progressive waves of new immigration. The founders of the Social Studies field and those such as Allan Kownslar who pioneered the New Social Studies movement of the 1960s began at quite distinct points and arrive at noticeably different conclusions from the traditionalists. Students, in the progressive scheme, best learn about their cultural surroundings by experiencing them at first hand and being allowed to make meaning of them for themselves. History for social studies educators, therefore, is most valuable in shedding light on contemporary social issues and problems; as Barton and Levstik (2005) demonstrated, history as a dry, abstract study is ultimately counter-productive as it drives the curiosity for history from students more effectively than does any other method. The field of social studies

during progressive eras thus has been conceived of as a more expansive endeavor, encompassing the fields of economics, sociology, psychology, and the study of law.

The conservatism reinforced at the administrative and policy-making levels by a 25 year program, launched during the Reagan administration, focused on narrowing the curriculum, standardizing the routines of schooling and increasingly wresting authority over the classroom from teachers. Apple (2001), for example, surveyed the deleterious influence of pre-packaged, teacher-proof curricula, such as the Whittle Corporation's Channel One, which robs classroom teachers and students of 10 minutes of lesson time each school day. Aronowitz and Giroux (2003) identified this trend as having originated in the Commission for Excellence in Education's *A Nation at Risk* report (1983), which re-established the social efficiency-oriented agenda, first developed by the administrative progressive movement, which disdains the role of teacher as researcher, intellectual and professional:

The call for excellence and improved student creativity has been accompanied by policy suggestions that further erode the power teachers have over the conditions of their work while simultaneously proposing that administrators and teachers look outside of their schools for improvements and needed reforms. The result is that many of the educational reforms appear to reduce teachers to the status of low-level employees or civil servants whose main function is to implement reforms decided by experts in the upper levels of state and educational bureaucracies. (p. 23)

Gatto (2000) further argued that these conservative trends were continued in the 1990s by the corporate-oriented, neo-liberal Clinton administration, which began the trend toward state-mandated high-stakes testing regimes.

Conservative education activists have, in a few cases, transcended mere rhetoric concerning curricular matters and lobbied successfully with school administrations for disciplinary action against individual teachers. As Evans (2003) noted,

. . . the present and recent wave of attacks are coming from persons with powerful connections receiving substantial financial support from well-heeled conservative

foundations bent on influencing policy, such as the Fordham Foundation, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and others. (pp. 523-524)

The most well-established of these today include Citizens for Excellence in Education, Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, and the Concerned Women of America led by Beverly LaHaye, wife of Tim LaHaye, who has become a media star in religious, conservative circles with his apocalyptic *Left Behind* book series.

Conservative organizations oriented toward, in David Horowitz's (2006) ironic words, taking "politics out of schools" (p. 371), abound in the culture of education today. Another online organization influenced by Horowitz's group Parents and Students for Academic Freedom (PSAF), ProtestWarrior.com, has created 160 high school chapters, arming students with "ammo that strikes at the intellectual solar plexus of the Left" (ProtestWarrior.com, 2006, p. 1). Another organization known as the Christian Copts of California distributed 5,000 booklets in several states denouncing a seventh-grade World History curriculum program as an "attempt to engrave Islam in the minds . . . of children" (MacDonald, 2005, p. 2).

Organizations such as PSAF and its affiliates have had a noticeable effect, as Horowitz (2007) himself was quick to claim. In November 2004, for example, a journalism teacher in Indianapolis was suspended after a group of parents criticized his decision to publish a controversial story in the Franklin Central High School newspaper about a classmate's arrest on murder charges (Olsen, 2004). A month later, a drama teacher in Paradise Valley, Arizona was fired after a parent complaint about a skit her students wrote and performed about the Holocaust (Madrid, 2004). In Grand Rapids, Michigan, an English teacher was suspended with pay for assigning a collection of stories, "Athletic Shorts," that included what parents described as racial slurs (*Book With Racial Slurs*, 2005). In April 2006, Sidney McGee, an art teacher from Frisco, Texas, was fired after parent complaints about the nude art that her 5th grade class viewed while

on a field trip to the Dallas Museum of Art (Pilkington, 2006). More recently, former Vice President Al Gore's Oscar-winning documentary on global warming *An Inconvenient Truth* has been the subject of furious debates in school board meetings (Libin, 2007).

Misco and Patterson (2007) outlined the case of Jay Bennish, a middle-school teacher in Colorado who was put on paid administrative leave for a month in the spring of 2006 after having been audiotaped by a student seemingly comparing the Bush administration to Hitler's Germany. Bennish was later interviewed under the klieg lights of the *Today Show* by Matt Lauer. Prentice Chandler (2006), an American history teacher in northern Alabama, detailed his struggles with his school's administration over his use of the primary source companion volume to Howard Zinn's classic *A People's History of the United States* text. Most recently, a California high school student and his parents filed a federal lawsuit in December, 2007 against his Advanced Placement European History teacher for alleged violation of Constitutional rights due to the teacher's persistent comments about religion (Haldane, 2007). These stories and others like them lead to a startling conclusion: it is remarkably easy to get fired merely for attempting to teach one's subject in a public school in the United States today.

In this context, the practical conclusions that classroom practitioners draw from their own experiences and those of fellow colleagues with teaching controversial public issues can either encourage or discourage them from pursuing a critical curricular agenda in the future. For example, Barton and Levstik (2004) commented on the ways in which the current political climate acts as a fetter against meaningful, empathetic discussions of public issues around race, gender and ethnicity in the social studies classroom. They stated:

(S)tudents (and teachers) in the United States are likely to have similar difficulty using what they have learned in history to examine controversial current issues. Not everyone wants to engage in reasoned judgment, develop an expanded view of humanity, or deliberate over the common good; many would rather stick to their own unexamined opinions, personal prejudices, and private desires. (p. 240)

Given this context, it is not surprising that Niemi and Niemi (2007) found that, “teachers convey their political opinions in the classroom in expected and unexpected ways” (p. 39). In their research, they found four patterns in this regard:

1) giving a direct opinion about politics and government; 2) giving advice to students about theirs and others’ political behavior; 3) expressing exasperation or frustration with the political system and politicians as well as name-calling of politicians and other government officials; and 4) commenting on government as it relates to their own classroom and/or school. (p. 39)

This dire situation, thus, calls for a research agenda that examines the experiences of veteran social studies teachers and the conceptions and stances toward teaching controversial subject matter that stem from these experiences.

Purpose of the Study

A profound paradox confronts researchers in social studies education today: at the same time that the field is flourishing in the halls of higher education, the relevance of research in American public schools is waning. The unfortunate result of a century-long attack on progressive modes of teaching and learning is a significant gap between research and practice. This is especially true in the social studies, which as Barton and Levstik (2004) suggested, is a field that has all but disappeared at the elementary level and is still dominated at the secondary level by content-driven history courses and traditional, teacher-centered pedagogical methods. They commented on this dispiriting educational arena.

Lawmakers argue that schools should teach to the test, and schools argue they should teach the way they think best. Researchers criticize teachers for not using primary sources, teachers criticize students for not wanting to learn, and students criticize textbooks for being deadly boring. What a mess. (p. 1)

As Patterson and Luft (2004) noted, the teaching and learning process is itself a construction and thus it is inevitable that most social studies teachers conceive of it in ways that often mimic and model the processes that they encountered in their own schooling experiences.

In this current climate of political and social reaction, those toiling in the trenches of classroom practice might then be forgiven for questioning the necessity for and relevance of research in their daily struggles. However, as I hope to support in this dissertation project, it is precisely within the current political mood in education that research can and must play a role in clarifying the needs and goals of teachers. In this dissertation research project, I hope to provide the rationale for research that situates itself on the solid theoretical ground of the constructivist tradition and seeks to empathize with and provide documentary evidence of the day-to-day reality of teachers' experiences.

The Nature of Controversy

This dissertation research project builds upon the existing body of scholarship on the conceptions of and stances toward controversy common among social studies teachers. Hess (2002) provided an invaluable definition of controversial public issues (CPI) as those that are currently under discussion, that take place in the public sphere of debate, and that are contested among different groups within society. Central to this scheme is the premise that CPI discussions involve unresolved questions of public policy. Good examples of these in today's educational sphere include debates over the reintroduction of school prayer, the inclusion of Creationism or Intelligent Design ideas in science classes, and the appropriateness of sexual education instruction; in other words, the equivalent of wedge issues in national political campaigns. Hess listed three attributes of a CPI: (a) that the controversy is live; that is, that there is an on-going and vigorous debate concerning the issue at hand; (b) a variety of segments of the population inform the debate from a multiplicity of perspectives, each looking at the issue through a specific cultural, political and/or social lens; and (c) there is a profound gulf between these positions among the participants in the debate about the CPI.

Hess (2007) more recently extended this basic definition in order to delineate public issues as either open or closed. By these distinctions, she meant merely that some issues, such as stem cell research, gay marriage, or gun control produce positions on both *pro* and *con* sides that advocates of either stripe could reasonably claim, and are thus open to debate. On the other hand, issues such as women's suffrage or the morality of lynching practices are conversely closed; that is, there is only one position--that is, in favor of women's suffrage and against lynching--that appears to be reasonable in polite society. Furthermore, she speculated that the majority of teachers would only countenance a discussion of open issues, while they would view a student's advocacy for the wrong side of a closed discussion as a breach of the norms of classroom etiquette and would likely treat the matter as a routine disciplinary incident, effectively shutting down the discussion.

Hess (2007) qualified these conceptions of controversy by stating that issues in the social studies can shift from open to closed (and even back to open again) depending upon the prevailing political winds of the time. For example, she imagined a period shortly after the Second World War, in which many social studies teachers may well have viewed the internment of Japanese-American citizens as a closed matter upon which most patriotic American citizens would agree on the expediency of the policy. As the war faded into memory, it eventually became an open issue that could be used efficaciously as a means of critical discussion, while today the consensus among teachers is that it should be a closed matter that constitutes a national disgrace. At the same time, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, Malkin (2004) re-opened this discussion, arguing for a return to the post-war consensus that the internment of a group of people thought to have sympathies with a nation's enemies was, and is, legitimate in a time of war. Indeed the idea of torture and its relationship to Constitutional law is an example of an issue that has shifted from closed, due to a long tradition of Enlightenment ideals surrounding human

rights, to a very lively open issue in the Bush era, in which various methods of torture have been re-interpreted as enhanced interrogation techniques.

Hess's provocative and interesting operational conception of controversy also requires the proviso that ideological disagreements will vary in different educational settings and contexts. What is controversial in a rural, Midwestern school district may be perfectly acceptable or even encouraged in an urban, northeastern school district. Cornbleth and Waugh's (1995) discussion of the high-profile cases of the California and New York social studies curriculum packages developed in the 1990s reinforces this point. While parents and educators in California felt confident enough to push for a social studies curriculum that would speak to the obvious diversity of California's public schools, a similarly-themed Curriculum of Inclusion in New York state was soundly defeated after prominent local conservative media outlets such as the *New York Post* rallied parents to oppose the curriculum. On the basis of these experiences, Cornbleth and Waugh ruefully concluded,

Despite the fact that teachers in the 1990s, particularly in urban areas, were becoming more aware of the inadequacy of curriculum and materials carried over from a halcyon time when white students were a majority, it is clear that teachers alone cannot effect the kinds of changes that are needed in the classroom. (p. 180)

It is certainly the case, as Cornbleth and Waugh (1995) pointed out, that the entire community must be involved in order to agitate for social change in schools, yet one can note a certain pessimism in their words, particularly about the ability of teachers to be part of that change agenda. By contrast, I will argue throughout this dissertation that the failure of reform efforts such as those in New York and California does not negate the possibility of success in the future; however, it does point toward the need for a bottom-up, grassroots strategy that begins in the classroom with the needs and voices of actual classroom practitioners.

Nonetheless, in order for this strategy to succeed, teachers need a sophisticated understanding of the political forces that operate within educational circles today. Kincheloe (2005) raised the critical issue of the power relationships within education that have perennially defined the outer limits of what is appropriate to discuss in a social studies classroom in a public high school. He asked, “Why are some constructions of educational reality embraced and officially legitimized by the dominant culture while others are repressed?” (p. 34). It is clear from a survey of the history of curricular organization that the subjects taught in public schools reflect the values of the power elite in society and education (Fitzgerald, 1979, Loewen, 1995; Zinn, 1980). For example, the perceived national security crisis provoked by the launching of the Sputnik satellite in 1957 paved the way for revamping mathematics and science curricula (Gutek, 2000). Berliner and Biddle (1995) pointed out that educational leaders in the 1980s and 1990s accommodated the needs of the corporate sector because of a perceived crisis in American economic competitiveness with Germany and Japan.

This issue of conceptions of controversy within the social studies curriculum therefore provides the first major category of interest in this current dissertation project.

Teachers’ Stances

While researchers in the social studies, especially those operating under cognitive constructivist understandings, appreciate the bewildering variety of approaches that teachers take toward their content, studies suggest that there are some common stances among teachers in regard to the use of controversial subject matter in the classroom. In his review of the literature concerning the debate over the role that teachers should assume in the discussion of controversial issues, Kelly (1986) presented the most sophisticated critique of the perspectives common to social studies practitioners. He identified these stances as that of “exclusive neutrality,” “exclusive partiality,” “neutral impartiality” and “committed impartiality” (p. 113).

By exclusive neutrality, Kelly (1986) referred to the teacher stance of total avoidance of issues that might be conceived of as controversial in the educational community. Kelly described the arguments put forward by the proponents of this stance: “Advocates of this position contend that teachers should not introduce into the curriculum any topics which are controversial in the broader community. Schools have an implicit obligation to serve equally their varied publics” p. 114).

Teachers serving in a public school system with increasingly diverse student populations would seem, under this scheme, to need even more sensitivity toward issues that might potentially offend one constituency or another than in the past when a more homogeneous student body might be taken for granted. There is an implicit assumption underlying this stance that controversial subjects, particularly hot-button issues involving sexuality or morality, are best left to other socializing institutions, such as the family or religious organizations. Excluding these issues from the classroom setting then, its proponents argue, preserves the non-partisan status of the school within the community.

In the second common teacher stance toward controversy--what Kelly (1986) termed exclusive partiality, teachers take what might on the surface seem the polar opposite approach: “This position is characterized by a deliberate attempt to induce students into accepting as correct and preferable a particular position on a controversial issue through means which consciously or unconsciously preclude an adequate presentation of competing points of view” (p. 116). At its most extreme and authoritarian level, teachers utilizing this approach actively shut down students who have the temerity to question the authority of their opinions and even grade students with opposing views in a punitive manner. It is precisely this stance that those such as Horowitz (2007) presume is rampant throughout secondary schools and institutions of higher learning in this country. Yet, Kelly was careful to insist that many of those operating under these

terms are not flagrant authoritarians but rather display exclusive partiality in more unconscious ways. These tactics include, for example, selection of texts that merely represent one side of a controversial topic or inviting exceptional students who are known to represent a particular view close to that of the teacher to speak in front of the class or participate in a debate. In addressing the reasons that teachers might employ these strategies, Kelly focused on their critique of contemporary culture, which, by offering endless individual options to students, seems to obviate the role of guidance: “In short, in a culture where knowledge can confuse more than clarify, contaminate more than liberate, some believe that students need to be shielded from systematic exposure to potentially harmful alternative perspectives” (p. 117). Teachers of this school of thought are likely to consider their students too naive or unschooled to be able to make meaning for themselves when it comes to the vital issues of the day.

Kelly (1986) referred to the third and most popular stance toward controversy among teachers as neutral impartiality. In this approach, teachers present a wide variety of materials regarding contentious issues for students to debate. At the same time, they remain scrupulous in their neutral distance from the material, even at the risk of seeming evasive to students curious about their views on the topics. Kelly described the method:

Overall, the teacher seeks to promote a classroom atmosphere where complexity of understanding, tolerance for ambiguity and responsiveness to constructive criticism are extended and where genuine dissent--the right to express an opposing view without ridicule, coercion or censure--flourishes. Challenging but achievable, this ideal of impartiality suggests a collaborative and passionate, if not conflict free, search for truth. (pp. 121-122)

Teachers pursue this method by employing an exemplary variety of modes, including guest speakers, library research, role playing and small group discussions. Kelly (1986) noted that this neutral impartiality seems to many pre-service and novice practitioners to adhere to the best practices within the field. Yet he critiqued the model for its cold rationality: “despite its

important strengths, this perspective suffers from problematic assumptions and a narrow rationalism, suggesting the need for a fourth major perspective on the teachers' role" (p. 127).

The neutral impartiality stance, despite its strengths, is thus deficient in that it carries with it the pretense of objectivity, which, in the students' eyes, might seem overly coy or even dishonest.

The fourth stance alluded to in Kelly's (1986) words is committed impartiality. In a stance that Kelly described as the most well-rounded and satisfying, the teacher enters a discussion on a controversial topic as a committed participant, offering candid perspectives as well as the rationales for these positions. At the same time, the teacher takes care to create an atmosphere of free inquiry among students with the presumption that no opinion is the definitive one for consideration. In the end, the teacher becomes what Brinkley (1999) called a pole of attraction for a particular set of ideas, while not disenfranchising students who may disagree with the teacher's stance. Kelly described the assumptions underlying this stance:

Committed impartiality entails two beliefs. First, teachers should state rather than conceal their own views on controversial issues. Second, they should foster the pursuit of truth by insuring that competing perspectives receive a fair hearing through critical discourse. (p. 130)

Kelly (1986) counseled that this voicing of viewpoints can legitimately be either teacher initiated or in response to student inquiry and should not be couched in the guise of devil's advocacy or "compromised with excessive humility or repeated qualification" (p. 131). This is a courageous stance in today's educational climate, and Kelly identified several critiques of the method. Many who adhere to either exclusive neutrality or neutral impartiality stances argue that there is an implicit contradiction involved in the committed impartiality stance; put plainly, that a teacher who admits to a committed position on an issue cannot be an impartial arbiter of classroom discussion. In addition, many point to the obvious disparities in power and authority within the classroom environment between teachers and students. While not disputing these,

Kelly put forward the contention that there need not be a contradiction implied with committed impartiality: “To acknowledge that there are certain clear-cut cases of abuse of teacher self-disclosure is not to assert, at least successfully, that all teacher self-disclosure is clearly violative of impartiality” (p. 131). In the end, Kelly’s advocacy for this position at least opened the door to the possibility of teacher advocacy and self-disclosure of views within a democratic classroom space. In this dissertation research project, I expand on Kelly’s theoretical model of teachers’ stances and develop a more practical model of teachers’ positions toward teaching controversial content.

In his work on teaching about environmental issues in the context of social studies classes in the United Kingdom, Hicks (2007) extended Kelly’s discussion to address an additional platform of stances--the cognitive and affective perspectives. Kelly contended that most social studies teachers who attempt to teach about issues such as climate change do so from the cognitive perspective, attempting to raise the consciousness of their students. He commented: “How do educators approach the matter of teaching about global issues? The initial response is often a desire to alert learners to the nature and importance of the problem, whether to do with environment, development, rights or conflict” (p. 75). This approach might involve presenting different perspectives on the issue of climate change--Hicks referred to neoliberal, neoconservative, and radical perspectives--and having students research and debate these perspectives in a classroom forum.

At the same time that Hicks (2007) felt that teachers using the cognitive approach have employed “an excellent learner-centered approach for investigating global issues,” he continued to feel that “what is often missing is the affective dimension” (p. 75). From this perspective, the goal of instruction shifts from a mere cognitive understanding of a social problem to creating a sense of personal feelings of responsibility and empowerment around the issue that might lead to

individual or social action. Hicks noted that classroom discussion is a vital piece of this kind of teaching practice that aims to encourage an affective response among students: “What ameliorated the initial sense of despair they felt when facing the state of the world was the opportunity to . . . meet as a group and discuss what they were feeling about the course” (p. 76). From this initial step, students can be shown a range of activist options from reformist action, such as buying green products to more radical action, such as attending demonstrations against polluters.

It is precisely these various stances and the meaning-making processes that contribute to their construction that I propose to study in this dissertation project.

Research Questions

Principal Research Question 1: What meanings do social studies teachers construct from their experiences with teaching controversial subject matter?

Ancillary Research Question 1: How do social studies teachers conceptualize controversy in the social studies?

Ancillary Research Question 2: How do these understandings intersect with their own teaching practice experiences, especially when it comes to teaching about controversial subject matter?

Ancillary Research Question 3: What teaching positions emerge from the conceptions and experiences?

Conclusions

Educational reform has been the by-word of educational policy in the past generation. As Grant (2007) pointed out, one consequence of this movement has been the standardization of social studies practice: “Although largely left out of the No Child Left Behind legislation, social studies remains a frequently tested subject on state-level standardized examinations” (p. 250).

The concentration of educational policymakers on standards and testing procedures during this period has had the unfortunate consequence of obscuring the need for research that focuses on the lives and voices of ordinary teachers and students. The top-down, bureaucratic nature of much of what has posed as educational reform during this period has thus created a lamentable suspicion of theory and research among those practicing in the field. However, rather than shrinking from this task in the face of this gap between research and practice, researchers in the social studies have a particular imperative to conduct investigations of the daily experiences of classroom practitioners as a means of stimulating grassroots reform in the field. Researchers such as Keith Barton, Ronald Evans, Stuart Foster, S. G. Grant, Linda Levstik, Wayne Ross, and Elizabeth Yeager have started this process by probing the ways in which students make sense of history and how teachers conceive of their teaching practices.

I would humbly wish that my own research will become a small part of this burgeoning movement toward democratizing the process of educational reform. My project begins from the premise that teachers will more effectively investigate their own teaching and learning practices if they feel free from ideological pressures to engage in free and open inquiry processes. At the same time, research that merely presents practical suggestions for practice to teachers often overwhelmed by the demands of the accountability movement is ultimately counterproductive. Many have conducted insightful research into the pedagogical routines of exemplary teachers when it comes to presenting controversial issues in the classroom (Hess, 2002). Others have focused on the conceptions of novice or pre-service teachers (Dawson-Salas, 2004; Misco & Patterson, 2007). Recently, Claire and Holden (2007) have produced an edited volume of essays considering the teaching of controversial issues, such as presenting issues of war and peace to young students, in a British context. However, there is a vacuum in the literature when it comes to addressing the stances of veteran social studies teachers in the United States. It is my hope that

this study will add significantly to our understanding of why so little critical teaching of controversial topics actually transpires in the classroom at a time when the research in the field cries out for more of it. As a consequence of conducting this dissertation project, it is my wish that my research will be a ray of hope and inspiration for those teachers who continue promote these principles of democratic, progressive inquiry in their classrooms.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The social studies teacher's stance toward the content material used in his or her classroom involves a complex set of calculations based on a variety of factors including his or her teaching philosophy, content knowledge, political perspectives and level of classroom teaching experience. In the current wave of what Zimmerman (2002) called "the culture wars in the public schools" (p. 2), social studies practitioners must also weigh a series of questions related to the ways in which this course content will be perceived by a number of different audiences. Will the content of this lesson provoke among students accusations of bias? Will the school's administration object? Will there be an angry phone call or parent conference as a result of the lesson? What will be the tone of the local or national media coverage in the case of a challenge? Above all of these questions, teachers must assess whether they are stepping into the realm of controversy. Answering these questions in a constructive manner requires a complex understanding of the history of academic freedom and the legal protections that are afforded public school teachers in the United States today.

The ability of public school teachers to address controversial social issues has a long and yet contested history in the United States. In this chapter, I present a review of the literature regarding this history. In the course of this survey, I argue that, while academic freedom has long been a central concern for American educators, particularly those operating in the arena of higher education, secondary-level practitioners have rarely been afforded the freedom to exercise full autonomy over their classroom practice. Indeed, this notion of academic freedom has throughout the history of American schooling run counter to the imperatives of the educational establishment. Finally, a critical look at the forces of power lying underneath curricular battles

today shows that these imperatives must be confronted openly and honestly in order for progress to be made toward the goals of organic teaching and learning.

Academic Freedom: A Historical Sketch

Academic freedom has long been regarded as part of the liberal democratic tradition and as a sacrosanct principle in the halls of academia. Philosophers such as John Locke, whose “Letter Concerning Toleration” (1689/1995) argued that states should have no control over the religious beliefs and observances of men and that tolerance should be extended to nonconformists and pagans, and Denis Diderot (1753) spoke eloquently to the Enlightenment conceptions of intellectual autonomy as a vital concern for pluralistic democracy. Much of American Constitutional law regarding the freedoms of religion, press, speech, and assembly has been an outgrowth of Locke's theoretical framework. John Stuart Mill (1859/2003) further expressed the need within such a society for engagement in multiple points of view, even deliberate falsehoods, without fear of suppression:

But the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race, posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error. (p. 100)

In the modern era, these philosophical statements have been inscribed in proclamations such as Article 19 of the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), which declared that, “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions, without interference, and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” In the United States, the right to academic freedom for university faculty was formally validated by organizations such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), which, in its founding manifesto, stated that,

“Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon free speech for truth and its free exposition” (1915). The National Council for the Social Studies (1969) in its own position statement “Academic Freedom and the Social Studies Teacher” echoed this idea:

A teacher’s academic freedom is his/her right and responsibility to study, investigate, present, interpret, and discuss all the relevant facts and ideas in the field of his/her professional competence. This freedom implies no limitations other than those imposed by generally accepted standards of scholarship. As a profession, the teacher strives to maintain a spirit of free inquiry, open-mindedness, and impartiality in the classroom. As a member of an academic community, however, the teacher is free to present in the field of his or her professional competence his/her own opinions or convictions and with them the premises from which they are derived. (p. 1)

At the same time, political elites through the ages have viewed education as a double-edged sword, vital for training the next generation of laborers and yet highly dangerous when oriented toward enlightenment and social justice. Chomsky (2003) noted that, “Controlling the general population has always been a dominant concern of power and privilege, particularly since the first modern democratic revolution in seventeenth century England” (p. 5). Thus, as education has become conceived of as both a means of socialization and of liberation, abuses of academic freedom have been legion in Western history from Socrates’s death sentence after having been convicted by the Athenian citizenry of the capital crime of corruption of youth to the tragic fate of Galileo, compelled to live under house arrest after recanting his life’s work to the Papacy.

While it is common among American citizens today to imagine Constitutional rights, such as the First Amendment restriction of Congress in regard to laws “prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press,” as permanent features of American society chiseled into the foundations of American democracy, the turbulent history of

struggles for the rights to speech, assembly and intellectual autonomy belies this assumption. Indeed, the credo that undergirds Americans' faith in the immutability of representative government is also frequently undermined by the very words of the Founding Fathers of that system of government. For example, as Parenti (1983) quoted him, John Jay once declared that, "The people who own the country ought to govern it" (p. 6). Alexander Hamilton shared this elitist political philosophy:

The voice of the people has been said to be the voice of God; and however generally this maxim has been quoted and believed, it is not true in fact. The people are turbulent and changing; they seldom judge or determine right. (as cited in Lodge, 1904, p. 401)

Given these sentiments, I argue that academic freedom--like other bourgeois, democratic liberties--is best understood not as a gift from above guaranteed by constitutional documents, but rather as the result of centuries of political struggle and subject to continual flux. If viewed in such a way, academic freedom thus becomes a goal to be fought for and to maintain through active engagement rather than a right that can be passively counted upon in times of need. In addition, the right to academic freedom is neither consistent nor inconsistent with the major narratives of American public schooling, or schooling in other nations for that matter; rather, it exists on a separate plain, often buffeted by the prevailing imperatives of education as a means of facilitating assimilation, industrialization, modernization or promotion of national security. As we have seen in stark relief in the past 6 years, individual civil liberties often suffer at moments of national crises, and academic freedom has certainly been no exception to this rule. Bracey (2002) urged us to be wary of such a discourse of crisis, "because each time the United States faces a social crisis of some kind, the schools get blamed for it" (p. 44). By reviewing the literature related to the history of academic freedom, I hope to shed some light on the varying conceptions of this vital right for teachers and to recommend measures for its protection in the future.

Conceptions of Academic Freedom

Reform in American public education has typically come as the result of a perceived national crisis. At the same time, as Berliner and Biddle (1995) noted, a false sense of crisis has often been used in a manipulative manner in order to further a variety of political agendas in education: “One of the worst effects of the Manufactured Crisis has been to divert attention away from the *real* problems faced by American education--problems that are serious and that are escalating in today’s world” (p. 4, emphasis in original). The American public school system, or common schools in the contemporary parlance, rose as a direct response to the insights of major figures in the common school reform movement. As Kaestle (1983) noted, reformers such as Horace Mann, Henry Barnard, and Catherine Beecher were appalled by the lack of professionalism among the teaching faculty, the outdated and mechanical nature of the curriculum, and the very decrepit qualities of the facilities common to many Antebellum school systems. They were further motivated by a reformist desire, doubtless borne of their middle class, Protestant roots to improve society. Kaestle summarized the principal tenets of common school reformers:

(T)he sacredness and fragility of the republican polity . . . ; the importance of individual character in fostering social morality; the central role of personal industry in defining rectitude and merit; the delineation of a highly respected but limited domestic role for women; the importance for character building of familial and social environment (within certain racial and ethnic limitations); the sanctity and social virtues of property; the equality and abundance of economic opportunity in the United States; the superiority of American Protestant culture; the grandeur of America’s destiny; and the necessity of a determined public effort to unify America’s polyglot population, chiefly through education. (pp. 76-77)

This seemingly contradictory ideology with its twin thrusts of individual rights and public solidarity thus produced a school system that was at once revolutionary in its structural reforms and, at the same time, hostile to dissent from without or, especially, within. These institutional changes, while admittedly improving the nature of schooling, also had the result, perhaps even

intentionally so, of stripping some of the autonomy from the teaching faculty. Indeed, the curriculum reforms undertaken during the common school period were perhaps the first instance of what Christian-Smith (1991) referred to as teacher-proof materials. While few would recommend a return to the widespread use of corporal punishment in American public schools, its gradual removal from the classroom management arsenal represented a loss of control for public schools teachers.

With the standardization of curriculum and the increased professionalization of the teaching field came the institutionalization of the teacher training process in so-called Normal Schools (from the French term *l'ecole normale*). Ogren (2005) listed the many virtues of Normal Schooling, among them that these institutions provided working class and immigrant women with employment opportunities unthinkable to a generation before. Institutions such as Catherine Beecher's Hartford Women's Seminary opened in 1832, also advanced the Common school reformers goal of feminizing the teaching faculty as they viewed women as more natural and nurturing educators of youth. This sentiment, again perhaps inadvertently, led to a gendered split between teaching and administrative tracks that continues to this day. Ogren noted that female graduates of state Normal Schools tended to teach for a few years before marriage, whereas "men tended to move quickly from teaching into school administration, which had more status among middle-class professions" (p. 186). This bifurcation between teaching and administration has had far-reaching effects on competing notions of academic freedom afforded to teachers and administrators.

As this division between teaching and administration became institutionalized in Normal Schools, the gap between research and practice--still a key issue today--grew apace. Academic freedom is so closely entwined with the history of higher education as to be described by Hofstadter in his and Metzger's classic history of the subject as "concurrent with the

development of the university from the twelfth century” (Hofstadter & Metzger, 1955, p. 3). As Stone (1996) reported, the late 19th century represented a period of genuine revolution in American higher education. During this time, universities such as Cornell, Johns Hopkins, Stanford, and Chicago were founded with the mission of implementing dramatic reforms, such as the introduction of an elective course system, graduate instruction and scientific courses. Stone noted that, “New academic goals were embraced. To criticize and augment as well as to preserve the tradition became an accepted function of higher education” (p. 64).

Nineteenth century debates about academic freedom in universities were energized by the discussion of two issues--academia’s response to Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution and the influence of the German university. Stone (1996) argued that the gradual acceptance of Darwinism led to challenging the institutional control of the clergy in universities: “In the attack on clerical control of universities, the most effective weapon was the contention that the clergy were simply incompetent in science” (p. 347). No less dramatic was the effect of Prussian conceptions of academic freedom on the American university. Reflecting on his numerous pilgrimages to German universities of the day, for example, William Rainey Harper (1892/1938), the first president of the University of Chicago, remarked:

When for any reason the administration of a university or the instruction in any of its departments is changed by an influence from without, or any effort is made to dislodge an officer or a professor because the political sentiment or the religious sentiment of the majority has undergone a change, at that moment the institution has ceased to be a university. (p. xxiii)

This comment reflected the one major distinction between Prussian and American conceptions of academic freedom. As Stone (1996) stated:

The German conception of academic freedom distinguished sharply between freedom within and freedom outside the university. Within the walls of the academy, the German conception allowed wide latitude of utterance. But outside the university, the same degree of freedom was not condoned. (p. 67)

While Stone continued that, “American professors rejected this limitation” (p. 67), the right of university faculty to express themselves at public lectures, demonstrations and other events is precisely what chafes at many conservatives who accuse the current professoriate of political correctness (D’Souza, 1991; Kimball, 1998; Kors & Silvergate, 1999).

In much the same way as the late 19th century amounted to, in Hofstadter and Metzger’s (1955) words, “a revolution in higher education,” (p. 277), America’s public schools went through a similarly fundamental restructuring period, often referred to by historians of education as The Progressive Era. Stone (1996) remarked on the irony that many of the new, more secular-minded university presidents of this era--Harvard’s Charles W. Eliot, for example--played a key role in this restructuring of public schools. Brought together under the auspices of the National Education Association, the Committee of Ten led by Eliot issued a report that began the vogue for standardization of curriculum that continues with state-sanctioned content frameworks today. This new wave of administrators sought to create a school system that would act primarily as an agent of socialization, inculcating students with the skills and mentality that would allow them to become useful, productive members of the industrial capitalist order. Tyack (1974) offered the explanation that “‘social control’ exists in some form in every organized society from the Bushmen to the Eskimos and in every epoch of recorded history” (p. 10). This is, of course, correct, and yet it is no exaggeration to say that figures such as the dean of Stanford University’s School of Education Ellwood Cubberley took this belief in what Bowles and Gintis (1976) called social reproduction to an unprecedented level when he suggested that schools are “factories in which students are products to be molded” (Cubberley, as cited in Tyack, p. 190). While few educators today would share Cubberley’s more sanguine turns of phrase, the influence of the social efficiency model to this day is inescapable.

During the 1890s, progressive thought began to split into two camps, referred to by Rury (2005) as administrative progressive and pedagogical progressive wings. While they shared the modernizing zeal of administrators such as Cubberley and Eliot, those interested in reforming schools from within by adopting new methods of teaching increasingly came to reject the social efficiency model. Principal among these innovators was the philosopher John Dewey, who played a key role in this pedagogical revolution by founding the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago before moving to New York City to take up a leading position at Columbia Teachers College. Dewey (1928), who as its first president wrote the AAUP statement on academic freedom cited earlier, believed that the right to free inquiry in academia was essential and developed a sophisticated framework for dealing with its complex issues. Ironically, he disdained the phrase academic freedom because, as he punned, “there really is nothing academic about freedom” (Dewey, 1928, p. 332). Instead, he insisted that, “freedom of mind, freedom of thought, freedom of inquiry, freedom of discussion is education, and there is no education, no real education, without these elements of freedom” (Dewey, 1928, p. 332). Following this logic, any challenge to these freedoms would fundamentally destabilize the foundations of intellectual integrity upon which he believed academia rested and would therefore be an “attack upon the very idea of education and upon the possibility of education realizing its purpose” (p. 332). For these reasons, Dewey far preferred the term “freedom of education” (1936, p. 376) to academic freedom, as it would be a more all-encompassing concept that included the entire academic community rather than merely instructors and their students.

From his vantage point in the early part of the 20th century, Dewey identified two major sources of the threat to this freedom: tradition and the imperatives of a political and economic elite. Dewey (1938) critiqued the curriculum of the traditional school as inert and producing experiences that would alienate students from their educations. In this traditional context, Dewey

(1938) commented: “(T)he subject matter consists of bodies of information and skills that have been worked out in the past; therefore, the chief business of the school is to transmit them to the new generation” (p. 17). This short, prescient statement stands as an effective antidote to the prescriptions of contemporary advocates of canonical cultural literacy such as Hirsch (1988) and Ravitch (2003). The more pernicious variety of threats to freedom of education, for Dewey (1936), stemmed from the attempts to “close the minds, mouths, and ears of students and teachers alike to all that is not consonant with the practices and beliefs of the privileged class that represents the economic and political status quo” (p. 377). As the 20th century progressed, educators saw Dewey’s worst fears in this regard confirmed as education more and more became shackled to the imperatives of this elite and the marketplace that is their primary arena.

Twentieth Century Struggles for Academic Freedom

As the 20th century dawned and produced a series of global conflagrations, education became gradually more tied to the needs of the national security state. This began to appear with the advent of the involvement of the United States in the First World War. Spring (1992) detailed the efforts of the Wilson administration’s Committee for Public Information (CPI) in disciplining teachers accused of making anti-war statements. The CPI, established a mere 2 weeks after the declaration of war against the Central Powers, included a number of notable educators, including Guy Stanton Ford, dean of the University of Minnesota’s graduate school, and the social efficiency advocate William Bagley, who was chosen to edit the CPI’s primary organ National School Service (NSS). Under Bagley’s leadership, the NSS distributed pro-war propaganda to the public school system by delivering issues directly to individual schools. As Spring (1992) described it, “(t)he major part of each issue of the NSS was devoted to detailed lessons for elementary and high school classes designed to teach patriotism, the evils of the enemy, and the

principles of ‘democracy’” (p. 24). The bulletin, among other objectives, encouraged teachers to promote war games and military-oriented arts lessons in their classrooms:

No form of occupation material can claim exemption from war service. Drawings of ponies and friendly cows are supplanted by galloping cavalry horses. Crayoned ships sail the ocean bringing supplies to our soldiers, while bits of folded paper floating through the air become miniature air ships. Clay cannons, bullets and soldiers are a common sight on the modeling table. Soldier games and marching songs are called for. “Over There” seems to be known to all and is more popular than the most tuneful childish melody. (Spring, 1992, p. 24)

Not surprisingly, many teachers objected to such a blatant use of their classrooms as a means of disseminating war-time propaganda. However, at a time in which the rights of teachers were ill-defined, Evans (2004) noted that teachers were counseled by their administrators to display an enthusiasm for the war effort and cautioned against the use of any material that might be construed as dwelling upon the horrors of war.

As the gap between research and practice that had begun in Normal Schools of the 19th century continued to grow in a new century, groups of academics such as those centered around Columbia Teachers College began to forge radical conceptions of social studies instruction often termed social reconstructionism. Social reconstructionism, as Dennis (1989) noted, grew out of the view that schools in an era of crisis for industrial capitalism could not merely train students for future jobs in a failed economic system. Dennis commented that, after a lengthy and inspirational visit to the Soviet Union in 1929, George Counts

came to believe that a planned economy had to be an essential feature of any well-run industrial society, and that view was reinforced on his return to America early in 1930, when he saw at first hand the effects of capitalism gone amok. (p. 37)

Counts believed that schools could play an integral role in promoting collectivism as a means of social change. Writing in the depths of the Depression, Counts (1934) stated:

Any completely satisfactory solution of the problem of education therefore would seem to involve fairly radical social reconstruction. The fact is that for the most part contemporary society is not organized primarily for the education of its children or for

the achievement of any other humane purpose. Such matters are largely subordinated to the processes of wealth production and accumulation. (p. 562)

One of the most common methods of encouraging this empathetic, humane response in children was by engaging them in works of New History such as David Saville Muzzey's *An American History* or Charles Beard's *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*. Despite their overwhelming popularity during the 1920s and 1930s, as Zimmerman (2002) explained, these textbooks came in for a withering attack from not just patriotic organizations such as the American Legion but also ethnic societies that felt they were misrepresented or under represented in these texts.

Challenges to academic freedom in the first half of the 20th century, thus, often came in the form of organized campaigns against progressive and radical history textbooks. As the country became mired in depression and war in the 1930s and 1940s, schools became a focal point for a dialogue on the nature of patriotism. During the 1930s, Harold Rugg (1931), one of the founders of the Teachers College program at Columbia University, developed a series of social studies textbooks that strongly reflected the social reconstructionist ideals expounded by Rugg's associates Beard and Counts. Evans (2004) described the "Man and His Changing Society" series of texts and workbooks as "centered around guiding principles distilled from the frontier thinkers, including the growth of modern cultures, development of loyalties and attitudes for decision making, and the synthesis of knowledge through social studies" (p. 60). The textbooks proved enormously popular, selling more than two million copies during a 10 year period and established Rugg as the primary voice in social studies education for his time and, not coincidentally, a lightning rod for controversy.

As the country became drawn into the global conflict that would become World War II, the need to stress patriotic duty became paramount and Rugg's textbooks, with their focus on

social issues, problem solving, and critical thinking, came under intense scrutiny and criticism. Zimmerman (2002) reported that many of these attacks were launched by civic organizations such as the American Legion and the Chambers of Commerce, who feared the influence that Rugg's critical stress on issues of economic inequality would have on children suffering the effects of the Depression: "The attack on the Rugg books was swift and sudden, steam rolling across the country even more rapidly than the texts had done" (p. 67). Rugg and his books were, not surprisingly, labeled Communist and Rugg himself a Fifth Columnist. A shell-shocked Rugg (1931) defended himself and his conception of a unified course of social studies against what he termed a manufactured crisis, writing that students needed to "utilize facts, meanings, generalizations, and historical movement. Whenever history is needed to understand the present, history is presented. . . . The same thing has been done with economic and social facts and principles" (pp. vi-vii). Despite the mass removal of Rugg's books from the shelves of American classrooms in this period, Evans (2004) remarked on the lasting legacy of Rugg's approach:

Rugg's influence on the social studies was quite extensive, despite the attacks, which would lead to a discontinuation of the textbook series. Workbooks for the series continued to sell well after the attacks, an indication that the books were still being used for some time in schools well into the 1940s. Despite, and perhaps partly because of, the lasting fame generated by public uproar over his textbook series, Rugg's achievement remains to this day the high point of progressive reform in the social studies. (p. 65)

In perhaps the apogee of attacks on academic freedom in the history of the United States, Cold War anti-communism on American universities and high school campuses saw scores of educators subpoenaed to testify before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Caute (1978), Kille (2004) and Sanders (1979) further chronicled the cases of academics that were fired for suspected acts of subversion during the 1950s in New York, Nevada and Washington states respectively. Less has been written, however, on the effect of the censorious mood of this period on secondary-level teachers. Schrecker (1986) dated the beginning of this period of reaction to

March 22, 1947, the day that President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9835, which mandated a new national security program premised on the declared loyalty of public employees. Central to this act was the promotion of loyalty oaths, required of all public employees, including public school teachers and faculty and staff members of state universities and colleges. Schrecker commented ironically that, “Since the security measures already in place had largely eliminated most Communists and other dissidents from sensitive positions, the new program was superfluous, except as a political gesture” (p. 4). Superfluous or not, these loyalty oaths were taken quite seriously and literally by administrations of public institutions and were often used to dismiss teachers and university faculty who either refused to adhere to or merely ignored them. Despite the threat, there was significant opposition and resistance to the oaths. O. L. Davis (2000) remembered:

We college students opposed the loyalty oaths that the Texas legislature imposed upon teachers in public schools and colleges and upon all students at public colleges and universities. One of my ex-GI classmates expressed his contempt of the law by signing, across several semesters, names like “Joseph Stalin” and “Vladimir Lenin” on the copy of his oath, each of which a local official in the busy registration line duly notarized. (pp. xi-xii)

Loyalty oaths were based on new and often vaguely worded definitions of what it meant to be a subversive person. For example, the Ober Law, enacted by the Maryland legislature in 1949, defined as subversive anyone:

Who commits or aids in the commission, or advocates, abets, advises *or teaches* by any means any person to commit, attempt to commit, or aid in the commission of any act intended to promote the overthrow, destruction, or alteration of, the constitutional form of the government of the United States, or the State of Maryland . . . by revolution, force, or violence, or who is a member of a subversive organization. (Guttek, 2000, p. 106, author’s emphasis)

As a result of the combination of the strict adherence to loyalty oaths and a broad definition of dissent and subversion, thousands of teachers and university personnel lost their jobs in the period of 1947-1950. Foster (2000), for example, reported that over 300 teachers in

the New York City public school system were fired in 1948 and 1949 after investigations into their acts of subversion or ties to the Communist Party (CP).

The House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), as Schrecker (1998) detailed, grew out of earlier committees, such as the Dies Committee, that responded to the growth of the CP during the years of the Great Depression. In 1946, HUAC became a permanent standing committee with a broad mandate to investigate charges of Communist subversion within public institutions. This corresponded with an era in which committee members and its supporters issued sensational charges that supporters of the Soviet Union existed within the top levels of the federal government. The 1950 conviction of high-ranking U.S. State Department official Alger Hiss only served to stoke these fears among the American populace; Hiss was convicted for perjuring himself during testimony in hearings responding to the accusations made by writer Whittaker Chambers that Hiss was a Soviet spy. The successful prosecution of Hiss established a pattern of public hearings held between 1951 and 1954, in which noted individuals in public life from writers to Hollywood producers were subpoenaed and called before HUAC in order to testify about their subversive activities. As Sanders (1979) noted, those who refused to appear or answer questions before the committee--often citing the Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination--were charged with contempt of Congress and held to large fines or imprisonment.

University faculty members were often targets of these investigations. For example, Schrecker (1986) outlined the case of Johns Hopkins University professor Owen Lattimore, a recognized expert in the field of China affairs, who was brought before the committee in 1952 as a result of having been named a Communist conspirator by ex-CP member Louis Budenz. After a lengthy hearing, the final HUAC report found that Lattimore was a “conscious articulate instrument of the Soviet conspiracy” and cited him for perjury (Schrecker, 1986, p. 166). In the

aftermath of the hearings, Lattimore was allowed to keep his position, but his reputation was severely damaged. Dozens of academics faced a similar fate before the HUAC hearings were brought to an abrupt end in 1954 as a result of the damage to McCarthy and the committee's reputation in the popular media. While the focus of HUAC was clearly on America's professoriate, Foster (2000) noted that America's classroom teachers did not escape the attention of the witch-hunters. He commented that teachers, unlike academics, had little if any formal protection: "At mid-century, more than half of all teachers in the United States were untenured; their job insecurity was prevalent, and their professional status was low. To advocate communism in this climate was to invite almost certain dismissal" (p. 19).

As the reactionary 1950s turned the corner into the radical 1960s, America's teachers were faced with a new challenge--how to respond to students who were taking on sometimes revolutionary, new views and expected their mentors to share in their enthusiasm for activism in the realm of civil rights and opposition to the United States military intervention in Vietnam. Some intellectuals were attracted to the first stirrings of, for example, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, while others, even those prominent in the Old Left, recoiled at what they saw as the juvenility and bad manners of the new activism. Jehn (1996) recalled that, as the Johnson administration dramatically expanded the bombing campaign in Vietnam, many academics joined hands with students at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor and other radicalized campuses to organize a series of impromptu teach-ins. In these actions, activist professors and students were energized by the examples of the 1930s sit-down strikes that led to the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organization, as well as the more recent acts of civil disobedience at lunch counters in Woolworth's stores throughout the South. At the same time, however, Jehn reported that activists were divided in terms of the nature of their protest: moderates pressured by Columbia University president Grayson Kirk's argument that academics "should hesitate before

(advocating for a cause) simply because . . . he can never entirely shed his scholar's gown . . .” felt a weight of responsibility about their roles as educators (Kirk, as cited in Jehn, p. 163). Yet Michigan anthropologist Marshall Sahlin captured the mood of the period when he was reported to have cried out in the midst of an all-night campus debate that, “They say we’re neglecting our responsibilities as teachers. Let’s show them how responsible we feel. Instead of teaching out, we’ll teach in-all night” (as cited in Levitas, 1965, p. 24). In the end, the National Teach-ins of 1965, though short-lived, served to challenge the traditional notions of academics as non-partisan arbiters of cultural knowledge.

Legal Conceptions of Academic Freedom

The late 1960s also saw major advances in rights for public school students, particularly emerging from the venue of the Supreme Court. In the 1969 decision in the *Tinker vs. Des Moines* case, the court radically re-defined the rights of high school students by stating that these rights “do not end at the schoolhouse gates” (Tinker, 1969, p. 2). The decision stemmed from an incident in December 1965 in which three Iowa high school students, including the plaintiffs in the case, John and Mary Beth Tinker, wore black armbands decorated with peace symbols to school in order to protest the on-going United States military intervention in Vietnam. The school subsequently suspended the three students until they agreed to adhere to the school policy proscribing political statements. In the majority decision, Justice Abe Fortas found that the Tinkers had engaged in political expression, which could not be denied them under the Constitution. This Tinker test, while contested over the years, has continued to be used in deciding similar cases around students’ rights, although it is unclear whether it will hold up to scrutiny under the current conservative incarnation of the Court, which recently decided against a group of Alaskan students who had displayed a banner reading “Bong Hits for Jesus” during a school assembly.

Given the relative paucity of literature regarding the rights of classroom practitioners in public schools, it has been difficult for teachers to negotiate the fine line between reasonable and appropriate advocacy and inappropriate attempts to inculcate values in students. In the absence of clear guidelines within the field, trade unions and organizations dedicated to civil liberties have frequently weighed in with their own conceptual frameworks. The American Civil Liberties Union (1994), for instance, issued its own “Policy Guide” on classroom advocacy, which stresses the importance of an overall classroom atmosphere of free inquiry:

This should include discussion of controversial issues without the assumption that they are settled in advance or that there is only one “right” answer in matters of dispute. Such discussion should include presentation of divergent opinions and doctrines, past and present, on a given subject. The teacher’s own judgment forms a part of this material. If such judgment is clearly stated, students are better able to appraise it and to differ from it on the basis of other materials and views placed at their disposal than they would be if a teacher were to attempt to conceal bias by a claim to “objective” scholarship. (p. 4)

While, as Strossen (1996) commented, there is no definitive Supreme Court precedent in relation to academic freedom, “. . . we can draw some inferences both from the Court’s general pronouncements about academic freedom or First Amendment rights in the classroom setting . . . ” (p. 74). In its *Sweezy vs. New Hampshire* decision in 1957, for example, the Court stated: “Teachers and students must always remain free to inquire, to study and evaluate, to gain new maturity and understanding; otherwise our civilization will stagnate and die” (as cited in Strossen, p. 77). Ten years later, in the *Keyshian vs. Board of Regents of the University of New York*, the Court echoed this declaration: “Our nation is deeply committed to safeguarding academic freedom, which is of transcendent value to all of us and not just to the teachers concerned” (as cited in Strossen, p. 77). At the same time, however, Strossen noted that the courts have to date failed to adequately clarify the contours of these rights. Indeed, far from this, Strossen stated:

The Supreme Court has actually done the opposite, by repudiating it to some extent. Along with its pronouncements about schools' duty not to indoctrinate their students, the Court has also declared that public schools not only *may* inculcate certain ideas or values in their students but also indeed that they have a *duty* to do so. (pp. 77-78, emphases in original)

Thus, the judicial system has left open to interpretation the question of which ideas and values are central to the school curriculum and which may fall outside the mainstream.

Advances in multicultural education, for example, provoked a profound reaction among conservative educators in a series of conflicts that came to be dubbed The P.C. Wars. In the early 1990s, the vogue in the popular media for attacking supposed political correctness in education created a virtual cottage industry of books accusing various progressive academic institutions of censorship. The very titles of these books--*Profscam* (Sykes, 1989), *Tenured Radicals* (Kimball, 1998), *Kindly Inquisitors* (Rauch, 1995), *The Shadow University* (Kors & Silvergate, 1999), to name but a few--is enough to give one a flavor of what these books offered: dark, apocalyptic portraits of former 1960s radicals turned tweed-jacketed tenured academics run amok inside America's pristine, Ivy-walled fortresses. In the most commercially successful of these books, D'Souza (1991) detailed a series of examples in which misanthropic deans and ideologically hide-bound professors relentlessly beat up on their impressionable students, restricting their learning opportunities with slanted curricula and draconian speech codes. D'Souza, a former editor of the conservative student newspaper *The Dartmouth Review*, became a leading spokesman of this movement against the politically correct crimes of universities against their students. Describing the faculty of Stanford University, D'Souza complained, ". . . (they) have placed ideological prejudice at the center of their curriculum" (p. 92). Among these alleged prejudices were propensities toward Marxist historical theory, literary criticism, feminism, multiculturalism, and the Frankfurt school. Despite an over reliance on anecdotal evidence to buttress his startling charges, D'Souza and like-minded critics had a good deal of success in

shifting public opinion in the 1990s, with some real consequences. Levine (1996) commented on the lasting influence of the P.C. Wars:

Those who oppose current developments in higher education . . . have not been able to halt the continued evolution of a more eclectic, open, culturally diverse, and relevant curriculum through the persuasiveness of their case and their scholarship, but they have been exceedingly skillful in casting aspersions on and perverting the meaning of those developments. (p. 171)

Indeed, those such as Horowitz (2007) involved in the current campaigns to include Academic Bills of Rights in the codes of universities across the country have attested to the influence that they have drawn from these earlier campaigns against political correctness.

The Contemporary Culture Wars

It is no coincidence that a parallel struggle emerged in the 1990s around attempts to draft frameworks for what had been identified by the first Bush administration's America 2000 policy as the core subjects. What began as a well-intentioned and yet naïve attempt to resolve such nuts and bolts issues as scope and sequence and core topics among history teachers quickly mushroomed into what Evans (2004) described accurately as "the runaway train of standards reform" (p. 149). The first salvo in this battle was launched in 1994 against the attempt, led by a group of scholars around the University of California-Los Angeles, to construct a new national framework for history instruction. This episode was documented by a group of participants, Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn (1997):

In the predawn hours of October 20, 1994, Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and other Californians helping to develop the National History standards were rattled out of their slumber. East Coast friends, having scanned their morning copies of *The Wall Street Journal*, were phoning, the three-hour time difference forgotten in their stunned reaction to Lynne Cheney's editorial page article attacking the standards. The banner headline pronounced "The End of History." (p. 3)

In the *Wall Street Journal* piece, Cheney (1994), a former chairperson of the National Endowment for the Humanities, painted a bleak portrait of the future of traditional history

education: “Imagine an outline for the teaching of American history in which George Washington makes only a fleeting appearance and is never described as our first president” (p. A22E). Nash, a respected historian, and his colleagues in turn accused Cheney of deliberate obfuscation in suggesting that the frameworks were to be used in classroom settings rather than as guidelines for teaching. After several rounds in the national media and in the halls of the U.S. Senate, which in 1995 censured the frameworks by a vote of 99-1, Nash offered to re-draft the frameworks in a manner that might be pleasing to everyone involved. The final draft was, in the estimation of Evans (2004), “a watered-down version designed not to offend. It had the desired impact, blunting the criticism of the earlier volumes and receiving a much more positive reception” (p. 168). Indeed, Ravitch (2003) praised the final version for removing “the most politically charged language” (p. 137). What exactly did conservatives object to in the original draft of the National History standards? Ravitch explained that it was its vision of a United States with its origins in multiculturalism:

The defining mark of the UCLA standards was their claim that American history began as the meeting of three worlds: African, Amerindian and European. This was a rejection of the traditional interpretation, which had traced the origins of the American nation to the English influence on American language, law, government, religion, culture, and institutions. (pp. 137-138)

This incident must be seen in the context of a series of culture wars over the historical canon in the Reagan/Bush years, including the controversy over architect Maya Lin’s design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, the publication of Martin Bernal’s two-volume study on the Egyptian influence on ancient Athens, *Black Athena*, the 500th anniversary commemoration of Columbus’s voyage to the Americas, and the Smithsonian Institute’s exhibition “The West as America.” These campaigns have taken on more urgency in the periods surrounding Presidential election campaigns, at which point public education has often been used as a wedge issue to stimulate the activism of the conservative base.

Recent years have seen the rise of organizations such as the Students for Academic Freedom (SAF) and its K-12 adjunct Parents and Students for Academic Freedom (PSAF) that call for the implementation of an Academic Bill of Rights (ABOR) on college and secondary school campuses. Its principal organizer David Horowitz, a former 1960s-era student radical turned neo-conservative media pundit, has made frequent appearances on talk radio and cable news programs advocating for the ABOR, which has been offered as legislation in some 23 states (McKenna, 2006). As Jacobson (2006) reported, these efforts have been upended in states such as Pennsylvania after thoroughgoing investigative research has failed to produce evidence to support Horowitz's contention that schools and universities are increasingly run by radical ideologues. In December 2003, the American Association of University Professors issued a statement condemning the ABOR project as "Orwellian" and a "grave threat to the fundamental principles of academic freedom" (AAUP, 2003, p. 2).

These set-backs have not slowed SAF's advocacy; indeed, through the organization's website, Horowitz and his supporters openly encourage students to audio-record lectures and report professors who engage political topics deemed controversial by the organization--the Iraq war, for example--to university administrations. SAF's mission statement (2004) instructs students to:

Note and object to events that abuse the academic nature of the university. These include one-sided faculty political teach-ins, one-sided faculty conferences and one-sided faculty lecture series that are inappropriately partisan events in an academic setting. Make a list of these events and demand reforms from the appropriate university authorities to ensure representation of diverse viewpoints. (p. 3)

Despite the organization's claims that the ABOR merely "codifies the principles of free speech and free inquiry first introduced by the American Association of University Professors nearly a century ago" (SAF, 2004, p. 1), SAF and its adjuncts offer a radical new conception of academic freedom that pits the freedom of students against their professors and teachers in an

almost binary opposition. Indeed, Horowitz (2006) compiled a list of what he referred to as “The 101 Most Dangerous Academics,” largely profiled by SAF members and supporters. Not coincidentally, one of those included on Horowitz’s list--University of Colorado ethnic studies professor Ward Churchill--was recently fired by university regents after a lengthy controversy involving his comments about the 9/11 attacks. Horowitz (2007) subsequently made the curious defense that his earlier book’s provocative subtitle was a publisher’s choice that he opposed:

To be fair, the subtitle of the book was a provocation and the response somewhat predictable, even though “dangerous” was not a claim actually made in the book. The subtitle was added to my original title by the publisher long after I had finished the manuscript. (p. 81)

Horowitz presumably failed to see the irony that this mea culpa appeared in a chapter of his latest book *Indoctrination U.* titled “Dangerous Professors.”

Horowitz (2007) more recently turned his attention toward K-12 public schools and teacher training programs, which he described as “a political movement that had targeted the educational system as a Gramscian platform to advance its agenda . . .” (p. 104). Horowitz saved most of his ire for what he terms the social justice movement, which he charged with violating its professional obligations to its students by promoting the idea that “American society is inherently ‘oppressive’ and ‘systematically racist, ‘sexist’ and ‘classist’ and thus discriminates institutionally against women, nonwhites, working Americans and the poor” (p. 107). Horowitz concluded:

The leftist political agenda of social justice educators undermines this traditional vision of the role of the American public school system. The historical ideal of public schooling as a means of assimilating all children, and particularly the children of recent immigrants, into a common civic and democratic culture is now under assault by education professors advocating social justice and class conflict and deriding the ideal of a common civic culture as nothing more than capitalist hegemony. (p. 110)

In this brief statement of purpose, Horowitz laid bare the political inclinations behind his conception of academic freedom. While making the pretense of neutrality and objectivity,

Horowitz instinctively fell back on the principles that motivated the social efficiency advocates 100 years ago. As Ross (2000) pointed out, the reality of this stance is that material that upholds the status quo is considered objective, while material that encourages students to make critical judgments is labeled political. “However,” he asked us to consider, “neutrality *is* a political category, that is, not supporting any factions in a dispute” (p. 44). Using this metric, Horowitz and his ABOR project is, thus, a highly-politicized movement engaged in preserving the privileges of powerful, entrenched interests in education and the wider society.

In order to combat effectively these threats to academic freedom and not to be caught off guard, Brinkley (1999) opened a dialogue about the importance of understanding the precise political direction of these academic freedom challenges. In contrast to the wealth of material regarding intellectual freedom in the university setting, there has been a relative lack of literature regarding conceptions of and threats to academic freedom for secondary level teachers. Murphy (1990) attributed this absence of concern to the confusion surrounding the issue within the ranks of the major teachers’ unions. Apple (2001) further surmised that teachers have not been afforded the same rights as university faculty due to the progressive de-skilling of teachers in an era of increasing standardization of curriculum. Bracey (2002) termed these developments “The War on Public Schools.” Kincheloe (2005) commented that “‘No Child Left Behind’ reforms demand disempowered teachers who do what they’re told and often read pre-designed scripts to their students” (p. 5). The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Position Statement on Academic Freedom and the Social Studies Teacher (2007) spoke to the context of increasing standardization under this neo-conservative Accountability Movement and its effects on social studies teaching practice:

In recent years, the movement for standards and high stakes testing has impinged on issues of academic freedom. In some schools, the movement for accountability has led to

the imposition of unhealthy pressure to cover content in a superficial manner, serving as a constraint on meaningful teaching and learning. (p. 283)

Spring (2002) traced the political agendas of groups from the religious right to the Greens, pointing out that while religious discussions tend to be extremely volatile among parents in southern Bible Belt states, the primary motivation for activism in schools in the Pacific Northwest is more likely to be the engagement of students in environmental issues. Spring commented: “Educational disputes range across a political spectrum, from the agendas of the crusading religious right to the separatist feeling of Afrocentrists and Indiocentrists” (p. vii). Spring delineated the agendas of four distinct groups--Compassionate Conservatives, Neo-conservatives, New Democrats and The Green Party Left.

Spring (2002) defined the first category as those who are equally motivated by morality and standardized testing with regard to student performance. The archetype of this movement is former Texas football coach Rod Paige, whom President George W. Bush appointed Secretary of Education in 2001. Paige, like many other functionaries in the Bush administration, had long-standing ties with the Christian Coalition and other religious conservative organizations that have used grassroots school board advocacy as a means of affecting change in what they see as a school curriculum overrun with secular humanist ideals. Spring summarized the efforts of these activists: “Therefore, the opposition to educational and government bureaucrats and the desire to return power to the people is based on the assumption that this will restore traditional values to education” (p. 24). In focusing on localized struggles, these religiously-inclined activists have made tremendous strides toward influencing the social studies curriculum.

The Neo-conservative movement, as Spring (2002) noted, originated with the proliferation of conservative think tanks that sprang up in the wake of Ronald Reagan’s first electoral triumph in 1980. Organizations such as the Manhattan Institute and the Olin Foundation

see themselves as providing the intellectual capital for conservative educational reform in a climate in which the traditional institutions of higher education have been captured by liberal and progressive activists. The main thrust of the efforts of neo-conservative groups is the privatization of public education, with voucher programs as a principal means of achieving this goal. This focus on school choice operates from the assumption that government schools are ineffective and under-performing, whereas the private sector would introduce a necessary element of competition to the process of educating children, particularly those in underserved communities.

Although the aforementioned groups have certainly been ascendant in the past decade, it is important not to forget the large numbers of education activists on the left side of the political spectrum. Spring (2002) asserted that the New Democrats, who ran education policy during the Clinton era of the 1990s and still occupy many positions of power within the educational bureaucracy at state and local district levels, married the demands of the global marketplace with those of Main Street America. A key premise of this agenda is the Skill-Mismatch Theory, first propounded by former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, who stated in terms reminiscent of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) that America's educational institutions were producing candidates ill-suited for work in an increasingly complex global economy. As Bill Clinton (1996) remarked: "There are people, principally the bottom half of America's hourly wage earners, who are working hard but aren't getting ahead because they don't have the kind of skills that are rewarded in this global economy" (p. 33). In the resulting Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the Clinton administration poured money into programs such as Head Start, while at the same time paving the way for the Accountability Movement by convincing teachers' unions to agree to programs of recertification and standardized testing.

In a chapter provocatively titled “What’s Left of the Left?”, Spring (2002) described the ideas of progressive activists who have certainly been toiling away in the wilderness in recent decades and yet can wield some considerable power in local districts in New England and the Pacific Northwest. These activists, many attached to the Green Party and the Presidential candidacies of Ralph Nader in 2000 and 2004, often exhibit a similar consumer-based politics to that which social and religious conservatives employ albeit to very different purposes. Parents informed by a variety of perspectives--from feminist to Afrocentric to queer theory--thus have pressured local municipalities to adopt more inclusive curricula in their schools.

Even though Spring was careful to be even-handed and to present the full scope of the challenges to the academic freedom rights of teachers, the fact remains that much of the movement activism that has underscored the most recent censorious efforts has come from the right. It is clear that progressive educators have been outmaneuvered by their conservative counterparts in recent years. Frank (2004) described this dynamic in vivid terms:

While leftists sit around congratulating themselves on their personal virtue, the right understands the central significance of movement-building, and they have taken to the task with admirable diligence . . . (T)here are the think tanks, the Institutes Hoover and American Enterprise, that send the money sluicing on into the pockets of the right-wing pundit corps, Ann Coulter, Dinesh D’Souza, and the rest, furnishing them with what they need to keep their books coming and their minds in fighting trim between media bouts. (p. 247)

That said, some caution is necessary in characterizing grassroots educational reform efforts, especially when it comes to labeling parent organizations involved in curriculum challenges as right-wing. Ravitch (2004) pointed out that both right and left wing groups have pressured schools and individual teachers about their curriculum choices in recent years. She comments that, “both right-wingers and left-wingers demand that publishers shield children from words and ideas that contain what they deem the ‘wrong’ models for living” (p. 79). At the same time, though, as Giroux (1987) demonstrated, the clear majority of these movements have come

from the right. He commented, “As part of the existing political assault on public services and social justice in general, schools are increasingly being subordinated to the imperatives of neoconservative and right-wing interests that would make them adjuncts of the workplace or the church” (p. 26).

In addition to maintaining a critical focus, it is important not to over-generalize about the intentions of these movements or to demonize their participants. Apple’s (2001) nuanced interpretation of the motives of religious parents is especially helpful. He noted, for example, that trends toward home schooling are linked to:

What are often accurate concerns about public schooling--its overly bureaucratic nature, its lack of curriculum coherence, its disconnection from the lives, hopes, and cultures of many of its communities, and more--here often connected to more deep-seated and intimate worries. (pp. 173-174)

However, Apple was careful to note that what parents often fail to take into account is the fact that the degradation of public education is by neo-liberal and neo-conservative design. Over the course of the past 20 years, there has been a concerted, consistent effort to impoverish public schools and to create an atmosphere in which parents quite logically lose faith in their community’s schools (Bracey, 2002). This has culminated in the bipartisan-sponsored No Child Left Behind legislation, which explicitly targets schools characterized as under performing for takeover by private educational consortia, such as the Edison School Project founded by Channel One entrepreneur Chris Whittle.

Conclusion

At the beginning of a new millennium, Ravitch (2000) summed up what she portrayed as the sorry legacy of a century of progressive educational reform:

Throughout the twentieth century, progressives claimed that the schools had the power and responsibility to reconstruct society. They took their cue from John Dewey, who in 1897 had proclaimed that the school was the primary means of social reform and the teacher was “the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God.”

This messianic belief in the school and the teacher actually worked to the disadvantage of both, because it raised unrealistic expectations. It also put the schools squarely in the political arena, thereby encouraging ideologues of every stripe to try to impose their social, religious, cultural and political agendas on the schools. (p. 459)

In this florid statement, one can see the major patterns of the history of the competing notions of academic freedom and its discontents. Ravitch (2000) also inadvertently unmasked the agenda of neo-liberal and neo-conservative educators who control much of the infrastructure of public schooling in the 21st century.

While there is a lengthy history stretching from the mid 19th century to the present of teachers freely advocating for themselves and their students in the classroom, this is, as I have argued, a contested legacy. Conceptions of intellectual autonomy developed early in the nation's universities, and yet the ways in which teachers' roles have been understood in the history of public schooling have precluded their being afforded the same rights as those of university faculty. This insight should not suggest, however, that those working in academia have received unassailable rights to academic freedom free from challenges. These rights have fluctuated wildly from period to period, reflecting dramatic pendulum swings between periods in which educators assumed themselves to be involved in fundamental social change followed by periods of conservative retrenchment and even social reaction. Neo-liberal and neo-conservative educators continue to disparage the idea of a politicized classroom. The lesson of this long and labyrinthine history is that continual vigilance and struggle is necessary in order to maintain the rights of teachers and academic faculty to pursue their own agendas in the classroom. In his classic work "On Liberty," Mill (1859/2003) expressed in no uncertain terms the necessity for this bold struggle and the dangers that its loss might entail:

Who can compute what the world loses in the multitude of promising intellects combined with timid characters, who dare not follow out any bold, vigorous, independent train of thought, lest it should land them in something which would admit of being considered irreligious or immoral? . . . No one can be a great thinker who does not recognize that as

a thinker it is his first duty to follow his intellect to whatever conclusions it may lead . . . There is always hope when people are forced to listen to both sides. It is when they attend only one that errors harden into prejudices and truth itself ceases to have the effect of truth, by being exaggerated into falsehood. (p. 99)

In the chapters that follow, I will detail the course of a research project that considered the real voices of veteran social studies teachers, voices that express fears and reservations about their roles as advocates in the classroom and yet at the same time burn with the desire to carry forward Mill's shining sentiments penned some 250 years ago.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The importance of establishing a clear philosophical and theoretical foundation for the implementation of new methods in the social studies lies in the need for an effective, robust and flexible pedagogical practice. Indeed, the two goals are inseparable. As Kincheloe (2005) argued, “The teaching and learning process is intimately connected to the research act” (p. 3). Once the teacher-researcher in the social studies has accepted the assumptions underlying the constructivist paradigm based on a reading of the literature and research, for example, he or she begins to reflect upon and change the goal of instruction from one of imparting a vast store of historical facts to a passive student audience to one of encouraging students to engage with a variety of disciplines in an effort to develop deeper, more critical perspectives. The constructivist framework presumes that knowledge is produced within an educational community from the experiences that are made available by the lessons at hand. Grant (2003) explained constructivist teaching and learning priorities in the following terms:

Taking constructivism to school means that knowledge is viewed as complex and multifaceted, that something may be lost when ideas are reduced to elementary pieces, that teaching is about creating opportunities for students to think about work through big ideas, and that learning is more about understanding than simply memorizing those ideas. (p. 84)

This process is fostered by authentic and real-world environments and culturally and socially relevant subject material as opposed to remote and abstract environments driven by text or testing priorities. These real-world experiences are imbued with the richness of culture, the complexity of communication within social groups and the ubiquity of problem solving. Social studies instruction also benefits most when meaning construction takes place within the framework of the learner’s prior knowledge and experience. Hopkins (1994) noted that

Knowledge in the modern world has become mobile and liquefied. The schools must find ways to accommodate to the turbulence, indeterminacy, and fluidity of the world outside if they are to meet the increasing demands that are laid on them by economic and social circumstance, and especially the demands of our democratic society. (p. 7)

This world of increasing pluralism and democracy described by Hopkins (1994) is necessarily complicated and involves a multiplicity of perspectives as well as controversy. Engaging students in this world requires on the part of the instructor an elaborate practice of scaffolding lessons in order to capitalize on the students' own personal and social knowledge and experiential bases. The practice of secondary social studies teachers in the United States has traditionally been circumscribed as an individual, and often isolated, act and thus the framework of cognitive constructivism, which emphasizes individual meaning-making processes, seems ideal for research into the meanings that individual teachers derive from their experiences with controversial public issue material.

Teaching and learning practices that encourage students to construct their own meanings from lessons in the social studies rather than merely passively receiving information from an expert instructor in turn require a research agenda that fits the goals of constructivist inquiry. Whereas quantitative studies that rest upon positivistic assumptions of objectivity that decontextualize the teaching and learning process, constructivism recontextualizes research in education, acknowledging the complex web of reality that exists in every school. Eisner (1995), for example, used the metaphor of the visual arts to describe just such a research agenda, commenting that, "artistically crafted research helps us to understand much of what is most important about schools. By its concern with particularity it can help us to recognize what individual teachers actually do when they teach" (p. 5). Conversely, Kincheloe (2005) pointed out that a research agenda that looks at teachers' and students' ways of knowing in the classroom is irrelevant to researchers trapped within the supposedly scientific worldview underlying more

traditional methodologies: “In transmission-based conceptions of teaching there is no reason to study the learner. Teachers in such pedagogies are given the curriculum to teach. They simply pass designated knowledge along to students and then test them to see how much they remember” (p. 6). This sorry state of affairs, referred to by Freire (1970) as the banking concept, is, however, precisely what social studies educators face in the early days of the 21st century, pressured by curriculum frameworks and testing regimes.

This project, therefore, is a humble attempt to realize the potentialities of a constructivist perspective within research into teaching practices in the social studies. In the following chapter, I outline the methodological design of a research project guided by the principles of both constructivism that looks at the ways of knowing of a group of seven social studies teachers currently practicing in Jacksonville, Florida public schools, as it relates to the matter of teaching controversial public issues.

Research Perspectives

Qualitative Research

The research interests identified in this project fall squarely into the realm of qualitative research and call for a research design created along these lines of inquiry. As Gergen and Gergen (2000) stated “The domain of qualitative inquiry offers some of the richest and most rewarding explorations available in social science” (p. 1025). In the vast arena that is social research, qualitative investigators fundamentally ask questions about the meaning of the activity that is taking place in some field of social interaction. Glesne (1998) described this process as “a careful and diligent search” (p. 3). In the educational context, qualitative researchers often view the classroom and its participants as texts to be read, or interpreted, based on a number of previously agreed upon criteria.

Numerous scholars have stressed the importance of research questions as a framing mechanism in qualitative research designs. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) underscored that “the questions that we ask will always to some degree determine the answers we find” (p. 43). Thus, in contrast to research questions in quantitative studies, which tend to revolve around identifying sets of variables and seeking an understanding of the relationship, or correlation, between them, research questions in qualitative studies attempt to produce data that will be thick, that is, rich in its descriptive detail and value. Glesne (1998) remarked that these questions often spring from a review of the literature. She advised “In working out the research statement, begin by jotting down questions about your topic, generated by your reading of the literature and your own experience” (p. 24). Following this astute advice, therefore, the research statement and questions that form the core of this dissertation research project, stem from personal experiences with challenges to academic freedom as well as a reading of the literature on the stances of social studies teachers toward the teaching of controversial public issues.

Some have warned, however, that this seemingly common-sense approach can escape researchers, particularly those entering the field, who may take the importance of research questions for granted. For example, Hatch (2002) spoke to his experiences mentoring novice researchers:

When I meet with students at various stages of the research process, I always remind them to refer back to their research questions. New researchers almost always feel overwhelmed when they first enter the field. There is so much going on, that they can barely take it all in, let alone make a record of it. . . . Asking if research questions have been answered provides a way to judge if enough has been done. (p. 42)

There have certainly been moments in the research process where I have felt the sense of being overwhelmed by the data and, thus, the remarks of veteran qualitative researchers and the guidance of my dissertation committee have been invaluable in this regard. Research questions thus begin with what Creswell (1998) described as “a *how* or a *what* so that initial forays into the

topic describe what is going on” (p. 17, emphasis in original). In qualitative research, questions take an open-ended character, avoiding the polarities typical in objectivistic inquiry. Using these guidelines, I chose qualitative methods of inquiry in order to explore the ways in which secondary-level social studies teachers construct meaning from their experiences with teaching controversial public issues in the classroom. These methods helped me to elicit authentic voices of classroom practitioners.

Constructivism

While the study of the issue of controversy in secondary social studies instruction could potentially involve a variety of methodologies, I felt that a constructivist framework was best suited for eliciting the organic voices and narratives of classroom practitioners. Constructivism as a theoretical framework, as Fosnot (1996) noted, has often been defined in contrast to positivism, which dominated the field of social research from its inception in the mid-19th century until the period after the Second World War. Fosnot commented that “constructivism is fundamentally non-positivist and as such it stands on completely new ground” (p. 10). Whereas, as Crotty (1998) described it, the essential intention of positivism and its adherents is to attempt to bring the discipline of the physical sciences to bear in social science research as a means of establishing definitive proof and certainty in research findings, constructionism fundamentally breaks with this tradition by rejecting the search for abstract truth as chimerical. Crotty stated “While it would be extremely premature to sound the death knell of this centuries-old tradition, foundationalism of this kind has certainly come under heavy attack and constructionism is very much part of the artillery brought against it” (p. 42). Instead of a search for this illusory objectivity, constructivism therefore posits social research as a process of gathering evidence not of direct causation but rather of human experience. It is just this search for experiences that is at the heart of my project.

In an epistemological sense, constructivism--and its twin paradigm constructionism--in its most common forms rests upon the assumption that learners construct knowledge as they attempt to make sense of their experiences in the everyday world. As Driscoll (1994) noted “Learners, therefore, are not empty vessels waiting to be filled, but rather active organisms seeking meaning” (p. 360). More succinctly put by Kafai and Resnick (1996): “Children don’t *get* ideas, they *make* ideas” (p. 1, emphasis in original). This process is in operation regardless of what is being learned and thus, for educators influenced by the constructivist paradigm, virtually any subject can be valuable, any moment a teachable moment. As students progressively make meaning from the environment around them, they learn to develop, expand and test out mental patterns until one emerges that suits the particular task at hand. This set of assumptions about learning in turn leads to the development of specific types of research interests and teaching and learning practices that necessarily go hand in hand with one another. For example, Larochelle and Bednarz (1989) commented that “as constructivism implies that knowledge is always knowledge that a person constructs, it has prompted the development of didactic situations which stress the need to encourage greater participation by students in their appropriation of scholarly knowledge” (p. 3).

This insight leads researchers interested in pursuing a constructivist orientation to establish a research agenda that focuses on the creation of learning environments that will likely produce a social or collaborative meaning-making process. For example, Wineburg and Wilson (1991) profiled the work of two teachers who acted as facilitators of student learning rather than as experts imparting wisdom to students in their American History courses. For these reasons, a constructivist theoretical perspective provides this research project, the aim of which is to present current social studies practitioners with the opportunity to share the meaning-making processes

with which they engage in the course of making decisions about teaching controversial subject matter, with the ideal theoretical foundation.

Research Settings

Duval County, Florida in many ways represents a microcosm of the United States past, present, and future. The county, which comprises metropolitan Jacksonville, offers many of the perplexing issues of inner-city blight and suburban sprawl that confound urban planners across the country. At the same time, it includes several rural areas that reflect the conservative values and political inclinations that recall the heyday of the Pork Chop Gang, a North-central Florida alliance that virtually controlled Florida politics until the civil rights movement and reapportionment in the 1960s. As such, Duval County is ideally suited for an exploration of the myriad issues involving the teaching of controversial subject matter.

Duval County, originally founded in 1822 from a section of St. John's County and named for former Florida Governor William Pope Duval, includes the largest geographical spread of any urban county in the United States, covering a territory from the Suwannee River on the west to the Atlantic Ocean on the east, north of a line from the mouth of the Suwannee River to Jacksonville on the St. John's River (Gold, 1928). For the students of public school magnet programs, such as the two included in this project--Orange Park College Preparation School and Riverview Arts Academy--this urban sprawl has important implications, as students are typically either bused into their neighborhood schools and then again out to these magnet high schools or are transported by parents or guardians.

The most recent census data (United States Census Bureau, 2000) indicated that Duval County includes 778,879 people, 303,747 households, and 201,688 families residing in the county, with a relatively low population density for an urban space of 1,007 people per square mile. The racial makeup of the county consists of slightly more than 65% of people of White-

European, 27% of African American, 4% of Latin American, nearly 3% of Asian, and less than 1% of Native American and Pacific Islander backgrounds. Slightly more than 3% of the population were listed as mixed race or of other racial category. More than 90% speak English, 4% speak Spanish, 1% speak Tagalog (a language native to the Philippines) as a first language, a demographic feature largely due to the presence in the southern extension of the St. John's River of the NAS Jacksonville naval air station.

According to the same census data (United States Census Bureau, 2000), there are 303,747 households out of which a third have children under the age of 18 living with them, 46% are married couples living together, slightly more than 15% have a female householder with no husband present, and a third are non-families. Twenty six percent of all households are made up of individuals, and nearly 8% have someone living alone who is 65 years of age or older. The average household size is 2.51, and the average family size is 3.06. The median income for a household in the county is \$40,703, and the median income for a family is \$47,689. Males have a median income of \$32,954 versus \$26,015 for females. The per capita income for the county is \$20,753. Roughly 9% of families and nearly 12% of the population are below the official federal poverty line, including 16% of those under the age of 8 and nearly 12% of those aged 65 or over (United States Census Bureau).

The politics of Duval County reflect its deeply segregated history. While the largely African American inner-city population on the western end of Jacksonville typically votes for Democratic Party representatives to the U.S. Congress such as Congresswoman Corrine Brown, the larger county reflects more conservative political and religious perspectives and has in recent Presidential elections become one of the most reliable large counties for Republican candidates. In 2004, for example, President George W. Bush received nearly 58% of the popular vote in the county, as opposed to the just over 41% received by his opponent Senator John Kerry (Duval

County Board of Elections, 2004). According to the city of Jacksonville's official website, there were 515,202 registered voters in Duval County as of October 2004 (City of Jacksonville, Florida, 2004).

Participating Schools

This project drew participants from three high schools within the Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) district: Orange Park College Preparation School, Southside High School, and Riverview Arts Academy.¹ Orange Park College Preparation School (OPCPS) is a high school on the western side of Jacksonville that was opened within the shell of an existing inner-city, neighborhood high school in 1995. OPCPS has attempted to cope with the high demand for its seats by building two extensions on the historic school building as well as using temporary trailers as instructional facilities. It features an honors track with a required number of Advanced Placement courses for students as well as an International Baccalaureate magnet program. OPCPS has a diverse student body, only 15% of which lives within the surrounding neighborhood, while 85% are either bused in from their neighborhood schools or are transported by parents or guardians. According to the DCPS website, 49% of the current OPCPS student population defines itself as Caucasian, 28% as African American, 14% as Asian American, 6% as Latin-American, and 3% as mixed race. The OPCPS faculty is similarly diverse and younger than that of the average DCPS high school. This is primarily due to the higher than average turnover of its faculty; in its first 10 years of operation (1995-2005), an average of 18 openings out of 42 faculty positions were filled each summer (Duval County Public Schools, 2007).

Southside High School (SHS) is a neighborhood high school located in the Mandarin area of south Jacksonville. Opened in 1990, the school has a unique design for a Duval County school, featuring an open layout that includes a large courtyard where a majority of the students

¹All names of schools and participants are pseudonymous.

socialize during lunch periods. Given the growth of the Mandarin area in Jacksonville, SHS has faced the issue of severe overcrowding and is the second largest high school in the Duval County school system. The school's Vision Statement asserts that its aim is to "develop knowledgeable, confident, and self-reliant lifelong learners ready to assume civic responsibility and who possess skills necessary to function successfully in an increasingly competitive global society" (Duval County Public Schools, 2007). As a neighborhood school, SHS, reflects the demographics of the Mandarin area of the city, which is home to a disproportionately large Asian community.

According to the DCPS website, 51% of SHS students describe themselves as Caucasian, 19% as Asian American, 13% as African American, 7% as Latin American, and 6% as mixed race or other (Duval County Public Schools, 2007).

Riverview Arts Academy (RAA) is an arts magnet high school located on the St. John's River in downtown Jacksonville. The school first opened in the 1930s as a traditional school for African American students. RAA became an arts-focused magnet public high school in 1985 and has been rated one of top arts high schools in America by *Newsweek* magazine. The school's design utilizes a variety of colors, a tin design, with a number of unique campus features such as a rotunda, sculpture garden, art gallery, and theater. Students at Riverview take traditional high school courses in the four core curricular areas, while concurrently attending arts classes as part of a specific arts program. The arts areas in which a student may major include Creative Writing, Dance, Instrumental Music, Musical/Technical Theatre, Film/TV, Visual Arts, Piano, and Vocal Music. Students are accepted to the school on the basis of auditions offered in the spring of each school year. A number of Advanced Placement and honors classes are also offered in numerous academic areas. According to the DCPS website, 64% of RAA students described themselves as Caucasian, 15% as African American, 8% as Asian American-Pacific Islander, 3% as Latin American, and 2% as mixed race/other (Duval County Public Schools, 2007).

Selection of Participants

Pilot Project

During a pilot project conducted in the spring of 2007, I collected focus group, interview, and archival data from 5 DCPS teachers. After the recruitment process, the 5 participants first sat down with me for a focus group session on March 9, 2007, which lasted for approximately 75 minutes and produced a wealth of fascinating observations about the state of social studies, many in the form of extended narratives. In an effort to reduce the effect of social pressure potentially existing within the focus group setting, I then conducted individual interviews with each participant. Lasting approximately 60 minutes, these interviews were invaluable in allowing each participant, including 2 teachers who had been slightly reticent in their contributions to the focus group session, to reflect deeply on their practices. Finally, I collected curricular work products from each participant, including syllabi and sample lesson plans in order to make comparisons between them and to analyze the influence of curricular frameworks standards on each teacher's decision making process. In reflecting upon the outcomes of this pilot project, I identified the lack of purposeful sampling and the reliance on convenience as a major weaknesses.

Sampling Procedures and Criteria

The insights derived from my experiences conducting this pilot project influenced greatly the manner in which I designed this dissertation research project. I realized in reflecting on the research process of this pilot project that the data that I collected from 5 secondary social studies teachers was rather limited in scope as a result of my having to rely on a participant group of relatively novice practitioners. Thus, for this current project, I used a more purposeful sampling approach. Patton (1990) described the basis of the method as “focus(ing) on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 230). This method of selecting participants, also referred to as purposive or judgment sampling, has the

advantage of revealing patterns of meaning-making that are associated with the epistemological subjectivity of the constructivist paradigm. Bernard (2000) described this procedure: “In judgment sampling, you decide the purpose you want informants (or communities) to serve, and you go out to find some” (p. 176). I have followed Bernard’s criteria for using purposeful sampling following the determinations that I have made concerning the purpose of the study’s participants within the project, and I sought them out according to the following criteria:

1. Each participant is a full-time public school teacher.
2. Each participant is currently employed full time in a Duval County public school.
3. Each participant has a minimum of 5 years of classroom teaching experience.
4. Each participant is currently teaching at the secondary-level.
5. Each participant is currently teaching in the social studies.

Once I had gained the appropriate permissions to conduct this study from Jill Johnson, the director of communications DCPS, she provided me with a list of 24 potential participants. From this potential pool, I first eliminated any participant that did not fit the criteria listed above and selected 7 individuals from three area high schools. I am confident that this purposeful sampling procedure produced a sample of participants that provided with a thicker set of narratives about classroom experiences from which to draw my analysis.

Description of Participants

My first participant, Adam, is a 35 year old White male. Born and raised in Chicago, he now teaches Advanced Placement U.S. History, Government and Economics at Orange Park College Preparation School in Jacksonville. After his family’s relocation to Jacksonville, he was graduated from a magnet high school. He attended a university in South Carolina and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Economics. He has 12 years of teaching experience in South Carolina, Florida and Illinois. Adam described himself as a conservative-libertarian and listed

government regulation, tax policy, and race relations among the most important political issues in contemporary American society.

My second participant, Ben, is a 32 year old Asian male. A self-described Navy Brat from New Jersey, he now teaches World History at Southside High School in Jacksonville. After his father was transferred to NAS Jacksonville Naval Station, Ben attended a high school in St. John's County. Upon graduation, he completed a Bachelor of Arts in History and a Master's in Education at a university in Jacksonville. Ben has 10 years of teaching experience in DCPS schools. He described himself as conservative and is concerned about a number of social issues including affirmative action admissions policies.

My third participant, Cathy, is a 62 year old White female. With 37 years of teaching experience behind her, she is currently the Social Studies Department head and teaches Advanced Placement European History and World Religions at Orange Park College Preparation School in Jacksonville. Originally from the Pensacola, Florida area, she received her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in History from a university in central Florida. Cathy has 37 years of service and will retire from OPCPS at the conclusion of the 2008/2009 school year. She described herself as an old liberal feminist and commented that she "remembers the second wave of feminism, you know, Gloria Steinem and all those women, well."

My fourth participant, Donna, is a 52 year old White female. A Florida native, she teaches World History and Humanities at Riverview Arts Academy in Jacksonville. After starting at local college near where she attended high school in central Florida, she returned to the Jacksonville area with her mother and received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at a local university. She has since completed her Master's degree in Social Studies Education and has twenty years teaching experience. Donna called herself apolitical and admitted that she is "a little cynical about politics."

My fifth participant, Eric, is a 54 year old White male. Born and raised in Wilmington, Delaware, he now teaches U.S. History, Government and Economics at Southside High School in Jacksonville. After receiving a Bachelor's degree and Master of Arts in Teaching degree from a university in Maryland, he and his wife relocated to Jacksonville in order to be closer to elderly parents in the Ponte Vedra area. Eric described himself as an ethnic conservative, and is concerned about educational policy issues such as inclusion and multicultural education. He has 19 years of teaching experience.

My sixth participant, Frank, is a 43 year old Latin American male. Jacksonville born and bred, he attended the oldest college preparatory school in the district and now teaches Advanced Placement U.S. History at Riverview Arts Academy in Jacksonville. After beginning college in Jacksonville, he finished his Bachelor's degree in History at a university in western Florida. He has since earned a Master's degree in Social Studies Education at a university in Jacksonville. Frank considers himself liberal and felt that he "fits in with the liberal climate" at Riverview as a consequence. He is the faculty sponsor of the Gay Straight Alliance at Riverview and has fourteen years of teaching experience in DCPS schools.

My final participant, Gina, is a 38 year old White female. A Florida native from Boca Raton, she now teaches World History, Sociology and Law Studies at Orange Park College Preparation School in Jacksonville. After her graduation from a Jewish private academy in south Florida, Gina stated that she "bounced" around a variety of Florida institutions, beginning with a university in Tampa before receiving a Bachelor's degree from a university in Miami. She described herself as a liberal and claimed to use innovative techniques in the classroom, including the use of role playing and the arts.

At the outset of this project, I submitted my project design to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Florida for institutional approval (see Appendix A). Upon IRB

approval, I contacted Jill Johnson in order to receive official approval to conduct research within DCPS schools. I then proceeded to contact participants using a recruitment email included in Appendix B. The 7 individuals profiled above met with me for an initial interview in November, 2007. Before beginning the interview session, each individual signed the informed consent form included in Appendix C. These interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and consisted of conversations about their conceptions of controversy and their experiences dealing with controversial subject matter in the classroom (see Appendix C). In early December, 2007, I returned to Jacksonville and interviewed each participant about his or her views about using a group of curricular pieces that have proven controversial in the field (see Appendix D). These interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. In addition, I collected one syllabus and one lesson plan detailing a lesson that the participants had deemed controversial during the initial interview session.

Data Collection

The purpose of data collection in qualitative research is to begin to make meanings of the data. Connell, Lynch, and Waring (2001) noted that, “from the beginning of data collection, the qualitative analyst is beginning to decide what things mean, noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows and propositions” (p. 3). At the outset of this project, it became clear that interview and archival collection strategies would be the ideal data collection foundation for a study centered on the voices of classroom practitioners in the social studies. There were a number of reasons for this decision. First, the individual interview is well-suited to the cognitive constructivist research perspective in that it allows participants to discuss candidly their experiences in the classroom. Second, the interview strategy is a technique that allows for delving into the ways in which individual teachers construct the meanings of their experiences in retrospect, whether these experiences are generally positive or negative. Finally,

the search for archival materials is crucial in order to consider the variety of positions that teachers take toward the lesson construction process.

Interviews

Numerous scholars (Eisner, 1995; Holstein, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) have testified to the nature and importance of interviewing in qualitative research. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) described the interview as “a conversation with a purpose” (p. 79). In the constructivist paradigm, that purpose is to elicit responses from individuals or groups of subjects, such as, in the case of this project, social studies teachers, in order to ascertain how they construct meaning from their teaching experiences. As Holstein and Gubrium (2003) remarked, interviews can range from the casual, often taking place within participant observation scenarios, to the formal; the interviewers’ stances often mirror this variety of scenarios. However, certain principles are regarded as standard throughout the arena of qualitative research. As Hatch (2002) discussed, “While the researcher’s stance in relation to his or her data may be different across different qualitative paradigms, the basics of doing observation, interviewing, and unobtrusive data collection are similar” (p. 71). These basics that Hatch referred to include creating a research protocol that outlines the details of the design and purpose of the project, obtaining the proper approvals from the sponsoring institution, establishing trust with the participants and constructing an interview protocol that encourages the participants to speak openly about their experiences within a naturalistic setting.

Whether casual or formal, the interview is shaped by the needs of the researcher; in the end, as Maykut and Morehouse (1994) stressed, “participants agree to be interviewed to help the researcher pursue his or her focus of inquiry” (p. 80). The interviewer approaches the subjects in the spirit of open inquiry, allowing the subjects to understand the research interests that guide the project. This agenda requires a structured protocol (with the obvious exception of those projects

whose research perspectives such as grounded theory call for semi-structured protocols), which includes all questions that will be asked of participants; this protocol is typically reviewed and sanctioned by the researcher's sponsoring institution as a matter of maintaining ethical standards in research practice (see Appendix A). In approaching the interview subject or subjects, an unobtrusive stance is important in order to keep the research participants at their ease and to be able to collect meaningful data. Spradley (1979) described the appropriate point of view for the researcher:

By word and by action, in subtle ways and in direct statements [researchers] say, 'I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you would explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?' (p. 34)

In other words, in qualitative projects employing an interview strategy for data collection, the researcher and subjects act as partners in the process. When used appropriately, interviews can provide the researcher with a window into their participants' worlds, especially those events that have not been observed at first hand.

Interview Process

With these provisos in mind, I interviewed 7 teacher-participants in order to ascertain how each makes meaning from the experience of teaching controversial public issues. After contacting participants using the recruitment email included in Appendix B, I arranged individual interview sessions during a 3 week period in November, 2007. In order to capture these participants in a natural setting, I interviewed each participant in his or her classroom, often during preparation periods or immediately after the end of the instructional day. This understanding came from my reflections after conducting the aforementioned pilot project, in which I conducted interviews in restaurants and coffee shops. Interviewing the participants this time in the classroom allowed for fewer distractions and interruptions in the session.

As Bogdan and Biklin (1982) noted, “a good part of the work (of interviewing) involves building a relationship, getting to know each other, and putting the subject at ease” (p. 135).

Toward that end, I designed the initial interview session to begin with questions that would allow the participants to talk freely about their educational backgrounds:

- 1. Describe your own educational background.
- 2. What do you consider the most controversial issues in teaching social studies at the high school level?
- 3. What in your experience makes these issues controversial within your community?
- 4. Give me an example of a recent lesson that you have taught that contained what you consider controversial material.
- 5. What was your experience when presenting this material to students?
- 6. Describe any experiences you have had in which students or their parents have criticized the content of a lesson that you have taught.
- 7. Looking at the curriculum piece that you have brought to the session, describe your intention in designing the lesson.
- 8. What do you perceive as potentially controversial about this lesson content?
- 9. Is there anything you would like to add?

In these initial interview sessions, it was notable that the veteran practitioners had experienced far more than the novice practitioners I had previously interviewed and had stronger opinions about the use of controversial content material. Cathy, for example, related several interesting anecdotes about parent conferences in which she had participated both as a teacher and as a department head. The data from these conversations will be presented in Chapter 4.

In the second, follow-up interview session, I selected three extra-curricular pieces that had proven controversial in my survey of the academic freedom cases in the literature: Michael Moore’s documentary film about the 9/11 attacks and the Iraq conflict *Fahrenheit 9/11*; President George W. Bush’s 2006 “State of the Union” address to Congress; and the companion

volume to Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*. These interviews were conducted in December, 2007 and early January, 2008 and lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Participants responded to the following questions:

1. This extra-curricular content material has proven controversial in the field. What is your level of familiarity with it?
2. What, if anything, would make this content material potentially controversial in your school or community?
3. What, if any, value would this material have in your own curriculum?
4. What, if any, concerns would you have in using this content material?
5. What do you perceive as potentially controversial about this material, especially as it relates to your school and wider community?
6. What, if any, official policies in your school, would relate to your potential use of this content material?
7. Is there anything you would like to add?

Five of the 7 teacher-participants were familiar with the three curriculum pieces that I had selected and offered ready opinions about them. All participants had seen *Fahrenheit 9/11* when it originally premiered in 2004, 3 of the participants had watched the 2006 State of the Union address live, and all but 1 participant was familiar with Howard Zinn's work. Participants were especially interested to hear of the challenges to academic freedom across the field. Adam, for example, commented, "I'm not a big fan of Michael Moore, but I don't think you should lose your job over showing one of his movies." After viewing selections of these curriculum pieces, the participants engaged in conversations that indicated their stances toward using such controversial public issues material in the classroom. Data from these sessions are presented in Chapter 5.

Finally, I conducted a brief member check session with each participant in March, 2008 in order to verify the analysis of the data collected from the interview sessions. Guba and

Lincoln (1981) described member checks as a continuous process during data analysis, including, for example, asking participants about hypothetical situations. These sessions lasted approximately 30 minutes and consisted of the following questions:

1. After reviewing the initial analysis of the data collected in this project, do you have any concerns about the way that your views have been presented?
2. Do you have any further comments about the analysis of the data collected?

Through these discussions and discussions with my dissertation committee members, I reflected on the occasionally judgmental tone of my initial analysis and accounted for this in subsequent revisions. During this process of conducting interviews, I maintained a habit of keeping field notes. These simple notations, which I later converted into a researcher's log primarily assisted me by helping me to remember visual cues that were not apparent on the audio recordings of the session. At the end of the process of conducting the initial set of interviews, I transcribed them using the conventions listed in Appendix D. In order to maintain a close relationship with the data, I transcribed the initial round of interviews from November by hand. After completing the second set of interviews, I employed a transcription service in order to expedite the analysis process. In March, I transcribed the final set of member check interview sessions by hand.

Archival Collection

Archival collections, as defined by Bradsher (1988), are at their most basic levels, repositories of institutional records and personal papers of enduring value or interest. These often have the character and role of preserving the details of the lives of venerable institutions and powerful individuals within society. Thus, the tradition of archival research has often been linked in the literature (Barthes, 1977; Foucault, 1972) with a reinforcement of the status quo within the political and social sphere. The use of archival records of teachers by qualitative researchers

following a constructivist perspective, however, has the potential to illuminate more democratic avenues of discourse that can lead to the empowerment of a class of educators typically subject to what Apple (2000) referred to as a process of de-skilling. Toward this end, I collected one syllabus, one lesson plan, and supplementary materials from each participant that supported a lesson that they conceived of as containing potentially controversial subject matter. For example, Ben brought to the session an extremely content-heavy World History syllabus and then spoke about an experience in which he had had to accommodate a student who had transferred into his class from a class that was studying a different era of history. Participants were asked to bring this curricular material to the initial interview session and were asked to speak about the potential controversies involved in the lesson plans. These curricular pieces and the narratives that emerged from the conversations with participants indicated strongly a variety of stances toward controversy and patterns of instruction of these kinds of materials. In addition, I reviewed the relevant literature on controversy in the social studies in order to select a group of what were deemed in the literature to be controversial subject materials, such as the DVD version of Michael Moore's 2004 documentary film *Fahrenheit 9/11*, which prompted a national discussion of appropriate teaching practices during the period of the 2004 Presidential election campaign (Dahlgren, in press).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research involves a complex system of techniques intended to discover something relatively simple--the meaning of the researcher's data; in Glesne's (1998) poetic words, "finding your story" (p. 130). The purpose of this activity is to organize what the researcher has witnessed in the data collection process in ways that can be readily understood by one's peers in a variety of professional settings. Hatch (2002) encouraged researchers to view data analysis as an on-going process that should begin as soon as the data is collected. Following

Hatch's advice that "analysis is happening from the first moments of data collection" (p. 149), I looked early for patterns emerging from the data that I collected from both archival and interview sources.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis centers on the stories that are told by research participants in the course of interviews. As Grbich (2007) pointed out, "there is an underlying presumption that much of our communication is through stories and that these are revealing of our experiences, interpretations and priorities" (p. 124). While much of the 20th century history of this method of analysis was dominated by formalist structuralism, exemplified by the work of Labov and Waletzky (1967), more recent work has turned toward more socio-cultural approaches influenced by postmodernist theoretical perspectives that focus on the subjectivity of each personal narrative (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). Narratives are attractive targets for researchers, partially because of their ubiquity in the interview context. Yet, as Riessman (1993) pointed out, the definitive nature of the narrative can be notoriously difficult to determine with any precision. Still, Riessman commented, "For now, ('narrative') refers to talk organized around consequential events" (p. 3). In this case, I have chosen to focus on the narratives that speak to social studies teachers' experiences dealing with controversial public issues.

As the interviews and focus group sessions that I conducted in the spring of 2007 produced a number of rich, insightful narratives, I felt that this form of analysis would reveal the underlying cultural, political, and social contexts that exist within each school setting, with the possibility of investigating critical patterns of discourse within them. The data analysis procedure for this project began with a process of open coding in order to extract the valuable narratives and to eliminate portions of the interview data that did not directly relate to the research questions at hand. As a beginning researcher, I found the style referred by Miles and Huberman

(1994) as descriptive coding the most accessible method. After the transcription process, I re-read the transcripts several times, correcting for mistakes and identifying message units. I then divided the transcript broadly into large sections based on major topics and then into more specific subtopics, as demonstrated in the following example:

Lines	Topics
1-12	Introduction
13-27	Education
28-39	Teaching experience
39-62	Lesson preparation
63-91	Economics class

This process led me to focus more intently on the narratives emerging from the data that spoke to the research questions and could prove valuable to the project. In the course of open coding, I determined that there were three major themes--conceptions, experiences, and positions--that would drive the organization of the dissertation.

After this process, I conducted a structural narrative analysis procedure based on the approach of Labov and Waletzky (1967). In their work, Labov and Waletzky identified six major elements that defined a standard narrative structure: (a) an abstract, which summarizes the main themes of the narrative; (b) an orientation, which explains the context of the setting of the narrative; (c) a complicating action, in which the narrative is plunged into new territory, often involving conflict; (d) an evaluation, in which the narrator provides an assessment of the meaning of the narrative and his or her action within it; (e) a resolution, which provides the conclusion to the narrative; and (f) a coda, an occasional element that provides a final comment to the narrative. This involved printing out portions of the transcript and cutting and pasting each constituent element onto large sheets of paper.

This structural analysis process, though somewhat rigid, assisted me in placing the narratives selected for analysis in an organized form. In addition, it allowed me to scrutinize the

narratives from the data in a much more intensive manner. Finally, I coded the narratives, using a method described by Bamberg (2004) that is intended to probe the identities of the subjects involved. Specifically, I analyzed and compared the structure of each narrative in an attempt to understand what elements of the narratives were used in order to assert a positionality as a classroom practitioner. This method of focusing on the positioning of individual teachers within their storytelling roles allowed me to conceptualize the subjects' identities as impinged by both the person-to-world and world-to-person positions. For example, some participants indicated that their choices came from stances toward the material or political positions developed over the years (person-to-world position), whereas others indicated that they felt constrained from time to time by the context of curriculum narrowing or stress on testing procedures (world-to-person position). This form of narrative analysis allowed me to note patterns in teachers' testimonies; for example, that those focused on curricular matters tended to begin with and focus on a lengthy orientation segment in their narratives. This provided me with an ideal vantage point in which to investigate a group of social studies teachers' choices with regard to lessons and curriculum as they relate to their various positions on the issue of the use of controversy in their teaching practices.

Subjectivity Statement

I approached this study looking through the prism of perspectives borne of both theoretical understandings and personal experiences, including as a classroom practitioner with 7 years of teaching experience in Massachusetts and Florida public schools. As a progressive social studies teacher and teacher educator, I share the convictions about intellectual autonomy common to my field, documented in the National Council for the Social Studies statement (1969), that "the teacher is free to present in the field of his or her professional competence his/her own opinions or convictions and with them the premises from which they are derived."

Further, I reject the positivistic premise that there is an objective and absolute truth about the past that can be retrieved and passed on to a passive group of students. Rather, it has long been my contention that good teaching in the social studies begins with assisting students in finding ways to do history, that is, to coach them in the skills of researching and evaluating the multiple perspectives that exist in historical scholarship (Barton & Levstik, 2004).

My reading of critical theory has also left me with the firm belief that the critical tradition with its roots in Western Marxist philosophy and its pedagogical conclusions have created for educators a vital conceptual framework for studying the effects of society and culture on schools. Many educators in the past 30 years have found this body of critical literature an invaluable tool in terms of analyzing the power structures that often form the basis of the public education system and may or may not be replicated and reproduced within schools. Teachers in today's schools are often frustrated by what they see as cynicism on the part of their students. From contemporary critical theorists and pedagogues such as Apple, Giroux, Kohn, McLaren, Wink, and many others, we can see the creative opportunities that exist in today's schools for fundamental change. The ideas of critical pedagogy are far from hegemonic today and certainly garner derision from conservative quarters; and yet, they are alive with possibilities for an educational system of tomorrow. These ideas imbue my own research with precisely these opportunities for social change.

As this study builds upon my previous research, including a number of case studies of incidents of censorship of teacher practice in K-12 schools, which has suggested a new period of challenges to the academic freedom of public school teachers and to the image of public education in general, I entered this project with a certain predisposition toward the data (Dahlgren, in press). It is inevitable from the manner in which I designed the interview protocol that the subjects ascertained this bias and perhaps provided convenient answers to fulfill the data

needs of the project. I guarded against this temptation by conducting individual interviews in natural settings.

Finally, as a former teacher in the Duval County Public School system, I feel a close bond with the faculty of the schools in the district. After working in the district as a social studies teacher for 3 years, I have a natural empathy for the conditions of work that the subjects from DCPS face on a daily basis. It is impossible for me to remove from my memory experiences of teaching in unconventional classroom spaces, proctoring state mandated FCAT examinations and attending teacher recertification seminars. Given all of these subjective factors, it is imperative that I, as a researcher, follow the formal procedures indicated in the project protocol and resist the temptation to interpret the results of the project entirely through these filters.

A Note on Validity

Issues related to validity are crucial in any research study. Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002) commented that, “Without rigor, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility.” This is particularly the case when it comes to qualitative research. As Gergen and Gergen (2000) noted, the persistent attack on the objective standards at the heart of quantitative methodologies based on positivistic paradigms by proponents of post-positivistic, and particularly postmodernist, theoretical models, “has led to substantial skepticism concerning the epistemological foundations of scientific practices” (p. 1026). This skepticism has produced what Denzin and Lincoln (1994) called a crisis of validity. They raised the insightful question, “How are qualitative studies to be evaluated in the poststructural moment?” (p. 11). Guba and Lincoln (1981) clarified thinking within the field replacing reliability and validity with the parallel concept of trustworthiness, containing four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Within these were specific methodological strategies for demonstrating qualitative rigor, such as the audit trail, member checks when coding,

categorizing, or confirming results with participants, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, structural corroboration, and referential material adequacy.

During the course of developing this project, I became convinced that the methods common to constructivist research can provide a path toward providing validity in a qualitative research design. By noting the patterns in the data, the researcher can begin to weave a rich narrative pattern of descriptions from the fieldwork experience. Through this process, important qualitative details emerge from the data. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) stressed the development of propositional statements as a result of gathering and analyzing data from field work.

In order to make sense of a vast array of field notes, audio tapes, and archival documents that I collected during this project, I converted this raw data into an easily digested form through a process of coding and unitizing. I followed Maykut and Morehouse's (1994) recommendation of using index cards and large sheets of paper in order to quickly and easily recognize the patterns emerging from this raw data. Finally, this methodology involved a high level of trustworthiness due to an audit trail, including a detailed researcher's journal, member checks in which I asked the 7 project participants for their input in the analysis of the interview and archival data, and the triangulation of multiple methods of data collection and analysis.

Limitations

As I reflected upon the findings and conclusions that have emerged from the data at the center of this investigation, I noticed several significant limitations. First, despite my firm conviction that the Jacksonville, Florida area represents a microcosm of the United States in the 21st century due to its sprawling ex-urban landscape and surrounding rural areas, it is undoubtedly the case that Duval County is a specific context for study. Given this reality, the conclusions drawn from data produced in interviews with 7 secondary social studies teachers

currently practicing in Duval County public schools contains issues particular to Northern Florida that may not be generalizable to other areas of the country. This insight was reinforced by the comments of 2 of the participants during member checks conducted at the completion of the data analysis process of the project. Adam, for example, commented that “teachers in other states might disagree with us, might have different things to say.” Donna agreed with Adam’s assessment, suggesting that the more liberal demographics of her setting, while distinct from the other schools in the survey, might be more emblematic of schools in the Northeast or Pacific Northwest regions: “We get a lot of kids who move here from the New York area or from Oregon or something and they’re shocked by how conservative this place can be.” Despite the purposeful selection of participants that resulted in a diversity of political, religious and philosophical dispositions, the sample of teachers in this study may well reflect this demographic reality as well. An awareness of the particular characteristics of Duval County, Florida, should thus be noted when reviewing the results of this project.

A second limitation involves the setting of the interview sessions for the project. As mentioned in Chapter 3, I conducted all interviews with participants in their classrooms, as a means of creating as naturalistic a setting as possible for the investigation. This understanding sprang from my earlier pilot project, during which I conducted focus group and interview sessions in local cafes and restaurants. During these sessions, it was evident that there were numerous distractions for the participants. Though the classroom settings in the current project proved to be less distracting for the participants, they may well have also restricted the forthrightness of the teachers’ statements about their experiences with controversial material in their schools. One participant, Gina, seemed especially nervous about the nature of the questions during the initial interview session and had to be convinced about the confidential nature of the project’s procedures before continuing the session. In the member check session that I

conducted, Gina admitted that, “I might have told you more if I wasn’t worried constantly about someone walking by in the hall.” While I am convinced that teachers’ classrooms were the best settings available for this project, I am also fully cognizant of the fact that the participants in the study might have provided slightly different testimonies under different conditions.

Third, the conclusions of this project are somewhat limited by the lack of observational data. In order to pursue a cognitive constructivist framework, I restricted my data collection procedures to interview and archival data. This data provided me with invaluable insights into these teachers’ meaning construction processes regarding the use of controversial subject matter. However, 2 of the participants noted during follow-up member check interviews that observations of classes might have produced some different conclusions. Cathy, for example, commented that, “you can’t really tell what’s happening in a teacher’s classroom unless you’re in there.” At the same time, Cathy admitted that this observation process might have had to continue for a lengthy period before producing any valuable data that might have added to the understandings reached in this project. Frank concurred with this view, adding that, “it’s a shame that we couldn’t have planned to have you come out and see a class where some controversy came into it.” These participants are undoubtedly correct in these remarks, and yet I am reasonably satisfied that the data produced during this project is a significant contribution to the scholarship regarding the use of controversy in the social studies. Moreover, it serves as a useful launching pad for further research on the subject.

Conclusions

While there is a wealth of valuable research that investigates the conceptions of controversy among pre-service social studies teachers (Misco & Patterson, 2007) or the best practices in teaching controversy among exemplary social studies teachers (Hess, 2002), the voices of the millions of veteran social studies practitioners have been missing from these

studies. Yet it is precisely these teachers who have been surprised to find their rights to academic freedom challenged by a number of sources. This dissertation project was designed in order to elicit the stories of everyday experiences that veteran social studies teachers have had with presenting controversial subject matter in the classroom. By exploring the unique narrative patterns of their testimony, it is my hope that this project will be of service to those teachers who are continuing to struggle daily to provide their students with critical lessons that will help to shape their worldviews.

As I delved into the wealth of material on qualitative research practices during this project, I was struck by the connection between these research methods and the art of driving in a large, crowded urban center. Having lived in the city of Boston for nearly 20 years, I can attest to the daily hurdles that face urban drivers. To my mind, they mirror perfectly the hurdles facing a researcher conducting a qualitatively-oriented project in the way that they demand that the researcher/driver in both cases to be attentive, to scrutinize new surroundings and to avoid potential hazards in the road. Just as the driver in an urban space must map out a clear and safe path from Point A to Point B, so too must the qualitative researcher develop a clear plan for a project that will progress from initial inquiry to final conclusions and development of theory. Just as the urban driver must be on the lookout for pedestrians crossing the road at inopportune moments, so too must the qualitative researcher be aware of potential concerns among his or her subjects. Just as the urban driver must proceed with caution, so too must the qualitative researcher be sensitive to the subtle changes in environment and adjust to them at a split second. Just as the driver in the urban space may occasionally come across a serendipitous parking space next to a desired destination, so too will the attentive qualitative researcher occasionally be rewarded with moments of pure spontaneity and creativity among participants. The metaphor of driving in a crowded urban space, thus, has been helpful to me in imagining the contours of

qualitative researching today. In the research process that I describe in the following chapters, it is my intention to use these insights in order to avoid these pitfalls and to take advantage of the potential for rewarding collaboration with teacher-participants.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS: CONTROVERSIAL CONTENT IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES TODAY

Introduction

Controversies abound in public education, as indeed they do throughout many avenues of American culture. This could only be the case in such a complex and diverse society as the United States. As Kammen (2006) commented in his survey of controversies in the art world of the past century, “The ongoing democratization of American culture during the course of several generations has inevitably made controversies more likely to occur” (p. xi). In other words, the empowerment of previously disenfranchised groups, and in the educational context, this includes students and parents, has increased the prevalence of controversy. When it comes to the education of children, the most deeply held beliefs among American citizens about politics, race relations, religion and morality frequently lead to explosive conflicts. These conflicts are not in and of themselves always negative in character; indeed, the movements that energized the landmark Supreme Court cases involving schools and education such as *Brown vs. Board of Education*, *Tinker vs. Des Moines*, and *Lau vs. Nichols* show that controversy can lead to important new understandings about the social role of American education that presage such vital reforms as school desegregation, students’ rights and bilingual education.

Numerous recent studies have affirmed the need for the discussion of controversy in the classroom (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Hughes & Sears, 2007; Parker, 2002). However, the era of neo-liberal reforms that has marked the past 25 years since the initiative of the landmark 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*, has ushered in a narrow Back to Basics curriculum based on social efficiency ideals that has been intolerant of the teaching of controversial issues. The advent of state-mandated testing programs under the Goals 2000 and No Child Left Behind regimes has only accentuated and exacerbated these trends. Added to this standards-based system instituted

by a corporatist educational leadership is a qualitatively new and complex web of conservative national religious and political lobbying operations, corporate media and parents' groups. The two wings of this movement, often working in concert with each other in the past decade, have created an agenda of routine and monotony on the one hand and fear and reprisals on the other. As Yeager (2005) noted, this agenda of standardization has viewed what she has referred to as wise teaching practices, including critical discussion in the social studies, as extraneous at best and positively dangerous at worst. She commented, "Teaching in public schools today, in the context of the 'shell game' that is high-stakes testing, must be completely frustrating: alternately pressured and frenetic, unimaginative and stifling" (p. 1).

At the same time, though, America's public school teachers retain a good deal of control and autonomy over the course of events in their classrooms. While the age of teachers as captains of their ships, sequestered in their classrooms may have gone by the wayside in an age of accountability, classroom practitioners continue to make key decisions about how to present topics, what materials to use, and how to assess student performance. Thornton (1991) referred to this as the gatekeeping role, in which teachers make significant decisions over what students in their classes study and learn on a daily, if not hourly, basis. The following chapter details the data derived from a series of interview sessions concerning social studies teachers' views of what constitutes controversy in their field today. These conversations reveal a profound sense of ambivalence toward the gatekeeping role; on the one hand it is viewed as a burdensome responsibility without the consequent freedoms normally associated with it, and on the other hand, it is fraught with potential for contentious conversations inside and outside the educational communities in which they make their daily living.

Teachers and Controversy

At the outset of each interview, I asked each teacher-participant to respond to the question of what he or she perceived as controversial in the field of social studies teaching and learning today. The narratives that emerged from each conversation illustrated the ways in which each teacher views his or her subject matter, revealing the positionality or identity of each teacher vis-a-vis his or her content, as indicated by Bamberg (2004).

Adam: Stay Away from Abortion

In a narrative that I titled “Story A--Stay Away from Abortion,” Adam indicated in his narrative structure several uniquely evocative patterns that speak to his view of controversy in the field of social studies. His narrative began, intriguingly, not with the traditional abstract, or overview, of the content of the narrative. Rather, he announced spontaneously that, “my department head told me to stay away from them (controversial subjects).” It is only when I prompted him that Adam supplied the abstract and orientation elements that provided much of the context of the narrative:

Adam A-1. The two big topics I’ve worried about, well, three, but I’ll put the first two together. The first two are homosexuality and abortion, which invariably come up in the Government class, especially if you’re going to look at, well especially with AP, not so much Honors, especially when you look into civil rights and how courts operate and how precedents are set because you have a number of decisions that affect those, you know. . .

Adam indicated here that the Honors track survey of American History is likely to produce more opportunities for the discussion of controversial social issues such as homosexuality and abortion than is the Advanced Placement U.S. History survey, in which he is pressured by time to “stick with the history.”

Adam commented that the two most potentially controversial topics that might come up in his American Government and U.S. History curriculum are “abortion and homosexuality.” In the orientation section, Adam commented about the contemporary relevance of these issues:

Adam A-2. Roe v. Wade is getting kind of old now, I think the last 5 years, we, we've had a lot of abortion cases, we had a lot of gay rights and marriage, well, not so many gay marriage cases but gay rights cases that are settled that people are going to be reading about in textbooks for years to come.

Returning to the complicating action at the core of his narrative, Adam deliberated on the meaning of his department head's directive:

Adam A-3. I don't know specifically if she meant "don't mention it at all" or "tread lightly," but I thought, "how can I talk about modern government and modern judiciary without discussing these issues?"

It is revealing that here at the center of the narrative is a dramatic contradiction between the relevance of topics such as abortion and gay rights and the relative risk of introducing them into the class discussion arena. The ambiguity of the department head's directive has an apparent influence on his practice, as he revealed in his evaluation of the narrative: "And I worry a little about addressing them because somebody's gonna complain." In the resolution to the narrative-- "And so far nobody's complained"--the success in Adam's mind is at least somewhat measured in the lack of controversy provoked among the school community, and particularly among students and parents, as a consequence of his curricular choices. This is perfectly summarized in the coda: "And that's kept things calm." In the end, Adam's stance of avoidance as one that provides the relative success of a smooth and peaceful teaching practice, even if it is at the risk of sacrificing the discussion of relevant public issues.

Cathy: I'm an Old Hand

Cathy, the most veteran practitioner included in my participant sample, foreshadowed the delicate position that she takes in the classroom in relation to controversial subject matter at the outset of her narrative. In the abstract to "Story A--Raised Catholic," she commented:

Cathy A-1. So, sure, I've got to be conscious of not offending anyone, because I've got in a typical class, a Southern Baptist kid next to a Hindu kid next to a Pentecostal kid. But at the same time, I tell them from the start that we're going to dig deeply into the doctrines and beliefs of these different faiths so that they've got to be willing to do that.

In this passage, Cathy indicated that there is an implicit tension between the utilization of controversial content in her lessons and her very reasonable goal of sensitivity toward students of different cultural backgrounds in a diverse setting. Thus, she operates from a position of being “conscious of not offending anyone.” In the orientation piece that opens the narrative, Cathy described this setting and deepened the context of the abstract by speaking to the potentially explosive content on offer in her elective course in World Religions. Asked how she stimulates discussion in her classes, Cathy evaluated her methods by speaking about her assessment procedures: “That’s simple. I count class participation and the students know that from the start. There can be some grumbling but they mainly accept that.” Cathy then provided the resolution segment of the narrative:

Cathy A-4. I tell them that I was raised Catholic but I’m not going to be a priest, even if I could in my church, I wouldn’t be one. So I’m not going to preach a mass in class, I’m not there to convert anyone. That happens the first week, if not on the first day of class. And that seems to relax people.

In an interesting coda to this piece, Cathy extended her comments about the appropriate teacher’s position toward students to include reference to her lengthy teaching experience: “I’m an old hand. The younger teachers here feel intimidated. But not me.” In other words, Cathy seems to feel that her approach of inoffensiveness is one borne of decades of experience; by extension, those who delve into controversial public issues in their classroom discussions are displaying the naïveté typical of novice practitioners.

These themes of the value of teaching experience in terms of demarcating a neutral position in the classroom are further explored in a second narrative, “Questioning Slavery,” in which Cathy discussed the issues that have emerged from her AP European History course. Again, she was insistent about the need to present controversial issues to students, while at the same time maintaining a distance from the material:

Cathy B-1. I don't shy away from any of it. I'm not trying to stick it in their faces, but how can you teach European history without dealing with the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Reformation, Columbus, the Holocaust, all of these things that have plenty of debating points to them?

Cathy focused the narrative on her unit encompassing the European slave trade with West Africa, during which she admitted that she witnessed a pattern in which "there is one student who questions slavery" on a regular basis. She explained this complicating action:

Cathy B-3. But then there will be some quiet little kid who'll say, "Are we sure that this wasn't exaggerated." And there's usually a shocked pause in the class and then pure chaos. Sometimes I have to referee these battles. I tell them that they have to back up what they're saying or it won't be allowed in my class, in our discussion pit, that's what I like to call it.

The image of the referee here seems an especially apt one for a teacher such as Cathy, who values neutrality above all else. Again Cathy raised the issue of experience, contrasting her matter-of-fact position toward what her students consider an outrageous outburst. Asked how she handles such incidents in the classroom, she evaluated her methods:

Cathy B-4. If they can't produce some evidence, some empirical evidence, of the truth of what they're saying, then I don't allow it. It doesn't get an airing. I don't allow idle speculation that can hurt people, because we have plenty of Black students in this school and they're just sitting there looking shocked when something like that happens. I'm worried about the effect that some accusation or something is going to have on them.

Again, it is illuminating that Cathy sees part of her role in the classroom as that of an ersatz ombudsman, clearly establishing the parameters of what constitutes useful inquiry and what amounts to idle speculation that can potentially harm students in a diverse school setting. Asked whether these students with controversial viewpoints are able to marshal sufficient evidence to her satisfaction, Cathy commented:

Cathy B-5. No, they usually pull something out of thin air that they've heard from a parent or friend or something, at best it's something they've pulled off the Internet from a white supremacist website.

The result of this intervention then is laid out in a coda section to the narrative: “That’s usually the end of it, it shuts them down. And then I can go on with what my agenda is for discussing the issue.” In this brief riposte, Cathy clearly distinguished between her agenda for the lesson and that of the rogue student presenting a controversial opinion on a historical issue. She was equally clear about the results of her action: “it shuts them down.” Thus, despite her intentions to maintain a distant and neutral position in the classroom, she betrayed her goal of suppressing potentially damaging discussions.

Donna: Church vs. State

Donna, one of 2 teachers interviewed who teaches at Riverview Arts Academy (RAA), presented in “Story A--Church vs. State” a narrative that spoke to the reality that challenges to extra-curricular materials can come from both the traditional right as well as from liberal elements, which in the past generation have become more attuned to issues of identity and diversity. In the abstract, she noted that as a social studies teacher in an arts academy she is in a distinct minority and that the liberal arts/humanities position that is her focus is occasionally at odds with the vocational arts-based thrust of the instruction at Riverview. The environment gives RAA a quite different atmosphere to many in the Jacksonville area, as Donna explained in the orientation segment of the narrative:

Donna A-2. Well, you have to understand that this is a different school from the others in the area. You might have a more conservative environment in most schools, particularly in the neighborhood schools where if you’re a liberal minded teacher like me you have to be careful to not talk too openly about abortion or sex or whatnot. Here, though, the students and even their parents are pretty diverse and much more liberal than in most schools in the area. It’s just the arts school focus, it changes everything.

The complicating action portion of the narrative then laid out an example of this difference in atmosphere, in which Donna was surprised by a student who challenged her

decision to bring in Christmas music to add to the festivities around the days before the winter holidays:

Donna A-3. So, I've had kids question choices that wouldn't be a problem in other schools. For example, I had for years brought in a copy of the Elvis Presley Christmas album, you know, with "Blue Christmas" and I had a kid complain that it was Christian music and that I shouldn't be playing it. He was Jewish and I guess I hadn't thought of it.

In evaluating her choice of extra-curricular materials, Donna expressed surprise in the student's response as she had considered the record:

A classic that I grew up with and my kids grew up with and it just seemed warm and friendly to have it going in the classroom in those days before the holidays when all the kids are ready to get out of school and have fun.

In the end, her resolution to the narrative provoked her to think about her role in the classroom. As an older teacher, she ruminated on the cultural gulf that has widened over the years between her and her students:

Donna A-5. I guess as I get a little older, it seems that I get further away from what these kids are about. They don't listen to my kind of music anymore and I sure don't listen to theirs.

The vehemence of her final comment indicated in her rising crescendo, "I *sure* don't listen to theirs," shows a distance from youth culture that belies her expressed desire to reach the students in her classes. In the coda, she commented: "So, I've had to rethink some things." There is sadness to her voice in commenting that perhaps her once close connection to her students has been lost over the years. Thus, a position of distance has crept into Donna's practice as a consequence of her understanding of the widening cultural gap between teachers and students.

Eric: Republicans and Democrats

In a narrative titled "Story B--Republicans vs. Democrats," Eric began by critiquing the quality of contemporary journalistic standards. Asked for an example of controversial content in the social studies, he provided an abstract in which he envisions that the partisan conflict

between the Republican and Democratic parties will “get hotter in the next year.” In the orientation section of the narrative, he spoke about how he planned to involve students in these issues during the Presidential election campaign:

Eric B-2. I’ll get the Government kids in for the spring semester. I’m planning to do some debates with the students. Have them choose candidates and debate different issues from the point of their chosen candidates.

These intentions stated clearly, Eric took a moment to mention his own position toward the issues in the classroom:

Eric B-3. I make no bones about my own opinions, the students know from day one that I’m a Republican, die-hard conservative, voted for Bush twice, but that doesn’t mean that students can’t criticize Bush in my classes, and they sure do, and I criticize him too sometimes, I think this administration has been deeply disappointing to conservatives in many ways.

Here, Eric seems to open up the possibility of the teacher playing an active role as one voice of many in a spirited, democratic discussion of the issues surrounding the 2008 Presidential campaign. Yet, he quickly followed this up with an evaluation segment that seemed to negate this possibility:

Eric B-4. I just try to keep the students focused on reasoned opinions, I don’t let them just shoot from the hip, they have to back up their rants, they can’t just take something from the Daily Show and run with it, I want sources.

In his evaluation, Eric displayed distrust of popular culture, here exemplified by the fake news humor of *The Daily Show*. When he remarked in the resolution to the piece that, “I try to make it real in the Government class,” he was again drawing a clear distinction between the level of scholarship he expects in his classroom and what he sees passing as infotainment in the contemporary culture. What this means in effect for his students, though, is that they are not free to voice their opinions with impunity; rather they must have fully footnoted and sourced views if they wish to make contributions to the class.

Frank: GSA

Frank is the only one of the 7 participant-teachers whose narratives spoke to the reality of dealing with controversial topics outside of the traditional classroom setting. In “Story A--GSA,” he spoke about his tenure as the faculty sponsor at Riverview Arts Academy (RAA) for the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), a nationwide support group for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered students and their straight friends and supporters. In his abstract, Frank mentioned that this experience stems from the demographics of RAA: “We’ve got a lot of gay and lesbian students here, probably because of the arts focus, that’s the stereotype but there’s some truth to that.” In the orientation segment of the narrative, Frank discussed how he was approached to sponsor the group:

Frank A-2. So, one of the first years I was here, a group of students asked me to sponsor the Gay Straight Alliance chapter here at Riverview. When I was first asked, I didn’t have professional status and I was still single so I told them thanks but no thanks. I helped them find someone else to sponsor them for a few years, to get the group going and I attended some of their events to let them know that I supported what they were doing.

In indicating that his decision to decline the students’ offer at first was due to his lack of tenure and marital status, Frank underscored the precariousness of the novice teacher’s employment status today. In the complicating action to the narrative, he addressed his decision to become a sponsor after a colleague’s retirement: “By then, I’d been married, I had a conversation with my wife about it, and she encouraged me to take it on.” Asked why this changed his mind, he briefly referred to the irony of “all of these Republican politicians who are married and turn out gay,” but insisted that “just having the ring on helps.” Interestingly, it appeared that his main concern is not the reaction of parents and students, but rather that of his colleagues:

Frank A-3. Oh, this is funny, the first year that we entered a float in the Homecoming parade, I was sitting in the faculty lounge and there was a list of participating groups that was tacked up on the bulletin board and one of the old guys in the math department said something like, “Gay Straight Alliance? Who’s the sponsor of that group?”

In the evaluation section of the narrative, Frank admitted that his role as GSA sponsor has meant handling some delicate ethical issues, such as how to address students who come out to him. Asked whether he felt mandated to report this to parents, Frank responded that, “I’m not required as a mandated reporter to inform parents that their kids are gay, so I don’t. I leave that up to the students.” In the resolution to the piece, then, Frank admitted some concern about parents, but mainly in regard to their relationships with their sons and daughters:

Frank A-5. Anyway, I’ve had students who were active in GSA who came out to their parents and their parents forbid them to come to meetings. They still come when they can sneak away or find an excuse to be after school. But I’ve never had a parent complain to my face. They’re probably too embarrassed.

In this lengthy narrative, Frank described the risks taken by teachers who take on responsibilities beyond the classroom that involve tackling controversy. With regard to the explosive issue of gay sexuality among teenagers, Frank’s decision to wait until he received the protection of professional status within his school and the protected status of marriage is perfectly understandable. Yet, even here, the implicit message that he sent the group of students who had initially approached him is that controversy involves risk and potential embarrassment in front of one’s colleagues.

Back in the classroom, Frank displayed a similar prudence. In a second narrative, “Story B--History as History,” Frank both recognized the potential for controversy in the field--“I tread lightly around religious issues, the war, those kinds of issues”--and demarcated a position for himself in the classroom. In the abstract to the narrative, he used coded language to explain this approach: “I treat history as history.” This fascinating construction, history as history, is a code redolent of avoidance of controversy. In the orientation to the narrative, Frank placed this position in a practical context:

Frank B-2. I'm lucky if I get up to Reagan in a good year. Yeah, that's a good year if I get to 1980. And I'm not sure that the students put together the periods like Vietnam and Iraq and I'm not sure I want them too. There's a lot of talk about that but it's more complicated than that. Yes, Vietnam was a disaster and Iraq is a disaster but they're really different. And I want students to understand Vietnam for Vietnam, to understand why we got involved and the mistakes that were made there, but not necessarily to extrapolate from that to be against Iraq. I think it's conceivable to think that Vietnam was a bad idea and that Iraq is noble, or vice versa.

Here, Frank intriguingly turned the practical matter known to all public school teachers of curricular time pressure into a blessing in disguise. As Frank's survey of American history is unlikely to reach contemporary topics, which in his mind are more fraught with political tension and controversy, students are able to focus their minds on looking at issues in historical context without the temptation of making historical parallels. In the complicating action of the narrative, Frank used an example of a lesson from a unit on World War I to illustrate this method. He centered his students' minds on the practical consequences of diplomatic efforts such as President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Point Plan. Frank was refreshingly candid in reflecting on and evaluating his own pedagogical style:

Frank B-4. Like I say, I'm pretty traditional when it comes to teaching style, I lecture very much like my high school history teacher Mr. Evans did. I remember looking at what he did and I wanted to be like him, to be able to lecture with authority and have students hang on my words like they did for him. He was awesome. So, when I lecture, I'm trying to help students to see how the decisions made by leaders have consequences, so we spend a lot of time with graphic organizers looking at the roots of conflicts and the consequences of particular decisions.

This comment reinforced the voluminous research that suggests that many social studies teachers merely replicate the teaching patterns that they themselves witnessed in their own schooling. The position that emerged from the narrative, then, is that a narrow focus on historical inquiry as a means of avoiding potential points of controversy in instruction.

Gina: Social Studies is a Minefield

In contrast to the approach that emerged from the narrative structure contained in Frank's stories, Gina viewed it as inevitable that controversy will be part of social studies instruction.

This perspective is highlighted in the abstract to "Story A--Social Studies is a Minefield." Asked what is controversial in the field, Gina responded candidly:

Gina A-1. Sure, well, what isn't? I mean, I don't start out expecting to do controversial work every day, I don't want to get fired, but social studies is a minefield, right?

This metaphor appeared especially appropriate in Gina's specific setting of Orange Park College Preparation School, which she described in the orientation segment of the narrative as a school in which "parents can be really intense, I guess is the right word, concerned." As did Eric, Gina laid much of the blame for this intense atmosphere at the feet of the media. In the complicating action section of the narrative, Gina claimed that parents are often provoked into action against specific teachers and schools they might otherwise trust because of the salacious coverage of such incidents in the local media:

Gina A-3. And it seems as if people are easily set off these days anyway, you see that every day on TV and in the papers, there are always people willing to complain and get upset about things.

In an interesting structural element, Gina then provided a coda that expressed her view that the climate in education has changed significantly during her time of service: "I know I sound old talking like this, but I really think that things have changed." This was then followed by an evaluation segment in which Gina transitioned from her critique of the media into a lament about the overly litigious nature of contemporary American society:

Gina A-4. And it's not just the people here in Jacksonville, it's everywhere. I mean, you constantly see in the Florida Times Union where someone is suing someone else for wrecking their coat in the dry cleaners or some such. I mean, what's that all about?

This complaint about the changing nature of education, in which teachers are caught in a bind between the increasing pressures placed on them from on high by an unseen educational bureaucracy and parents who are viewed as customers of educational services, emerged from many of these conversations. Asked to comment on whether this heightened sensitivity exists among her students, Gina provided a further narrative, “Story B--Going, Gone, Gonzo.” In the orientation segment that begins the narrative, Gina reminisced about an incident that occurred in the spring of 2007 during the scandal involving the firing of several U.S. attorneys by the Justice Department led by former Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez. She then detailed the incident in the complicating action of the narrative:

Gina B-3. I have this bulletin board in the classroom and I try to change the items pretty frequently to keep the kids interested. So I have a lot of current events topics and extra credit questions on there. Most of the time the students don’t notice but I try. So one of the things I do is cut out pictures and headlines from magazines and newspapers to go along with the current events issues. So I found this headline with a picture of Gonzalez and it said something like “Going, Gone, Gonzo” or something like that. I think it was from *Newsweek* because I have a subscription that comes to the school . . . and I put it up and something like the next day, a student who usually is barely awake asked a question, “Why is that there?”

Gina described a feeling of being caught off guard in response to the student’s query. In the evaluation of the narrative, Gina commented defensively: “Well, I thought it was ideal for my Law Studies class. Anyway, I thought it was funny . . .” Interestingly, just as Gina was preparing this defense, she noted in the resolution segment of the narrative that the student was far from serious in raising the issue:

Gina B-5. And I geared up for a big fight with him about my right to bring items in from home and trying to enrich the curriculum and blah de blah blah, but then he just smiled, kind of like “Gotcha!”

Finally, Gina provided the abstract to the narrative at the end of the story:

Gina B-1. That’s funny, because they complain but a lot of times it’s just to see if they can get a reaction from me, get me to say “Come on!” That’s almost my catch-phrase. Come on!

This final exhortation, repeated twice indicated Gina's level of frustration with regard to these interactions with students and their parents.

Conclusions

The narratives that emerged from these interviews illustrate that the experiences that social studies teachers at the secondary level have had, and, more importantly, the meanings that they have constructed from these experiences, with teaching controversy have led to the development of a variety of very individual positions toward their roles as teachers. These begin with their own organic conceptions of what constitutes controversy within the school and wider community. All 7 teacher-participants interviewed were able to readily detail these experiences and to make meaning from them, as expressed in fascinating narrative structures. As Adam recalled, conversations with veteran colleagues had an important role to play in developing his approach as a novice teacher. "My department head told me to stay away from them (controversial subjects)." As researchers have suggested (Apple, 2001; Barton & Levstik, 2004; Grant, 2005), pre-service and novice practitioners are often given the advice from veteran teachers to leave behind the idealism and theoretical understandings that they gained from their teacher training experiences. What is particularly fascinating in these conversations is that these pieces of advice, offered to them early in their careers, are internalized to the point at which they are still extremely vivid in their memories many decades later.

All of the teacher-participants were equally able to recall immediately experiences in which their curricular decisions were challenged. These conflicts ranged in severity from relatively mild and innocuous incidents, such as the mock indignation expressed by a student in response to Gina's posting of the headline relating to Alberto Gonzalez, to more serious censorious incidents. The profusion of these incidents leads all of the teachers interviewed to be

cautious, however; in the words of Donna, “You have to be careful not to talk too openly about abortion or sex or whatnot.” While each teacher has negotiated his or her own position toward controversial subject matter, these encounters seem to have provoked common responses of either avoidance of a distant neutrality.

Finally, all of the participants spoke eloquently about the social pressures placed upon them by the educational community, by the students, parents, and even the colleagues with which they work side by side in terms of their responses to their experiences in the classroom. Frank’s memory of the faculty lounge incident in which “one of the old guys in the math department said something like, ‘Gay Straight Alliance? Who’s the sponsor of that group?’” is a testament to these kinds of pressures and how they relate to the decisions to take on risks in their teaching practices in and out of the classroom. It also testifies to the need for teachers entering a new school to build alliances with like minded colleagues.

In the next chapter, I analyze the curricular materials selected by my teacher-participants to represent their teaching of controversial public issues. I then look at the narratives that emerged from our conversations about the lessons contained within these curricular materials.

CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS: TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH CONTROVERSY

Introduction

The issue of teachers' positions toward subject matter is a central concern in teaching and learning practices in the social studies today. Yet, constructivism as a paradigm, and those who conduct research within it, explicitly reject the idea that knowledge is impartial. Indeed, as Kincheloe (2005) pointed out, this is precisely what distinguishes constructivism from more traditional, positivistic ways of knowing. He commented that, "An epistemology of constructivism has maintained that nothing represents a neutral perspective, in the process shaking the epistemological foundations of modernist Cartesian grand narratives. Indeed, no truly objective way of seeing exists" (p. 8).

In the constructive worldview, different individuals in the educational community, whether they be teachers, students, administrators, parents, or those in the wider community, will view the subject matter of a social studies classroom in a variety of ways. Kincheloe (2005) used the analogy of a sports event to imagine how "a German bank teller, an Igbo tribes person, a Texas rancher and a woman from a small village in China close to the Mongolian border might describe a major league baseball game" (p. 9). When posed in this clear-cut manner, it should be apparent that an approach that privileges multiple perspectives--what in constructivist literature is referred to as *bricolage*--is the most appropriate one, especially in today's diverse classroom.

However, the history of American schooling has not followed this pattern. As I mentioned in my review of the literature, educators throughout the history of American schools have viewed the social studies curriculum through the lenses of the dominant imperatives of schooling of the day. For example, colonial educators saw schooling and its curriculum as a means of perpetuating the values, often religious, of the Old World of Europe in the New World

of the colonies. For revolutionary figures, such as Thomas Jefferson and Noah Webster, the role of schools was to unite a fragile republic by means of a transmission of patriotic virtues into passive Republican machines. Nineteenth century common school reformers such as Horace Mann and Catherine Beecher utilized the curriculum in order to instill the liberal values of middle-class Protestantism in a massive wave of immigrant families and their children, whom reformers found lacking in their sense of work ethic. In all of these cases, the assumptions underscoring these efforts were that the curricula were impartial; however, underneath this facade of neutrality, the imperatives of those who possessed social capital were able to dictate the terms of what the cultural capital offered in the classroom (Rury, 2005).

In the following chapter, I explore the views of 7 social studies teachers currently teaching in the Jacksonville, Florida area, as they consider their positions toward the content material on offer in their classrooms.

Curricular Choices

At the initial interview session, I asked the 7 teacher-participants to bring some work products from their teaching practice, including one sample course syllabus and one sample plan for a lesson that they perceived as controversial. During these interviews, I asked them to speak to the potentially controversial elements of these materials. The narratives that emerged from these conversations illustrate the individual responses to the myriad challenges and pressures facing secondary social studies teachers today. Moreover, my analysis of these narratives, informed by Bamberg's (2004) positionality thesis, points toward the very personal positions taken by these individuals toward the use of controversial subject matter. These positions are the subject of Chapter 6.

Adam: Cut and Paste Job

In a narrative titled “Story B--Cut and Paste Job,” Adam candidly addressed the process surrounding the creation of the syllabus for his course in American Government at Orange Park College Preparation School (OPCPS). In a revealing narrative gambit, Adam began, not with an abstract or overview of the narrative, but rather by orienting the narrative in the context of curricular time pressures. He first described the decision to present the syllabus for the Government course rather than that for his Advanced Placement U.S. History course, which he referred to as, “restricted by the needs of the AP and the College Board.” Adam elaborated on the pressures placed on him by the testing regimen at his school:

Adam B-2. But mostly it’s that over the past few years, as you probably found, we’ve lost a lot of time to testing. We now have a pre-test at the beginning of the year, and a post-test at the end of the year. And that’s in addition to PSAT if you teach ninth grade and AP tests and IB tests and it’s just endless. So we’ve lost time for regular instruction and I’ve had to adjust so that I get through as much material as possible. It’s tough and I have to admit that I don’t get to as much as I used to. Just can’t.

This dilemma involving coverage of material in an era of mandated testing is a common one for secondary social studies teachers and Adam’s unique narrative structure indicates a rationale for a programmatic trend in his instruction practices. Once this rationale had been provided, Adam returned to the abstract of the narrative in which he indicated that, “To be honest, since I’ve been doing this for a long time, it’s usually kind of a cut and paste job from the previous year’s material.” In other words, Adam begins his preparation of the next year’s course from the shell of the previous year’s instruction and adds very little to it. Adam further questioned the need to provide fresh material for each year of instruction by describing his “old school” teaching style:

Adam B-4. I’m kind of old school, I guess even though I don’t like to think of myself as a dinosaur or anything but I do mostly direct instruction or lecture or whatever you want to call it because that seems to give students the structure that they need. In fact, when I

try to do more group stuff, they complain, especially the AP students. They just want content that they can use for the test.

It is noticeable that when speaking of the general course design, Adam couched his choices in terms of the needs of the institution; when discussing his own pedagogical choices, however, he reflected on the needs and preferences of his students. He further contrasted the profiles of his Advanced Placement (AP) students, whom he viewed as more concerned about learning content for the cumulative AP examination, and his Government students, who might be more open to more “experimental methods:”

Adam B-5. Well, they’re more in tune with doing group work but still it’s not really my style. I might do more experimental stuff with them but not as much as you might or others might do.

It is only in this resolution section that Adam referred to his own preferences, expressing that cooperative methods are not “my style.” This sublimation of one’s own needs and psychic rewards in the educational process is typical of the secondary social studies teacher’s position toward the social studies curriculum today. Adam perfectly exemplified the common notion of adapting to the imperatives of the dominant power structure within schooling.

Ben: Renaissance to Modern

Ben echoed Adam’s concerns about the need to conform to curriculum frameworks structures when designing his World History survey. In “Story C--Renaissance to Modern,” Ben employed a similar narrative structure to address the content coverage issues involved in teaching a traditional survey covering the totality of human history from Ancient Mesopotamia to the contemporary world:

Ben C-2. Some schools have gone to a system in which they’re doing Ancient and Classical Civilizations in the middle grades and then letting us start with the fall of Rome. That helps. Ideally, we should be doing Renaissance to Modern, don’t you think? Well, as you can see here, I’m spending the first half of the year--almost 18 weeks--just getting up through the Middle Ages. That means that it’s a constant struggle to get to the end of the survey.

In this orientation segment, Ben admitted that in teaching this unwieldy World History survey, “a lot gets left out” and that, “for most teachers that means that anything beyond Western Europe and the United States gets tossed out--Latin America, Asia, Africa most of all because most teachers have been trained on European history and they feel comfortable with that.” In other words, the pressures of the traditional survey have created an unfortunate dynamic in which students and future teachers are trained in the context of a Eurocentric historical focus that excludes the stories of non-Europeans. Once Ben had laid out the context for his curricular decisions, he discussed the possibilities for teaching the traditional survey in more inventive ways. Asked if he had ever attempted to teach half of the survey rather than trying to cover the totality of human history, Ben admitted:

Ben C-1. Well, I tried that one year--and this was before the End of Course exams came in. So, one year I got it into my head that I’d just start with the Renaissance and move forward from there. After all, I’ve had friends who taught the survey backwards, so what I was doing wasn’t that radical. I was just assuming that the middle school teachers were doing their jobs, which I think they are for the most part.

In his evaluation of this method, Ben extolled the virtues of this abbreviated survey:

I immediately noticed that I had the freedom to do units on the Ottoman Empire that I hadn’t been able to do before, and I could get further in the survey. I ended up with a unit on contemporary conflicts in the 90s that year. It was amazing.

Yet, despite these advantages, there is a complicating factor created by the institutional demands of the school. In this section of the narrative, Ben described a situation in which a new student was introduced to his class:

Ben C-3. But the problem is that I had some students who switched from another class into another. I get this kid in my class and of course, he’s been doing the Hellenistic Period with his other class and we’re already doing the Scientific Revolution, some few thousand years later. I tried my best to catch him up but it was hard for him. So, I got called in for that.

Ben further elaborated on this theme in the resolution to the narrative, describing the events of a meeting with the vice principal, department chair and the parents involved: “Well, I

agreed to meet with the student twice a week after school to catch him up and I had to agree to some accommodations around testing and grading. I didn't mind that." While Ben concluded that this was a fair compromise, he affirmed his intention to try to avoid this kind of situation in the future by making "sure to not do that again. I'm back to doing the straight survey." The coda of the piece then related the lesson that Ben learned from this incident:

Ben C-6. You're dead meat if you don't keep up with the pace of the survey and what's covered on the test. They've gotten to the point where they look at each question and do a statistical review of each teacher's performance on those items. So, if I say skipped teaching about the Byzantines and all my students failed those items, they'd know for sure.

At the end of his narrative, therefore, Ben had resolved to drop his experimentation with the traditional historical survey, which he had found useful in freeing time for more topics and covering more contemporary issues, because of the curricular pressures attached to teaching World History.

Cathy: The Seven Years' War is Still the Seven Years' War

Cathy, the most veteran teacher among the participants, began her narrative with an apology for the stale quality of the syllabus for her Advanced Placement European History course. In "Story C--The Seven Years' War is Still the Seven Years' War," Cathy allowed that, "I've been doing it all the time that I've been here and longer in other schools, so it's (the syllabus is) pretty dusty." In the complicating action portion of the narrative, Cathy contrasted her approach with that of a junior colleague, who had adopted the dramatic practice of destroying all of her materials at the end of the school year in an effort to prevent boredom and intellectual atrophy:

Cathy C-3. I used to have a close friend who taught here a few years back who had a ritual in which she literally burned her notes from the previous year on the last day of school. She made a big deal about too. She'd invite friends like me over for a barbecue and she'd throw the notes on the grill. And then she'd spend most of the summer putting the course together, and she did APUSH, so I don't know how she did it.

While she clearly admired her friend's passion and devotion to teaching something new and fresh every year, Cathy distinguished between her friend's practice and that of her own. In the orientation section of the narrative, she rationalized that the historical topics that form the core of her curriculum "don't change:" "History hasn't changed, the Seven Years' War is still the Seven Years' War, right?" Cathy in this brief telling quip acknowledged an approach toward history in which one dominant perspective on an event is superior to more novel approaches. She expanded on this flippant remark in her evaluation:

Cathy C-4. I probably teach it the way that I was taught it years ago. Again, the topics haven't changed much and I resist the revisionist stances that have become popular. Some of the younger colleagues here are bringing in some postmodernist concepts in their teaching--multiple perspectives and the like--and I raise an eyebrow at that in meetings.

In a dramatic shift in the narrative, Cathy resolved the narrative by referring to her impending retirement: "I'm going to retire at the end of next year and everyone knows that my reign is almost over." Sensing this shift, she immediately added some dark humor in the form of a coda to the piece:

Cathy C-6. They'll say, "The Queen is dead" at the end of next year and a new department chair will be nominated. Whoever is unlucky enough to get the job has my sympathy.

The darkly comic tone that pervaded many of Cathy's comments throughout this narrative belie her obvious seriousness of intent with regard to her craft. This humor provides Cathy with a means of anticipating her retirement at a period of her career when she undoubtedly feels the social pressure of supervising and working alongside younger colleagues who bring to the school new and adventurous ideas with which she may disapprove.

Donna: They Need Structure

While Cathy's tone and decision-making process was very personal, Donna organized her narrative concerning her World History curriculum, "Story B--They Need Structure," around her

perceptions of the needs of her students. She admitted in the abstract of the narrative that the document that she had brought to the session was not a syllabus in the traditional sense:

Donna B-1. Well, I don't know if you would call it a syllabus, not at least what they'll get at college level as much, I guess, it's what you might, I don't know, it's really just a list of rules and requirements for the course.

She immediately provided a justification for this unusual choice by explaining the context of her school and student population. She commented in the orientation section of the narrative:

Donna B-2. I find that since most of my students think of World History as a requirement, not as something that they love, not as something that they have a passion for like drawing or painting or singing, that I have to lay down the law on the first day about what's expected of them. I give them this big lecture about how few students will actually end up working in the arts, and I have statistics to prove it. . . . They need to know these things.

It is striking in these comments that Donna's interpretation of the context of Riverside Arts Academy as a school that prepares students to have what she considers unreasonable career expectations leads her toward a more conservative teaching stance and practice. She clarified this position by stating that, "Of course, we would like to be able to sing or write poetry for the rest of our lives, that's a given, but we have to be practical about these matters. They may have to fall back on their academics." In her calculus, most of her students will fail in their desired career in the arts and will thus have to "fall back" on the knowledge and academic structure that she hopes to provide them in her course. She expanded on this theme in the complicating action segment of the narrative:

Donna B-3. And if they're going to go to college they need to fulfill the requirements of college admissions, they'll need four years of the core subjects. The arts faculty need to inspire them to be creative for the rest of their lives even if they end up as accountants, but my job is more bread and butter.

The phrase "bread and butter" is redolent of a vocational educational project and yet, in Donna's estimation, she is passing on the foundational knowledge and skills of a liberal arts curriculum. In the evaluation segment, Donna addressed the need for her list of somewhat arcane

and pedantic rules--the need for a three ring binder and college-ruled paper, for example--by describing her arts students: "A lot of these kids just walk around in a kind of cloud all day long, they're up there and I need to bring them back down to earth." Asked if she encountered any resistance to these rules and regulations in her classroom, Donna provided the resolution to the piece:

Donna B-5. I don't take a lot of guff about it, either they do it my way or there's going to be trouble, I tell them that. My way or else, because if you start getting into arguments and accommodations with these kids they'll run away with you.

In the end, the tone of Donna's narrative--"They Need Structure"--suggested her justification for her "tough love" approach and toward a group of students for whom she cares deeply and yet considers incapable of developing meaning for themselves without the aid of a structured academic program.

Eric: It Gets Very Vocational

When asked to provide a syllabus for this project, Eric elected to present a syllabus that he had created for his elective course in Economics. Like most of the participants, Eric began his discussion by outlining his reasoning for organizing the course in the way that he has chosen. In his orientation section to "Story C--It Gets Very Vocational," Eric explained his preference for using experiential, project-based lessons:

Eric C-2. I like to think that students learn more from rolling up their sleeves and wading in the material. Sure, I can lecture about how Wall Street works and I do as a way to prepare them for the game, but it's through buying and selling stocks and checking their values every day in the paper and competing with each other that they get a sense of the system and how it works. I do a lot of project based stuff. I do the standard stock market game in the second half of the course.

When asked whether he had considered more practical exercises in household finance that might relate to more students than does a stock market game, Eric demurred, explaining in a statement that forms the abstract for the narrative that those exercises might be more suitable for

a more “vocational course” such as Business Math for lower-level students: “I do some of that, but it gets very vocational.” In the complicating action segment of the narrative, he related an experience that led him toward his current thinking about the Economics course:

Eric C-3. The first job that I had in Delaware, I got tossed an upper level elective course like this one in economics and I started out with a course outline that had a lot of activities like the ones that you talked about, dealing with a household budget. checkbook management, and so on, and I ran it by the department head and you know what he said? He looked at the project work and he said, “That’s what we do in Business Math.” In other words, that was something for the dumb kids.

In his evaluation of the narrative, Eric suggested that he had internalized the message communicated by the department head and the school community in Delaware about the contradiction between practical-based lessons and high academic standards: “It was all about tracking for sure and what the kids were supposed to need, at least in terms of the way that the school defined that.” His choice of the conditional phrase “at least in terms of” indicates a certain level of discomfort with school policy evident in his first teaching job, and yet at the same time, Eric’s current syllabus suggests that he has made his peace with the dichotomy between the vocational and the academic curriculum.

Gina: Sociology

In discussing her curricular choices for her elective course in Sociology in her narrative “Story D--Sociology,” Gina employed a striking narrative pattern that began with the resolution to the narrative: “The problem is that some of the kids, no, most of the kids are pretty provincial so they immediately gravitate toward something that fits in with their ethnicity because that’s easy to do.” Asked to explain this comment, she stated that the requirements of the course are “fairly flexible because no one really looks at the materials that we use to teach the elective courses, they just kind of give us a textbook and let us go.” In the orientation section of the narrative, she expanded on her views about student-driven course work:

Gina D-2. If the group is particularly interested in youth culture or the family or law and order, then we go with that. As long as I cover my two big units in the term then I'm happy with that.

At the same time, she argued that it is the closed and narrow perspectives of her students that restrict her options. She described this point in an extended commentary that provided the complicating action of the narrative:

Gina D-3. I had a group that investigated whether there was an image among students that male cheerleaders are gay. That was interesting. But most are the usual axes the kids have to grind about school policy. One year the administration had decided to go against school tradition and award the "Spirit Stick"--it's this dumb thing that they have for pep rallies--to the junior rather than the senior class. Well, the seniors were irate and several did their projects on that. So it varies.

This statement seemed to contradict the themes throughout Gina's various narratives that stress student-centered learning and innovative teaching practices. It is clear from this statement that Gina put a higher value on issues that she finds important--for example, gay sexuality--and disparaged issues that she finds relatively trivial that are merely "axes the kids have grind about school policy." This statement ignored the understanding that those issues closest to students' lives can often be the ones that motivate student action that can inform a life-long practice of community engagement and activism.

Controversial Lessons

As discussed in the last chapter, teachers' conceptions of controversial teaching within the social studies varied widely. These viewpoints are informed by a variety of elements, such as individual political ideas, educational background, content knowledge, and the context of the school community. These elements can be seen in the choices that teachers make about the daily lessons that they present to groups of students. At the culmination of the first set of interviews, I asked each teacher-participant to discuss a sample lesson that they conceived of as potentially controversial. The narratives that emerged from these conversations are fascinating in the way that they illustrate the individual positions that these teachers have developed toward social

studies curricula, and especially toward the controversial content areas, over their many years of service.

Adam: The Bell Curve

In his narrative “Story C--The Bell Curve,” Adam described a lesson that he built around a suggestion made by Herrnstein and Murray (1994) in *The Bell Curve*, a book that led to furious scholarly exchanges (Fraser, 1995; Jacoby & Glauberman, 1995; Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Glesson, 1996) surrounding the authors’ claims that American class structure represented a natural meritocracy based on intelligence and consequent career success or failure. In the orientation section of the narrative, Adam addressed the controversial nature of the lesson:

Adam C-2. Well, you said controversial and that book was hot. It’s cooled off now, in fact I don’t think anyone even remembers it, definitely the kids I work with have never read it, never heard of it, for sure.

Asked to describe the design of the lesson, Adam detailed how he took the basic kernel of an idea from Herrnstein and Murray and built it into a lesson:

Adam C-2. What I did was to create a worksheet that had the basic set-up on top. They (Herrnstein and Murray) start the first chapter by asking readers to think of their twelve closest friends. In the book, they wanted people to list the educational achievement of friends and they do that to talk about their idea of a “cognitive elite.” Well, so after we read and discussed this short piece here, then I had them list their friends names and then I had them sort them by a number of different categories.

Adam continued the orientation section of the narrative by addressing how his students’ status within the prestigious International Baccalaureate magnet program at Orange Park College Preparation School--“a cognitive elite within the school”--and the relative diversity of the group made the lesson even more explosive.

Adam C-2. They all are in high school but I wanted to find out how many had close friends in other schools, how many had close friends in the IB track vs. the Honors track--this was an IB heavy class on Government, so most of them associated with other IB kids because they travel together all day long and they’re all smart kids that their parents probably approve of. Then I had them categorize by age, gender, all sorts of other sociological categories including race.

At this point in the narrative, Adam admitted that he purposely designed the lesson for its maximum effect on students, who rewarded him for his efforts when the situation in his classroom “blew up.” In the complicating action segment of the narrative, Adam described the reaction of his students to the assignment:

Adam C-3. So the first kid who notices it says, “Hey, you can’t ask us that!” And I said, “Why not?” So that started a whole discussion the basic point of which was whether or not even asking questions about race was racist. I was pretty astonished. I guess I knew I might be treading in deep waters, but I assumed it would be because some parent would be familiar with the book.

Here, Adam expressed surprise not in that the lesson was perceived as controversial, but rather by the direction of the challenge. He interpreted his students’ reaction to the assignment as one of avoidance: “It was just that the whole class wanted to ignore the issue of race because they think they’re color blind in this generation, that it doesn’t matter any more.” When asked if he revisited the topic with another lesson design, Adam provided the resolution to the narrative:

Adam C-5. Yeah, but the discussion had really skewed it because then I don’t think I got honest answers. And what I got was a kind of rosy colored view of everything, everyone is friends with each other and there are no problems, no divisions at all, you know. And that’s just not the truth.

In evaluating the incident, Adam admitted that he did not achieve the objectives that he had had for the lesson--to encourage students to speak truthfully and candidly about issues of race and class from a place of intimate knowledge--but he assigned blame on the students for not being open to explore the basis of their friendships rather than exploring the issues that were raised by the design of the lesson itself. Asked if he would revisit the lesson, Adam supplied a somber coda to the piece:

Adam C-6. I did the same lesson for two classes that day and it was pretty much the same story in both and I went home that night and I was still really tensed up from the whole thing and I thought I don’t need this, I don’t need to come from school and not be able to sleep because of some stupid lesson, jackass.

With some reframing and fine-tuning, Adam's lesson might well be successful in the future; yet, the experience of having his lesson called into question by his students, and particularly the shocking accusation made against him of racism, had clearly chastened Adam from approaching the same lesson, or perhaps the topics at the heart of the lesson, ever again.

Ben: Student Skit

Ben continued this theme of student resistance to lessons in his narrative "Story D-- Student Skit." In the abstract to the narrative, Ben explained his preference for using student-centered activities in his classroom instruction: "I've tried to include more student-centered exercises over the years, so one of the ways that I've included students more is through skits."

Asked about the source of the skits, Ben provided the orientation to the narrative:

Ben D-2. They're skits I've written. It's kind of a side thing. I'm kind of a frustrated playwright or screenwriter. So, it's a combination of things. Sometimes I use some parts of existing documents; sometimes it's all me. I try to take on a period and create something that's going to characterize it.

From this seemingly sensible lesson plan that might appear in the agenda books of social studies teachers across the county, Ben dives into the controversy with the topics that he selects for his skits. By selecting topics that will raise awareness of critical issues and then expecting that students will play an organic role in acting out these issues in front of a group of their peers, he accentuates the contentious nature of the lesson. Not surprisingly, Ben was then able to relate a story about a student who had resisted the skit lesson plan in the complicating action segment of the narrative:

Ben D-3. I had one that was loosely based on the Amistad incident and a Black kid, actually maybe more than just one over the years, but definitely I remember one kid who just refused to even be in the room for it. She said, 'my mom just says that I shouldn't be around when you folks are talking slavery' or something like that. I was totally flummoxed. I'd never had to deal with that.

As with the students in Adam's narrative about the lesson surrounding *The Bell Curve*, the issue of race was the trigger to the conflict in the classroom, and in both cases, the students involved in the incident objected to their mere exposure to the issue. In his evaluation of the narrative, Ben reflected on his efforts to reduce the possibility of student resistance:

Ben D-4. I'm pretty careful there. I don't require all of the group members to act. They can do the background work, write the paper, I just control who does what. I have to do that because otherwise I hear about it. There are so many kids on IEPs and special accommodations these days, that I don't dare require them to do something that might take some effort, right? I cover my butt at all times.

While Ben felt that he took proper precautions to "cover his butt"--so common an expression in faculty lounges today that it is often shortened to the acronym "C.Y.B." for convenience--he still expressed concern about the future use of his skits in the coda to the narrative: "It is a worry, though." Whether treated in a historical or contemporary context, the issue of race is so raw in the American body politic today that teachers who attempt to raise critical awareness of the reality of race in American society run the risk of engendering student resistance.

Cathy: World Religions Journal

Cathy reflected similar concerns about the inclusion of religious issues in her classroom instruction in her narrative "Story D--World Religions Journal." However, while Adam and Ben have the opportunity to avoid the delicate issue of race in their courses, religious issues are, by definition, the core of her elective course in World Religions at Orange Park College Preparation School. In the abstract to her narrative, Cathy described one of her efforts to encourage students to reflect on their religious worldviews: "Well, in my Religions classes, I've for a long time done weekend journals, you know, reflective journals. I guess that's pretty innovative, right?" Cathy's narrative structure was significantly different from those of Adam and Ben in that it was imbued with controversy and student resistance from beginning to end. In her orientation to the narrative,

she explained that the journal is a strategy calculated to elicit candid responses from students who are more taciturn in the classroom setting:

Cathy D-2. There are some students who just won't discuss the issues in class but you get them at home and they write up a storm and then I'll take a piece or two and either have them read them in class or I'll read them out anonymously and we'll wrangle over their ideas that way.

Though she has had some significant success with this approach, Cathy nonetheless expressed frustration with her students' inability to deal honestly with the issues at the center of the course:

Cathy D-2. There are occasionally some topics that they will challenge, or some will challenge, for example, if I ask them to consider reincarnation, some will say, "I don't believe in that. It's not Christian." And I'll say, "I know it isn't, but remember what I said on the first day of class--we're here to talk about ideas, even ideas you don't like." It's fair game for them.

Cathy related in the complicating action section of the narrative that the students will often specify on their written work: "Do not read this!" It's usually in block letters and underlined." She continued this thought by describing one incident in particular that challenged her objectives in using journaling with students:

Cathy D-3. I suppose the issue that I've had the most heat on recently is that I gave them a question about Christianity, well about Judaism, I suppose, it was about the Book of Genesis and the story of Adam's Rib. It was, let's see, something like "Discuss the gender stereotypes involved in the story of Adam's Rib."

Asked about the student response, Cathy commented, "Let's see, 'I don't want to write about that,' 'That's a stupid question.' That kind of thing." At the same time, Cathy did admit some successes with individual students:

Cathy D-3. I had this student, this little girl, but she wrote this beautiful journal entry for me on Adam's Rib where she essentially said that her faith had saved her and she didn't want any misgivings about one element of the Bible to destroy that. It was very emotional for her, she admitted that she took the Bible literally, believed that every word was the literal "word of God" as she said it and she didn't want to think of it as sexist, even though she came close to saying that it indeed was. And she quoted an Alexander Pope poem, as I remember, that was a lovely touch. And I just wrote on her paper that she

might come to understand that the Bible is a historical document and reflects the beliefs of those who wrote it.

This statement underscores an exemplary approach toward nudging her students forward in their understandings of historical documents and connecting them to their contemporary views. In her evaluation segment, Cathy reflected on these successes:

Cathy D-4. The responses to all of those questions were pretty good though, I have to say. They complain but most of them come through in the end with something interesting, just so I know that they're still out there thinking.

Cathy stated that this tendency for the most interesting journaling emanating from those students who are most recalcitrant in attempting these assignments is especially true of the girls in her class: "it's the ones who don't speak up in class, usually girls, who have the most interesting things to say in their journals, so I'll write on their papers--I always respond to them . . ." In the end, Cathy was more sanguine in her reflections than were Adam and Ben, perhaps reflecting the wisdom of her many years of experience in the classroom. Asked whether she was able to coax the student at the center of her narrative to speak more in class, she provided an equivocal resolution statement:

Cathy D-5. I couldn't pry anything else out of her on the subject, even though I read her piece out in front of the class. Even the Pope, which I loved. But nothing. She just sat at the back of the class with a slightly annoyed look on her face.

Despite this student response, which is familiar to any high school social studies teacher, it is clear from the tenor of her comments that Cathy will continue to use journaling, including on controversial topics, in her classroom practice in the future.

Donna: The Jena Six

Donna continued this theme of teachers being caught off guard by student responses to lessons, particularly those related to controversial contemporary issues, in her narrative "Story C-The Jena Six." In the abstract to the narrative, Donna discussed her reasoning for choosing to

introduce the case of six African Americans from Jena, Louisiana who were arrested after a physical altercation that stemmed from their reaction to a noose having been hung on a tree overlooking a popular seating area on the high school campus. Donna reported that, “One thing I did recently was to bring in an article about the Jena Six case for my Government class.” In the orientation section of the narrative, she explained how the choice of material affected an already tense situation in her classroom:

Donna C-2. I brought in an article that I found in Rolling Stone magazine. Some kids, mainly the music kids read it and I’ve always found that the political articles are pretty good, there’s usually at least one big investigative piece and that was true of this one. It was about four or five pages long, pretty dense. I should have given them more time with it. But I brought in copies for discussion and I broke them up into groups, like a Jigsaw, to discuss different parts of the article.

In this statement, Donna exhibited the ability to reflect on the nature of her preparation and design of the lesson and concluded that more scaffolding might have helped her students--“I should have given them more time with it (the article).” During the course of the group work section of the lesson, a furious reaction to the article erupted in the classroom. As Donna described it: “I was just monitoring the work as usual and it just exploded with noise.” Donna continued in the complicating action segment of the narrative to detail her response to the escalating situation:

Donna C-3. It just started with something relatively simple and small. One white student had noticed that the author had used a lowercase “w” for the word “white” and a capital “B” for “Black” in the article. And he had yelled across the room to another friend and mentioned it and it spread on and on. So, at a certain point, I had to rein them in and bring it back to a big group discussion and air the different views. One black student offered to manage the discussion but I told her that I thought it was a really bad idea. But the atmosphere was electric in the classroom. Electric. It just seemed as if the atmosphere in the room, just everything, was really tense and I worried about how it would go if there wasn’t an objective person leading the discussion.

It is interesting here that Donna sees her role in the classroom as the only “objective” mediator and thus rejected the student’s offer of assistance. In the evaluation section of the

narrative, she assessed her own performance in reducing the conflict in the room: “I tried to do that as best as I could. I suppose I was a little defensive because I had brought the article in in the first place and I found myself defending my choice, my curriculum choices.” In spite of selecting an article from a magazine that Donna felt would appeal to her students’ intrinsic interest in music, she regretted her choice of material. This defensive tone continued in the resolution section:

Donna C-5. I’m from Yulee, which is a really small, rural, provincial place, so I thought I understood race issues in this area, but maybe not. I just think they instinctively identified with whiteness. At the same time they kept qualifying their comments by saying things such as “I’m not saying that racism is alright” and “those white kids were wrong to do what they did.” But they felt that the article made all white students out to be racist or perhaps it was that the South is still racist.

In an effort to continue the discussion of race and yet lower the tension level in the classroom, Donna decided to introduce a student project. Yet, despite her best intentions, her students responded in a similar fashion to those in Adam’s Government class:

Donna C-6. I got some really good work from them, but I have to say that I never quite got back to the raw honesty of that first day of discussion. Something was a little closed down, I think they sort of censored themselves.

Thus, after the initial burst of discussion around a simple, and yet crucial, linguistic debate--whether a capital letter signifies respect and privilege--Donna’s students reverted to a tense silence regarding the topic of contemporary race relations. While her effort to address this topic in the context of a school-related story with which her students could organically relate is admirable, her failure to scaffold discussions in her class left her students to replicate the age-old polarized pattern of either an inappropriate and unstructured “free-for-all” or the complete absence of discussion.

Eric: The Cold War

In his narrative “Story D--The Cold War,” Eric presented an interesting twist on this theme of unexpected reactions to controversial material. Eric designed a lesson for his course on Economics that focused on some primary documents from the Marxist economic tradition that Eric expected to be regarded by his students as controversial. In the orientation section of his narrative, Eric explained that these preconceptions were largely based on his childhood experiences during the Cold War conflict between the United States and its arch-rival the Soviet Union:

Eric D-2. The Cold War was a big part of my upbringing. My dad built a bomb shelter in the backyard and there were shelters all over the neighborhood. My school was an official shelter, had the signs up everywhere. So, I grew up with an instinctual hatred of anything that smacked of communism, because the Reds were all out to get us. We read that sort of thing in the papers every day about the “Red Menace.”

He continued this theme by speaking about his own visceral response to reading documents such as Marx’s *Das Kapital* and Lenin’s “What is to be Done?”:

So, I always assume that although I’m going slant it heavily in a direction away from communist ideology--whenever I read these documents they remind me of Khrushchev banging his shoe on the lectern at the UN and saying that they would bury us--that there will be complaints.

Eric was unapologetic about his efforts to “slant” the material in a certain direction, assuming that communism is a closed issue in the minds of his students. Yet, to his surprise, his students responded with either indifference to or even approval for the ideas included in the readings. In the complicating action section of the narrative, Eric attributed this surprising reaction to his students’ youth and the reality that they came to political consciousness in a post-Cold War era:

Eric D-3. So when I give them the Marx to read and it’s full of all of this stuff about how socialism is going to help the working man, it kind of makes sense to them in a really dumb way. And the end of the discussion, I always take a straw poll--“Are there any Marxists in the room?”--and I always get one or two punks who raise their hands. Amazing. That would have never happened in the fifties or sixties and my old man would kick their asses if he was still around.

Eric made the assumption in this statement that the appeal of socialism is on a simplistic and immature level--“a really dumb way”--while discounting the possibility that his working class students might actually relate to Marx’s ideas in an organic sense, having not been exposed to a fog of McCarthyite propaganda in their schooling. This inability to understand how his students establish their own identities and interpret school materials through their own lenses is echoed in another anecdote that Eric related in the resolution to the narrative:

Eric D-5. There was even a club, well, informal group that started up a few years back with a Chinese-American kid who was big on his own heritage and he had a lot of stuff, clothes and posters and books around from his trips home to see family and he got a small group of friends to wear the Mao caps and the khaki jackets. It was pretty funny for a while but the older teachers like me weren’t laughing that much.

Rather than understanding the Asian student’s need to express his ethnic pride, Eric placed blame for the student’s innocent display on his parents: “In the end, if you have no living history of these periods and your parents aren’t stressing certain things with you, it won’t be there, the historical understanding will just be absent.” The issue of living and dead history is indeed a crucial one for social studies teachers. However, Eric’s assumption that there is a consensus surrounding historical issues living or dead indicated his own homogeneous background and denied the diverse backgrounds of his own students.

Frank: Abstract Art

In a fascinating narrative “Story D--Abstract Art,” Frank displayed similar misconceptions about his students. As a social studies teacher in an arts academy, he made the assumption that his students would be more tolerant and open to viewing and discussing modern art. In the abstract to the narrative, Frank discussed his exemplary practice of trying to tie his American history curriculum--in the specific case, the Post-war Era--to his students’ interest in the arts: “I’ve done this lecture on Abstract Expressionist art for years now, it actually started with a set of slides that I picked up when I was in New York one year. I try to use them to tie in

to the discussion of post-war politics.” He expanded on the context of his teaching practice in the orientation segment of the narrative:

Frank D-2. You know, when you teach at a school like this you kind of have to tailor what you do to fit the interests of the students, and I’ve got a lot of kids who come into class with paint-spattered jeans on, so I know I can’t just talk about the Marshall Plan and think that they’re going to get into it. I’ve got to bring the cultural history in as well.

Much like Eric, Frank had preconceptions about the manner in which his students “with paint-spattered jeans on” would interpret the slides of Jackson Pollock and Alexander Calder paintings that he presented to them in his lecture:

Frank D-2. I show a set of these slides of the usual favorites and usually the kids are just like “cool, look at trippy pictures.” In fact, I usually have to struggle to point out that the work was really controversial when it was first exhibited because these kids have been exposed to so much crazier stuff; they’re the kind of kids whose parents have taken them to New York to MOMA.

In the complicating action section of the narrative, however, Frank indicated how these assumptions were disturbed by an incident in a recent class:

Frank D-3. Anyway for some reason there was this one kid last year who was super cranky and demanding all year, always had his hand in the air and sure enough, I was showing this slide of, I think, a Pollock. And he just stuck his hand in the air and I called on him. And he just said, “That’s just a mess. I could do better than that.” I challenged him to articulate what he meant by a “mess,” and he said that it was fuzzy and out of proportion, that there weren’t any features to it that were specific or concrete.

To his credit, Frank responded well to this interruption: “And that just kicked off this great discussion about what people value in art, whether an artist should always strive for a photographic copy. I don’t think anyone changed the kid’s mind, though. But that’s okay.” It is clear from this response that Frank enjoys and looks forward to these teachable moments that deviate from the routine script that he has constructed for the lesson. In the evaluation section of the narrative, Frank expanded on this point:

Frank D-4. I’d always prefer to have that kind of discussion than to have students just sitting there silent as mice, even if they disagree with me.

In this narrative, Frank admitted to having preconceptions about the student reception of course material based on his experiences in the classroom. At the same time, however, he indicated his willingness to allow for those rare situations in which students confound his expectations.

Gina: Teaching Buddhism

Gina's narrative "Story E--Teaching Buddhism" is linked to the narratives of her fellow participants in her stated desire to attempt to tie the abstract curriculum to students' real-life experiences. In the abstract to the narrative, Gina described her intentions for the lesson in question:

Gina E-1. So, I thought I would try to show students how to use some of these ideas, rather than just treating them as if they were just some dry, abstract thing. So when I got to teaching about Buddhism, I thought, "Why not teach them how to meditate?" That's something that I've been doing for years as a personal thing, as a part of my daily routine.

It is particularly interesting that in this statement, Gina echoed the goals of many social constructivist-oriented educators in attempting to create an educational community in which the group creates meaning from a sensory experience. In the orientation segment, Gina expanded on the relationship between these conceptions developed during her teacher training experience and her current practice:

Gina E-2. I've done this unit on Asian religions and philosophies for years now and when I started out I was just full of these ideas that I'd read in my teacher training classes, so I tried them all out. Even when I didn't get a lot of support from the school or other teachers around here. Well, I guess the first thing I did was burn some incense in the room, and maybe I had some music going. I thought I'd just burn a little at the beginning of the day and then put it out in case there were some kids with allergies or something.

All of this seems to be exemplary teacher practice; however, Gina explained that her innovative teaching methods caused friction within her school: "I had some custodians up in my room in about five minutes looking for some electrical failure and when I told them what I'd

done they just gave me a look and then it was all over the school.” She expanded on this narrative in the complicating action piece:

Gina E-3. When the kids came in, they of course were like, “What’s that smell?” So anyway that was a disaster. I haven’t tried that again since. Then the second time I did it, the next year, I had one parent who called about it. In fact, I think it was the same guy who had spoken up at the Open House, asking how I was going to deal with prehistory, I think he was worried about the issue of Creation vs. Evolution.

In other words, the disaster involving her lesson design, stemming from her thoughtful decision to create an enriching environment for students, inadvertently caused problems for Gina in terms of her relationship with both the school staff and her students, and it led her to compromise her approach toward future lessons. However, even this retreat was insufficient in terms of satisfying the school community:

Gina E-3. He wanted to schedule an appointment and I had Janine, my department head, sit in that time, because I had this feeling that it might get a little heated. And it did. He basically came in and accused me of trying to recruit his daughter to a religious cult. I tried to, say, detail how it fit into the curriculum, I had a copy of the standards there, and I pointed out the place where comparative religions is and Eastern philosophy and explained how I try to do as much hands-on kinesthetic work as possible, I remember having to define that for him, and I could just tell that he wasn’t swayed at all. Janine was real great in coming in helping me out and backing me up because I was feeling really emotional and charged up.

The support that Gina received from her department head appeared to be a key element of this section of the narrative, and she rebounded from the experience with a commitment to “teach in the right way.” She expressed this determination in the evaluation section of the narrative:

Gina E-4. I was determined that I was going to teach in the right way and that I wasn’t just going to cave in to the pressure of fitting into a school. It just seems silly to just talk about it and not do it, not show the kids the way that it works and that it might, for some of them, help them out in their lives.

Gina’s commitment in this regard was explicitly connected in her narrative to a genuine concern for her students and the conditions of their schooling:

Don’t forget, these kids are in seven classes a day, they’ve got after-school activities like you wouldn’t believe, don’t get home until 9:00 at night and then have 2 hours of

homework to do on top of all of that. So, I thought that showing them how to relax with different meditation techniques might help them out.

At the same time, however, Gina was clear in the effect that her determination had had on the relationships that she developed within the school. She addressed the issue of her reputation with her colleagues, for example, in the resolution segment:

Gina E-5. I was getting all these jokes in the faculty lounge, people calling me “Smoky” and that sort of thing as if I was smoking pot in my room. Which is ridiculous. But that’s the kind of narrow-mindedness that you get among teachers sometimes. Don’t get me wrong, I get along with a lot of people here but I can’t say that I have that many friends among, not real friends, they’re just the kind of people who smile and nod in the hallways but I can’t really count on them. If I need a sub, I just go through the main office, I don’t even try to get favors of people in the department, which is kind of sad because I’ve done plenty of people plenty of favors over the years and they should know who I am by now.

At the end of this fascinating narrative, Gina redoubled her efforts to “teach in the right way,” that is, in a manner consistent with her social constructivist teaching philosophy and her teacher training experience, despite the social pressures she faces from her immediate school community.

Conclusion

Many of the teachers interviewed for this project expressed the sentiment that their experiences with teaching controversy have been generally positive and have led to their reflecting on their teaching and learning practices. This corresponds with the view of Kammen (2006) who answered his own rhetorical question--“whether controversy is necessarily a negative condition, an undesirable phenomenon to be avoided at all costs”--by stating unequivocally, “Not at all:”

Conflict can certainly be stressful, push people . . . into serious situations, and agitate civil society. Yet conflict can also be enlightening and educational, *at least in retrospect*, especially when individuals modify their mind-sets or, better still, have a change. (p. xii, author’s emphasis)

The context of modern schooling has certainly placed undue pressure on social studies teachers. Many of the participants, for example, referred to curricular time pressure as a concern when developing syllabi and lesson plans for their courses. Eric expressed this sentiment within the unique context of teaching at Riverview Arts Academy: “We all feel under the gun time pressure wise because in this school we lose more time than most because there are a lot of compulsory attendance assemblies at the end of the school year . . .” Thus, content coverage appears to place more stress on these teachers than do instances of outright violations of teachers’ academic freedom.

In the context of the contemporary culture wars in schools, teachers’ experiences with controversial subject matter are certainly fraught with tension and fear. In discussing these experiences, the participants were remarkably consistent in describing conflicts arising from discussions of race relations and religious ideas. Yet, there was also refreshing optimism among the participants in this research project that, while dealing with ideological conflicts among students, parents and administrators, to say nothing of the wider media community, is stressful *in the moment*, the experiences have in fact made them better teachers. Cathy, for instance, commented on the outcomes of a journal assignment that had caused consternation among her more religious students: “They complain but most of them come through in the end with something interesting, just so I know that they’re still out there thinking.” In the context of contemporary secondary social studies practice, therefore, the change of heart mentioned by Kammen appears to involve a genuine desire on the part of practitioners to learn from rash choices, poorly designed lessons, off-hand comments and the like. The reflective nature of their comments doubtless illustrates an intrinsic interest in improving their craft, even among those reaching the ends of their careers.

At the same time, it is striking that none of participants expressed a desire to walk boldly back into the treacherous waters of controversy and indeed imagined that part of their learning process in constructing meanings from their experiences with handling controversial incidents in their classrooms has been the goal of avoiding similar incidents in the future. In reflecting on an incident in which his innovative design for a World History survey had led a parent conference, for example, Ben resolved to avoid future conflicts by making “sure to not do that again. I’m back to doing the straight survey.” This is disheartening and yet entirely understandable. No teacher wants to feel the tension that Adam felt as he left school after a stressful day and none would rebuke him for his comment that, “I don’t need this, I don’t need to come from school and not be able to sleep because of some stupid lesson . . .” In the next chapter, I review the second set of interviews that I conducted with these participants in which I asked them to comment on a group of curriculum pieces that have encountered resistance.

CHAPTER 6
FINDINGS: TEACHERS' POSITIONS TOWARD CONTROVERSY

Introduction

Social studies teachers over the durations of their careers come to adopt different positions toward the material that they are asked to teach. As Barton and Levstik (2004) noted, some of these come from internal sources, including personal background, education, content knowledge and philosophical, religious or political worldviews. Grant (2003), for example, described the stereotypical content-focused secondary social studies teacher who fell in love with history in grade school and continues to teach in the manner that he or she was taught: "These teachers stand in front of the class, deliver ready-made lectures, and assign textbook and workbook pages. In doing so, such teachers embody a particular stance toward knowledge, learning, and teaching" (pp. 39-40). Evans (1989) further identified five approaches toward teaching history that stem from these elements in a teacher's personal background: that of "storyteller," "scientific historian," "relativist/reformer," "cosmic philosopher," and "eclectic." Evans commented on the influence of these perspectives on teaching methodologies and repertoire:

Interview data suggest that pedagogy may relate strongly to conception of history. The idealist tells stories, the scientific historian promotes open-ended thinking about history, the reformer mixes methods to promote student questioning and to relate past to present, the cosmic philosopher challenges students with cosmic interpretations, and the eclectic opts for variety to build student interest. (p. 237)

As social studies teachers begin the process of developing lessons and unit plans, for example, they are guided in very personal ways by these internal factors and the positions that arise from them. In Chapter 4, I surveyed a wide variety of these conceptions of controversy that stem from these internal factors.

At the same time, social studies teachers are equally influenced by external factors, including social pressure within the school community, a sense of the political climate in the surrounding community and knowledge of the power dynamics within education. Barton and Levstik (2004) noted the impact of this subtle social pressure on teacher practice. They commented:

The first is that teachers hope to fit in: They want to be accepted as competent professionals by fellow teachers, administrators, and parents. Doing so means acting in ways similar to those around them; if everyone else covers the curriculum and maintains quiet, orderly classrooms, *devoid of controversy*, then new teachers will be highly motivated to do the same, regardless of what they may have learned about the nature of history or methods of teaching the subject. (p. 254, author's emphasis)

The imperatives of standards reform in the current period have added to this tendency toward conformity that corresponds with the teacher's knowledge of the culture of the school. Apple (2000) commented on the increasing trend toward disempowering classroom teachers with the introduction of pre-packaged, teacher proof materials:

Rather than moving in the direction of increased autonomy, in all too many instances the daily lives of teachers in classrooms in many nations are becoming ever more controlled, ever more subject to administrative logics that seek to tighten the reins on the processes of teaching and curriculum. (p. 114)

In the past 10 years, the primacy of the teachers' role in determining curriculum has also been challenged by a complex network of national political organizations, media outlets and parents' groups. In the following section, I will provide a brief description of three cases that exemplify these trends.

Three Cases

Fahrenheit 9/11

This new effort to restrict the academic freedom of public educators is perfectly illustrated in the response to the use of Academy-award winning film maker Michael Moore's 2004 film *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Moore's provocative documentary looked at the Bush

administration's policy following the September 11, 2001 attacks that subsequently led to the invasion and occupation of Iraq. The critically acclaimed and assailed film was destined to garner media attention and to become a lightning rod for partisan debate in a Presidential election year, unsurprisingly garnering a furious response from conservative media pundits even before the official release of the film. In May 2004, for example, a public relations firm connected to the Republican Party formed a group called "Move America Forward" in order to pressure theater owners across the country not to show the film (Berkowitz, 2005). Throughout the promotional campaign surrounding *Fahrenheit*, Moore urged the use of his film as a pedagogical tool for teachers, further inflaming his critics, who saw the film as purely propagandistic. A storm of protest followed the decision by the National Education Association (NEA) to present the film at its annual conference in the summer of 2004 (Archibald, 2004). As the October release of the *Fahrenheit* DVD approached, Moore posted a "Teacher's Guide" for using the film in high school and college classrooms on his website, including sample critical thinking questions that teachers could use with their classes (Moore, 2004). Activists supporting the two major political candidates in the Presidential election seemed primed for a media battle over the film. Commentators sympathetic to the Bush administration warned their readers to be ever watchful of materials being used in the classroom. Eric Pratt, for example, in an article titled "Fahrenheit 9/11 in the Classroom?" for the conservative weblog *American Daily* commented: "With kids going back to school around Labor Day, parents should make a renewed effort to keep tabs on what their children are being taught" (Pratt, 2004). Conservative parents' groups took up the call.

Within days of the DVD release of the film on October 5, stories began to surface in the "blogosphere" about incidents in which high school teachers and community college professors had been disciplined for having the temerity to show the film to their students. On October 8, a

parent of a student at Pathways Learning Center, an alternative high school in Beaumont, Texas, complained that his son had been compelled to watch *Fahrenheit* in his social studies class. After several complaints from parents, *FahrenHYPE 9/11*, a film attacking the Moore film, was also presented to students (Beaumont Students Watch, 2004). On October 20, Suzanne Miller, an English teacher at Central High School in Knoxville, Tennessee, was officially reprimanded after presenting *Fahrenheit* to her senior-level English class. She was subsequently removed from the classroom and placed on unpaid, administrative duty for 2 months (Knoxville Teacher Reassigned, 2004). During the same week, officials at Kearsarge Regional High School in North Sutton, New Hampshire cancelled a screening of *Fahrenheit* that had been scheduled as an after-school activity by English teacher Kevin Lee and film studies teacher Deborah Barry. When the teachers expressed reluctance to show *Fahrenhype 9/11* because of curricular time pressures, district superintendent Tom Brennan cancelled the session, openly admitting that parental pressure had forced his hand on the issue: “We didn’t want to get into a controversy. That wasn’t the point” (Conaboy, 2004). On October 29, the Friday before the 2004 Presidential election, Judy Baker, a teacher at Jackson High School in Washington state, showed *Fahrenheit* to a small group of students. Baker, having heard of the earlier incidents, followed her own district’s policy by obtaining the principal’s permission as well as release forms signed by parents of the students involved in the activity. Responding to the local Snohomish County Republican party’s complaints, however, Jackson High School principal Terry Cheshire ordered Baker to either balance the presentation of *Fahrenheit* or not show the film at all. “We have a policy that . . . if we deal with controversial issues, we need to show both sides,” he claimed (Slager, 2004). In one of the most chilling cases involving violations of academic freedom, an instructor at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College (RCCC) in Concord, North Carolina was suspended with pay for four days after showing *Fahrenheit* in class during the week before the Presidential election.

School officials claimed that Davis March, an instructor in English composition for more than twenty years at Rowan-Cabarrus, had violated school policy and disobeyed specific orders in a memorandum explicitly instructing faculty to remain non-partisan during the election campaign. In an extraordinary act of censorship, RCCC administrators appeared in March's classroom while the film was being presented and escorted him from the campus grounds (Smith-Arrants, 2004).

Each of the incidents seen in isolation doesn't appear to be significant; yet, viewed as a whole, an eerily similar pattern begins to emerge that suggests systematic, coordinated political action to stifle *Fahrenheit 9/11*'s distribution and intended impact in the classroom.

The “State of the Union” in Colorado

On January 31, 2006, President George W. Bush delivered his sixth annual address to Congress, a duty specified in the Constitution. In the speech, Bush (2006) outlined the achievements of his administration over the course of the previous year, many of them related to foreign policy. Bush, for example, spoke at length about the progress made in the United States intervention in Iraq:

No one can deny the success of freedom, but some men rage and fight against it. And one of the main sources of reaction and opposition is radical Islam--the perversion by a few of a noble faith into an ideology of terror and death.

The following day, Jay Bennish, a high school geography teacher in Aurora, Colorado, was preparing to introduce a lesson on the effects of globalization policy on the environment when one of his students, Sean Allen, asked him for his views of the President's speech. As the discussion continued, Bennish spoke candidly about his views of the Bush administration and U.S. foreign policy, unaware that Allen was surreptitiously audiorecording the class (Teacher Probed Over Bush Remarks, 2006). Allen, who claimed that it was his habit to record all of his classes for study purposes, later made several appearances on the cable news show *Hannity and*

Colmes and his parents subsequently sold the recording to a local radio station (850 KOA). In the brief excerpt repeated ad nauseum by media outlets in the weeks that followed, Bennish is heard comparing the Bush administration to the Nazi regime: “Now I’m not saying that Bush and Hitler are exactly the same. Obviously they’re not, okay? But there are some eery similarities to the tones that they use” (Bennish, cited in Vaughn & Doligosa, 2006).

Bennish was also heard concurring with another student who responded to Bennish’s question “Who is probably the single most violent nation on planet Earth?” by stating that, “We are.” Later he encouraged students to imagine that other nations might see the United States and its allies as “terrorists,” suggesting that “to many Native Americans [the American] flag is no different from the Nazi flag” (Overland Teacher Controversy, 2006).

Bennish, who had taught at Overland High School since 2000, was placed on administrative leave by the Cherry Creek School District superintendent Monte Moses during the media furor that ensued. In his decision, Moses pointed to a district policy that required teachers to present varying viewpoints when tackling controversial subjects. Bennish then approached the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), whose attorney David Lane represented him during his period on leave. Lane contended that Bennish’s First Amendment right to freedom of speech was being jeopardized (Overland Students Walk Out, 2006). Bennish later appeared on NBC’s *Today* show, emphasizing in an interview with co-host Matt Lauer the support that he had received from students and parents at Overland High. After a month’s leave, Bennish was reinstated on March 10, with Moses stating that, “Bennish doesn’t deserve to be praised, nor does he deserve to be fired” and that “Jay Bennish has promise as a teacher, but his practice and deportment need growth and refinement.” Reflecting on his experiences during the incident, Bennish was sanguine about his role in the classroom:

You know my job as a teacher is to challenge students to think critically about issues that are affecting our world and our society. And you know the process of cognitive dissonance is one way to activate their minds and to get them to think about these various things. (Bennish, cited in Vaughn & Doligosa, 2006)

As this incident shows, embodying a stance in which one answers with candor the questions posed by curious students in a manner intended to provoke a response carries with it significant risks for teachers. Many classroom teachers, including several of the participants in this study, choose instead to avoid controversy and to question the ability of teachers in the current political climate to play the kind of advocacy role that teachers such as Jay Bennish offer their students.

Voices of the People's History

In a third case, Prentice Chandler, a high school teacher in northern Alabama, engaged in a struggle with parents and administrators in the Athens High School community during the 2006/2007 school year over his decision to use primary sources included in the companion volume to Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* (1980). Chandler (2006) explained his rationale for the use of these documents in his U.S. History courses at Athens: "I had envisioned the class based on the writings of contemporary social studies theorists: multiple points of view, allowing multiple voices in the classroom, less teacher directed and focusing on primary documents" (p. 354). In order to facilitate this approach, Chandler applied for and received a grant in order to purchase a classroom set of the *Voices of the People's History of the United States* primary source reader (Zinn & Arnove, 2004). Chandler specified that the *Voices* reader allowed him to present students with "alternative histories (that) contrast with the official history that one would find in typical history books" (p. 352) He further described the response of his students to his plan as overwhelmingly favorable: "The students seemed to be excited about the prospect of learning a 'different' kind of history, one that deals with oppressed people

of the world, in contrast to the usual accounts of presidents, diplomats, treaties and wars” (p. 352).

Despite the auspicious preparation process, Chandler encountered difficulty from the start of his ambitious project. Chandler (2006) recalled that, “the first night that the books went home with my students, I received a phone call from one set of parents who demanded to know why I had chosen these books for my class” (p. 354). Chandler patiently responded to these parents, explaining to them his intentions for the class and providing a justification for the use of the Zinn material. The parents, however, were unmoved in their objection to the use of the *Voices* reader. Chandler detailed the aftermath of his conversation with the parents:

Over the next week, the parents pressured the superintendent into removing these books from this advanced, college-prep track course because of what they considered ‘inappropriate content.’ For the remainder of the semester, 60 copies of Zinn’s social history sat on my shelves unused. (p. 354)

While he continued to engender controversy among a few parents by using selected excerpts in his classroom instruction, Chandler (2006) was supported by an increasingly active group of students. He described the scene in his classroom:

Upon telling my students that we would be doing ‘book work’ as opposed to discussing primary documents readings, most of the 25 students brought their textbooks to the front of the room and put them in a pile. They were not refusing to do work because they were being disrespectful or disobedient; they were simply refusing to do something that they knew was not as valuable as reading and discussing primary documents. (p. 355)

Chandler (2006) noted the irony that this student action took place a day after the class had read Henry David Thoreau’s famous essay on “Civil Disobedience.” While it did not conform to his original plan, it’s clear that Chandler’s students over the course of a year in which they saw the culture wars in America’s schools at close hand learned some extremely valuable lessons about the nuts and bolts of community activism in their social studies class.

Teacher's Views

Two weeks after the initial interview sessions, I met with the 7 teacher-participants in this study to present them with the cases outlined above and to engage them in conversations about their views of these cases. The narratives that emerged from these conversations were extremely enlightening in establishing the individual positions of these teachers toward the social studies curriculum and particularly in relation to the use of controversial extra-curricular materials.

Adam: They're Nuts!

When I mentioned Michael Moore's documentary film *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Adam emitted a spontaneous utterance "Oh God!" Asked to explain this response, Adam provided the abstract to his colorful narrative "Story D--They're Nuts!" "Well, I just can't believe any teacher in their right mind would use that in the class, that's just crazy." In this statement, Adam indicated again his ideal of the prudent teacher who scrupulously avoids controversy and his image of the "crazy" teacher who dives into controversy by employing controversial methods and materials.

Adam supplied further elaboration on this point in the orientation section of the narrative:

Adam D-2. Well, let me be clear and honest from the start. I don't really appreciate Mike Moore's stuff. I just think he's a provocateur. He's not really in the business of being fair in his presentation. He's trying to push it with every frame and make a propagandistic point. I'm not the kind of conservative who goes out of his way to track down the most extreme, in your face, stuff. I don't like Ann Coulter, I don't listen to Rush, I don't watch a whole lot of Fox News.

This equation of Michael Moore with "provocateurs" of the right such as columnist Ann Coulter and radio host Rush Limbaugh that Adam repeated here was common among the criticism of Moore's work (Toplin, 2006). However, beyond the negative view of Moore's political views, Adam provided a more searching critique of the teachers who would choose to use his work in their classroom instruction. In the complicating action segment of the narrative, Adam addressed the issue of community standards:

Adam D-3. You've got to know the climate that you're dealing with and the material that you're dealing with. Obviously in a place like this you're going to have trouble with a movie like *Fahrenheit 9/11* in a community with so many military people. You're sticking it in their face when you show something that says that what they're doing is worthless or worse, that's it's making American people less safe.

Like many critics of *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Adam assumed that his use of Moore's work would create a firestorm of protest among parents connected to the United States military service, this despite a lengthy segment in the film in which Moore sympathetically interviews Lila Lipscomb, the mother of an army sergeant who was killed in Karbala, Iraq in 2003. That said, the structure of Adam's narrative shifted in a dramatic and interesting manner in the evaluation section. Here, he presented a defense of teachers from an almost populist, teacher-centered position:

Adam D-4. When it comes to teachers, I'm a people person. I side first with my fellow teachers, because I've been here so long and I know what teachers go through, so they're first, kids maybe next, parents and administrators way down the order. So, even if I disagreed with what a teacher did, they're just trying to do what they think is best, and just trying to survive in a really hard job, so I'd cut them some slack.

This stance of siding with his fellow teachers is in stark contrast to his earlier, harsher comments, in which he excoriated those who would use controversy as "nuts." He expanded on this more empathetic tone in the resolution segment. Asked how he would handle such a controversy as an administrator, Adam averred:

Adam D-5. If I was an administrator, I'd put a brick wall around the school, I wouldn't cave in to pressure, I'd protect my teachers. But that's probably why I'd never make an administrator. I care too much about teachers.

Adam thus concluded at the end of the narrative by expressing that teachers should only be disciplined for outright abuses of students "having sex with the students or hitting the students" but not for engaging students with controversial materials. He may well question their teaching strategies, but in the end Adam identified himself strongly with his colleagues and is willing to forgive them what he considers ill-conceived transgressions.

Adam continued this theme of empathy for his fellow teachers in a narrative titled “Story E--Howl,” drawing parallels between Prentice Chandler’s use of the *Voices* reader and his colleague’s use of Allen Ginsberg’s epic poem *Howl* in his English class. Once again, though, Adam linked the failure of the lesson with a lack of understanding of the school community. In the orientation section of the narrative, he explained the culture of his friend’s school and the implications for his use of beat poetry in the classroom:

Adam E-2. There wasn’t a lot of support for him among the students, certainly not the parents, so he was just run out of there, which is crazy because he’s a great teacher and the kids love him here. He’s actually pretty conservative, a straight up Republican guy, which makes the thing so funny.

Adam continued by speaking about the importance of teachers finding a good fit in their school placements: “Maybe this is just a better environment for him, a little more intellectual.” In this comment, Adam was implicitly suggesting that Prentice Chandler had misperceived the support that he could expect at a high school in northern Alabama. When reminded that Chandler did indeed receive significant backing from students and parents, Adam conceded the point, but returns to his anecdote about his English teacher friend in the complicating action segment:

Adam E-3. I know he got some heat from the administration, for sure. They didn’t like what he’d done, for sure. Didn’t think it (*Howl*) was appropriate for a ninth grade group because of the language.

In the end, the narrative comes to a resolution by Adam offering to help his friend transfer to another school. When he asked me how Chandler resolved his situation, I mentioned that he had recently completed his Ph.D. and had taken up a position at Athens State University in Alabama, he’s unsurprised, as this confirms his thesis that teachers must strive to find an appropriate venue that will support their teaching styles:

Adam E-4. So I was teaching over here and I told him that I could probably get him an interview with Janet over here if he wanted to transfer. Maybe this is just a better environment for him, a little more intellectual.

Yet, in his coda to the piece, Adam reserved his optimism, admitting that even at Orange Park College Preparation School he had had cause for concern: “But you still have to be careful even here.” While Adam was confident throughout his various narratives that a prudent approach that takes into account the standards and values of the surrounding community will allow social studies teachers to be successful, this final comment betrayed his essential uneasiness about the power dynamics in public education.

Ben: Truth, Consequences, and War

Ben again exemplified the position of accuracy in a narrative responding to the cases presented to him. He established this position in the abstract to “Story E--Truth, Consequences and War” by suggesting that his objection to using *Fahrenheit 9/11* in the classroom is that “there is too much opinion in Michael Moore’s movie. That’s the problem with it. I just think that there are better resources out there.” In this statement, he based his practice on a dichotomy between opinion and fact” abnegating the possibility of multiple perspectives in social studies teaching and learning. Following this principle, Ben described a PBS *Frontline* documentary that he had used as an alternative to more controversial material on the Iraq War. In the orientation segment of the narrative, he detailed the lesson:

Ben E-2. I do a current events thing on Fridays and I often use videos as part of that because it just seems to be the way to kick off a discussion with these kids. There are a bunch of videos that are available in the library here, that’s a useful resource and then I have a few DVDs that I’ve bought. For a few years I was using this Frontline special on Iraq called something like “Truth, Consequences and War.”

Asked about the response of students to this documentary feature, Ben spoke in positive terms: “The kids were really into it. It definitely got their attention.” At the same time, he admitted that even this more balanced presentation engendered a contentious response among a few students: “Of course there were one or two conservative kids, kids with parents involved in the war, who took it personally. They’re going to think that any debate is wrong, that you just get

behind the troops no matter what.” In the evaluation of the narrative, however, Ben provided a rationale for using the *Frontline* piece:

Ben E-4. And PBS is usually pretty left-wing but this one was really fair. It just laid out the arguments pro and con very well. It relied on official reports and the speeches of administration officials like Rumsfeld. It didn't try to sway people one way or another. It just said, okay, here's the argument for war, here's how much it's going to cost, is it worth it?

Ben, a self-defined conservative, began this comment with an interesting qualifying statement, “PBS is usually pretty left wing,” before describing the fair elements of the documentary. Here, Ben indicated that the use of “official reports” and “speeches of administration officials” are, in his mind, more objective and factual than the sources included in Michael Moore's film. This view is then reinforced in the resolution section: “And in the end, the *Frontline* video was based on fact, based on research, not on opinion, so they couldn't really take it apart.” In other words, the complaints of conservative students, who might have preferred to avoid the discussion altogether, are stymied by the presentation of research in the film. Ben discounted the possibility, however, that speeches by administration figures, such as former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, might indeed jibe with the views of his conservative students. Ben added a brief coda to the piece in which he again stated his goal of engaging his students in a debate on a controversial issue: “The only way that this thing (the Iraq intervention) is going to work is if the nation is behind it and that takes knowledge and information. We can't hide what's going on.” His pro-war stance was laid bare in this brief coda. Ben felt that an intervention such as that in Iraq can only be successful on the foundation of a unified national effort. This in turn required periodic review and debate, the essence of social studies teaching and learning.

Cathy: Stick to the Script

Cathy returned to her themes of teacher experience and preparation in two narratives in which she expressed her opinion about the cases involving *Fahrenheit 9/11* and Jay Bennis and displayed a position of professionalism. In “Story E--‘R’ Rated,” she related an anecdote about an incident that happened at Orange Park College Preparation School. Cathy indicated in the abstract of the narrative that the crux of the controversy was the use of extra-curricular materials that were age-inappropriate for the group involved: “Well, I guess the major sticking point was that he’d used an ‘R’ rated movie without getting permission.” Cathy continued this thought by explaining the district regulations regarding the use of films in class:

Cathy E-2. You need that for anything over a “G” rating. That’s why as I say I tell young teachers to stick with the materials that are available in the library, that are district approved. I know that young teachers aren’t going be able to lecture every day and don’t have ready-made lessons planned for the whole year, they need some help, but buying something and bringing it in is a mistake in my opinion. What he needed to do is to contact the parents ahead of time.

In this statement, Cathy quickly embodied the persona of the department head who dispenses advice to younger, more callow colleagues. She maintained this tone as she described the complicating action of the narrative:

Cathy E-3. I mean, he had put together what sounded like an interesting lesson. I never saw a lesson plan because he wasn’t in my department, but it sounded good, what I heard was sound. But he went in there without the proper preparation and that’s always dangerous.

Here, Cathy made the assumption that the parents who challenged the use of *Fahrenheit 9/11* were doing so because they had not been informed ahead of the lesson. Yet, when she was challenged on this point, she conceded that, “there (was) something political in the response to what he did.” She also allowed that she might well have been sanctioned for her use of certain materials without permission over the years and that many others had also done so. In the evaluation section of the narrative, she commented:

Cathy E-4. I do it too. I've got some Shakespearean things from the BBC that have nudity in them and probably have an 'R' rating but I've worked to build a reputation over the years so that parents don't question what I'm doing. They know me and trust me. That's not ever going to be true for a first year teacher.

When preparation failed, therefore Cathy relied upon the status that she had achieved over her many years at her school. The tone of this last comment, as well as the resolution segment in which she expressed that she "felt bad about the incident," suggested that she acknowledged the contemporary context of public schooling and that young teachers are in a more precarious position than are many veteran practitioners.

This sense of empathy for her colleagues and regret for the sorry context of public school teaching today pervaded Cathy's second narrative "Story F--Stick to the Script." Responding to the case of Jay Bennish, Cathy provided an abstract that spoke to the arbitrary nature of curricular challenges: "We've all said things that if they were isolated in a 30 second clip the way they've done with this guy, they would look pretty unflattering. So what you need to do is stick to the script." That phrase stick to the script is redolent of curriculum frameworks, and yet Cathy was careful to distance herself from this paradigm, commenting that what she was referring to was merely "good teaching practice:"

Cathy F-1. What I mean is that you have a lesson plan, you put together your materials and you have notes for your material. If you're going to do a lecture, you have notes. In this schema, a teacher's notes are a "script" that, if followed closely, can prevent a teacher from engaging in extemporaneous commentaries that might get him or her into "hot water."

As a means of explaining this view, Cathy related a story about a former colleague who went off the script during a session of his Advanced Placement Psychology class:

Cathy F-3. What happened was that the guy who did AP Psych. did this unit on IQ testing and most of it was pretty sound but then he tried to make some connections with IQ testing and the Gifted program and he said some things that he shouldn't have said. Like questioning the whole basis of the Gifted program on IQ testing.

Asked for the specific comments involved, Cathy recalled: “I think I remember that he used the word ‘bogus’ and that just enraged some of the parents.” Returning to the orientation section of the narrative, Cathy explained why this verbal transgression was especially controversial within the context of her school: “The Gifted program has a lot of clout here and I think it does some valuable work.” Asked if she was satisfied with the outcome of the incident, Cathy presented the evaluation segment of the narrative:

Cathy F-4. I suppose when you make someone angry, the right thing is to apologize, but I just wish that people didn’t get so angry about little things all the time. I don’t think he wanted to insult the kids in his class or their parents who had made the decision to have them tested at a young age. That’s just what happened. So, yes, we should be accountable.

Accountability, in the context of Cathy’s narrative, means publicly apologizing to the offended parties, a resolution with which she expresses approval. At the same time, she voiced regret again that this policy led to the loss of a valued colleague:

Cathy F-5. It eventually blew over, but you never recover from something like that. The kids know that they’ve got you then and it never ends. So in the end he moved to another school where he could start over.

It is with a profound sense of loss then that Cathy supplied a brief coda to the narrative: “I think we lose a lot of good, effective teachers because we’re so damned sensitive all of the time.” While she was confident in the efficacy of her own teaching practices of meticulous preparation of lessons and building alliances within the school community, she also had the humility to understand that some of her colleagues have not been allowed to survive in teaching long enough to gain this experience and to build such alliances.

Donna: Violation of Trust

Donna, the one teacher who identified herself as apolitical in her initial interview session, exemplified the student focus position in two narratives responding to the cases presented to her during the second interview session. In a very personal narrative “Story D--Violation of Trust,”

Donna explained the reasons behind her reluctance to admit her political allegiances to her students, despite frequent entreaties from them to do so. In the abstract to the narrative, Donna commented that:

Donna D-1. I would never say that in front of a class, and not because I would get into trouble, which I probably would, but because it would be a violation of trust. I'm not sure that I could ever get that trust back.

In this statement, Donna indicated that building relationships of trust is of utmost importance to her teaching practice. This position came from an understanding that she had developed over the years about the role that teachers play in their students' lives. In the orientation segment of the narrative, she elaborated on this understanding:

Donna D-2. Well, you have to know as a teacher that kids will ask you anything, just anything. And most of it is innocent, they just want to find out as much about you as they can, as you're willing to let them know. Because they're curious, they're at that stage where they're still just sponges for information, taking everything in, and you're just this huge part of their lives.

Asked why this is the case, Donna commented that, "You may actually be the only adult who cares about them, that's the scary thing." This understanding also reflects Donna's background in counseling and social work. She extended this argument by stating that, "They may come from households where either the adults aren't around or they aren't talking to the kids because they're too busy or they don't care." When I asked her for an example of an issue that she would be unwilling to discuss with her students, Donna illustrated this position by talking about her support of reproductive rights:

Donna D-3. For example, I have a lot of kids who are pro-life and they care tremendously about the issue. And I'm pro-choice and I care about it too because I remember a time when abortion was still illegal and having an unwanted, unplanned pregnancy was a disaster, a scandal. I know I'm dating myself with that. But I think that's one of the big advances for my generation that we made abortion safe, legal and rare.

Donna imagined that her students who did not share her opinion on an issue about which they have intense emotional feelings would be disappointed to find out that a teacher whom they

had, until that point, trusted, did not agree with them. Donna refined this view in her evaluation piece: “Because you realize that you can very quickly lose that trust, you can disappoint them.” Thus, what frightened Donna the most in this incidence was not the challenge from the world outside of the classroom, including controversies in the communities or the threat of the loss of her employment, but rather the possibility of losing a delicate balance of trust that she had worked diligently to build.

Donna expanded on her ability to disguise her political inclinations and the biases that might be evident in the material she chooses for her lessons in a second narrative “Story E--I Don’t Announce It.” Responding to the case involving Prentice Chandler’s use of the *Voices of the People’s History of the United States* reader, Donna admitted that she too had used Howard Zinn’s work, albeit in a slightly different form: “I use Zinn’s work at several points in my World History survey, particularly in the unit on the Age of Discovery. That’s the strongest part of the book.” Asked to elaborate on the means with which she employs the Zinn material, Donna supplied the orientation segment of the narrative:

Donna E-2. I like to use primary sources for reading exercises. I probably do one or two during a two week unit. I’ll lecture one day on a broad period and then I’ll try to focus their attention on one specific issue. So, then I’ll pull a piece out of a variety of reference books that I have around.

Asked how her students respond to the material in the Zinn text, Donna admitted that she does not “announce it.” In the complicating action piece of the narrative, Donna described her use of the Zinn text in conjunction with the district-sanctioned textbook:

Donna E-3. The Glencoe Spielvogel text is the one that we’ve adopted in this district. So that’s the one that gets assigned to the students, and it’s not bad. I think Spielvogel’s learned a trick or two over the years. I think these textbook writers have been influenced by some of the criticisms. But they’re still pretty bland and there’s probably too much in them, so the impact is diluted. Whereas Zinn’s book is like ‘bam,’ it hits them over the head.

In this statement, Donna betrayed her preference for the Zinn text but, at the same time, excused herself for using the diluted material in the Glencoe text due to its official adoption by the Duval County school district. Instead of assigning a set of Zinn books, as Chandler did with his students in Alabama, Donna furtively uses primary sources culled from Zinn's work in order to add interest to her reading assignments. She described this approach in the evaluation of the narrative:

Donna E-4. Using the Zinn? No, well, I should admit that I don't announce that that's where it's from. What I tend to do is just take pieces, excerpts from the book and then create my own lessons from that.

Donna's assumption in pursuing this agenda of inoffensiveness is that using primary sources that have an association with a radical scholar will allow her to avoid any potential controversy. Once again, the relationships that she has developed with her students was of paramount importance to Donna. In the resolution segment of the narrative, she commented that, "The kids are curious about what I think of some of the more radical readings from, say, trade union leaders but I keep my views to myself, I don't get on the soapbox." Here, Donna was at pains to point out that her decision not to announce the origin of the materials that she uses in the classroom stems from her relationships with her students and the desire not to breach their trust rather than the fear that these materials will cause controversy within the school or wider community. In a brief coda to the piece, Donna stated: "I don't know that it would cause any trouble in this kind of school, but you never know." The presumption underlying this final statement is that Zinn's work would be unfamiliar or uncontroversial in the context of the Riverside Arts Academy community; at the same time, she is unwilling to take the chance that it might prove so as it did in the Prentice Chandler case.

Eric: It Just Isn't Accurate

In a narrative titled “Story E--It Just Isn't Accurate,” Eric affirmed his identity as a conservative teacher who places a premium on the search for historical accuracy and truth. Responding to the cases involving the use of Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Eric constructed an abstract in which he stated that his main objection with the film is that, “it wasn't accurate. He just isn't accurate in what he talks about in those movies.” Disdaining the conception of multiple perspectives of history, Eric continued his deconstruction of Moore's technique in the orientation segment of the narrative:

Eric E-2. Right, now I was teaching at the time of Columbine, actually on the day and I remember how scared people were, how scared the kids were after it happened. Then there were these loser kids who thought that it was funny to dress up like the ‘Trenchcoat Mafia,’ with black clothes and make-up, just to scare people deliberately. And here is Michael Moore saying that schools are being unfair to these kids and that “going to school sucks.”

In this fascinating statement, Eric measured Moore's treatment of the atmosphere in secondary schools following the tragic school shooting incident at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, in 1999 in *Bowling for Columbine* against his own memory of the period. Yet, rather than appreciating that Moore is presenting one valid perspective of the events--that school administrations were unfairly targeting students in order to appease fearful parents--against his own equally valid perspective--that a few students were exploiting the fears raised by the incident in a undisciplined, opportunistic manner--Eric presumed that his is the accurate view and Moore's is merely one of propagandistic expediency. In the complicating action section of the narrative, he supplied evidence to support his claims: “Listen, there's a guy out there who runs a website called Moorewatch or something that's just about showing the mistakes in his (Moore's) work.” When I reminded him that the founder of Moorewatch.com has been a prominent conservative critic of Moore's work in recent years, Eric countered that, “Sure, but he

does his research and it's well researched and footnoted." The narrative structure and tone shifted dramatically as Eric responded to a question about his feelings about the cases in which teachers were disciplined for using the film. In the evaluation section of the narrative, Eric expressed empathy for the teachers involved:

Eric E-4. Listen, I show 'Schindler's List' and so do some others around here. We're always showing war movies--"Gettysburg," "Saving Private Ryan" you name it--and there's some brutal stuff in those and they're all "R" rated but they're seen as patriotic so people get away with it.

In this statement, Eric indicated his view that disciplining teachers for the use of an "R" rated film while other teachers within the same institution are allowed to use similarly-rated materials deemed patriotic betrays the political machinations underpinning these incidents. He continued by mentioning "a teacher in English (who) showed 'Pride and Prejudice' and got into trouble because there are some racy scenes in it" as a counterbalance to this view. Finally he concluded the narrative with a brief comment that showed his loyalty toward his colleagues: "We need leverage to be able to show what we need to in class, within reason." Thus, in the space of a short narrative, Eric traveled a long distance from an unequivocal position that privileged accuracy and truth to a more nuanced view that indicates a depth of empathy toward fellow practitioners.

Frank: Rally Round the Flag

These challenges and the frustrations emanating from them form the backdrop of Frank's narrative "Story E--Rally Round the Flag." In the abstract to the narrative, Frank presented an overview of the incident in which he attempted to encourage student community involvement by announcing an event initiated by a student Christian organization: "What happened was that I was asked to read out an announcement for the Rally Round the Flag event." Anticipating my

questions about the nature of his advocacy, Frank quickly provided the orientation segment of the narrative:

Frank E-2. Now, I've always made it a point to announce any event on campus, regardless of what it is. Yes, even then. Maybe especially if I don't agree with it. Because you have to be fair and consistent if you're going to gain the students' trust. Anyway, this group at the school that has a Bible study session several times a week has an event at the flagpole in front of the school once a year in October.

Frank displayed an admirable and complex sense of fairness, which in this case was not premised on avoidance of issues or a bland, neutral treatment. Rather, Frank indicated throughout the narrative structure that he encourages students to be active members of their community, despite his disagreement with the specific cause behind the event. He continued this thread by describing how he designs his classroom to be an organizational locus for student groups:

Frank E-2. So, these students in FCA came to me a few days before the event because they knew that I had a bulletin board right next to the front wall where I posted a lot of posters for things like the drama club's events, any sports events on campus, charity events, that kind of thing. I think it promotes civic engagement.

It is clear from this statement that students frequently approach Frank with such requests precisely because he is the kind of instructor who promotes this kind of activism. In the complicating action segment, he also revealed a reflective nature about his teaching practice:

Frank E-3. I mentioned in passing that I didn't share the group's views and wouldn't be joining them at the flag because I thought it was a Constitutional violation. So, there was one of the FCA girls in that class and she wasn't happy. She said, "You don't do that for the other events." And I thought, "You know, she's right."

Here, Frank engaged in a thoughtful practice while in the midst of a busy school day and changed his approach the next day: "Anyway, I decided to just read it out without any comment the next day." Despite this exemplary practice, Frank's narrative was instructive in showing how this generosity of spirit occasionally poses problems for him. On the day in question, Frank decided to allow a few students participating in the event to enter class late without a tardy pass,

a decision that provoked a complaint from one student: “Then there was one guy who said, ‘why do they get to come in late?’ And I said that they were involved in a school event.” Almost immediately, Frank realized that he had committed an error of judgment, which he detailed in the evaluation segment:

Frank E-4. Well, that was the wrong thing to say because it specifically isn’t a school event but a student-initiated one. That’s the only way that it’s at all legal. So at that point I probably should have sent them all down to administration to get tardy passes.

In this statement, Frank again showed his capacity for reflecting upon his methods, particularly when it comes to building relationships with students. In the resolution section of the narrative, Frank disclosed the details of a contentious meeting with a school board member:

Frank E-5. So, the next problem was that the student who was upset and questioned my decision is the son of a school board member, so the next thing I know I’m getting a phone call from this woman. And then the next day she comes into my class while I’m teaching.

Asked how this conflict was resolved, Frank commented that, “I just basically had to eat crow over it. She said that I needed to remember that a public school couldn’t advocate religious practices and I said ‘yes, ma’am.’” Frank’s use of the colloquial phrase “to eat crow” as well as his overly quaint and servile response of “yes, ma-am” to the school board member indicated his ironic sense of resignation over his understanding of his place in the hierarchy of the school community. At the same time, his one word coda to the piece--“whatever”--suggested that he had not taken this incident to heart and will perhaps continue to exercise his independent judgment regardless of the immediate consequences.

Gina: I Set the Agenda

In two related narratives, Gina represented a position of “dogmatism” in which she maintained control over the subjects discussed in her classes. Asked to respond to the Jay Bennish case, she expressed sympathy for teachers who have been disciplined in similar cases as

she frequently voices her opinion about political matters. In the abstract to “Story F--I Set the Agenda,” she developed this theme: “I’m always shooting my mouth off with my kids. If someone was taping my classes, they could have a ton of evidence that would make Sean Hannity mad.” Gina quickly followed this startling confession with an explanation of the context of the remark:

Gina F-2. I usually go in every day and do a short piece to open up class, sometimes it’s just ‘what did you do over the weekend,’ but a lot of times it’s a news item, something that they’ll have heard something about but usually have just developed only a knee-jerk response to it.

In this statement, Gina foreshadowed her methodological choices, especially relating to student involvement in lessons. Gina supplied a brief example of the kind of “knee-jerk response” that she sees among her students: “So, if it’s Don Imus, they’ll just say, ‘what’s the big deal’ or ‘he should be fired’ but they don’t have a sophisticated view of it.” Asked if she allowed students to choose topics or supply items for discussion, Gina indicated her view that her students are not knowledgeable enough about current events to be able to play this role effectively:

Gina F-3. Let’s be honest, these kids are not reading a newspaper, most don’t watch the news on TV, even the local news, unless maybe it’s the sports, they’re certainly not reading books on sociology or law, so no, that’s my job to set the agenda.

Rather than inspiring her students to take an active interest in their world, Gina accepts that they will not be interested enough in the news of the day to read a daily newspaper. She also ignores the division between old media and new media and the reality that many of her students may indeed be paying attention to news stories but are gaining their information about current events from online sources. These sources are not without their inaccuracies and pose new challenges for teachers; however, these pedagogical issues seem entirely lost on Gina. Ironically, Gina had, throughout her interview sessions, claimed that she pursues “innovative” teaching

methods on the basis of her progressive worldview. She returned to this theme in the evaluation segment of the narrative:

Gina F-4. I'm a big believer in making connections with kids, and I think you have to be honest with them in order to do it. There's no point hiding who you are because the kids always know anyway. They pay attention to everything.

This sentiment was, of course, admirable in any teacher. However, instead of making connections with her students by including them in her methods, Gina interpreted progressive pedagogy to mean a license to share her political views with her students in an authoritarian fashion.

The consequences of this contradictory method are brought to light in a final narrative that Gina provided in response to the Prentice Chandler case. As with her previous narrative, she began this story with a stark pronouncement about her place in the classroom: "When it comes down to it, I try my best but I don't think I make much of a difference in the end, I don't think I have much influence." This was the voice of a practitioner who assumed that students would merely drift in and out of her classroom and her life without any of her influence rubbing off on them. In the orientation section of the narrative, she expanded on this thought:

Gina G-2. Here I am, I'm a middle-aged woman, they're forced to come to me five times a week for classes. If they weren't forced, half of them wouldn't show up. I'm definitely not 'cool.' I just think their peers have much more influence on them than we do.

In this statement, Gina returned to her previous theme of the cultural gulf between teachers and students. She related this to the subject of public advisory messages in the complicating action section of the narrative:

Gina G-3. You know those anti-drug messages? What we should be saying in those is not 'Just Say No' but 'Oh, go ahead and do it--it's no big deal,' because it's the forbidden fruit element of taking drugs that makes it so cool and tempting to them.

At this point in the narrative, Gina returned to the Chandler case expressing her view that parents who complain about the indoctrination of her students do not understand the relative lack

of influence that teachers have over their students: “If they realized how little these kids actually listen to us, they wouldn’t worry about what we ask the kids to read; they don’t read much of it anyway.” In the evaluation section of the narrative, Gina continued this plaintive tone:

Gina G-4. I do my best to make it fun, but I’m under no illusions that they’d rather be at the beach and there are some days when I’d rather be at the beach too, if I’m telling the truth.

Gina then rounded off this tragic dialogue by signaling her intentions to continue to “beat my head against the wall” by assigning readings that will challenge her students: “They may not read them but what other choice do I have.” When asked if she thought that including controversial topics would stimulate her students’ interest in the subject of World History, she supplied a brief coda: “Not really, no.” This somewhat jaundiced response may merely reflect a temporary mood; however, over seven narratives drawn from two separate interview sessions separated by several weeks, Gina had indicated again and again that her approach of dogmatically forcing her progressive views on her students and ignoring their input had not brought her the returns on her investment that she had expected.

Conclusions

When teachers tell stories, they tend to emphasize fascinating details about their experiences in the classroom, events that have occurred in their teaching careers and comments that students and parents have made about their teaching practice. These narratives reflect, in microcosm, the totality of their background, feelings about the world around them and experiences inside and outside of the classroom. Evans (1989) commented on the complex interplay between these elements:

Teacher conceptions of history seem profoundly related to teacher background, teacher belief, and teacher knowledge. Among the factors mentioned by informants: previous teachers, college professors, family, books, and life experiences, though home and school factors seemed most important. In particular, political and religious background seem to

play an especially important role, though the importance of each of these factors may vary considerably. (p. 236)

In the course of these narratives documented above, the 7 participants in this study revealed complicated and sometimes contradictory stances toward the content material that they are charged with teaching. This relationship becomes even murkier when it involves conscious and unconscious decisions to enter areas of controversy in the field.

Many of the respondents, for example, felt a close bond with their students and thus pursued a student-focus approach to exploring controversial issues. Ben, for example, spoke about how he had “tried to include more student-centered exercises over the years,” in describing his integration of skits on controversial topics such as witchcraft and slavery into his curriculum. This position presumes that these issues will be far less controversial if discussions and activities are student-led rather than centered around direct instruction.

Another common strategy revealed in these conversations was one of stressing accuracy and fact in the presentation of controversial material, a position that seems intimately connected to the historical paradigm within which many of these teachers operate. In his critique of Michael Moore’s work, for example, Eric stated that, “He just isn’t accurate in what he talks about in those movies.” Controversy exists in the classrooms of teachers who operate under this guise of accuracy and yet the notion of multiple perspectives often gives way to the primacy of one accurate view most often articulated by the instructor.

Several of the teachers interviewed for this project displayed a position of inoffensiveness, stating a deliberate intention to avoid offending students in their classes. This has become a more pressing concern for social studies teachers in the past generation as public school classrooms have become increasingly diverse spaces. For example, in her discussions of religious issues in her World Religions elective course, Cathy commented that, “I’ve got to be

conscious of not offending anyone, because I've got in a typical class, a Southern Baptist kid next to a Hindu kid next to a Pentecostal kid." While sensitivity is indeed paramount in teaching today, this position seems to preclude the possibility of candidly addressing issues of interest to students in an open forum.

Given the context of teaching in an era of heightened sensitivity, it is not surprising that a position of fear pervaded many of the conversations I had with teachers for this study. Several teachers were aware of national and local incidents, such as the ones profiled earlier in this chapter, in which teachers had been disciplined for taking risks with their instructional practice. In a fascinating narrative, Gina described the current practice of social studies instruction as a "minefield." She commented that, "I don't start out expecting to do controversial work every day, I don't want to get fired . . ." Despite participants' claims to the contrary, fear seems to be a significant factor when it comes to decisions about how to present controversial public issues.

Finally, a handful of the teachers who participated in this study indicated a position of curriculum focus, often hiding behind curricular issues and time pressures as they presented rationales for not including more controversial teaching in their practice. When challenged by a student to include more material on Black History, for example, Frank responded that, "I don't have enough time to take a month or even a week out to satisfy every different interest group . . . and still prepare them for this test, and that's my main job." This position appears to be particularly common among those teachers whose principal teaching load involves Advanced Placement courses; however, in an age of high-stakes testing, the focus on narrow curricular matters at the expense of more enriching discussions is something that afflicts all teachers.

In the following chapter, I attempt to synthesize the findings from this study, concentrating on the three main areas of convergence--conceptions, experiences, and positions--

that sprang from the original research questions and the myriad factors affecting these three main areas of inquiry.

CHAPTER 7
TOWARD A NEW MODEL OF CONTROVERSY IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES

Introduction

As the unique and fascinating narratives that emerged from the conversations detailed in the previous three chapters indicate, teachers approach the process of lesson planning in highly individual and personal ways. These teachers reflected upon their own educational backgrounds, content knowledge, supplementary interests and understanding of pedagogy. At the same time, however, this complex process is influenced by the environments in which they teach. In describing how trends and ideas can spread in a similar manner to that of contagious diseases, Gladwell (2000) identified a factor he referred to as “The Power of Context.” He commented:

Epidemics are sensitive to the conditions and circumstances of the times and places in which they occur. In Baltimore, syphilis spreads far more in the summer than in the winter. Hush Puppies took off because they were being worn by kids in the cutting-edge precincts of the East Village--an environment that helped others to look at the shoes in a new light. (p. 139)

Seen in the light of the field of education and school settings, Gladwell’s “Power of Context” would suggest that the environment in which social studies teachers practice can be an important factor in terms of their decisions to use controversial content material in their regular instruction. Put simply, certain environments seem to support these decisions while others discourage them.

In the narratives that form the heart of this study, three broad categories emerged: (a) the conceptions that teachers have of what constitutes controversy in the field of social studies; (b) the experiences that they encountered in using controversy in their teaching; and (c) the positions that they take toward using controversy as a result of these experiences. Within each category, each teacher exhibits complex intersections of myriad environmental elements. In the following chapter, I will detail how these environmental elements emerged from the teacher narratives conducted for this study.

Conceptions

The narratives that emerged from the initial set of interviews conducted with 7 social studies teachers currently practicing in the Jacksonville, Florida area suggest that there are a wide range of historical and contemporary issues that have proven controversial in the northern Florida communities served by the Duval County Public school district (DCPS). Table 7-1 shows a breakdown of these issues mentioned by the teachers participating in this study.

While there are clearly an abundance of issues that have proven controversial in the social studies classrooms of northern Florida, a handful of themes appear to be more significant than others.

The Bush Administration

It is not surprising that the topic of the Bush administration's policies, including the PATRIOT Act, the firing of U.S. attorneys in 2005, extraordinary rendition, its nominations to the Supreme Court, and, most notably, its Iraq policy, have proven highly controversial in the classrooms of Duval County public schools. Florida was a high-profile swing state in both the 2000 and 2004 Presidential elections, and as mentioned earlier, operatives on both sides of the partisan divide were especially concerned about the coverage of these issues in Florida classrooms. Thus, any reference by Florida social studies teachers to the Bush administration and its policies during these periods was scrutinized by students, parents and the wider community for signs of partisanship.

Each of the teacher-participants in this study made reference to the Bush administration's policies in their various narratives, thus underscoring these points. In "Story D--They're Nuts," for example, Adam criticized Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* for its sensationalistic approach to the issues of the Bush administration and its response to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon:

He's just trying to sell tickets or books by saying outrageous things about the Bush administration, so it's not enough to say that the Bush policy about the Iraq War was wrong--which I'd agree with and most conservatives would agree with--he's got to trade in all of these 9/11 conspiracy theories about Bin Laden and the Saudi royal family and then the Caspian oil deals. It's just too much.

In this statement, Adam indicated that the Bush administration is a convenient and easy target for those on the left side of the political spectrum and that left intellectuals such as Moore are guilty of "piling on" as the approval numbers for the Bush administration have plummeted in recent years. The virtual cottage industry of books criticizing the Bush administration that cluttered the *New York Times* bestseller list during the last Presidential campaign year (Clarke, 2004; Dean, 2004; Suskind, 2004) would seem to support Adam's point. In a similar vein, Cathy recalled in "Story E--'R' Rating" a colleague who was disciplined for using *Fahrenheit 9/11* due to the heightened sensitivity of the community to these issues during the fall of 2004: "He made it easy for those people who were looking for an excuse to punish someone for getting partisan about the Presidential election." Cathy clearly felt that teachers facing the context of a contentious political climate needed to take unusual care in the preparation and presentation of their lessons.

At the same time, some teachers expressed their enthusiasm for engaging students in the upcoming Presidential campaign. Eric, for example, in "Story B--Republicans vs. Democrats" spoke about his plans for his spring semester course in American Government: "I'm planning to do some debates with the students. Have them choose candidates and debate different issues from the stances of their chosen candidates." Eric commented further about the candid stance that he takes toward these issues:

I make no bones about my own opinions, the students know from day one that I'm a Republican, die hard conservative, voted for Bush twice, but that doesn't mean that students can't criticize Bush in my classes, and they sure do, and I criticize him too sometimes.

In this passage, Eric exhibited his willingness to allow open debate in his classroom. Gina also showed a willingness to engage her students in current events discussions about the Bush administration's policies, albeit through the slightly passive form of a bulletin board collage of headlines. When questioned about a headline critical of former Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez, Gina described an interesting exchange:

I geared up for a big fight with him about my right to bring items in from home and trying to enrich the curriculum and blah de blah blah, but then he just smiled, kind of like "Gotcha!" He just wanted to see if he could get a reaction from me.

This incident and Gina's comment perhaps best exemplifies the terrain upon which social studies teachers operate when discussing the current administration: if they're courageous and willing to entertain the opinions of their students, they can certainly address these issues, but they must take undue caution in doing so lest they face criticism--or worse--from their immediate school communities.

Religion

Religious issues also proved especially contentious in Jacksonville area secondary schools. Duval County is home to a large Southern Baptist congregation, as well as many smaller fundamentalist and evangelical Protestant denominations who actively campaign for a return to the kind of explicit religious instruction banned by the Supreme Court in landmark decisions in cases such as *Engel vs. Vitale* (1962). Many school districts, including DCPS have thus retreated behind a wall of silence on religious topics rather than addressing the plurality of philosophical, ethical, and moral concerns that are at the core of religious traditions in a spirit of open, critical inquiry. At the same time, DCPS schools adhere closely to the "Lemon Test" that emerged from the Supreme Court's decision in the *Lemon vs. Kurtzman* (1971) case that permits student initiated religious observances such as the before-school ritual observed by Frank in "Story E-- Rally Round the Flag."

Ben's comments in his narrative "Story D--Student Skit" were typical of the responses from the participants in this study. Addressing his strategy of using original skits in order to stimulate student interest and understanding of historical eras in his World History classes, Ben stated that he habitually anticipates controversy arising from a skit concerning the French religious wars that includes several florid passages of anti-Catholic rhetoric: "So every year, I'm waiting for something to happen, because there is plenty of inflammatory stuff in it." While many of the respondents have the option to avoid confronting controversial religious issues, Cathy, who teaches an elective course in World Religions, is forced to deal with these topics in the daily routine of her instruction. In "Story A--Raised Catholic," Cathy commented about her efforts to teach in an inoffensive manner:

So, sure, I've got to be conscious of not offending anyone, because I've got in a typical class, a Southern Baptist kid next to a Hindu kid next to a Pentecostal kid. But at the same time, I tell them from the start that we're going to dig deeply into the doctrines and beliefs of these different faiths so that they've got to be willing to do that.

In her response, Cathy demonstrated that her approach is largely governed by her understanding of the unusually diverse student population of Orange Park College Preparation School. She admitted that her students are not always able to rise to her challenge of digging deeply into these issues: "I've had students that just shut down in the middle of the course." This comment lent testimony to the extraordinary difficulties facing social studies teachers who choose to address in their instruction religious issues so personal to their students.

In her fascinating narrative, "Story A--Church vs. State," Donna illustrated the importance of school context in relation to issues of controversy. She stated that while many teachers in other DCPS schools might expect to find support for their efforts to blur the lines between religious instruction and public education, she has also encountered challenges from her more liberal students at Riverside Arts Academy:

Here, though, the students and even their parents are pretty diverse and much more liberal than in most schools in the area. It's just the arts school focus, it changes everything. So, I've had kids question choices that wouldn't be a problem in other schools.

Donna provided an example of this unusual context when she detailed an incident in which a student complained about her use of an album of Christmas music:

I had for years brought in a copy of the Elvis Presley Christmas album, you know with 'Blue Christmas' and I had a kid complain that it was Christian music and that I shouldn't be playing it. He was Jewish and I guess I hadn't thought of it.

As a result of the student's intervention, Donna was forced to reflect upon what, in her mind, had been a seemingly innocuous inclusion of classic music in an effort to create a warm, inviting atmosphere in the classroom for her students. In the end, the cultural gulf between teachers and students from both sides of the Church vs. State argument reflects the culture wars in schools.

Race

Issues involving race also operate on an extremely delicate ground in diverse northern Florida public schools. Many commentators have noted the radioactive nature of the discussion of race during the recent Presidential primary season, in which the campaigns of both Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama have faced criticism for injecting race into the debate (Sirota, 2008; Williams, 2008). While many Americans would like to think that the United States became a color blind society after the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, the work of several educators has focused attention on the continuing racial divide that exists within public schooling. Kozol (2005), for example, posited that the *de jure* segregation in schools ended by the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision in 1954 has, in the advent of white flight to suburban neighborhoods, been replaced with a *de facto* segregation in many school districts. Levitt and Dubner (2005) reported that the average White student attends a public school with a black student population of 6%, while the average Black student attends a public school with a black student population of 60%. Tatum (1997) further analyzed the implications of the self-

segregation practices of many African American students within what such students interpret as the white space of public schools.

Five of the respondents included in this study mentioned race relations as an extremely controversial issue for their students. In “Story C--The Bell Curve,” Adam offered concrete evidence of the precarious ground upon which social studies teachers stand when addressing these issues with their classes. Following Herrnstein and Murray’s (1994) provocative exercise, Adam created a worksheet that prompted students to reflect upon the demographic realities of their most intimate relationships with their peers. Not surprisingly, he encountered resistance to this plan:

I had purposely put it (race) at the bottom of the column of a lot of other items, I’m not an idiot, you know. So the first kid who notices it says, “Hey, you can’t ask us that!” And I said, “Why not?” So that started a whole discussion the basic point of which was whether or not even asking questions about race was racist.

In his narrative, Adam expressed shock in the response from the students: “I was pretty astonished . . . the whole class wanted to ignore the issue of race because they think they’re color blind in this generation, that it doesn’t matter anymore.” Ben reinforced this testimony about the difficulty of engaging students in even historical discussions that involve race such as the slave trade in his narrative “Story D--Student Skit.” He related an anecdote about a classroom incident in which he had asked a group to act out an original skit based on the 1839 *Amistad* slave rebellion:

I had one that was loosely based on the Amistad incident and a Black kid, actually maybe more than just one over the years, but definitely I remember one kid who just refused to even be in the room for it. She said, “my Mom just says that I shouldn’t be around when you folks are talking slavery” or something like that.

Thus, within the overheated political climate of 2008, students in American high schools view even sympathetic historical discussions that involve race as offensive and potentially degrading.

Despite these student protestations of colorblindness, however, the teachers in this study mentioned several incidents in which racial tensions and resentment boiled over in their classrooms. In “Story B--Questioning Slavery,” for instance, Cathy detailed the regular practice by individual white students in her World History classes of challenging the ways in which the slave trade has been characterized in mainstream historical texts. She recalled that, “There will be some quiet little kid who’ll say, ‘Are we sure that this wasn’t exaggerated?’” Cathy related that her typical response in the face of these incidences of overt racist challenges to her curriculum was to shut it down by requiring students to provide the research to back up their assertions on the spot. Donna recalled in “Story D--The Jena Six” how a near melee had broken out in her classroom over a simple misunderstanding about the use of capitalization in an article that she’d used to explore the case of the Jena Six: “It just started with something relatively simple and small. One white student had noticed that the author had used a lowercase ‘w’ for the word ‘white’ and a capital ‘B’ for ‘Black’ in the article.” The sheer abundance of these anecdotes in the testimony of these teachers speaks to the explosive nature of race as a contemporary discussion point in today’s social studies classrooms.

Iraq

Given the large number of military personnel stationed in the Jacksonville area, any references to the ongoing occupation of Iraq by United States military forces are fraught with controversy. Duval County, Florida is home to the Naval Air Station, Jacksonville, which employs 23,000 civilian and active duty personnel on its southside Jacksonville base. While there are certainly elements of the Bush administration’s policies that are unpopular among these military families; including the stop-loss practice of continually re-deploying troops that are due for domestic leave, the treatment of veterans of the deployment at Veteran’s Administration facilities, and the inadequate materiel provided to troops in Iraq and Afghanistan; the tradition of

following the orders of a civilian leadership has meant that overt criticism of the occupation is anathema within military circles. This taboo has been reinforced by the Bush administration's conflation of emotional support for the troops and hopes for their safety--naturally, a quite widespread sentiment among the American populace--with support for their policies, including narrow elements of policy such as the recent expansion of troop deployments commonly known as "The Surge."

The teachers interviewed for this project experienced these trends at first hand. For example, Ben commented on the tendency of students from military families to reject the need for any discussion of the issues surrounding the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan in "Story E--Truth Consequences and War:"

Of course there were one or two conservative kids, kids with parents involved in the war, who took it personally. They're going to think that any debate is wrong, that you just get behind the troops no matter what, and I get that.

Ironically Ben noted that, as a supporter of these policies, "I get that and I have the (Support the Troops yellow ribbon) decal on my car." At the same time, he felt strongly that, in order for the policies to be successful, an informed American public needed to unify behind them. Thus, Ben felt justified in using materials such as the PBS *Frontline* documentary that provided, to his satisfaction, fair and factual coverage of the issues involved: "But you have to have more than that. The only way that this thing is going to work is if the nation is behind it and that takes knowledge and information."

In "Story B--History as History," Frank presented a contrasting narrative in which he represented curricular time pressures in a positive light. Noting that he rarely reached further than the Reagan administration of the 1980s in his survey of American history, Frank stated that this was an advantage as it prevented students from making what he considered inappropriate historical parallels between events such as the U.S. military interventions in Vietnam and Iraq:

“I’m not sure that the students put together the periods like Vietnam and Iraq and I’m not sure I want them too. There’s a lot of talk about that but it’s more complicated than that.”

Asked to explain his aversion to drawing connections between historical and contemporary issues, Frank conceded that, “Yes, Vietnam was a disaster and Iraq is a disaster but they’re really different.” Yet, he concluded that this is a rather facile comparison that hides the underlying dissimilarities. In the end, he expressed the desire in his students for what he considers a more nuanced view:

I want students to understand Vietnam for Vietnam, to understand why we got involved and the mistakes that were made there, but not necessarily to extrapolate from that to be against Iraq. I think it’s conceivable to think that Vietnam was a bad idea and that Iraq is noble, or vice versa.

Thus, rather than Ben’s policy of openly addressing contemporary issues in a history class as a means of gaining critical understandings of historical issues, Frank preferred the advantage of avoiding these discussions by presenting a historical survey that stopped short of and actively avoided contemporary topics.

Abortion

The conservative Bible-Belt politics mentioned above also make discussion of abortion and reproductive rights in general quite complicated in Jacksonville area social studies classrooms. In recent years, abortion, along with gay rights--also mentioned as an issue of controversy by several participants--and gun control have been utilized by political candidates and campaigns as wedge issues in order to divide constituencies that might otherwise be likely to vote as a bloc around their economic interests rather than more narrow social concerns. Public education, too, has become a political football in local political races. While the current Abstinence Only policy mandated by No Child Left Behind proscribes altogether the discussion

of abortion and contraception in health classes, social studies teachers still retain the, albeit limited, ability to discuss these topics as public policy issues in their classes.

The participants in this study were well aware of this complicated context. Adam, for example, listed abortion as one of three issues that he was advised by a senior colleague to “stay away from” in a self-evidently titled narrative “Story A--Stay Away from Abortion.” While he expressed the tendency to avoid controversial public policy issues as a young teacher, he also noted that he has included them in his more recent instruction of American Government. He asked rhetorically: “How can I talk about modern government and (the) modern judiciary without discussing these issues?” In “Story A--Church vs. State,” Donna concurred with these concerns:

You might have a more conservative environment in most schools, particularly in the neighborhood schools where if you’re a liberal minded teacher like me you have to be careful not to talk too openly about abortion or sex or whatnot.

At the same time, she expressed more concern about disturbing the delicate relationships that she’d established with her students, particularly with those who hold opposing views to her own on the issue of abortion, than with wider community standards. In “Story D--Violation of Trust,” she admitted that these concerns weigh on her mind when considering the presentation of her views:

It has to, yes, it does. Because you realize that you can very quickly lose that trust, you can disappoint them. For example, I have a lot of kids who are pro-life and they care tremendously about the issue. And I’m pro-choice and I care about it too.

Upon reflection, Donna concluded that, “I would never say that in front of a class, and not because I would get into trouble, which I probably would, but because it would be a violation of trust. I’m not sure that I could ever get that trust back.” In the end, Donna implicitly understood that her relationship with her students is by far the most important in regard to her

teaching practice. In the narratives discussed in the following section, this understanding filters through the conversations with all 7 participants.

Experiences

When analyzing the narratives that addressed the experiences that individual teachers had encountered with the use of controversial public issues in their classrooms--the question at the center of this study--several common categories emerged. These categories corresponded with the various players within the school community that had a role in the incidents described. Table 7-2 includes a visual display of these categories.

It is instructive to note in the following discussion that these factors mentioned below begin with the most intimate and personal teaching relationship--that with students--and then build out gradually in concentric circles to include wider and wider areas of the community.

Students

Students in traditional school settings were typically conceived of as passive vessels with which to fill up with expert knowledge and as polite subordinates to the *paterfamilias* authority in the home and the *in loco parentis* authority of the teacher in the classroom. In contrast, students of the past two generations have gained an immeasurable amount of freedom and independence. In 1969, for example, the Supreme Court decision in the landmark *Tinker vs. Des Moines* case stipulated that students' rights to free expression--in the specific case, the right to display a black armband adorned with a peace symbol in a protest of the United States military intervention in Vietnam--did not "end at the schoolhouse gates." While these rights were recently challenged by the decision in favor of an Alaskan school district's suspension of a group of students who displayed a banner reading "Bong Hits for Jesus" in the *Morse vs. Frederick* case (2007), it is indisputable that high school students in 2008 feel more confident in voicing their

opinions inside and outside of the classroom than did their counterparts fifty or a hundred years ago.

In nearly all of the incidents involving controversy in the classroom described by the teachers participating in this study, students provided the spark that initiated the conflict. Indeed, in those instances in which their parents or the wider community become involved in a discussion of a teacher's practice, their views are filtered through the lens of the information provided to them by the students who first witnessed the incident. Several teachers referred to this new sense of power felt by their students. Gina, for example, remembered an incident in "Story B--Going, Gone, Gonzo" in which she was caught off guard by a student challenge of an item that she had posted on the bulletin board in her classroom that referenced former Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez's status: "I put it up and something like the next day, a student who usually is barely awake asked a question, 'Why is that there?'" Ironically, as Gina later related, the student was not terribly upset by the item but rather merely wanted to get a reaction from Gina: "I geared up for a big fight . . . and he just smiled, kind of like 'Gotcha!'" Despite the humor involved in this anecdote, it clearly indicated the tremendous psychological power that students often exert in their relationships with their teachers today.

In "Story C--Renaissance to Modern," Ben's plans for an innovative World History survey that allowed him to give more attention to non-European topics was undermined by the introduction of a new student who had previously attended a class with a more traditional scope and sequence of topics. This incident was eventually resolved in a meeting involving administrators and parents. Ben commented on the details of the meeting:

I had to meet with the VP and the department chair. I guess the kid had gone home and told his mom and she'd called them to say that her kid was confused. I don't blame her because I'm sure it was confusing to him. It was just an unfortunate situation.

In this statement, Ben confirmed that the meeting had itself been initiated when “the kid had gone home” and complained of confusion. Admirably, Ben harbored no resentment and recognized the conflict as “an unfortunate situation” that could be resolved with a little extra work after school with the student. Of all the teachers interviewed, Frank perhaps demonstrated the most successful relationships with his students. In “Story A--GSA,” for instance, Frank recalled how “one of the first years I was here, a group of students asked me to sponsor the Gay Straight Alliance chapter here at Riverview.” In his classroom instruction too, Frank indicated his inclination to orient his historical material to the students’ own interests. In “Story D--Abstract Art,” Frank explained the rationale for including a presentation of modern art in his U.S. History class:

When you teach at a school like this you kind of have to tailor what you do to fit the interests of the students, and I’ve got a lot of kids who come into class with paint-spattered jeans on, so I know I can’t just talk about the Marshall Plan and think that they’re going to get into it. I’ve got to bring the cultural history in as well.

At the same time, however, Frank was sometimes surprised by the reaction of his students to his lessons. In the same narrative, for example, Frank mentioned one student who had complained about the selection of Jackson Pollock’s work: “he just said, ‘That’s just a mess. I could do better than that.’” This exchange suggested that even the most sensitive and student-centered teacher has a great deal of work to do in maintaining successful relationships with groups of students who feel increasingly confident about speaking their minds and challenging the ideas that teachers bring into social studies classrooms.

Colleagues

Many educators over the years (Goodlad, 1984; Sizer, 1992) spoke eloquently about the isolation facing most teachers who spend hours in the classroom with students each school day with little chance to engage in collaborative activities with their fellow teachers. Indeed, save the

brief greetings in the morning and rushed lunches in the faculty lounge at mid-day, teachers rarely have the opportunity to speak with their colleagues. Yet, as fleeting as these encounters may be, teachers' reputations within a school are largely based on the views of others teachers. Apple (2000) addressed the common dynamic in which a young teacher, flush with idealism from a program of teacher training and practicum experiences, meets with the disapproval or outright resistance of more established faculty members.

The participants in this study consistently mentioned the issue of collegiality, or lack thereof, in their teaching lives. Adam, for example, remembered the not-so-subtle social pressure implied in the advice that he had received from a veteran teacher in the department. In "Story A--Don't Mention Abortion," he recalled: "And I worry a little about addressing them because one of the warnings I got when I first started teaching was 'stay away from abortion, stay away from homosexuality' because somebody's gonna complain. And so far nobody's complained."

For a young teacher entering the field, this kind of advice can have a devastating effect on his or her confidence in the ability to conduct critical lessons. Despite his claims otherwise, it's clear from his comments--"I still feel antsy because I know that one day there's gonna be that phone call"--that his colleague's words have had an effect on his practice. No teacher relishes the prospect of facing a phone call from an angry parent and thus many choose to avoid taking risks with their instructional practices. Ben's narrative "Story B--Tough Adjustment" testified to another aspect of the reality of public school teaching that makes life particularly difficult for first-year teachers: the lack of effective mentoring programs. Assigned to teach in a rotation of different classrooms, a situation known to many first-year teachers, Ben remarked on the lack of sensitivity and support displayed by his colleagues:

A lot of the teachers would see me in the hallway and they'd say things they thought were funny--"Travel Much?"--or something stupid like that. Sometimes they'd ask how

things were going but they really didn't want to hear about it, so I'd just keep moving and chalk off the days.

This response from veteran teachers thus turned what could have been a more fruitful experience into a rite-of-passage in which Ben "chalk(ed) off the days." In "Story A--Church vs. State," Donna related a surprising narrative regarding pressure placed on her by a fellow teacher advocating on behalf of a student who was caught plagiarizing a paper for Donna's class. She commented:

I remember one kid who I caught plagiarizing a paper, a term paper, and maybe I could have been more careful with the assignment to prevent that kind of thing, but I had the kid dead on it. It was straight from Wikipedia, word for word. And because she had some work in the spring show, well, you know where this is going.

Finally, Gina addressed the resistance that she encountered from her colleagues at Orange Park College Preparation School to a lesson in which she attempted to use a demonstration of meditation techniques as a means of enriching the students understanding of Buddhism. In "Story E--Teaching Buddhism," she described the response to her lesson:

I was getting all these jokes in the faculty lounge, people calling me "Smokey" and that sort of thing as if I was smoking pot in my room. Which is ridiculous. But that's the kind of narrow-mindedness that you get among teachers sometimes.

In a subsequent parent conference triggered by her meditation lessons, Gina was supported by her department head. However, she related that, "she (the department head) told me that I probably shouldn't do the meditation exercise again in the future, as if I had done something wrong." These comments from veteran practitioners spoke volumes to the influence that even casual comments made by colleagues can have on teacher confidence and the use of unconventional and potentially controversial teaching materials and content.

Parents

Parents and organized parent groups have played a central role in recent challenges to teacher autonomy and academic freedom. Ross and Marker (2005) noted the irony that

conservative mothers have often been on the front lines of this new movement to challenge the practices of (predominantly) female teachers. They commented that, despite the association of women's politics with progressive struggles for suffrage, reproductive rights, and the Equal Rights Amendment, that, "Today, 'the movement' has a new identity" (p. 144). Apple (2001) surmised that this new dynamic is largely due to the character of religiously conservative families. According to the dictates of the churches that dominate the thinking of these families, it is a woman's proper role to take care of raising children and, by extension, their education. Indeed the capture of this role by secular schools and teachers is often the primary source of tension in these cases.

Many of the respondents in this project recognized this shifting reality in their comments about their experiences in parent conferences. Cathy, for example, related an instance in which a fellow colleague was forced to recant some intemperate comments made about IQ testing and the "Gifted Program" at her school. In "Story F--Stick to the Script," she recalled:

(T)hey had a big meeting of all the Gifted parents and students and this guy had to walk the plank. . . . He had to apologize, to do the *mea culpa* in front of all of these angry parents. It eventually blew over, but you never recover from something like that. The kids know that they've got you then and it never ends. So in the end he moved to another school where he could start over.

As a result of such incidents, Cathy developed a supervisory position toward younger teachers in which she admonished them for straying away from their lesson plans. As she commented: "So what you need to do is stick to the script. What I mean is that you have a lesson plan, you put together your materials and you have notes for your material." In "Story E--Rally Round the Flag," Frank provided an anecdote about his struggle with a particularly powerful parent over the issue of whether students should have been allowed to come late to his class from a religious ritual. Frank remembered receiving a phone call from a school board member whose son was a member of one of Frank's classes:

(T)he next problem was that the student who was upset and questioned my decision is the son of a school board member, so the next thing I know I'm getting a phone call from this woman. And then the next day she comes into my class while I'm teaching.

Realizing upon reflection that he had badly misrepresented a secular institution, Frank recalled that, "I just basically had to eat crow over it." Social studies teachers such as Frank are aware that the power dynamics, particularly involving well-connected parents, of public education mean that the only proper response to a challenge of this kind is, as Frank related, "yes ma'am." While the participants in this study confirmed that the normal channels of communication between parents and teachers were still very much in place, a layer of tension has been added to this communication as a result of the culture wars.

Curriculum

One of the central components of standards reform in the past 25 years has been the primacy of curriculum frameworks. Constructed by federal and state departments of education, occasionally in consultation with classroom practitioners, these detailed content guidelines are in turn disseminated to local districts for implementation in individual schools. While the frameworks paradigm has addressed the pressing problem of scope and sequence in order to avoid the irritating tendency of schools to cover identical material in several history classes, it has also severely constrained creativity and added a pressing time concern to teachers' planning processes. Within the domain of standards reform, therefore, the organic assessment of students by concerned educators has been replaced by an inauthentic accountability buttressed by a regime of high stakes testing.

Several of the teacher-participants who provided narrative responses for this study addressed this current state of affairs. In his narrative "Story B--Cut and Paste Job," Adam lamented the loss of instructional time to the battery of tests now administered in his school:

We've lost a lot of time to testing. We now have a pre-test at the beginning of the year, and a post-test at the end of the year. And that's in addition to PSAT if you teach ninth grade and AP tests and IB tests and it's just endless. So we've lost time for regular instruction and I've had to adjust so that I get through as much material as possible. It's tough and I have to admit that I don't get to as much as I used to. Just can't.

Asked whether this testing regime affects the depth of instructional detail that he is allowed, Adam commented that, "It's got to." Ben added a fascinating narrative to this testimony. In "Story C--Renaissance to Modern," he exalted about the freedom that he felt when he reduced his World History survey from one that covered Prehistory to the current world to one that began at the period of the Italian Renaissance:

I immediately noticed that I had the freedom to do units on the Ottoman Empire that I hadn't been able to do before, and I could get further in the survey. I ended up with a unit on contemporary conflicts in the 90s that year. It was amazing.

Unfortunately, this schema created problems of coordination with other contemporaneous classes in the school. As Ben commented: "the problem is that I had some students who switched from another class into mine. . . . I get this kid in my class and of course, he's been doing the Hellenistic Period with his other class and we're already doing the Scientific Revolution, some few thousand years later." In Ben's case, a controversy erupted due to his lack of discipline in regard to conforming to the frameworks, resulting in a humiliating parent conference and an admonishment from the administration. Finally, Frank related an interesting anecdote regarding his Advanced Placement courses. In "Story C--Time Pressure," he noted that, in recent years, students had begun to complain about the brevity and lack of depth in the survey of American history:

You know, I have had a few complaints recently. Some kids have complained that we skip pretty quickly over the material at times, it's the only way that I can cover everything, to be honest, I just at times have to assign text readings and then test them on it in order to catch up. So there is some bellyaching about that.

This general criticism led to specific incidents in which students challenged Frank's curricular choices during Black History Month in February. Asked how he addressed this query, Frank admitted that he couldn't satisfy each student's demands: "I don't have enough time to take a month, or even a week, out to satisfy every different interest group." It is clear from these responses that the breakneck pace with which social studies teachers must cover material in an age of accountability measured by success on high stakes tests means that there is little time or support for their innovations in the classroom.

Positions

On the basis of the structural and positionality analysis conducted on the narratives that emerged from my conversations with 7 social studies teachers currently teaching in Duval County Public high schools, I identified a variety of positions that teachers commonly take toward the use of controversial subject matter in their instructional practice. These positions are not exclusive; many of the participants displayed the salient characteristics of more than one position, occasionally within the same narrative. Indeed, the contradictory nature of some the positions attests to the complex nature of teaching in the social studies today. Table 7-3 contains a visual representation of these positions. As Table 7.3 indicates, the teachers involved in this study presented a wide variety of nuanced stances; however, several common positions emerged from the discussions.

Student Focus

As I previously noted in Chapter 6, the teachers that I interviewed were inordinately concerned with the relationships that they had built with their students. This emphasis in their instruction was displayed in a position that I have labeled student focus. The strategic presumption underlining this approach is that teachers can avoid the appearance of bias in the discussion of controversial issues by allowing students to engage in discussion without

interference or intervention on their part. This is the intention behind Eric's statement in "Story F--He Doesn't Do Himself Any Favors," "I like to just lob an issue out there for the kids to wrestle with." It is, of course, convenient for these teachers who employ this tactic that student-centered approaches correspond with current ideas and research within progressive teacher training. Adam embodied this approach in "Story A--Stay Away from Abortion," in his careful instructions to students before a discussion: "I've always prefaced these discussions by saying, 'Look, we're analyzing the issues, we're talking about different sides of different arguments, we're not actually having the arguments.'" The teacher who most consistently voiced this position was Frank, who indicated several student-centered practices in his narratives, including posting notices announcing student activities in his classroom. In "Story D--Abstract Art," he displayed this position in describing a lesson in which students were encouraged to respond to modern art pieces in a free-write exercise. Frank recalled a discussion that sprang from one student's visceral reaction to a Jackson Pollock painting: "And that just kicked off this great discussion about what people value in art, whether an artist should always strive for a photographic copy. I don't think anyone changed the kid's mind, though. But that's okay."

Frank's reaction is a perfect encapsulation of the student focus position. Frank's presumption that this position would allow him to avoid challenges to his practice, however, was undermined by his testimony in "Story E--Rally Round the Flag." In this case, Frank is upbraided by a member of the school board whose son had challenged Frank's tacit support for a religious observance before school. Reflecting on this experience, Frank commented: "I learned my lesson that day. I won't sell the students out but I won't go out on a limb either." This incident shows in stark relief that the student focus position, despite its obvious admirable qualities, is not in itself a sufficient strategy for protecting teachers' academic freedom.

Accuracy

Another thread that ran through many of the narratives collected during this project involved historical accuracy and fact, often defined in a narrow sense and contrasted with the progressive notion of multiple perspectives. This is undoubtedly due to the participants' own training within the historical paradigm, with its concentration on archival evidence and primary source material. In his rejection of the use of Michael Moore's documentary film *Fahrenheit 9/11* in "Story D--They're Nuts!" Adam commented, "I don't really appreciate Mike Moore's stuff. I just think he's a provocateur. He's not really in the business of being fair in his presentation. He's trying to push it with every frame and make a propagandistic point."

In the context of the accuracy position, Adam judged *Fahrenheit*, which he derided for its acceptance of what he considered conspiracy theories, to be a work of propaganda rather than a fair and accurate historical record suitable for use in a social studies classroom. In stating his preference for a PBS *Frontline* documentary over that of *Fahrenheit* in "Story E--Truth, Consequences and War," Ben concurred with Adam on the need for historical fact in the presentation of controversial material: "It just laid out the arguments pro and con very well. It relied on official reports and the speeches of administration officials like Rumsfeld." In this framework, official reports and speeches gain a particular cachet as part of the hegemonic record of events. Cathy best exemplified this position in her narrative "Story B--Questioning Slavery." Responding to a student contribution to a discussion about the legacy of slavery that she considered both outrageous and outside the parameters of polite conversation on race, Cathy explained her criteria for appropriate classroom debate:

I tell them that they have to back up what they're saying or it won't be allowed in my class, in our discussion pit, that's what I like to call it. If they can't produce some evidence, some empirical evidence, of the truth of what they're saying, then I don't allow it. It doesn't get an airing.

It is clear from this statement that Cathy considers discussion without the support of “empirical evidence” intolerable and that student engagement in such idle speculation will lead to their exclusion from the conversation. Cathy expanded on her conclusions stemming from this emphasis on historical accuracy and fact in “Story C--The Seven Years’ War is Still the Seven Years’ War.” In her justification of her practice of leaving her World History survey intact year after year, in contrast to her friend and colleague’s dramatic practice of burning her notes each summer, Cathy declared that, “I rationalize it that the history hasn’t changed, the Seven Years’ War is still the Seven Years’ War, right?” When I pressed her on this comment, she responded that, “the topics haven’t changed much and I resist the revisionist stances that have become popular.” In this schema, history is static, with evidence pointing toward clear and unambiguous conclusions about unchanging events, while attempts by younger teachers and scholars to present different perspectives is dismissed as historical revisionism.

Inoffensiveness

A position of inoffensiveness pervaded many of the conversations with the teachers in this study. Many of the participants stated a preference for avoiding discussions that they interpreted as promoting controversy, not because of fear of loss of employment, but rather due to their own conceptions of social studies teaching. It was with no sense of irony, for example, that Adam stated in his narrative detailing a lesson based on the explosive book on race and intelligence, *The Bell Curve*, that, “I don’t go out of my way to be controversial.” In a similar vein, Gina commented in “Story E--Social Studies is a Minefield,” that, “I don’t start out expecting to do controversial work.” It is tempting to interpret these statements as expressions of the chilling effect that challenges to academic freedom have had on these teachers. Yet, the narratives provided for this study do not support this conclusion. When the inoffensiveness position is voiced, it is done so out of concern for students more often than out of concern for job

security. For example, in “Story D--World Religions Journal,” Cathy described her main concern in preventing sectarian discussions regarding religion in her classroom as one of guarding her diverse student population from potential harm. Donna epitomized this position in several narratives. In “Story D-- Violation of Trust,” Donna explained her decision to keep her pro-choice views private:

I think that’s one of the big advances for my generation that we made abortion safe, legal and rare. But I would never say that in front of a class, and not because I would get into trouble, which I probably would, but because it would be a violation of trust.

In this conception, teachers expressed their concern that they would lose authority and respect with their classes if they were to explore in a candid manner controversial issues or reveal opinions that they conceive of as risky or contrary to those shared by a predominance of their students. When these teachers have been challenged by students to justify a curricular choice, therefore, it has been in situations in which they have been caught off guard, such as Donna’s use of an Elvis Presley album of Christmas music, not when they have consciously waded into a controversial topic with eyes open.

Fear

While the fear of loss of employment was not uppermost in the minds of the teachers in this study, it is clear from their narratives that it forms an important backdrop to their decisions about lesson planning. Frank, for example, recalled his calculations when approached by a group of students about sponsoring a nascent branch of the Gay Straight Alliance at Riverside Arts Academy in “Story A--GSA:” “When I was first asked, I didn't have professional status and I was still single, so I told them ‘thanks but no thanks.’” In this statement, Frank indicated that his reasoning for turning down the offer was based solely on his lack of job security. Adam described the lessons that he took from the advice that he received from a veteran colleague during his first year of teaching in “Story A--Stay Away from Abortion:” “I worry a little about

addressing them because one of the warnings I got when I first started teaching was ‘stay away from abortion, stay away from homosexuality’ because somebody’s gonna complain.” Adam admitted that this sense of fear creates stress that has an influence on his choices in the classroom. After a lesson in his American Government course collapsed amidst accusations of racist intent on his part, he recounted his reaction:

I haven’t used it again, I just felt like it was a hassle. I did the same lesson for two classes that day and it was pretty much the same story in both and I went home that night and I was still really tensed up from the whole thing and I thought “I don’t need this, I don’t need to come from school and not be able to sleep because of some stupid lesson, jackass.”

Of all the respondents, Gina most clearly identified herself with the position of fear. Asked for her views on controversy in the field in the social studies, Gina described it as a minefield in her first narrative. Gina expressed this position in terms of a critique of an overly sensitive and litigious society in which citizens can be driven to action by the smallest and most seemingly trivial incident: “There are just so many different issues and perspectives out there that people really care about and when it comes to their kids, parents can be really intense, I guess is the right word.”

Despite her reference to concerned parents in “Story A--Social Studies is a Minefield,” it was clear from the unique pattern of her narratives in which she spontaneously dived into the complicating action of incidents that Gina is most worried about the responses of her students to her instructional choices. In “Story B--Going, Gone, Gonzo,” for example, Gina remembered a time in which she was challenged by a student for posting a headline perceived as critical of former Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez. Although most teachers, like stand-up comedians, learn to weather this kind of heckling from students, the profusion of such incidents in Gina’s classroom has led to her walk on eggshells around her students and has increased the gulf in cultural understanding between them.

Curriculum Focus

Finally, 5 of the participants displayed characteristics of a position that is focused on curricular matters. This curriculum focus position is the flip side of the student focus position so common among the teachers interviewed for this project in that it is an attempt to deflect criticism for controversial choices onto the curriculum itself. For instance, the most common response to a curricular challenge among these teachers appeared to be the phrase, “it’s in the curriculum.” Indeed, many of the teachers questioned how they could adequately cover the material in their courses without delving into some controversial subjects. In “Story E-- Teaching Buddhism,” for example, Gina discussed her rationale for including a demonstration of meditation practices in a unit on Eastern philosophies: “So, I thought I would try to show students how to use some of these ideas, rather than just treating them as if they were just some dry, abstract thing.” In this case, Gina imagined that this choice was beyond reproach as it fit so neatly into the curriculum in her course in World History. This turned out to be a naive hope as she was ridiculed for the choice by students, parents and colleagues alike.

At the same time, several teachers offered up the time pressures created by standards reform as an excuse for not doing more to enrich the curricula of their classes. When a student complained about the lack of material for Black History Month, Frank claimed, “I don’t have enough time to take a month, or even a week, out to satisfy every different interest group . . . and still prepare them for this test, and that’s my main job.” The curricular narrowing and focus on academics in the current accountability regime was a common theme among these teachers. In his narrative “Story C--It Gets Very Vocational,” Eric commented on a course outline for an elective in Economics that included some practical instruction on household budgeting, checkbook management and job interviewing that was rejected by a department head as too vocational in focus:

(H)e looked at the project work and he said, “that’s what we do in business math.” In other words, that was something for the dumb kids. So, he wanted for me to stay away from those areas that might smack of vocational education like home ec. or business math.

The pressing demands of an overstuffed and yet narrowly-focused social studies curriculum that is increasingly tied to the demands of high stakes testing, therefore, both creates pressures and excuses for those social studies teachers contemplating the inclusion of controversial subject matter in their instruction.

Conclusions

Teaching at the beginning of the 21st century involves juggling an unprecedented number of challenges for social studies teachers. Eggers, Malthroup, and Calegari (2005) estimated that the average teacher makes more than a thousand decisions in an hour during the course of a busy school day. The curricular challenges discussed in this project merely add to the pressure of an already overstressed and underpaid secondary social studies faculty. Figure 7-1 gives a visual representation of the complexity of this scenario.

Based both on internal factors such as personal background, educational experience, and political or religious affiliation, as well as external factors such as knowledge of the school community, these teachers developed some clear ideas about the issues that are the most potentially explosive ones in the social studies. These understandings cause many of these teachers to be especially and, it can be argued, unduly, cautious in their treatment of the Bush administration, religion, race, the occupation of Iraq, and abortion. At the same time, the data from this project suggest that, in the normal course of their teaching practice, social studies teachers are often caught unwittingly wading into controversial waters with their classes.

These experiences have led the teachers interviewed to develop very clear ideas about their positions in the educational hierarchy and about the relationships, both positive and

negative, that they developed in their tenures as teachers. The most important of these appears to be with students, with whom teachers spend the bulk of their working lives. While teaching can be isolating, the narratives emerging from the interviews in this project also indicated that colleagues can be important allies for teachers but can also exercise a great deal of social pressure on those who are perceived to be acting outside the boundaries of the dominant discourse. Parents, the curriculum, the wider community, and the media also play an important role in these teachers' lives.

As a result of these understandings, teachers develop complex and often contradictory positions toward teaching controversial material in the social studies. A focus on students can either propel teachers (for example, Frank) to take on risky projects inside and outside of the classroom or dissuade teachers (for example, Donna) from expressing candid views with students. The common paradigm of historical accuracy leads many teachers to stress one factual perspective over a multiplicity of viewpoints, even among their students. Teachers often respond to the external pressures of the job with positions of inoffensiveness and fear that serve to stifle their decision-making. Finally, the stresses of standards reform frustrates many teachers who would prefer to introduce controversy within their curricula but feel as if it might be a luxury in an already overstuffed course outline.

This model reflects the lives of ordinary secondary social studies teachers who struggle every day to engage their students with interesting and important content in the context of a society that is becoming rapidly more diverse, less traditional, more global and less monolithic in its outlook. These trends have not been without their antagonisms, as the American populace has historically struggled to keep pace with rapid social changes--18th century industrialization, 19th century immigration, or 20th century integration, as examples--that is has encountered. These are, thus, uncomfortable times for many Americans rocked by these fundamental changes, and it

is in these times that those with whom we are most familiar are too often scapegoated for the wrenching dislocations experienced while a society is engaged in massive modernization projects. As Adam, Ben, Cathy, Donna, Eric, Frank, and Gina have memorably testified, it is social studies teachers who are caught in the crosshairs of the culture wars today.

Table 7-1. Controversial Issues

Issue	Adam	Ben	Cathy	Donna	Eric	Frank	Gina
Bush	D	E	E	D	B, E, F	A, B, C	B, F
Religion	A	D	A, D	A		E	E
Race	B, C	D	B	C		C	A, F
Iraq	A	E	E		E	B	
Abortion	A			A, D			A, C
GLBT	A	A				A	D
9/11	D				E		E
Sex ed.				A	A		
Slavery			B			C	
Drugs							G
Economy					C		
Sexism			F				
Holocaust			B				
Testing			F				
Colonialism				E			
Communism					D		
Vietnam						B	
WWI						B	
Modern art						C, D	
Beat poetry	E						
NCLB						C	
Death pen.							C
Ecology							C
Schiavo							C

Note. The letters correspond with the narratives in which the factors were mentioned.

Table 7-2. Experiences with Controversy

Experience	Adam	Ben	Cathy	Donna	Eric	Frank	Gina
Students	A, B, C, E	A, B, C, D, E	A, B, D, F	B, C, D, E	A, B, C, E, F	A, B, D, C, E	B, C, D, E, F, G
Colleagues	A, D, E	B, C, F	C, E, F		C	A, E	E
Parents	A, C	A	D, E, F	A		A, E	
Curriculum	B	C	C, F	E	C	C	
Community	D	A		A		A, C	A
Admin.	D, E	A, C, F					D, E
Media	D		E		A, F		A, B, F
Testing		C	C			B	
IEPs			E				
School board						E	

Note. The letters correspond with the narratives in which the factors were mentioned.

Table 7-3. Positions Toward Controversy

Stance	Adam	Ben	Cathy	Donna	Eric	Frank	Gina
Student focus	A, C	D	A, D	D	C	C, D, E	B, D, E
Accuracy	D	E	B, D		B, E	B	
Inoffensiveness		F	A, B	D, E			A
Fear	C, D	F				A	A, B
Curriculum focus	B	D			C	C	E
Professionalism			E, F	D	F		
Condescension				B	A, D		F, G
Candor			A		B	A, E	
Avoidance	C		D	F			
Conservatism	D				A, E		
Dogmatism				C			F
Neutrality	A						

Note. The letters correspond with the narratives in which the factors were mentioned.

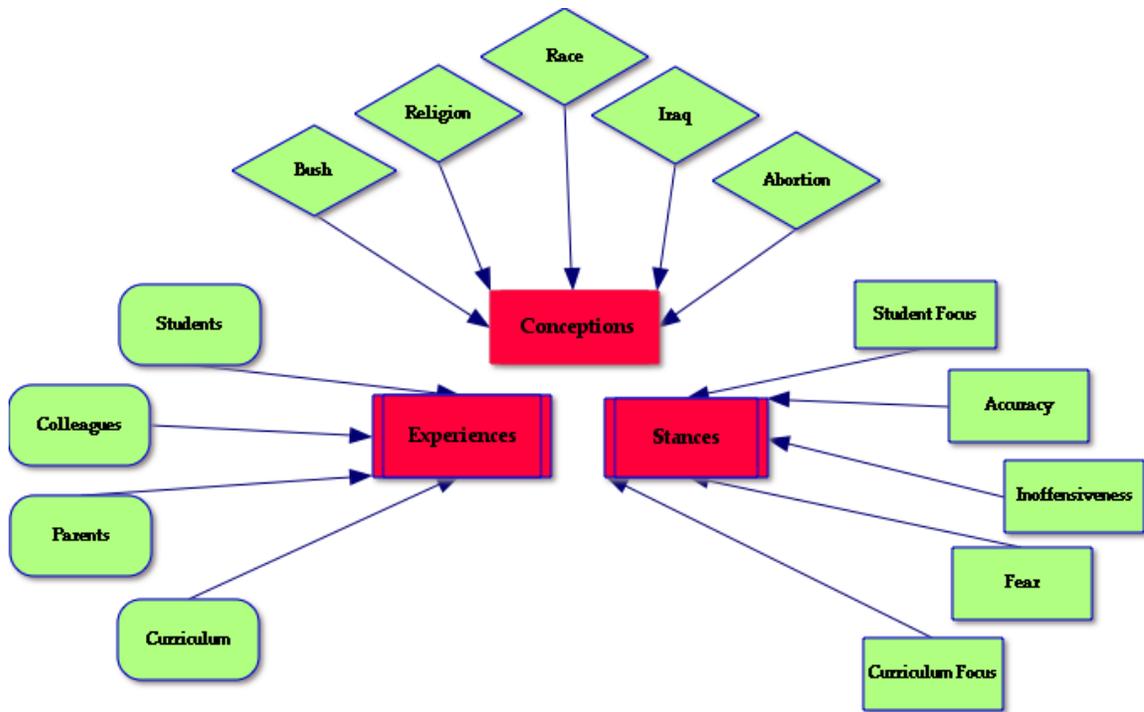


Figure 7-1. Controversy in the classroom: A model

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In his latest novel, Richard Russo (2007) related a story in which Mr. Berg, an eccentric social studies teacher in a small high school in an upstate New York town, greets his students on the first day of school with a Socratic exercise. Asked a simple question by a student about the classroom's remote location from the school's main administrative building--"how come we're meeting in *here*?"--Mr. Berg avoids a quick and definitive answer in favor of using the pupil's question as the launching pad for a class discussion.

"Which answer would you like?" he responds with a twinkle in his eye. "For instance, I could tell you I've selected this room so we could listen to loud jazz without disturbing other classes, and that would be true, though it would not be the whole truth and nothing but the truth." (p. 299)

In an amusing series of exercises, Mr. Berg proceeds to shock the assembled students by smoking a cigarette, playing a record on an old phonograph machine, sitting cross-legged on his desk and referring to the school's principal as "fat and lazy." Only then does he reveal the true answer to the student's initial question:

Of course the real reason I selected this room may have nothing to do with cigarettes. Maybe I've located us all the way here not so much because we could *do* things as *say* things. Things we might not want to say over there . . . Things we might not want overheard. (p. 301, emphasis in original)

The Bridge of Sighs is set in a historical moment, post-war America, and yet Russo (2007) here spoke to the challenges that have dogged American teachers throughout the ages and the ingenious yet often shortsighted solutions to these problems that they have devised. Mr. Berg, in Russo's narrative, represents the archetype of the teacher as king of his castle, where behind a closed classroom door, with only the captive audience of his passive students, he can take risks with subject matter and pedagogy. The findings of this dissertation research project

suggest that this world of teaching is rapidly disappearing and that, far from fostering creativity and innovation, isolation makes the use of controversial material more risky and consequently less likely to occur. The standards reform movement, premised on the notion of the accountability of students, teachers, and schools, makes it highly unlikely that any teacher can survive for very long in a school by merely hiding away in a corner in which he or she can teach, with little regard to curriculum frameworks, things we might not want overheard. For better or worse, teachers and education in the 21st century have been placed under a spotlight and this context calls for more openness and collaboration.

During the first waves of the recent attacks on the social studies curriculum in the 1980s, the focus of conservative anger tended to be aimed at school boards and administrations who deigned to introduce progressive curriculum packages that included multicultural treatments of history (Cornbleth & Waugh, 1995; Nash et al., 1997). Classroom teachers, once spared criticism due to their image as saints are now, however, often cast as the sinners of this drama. Condon and Wolff (1996) provided an excellent example of this shift in thinking. Written as a *Parent's Legal Handbook and Action Guide*, Condon and Wolff's work revealed the unique perspective that many conservative parents' groups take toward public school teachers. In a chapter titled, "What They Teach," Condon and Wolff offered answers to sample questions such as "Can teachers use dirty words in class?" "Will there be more use of television in classroom?" and "Our son's fourth grade teacher recently showed a film about abortion. Shouldn't he be fired for this?" (pp. 67-68). The presumption behind these questions appears to suggest to parents that they pay close attention to the stories that their children bring home with them from school and exert immediate pressure on those teachers and school administrators who are following paths with which they may have philosophical disagreements. The narratives that emerged from the interviews in this project show that parents, and their children, have taken this advice to heart.

Moreover, in a society in which the smallest fragments of discourse can be magnified under the microscope of a 24 hour media cycle, social studies teachers are forced to take undue caution in their lesson choices, even in their words, in the classroom.

It is tempting to assume, therefore, that what we as educators are witnessing is a culture war waged primarily between conservative, religious parents and liberal, secular teachers. However, this polarized analysis does not square with the data collected during this project. The findings reported above indicate a much more complex model of the educational community at work, with teachers entering the scheme holding a range of sometimes contradictory personal and pedagogical views and then buffeted by a variety of external factors such as their relationships with students, colleagues, and parents. Nor does it seem to be the case that there is widespread disaffection for public education among students, parents, and the wider community. While the overheated rhetoric of groups such as the Reverend James Dobson's "Focus on the Family" of teachers as an enemy within may grab the headlines, the reality is that most parents feel more than satisfied with the educations that their children are receiving in public schools (Apple, 2001). In her practical guide for teachers involved in censorship cases, Brinkley (1999) cited a 1996 *USA Today* poll showing that fully 75% of parents felt that their children's schools met high academic standards and that 83% would recommend these schools to a friend.

Furthermore, she has reported that:

Using an A-F standard scale, *USA Today* reported "grades"--all within a positive B+ to B range--given by more than 1,000 public school students and their parents for the following categories: teachers, principal/administration, equipment and facilities, school bus, the way that students treat each other, and atmosphere (p. 53)

Brinkley's work reinforces the findings in this project that challenges to the curricular choices of social studies teachers come from small but vocal groups on both the right and the left side of the political spectrum, with conservative students and parents challenging lesson choices

interpreted as anti-patriotic or anti-religious and liberal students and parents objecting to lesson choices interpreted as overtly religious or racist in tone.

The findings of this study also support the research (Daly, Schall, & Skeele, 2001; DelFattore, 1993) that suggested that, in recent years, students and parents who have traditionally objected to the instruction that occurred in mainstream American high schools have begun to turn their attention away from textbooks and curriculum frameworks and specifically toward the supplementary materials used by teachers. The arena of extra-curricular materials is ripe for struggle as teachers, including those in this study, have in recent years used a wide variety of books, newspaper and magazine articles, videotapes, slides, and PowerPoint presentations to liven up the often stultifying classroom material offered them by their administrations. Teachers' private classroom libraries have become a particular focus of concern. For example, DelFattore documented a case in Bay County, Florida, in which one parent commented that the appearance of a teacher's classroom was "like walking into a *B. Dalton* with desks. There are books just lining the walls" (p. 104). Far from reacting to this kind of atmosphere of intellectual inquiry with satisfaction and admiration for teachers, though, some parents see them as the equivalent of brainwashing svengalis with subversive reading material at a mere arm's length. As a result of this view, any use of extra-curricular materials, that is, materials that fall outside of the parameters of state or district sanctioned and mandated frameworks, is treated with suspicion by parents, and increasingly by administrators as well. What were once referred to as enrichment activities, such as documentary films, musical clips or in-depth readings, are now viewed as, at best, distractions and, at worst, blatant attempts on the part of activist teachers to indoctrinate students in either their secular, humanist or religious, conservative worldview (Charen, 2004). As DelFattore remarked:

Some districts also discourage teachers from going beyond what is in state-approved or district-approved textbooks--and . . . they are within their rights to do so. These districts may be trying to maintain uniformity of instruction, or they may fear parental protests about teacher-made materials not submitted for district approval. (pp. 124-125)

Many of the teachers interviewed for this project reported similar incidents in which they were surprised to find their efforts to enrich the curriculum through supplementary materials challenged by students, parents and even their colleagues. “Stick to the script,” in Cathy’s memorable words, appears to be the order of the day for many social studies teachers.

The most surprising finding of this study is that, despite the recent evidence in the media to the contrary, the traditional channels of communication within a school community are still very much intact. When students are upset about their teachers’ curricular choices or statements in class, they invariably raise the issues with their teachers, often on the spot. This undoubtedly makes for uncomfortable moments in the classroom for teachers, and yet it at least offers them opportunities to respond to challenges and to defend themselves and their lesson choices. When students are frustrated in these efforts, they customarily take these frustrations home to their parents who, in turn, question the teachers directly. In those few cases in the study that involved administrators, the issues were either of an extremely serious nature or came as the result of an unsatisfying parent-teacher conference. Therefore, the cases in which these age-old modes of communication have been circumvented, as they were in the *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Jay Bennis, and Prentice Chandler cases, are dramatic because of their rarity. When the participants in this project mentioned the media, it was in connection to the teachers’ own critiques of the role that media played in their students’ lives, not of the invasive role that they played in their own lives. In the end, what gave these teachers pause for thought before launching into a lesson on a potentially controversial topic appeared to be the fear that they would lose authority and respect

in the eyes of their students, their colleagues and within the school community; the concerns about having to justify their actions in the court of media opinion appear rather remote.

Implications

Though the focus of this dissertation research project was on veteran practitioners, the findings of this study have important implications for teacher training programs and those working with pre-service teachers. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF; 2007) documented a shocking rate of teacher attrition in the United States. The NCTAF brief reported that fully one third of America's teachers leave the field within their first 3 years and that half leave within their first 5 years of service. In urban areas, the rate of attrition has risen to nearly 17% in recent years. The report concluded that this loss of new teachers could cost public education as much as \$7.3 billion in recruitment and training resources. It is, thus, vital, for teacher educators to identify the elements that lead to the development of a successful teaching practice as well as those that hinder the efforts of pre-service and novice teachers. It is my firm conviction that the narratives emerging from the data collected in interviews centering around the conceptions, experiences and stances regarding the use of controversial material, can provide just such a template for effective teacher training programs on controversy in the social studies in the future.

The participants in this study acted as veritable canaries in the coalmines of social studies practice, reporting on the most contentious subjects in the field. These conceptions of what is controversial in the educational community were drawn from their organic relationships with the communities in which they teach rather than from a purely theoretical understanding of the issues. They were in turn informed by experiences working with the bewildering cast of characters on display in their schools. Among these, the research subjects were unanimous in characterizing the relationships with students as their most important concern. At the same time,

they explained the need to develop early trusting connections with colleagues, parents and other individuals in the community. These experiences, both positive and negative, greatly influenced the stances that each individual took toward teaching in general and especially toward their use of controversial subject matter.

The spirit motivating this project, therefore, is that the veteran social studies practitioners who participated in this study, as well as millions of others across the country, toil each day in a good-faith effort to provide meaningful educational experiences for their students. The critiques of the specific methods and materials employed by the teacher-participants who gave testimony included in this dissertation certainly does not negate this sentiment. Each participant has managed to survive and even thrive, even as the possibilities for critical and innovative teaching practices have narrowed under the current standards reform regime. In their own inimitable fashions, these teachers took care to create atmospheres in which free inquiry could flourish. This reality is often overlooked by critiques of contemporary school culture that focus on the revolutionary potentials of pre-service teachers to transform schooling practices (McLaren; 2002; Postman & Weingartner, 1969; Sizer, 1992). Yet, in order to pursue effective strategies toward teacher training in the future, colleges of education must listen carefully to the kinds of voices and stories that emerged from this project as they are the authentic tribunes of the practice.

How then are novice and pre-service social studies teachers to establish a successful teaching practice within a new school setting in order to pursue this innovative agenda? First, the findings of this project suggested that it is of utmost importance for teachers to begin early developing lasting, positive relationships with their students. While each participant indicated in his or her narratives unique and different means of establishing trust with students, all of them attested to the crucial nature of this project. Donna, for example, commented on the centrality of the teacher in the lives of students: “You may actually be the only adult who cares about them,

that's the scary thing . . . you're just this huge presence in their lives." If nurtured, these relationships have the possibility of leading to a solid reputation for these teachers within the school community. Cathy testified to the importance of the development of a positive reputation over the years of a lengthy teaching career, admitting that, "I get away with a lot that a 22 year old teacher wouldn't, you know." In other words, veteran teachers who are valued members of a school community can afford to take risks in their teaching that would be unwise for novice practitioners. In the case of extraordinary curricular challenges such as that weathered by Jay Bennish in Littleton, Colorado, this trust may ultimately allow teachers to save their jobs and to survive within a school placement (Vaughn & Doligosa, 2006).

Each of the teacher-participants spoke to the vital role that scaffolding of discussions plays in developing lessons, especially those that contain controversial topics. Gina, for instance, detailed in several narratives a daily practice in which discussion of current events was central to her classroom routine. She mentioned that, "I usually go in every day and do a short piece to open up class, sometimes it's just 'what did you do over the weekend,' but a lot of times it's a news item." As B. G. Davis (2001) noted, this routine begins on the first day of class with a variety of ice breaker exercises, including having students introduce themselves to the class, share an entertaining anecdote about themselves or exchange information for later use:

The first day of class sets the tone for the rest of the term. It is natural for both students and instructors to feel anticipation, excitement, anxiety, and uncertainty. To pique students' interest and anticipation, convey your enthusiasm for the material and stimulate students' curiosity about topics that will be covered in the term. To reduce students' anxiety and uncertainty, try to create a relaxed, open classroom environment conducive to inquiry and participation, and let students know what you will expect from them and what they can expect from you and the course. (p. 20)

These ice-breaker activities are a vital part of scaffolding successful discussions for the future. Whereas an open, positive posture can create an atmosphere of free inquiry among students, a first impression that is hostile will inevitably close down discussion or, worse, breed

an atmosphere of tension rife with antagonisms among students or between students and their teacher. Of course, every teacher has his or her unique style and means of relating to students; however, adopting a hard-edged persona from the beginning of a school year, as in the “Don’t Smile ‘Til Thanksgiving” adage, is rarely efficacious if one’s goal is to open up a dialogue with students.

Barton and Levstik (2005) underscored the need to teach students effective ways of speaking in class discussions: “It might seem that the last thing your students need is help with talking, but students really need exactly that if they are to participate in the kind of reasoned discussion of controversial issues that we have in mind” (p. 137). They stressed that this requires the teacher to take the time out of content instruction to establish clear rules for discussion, and to reinforce these rules at every stage of the course. This appears to be Adam’s design as he instructs his students that, “we’re analyzing the issues, we’re talking about different sides of different arguments, we’re not actually having the arguments.” Stressing the vital distinction between notions of arguments as heated exchanges and arguments as reasoned statements in a discussion, in the manner in which Adam does here, is an important step in this scaffolding process. Donna also reinforced this lesson in her humble reflections about an article that she had used to investigate the case of the Jena 6: “It was about four or five pages long, pretty dense. I should have given them more time with it.” In other words, Donna had learned through this experience with her students that even a minimal scaffolding effort ahead of the lesson might have eased some of the tensions that erupted during the actual instruction. This job of creating the conditions for effective discussions of controversial topics such as, in this case, race relations, thus, continues throughout each day and involves each aspect of the course from syllabus design to grading rubric.

While each teacher in this study displayed a variety of sometimes contradictory approaches toward student involvement, each teacher presumed that students should play active roles in the process of discussing controversial topics. Gina, for example, while lamenting the lack of student interest in topics of importance to her such as the death penalty, recognized that students must also take some responsibility in order to facilitate the discussion process: “I always try to get students to lead the discussions because it’s no good if it’s just me up there talking at them.” Hess (2002) pointed out that, “all students should be expected to prepare for discussions and that discussions should be planned well in advance to allow for thorough preparation” (p. 37). While the hectic pace of the school year occasionally forces teachers to make last-minute lesson decisions, Hess’s guidance here cannot be stressed enough. In reflecting on his students’ explosive reaction to a lesson that he had designed around an exercise from Herrnstein and Murray’s *The Bell Curve* (1994), Adam realized that the lesson might have gone more smoothly if he had given students advance notice of the nature of the assignment: “I kind of sprang it on them at the last minute. It might have been better to announce what we were going to do a day ahead and maybe give them something to read for homework.” These reflections on the nature of scaffolding by veteran practitioners have much to offer pre-service and novice teachers in the social studies.

Several of the teachers interviewed indicated that student-centered approaches were at the heart of their practices. A good example of this student focus stance was Ben’s regular use of skits in order to involve his World History students in the topics under discussion. Ben realized the risks of this approach: “I’m pretty careful . . . I have to do that because otherwise I hear about it.” Although Ben’s historical skits had occasionally incurred some student resistance, he concluded that they had largely been successful in providing an entertaining and creative outlet for his students: “It works well, especially if I’ve got some drama kids in class; they even will

say ‘scene’ at the end of a skit, it’s pretty funny, they get into it.” It was illuminating to see that even those teachers who described themselves as “old school” such as Frank had integrated some more cooperative methods into their largely direct instruction routines. In a U.S. History lesson on post-war culture, for example, Frank deliberately focused on a subject, abstract art, that he felt might appeal to the large number of visual arts students in his class. Furthermore, instead of merely lecturing to his students about the art works on display, he encouraged them to voice their opinions about the images. Frank recounted that this approach ultimately led to an exciting dialogue: “that just kicked off this great discussion about what people value in art, whether an artist should always strive for a photographic copy.” What is instructful to note here is that cooperative, student-centered pedagogy has gradually seeped into the instructional routines of even those such as Frank who profess to teach in the manner in which they were taught many years before. This is a testament to the ongoing influence of teacher training in stimulating positive change in American schools.

Many of the respondents in this study spoke to the obvious reality that teaching, especially in the contemporary context of American schools, is one of the most stressful occupations that a young person could possibly choose. Nieto (2003) commented that, “Even under the best of circumstances, teaching is a demanding job, and most teachers do not work under the best of circumstances. The enthusiasm and idealism that bring them to teaching dissipate quickly for many” (p. 3). There is also ample evidence that the past 25 years of increasing standardization of curriculum, loss of tenure status and focus on state-mandated testing procedures has sapped the profession of many of what Greene (1995) referred to as the psychic rewards that encouraged many of us to enter the teaching profession in the first place. Yet, there are glimmers of hope within the narratives of the teachers interviewed for this project for an organic resurgence of teaching and learning in America’s schools. If a new wave of pre-

service and novice social studies teachers follows their lead pursues a critical agenda, based on the solid foundation of positive alliances built with students, that includes exciting discussions about the vital, controversial issues of the day, the future for American public education can indeed look bright.

Future Investigations

The findings and conclusions that emerged from this research project reinforce my understanding of the complex and challenging nature of social studies teaching. The stories that the participants told me during the course of this study simultaneously represent age-old concerns on the part of teachers for their job security as well as fears that belong to a particular time and place. By labeling the current period a new McCarthyism, Schrecker (2005) intriguingly opened the door to further investigations into the parallels between historical periods of reaction and the contemporary issues of standards reform and curricular challenges. This insight has led me in my doctoral studies to research the effects of anti-Communism on social studies teaching in Florida public schools (Dahlgren, 2005). I look forward to collaborating with educational historians in an effort to contribute to the scholarship on these issues.

I am also convinced that investigations of the experiences of teachers in other areas of the country would educe some important insights into the unique pressures facing teaching in, for example, the Pacific Northwest or Northeastern states. As an active member of the National Council for the Social Studies' standing committee on Academic Freedom, I am in contact with educators from the across the country who are attuned to the issues of teaching controversy. These connections will undoubtedly provide me with further evidence of challenges to academic freedom and may lead toward fruitful collaborations in the future.

While the influence of the media on the teachers interviewed for this project was somewhat less significant than expected, I anticipate that the pervasiveness of the media reach

into the lives of Americans will continue to play an increasing role in future challenges to academic freedom. Researchers (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Bracey, 2002) already found that a complex web of broadcast and print media have participated in isolated cases such as those detailed in Chapter 6. Research that takes a detailed look at the ways in which media outlets frame the debate on educational issues is, therefore, imperative.

I am aware that this project reflects a particular time and place, the cultural conflicts of the first decade of the 21st century. I am of the firm conviction that the educational system in the United States, which has been mired in the dogma of standards reform for 25 years, is on the verge of an epochal change in direction. This change will, of necessity, come from below, from the grassroots activism of those at the heart of the educational community--teachers, students, and parents--rather than from the ossified educational bureaucracy. These changes will obviously affect the context of social studies teaching and learning and, yet, will not entirely obviate the need for struggles for academic freedom in the future.

Conclusions

The findings of this study regarding the experiences of secondary social studies teachers with the conscious and, often unwitting, use of controversial public issue content in their classrooms finally, and most importantly, suggest that there is the perception on the part of many of the actors in the educational community that teachers continue to exert tremendous influence over their students. Some researchers have challenged this common perception. Daly et al. (2001), for instance, argued that challenges to teacher autonomy frequently stem from a misinterpretation, or at the very least, an outdated conception, of the teacher's role. It is the assumption on the part of many of those leading the current round of censorship efforts against social studies instructors that schooling still amounts to what Freire (1970) called the banking concept of teaching. As a consequence of this traditional notion, Daly et al. argued:

(T)hen teachers become controlling figures who can communicate their worldviews along with the multiplication tables. This understanding of learning can be particularly troubling to those who worry that the lives and minds of children are being molded by those who espouse an ideology they do not share. (pp. 3-4)

Students and parents who subscribe to this view are, thus, more likely to be on the alert for curricular choices that, in the words of Savage (2003),

Have to do with the way radicals are working to control your mind. That's Ritalin, revised textbooks, ultra-intolerance, socialist indoctrination, deconstruction of patriotism, censorship of conservative ideas, and a host of other mental gymnastics they expect students to perform until they're completely lost. (p. 182)

In this scheme, any attempt to introduce controversial issues, even in an open, democratic forum, equals indoctrination of students.

Though they do not share these conclusions, another set of educators, including Thornton (1991), insisted that teachers do in fact continue to play a major "gatekeeping" role, framing the content of courses through their preparation of course syllabi and their daily decisions about lessons. Indeed, Grant (2003) commented that, "teachers do not make these decisions in a vacuum, but they do exercise considerable autonomy over the kinds of learning experiences their students have" (p. 29). In other words, teachers do not have the latitude of a Mr. Berg, squirreled away in an outlying classroom; however, they continue, even within the context of the standards reform regime, to make the key choices about the ways in which the required content in their courses will be presented. The means of providing an atmosphere in which teachers feel emboldened to challenge their students to discuss important public issues is, thus, the key issue that emerges from the data of this project.

This dissertation project builds upon the past and current work on teaching controversy in the field of social studies. Educators have begun this discussion about the means with which to effectively present controversial subject matter in the social studies classroom, as evidenced by Dawson-Salas's (2004) thoughtful and provocative work. Dawson-Salas, a young teacher in

Minnesota, spoke eloquently of the fears on the part of teachers new to the field about butting heads with administration figures or parents over controversial teaching methods or materials. In the end, however, she counseled courage, concluding that, “Engaging my students in social justice issues is at the heart of my teaching. I have learned that developing curriculum is a long-term process that often happens very slowly. But I wouldn’t do it any other way.” Only through a concerted struggle will progressive educators be able to continue their work in improving public education for the benefit of all of our students.

APPENDIX A
IRB PROPOSAL

1. Title of Project: A study of secondary social studies teachers' experiences with teaching controversial public issues in the classroom
2. Principal Investigator: Robert Dahlgren, Doctoral Candidate, School of Teaching and Learning, [personal information not displayed]
3. Supervisor: Dr. Elizabeth Yeager
4. Dates of Proposed Research: November 1, 2007 to October 31, 2008
5. Source of Funding for the Protocol: None
6. Scientific Purpose of the Investigation: To investigate the experiences of high school social studies teachers in teaching controversial public issues in secondary-level public school classrooms in Florida.
7. Describe the Research Methodology: Researcher will ask up to eight social studies teachers that have completed at least five years of teaching practice in secondary level public schools in Florida to participate in archival collection and two interview sessions that will be conducted on site. Researcher will analyze teachers' curricular documents that are brought to interview sessions. Interviews will last one hour per session; these sessions will be conducted face to face in the individual teachers' classrooms after school hours. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. (See interview questions attached). In addition, researcher will collect a variety of curriculum documents from teachers including syllabi, lesson plans and supplementary lesson materials.
8. Potential Benefits and Anticipated Risks: This investigation will add to the understanding of the experiences of secondary social studies teachers in using controversial extra-curricular materials in the classroom. It can promote discussions related to the pressures placed on secondary social studies teachers in a period of increased accountability and standardization of curriculum. At the same time, the subjects will be asked to speak candidly about school district policy regarding academic freedom. Thus, the most stringent measures of confidentiality will be implemented during the proposed study. Transcripts of all interview sessions will be provided to subjects for clarification and approval. All confidential material will be stored in a locked drawer in researcher's office.
9. Describe How Participants Will Be Recruited, the Number and Age of Participants, and Proposed Compensation: The principal investigator will recruit between 6 and 8 participants from a pool of social studies teachers in Duval County public secondary schools. Participants will range from 25 to 65 years of age and between 5 and 35 years of practice. No compensation will be given. (See attached recruitment materials.)

10. Describe the Informed Consent Process: An informed consent form will be provided to participants prior to the interview process. Participation is completely voluntary. (See attached informed consent form.)

Principal Investigator's Signature

Supervisor's Signature

I approve this protocol for submission to the UFIRB:

Dept. Chair

Date

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT EMAIL SCRIPT

Dear Participant: I am a doctoral candidate in Social Studies Education at the University of Florida. I am currently in the midst of gathering data for a research project on the experience of social studies teachers in secondary-level Florida public schools with teaching current events issues. What I'd like to do is to collect curricular material from you that represents lessons that you deem potentially "controversial" in your community and to interview you and some other area teachers. This would entail two one-hour interview sessions. No compensation is available, but we would appreciate your participation.

APPENDIX C INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Initial Interview

1. Describe your own educational background.
2. What do you consider the most controversial issues in teaching social studies at the high school level?
3. What in your experience makes these issues controversial within your community?
4. Give me an example of a recent lesson that you've taught that contained what you consider controversial material.
5. What was your experience when presenting this material to students?
6. Describe any experiences you've had in which students or their parents have criticized the content of a lesson that you've taught.
7. Looking at the curriculum piece that you've brought to the session, describe your intention in designing the lesson.
8. What do you perceive as potentially controversial about this lesson content?
9. Is there anything you would like to add?

Follow-up Interview

1. This extra-curricular content material has proven controversial in the field. What is your level of familiarity with it?
2. What, if anything, would make this content material potentially controversial in your school or community?
3. What, if any, value would this material have in your own curriculum?
4. What, if any, concerns would you have in using this content material?
5. What do you perceive as potentially controversial about this material, especially as it relates to your school and wider community?
6. What, if any, official policies in your school, would relate to your potential use of this content material?
7. Is there anything you would like to add?

Member Check

1. After reviewing the initial analysis of the data collected in this project, do you have any concerns about the way that your views have been presented?
2. Do you have any further comments about the analysis of the data collected?

APPENDIX D TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

The following transcription conventions have been excerpted from Silverman (2002). The examples printed embody an effort to have the spelling of the words roughly indicate how the words were produced. Often this involves a departure from standard orthography. Otherwise:

- () Empty parentheses indicate talk too obscure to transcribe. Words or letters inside such parentheses indicate the transcriber's best estimate of what is being said.

- hhh The letter "h" is used to indicate hearable aspiration, its length roughly proportional to the number of 'h's indicated. If preceded by a dot, the aspiration is an in-breath. Aspiration internal to a word is enclosed in parentheses. Otherwise "h"s may indicate anything from ordinary breathing to sighing to laughing, etc.

- [Left-side brackets indicate where overlapping talk begins.

-] Right-side brackets indicate where overlapping talk ends, or marks alignments within a continuing stream of overlapping talk.

- ° Talk appearing within degree signs is lower in volume relative to surrounding talk.

- > < "Greater than" and "less than" symbols enclose talk that is noticeably faster than the surrounding talk.

- ((nods)) Words in double parentheses indicate transcriber's comments, not transcriptions.

- (0.8) Numbers in parentheses indicate periods of silence, in tenths of a second. A dot inside parentheses indicates a pause of less than 0.2 seconds.

- ::: A series of colons indicate a lengthening of the sound just preceding them, proportional to the number of colons.

- A hyphen indicates stress or emphasis (for example, "I'd ne-ever do that").

- Underlining indicates stress or emphasis (for example, "he says").

- dr^ink A "hat" or circumflex accent symbol indicates a marked pitch rise.

- = An equal sign (ordinarily at the end of one line and the start of an ensuing one) indicate a 'latched' relationship--no silence at all between them.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Robert Lawrence Dahlgren was born on January 11, 1964 in Naples, Italy, the second son of Wayne and Emily Dahlgren. Robert is currently a doctoral candidate in Social Studies Education in the School of Teaching and Learning of the College of Education at the University of Florida.

Robert began his career in education as a social studies teacher, teaching World History, American Government, and Humanities at Peabody Veterans Memorial High School in Peabody, Massachusetts. During his time at Peabody, he also taught in the Graduate Education Department at Simmons College in Boston. Following a brief stint teaching English and American Studies at Miyazaki University in Miyazaki, Japan, Robert continued his social studies teaching at Paxon School for Advanced Studies in Jacksonville, Florida.

A graduate of Department of Defense Dependent Schools in Germany and England, Robert was graduated by Lakenheath High School in 1982. He subsequently earned a Bachelor of Science degree in print journalism with a minor in political science at Boston University in 1986 and a Master of Arts in Teaching degree from Simmons College in 1997.

Robert is the author of several professional journal articles in the field of Social Studies Education. He has presented his scholarship at numerous local, state, and national education conferences, including the National Council for the Social Studies and History of Education Society annual meetings.

In the fall of 2008, Robert will take up a position as Assistant Professor of Social Studies Education at the State University of New York at Fredonia. His career goals include continuing to mentor pre-service social studies teachers, publishing scholarship on the challenges to the academic freedom of secondary social studies teachers, and advocating progressive social change within educational policy.